

# Storm Warrior (The Grim Series) (25 page)

For a moment, she almost smiled...

Her grandmother used to say that the best medicine for feeling miserable was to go make somebody else happier. Morgan doubted there was a medicine in the world that could make her feel much better—with the possible exception of Jack Daniel's—but she knew there was one soul who she could visit and at least not make him feel any worse.

She would spend some time with Fred.

Rhys kicked a bale of straw across the floor between the stalls, startling Lucy. Steady beast that she was, the horse didn't shy or jump, just flattened her ears and switched her tail. He was far too angry to be sorry for kicking the straw right then.

Morgan had been furious when she stormed out of the stable. Although she'd ordered him to leave, Rhys had lingered, knowing that she spoke from the heat of the moment, from the emotions that were tearing at her. Frustration clawed at him as well. He knew how to ride and how to fight, how to farm and how to build. He knew how to care for an injured horse, yet he had no idea whatsoever how to help the woman he loved. She was compassionate and skilled as a healer, clever of mind, but how could she accept a truth that she viewed as impossible? To be fair, few in this time and place would be able to believe such a thing. The Fair Ones were all but forgotten, relegated to myth, diminished to tiny beings that consorted with butterflies in picture books.

Helplessness didn't sit well with him. Rhys much preferred action, but the situation called for him to give Morgan time.

*How much time?*

He paced the stable until the mare was nervous, then walked the fields. He didn't go far, however. He'd vowed to watch over Morgan Edwards and protect her, and the fact that he'd made that promise while still a dog didn't nullify his commitment. Even if she didn't want him, he would see to her safety no matter what.

But she

*did*

want him. Of that he was certain.

At noon, Rhys judged himself calm enough to walk the mare and even turned her out for a short time to graze. He studied the horse's movements, saw that she wasn't favoring that left hind leg nearly as much, and judged that by the next day she would be ready to spend the morning in the pasture. Morgan would be pleased—if she ever talked to him again. He led the mare back to the stable, noting that the big horse seemed content and comfortable. He was neither.

The red car was gone.

He leaned in the doorway of the barn for a long time. Wondering what Morgan was doing. Wondering what she was thinking. Remembering the night she'd spent in his arms. By all the gods, she'd revealed a passion that matched his own, and his groin ached at the thought.

His heart ached more, however, and was much harder to ignore.

When Jay and his friends arrived for practice, Rhys was glad. Not for the company so much, but for the chance to *do* something. And right now, a good fight could only improve his present outlook on life.

"The Renaissance Fair Rules of Heavy Combat" turned out to be a little more detailed than simply "Don't kill anyone."

"No maiming, dismembering, mutilating, stabbing, or any other kind of wounding," said Jay, ticking off his fingers. "No bloodshed, period."

Rhys rolled his eyes. "Are we dancing with them or fighting? Can I hit them?"

"As much as you like, as long as they can walk away afterward. Many of the events are full contact, just like football." Jay glanced at Rhys and added, "Ask Leo about football."

At least he'd be allowed to use his fists. That was a relief because the weapons, from swords to maces to flails, had been created out of materials that Jay called safe and Rhys called flimsy. The weight of the weaponry was all wrong and poorly balanced, if at all. He hefted the sword Jay had given him. It was not only wooden but padded—*padded*—like something you would give to a very small child, had he or she been able to lift it. And Jay had said that the actual weapons in the combat event were made of something called *rattan*, which was said to be even lighter. It would be more like a brawl than a battle, but if Rhys was honest with himself, even a fistfight held a lot of appeal right now.

He blew out a breath and centered himself.

*Control.*

He had to stay in control. The fair was still a couple of days away, and he had no desire to unleash his frustrations on his new friends.

Oblivious to Rhys's inner struggles, Jay and Mike and the rest seemed excited by his presence. Their families had come to watch, as had Leo. Ranyon had decided to come along as well—after all, no one would see the ellyll unless he permitted them to—but Rhys was concerned he'd been a little too thorough in protecting the farm with iron nails and horseshoes. As it turned out, Ranyon had created a charm for himself that would allow him to ride in Leo's car. The thing hung from the rearview mirror like a bizarre wind chime—a strange collection of car keys and brake shoes, twigs and crystals, all

bound together with the copper wire that the ellyll seemed to favor. The same charm permitted Ranyon to enter Morgan's farm without discomfort.

Brandan had brought along his big black Friesian, Boo, as usual. But there were three extra horses tonight as well to practice something called *jousting*

. The strange sport had been developed centuries after Rhys had first sat astride a horse, but he cheered enthusiastically with the rest of the group as rider after rider was knocked to the ground in a great clanking of armor. When it was over, he was of a mind to ask the victorious Brandan for some lessons. Rhys also wondered how much coin it would take to purchase Lucy from her owner—he felt that the gray mare's powerful build and temperament would be well suited to such a sport once she had fully healed. He'd have to talk to Leo about finding more paying work. But he already knew he couldn't keep Lucy at Leo's house. His friend had explained the difference between livestock and pets and why the former couldn't live in the city when Rhys had proposed he keep a goat.

*More rules.*

That meant Rhys would have to ask Morgan about keeping the horse at her farm. Of course, right now the horse was perfectly welcome. It was *him*

that Morgan didn't want there. He sighed and resolved to speak to Leo about the dilemma later.

Right now he could do with a little hand-to-hand action.

The sun was slipping behind the horizon when Morgan finally drove home. She saw a pickup and horse trailer pulling out of her driveway as she approached, which told her the gathering at the corral had broken up. Brandan was driving, and she waved as she passed the truck.

She loved her friends dearly, but although she was in a much better frame of mind than when she'd left, she wasn't in the mood for company. Fred had been an excellent listener once again, and she'd talked for a long time. A couple of times she thought she saw his tail twitch slightly, perhaps in sympathy. After all, she felt almost as crappy as he did. That thought produced a mental image of her renting an empty run from Ellen and crawling into a doghouse just to be alone for a while. To just lie in the shade and the cool and—

She was in the kitchen before she recalled that she'd left her groceries in the car. As she retrieved them, she saw the light go on in the barn.

*So Rhys still hasn't left*

...Part of her was furious,

and part of her was relieved, and all of her was much too tired to deal with it right now. She'd take it up with him tomorrow. Or the next day. Depending on how long she could ignore his existence, and assuming she knew what the hell she wanted to do about it by then...

Morgan crossed the darkening kitchen awkwardly, her arms full of tall paper bags she could barely see over—the store had been out of plastic. She plunked the bags on the table, forgetting that she'd set the small wooden jewelry box there earlier. It tumbled to the floor, scattering its contents at her feet.

*Crap.*

She backed away carefully, hoping not to step on anything, and slapped on the light switch by the door. Knelt and began gathering the tangled trinkets and treasures. Thank heavens she hadn't put the precious photo back in the box...

A glimmer of silver caught her eye.

*Nainie's necklace?*

Morgan's fingers trembled as she gently drew the long intricate chain from the debris. It seemed to separate itself from its neighbors as though glad to be rid of them. She studied it with adult eyes, recognizing several of the small colored stones woven into the spiraling chain—amethyst, citrine, garnet, peridot—but the large carved stone of the medallion was as mysterious as ever. Even with all her books, she'd never been able to name the dark, mysterious gem. Tiny flashes of blue, green, and purple seemed to spark from its faceted surface, and it was both opaque and transparent. How could something look like a pearl and a crystal at the same time? Even Nainie hadn't known what it was.

Set in silver and circled with smaller stones, the design was strongly Celtic, yet unique in a way Morgan couldn't quite pinpoint. Even in Wales, with every gift shop offering Celtic jewelry of every description, she'd never seen anything even vaguely like it—except for the ornate silver collar that had fallen from the neck of the great black dog, Rhyswr. A strange thought occurred to her that the designs, though different, were of the same origin.

*Oh, good grief.*

That was

so

not possible. She had no reason at all to connect them, it was simply the product of an overstressed mind. Which reminded her, she needed to unpack the Kleenex she'd just bought...

*Keep the necklace with you until your heart calls for it.*

Those had been her grandmother's instructions. Morgan didn't really understand them—why would her heart call for it? And how? She

*did*

feel guilty that the heirloom had been in a box for so long. Technically it had been

*with*

her. After all, she'd kept it and it was in her house. But she was pretty certain that Nainie had intended for her to wear it.

*It'll help you to have faith and it'll show you truth when you need it most.*

"I sure wish it could. I don't know about the

*faith*

part, but it'd be nice to have a little

*truth*

around here," she murmured as she placed it reverently around her neck, looping the long chain twice so the heavy stone medallion didn't hang to her waist. The cool links felt reassuring against her skin, and there was a sense of rightness that lightened her aching heart a little. She fingered the pendant for a few moments, then knelt and began scooping up the other fallen bits of jewelry into the box. Suddenly, the hair on the back of her neck stood up as realization hit. All the bracelets and brooches, necklaces and rings were dulled with time, blackened with tarnish or green with oxidation. Everything was in sad need of cleaning and polishing.

Not so the medallion nor its long chain. She lifted the necklace from where it fell between her breasts and stared at it. The gemstones glittered. The silver gleamed as it always had, just as she remembered it. Just as if it were new. But hadn't Nainie told her that the necklace had been in their family for generations?

*Forged in faery fire, crafted by faery hand.*

That's what Rhys had said about the dog's silver collar.