

Storm Warrior (The Grim Series) (30 page)

Jay intercepted Rhys at the bleachers. “Hey, where the hell did you go, man? Leo’s been taken to the hospital, and Morgan’s pissed at you for taking off. Brandan’s there with her—he says Leo’s stable for the moment, but they don’t know what’s wrong with him.”

“I know what’s wrong with him,” answered Rhys. He stopped at the first bench and motioned at Jay to take a seat. “And I’m needing to set it right.”

“What the—I’m not sitting down at a time like this!”

Rhys ignored him and looked at his left foot. “Ranyon, this man is worthy of trust. He knows what I am and what I’ve been. We need his help in order to help Leo.”

“Aye, well for Leo’s sake then.” The ellyll revealed himself.

Jay’s face lost all color and he sat down. Hard.

Ranyon chuckled and tipped his baseball cap. “Seeing as we’re soon to be in a bit of a war together, Jay, ya best be knowing who’s on yer side. Pleased to make your acquaintance I am.”

It took a couple of tries, but finally Jay stammered out, “Same here.” He shook his head hard, then seemed to recover himself and stuck out a hand to the strange little creature.

Ranyon shook it enthusiastically with both of his.

“Jay, we must get to the farm quickly,” said Rhys. “I’ve something there that could help Leo.”

“I’m your man,” he said and gamely got to his feet. “The clinic truck’s still here, and I have keys for it.” He led the way, only slightly unsteady for the shock he’d just received. The field events were over for the day, with most of the crowd gathered at the drinking tents. The way to the parking lot for emergency vehicles, the veterinary truck included, was thankfully unimpeded.

Rhys looked down at Ranyon. “There’s iron all about the farm, and you don’t have your charm from Leo’s car—perhaps you should stay here.”

The ellyll drew a small acorn from his hair. The nut was carefully wound with fine copper wire and sported a small spotted feather and a miniature copper bell. “Nay, I’ve made up another one to keep in my pocket. I’m not needing such a powerful charm now.”

“But when Leo first brought you to the farm, you couldn’t even cross the gateway.”

“Aye, it wouldn’t shield me from your damnable nails and horseshoes before, because of yer intent.”

“That makes perfect sense. Intention always plays a huge role in magic,” Jay said over his shoulder, and both Rhys and Ranyon looked at him in surprise. “What? I’m a practicing pagan. Besides, I read.”

“The boy’s a sharp one,” chuckled Ranyon. “And he’d be right.”

“You’re my friend. I have no desire to keep you from the farm,” said Rhys.

“Aye, I’m yer friend

now

. Ya hadn’t met me when you nailed up them horseshoes and determined ya were going to keep

all

fae from the farm. It’s yer friendship, plus the spells I’ve put into this new charm, that should keep me safe from yer bloody iron.”

“Should?” asked Jay, as he unlocked the truck. “Then you haven’t tested it yet?”

The ellyll shrugged. “Fer Leo, I’d test walkin’ on coals.”

The men nodded in agreement. They all would.

NINETEEN

L

eo was asleep, his condition unchanged. His children had been called, and they were flying in from the coast. Brandan and Mike and the others had gone back to the fair to take care of their horses and load them up. Only Starr remained, talking quietly on her cell by the vending machines in the waiting room. Finally she pocketed the phone and came over to where Morgan was leafing aimlessly through the last of a stack of

Classic & Custom Cars

and

Quilters Monthly

magazines.

“Jay says to tell you he has the clinic truck and he and Rhys are on their way here. I’m going to wait for them, but you can take my van if you want to go home.”

“Don’t you still have to take down the fair booth? I could help you,” said Morgan.

Starr shook her head. “Thanks, but Vanessa has already taken care of it.”

“Well, Jay’s on call tonight so I guess he might as well keep the truck. And truthfully, I’d just as soon not be here when Rhys shows up.”

“I kinda thought so. It looks like you two are going through a rough patch.”

“You could say that, I guess.” Actually a

rough patch

was something Morgan would use to describe a bump in the road of a long-established couple. She and Rhys barely qualified as a couple at all, despite their feelings. They hardly knew each other, or more accurately,

she

didn't know

him

, and that was the crux of the whole problem. Damn it, her eyes were starting to fill just thinking about it. “I'd love to borrow your van, thanks. You're a lifesaver, Starr.”

Grateful for the chance to escape before Mr. Celtic Warrior showed up, she hurried into the elevator with the keys in her hand, trying to remember the location of the van in the neighboring parking garage.

Third floor, west wall, seventh or eighth stall. Third floor, west wall, seventh

...

The door slid open to reveal the hospital lobby. Morgan's getaway was going really well—until she all but crashed into the solid wall that was Rhys. He grabbed her shoulders to steady her but ended up hugging her to him. Part of her wanted to stay in that embrace, take comfort in his strength—but most of her just wanted to punch him. Her anger won and she pushed at him.

He released her reluctantly. “How is Leo?” he asked, as Jay came jogging up behind him.

“Stable so far, no thanks to you,” she said. “I don't know where the hell you took off to, but I could have used some help with him. I needed you;

he

needed you.”

“I

was

helping him.”

“By running in the other direction? What the hell were you afraid of?” Morgan knew she'd hit a nerve then. Rhys's face darkened, and his golden eyes fairly sparked with temper. In her peripheral vision, Jay was giving her some sort of sign language, but her attention was firmly fastened on the big man in front of her. She'd tried to avoid him, tried to just go home and relax

for a while before tackling the issue, but maybe a head-to-head confrontation

now

was just what was needed—

“I fear nothing, except that I cannot persuade you to listen.”

“Listen to what? All I've heard so far is this warrior crap and how you're older than a hundred human lifetimes.”

With uncanny speed, he snared her hand and held it against his chest. “You hear nothing else? My heart reaches for yours as do my arms. You hear not how I feel? What

I would gladly do for you, give to you?" His gaze was fierce. "My desires are to you, my every thought flies to you. I see in your eyes that you feel the same. And yet you are determined to hold yourself apart from me."

"Well, excuse me. I can't just say, 'Oh, well, he's crazy but he loves me so that makes everything all right.' What planet are you from?" Morgan put her free hand to her head. "Don't answer that, please. I can only handle one wild story at a time."

"You're the most kindhearted woman I've ever seen draw breath. And yet your heart is closed and locked."

She yanked her hand out of his grip. "Like hell it is! I wouldn't be suffering like this if it was, because you wouldn't have gotten into it." That was a lot more than she planned to say, but maybe he damn well ought to know that she was in a world of pain.

Rhys was silent for a long moment, and when he spoke again, his voice was gentler. "Aye, well, you've let me into your heart then, but not the truth that comes with me."

"So it's a package deal, you and your insanity?"

"Nothing can be built without truth."

"And so far, you and I can't agree on what that is," she said, folding her arms tightly over her chest. "You don't understand what this is like for me. It's as if I'm under some kind of stupid

curse that nothing I love will

stay

in my life. I loved my parents and they vanished. I was close to Nainie and she died. I thought I'd made a dear friend with Gwen in Wales, but I've never heard from her since. I loved my big, beautiful dog and then he disappeared. Then I developed feelings for you, but you keep leaving as well."

"I'm here, right before you."

"No. No, you're not. Oh, sure, you're here physically, but every time we get close, you leave

reality

. What am I supposed to do with that?"

"Have faith in me. Have faith in

us

."

She had no answer to that, no comeback, no question. Something about the way he'd said it had resonated in her. And for no reason, Nainie's words about the necklace echoed in her head.

It'll help you to have faith

...

What exactly did it mean to have faith in someone? Surely it didn't mean to believe the unbelievable? Damn it, she wasn't falling for this crap. "You say you'll do anything for me? Fine. See a doctor. Get help. Better yet, get some medication and some therapy.

Because until you do, I want you to stay as far away from me as possible. We have nothing to say to each other.”

Rhys shook his head. “Nay, we have much to say to each other yet, anwylyd. But we’ve no time right now. Leo needs me.” He entered the elevator and Jay followed. The last thing she saw as the doors slid shut was the expression on Jay’s face.

If she didn’t know better, she’d say he felt sorry for her.

Well, that’s what I get for arguing in front of friends.

Still, it stung a bit to see her

friend

apparently on Rhys’s side.

“Men,” she muttered as she marched out to the parking lot. The sun had set, but there were still streamers of orange and purple in the sky. She didn’t relish the thought of going home

to an empty house. What she really wanted was someone to talk to—and she knew where to find the perfect listener.

Even if he

was

male.

As Ranyon sat on the bed next to his pillow, Leo’s eyes fluttered open. “Hey, buddy,” he whispered and held up a shaky hand, which the ellyll immediately wrapped his twiggy fingers around.

“Sorry I am to wake you, but these fellows brought you something that might put some spring back in your step,” Ranyon said.

“You brought me a naked woman?”

Rhys grinned, hiding his concern at the weakness of Leo’s voice and the pallor of his skin. “We’ll bring one for you next time. Right now you need your strength, and I’m hoping this will help.” He pulled a wadded sock from his pocket and dumped out a palm-size stone on the bed.

The old man glanced down. “I’m not swallowing that,” he rasped. “Not even for

two

naked gals.”

Just then, Jay slipped inside the door. “Starr’s in the hall. Is it okay to let her in, or shall I go wait with her?”

Rhys exchanged glances with Ranyon, who nodded. “We may need all of our allies. Aye, bring her in.”

“No screaming,” said Ranyon quickly. “I can’t abide a woman’s screams. Like cat’s claws on slate, it is.”

To her credit, Starr didn't make a sound when Jay first ushered her in. She simply stared at the tiny man sitting by Leo's pillow, her eyes wide and wondering. Jay squeezed her shoulder and she seemed to pull herself together. As her husband had done, she extended her hand to the ellyll. "I'm very pleased to meet you, Mr. Ranyon. My name is Starr."

"And surely yer a light in the darkness," said the ellyll, inclining his head, and she laughed.

"No one warned me you were charming."

"No one suspected," muttered Leo.

Jay leaned over the smooth, dark stone gleaming against the stark white sheets. "What is this? It almost looks like a pearl." Despite his fascination, he didn't make any move to touch it. "Kinda looks like a crystal too—never seen anything quite like it."

"There's nothing in my collection that resembles it," said Starr. She seemed about to say something else but fell silent.

"It's from the skull of a bwgan I killed. It grows in its forehead." Rhys touched a spot on his own to indicate the spot.

Jay pulled back. "What the hell is a
boogun
?"

"It's a monstrous fae creature that's fond of human flesh."

Leo snorted. "And you put that nasty thing on my
bed
?" he rasped.

"Is it magic?" asked Starr.

"Well, not to the creature that grows it during its life—a bwgan has too little of brain and too big of teeth to need magic for anything," explained Rhys. "But legend says when the creature dies, all its fae essence goes into its stone. That's why druids and magi prized these."