

Storm Warrior (The Grim Series) (6 page)

Without warning, he knelt behind her and began pressing soft, moist kisses to her buttocks. She was wriggling now, wanting more, but he threw a powerful arm around her hips and held her in place. Slowly, painstakingly, he kissed his way over every inch of her bottom, interspersing the kisses with light nips that were immediately laved with his tongue. Bliss shot through her like a hot current through copper wire. Her last coherent thought was to marvel that everything within her was so intricately connected that to be touched in one place was to be touched everywhere...

Then two strong fingers slipped inside her, and all thought vanished as she gasped aloud. She slid down them, praying he wouldn't pull them away, and nearly cheered when he thrust them deeper. She could feel her own rush of moisture, feel him alternately crook and splay his fingers as she rode them faster, harder. Gradually he added part of a third.

Yes, oh, yes, omigod, yes...just like that, don't stop, oh, don't stop

...The pleasure ramped up, even as her legs began to get rubbery, and his thickly muscled arm was holding her up as much as it held her to him.

*Faster,
harder.*

He rubbed his thumb over her wet clit and triggered an avalanche. She screamed out as the orgasm thundered down on her, overwhelming her senses until she tumbled bonelessly into her lover's lap.

She looked up into his face just before she was jarred awake by the frantic peal of the alarm clock.

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he X-ray lab was dark, cool, and fairly quiet, a welcome respite from the busy clinic. Too bad the developer fumes had such a pungent odor to them, Morgan thought. The exhaust fan was on full blast, but still her eyes stung a little. She swished the film frames in the vertical tank of developing fluid as she watched the glowing numbers on the timer click down to zero. Quickly, she dunked the frames in the rinse tank, turned the timer on again, and leaned on the counter. Two weeks, her supplier had said. Just two more weeks until her shiny, new digital radiography equipment would be set up and installed. Two weeks until somebody finally hauled off the last of the antiquated equipment and chemicals she'd inherited when she bought the practice. Two weeks and her clinic would be fully in the twenty-first century.

Only a couple of decades late.

The satisfaction of achieving such a major goal and the prospect of never having to develop X-ray film again weren't enough, however, to keep Morgan's thoughts from straying to what had clearly been the hottest dream of her life. Not only had she had an intense orgasm, but she'd actually gotten off in her sleep!

She'd awakened with her underwear damp, her body quivering and still clenching with little aftershocks of pleasure. Just thinking about it made certain parts of her body tingle anew.

Blissful gratification aside, what intrigued her more was the glance she'd gotten of her dream lover. She didn't recognize his face, and it wasn't a face that any woman would forget. Handsome but not in a pretty way. He could have been a cowboy or a Viking or a sea captain—the strong features were definitely on the rugged side. Dark hair, nearly black, long enough to shadow a strange bluish symbol on his collarbone, a creature of some sort. What she remembered most, however, were his eyes. They were the color of ale and old gold. And they had looked at her with incredible tenderness, perhaps even love—

Somebody banged on the door, making her jump. "You in there, Morgan?" It was Jay.

"Yup, I'm here." She knew he wouldn't open the door, not with the red warning light on. "Finishing up the X-rays on that ferret."

"I just got off the phone with the cops. They found the guy. They've got him locked up right now, waiting for you to ID him."

"Really?" Relief washed over her, and suddenly she felt shaky all over. She was glad the younger vet couldn't see her. "That's great news, Jay, thanks."

"Thought you'd want to know. I put the officer's number on your desk. If you want someone to go with you, Grady and I are both available."

"Thanks." She was grateful for such good friends who were willing to back her up, but she wanted to do this by herself. She was hoping the process would be similar to what she'd seen on TV, where she could point the man out of a lineup from behind one-way glass. Maybe even by watching video footage in another room completely. However it was done, it would be satisfying to say, "That's him," and know her attacker was in jail.

And if the black dog hadn't intervened, her attacker would have been her *killer*

—and likely never caught. It was fitting that she'd named the big canine on the clinic records with a Welsh word she'd borrowed from some of her grandmother's stories.

Rhyswr.

Hero.

He was surprised to awaken. He'd expected to be dead; he *should*

be dead. But then the last time he'd thought that, the Tylwyth Teg had stepped in.

They wouldn't have saved him this time.

He'd disobeyed the Fair Ones, using the powers they themselves had given him. He'd abandoned the land he was bound to, traveled the high winds in the guise of dark mist, crossed the cold seas, all on his own errand. He'd saved Morgan Edwards, a mortal marked for death, planning to forfeit his immortality and trade his life for hers.

Yet, she had turned around and saved

him

. It shouldn't be possible. He breathed when he had not breathed for centuries. It hurt to breathe, but that was even more of a miracle. He couldn't remember the last time he'd felt anything. Not only did he live, he was mortal.

Morgan called him Rhyswr. She'd whispered the Welsh word to him many times as she'd tended him. He knew what it meant although he didn't feel like a hero. Rhyswr. Still, there was something strangely familiar about it. Long-forgotten memories began to rise to the surface of his mind, fragmented images, thoughts. Rhyswr, Rhyswr...

Rhys! He was

Rhys

! He hadn't heard his own name spoken since before the Romans captured him, hadn't remembered it since the Tylwyth Teg changed him. Even fettered by this bestial form, he felt a rush of freedom course through him like strong drink. He felt something else too. A deep stirring in his heart for this woman who had given him so much.

Rhys made a decision. He had not known freedom or choice in nearly two thousand years. This one time, he would both choose to serve and choose

whom

he would serve. Wherever Morgan Edwards went, he would follow her. He would be her protector to the end of his days.

The big mastiff slept most of the time but was healing well. Morgan often snatched a few minutes throughout the day to sit with the dog, while she fingered the heavy metal collar around his muscled neck. Not only were there no tags or nameplate, she could find no fasteners, no buckles or clasps. It was like nothing she'd ever seen, and she'd been unable to remove it. Thick silver coils and links interlocked in an intricate Celtic design. An inset to the left of the throat framed a silvery creature inlaid with blue stones. It was definitely a canine, perhaps a hunting dog of some sort. The collar itself seemed more like a chain mail torque from a museum than any kind of pet restraint. It was as mysterious as the animal that wore it.

"Where did you come from, Rhyswr?" she asked the sleeping dog. "Where are your owners? They've got to be missing you." The mastiff must belong to American tourists, she had decided. It would certainly explain why the dog was following her bus, and more importantly, it was the only possible explanation for how the animal had gotten to the United States. However, she had been the sole American on her particular tour. Had the dog become separated from an earlier group?

It was easy to picture frantic owners searching, backtracking, and finally finding their oversized pet in time to take it home. But what were the chances that his home was right here in Spokane Valley?

The coincidences were almost beyond belief, but Morgan had been right that her partner Jay would believe her. He'd whistled at the strange story yet immediately begun coming up with ideas for locating the owners.

Morgan had already contacted the travel agency, the tour company, even the British consulate. She'd left many messages for the older woman who had been her tour buddy too. Wouldn't Gwen be amazed to know that the so-called grim had apparently followed Morgan home? So far, however, her calls hadn't been returned. Perhaps her new friend was busy traveling somewhere else.

With Jay's help, Morgan managed to phone or e-mail every veterinarian, animal shelter, kennel club, groomer, and pet shop in the northwestern United States. Jay found a pair of mastiff breeders in the state that Morgan hadn't known about, although calls to them revealed that their dogs were all brindle, not black. In fact, they insisted that mastiffs were
never

black. The breeders were happy to pass the information on to their association, however. There were ads running in two different Spokane newspapers and one in a tristate publication. Jay had even placed an ad in a couple of paranormal e-newsletters and several online forums that Morgan had never heard of. A week had gone by, then two, and still no one seemed to be missing a giant black dog with an expensive collar. It made no sense at all.

"Well, Rhyswr, that's it," she told the dog as she snapped her cell phone shut. She was sitting on the floor and decided she had little hope of getting up. It wasn't just that the oversized city yellow pages weighed heavily in her lap—the dog was dozing with his massive head resting on her leg. He might as well have been a pony. "I don't think there's anyone left on the planet I can contact." Morgan stroked the dog's velvety ears, worked her fingers into the thick glossy fur of his neck, and smiled as he nudged his head back in a clear signal for her to continue. "I'm really sorry that your owners have been so careless with you. But you're welcome to come and live with me. What do you think about that?"

The dog thumped his tail without opening his golden eyes.

"I'll take that as a yes. I know you're still stiff and sore, but it's time to get you out of my office. It's starting to smell kind of doggy in here, you know? You'll like my place. I've got some land and a whole lot of trees, just right for a big fella like you." His tail thumped again and she smiled. "Somehow I can't picture you in my car, even if I open the sunroof, so I've got the keys to the clinic van. If that doesn't work, well, I guess there's always the livestock trailer."