

Storm Warrior (The Grim Series) (8 page)

FIVE

M

organ had gone to bed hoping for another visit from her fantasy lover and wasn't disappointed. A dream whisked her away soon after her head touched the pillow, and she found herself walking the edge of a calm, silvery ocean. A bright moon shone high and full as a warm breeze licked along her naked skin. She dipped a toe into the water, then waded slowly into the shallows, the soft waves caressing her.

She saw him then—her familiar stranger, her lover—swimming toward her. Saw his powerfully muscled body emerge from the waves as he set foot in the shallows, saw the silvery droplets of seawater fly from his skin as he approached. Heat radiated from him as he enveloped her in his strong arms, and his mouth burned against her lips. An answering heat blossomed between her legs, and she wanted him to touch her there, please, please,
please

...

Instead, he feasted on her breasts. His powerful hands cupped and squeezed them while his clever mouth worked the eager nipples relentlessly. Her clit began to pulse in rhythm with the magic he was making, and she tangled her hands in his thick dark hair to hold him to her. Something deep within her began winding tighter and tighter, and she knew she'd shatter when it let loose—

Without any warning, the dream shifted and changed.

Morgan's lover vanished abruptly, along with her pending orgasm.

Damn it!

She gritted her teeth with frustration as she found herself wandering long, darkened hallways through a house that resembled hers yet didn't—when had it been so far to the kitchen? She wasn't quite sure it

was

her own house until she entered the laundry room, wasn't entirely certain she was still asleep even—until she saw her new dog communicating with glowing alien beings!

Good grief.

It was almost a relief to have to slap the damn alarm clock off.

Morgan opened her eyes, contemplating her dreams for a few moments. She briefly considered getting out her favorite vibrator, but that mood was long gone, ruined by the bizarre visions of extraterrestrials among her baskets of dirty towels and jeans.

That'll teach me to eat popcorn late at night.

She had the day off but wasn't interested in sleeping in—after all, she had a new dog. And that dog was probably dying to go outside for a pee. Later she wanted to place an overseas call again in hopes of contacting Gwen—Morgan had been looking forward to telling her about the dog for two whole weeks now. She slipped into her bathrobe and barefooted her way to the laundry room to let Rhyswr out. She hadn't been sure about the choice of accommodations, and he hadn't seemed thrilled either. Small wonder. Although the room was large, it was on the opposite end of the house. But she couldn't imagine getting much sleep with the great snoring creature in her room. Where could she put him so he could be close by? Maybe she could rearrange things in the kitchen area. Would the entryway be better? Deep in thought, Morgan was several steps inside the laundry room before pure shock brought her up short.

There was a man, a naked man curled on the dog bedding. A very big, very powerful, completely naked—

Morgan spun and ran. All the terror of the attack in the parking lot gave her speed as she raced through the house and straight out the front door. She headed for the only vehicle in the driveway, the clinic van, and tried its doors frantically. All locked, even the cargo doors.

Damn it!

Heart pounding, Morgan kept the van between her and the house as she peered back toward the front door. She'd left it wide open—a clear signal to the intruder as to where she had gone. “Crap! What am I going to do?” she muttered. “Think, think!”

The keys were in her purse in the house. Her cell phone was in her purse too. And her purse was—where the hell was her purse? Dining room table? Entryway shelf? Kitchen counter? Bedroom dresser? She'd found the stupid thing in all those places before. Where had she put it last night? And did she dare go back inside to look for it?

“There's got to be something else.” Hers was the last farm on the rural road. She'd liked the privacy when she first bought it, appreciated the fact that only the occasional tractor or combine passed by. It had been such a welcome relief from the busy city. Now it felt isolated and dangerous. The nearest neighbors, Jorge and Katrina Klassen, were three miles away. Normally, she could walk the distance easily. Barefoot, however, would make it very tough going.

Morgan turned away from the useless van and left the driveway. It was the first place the intruder would look for her, although there was no sign of him yet. She jogged to a thick stand of trees and huddled down behind the bushes. Her stupid white bathrobe was sure to give her away if she wasn't careful, but there was no point taking it off. Not with brilliant pink pajamas underneath. She watched the house while stealing glances at the old barn and the machine shed. Could she hide in one of them? She was just contemplating the grain bin in the stable when she remembered the dog. Where was Rhyswr? Why hadn't he barked or chewed the intruder's leg off?

The black dog certainly hadn't been in the laundry room. Obviously, the stranger had let the dog out, but where would Rhyswr go? Her property bordered a forested area around a creek. Maybe the big mastiff had found a rabbit or a deer to chase? Morgan sighed heavily. She'd have to search for her dog later. Right now, she had much bigger problems.

Although there was no activity that she could see in the house, she couldn't stay hidden long. She had to either sneak back in and try to find her keys, hide on the property somewhere, or start off walking to the neighbor's house. She had just decided to follow the creek through the woods, which would take her from her own land and into Klassen's pastures, when a loud whoop from the house had her flattening herself behind the bushes.

He was human. Human! Rhys leapt up from the floor and nearly fell over. He grabbed for a chair to steady himself. By all the gods, human! He was a man again, although he felt like a newborn foal with strange legs that didn't want to support him. Slowly, he drew himself up, teetering just a little. It was almost dizzying. He'd been among the largest of dogs, but he hadn't seen the world from a man's height for millennia. And he'd completely forgotten all the colors. As a dog, the world had looked very different. There was color of a sort, but nothing like this. Everywhere he looked, he was assaulted with hues that had not even existed when he last walked on two legs. Suddenly Rhys wanted, no, *needed* to get outside. One thing would be the same, no matter how much time had passed.

He had to see the sky...

His body felt awkward, but it was still as physically powerful as if he'd awakened from an ordinary night's sleep and not a centuries-old spell. Years of battle against the Roman intruders had strengthened it. Years of fighting in the ring for his Roman captors had honed it. His walking improved with every step, and gradually he stood straighter and didn't need to brush his hands along the walls for support.

The door stood wide open. Beyond it, Rhys could see a sprawling expanse of brilliant green. Had mere grass always been that incredible color? He had to rub sudden moisture away from his eyes with the heel of his hand. Walking over the threshold and into the light was akin to being born, and although his heart leapt, he didn't look up. Not yet. Instead, he stepped carefully off the porch and onto the grass, strode barefoot through the bright, tickling blades until he was well away from the building. Then he extended his arms, palms up, tilted his head back, and stared up into the clear, bright blue of the sky.

The intense color dazzled him until he let himself fall backward onto the grass. Rhys lay there for several minutes in a state of near rapture, unable to take in the splendor, unable to look away from it. Blue was a sacred color, and he ran his fingers over the tattoo of a blue hound on his collarbone. Although the image had caused merriment for the Fair Ones and had inspired his sentence at their hands, the blue hound was his clan

emblem—its color a part of his identity, part of his very soul. Looking up into the sky, the color filled him, soothed him.

Each unselfish deed has weakened the links of our spell, and now the spell is unmade.

Morgan had done it. He was free because of the woman who had befriended him, cared for him, even saved his life. Rhys closed his eyes for a moment in reverent thanks but opened them quickly when a sharp metal point pressed against his throat. He was shocked to discover his benefactor on the other end of a long-handled hoe.

“Who are you?” she demanded, forcing her voice to be steady, although she didn’t feel steady in the least. A close look at the stranger’s face had revealed eyes the color of ale and old gold. His features were as familiar to her as her own. He was the man from her dreams—but how was that possible? More, the blue symbol tattooed high on his collarbone was a perfect match to the enameled animal on Rhyswr’s collar. Shaken, she pressed the hoe harder and saw the man’s golden eyes widen.

“Rhys. My name is Rhys.” His voice was deep. A little raspy but melodic with an accent that sounded all too familiar.

“Okay,
Reese
, what the hell are you doing here? You’ve got no car and no clothes. How’d you get here?”

“My name is
Rhys
,” he corrected, pronouncing it with a single roll of the
r
, just as Nainie had said her

r
’s all her life. As did every Welsh person Morgan had met on her trip, from the hotel clerks to the shopkeepers to the tour directors. “You brought me here.”

“I’m pretty sure I’d remember that. What the hell are you doing here?”

“I was a warrior of my clan until I was captured by the Roman invaders. They forced me to fight in the arena at Isca Silurum and named me the Bringer of Death for my skills. I thought I knew

hell
then, but I had not truly found it until I escaped from them.”

Good grief, was he high on something? The Bringer of Death...Somebody had been playing way too many video games. “Good for you. Ten points for originality. Let me guess, you were drinking last night, and your friends decided to play a prank on you. They stole your clothes and dumped you at the wrong place. Am I close?”

“A prank.” He seemed to consider that. “Yes, you could say that a bit of a prank was played on me. I found a cave, but it turned out to be an entrance to the world below. The Tylwyth Teg found me there, and there aren’t greater pranksters to be had.”

She nearly dropped the hoe. “How do you know about the Tylwyth Teg?” Except for her grandmother, she’d never heard anyone on this side of the ocean speak of them, never mind pronounce their name correctly. The tourist shops in Wales did a booming business in faery merchandise, yet she hadn’t heard the ancient name of the fantasy creatures used very much even in

that

country. She narrowed her eyes at the man, daring him to answer.

He shrugged a little. Although she wasn’t pressing on his neck anymore, he remained prone. “The Fair Ones are cousin to men but very much older. Ancient as the mountains. It was the custom of our clan to leave offerings for them outside the village. The Fair Ones are often bored, and they think nothing of toying with mortals for sport.”