

GALAHAD

Angela Knight

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SHE came out of it curled on the living room rug, sweating and nauseated. Caroline Lang swallowed hard, trying not to heave up the pint of magic, calorie-free Ben and Jerry's she'd had for dinner. The copper taste of blood drowned out any lingering chocolate, accompanied by a pulsing throb in her lower lip. She must have bitten it.

Groaning, she rolled onto her hands and knees and watched her arms shake. Her muscles were still jumping in the aftermath of the vision, and her head throbbed. The television didn't exactly help, blaring a used car commercial loud enough to wake Elvis. "Off!" Caroline gasped, casting a quick spell.

The TV instantly went silent. She sighed in the blessed stillness.

One minute she'd been licking a spoonful of Chunky Monkey and yelling answers at a particularly witless *Jeopardy* contestant. She'd just told him the capital of Lithuania when all hell broke loose in her brain. Blinded by the storm of images, Caroline had reeled to her feet, tripped over the coffee table, and fallen flat on her face.

After that, she'd been subjected to fifteen solid minutes of the Vision from Hell. None of which made a damn bit of sense. There'd been a seven-foot devil and cups of human blood, women sacrificed on stone altars, vampires grinning while they did stuff no vampire had any business doing. She'd even seen herself, flinging magic around like something out of *The Lord of the Rings*. But what really worried her was the guy with the sword, his handsome face cold with determination as he fought at her side.

That was all she needed. Another flipping vampire, sinking his fangs into various parts of her anatomy, including her heart. Unfortunately, she was going to need all the help she could get.

This being a witch thing was starting to seriously suck.

No way, Caroline thought, beginning to panic as the implications of her vision became painfully clear. This is a really bad idea. I haven't had the training. I'll screw it up. I'll get somebody killed. I'll get mekilled. She climbed to her feet, longing to crawl into bed and pull the covers over her face. *I'm only an English teacher. They can't seriously expect me to ...*

Yes, they could. Caroline had only been in Avalon a month, but she already knew these lunatics took the Maja's Oath seriously.

But what if she didn't tell anybody? What if she just ignored it? Nobody had to know.

Except her.

Caroline groaned, knowing there was no way she'd just stand around with her thumb up her butt and let people die without trying to do something about it. Of course, she didn't have a clue what to do, but one step at a time.

Okay then. She straightened her shoulders, the decision to act steadying her. Much as she hated the thought, she had to find the vampire swordsman. Luckily, that shouldn't be a problem. It felt as if the vision had tied a mystical cord around her neck, and he was somewhere out there on the other end.

She'd just have to make sure he didn't get too close. She wasn't up to another game of Bite-and-Run, not after her glorious month with Count Rat Bastard, otherwise known as DominicBonnhome , who'd gotten her into this mess to begin with.

Just before she stepped outside, Caroline took one last longing look around. Over the past couple of weeks, she'd consoled her broken heart by playing with her new powers, including conjuring a houseful of French antiques. She'd since decided they were a little much for her tiny brick ranch, so when she'd seen this cool cream leather living room set on *Queer Eye* , she'd magicked herself a copy. She liked the results. The cream set off the gold in the cheer-leading trophies tastefully displayed on top of the TV.

Now, whether a twenty-eight-year-old woman should actually display her cheerleading trophies was a different question. She'd think about that one if she survived.

Enough stalling. Time to find the vampire.

Caroline opened the door and stepped out into an alien world. To the east, a Scottish castle towered over an expansive golf course that was a dead ringer for Augusta . Just across the cobblestone street, the neighbors' Roman villa lazed in the moonlight, surrounded by an olive grove. Something tiny and glowing zipped around in the trees, reminding Caroline of the lightning bugs back home.

It was probably a fairy.

Next to those displays of conspicuous magical consumption, her pretty brick ranch looked like a double wide. It was a good thing witches and vampires didn't form homeowners' associations, or she'd be in deep trouble for dragging down the neighborhood's property values.

When she got a little stronger in the magic department, Caroline fully intended to ditch the magical duplicate of her house in Georgia and replace it with something that would let her keep up with the Draculas .Disneyland , maybe.

Crossing her postage-stamp of a yard to the cobblestone street, she paused a moment to get her bearings. Ahead, the magical city of Avalon sprawled in all its shimmering, otherworldly glory beneath a sky spread with alien constellations.

Pretty as it was, it was a little unnerving.

In the space of eight weeks, she'd gone from grading papers to losing her job to living on an alternate Earth in a parallel magical universe. Sometimes she got mental whiplash so bad, she had to create a dimensional gate back to Realspace Earth, where her parents had a house in Atlanta . An evening spent

listening to Dad bitch about the Braves made her feel almost normal again.

One of these days she was going to have to tell them what she'd become. But any conversation that began, "Well, Dad, I picked up this vampire in a bar..." couldn't go anywhere but downhill.

CAROLINE tracked the swordsman down in an elegant brick Georgian that looked like a set in *My Fair Lady*. The massive double doors opened automatically when she stepped up to them, but once inside, the building seemed as empty as the rest of Avalon. She wondered where the heck everybody was. The place had seemed crowded enough when she'd arrived with Dominic. Then, *poof!* Instant ghost town.

Was it something she said?

He was here, though. This close, Caroline could feel him—strength and masculinity, powerful and dark and frightening.

Her favorite flavor.

Cut that out, Caroline, she told herself sternly. *You're on a fang-free diet, remember?*

Following that psychic pull, she walked down a short corridor past stained glass windows, heavily carved wainscoting, and a chandelier dripping with crystals shaped like daggers. Yet another set of intimidating doors swung slowly open. Caroline resisted the temptation to give them a magical creak.

The first thing she saw was a walnut bar the length of an aircraft carrier, equipped with more brass than the Boston Pops and more crystal than Tiffany's. Around it stood walnut tables and massive armchairs upholstered in oxblood leather. Other than the swordsman, there was no one in sight.

He sat in an armchair wearing a full suit of plate armor that gleamed gold in the dim lighting. A great helm sat on the table at his elbow, next to a pair of gauntlets. His long sword leaned against the arm of the chair, its hilt encrusted with gems.

Damn, he looked more gorgeous and romantic than he had in the vision. Black hair lay tangled around shoulders broad enough for an Olympic gymnast. His face was equally broad and exotic, with an arrogant Roman nose and cheekbones so high and sharp, they could grate female hearts into pate.

He turned to look at her as she entered, one brow lifted, his eyes a smoky blue that gave his harshly handsome face a hint of the poet.

All of which provided a marked contrast to the bottle of Jack Daniels he balanced on one knee.

"You just sit around in full armor?" Damn, she'd kill for a can opener. "Doesn't it chafe?"

"It's enchanted. I've worn less comfortable Armani." The swordsman squinted at her through the smoke curling from his thick black stogie. Instead of the usual cigar reek, it smelled masculine and exotic, a hint of magic giving the smoke a faint glow. "Don't believe I know you, kid. And I thought I knew every Maja in the Mageverse." White teeth flashed. "Most of 'em in the biblical sense." Flicking ashes into a crystal ashtray sitting beside his helm, he took another puff. His hand was big, square, and scarred, but his lips looked impossibly erotic as they closed around the cigar.

She dragged her wandering attention away from all the carnal ideas that mouth gave her. "I'm Caroline Lang." And how was she supposed to explain the situation without sounding like an even bigger idiot than usual? "I'm new here."

The swordsman stood to shake her extended hand. His touch did devastating things to her concentration. "Hell of a time to join the business." He nodded at the nearest chair. "I'm Galahad. Have a seat."

"Galahad? *The* Galahad?" When he lifted an amused brow, she mechanically moved to take the chair he'd indicated.

Gorgeous old tales spun through her memory. Sir Galahad, son of Lancelot and knight of the Round Table. So pure of spirit, he alone of all Arthur's knights was fit to find the Holy Grail, the cup of Christ.

The legends had neglected to mention he was a vampire.

They'd gotten the part about the Holy Grail wrong, too, according to the vamp who'd made her a witch. Assuming Count Rat Bastard hadn't lied about that the way he had about everything else. For one thing, it wasn't holy.

According to Dominic, the cup actually belonged to Merlin himself, who used a series of tests to determine the worthiness of the knights and ladies of Camelot. Those who passed were allowed to drink from the Grail, which magically transformed them. The women became magic-using witches—Majae—while the men became warrior vampires, or Magi. Collectively, they were known as Magekind, the immortal guardians of Man.

The Magekind were a fertile lot, but their children were born mortal. The Latents, as they were called, carried a genetic trait called Merlin's Gift that could transform them into Magekind.

If, that is, the adult Latent made love to a Maja or Magus at least three times. Repeated sexual contact triggered the Gift, transforming the Latent in an explosion of magic. Without that contact, the child grew old and died like anybody else, except for passing the trait on to his own Latent descendants. Sometimes the Gift passed unused through so many generations, the Latents themselves forgot its existence.

Which is how Caroline became a witch after meeting Dominic Bonhome in a bar. He'd spent the next month romancing her—wine, roses, expensive dinners. She'd just lost her teaching job to state education cutbacks, and she was feeling all too vulnerable. Dominic seemed the perfect antidote: handsome, seductive, fantastic in bed. A dream lover who anticipated her every need and fulfilled each and every one of them. What more could a girl want?

Then he told her he was a vampire. Didn't it just figure? The man of her dreams was a nutball. What was worse, he swore she was a descendent of one of the knights of the Round Table. She was getting ready to call the little men in white coats when he turned into a wolf.

What a relief.

So when he'd offered her immortality, measureless power, and a role in saving the world with him by her side forever, she'd jumped at it like the lovesick idiot she'd been. The next thing she knew, it felt like the power of the cosmos was pouring into her on the end of Dominic's dick. Suddenly she was a Maja, mistress of mind-blowing magical powers. Scary as hell, but what a kick.

It only got better when he showed her how to create a magic gate to Avalon. She thought she'd died and gone to cheerleader heaven.

Which was when her dream lover dropped her like a coyote-ugly sorority girl the morning after a drunken frat party. Ooops. Her Maja trainer later told her Dominic was a professional seducer whose job was romancing promising Latents. She'd been suckered.

Now the latest vampire in her life was watching her through the smoke of his cigar. Sir Galahad himself. She could tell just by looking at him that he was going to be bigger trouble than Dominic.

"Ninety percent of what you've heard about me is bullshit," Galahad told her.

"Yeah? My trainer said you Round Table guys are stone killers who go through women like toilet paper." *Keep your distance, Sir Fangsalot.*

He stuck the cigar between his fangs and grinned around it. "You got me on the first part. Not sure about the second." Puffing, he allowed an artistic pause to develop. "I've never used toilet paper. Last time I took a dump, Europe was sliding into the Dark Ages." Before she could think of a suitable response to that one, he flicked his cigar into the ashtray. "So what brings you to the Lords' Club, Caroline? You do realize the Ladies' Club is across the street, right?"

Apparently Sir Galahad was a sexist jerk. That made things a lot easier. "I guess you didn't get the memo. Men and women are equal now."

He gave her a long look that somehow made her feel like a bitch. "Maybe, but witches are better than everybody. Which is why there are two clubs. All that blood and sex is so distasteful."

And maybe she needed to quit being so defensive before she alienated the only guy who could help her. "That's what I get for making assumptions."

"I forgive you." He stretched out his long legs, mailed heels clanking on the hardwood floor as he studied her. "Mostly because of those shorts. Is that fabric, or just a layer of magical spray paint?"

Caroline glanced down. She wore the same snug denim cutoffs and cropped T-shirt she'd had on when she sat down to watch TV. "I forgot I was wearing these. I came right over when I had the vision."

"Yeah, I figured I didn't owe this little encounter to good Karma." He rolled out of his chair with a boneless grace that suggested he wasn't kidding about the enchanted armor. Caroline followed as he sauntered over to the bar and pulled a glass down from an overhead rack. "I assume this vision did not involve you, me, and a pair of fur-lined handcuffs."

She had to admit she was tempted, Dominic notwithstanding. "If I said yes, could we pretend it did?"

He looked up at her, lifting a brow. "I'd love to, but I get the distinct impression we have a more pressing engagement." Pouring two fingers of whiskey into a glass, he handed it to her. "Spit it out, Caroline. Who am I supposed to kill now?"

CAROLINE reached past Galahad to claim the glass of whiskey. She had the feeling she was going to need it. "Actually, I think they're vampires."

"Figures. Geirolf's bunch?"

"Who's Geirolf?"

"You're new." He shrugged those impressive gold-clad shoulders. "It's complicated. Why don't you tell me what you saw?"

She hesitated, not sure where to start. "Well, you're not going to believe this, but I think I saw the devil."

"Big guy? Red skin, huge horns?"

"I'm not making this up."

"I don't doubt it, but that wasn't the devil. *That* was Geirolf."

"You're kidding. Horns?"

"He only had horns part of the time. The rest of the time, he looked kind of like Richard Gere." Galahad took another swig from his bottle and grimaced at the fire.

"Both forms were probably illusions. He was actually an alien from another planet in the Mageverse."

Dominic had mentioned Mageverse aliens, too. Apparently Merlin and his lover Nimue had also been from another planet; they'd come to Realspace Earth like old-style missionaries visiting Africa. After transforming the humans they'd chosen as champions, they'd jaunted off to the next world on their list. "Geirolf is one of Merlin's people?"

"God, no." Galahad leaned a mailed elbow against the bar, armor creaking as he settled in to tell his story. "Geirolf and his kind—they're called the Dark Ones—are psychic parasites."

Caroline snorted. "Sounds like Dominic."

"Guy that turned you?"

"Yeah."

"I figured. You've got that skittish look. Court seducers don't have a whole lot of scruples when it comes to recruitment." He met her gaze. "Not all of us are like that, Caroline."

Those blue eyes were so direct and level, she found herself relaxing. Maybe he could be trusted. "That's good to hear. So what's this with these killer aliens?"

He puffed his cigar a few times, eying her thoughtfully through the smoke before continuing. "The Dark Ones came to Earth about five thousand years ago and started passing themselves off as gods. They'd con the locals into making human sacrifices, then they'd feed on the life force of the victims. When Merlin

and Nimue showed up, they declared war on the Dark Ones and kicked their collective butts."

She toasted him with her glass. "Yay, Merlin."

He grinned and flicked his ashes into the crystal ashtray at his elbow. "After the battle, Merlin and Nimue banished the Dark Ones and imprisoned their ringleader, Geirolf, in a cell on Mageverse Earth."

"Why didn't they kill him?"

"Evidently they're not real big on killing. Personally, I think it's the only real way to thin the asshole population."

Caroline instantly thought of a principal or two she'd like him to meet. "That could work."

"Yeah, but they won't let me do it. Anyway, Geirolf stayed locked up for the next sixteen centuries before escaping a year ago. The bastard managed to create a vampire army before we killed him last month."

"You sure he's dead? Because I saw him making magical cups in my vision."

Galahad shook his head. "Nope, he's dead. You must have seen something that's already happened. I never heard anything about any cups, though."

"Well, he made them. Three of them. He gave them to these... I guess they were his priests. They wore these really loud robes. Anyway, thousands of worshipers lined up to drink from those cups. As soon as they took a sip, they turned into vampires." She sipped her whiskey and frowned. "Some of whom were female. I thought only men became vamps."

"Geirolf's vamps have different rules than we do." Galahad scratched his jaw thoughtfully. "So that's how he transformed all those idiots. We wondered. Sounds like he stole a couple of pages from Merlin's book."

"Presumably. Next I saw him getting ready to sacrifice a naked man and woman on this stone altar..."

"Right. That was a Magekind couple, Erin Grayson and Reece Champion. Geirolf intended to use their deaths to power a spell designed to wipe us all out."

"Sounds ugly."

"That's putting it mildly. We'd have all cashed in our chips if he'd pulled that spell off. Luckily Erin and Reece managed to kill him first. But before we could wipe out Geirolf's worshippers, his second-in-command scattered them all over the planet. We've been hunting vampires ever since." Galahad grimaced. "And what a pain in the ass that's been."

"Oh, so that's what that was. I wondered what the hell was going on when I saw all those vampires vanish." Caroline sighed and took another sip. "Anyway, it's going to get worse."

"Figures. Why?"

"Geirolf's priests took the cups with them when they gated away. I saw this one in particular make his own little nest after looking up twenty of his followers. And since he's got his very own cup—"

Galahad winced. "—He's going to use it to create more vampires."

She nodded. "His own private army."

"Jesu, that's all we need." He sighed. "Looks like we're going on a cup hunt."

IT had always annoyed Galahad that Magekind vampires couldn't work spells beyond healing their own wounds or turning into wolves. If you needed anything magical done, you had to go to a witch, particularly for complex spells. However, for relatively simple ones—protection or communication, for example—you could get her to make you an enchanted object, like armor, swords or gems. You could then use that object to work that specific spell.

Which was why Galahad was forced to put his helm on to contact Morgana Le Fay. When he closed his visor and called her name, her image instantly appeared in his mind.

Normally, Morgana favored slinky lingerie or designer suits, but this time she was clad in a glittering suit of plate mail, heavily engraved with runes and set with enchanted gems. A chain mail coif framed her long-boned, elegant face. Even in her current grim mood, she was one of the most beautiful women he'd ever seen. "Your timing leaves much to be desired, Galahad," she growled. "We found that nest in Peru, and I'm getting ready to lead an attack. I don't have time to chat."

"Make time," he snapped, and quickly filled her in.

When he finished, she cursed in a fluid, profane blend of a dozen dead languages. "Enchanted cups. No wonder there seem to be so many more of these Goddess-cursed vampires."

"We've got to get that cup, Morgana."

"Obviously. I'll want a look at it, if I'm supposed to create a counter-spell."

"Then Caroline and I are going to need reinforcements. She estimates there were a good twenty vamps in that nest she saw."

"Then you'll just have to figure something out, because I can't spare anyone." When he started to protest, Morgana held up a ringed hand. "Galahad, we're about to fight a force of two thousand with one barely half that size. Arthur has his hands full with odds just as bad in Turkey, and Lancelot and Grace are leading a force against a heavily fortified nest in Montana. Then we've got another hundred agents going after individual killers, with Merlin knows how many innocents at risk." She broke off. "Speaking of killers, I gather you tracked your assignment down."

"Took him out just after sunset." He grimaced, remembering the carnage he'd seen. "Son of a bitch was lucky I hadn't found the bodies before I killed him, or I'd have gotten artistic."

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She winced. "How bad was it?"

"Bad as it gets. I counted twenty kids, all under eleven. Did save three of 'em he had in a cage, though."

They're going to need aMaja to do psychic repairs, or they'll be screwed up for the rest of their lives."

Actually, he wouldn't mind being put under a spell or two himself. Otherwise he'd be seeing that pit full of little corpses in his nightmares for the next couple of centuries. At least until he saw something worse.

Morgana sighed. "Let me get through this fight and I'll attend to it. What did you do with the survivors?"

"Called the police after I killed the bastard. They'll see the boys get home."

She stiffened. "You didn't let the mortals find his body?"

"I'm not an idiot, Morgana. Nobody's going to find him. Ever."

"Good." The witch studied his face, her own softening fractionally. "Before you go after that cup, get something to drink. And I'm not talking about that mortal poison you love. You look drained."

Galahad gave her a taunting smile. "So gate on over. You know I don't drink*that* from a bottle."

Morgana lifted an elegantly aloof brow. "I seem to have a prior engagement. Why don't you nibble on your new friend instead? She probably needs it as much as you do. By the way, be careful with her. She hasn't had combat training."

He straightened. "*Any?* Merlin's Cup, Morgana!"

"Why do you think she's not here fighting? We're so short-handed, I had to pull her trainer in. And I could hardly throw Caroline into a battle like this when she's only had about a week's instruction."

"Let me get this straight. You left a brand-newMaja alone in Avalon with nobody to instruct her in the use of her powers? You're lucky she hasn't turned the city into a crater."

Morgana snorted. "That kind of spell would require more knowledge and power than she has."

"And you want me to take her into combat?"

"Not particularly, but we don't seem to have a choice."

"Morgana..."

"What do you want me to do about it, Galahad?" she snapped. "Yes, I'm aware the situation is far from ideal, but you're just going to have to make the best of it. Keep a close eye on the girl, kill as many vampires as you can, and don't let her blow up anything important."

He was about to tell her just how asinine that order was when something boomed, almost knocking her off her feet. Morgana ducked with a vile Latin curse. "Take care of it, Galahad. I've got vampires to kill."

The image vanished.

Galahad glowered into his darkened visor. Perfect. Just perfect. Thrown to the wolves with no backup except a grass-greenMaja who'd probably blast him by mistake. He jerked off his helm and cursed.

"I gather they're not sending reinforcements," Caroline said.

Galahad turned to see her sprawled in a chair, long, silken legs crossed at the ankle. The view was almost enough to take him mind off their current situation. "They don't have any to send. We're stretched too thin, and Geirolf's vampires seem to be creating new recruits. If we don't get a handle on this, we're screwed."

"I was afraid of that. In my vision, I didn't see anybody else on our side." She flipped her long, silken hair off one shoulder. It reached to the center of her back, as mink brown as those big dark eyes of hers. They dominated her oval face, though that exotic full-lipped mouth did a good job of balancing them out. Add a round chin and high cheekbones, and you had a girl-next-door prettiness Galahad found more than a little intriguing.

Caroline's body was just as mouth-watering, with a lean, elegantly muscled build that suggested she did a lot more than grade papers. Her cropped shirt clung to perfect breasts the size of brandy snifters, while those spray-paint shorts revealed long, sleek legs.

Except... Galahad looked closer and frowned. There was a hectic flush across her high cheekbones, one he knew a little too well. "How long has it been since you were milked?"

She lifted a brow. "Is that a reference to breast size? Because if it is..."

"No, when was the last time anybody fed from you?" He hated that term. The Majae considered *milk* demeaning, but at least it didn't make them sound like Happy Meals.

"That would have been Dominic. I didn't much notice, since I was busy getting barbecued at the time." She rolled her eyes. "'Merlin's Gift,' my ass. Hell of a way to ruin a good climax."

"How long have you been here?"

She shrugged. "A month or so."

"And you haven't fed anybody in all that time? Didn't they warn you that you have to donate every two weeks?"

"Or what, the Avalon Red Cross sends somebody named Guido to collect?"

"No, you pop a blood vessel and drop dead if there's nobody around to fix you." He watched her eyes widen and swore. "They didn't tell you. Somebody needs to be spanked."

"Dominic said I'm immortal!"

"You are. But along with giving you magical powers, Merlin's Gift allows you to feed vampires much more often than mortals can. Which means if you don't donate, your blood pressure spikes."

Worry drew down her dark, silky brows. "Couldn't I fix it with a spell?"

"Fraid not. The Gift doesn't allow that. Merlin intended Majae to feed Magi, and he made damn sure they do it." He stubbed out his cigar in a crystal ashtray on the bar, then turned to her. "Come here, sweetheart."

Her eyes widened in an expression of alarm he would have found amusing if he hadn't been so damn

hungry for her. "What? Why?"

"I'm a vampire, Caroline. Why do you think?"

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GALAHAD'S blue eyes simmered with a blend of erotic heat and alien hunger Caroline found both intimidating and perversely sexy. She backed up a pace. "Hey, I thought you didn't play those kinds of games."

"I don't." He followed, his gaze so seductive, she could feel her resistance melting. "I'm not offering you a sham romance, Caroline. This is about simple mutual need." As he spoke, she saw the flash of fangs.

God, she was tempted. What would it be like to feel those arms around her, that mouth on her skin? Would he be sweet and tender or rough and dominant?

Since they both knew what to expect, where was the harm?

But... "Believe me, I'd love nothing more than to play with all your jutting bits, but the bad guys are hungry, too. And they do hurt people. I don't think we have time for you to take a lunch break."

Irritation flashed through his simmering sensuality. "Do you have time to drop dead?"

Caroline blinked. "Not really, no."

"And I haven't fed in two days. Which is not the way I like to go into a battle to the death, particularly when I'm outnumbered. Just how long do we have before the bad guys start serving cocktails out of Geirolf's Grail?"

"I don't know. Probably not long."

His gaze locked on her mouth. "So we don't have sex."

Caroline licked her lips, trying to ignore the whimper of disappointment in the back of her mind. "No?"

"No. I'll just have to restrict myself to that pretty throat." He stepped closer, lids lowering over those blue, blue eyes as he lowered his head. "At least for right now."

She tensed, wondering if he was just going to grab her and snack, but Galahad was a lot more subtle than she'd given him credit for. He didn't take her in his arms. Only their mouths touched, his lips brushing over hers, damp, warm, maddening satin. Knowing she shouldn't, Caroline opened for him.

Mutual need. Yeah, she could do mutual need. That was safe.

Galahad caught her lower lip gently between his teeth and sipped at it. He was really good at that. With a groan, she slid her arms around his neck and buried one hand in the coarse black silk of his hair. The hard, cool contours of his armor pressing against her body made her wonder what he felt like underneath it. "You know," she said against his mouth, "this is kind of kinky."

"Oh, I haven't even gotten started." Galahad's tongue stroked boldly between her lips. He tasted of enchanted smoke and whiskey, a thoroughly masculine combination that tempted her into deepening the kiss. Instead, he drew back to lick and nip at her mouth.

She leaned into him blindly, craving the contact of his body, but all her hands touched was the cool, etched steel of his armor. Caroline moaned in disappointment and seriously considered zapping him naked just so she could rub up against him.

It had taken Dominic an hour of serious foreplay to make her burn like this.

Galahad tore his mouth free of hers and lifted his head, his blue eyes feral. "You sure we don't have time for more?"

Caroline stared blindly up at his extravagantly handsome face as she clung to his breastplate. "Oh, we've got plenty of time."

Fangs flashed in his smile. "Yeah?"

"What, you expect me to say I'd rather go fight vampires than have jungle sex with you? What are you, nuts?"

"Guess that answers that question." He stepped back and took her shoulders in his hands. Spinning her around, he pulled her back against his tall, armored body.

She stiffened. "What...?"

"I'm losing it." Galahad's breath puffed warm against her ear. "If we stay face-to-face, I'm not sure I can resist the temptation." He pressed a burning, open-mouthed kiss to the leaping pulse in her throat.

Caroline caught her breath. "Is this going to hurt?"

He licked the straining cord in the side of her neck. "Did it hurt the last time?"

Nerves made her joke. "I'm not sure. About the time he bit me, I got lit up like a mosquito in a bug zapper by Merlin's Ugly Practical Joke."

Galahad chuckled, the sound wickedly suggestive. "Ah—a virgin." Tauntingly, he raked the very tips of his fangs over her pulse.

She shivered in an erotic blend of arousal and fear. "Galahad..."

"It won't hurt," he interrupted, his hands suddenly sliding up under her T-shirt to claim her breasts. "Well... maybe it will, but you'll be too hot to care."

His hands felt very warm as they squeezed her through the thin lace cups of her bra. Skillfully, he hooked his index fingers into the fabric and tugged just enough to pop her nipples free.

Caroline looked down to watch as Galahad's clever hands found the tight little peaks. Plucked, rolled, stroked. She squirmed, unconsciously rubbing her backside over his armored groin. The steel codpiece jutted against her ass, taunting her with the question of what his cock looked like.

"Sensitive little nipples you've got there," Galahad whispered in her ear. "Bet they'd be fun to suck." He rolled the hard nubs. "Mmm. Are they, Caroline?"

"You're asking *me*?" Panting, she threw back her head and let it rest on his hard, armored shoulder. She was starkly aware of his height. You'd think he'd be short, given the times he'd come from, but he was a full head taller than she was. An image flashed through her mind—Galahad naked, all sculpted swordsman brawn. "Oh, God!"

He inhaled sharply. "Ahhhh. Getting nicely wet now. I can smell it." Releasing one of her breasts, he reached down her torso, found the button of her shorts. Flicked it open. The zipper hissed.

She tensed at the erotic anticipation curling through her in shivering waves.

Galahad worked a hand down into her open fly and slipped into her delicate silk panties. As he found her sex, Caroline groaned helplessly. Two long fingers pumped their way between her tight folds, eased by the thick cream of her desire.

"Oh, yeah. You're wet." Hescissored her clit between two fingers, and she arched her back, gasping.

"A little." Actually, a lot. She set her feet farther apart, knowing if he decided to push her down and take her, she'd welcome him. She was one deep breath from begging as it was.

"Mmmmmmm. This is the good part." Galahad paused to trace his tongue over one of the whorls of her ear. "The anticipation. I'm going to take you right to the edge. And then..." He lowered his head to lick her pulse. "... I'm going to *bite* ." Strong fingers stroked right up into her core as his thumb strummed her clit.

Caroline groaned. He'd discovered a delicate little bundle of nerves right over her pulse. He raked his fang tips across it as he played with her. She felt the orgasm building, teased to unbearable heights by those clever fingers. She arched against him as he pumped both fingers into her depths, squeezed her nipple with tender brutality.

And bit into her straining throat as he flicked a skillful thumb over her clit.

Her strangled gasp of pain spiraled into a cry of pleasure as her orgasm burst free. That first sweet wave was followed by a second, and then a third. Writhing mindlessly in Galahad's arms, she came in long dizzy pulses as he drank.

HER blood burned hotter than the whiskey had, flooding his mouth with its raw, intoxicating taste. Galahad tightened his grip in instinctive greed, wishing he were naked so he could feel every silken inch of her long, supple body.

He drank hungrily, drank until it should be time to start tapering off, drank until his cock ached. Caroline went right on pumping hard. It really had been way too long for her. She needed more drawn off, and he was delighted to comply.

Almost as delighted as he would have been to thrust into the tight, creamy flesh he could feel gripping his fingers. He was hard as a pole arm behind his armor.

But now was not the time, so all Galahad could do was work her with his fingers and drive her to another convulsing orgasm while he drank. Her nails raked the engraved steel of his armor as he fed.

Finally, after long, delicious moments, the pressure eased off. Galahad lifted his head, cradling her, knowing she'd feel dizzy from the sudden decrease in that murderous blood pressure.

"Thank you," he said in her ear. His voice sounded hoarse, and he cleared his throat.

"Oohhhh." She hung in his arms, panting. "That was... incredible."

Galahad grinned over her head. "My pleasure."

"I..." She stopped to swallow. "I've never come like that just from being..."

"Bitten?"

"That, too." She straightened in his arms as if making a deliberate effort to pull herself together. "Is it always like that?"

It had been pretty damn intense. More so than the last time he'd... Well, actually he couldn't remember the last time it had been that hot. "You needed it more than most." Yeah, that sounded good. He turned her carefully in his arms, made her meet his gaze. "How are you feeling now?"

She blinked, her cheeks a little flushed, her eyes glazed. "Good, actually. Better. Which is funny, because I'd expected to feel weak after losing that much blood."

"That's because you damn near waited too long. If you'd gone one more day without being milked, you'd have popped something that would have killed you." He laid a hand alongside her face to gather her floating attention. "Never do that again, Caroline. It's not something to fool around with. When you feel pain or weakness, don't just magic it away. Tell someone."

"Yeah, sure." She swayed against him. "Ummm. A chair would be good."

Galahad guided her over to one and tried to ignore the thoughts those long, bare legs inspired as she sat down. They had other fish to fry.

Bloodsucking vampire shark, in fact.

4

GALAHAD spent the next half hour grilling her about the vision.

So much for lazing in the afterglow.

Not that she could blame him. They had a nest of vampires to kill. *Focus, Caroline* .

But it was tough, and not just because the amazingly gorgeous man questioning her had just drunk her

blood. She knew she must have climaxed harder at some point in her twenty-eight years, but damned if she could remember it.

And that was aside from the fact he was sixteen hundred years old *and* a knight of the Round Table.

What the hell was happening to her? This time last year she'd been trying to teach sentence construction to a bunch of bored high school juniors. Now she was supposed to help Sir Galahad clean out a nest of evil vampires and recover the Unholy Grail. What did she look like, Sarah Michelle Gellar?

Though she'd stack her eye candy against Buffy's any day.

Apparently satisfied he had as much of the story as he was getting, Galahad leaned against the bar and started scribbling on a notepad she'd conjured for him. His handsome face drew into a scowl of concentration as he wrote in long, slashing strokes.

He'd drank her blood. And she'd liked it.

Caroline was still mentally reeling from that when he finally lifted his head, running a harried hand through that silken hair of his. "Obviously, we need to clean out that nest you saw. The thing is, I don't particularly like going into combat based on intelligence from a vision."

"Yeah, I could see how that would be less than ideal." He looked all sexy and grim and determined. She, on the other hand, felt like a giant rag doll with all the stuffing sucked out. *Focus, Caroline* .

"That's putting it mildly," he said, turning to pace, apparently unaware of her dazzled gaze. "Visions only reveal the big picture, and in combat, it's the details that bite you on the ass. I'm damned if I'm going to just gate into some magical underground installation without knowing how many bad guys are going to object."

That particular mental image was enough to kill the last of her afterglow and start her stomach crocheting itself into sick knots. She rubbed it absently. "So how do you suggest we find out?"

"For one thing, we don't do this in one big go. It's going to take a series of strikes, just in and out. Fast."

Caroline nodded. It made sense. Not enough to keep her from wanting to throw up, but still.

"First order of business is to find that Grail you saw and secure it for Morgana to study," he continued. "Then we gate home to plan our next move. In the meantime, I want you to try to do a magical scan and get me a bad-guy head count. Find out where they are and what they're doing. Think you can do that?"

"I'll give it my best shot." Her palms were going damp. "Then what?"

"Based on that intelligence, we'll make a series of strikes to whittle down their forces."

Which was military speak for *killling people*. *Oh, God* . "Sounds good." An outright lie if ever she'd told one.

In her entire life, Caroline had been in exactly two fights. The first has been when she was ten and Jenny Peterson said she was a stupid head. She didn't remember much about the resulting catfight beyond hair pulling and being told she hit like a girl. Originality had never been Jenny's strong suit.

She'd gotten into the second one just a couple of years ago, when she'd tried to break up a pair of brawling seniors. Somebody shot an elbow into her face and she spent the next two weeks looking like Sylvester Stallone at the end of *Rocky* .

Now she was supposed to battle killer magic-users who sacrificed people and drank blood from cups. This was beginning to feel like a bad reality show. *Survivor: Vampire Vacation* . Somebody vote her off the island. Please.

But if they didn't do this, people were going to die.

"Your eyes are the size of bread plates." Galahad put a hand on her shoulder that was almost fatherly. "Look, this first time out, I'll do the heavy lifting. I don't expect you to do much real fighting; you haven't had the training."

Caroline licked her dry lips. "What if we're really outnumbered?"

He shrugged. "Toss a couple of fireballs and try not to hit me. Then gate us out of there." Apparently reading her sick anxiety, he gave her a reassuring smile. "I've been at this since Rome fell, Caroline. I know what I'm doing. Now, armor up and let's go."

"Armor. Okay." Tentatively, Caroline laid a hand on his breastplate, closed her eyes, and reached for the magic. It leaped for her as it always did, almost joyously, surging across her body in a tingling, foaming wave. She envisioned what she wanted, and the energy settled against her skin, grew solid and cool. When she opened her eyes again, she was wearing a gleaming suit of magical plate that was an exact duplicate of his.

God, magic was fun. The rest of this sucked, but she did like conjuring.

Galahad looked down at her chest and grinned. "You do realize those runes spell my name, right?"

Feeling a flush spread across her cheekbones, Caroline looked down at the indecipherable designs scrawled across her breasts. She couldn't even read the symbols, much less write her own name in them. "Oh. Um..."

He laughed as he moved to put on his helm and gauntlets. "Don't worry about it, Caroline. Just create a gate to the cup."

GALAHAD watched Caroline square her shoulders. She'd gone pale as a ghost, yet she still seemed grimly determined to take out the nest. He had to admire that.

Besides, she looked really cute wearing that scaled-down version of his armor, name and all.

Gesturing, she drew the gate out of the air. It spiraled outward from a pinpoint spark to a glowing, man-shaped opening in the course of a blink. Not bad. The kid was green, but she had muscle.

Galahad stepped closer to see what was on the other side. The view showed a fountain cut from rough, red stone sitting in the center of a round room built of the same crimson rock. A clawed hand thrust from the center of the fountain bowl, holding something gold.

A cup.

And from it spilled...

"Is that *blood*?" Caroline demanded.

"Probably just looks like it. Geirolf's lot would never let that much go to waste. You sense anybody there?"

"Not right now. Which doesn't mean they won't gate in behind us."

"We'll have to risk it." Having dealt with more than enough raw recruits, he decided to remind her of the plan. "So we'll make it quick. I'll snatch Geirolf's Grail while you get me a bad-guy head count. Then we duck back through the gate again and decide how to clean house."

"Okay." Caroline's voice shook.

He threw her a smile as he lowered his visor. "You're doing good, kid. You'll be fine."

As he reached over to flip hers down, too, she gave him a sick smile. "Wonder if Custer said that before the Little Big Horn?"

"No, actually, he said, 'Indians? What Indians?'"

She snickered as the visor clicked down.

Satisfied, Galahad drew his sword and stepped into the gate. Magic rippled over his skin in a hot, tingling wave as it transported him across the dimensions to Realspace Earth. In a blink he was through, stepping out onto the smooth stone floor.

He moved aside to let Caroline through as he aimed a quick look around them, all his senses open. He didn't smell anything but damp stone and water. The room was silent except for the sullen patter of that disgusting fountain. "You feel anything?"

Caroline's helmeted head tilted as she went still. He could feel the magic rise around her. "We're underground," she said. "Somewhere in... Virginia? Out in the sticks..." She stiffened, her voice rising in horror. "Oh, God! They killed four people to work the spell! They sacrificed them right over our heads. I can *feel* them."

"It's okay, you're all right." Galahad touched her shoulder to bring her out of it. When her eyes met his through the slits in her visor, he told her, "These bastards can't draw on the energies of the Mageverse the way Majae can. They have to use death energy to work their spells."

"And what a fine source of power you're going to be," a strange voice said. Galahad whirled an instant too late.

BOOOOM!

The blast of magic took him full in the chest, knocking him across the room to slam hard into a stone wall. If he hadn't been wearing enchanted armor, it would have flash-fried him. Caroline screamed his name.

He hit the ground rolling and scrambled for the sword he'd dropped when the blast hit. The hiss and crackle of magic filled the air, shots volleying back and forth over his head. He grabbed his weapon and looked up to see Caroline exchanging fireballs with a tall, graying man in gaudy pseudo-priestly robes.

"You back-shooting son of a bitch!" she snarled, summoning another shimmering ball of energy. Judging from the glow, it had enough kick to melt a hole in a tank. She lobbed it at him, but the priest blocked it with a shield spell. His return blast splashed off her armor in licking tongues of flame.

She danced aside and hurled another ball at him like a major league pitcher with the bases loaded. He blocked it and started circling, looking for an opening.

Galahad knew Caroline would eventually wear the bastard down, since Geirolf's vamps ran out of magic when they used up the life force they'd stolen. Majae, on the other hand, drew on the raw energy of the Mageverse itself.

Unfortunately, she probably didn't have that much time. He was willing to bet the bastard's reinforcements were on the way.

He had to wrap this up.

Galahad leaped for the priest, bellowing a battle cry as he swung his sword with all his strength. The cultist spun, throwing up another one of those magical shields. The blade jolted in Galahad's hands as it hit the glowing barrier hard enough to rattle his back teeth. He ignored the sensation and started hacking, trying to batter down the shield before the priest could muster stronger defenses.

A burst of heat blazed against his back. *Hell, another one already*. Galahad ducked, glancing around for his new foe.

"Ooops!" Caroline called, a second fireball floating in her hand. "Sorry!"

"Watch it!" he growled and returned his attention to his opponent.

But the vampire had taken advantage of his instant's distraction to create a sword and armor. The priest now wore a suit of iridescent black mail, swinging the sword with skillful rotations of one wrist. Geirolf must have magically taught his worshipers how to use a blade; most moderns barely knew hilt from point.

Galahad wasn't worried. No spell could match his sixteen hundred years as a swordsman.

The only question was—how long before the rest of the cultists arrived?

CAROLINE watched anxiously, looking for an opening. The two vampires were so fast, she was afraid to try another shot for fear of hitting Galahad again.

Besides, he didn't seem to need the help. The knight moved in an oiled blur of gold, battering at his opponent with flashing strokes of his sword.

There! They'd whirled apart.

Magic rushed down her arm, tingling and stinging to coalesce in a white-hot ball. She hurled it at the priest with all the force she could muster. He screamed, the sound blending with an outraged female shriek.

"Bitch!"

A weight slammed into her back, knocking her flat on her face. Stunned, disoriented—where the hell had that come from?—Caroline felt something jerk off her helmet. She twisted around and threw up an arm just in time to block the fist coming at her head.

Britney Spears was sitting on her back.

Actually, it just looked like Britney. Blond, so young she could have been a cheerleader on the team Caroline advised. But her face was twisted like something out of a horror flick, and fangs filled her open mouth in curving spikes.

"You hurt my dad!" she hissed, fingers fisting in Caroline's hair. "I'm going to rip out your fuckin' throat and use the power to kill your boyfriend!" Fangs gaping, she bent toward Caroline's exposed throat.

"Getoff!" Caroline grabbed for the power, twisted around, and shoved her fist into the girl's open mouth. Fangs raked her knuckles, but she ignored the sting and sent raw energy shooting down her arm.

The blast picked the girl up and threw her across the room like a straw in a hurricane. She didn't even scream as she hit the stone floor with a meaty thud.

Heart pounding, Caroline scrambled to her feet. The girl didn't move.

Swallowing, Caroline edged closer, only to recoil in horror. The kid was burned black, flesh seared to charcoal by that panicked blast. "Oh, Jesus."

"That your first?" Galahad asked, rough sympathy in his voice.

Unable to speak, she turned. He stood looking at her, his sword dripping blood. At his feet lay the priest, his body oddly stunted. It took her a moment to realize the object lying a few feet away wasn't the man's helmet.

It was his head.

Caroline whirled away and almost stepped on the girl she'd killed. She clamped both hands over her mouth and closed her eyes, fighting the rise of vomit.

"Shit," Galahad growled, his voice grim.

Mechanically, she turned her back on the body and opened her eyes. He was staring at the fountain.

Geirolf's Grail had disappeared.

"WHAT the hell happened to the cup?" Galahad growled, glaring at the empty clawed hand still gushing faux blood. "I know I kept that priest too busy to do anything with it."

"The girl must have transported it away before she attacked me," Caroline said, raking a shaking hand through her hair. She carefully did not look at either of the corpses.

He cursed in a language that sounded vaguely like Latin. "Is there any chance it's still in this complex?"

Caroline closed her eyes and concentrated, searching for the slightly greasy mental impression the cup had given her. Nothing. She swore in frustration and opened her eyes. "She must have sent it to her vampire buddies."

"Not necessarily. I've known Majae to create magical shields so strong, you could stand right next to it and not know it was there. We're going to have to make a fast search." He turned toward the nearest of two corridors into the chamber. "And while we're at it, we need to make sure there's nobody else lurking around."

"I'm not picking up anybody."

Galahad jerked a thumb at the bodies. "You didn't sense them either, but they were sure as hell here."

That stung. "I'm sorry. I guess I screwed up."

He sighed and flipped up his visor. "No, that was uncalled-for. They probably gated in behind us. Either way, we're both still alive and two of the bad guys are dead. You didn't freeze when I was hit; you stepped in and started defending me. That was damn good for a first fight."

Unwillingly, her eyes tracked toward the burned and twisted body of the girl. "Yeah. Real good."

Galahad followed her gaze. "She'd have killed you, Caroline."

"She was trying to defend her father." She forced an insouciant shrug. "But hey, one less murdering vamp, right? Besides, she reminded me way too much of some of my bitchier cheerleaders."

"Cheerleaders?" He sheathed his sword. The blade scraped against the leather sliding in, the cave giving it a sinister echo.

"I'm a teacher. I was the squad advisor last year." Caroline's gaze drifted toward the girl's body before she snatched it away. "Did I tell you I was captain of my college cheerleading squad? We went state champion one year. I shake a mean pom-pom."

Galahad gave her a long, level look before stooping to pick up her fallen helm. "The first time you're forced to kill is never easy, but she didn't give you a choice."

"Not buying the act, huh?"

"No." He flipped up her visor so he could meet her eyes. "Whether she was defending her father or not, she wasn't blameless. You told me yourself that they murdered four people for the magic to build this complex. She was part of that. And judging by the way she tried to rip out your throat, I doubt she was as an innocent bystander."

Caroline shook her head. "I know, but..."

"Remember the string of cult murders earlier this year? The poisonings, the bombings, the mutilations? She and her fellow cultists did all that to provide Geirolf with the power he used to damn near wipe out Magekind. She had it coming."

"She could have been one of my students, Galahad."

"Klebold and Harris were kids, too, but that didn't stop them at Columbine."

She swallowed. The stench of burned flesh was making her queasy. "I know, but this is going to bother me for a long time."

"It's always going to bother you. You never forget the first one."

"That wasn't what I was hoping to hear, Galahad."

"What can I say? I'm like Superman—I'm always honest." He grinned. "Except when I lie."

She snorted, reluctantly amused. He was entirely too damn charming for her peace of mind. "Oh, that's comforting."

"I know." He clapped his mailed hands. "Okay, break's over. We need to find that cup and gate out of here before dawn. I figure we've got maybe two hours before the sun rises."

"We're underground. What difference does it make? It's not like you'd ignite. Dominic said that's a myth, like the thing about crosses and garlic."

"He left a few details out. No, I don't burst into flame, but when the sun comes up, I lose consciousness, and there's not a damn thing I can do about it."

"Well, that makes about as much sense as screen doors on a submarine. Why?"

He shrugged. "It's got something to do with absorbing energies from the Mageverse. Point is, I don't want to be here when that happens. If that cup's here, we need to find it. Now."

She sighed and snapped her visor closed. "You're the boss."

"You bet your tight little ass I am. And I'm telling you to get it moving." Drawing his sword again, he turned to lead the way down the nearest corridor. "Stay close."

THE good news was that they found no other vampires in the complex. The bad news was that they didn't find Geirolf's Grail either. Under Galahad's direction, Caroline scanned the walls and furniture carefully with a spell that was the magical equivalent of an X ray. She found nothing other than a nauseating collection of photographs in a drawer, apparently souvenirs from the cult's murders. The girl who'd attacked her held the knife in one of them, blood-spattered and smirking.

Caroline started feeling better about killing her.

The complex itself was laid out around a single cavernous central chamber like the hub of a wheel. Corridorsspoked out to smaller chambers, most of them dormitories, though one was a den complete with a television set, an entertainment center, and a wide selection of porn DVDs. Galahad made a show of looking through them with such exaggerated lechery Caroline had to laugh.

But any amusement died a quick death when they stepped into the central chamber.

Galahad'svampire nose detected the reek of decayed blood coming from the pentagram-shaped altar that dominated the room. He turned just in time to catch Caroline as she staggered. Her open visor revealed a face as pale as paper.

"Death." Huge dark eyes met his. "I saw this. I saw this room. And now I see..." She gagged. "Oh, man, that's just disgusting. What is it with these people?"

"They're assholes?"

"Nah, that's an insult to assholes everywhere." She reached up and dragged off her helm. "Look, this is a waste of time.Geirolf's Grail isn't here, and neither are the vamps—thank God. I've scanned every inch of this place, and there's nothing. Besides, if anybody was here, they'd have jumped us by now."

Frustrated, Galahad glared around at the surrounding walls. "Then where are they? It's barely an hour until dawn. The cultists sleep during the day just like I do."

"Which means they'll be back any minute."

"That, or they'll go to ground somewhere else. Either way, I'm not waiting around to get ambushed. Look, could you work a spell to keep them out of here?"

Caroline's silky brows pulled together. "If I do that, they're going to know we're onto them."

"They'll figure that one out when they see the two bodies. Assuming Teen Bitch didn't just send them the cup and telepathically tell them what was going on."

"But if she did, why didn't they come back and blast us? Something else is going on here." She frowned and scratched her forehead through her open visor. "Think they've just decided to abandon the complex and build another one?"

"But you saw us fighting a whole bunch of them here in that vision. So they're going to come back." He drummed his mailed fingers on the hilt of his sword. "Tell you what. Set a spell to let you know when they return—without alerting them—get rid of the bodies, and gate us out of here. We'll come back when we've got reinforcements. Or at least a better idea what the fuck is going on."

"So what are we going to do in the meantime?"

"Get some sleep. It's not as if I've got a hell of a lot of choice."

THE priest was dead.

Marilyn Roth realized he was gone as she rose from the body of the rival cultist she'd just killed. His gnawing presence had vanished from her mind like a toothache. She licked the blood from her lips and grinned in pure, savage joy.

Alan Grange was dead, stripped of his stolen power, unable to dominate or abuse her any longer. She was free. Free to take control of his cult and enjoy all the benefits leadership would give her: safety and power and the fear of those beneath her.

And she had no intention of losing the opportunity his death gave her.

Her eyes tracked across the battlefield, where Alan's lieutenant was busy raping the leader of the eco-terrorists. Apparently Steve hadn't yet realized the priest was dead.

Good.

She plucked the blade from the heart of her victim and started toward him, detouring around a battling knot of vampires. She glanced at them long enough to make sure her people were winning. They were, so she kept going.

So much for the would-be grail thieves.

Just that night before, Alan announced he'd had a vision another cult had learned they had one of the cups. They'd all known what that meant.

War.

Only last month, all the cults had been united under Geirolf's leadership. That had ended when the demon god died and the vampires were forcibly scattered by Geirolf's lieutenant.

They didn't stay scattered. It wasn't long before the cult leaders started searching out their original members. Alan had been one of them, armed with the stolen Grail he intended to use in creating fresh recruits.

Unfortunately, he wasn't the only ambitious priest with that thought. Anybody who had a grail was trying to hang onto it, while groups without a cup were trying to take one by force.

So far, Alan's cult had successfully defended its grail against another Satanist cult and a group of white supremacists. Next had come this bunch of eco-loonies who'd thought Earth would be just perfect without all the people on it.

Alan's decision to hit their would-be invaders first had handed them a victory, but they'd still lost several warriors in the process. Marilyn figured she was going to have to do something about recruitment as soon as she took care of Alan's second-in-command.

Of course, once Steve Jones was attended to, she'd have to deal with his supporters, not to mention whomever had killed the priest himself. That last might be a problem, since Alan had gasped something about the grail just before he gated away with his daughter.

But first things first.

Marilyn stepped up behind Jones as he pumped between his victim's thighs. She tapped him on the

shoulder, the knife hidden by her side. "Oh, Steve," she purred, "I hate to interrupt. . ."

6

"IT'S a good thing I'm not afraid of heights." Caroline stepped up to the edge of Galahad's bedroom and looked out over the moonlit mountains. She'd gated them there after he showed her a mental image of where he wanted to go.

Compared to the villas, chateaus, and castles of Avalon, Galahad's home was an exercise in minimalism. The semicircular room jutted out from the face of a vertical cliff to hang, unsupported, a dizzying distance from the ground. It had no apparent walls other than the cliff itself—and, for that matter, no ceiling either.

That was an illusion, however. She could sense the magical barrier that protected the room emanating from runes cut into the stone. Nothing could get in he didn't want in.

She had to admit, the room suited him. The rough granite wall seemed a reflection of Galahad's uncompromising strength, just as his sensuality was reflected by the circular bed draped in white silk.

A heavy walnut armoire stood off to one side of the bed, its dark, gleaming wood heavily carved with more of those runes. She wondered what enchantment they cast—a cleanliness spell? An anti-wrinkle charm? Probably, since it was a good bet Galahad didn't do laundry.

Noticing a low, musical tinkle, Caroline looked around to see a little waterfall flowing through an opening in the cliff. It splashed down over the rocks to flow past the bed and into a tiny pool surrounded by plants and vines growing from niches in the stone. Other openings glowed with some kind of magical illumination that provided a soft, dim light.

Two rock doorways cut into either side of the cliff wall. Stepping over to one, she saw stairs leading downward. "Where do these go?"

Galahad dropped onto the bed and twisted around to reach into one of the stone niches. He pulled out a bottle and a couple of glasses. "There are two more floors below—a pool room and a library."

Caroline turned to look at him. "That's it? In the whole house?"

He shrugged, pouring the contents of the bottle into the glasses. "Hey, what else do I need? I don't eat anything that's not in the magic wet bar here. Any visitors who need something more substantial are probably Majae, and they can conjure their own food."

"You've got a point." She crossed the room to look down. Jutting from the cliff thirty feet below and off to the left was another circular platform. A pool shimmered in the center of it, its surface rippling from the waterfall tumbling down the cliff to splash into one end. "I've got to admit, this is impressive."

"Morgana built it for me." He walked over and handed her a glass.

Caroline took it. "How'd you get her to do that?"

"We were lovers at the time."

"You banged the dragon lady? You are brave."

"That's exactly what my brother knights said." He smiled a little dryly and took a sip. "We lasted an entire decade before I managed to piss her off. I still hold the record for longest-running relationship with Morgana Le Fay."

"Hey, better than I did with Dominic." Caroline swallowed a mouthful from her own glass, shuddered at the taste, and turned it into Pepsi. "Do you always drink like this?"

Galahad shot her a look. "I'm a vampire, Caroline. The only drinking problem I have is making sure I've got a date on Saturday night."

"You silver-tongued romantic, you."

His smile was wicked. "I didn't hear you complaining."

Caroline turned to watch as he walked back across the room in that muscular, long-legged stalk of his. Damn, the man looked good even wearing more metal than a can of tuna.

It was probably just as well it was so close to dawn. Given her romantic track record, it probably wouldn't be a good idea to yield to Galahad's potent temptation.

He sank down on the bed and slumped, looking tired. "Can you help me with my armor? I doubt I have time to take it all off before the sun comes up."

"Sure. Where do you want it?"

He gestured vaguely. "Over there's fine."

Caroline cast a quick spell, and the suit vanished from his body to take up residence in a neat pile. Her own joined it an instant later.

Galahad looked down at the pair of silk pajama bottoms she'd given him to replace it. "Nice. Thanks." He rubbed absently at his chest. "And I'm clean, too. Aren't you efficient?"

She shrugged and straightened the hem of her own cotton pajamas. "That's the nice thing about magic. It's a great time-saver."

As he rose to pull down the covers, it suddenly occurred to her there was only one bed. But before any real alarm could set in, she got a good look at his back and forgot about everything else. A rainbow of scrapes and bruises decorated his ribs. "What happened to you?"

He glanced up at her as he slid under the covers. "Got into a fight with a pedophile earlier tonight. Bastard had an axe. Armor kept it from cutting me in half, but the impact was a bitch." A pained grunt escaped him as he lay back.

Concerned, Caroline crossed the room to his side, frowning. "You want me to heal that?"

He shrugged. "My body will take care of it by sunset. It's one of the few kinds of magic I do have."

"But you're hurting now. Let me fix it." She could see the pain in his eyes, and it bothered her.

Reaching out a hand, Caroline rested her fingers against the side of his face and reached for her magic. Carefully, she sent it into him in the same gentle stream she used tending her own aches, seeking out his injuries and healing them. As she watched, the bruises faded and disappeared.

He sighed and relaxed. "Thanks."

Caroline shrugged and dropped her hand, feeling oddly shy. "Least I could do after you helped me with Father Fang and Teen Bitch."

"My pleasure, more or less." Galahad settled back against the mound of pillows. "You know, there's more than room enough for two in here."

"Honey, there's room enough for the Washington Redskins in that bed."

"Now there is a thoroughly unpleasant image."

Caroline gave him a wicked grin. "Depends on your point of view."

What the hell. She was too tired to conjure another bed anyway. She moved around to the other side and flipped the comforter back, then slid between the fine silk sheets.

They felt deliciously cool and smooth against her tired body.

With a sigh of pleasure, she snuggled in and looked at the horizon just beginning to pinken over the mountains. "Why don't you live in Avalon like everybody else? I figured you for a castle or something."

"I was never one for conspicuous consumption. Besides, sometimes I just don't need to be around people." He paused, and something a little dark moved behind his eyes. "I kill too many of them."

She bit her lip, painfully reminded of the girl she'd blasted. "Yeah. I guess I can understand that."

"It's nice to come here and look out at the stars and watch the dragons."

Caroline straightened. "You've got dragons? Here? You're kidding me!"

"Nope. They don't come around Avalon much. Too many people." He extended a brawny arm to point at a winged shape turning lazy circles out over the mountains. "There's one now."

She saw it breathe a long, lacy plume of flame. "Wow? Why did it do that?"

"Probably just target practice." He slid an arm around her.

She rested her head against his shoulder, watching the dragon. "What happens when the sun comes up?"

"The spell barrier filters out most of the light." Galahad rested his temple against hers. His late-night stubble rasped over her hair, the sensation oddly sensual. "Sometimes if I watch, I can just see the first little bit of the dawn."

They fell silent as the horizon slowly blushed rose behind the mountains. Another dragon came out to

chase the first, dancing in the rising currents of magic. A sliver of bright disk edged upward.

"Look," Galahad said, his voice soft. "There it..."

But when Caroline lifted her head, his eyes were closed.

He sprawled halfway across the bed, his muscular arms flung wide, his dark hair tangled around his tired face. She caught her breath at his raw male beauty. Something in her chest contracted into a tight, aching ball.

Dammit, Caroline, don't you dare fall for him. Maybe she ought to conjure that second bed after all.

But before she could do it, she caught a glimpse of movement at the corner of her eye.

The dragon hung in the air looking in at her, its great wings beating lazily. Scales shimmered in the rising sun, green and blue dancing along the whipping tail. Its head was long and elegant and oddly delicate compared to the solid muscle of its body. Its eyes met hers, glowing iridescent in the light of dawn, intelligent and alien. Then it turned and flew away.

With a sigh, Caroline lay her head back down on Galahad's chest to watch.

THE dull gold of Geirolf's Grail was worked with naked human figures writhing together like a nest of mating snakes. They seemed engaged in every possible perversion.

And a good portion of them seemed to be killing the mates.

Fascinated, Marilyn turned the cup between her palms, holding it as she waited for the sun to rise. She'd found it on the Grange's body after she'd killed him, along with a note for the priest's daughter.

Terri Grange had apparently had a little crush on her father's lieutenant, which was why she'd transported it into the pack he carried in case his magic ran out. The note that was included said she hadn't warned him she was sending because she was afraid of distracting him during battle. The key to everything was slung around his waist, and he hasn't even known it. Marilyn rather appreciated the irony.

Now he and his supporters were dead. And so, her magic told her, was the priest and that little bitch, Terri.

The remaining members of the cult had been quick to see logic. They all knew Marilyn had a way with a spell. And between betraying Steve and the other kills she'd racked up, she had more than enough power for some very nasty magic.

Which didn't mean she had any intention of taking on the witch and the vampire knight Terri had described in her magic note. At least, not yet. For one thing, the cult's headquarters were located in Virginia—two time zones later than the Texas farmhouse they now occupied. The sun had already risen there, so it wasn't a good idea to gate back.

Besides, there were only fifteen members of the cult left. Marilyn wanted better odds when they went after their Magekind foes, which was why she decided the cult would camp for the night in their defeated enemy's headquarters.

Luckily she'd found several intriguing cages in the attic, stocked with pissed-off prisoners. To Marilyn's experienced eye, the ten men looked like a nice, beefy collection of potential warriors. Apparently the eco-terrorists had planned to magically recruit them once they got their hands on the cup.

Which gave Marilyn an idea. A little brainwashing, a shot from the cup, a murder or two for power and blood, and they'd be ready to give Arthur's idiots the shock of their lives.

She couldn't wait.

THE stench rolled out of the darkness in waves. Fear gripped Galahad, sick and cold, but he knew his duty. He took a deep breath, reached down, caught the rope handle of the trapdoor, and pulled. It creaked upward, carrying the smell of rotting meat.

Mentally bracing himself, he aimed the enchanted gem set in his gauntlet down into the hole and activated it with a whispered chant. White light spilled from it.

The little corpses lay naked, piled like dolls tossed aside by a sadistic child. "Oh, Merlin's Grail," he whispered hoarsely. "No."

As he stared helplessly, one of the bodies stirred. For a moment, his heart stopped, thinking perhaps the boy had somehow survived.

Then a face looked up at him that didn't belong to anything still living. "Why didn't you come in time?"

A hoarse scream tearing his throat, Galahad jolted awake.

7

"GALAHAD?"

He jerked around, his muscles coiling to strike out. Caroline blinked at him, her dark eyes wide and startled. His sleep-drugged brain jarred to full consciousness with a sense of relief.

A dream. It had been a dream.

He rolled out of bed and staggered toward the stairs, vaguely aware that she was hurrying after him. "Galahad? What's wrong?"

He didn't trust himself to answer. The sticky weight of fear and failure clung to his shoulders like a rotting shroud.

The minute he reached the exercise room, Galahad stripped off his pants and dove into the pool with the desperation of a man hungry to wash his demons away.

The shock of hitting the water blasted him fully awake, and he started stroking hard, trying to power his

way through his lingering depression.

Sometimes he fucking hated this job. No matter how many battles he won, the war never ended. There was always another fight, on and on, world without end: Nazis, communists, terrorists, serial killers, psychopaths of every stripe.

And no matter how many bad guys he killed, he was always too late to save some innocent. The pit in his dreams had no fucking bottom. Gritting his teeth, he swam harder.

Finally he stopped pushing and rolled over on his back to float, his muscles jumping from the effort he'd demanded of them.

"You want to tell me what's eating you?" Caroline said.

Galahad looked over at her. She stood on the edge of the pool, watching him. The silky peach pajamas she wore emphasized the length of her legs and the sweet, high curves of her breasts. Hunger rose, sudden and violent. He tried to push it aside. She was still gun-shy from that asshole Dominic. "I hate the day-sleep," he told her finally over the patter of the waterfall. "I get nightmares like you would not believe, but I can't wake up."

Sympathy warmed her dark, lovely eyes. "I know what you mean. I had some nasty ones myself. I doubt I got more than four or five hours sleep." She sighed, making those lush breasts rise and fall. Her tight little nipples tented the fabric.

He remembered the way they'd felt hardening against his palms. Remembered the slick, tight grip of her sex as he'd stroked a finger inside. She'd feel impossibly good around his cock, which was suddenly rock-hard and aching.

God, he needed her. He needed the forgetfulness he'd find in her body. She was so damn clean. So innocent of the kind of shit he had to wade in every single day. He wanted to see the passion overtake that pretty face. Wanted to forget all the innocents he'd failed, all the men he'd killed. He wanted to plunge into her the way he'd plunged into the pool and just forget. His cock hardened in a hungry rash, arching over his belly as he floated on his back. "Caroline." His voice came out rougher than he intended, rasping with need rather than the smooth note of seduction he'd intended.

She took a wary step back. "As impressed as I am by that morning broadsword of yours, may I remind you we've got vampires to kill?"

Dammit, she had a point. "I assume they're back in their burrow by now."

"Actually, no. Not yet."

Galahad jackknifed upright until he could stand in the cool, shoulder-deep water. Despite both the temperature and the situation, his cock refused to get the message. He ignored it. "Any idea where they are?"

"No." She shrugged, a gesture that did marvelous things to those sweet, unbound breasts. "I spent the afternoon trying to figure out how to work a locator spell. No luck. But according to the vision that started this mess, they are coming back."

"So we wait." He gave her his best wolfish grin. "I have a couple of ideas about how to pass the time."

Caroline took another step back. "Pinochle?"

"How about a nice, rousing game of hide the broadsword?"

That pretty pink tongue crept out to lick her lips. "Don't do this to me, Galahad. I'm still recovering from Dominic."

"That prick needs his ass kicked," Galahad growled, frustrated. "My father was a court seducer before he met his new wife. They're supposed to keep it light, not convince you you're in love."

"Yeah, well, Dominic all but promised me a ring."

"You want me to beat him up?" He bared his teeth, meaning it.

She laughed, the sound throaty and impossibly seductive. "It's tempting."

Galahad stared at her, aching. "I need you, Caroline." The words emerged as more naked than he intended, but he didn't take them back. "Help me forget this. Just for an hour. That's all I need."

She looked at him. Her expression softened at whatever she saw on his face. "All right."

Light flashed, and the pajamas became a string bikini that made his dick rock-hard all over again. Before he could get the full effect of all those luscious curves, she dove in.

Galahad grinned, his heart lifting at the prospect of having Caroline to himself. Suddenly he was in the mood to play.

WHEN Caroline surfaced, the lights were out, leaving the room lit only by the Mageverse sky and moonlight reflecting off the water. Galahad was nowhere to be seen—not that she could see much anyway.

What's he up to now? Her heart began to pound as she looked around, expecting him to surface any second and pounce. The reflections on the water were so bright, she couldn't make out anything under them. Automatically, she tried to conjure a light.

Nothing happened.

"If I don't want you to use magic in my house, you can't use magic in my house," Galahad said from behind her, his breath warm on her ear.

Caroline jumped and whirled around barely in time to see the ripple as he submerged again. "Come back here, you big jerk!" She tried to levitate him out of the water, but he was gone. There must be a dampening spell built into the house he could order on and off. Which meant she was helpless.

All alone in the dark with a horny Galahad. A wicked little thrill ran up her spine.

This was going to be fun.

Which didn't mean she was going to make it easy. She had her pride. Drawing in a deep breath, Caroline ducked under and shot toward the other end of the pool, swimming in long, strong strokes. As she flashed through the water, male fingers brushed her ankle, just missing a grab.

Ha! Caught him off guard.

Not for long. Powerful arms closed around her waist and pulled her upright. Her head broke the surface. As she gasped in surprise, Galahad's mouth covered hers in a devouring kiss. He hauled her close against the hard strength of his body, one hand cupping her backside, the other stroking her breast, fingers teasing one nipple into aching erection. She leaned into him with a moan of hunger. He lifted his head, flashed her a triumph grin, and let her go.

And then he was gone.

Unsupported, she sank. Shutting her mouth barely in time to avoid sucking in a lungful of pool, Caroline looked around wildly. Underwater in the darkness, she couldn't make out a damn thing but dim flashes from the surface.

While vampires could see in the dark. Dammit.

Okay, so he had an advantage. They'd just see how long it lasted. Kicking twice, Caroline broke the surface, drew a breath, and dove under again.

Fingers tweaked her nipple through the thin fabric of her top. The fleeting pleasure almost made her gasp. Her heart pounding in a blend of atavistic fear and arousal, she kicked hard, trying to make it a little tougher for him to get those wicked hands on her.

But the minute she surfaced again, he grabbed the ties of her bathing suit top. One ruthless jerk snapped it. Before she could turn, he freed the knot holding the top around her neck and pulled it away.

Caroline whirled in time to see the top disappear under the surface with him. "You're beginning to piss me off, Galahad!"

Arousal pulsed between her thighs. She licked her lips and thought of everything she'd like to do to him when she caught him.

Then she imagined everything he could do to her, and the heat increased even more.

Just behind her, he whispered, "I like to play with my food." Long fingers closed around her hips, dragging her backward.

Then she was plastered against Galahad again, her back to his brawny chest, his hard cock pressing her backside. His sword-callused hands slid up over her bare breasts to capture both peaks between thumb and forefinger. Pleasure spooled through her as he gently plucked them taut. "Breakfast," he purred.

Caroline panted as hot little flashes of pleasure skated across her nerves. "You've got a kinky streak, Galahad."

"Oh, yeah." He reached for the tie of her bathing suit bottoms. Tugging it loose, he started dragging the scrap of fabric off, raking sensitive flesh in the process. She gasped at the urgent clench of pleasure he triggered, and he chuckled, the sound deep and sexy. "In fact, maybe I'll just tie you up with your own

bikini."

Caroline let her head fall back against his wet, brawny shoulder, impossibly turned on. "Yeah, you're kinky."

"Oh, darlin', you have no idea. Yet." Then those strong arms slid out from around her. She whirled, but he was gone. Again. "Tease!"

She could feel her sex swelling, throbbing. Evidently Galahad wasn't the only one with a kinky streak. This was like being trapped in an erotic version of *Jaws*. And it was. past time to turn the tables on the great white vampire.

Caroline really wanted to get her hands on his harpoon.

She swam for the side. If she could lure him out of the water, they'd be on more equal ground.

As equal as you could get with a guy who could bench-press a Cadillac, anyway.

Reaching the side of the pool, she caught the cool granite rim and prepared to lever herself out.

"Now where do you think you're going?" Galahad pulled her back into those magnificent arms, one hand taking possession of a hard nipple while the other slipped between her thighs.

A long, broad finger slid into her sex in a deep, breathtaking stroke. She gasped, arching her butt against his rock-hard cock. "There's a word for men like you."

He chuckled in her ear, the sound richly seductive. "There are lots of words for a man like me. Which one do you have in mind?"

Caroline whimpered at his lushly extravagant probes into her sex. "Tease."

"Nope, that's not one of them. Teases never intend to follow through." Scissoring her clit between his fingers, he raked his fangs across her pulse. "I do."

"When, exactly?" she panted.

"Now." He turned her around in his arms and lifted her out of the water. The next thing Caroline knew, she was lying on her back beside the pool edge with her thighs draped over his shoulders. Still in the water, he buried his face between her legs.

"Oh, God!" She came halfway off the stone floor as Galahad parted her lips and started feasting—licking, sucking, dancing his tongue over delicate flesh in seductive circles and swirls. His hands claimed her breasts again, stroking the soft flesh, thumbing her nipples. Driving her insane with breathtaking speed until she writhed on the stone, begging for the climax bearing down on her with every flick and caress.

But it wasn't enough.

She craved his massive cock, ached for his deep, driving thrusts, burned to feel his weight spread over her, big body surging against hers.

"Galahad!" His name was a desperate, pleading scream.

His only response was a growl.

"Please!"

He lifted his head, his eyes glowing red in the darkness. "Goddess, I love listening to you beg." Fangs flashed in his grin.

She groaned, panted. "Jerk!"

"Now is that any way to talk to a man who's got you right where he wants you?" With a muscular surge and splash, he levered himself out of the water. She whimpered at the sensation of his wet body covering hers. His cock pressed against her belly, hard as a blade.

"Yes! Now!" Her need leaped into a hot roar, and she tried to wrap both legs around his backside.

"Not so fast." Galahad coiled his arms around her and rolled her astride his hips, big hands spreading her thighs, lifting her, positioning her so he could thrust hard into her slick, swollen core.

"Ooooh! Galahad!" Her eyes flared wide at the stark sensation.

He chuckled in her ear. "Like that?"

"Jesus!" He felt so damn big.

"I'll take that as a yes." One hand clamped over her butt, holding her in place as he started thrusting—hard, deep lunges that raked her clinging flesh with delight. He fisted the fingers of the other hand in her hair, pulled her head back. She moaned in helpless anticipation.

The burning penetration of his fangs sinking into her throat made her yelp in a combination of arousal and erotic pain. Instinctively, she tried to pull back, but he wouldn't allow it. She couldn't move at all, held in those supernaturally powerful hands as he took her.

Then the pleasure rose, white hot and overwhelming, and the desire to flee drained away. Almost blind with it, she clung to his brawny shoulders as he stroked in and out of her slick flesh, his mouth hot on her throat.

The storm of sensation went on and on, blazing through her consciousness until there was room for nothing else. Then the climax hit like a velvet hammer, and she screamed. "Galahad!" The sound blended with the merciless slap of his hips on hers. As if her climax triggered his, he stiffened against her with a muffled growl of feral pleasure.

Helpless, lost, she lay in Galahad's arms as he pumped his seed deep and fed.

8

CAROLINE lay in Galahad's arms as her heartbeat slowed its lunging pace, listening to the patter of the

waterfall. Her muscles jumped and quivered with the aftershocks of his ferocious passion, and her throat stung. Clinging weakly to him, she let her eyes drift closed.

"Cachamuri'seggs, Galahad, have you ruined another virgin?"

With a start, she jerked her head off his chest.

A scaly head the size of her entire body stared at them from barely ten feet away.

With a terrified little shriek, Caroline tried to roll off Galahad—whether to run or throw a spell, she didn't quite know. He held her still, laughing. "Calm down, Caroline. It's just Soren. He won't hurt you." To the dragon he added, "Look what you've done, you overgrown gecko—you scared her!"

The dragon sighed gustily as it clung to the cliff looking in through the barrier spell. "I suppose it's just as well she's not a virgin. She's too high-strung for me anyway. Ah well. Let me in, would you? I'm getting tired of hanging out here."

"If you insist," Galahad said. "Just quit trying to scare the daylights out of my girl. Shield down."

Before Caroline could process being referred to as "his girl," the dragon snaked its massive head inside. Wide-eyed, she watched it maneuver its huge upper body through the opening. It was obvious the rest of the beast would never fit.

"He keeps promising me virgin sacrifices," the dragon complained to her in a rumbling basso. "But by the time they arrive, they're not virgins anymore. It's most frustrating."

"That thing actually *yeats* women?" she hissed at Galahad, horrified.

The dragon's grin revealed teeth longer than Galahad's great sword. "Every chance I get." Magic streamed out of its glowing eyes to wash over its body and blaze painfully bright. When the glare faded, a tall, breathtakingly handsome man stood in the dragon's place. "But it's not as if I chew. And they don't seem to mind."

"No," Caroline said faintly. "I don't suppose they do."

The dragon man was dressed like a medieval courtier in a blue velvet doublet, an impressive jeweled codpiece, and hose that clung to long, powerful legs. His face was long-boned, with a majestic nose and sensual lips, and his head was shaved perfectly smooth, a faint blue tint just beneath the skin. "Very pretty." His iridescent gaze was hot and approving as he stared at her before he lifted a brow at Galahad. "I don't suppose you'd share."

"No." Giving the dragon a warning glare, Galahad added to Caroline, "Clothes, darling. Knowing Soren, something in a gunnysack."

Soren's sensual mouth shaped into a pout as she hastily conjured jeans and T-shirts around both of them. "Selfish mammal. You know how I love seducing Majae."

Galahad rolled to his feet and gave his friend a dry look. "You might get more opportunities, if you hadn't indulged in the goat incident with Morgana."

"You'd be surprised. Anyway, you laughed louder than I did, you hypocritical egg-sucker."

He grinned. "I didn't say it wasn't funny." Catching Caroline's questioning gaze, he shook his head. "Believe me, you don't want to know. For one thing, if I told you she'd have to kill you."

"Then by all means, leave me in happy ignorance."

"Smart girl." He returned his attention to their exotic guest. "Speaking of well-cast spells, would you be willing to help us with a nasty little vampire problem?"

He described the situation, Caroline throwing in details of her own when she thought he'd missed a point. Soren listened, but when they'd finished, he shook his head. "Galahad, you know I cannot directly involve myself in mammal affairs."

Galahad sighed. "I know, but I thought it was worth a..."

"However, I do know of a spell that might prove helpful." He shrugged at the knight's surprised blink. "I never could stand Geirolf and his race of parasites. These vampires are no better."

"That's putting it mildly. What do we need to do?"

"You, nothing." Soren turned his shimmering gaze on Caroline. "You, come here. This is a complex spell; I'll need to transfer it to you directly."

Her heart gave a wary thump, but Caroline walked over to him anyway. He was even more breathtaking at close range, and she swallowed, looking up at him. "How, exactly, do you intend to do that?"

Soren gave her a wicked little smile, lowered his head, and kissed her.

She barely had time to notice his kiss wasn't as blazingly erotic as Galahad's when magic rolled over her in a frothing flood that rocked her back on her heels.

THE jealousy that flooded Galahad as he watched Soren kiss Caroline took him completely by surprise. It intensified when she sagged into the dragon's arms. Galahad knew her reaction was probably from whatever spell transfer Soren was doing, but his inner Neanderthal growled. It was all he could do not to stalk over there and make lizard pate out of his friend.

Which, considering Soren's true form, said something about just how stupid his inner Neanderthal really was.

He'd never been this jealous of Morgana.

But just before Galahad's common sense went down for the count, Soren lifted his head and set Caroline back on her feet. She looked dazed, which only added fuel to the fire. The dragon gave him a toothy smile. "Lucky mammal."

"What the hell was that all about?" Galahad exploded. He knew he sounded like an idiot, but he didn't care.

Soren shrugged his broad shoulders. "It's the only chance I'm going to get to kiss the bride."

"You..." Galahad's mind belatedly processed what his friend just said. "What in Merlin's name are you talking about?"

Obviously enjoying his reaction, the dragon folded his arms. "You do know you're going to Truebond with this girl?"

He snorted. "You've been flying too high, Soren. That reptile brain is oxygen-deprived."

Caroline blinked, as though trying to shake off whatever Soren had done to her. "Truebond? What's a Truebond?"

"The Magekind version of marriage." A vast oversimplification, but it would have to do for now.

Caroline's jaw dropped in a gape. Even that looked good on her. "That's ridiculous. We haven't known each other twenty-four hours!"

"With a Truebond, that hardly matters." Amusement shone in the dragon's iridescent eyes. "You'll tap one another's memories, emotions, thoughts. You'll know one another better than if you'd been married a century."

"It's a mind-fusion," Galahad explained, glaring at his friend. The idea of exposing Caroline's bright innocence to his sixteen hundred years of corruption was repellent. It would destroy her. Hell, sometimes he thought it was destroying him. "And no way in hell are we doing it."

The dragon ignored him, looking into her eyes. "He'll be your conduit, Caroline. You'll free each other."

"I said forget it!" Galahad snapped. "I don't care what vision you had, it's not going to happen."

The dragon looked over at him in that infuriating way he had: wise, amused, tolerant of the hapless mammal's foibles. "Of course not." He gave Caroline a smile. "It was a pleasure to meet you, my sweet."

As Soren turned and started toward the edge, Caroline stopped him. "Wait. The Truebond thing. What else did you see?"

He smiled wickedly. "This and that." Before she could stop him again, he turned and leaped in a hard, long dive right off the edge. Caroline gasped as he disappeared, but an instant later, he shot past in dragon form, headed skyward, his massive wings beating.

She turned on Galahad, bristling. "Did you have to be such a jerk? I might have gotten some more out of him if you hadn't run him off."

He snorted. "Nobody gets anything out of Soren he doesn't want to give."

She stalked to the edge and looked up as if she were considering flying after the dragon. "Well, I'd still like to ask him when we're supposed to do this Truebond thing."

"We're not Truebonding," he gritted. "You have no idea what's involved, and believe me, you don't want to find out."

"Well, it sounds to me like we're not going to get a whole lot of choice."

"First off, visions have been known to be wrong. Second, Soren isn't above lying when it suits whatever game he's playing. Third, for all you know, if we do Truebond, it won't be for a couple of centuries. Either way, it ain't happening anytime soon."

Caroline glared at him. Even in his current enraged mood, he could see she was hurt. "Suits me just fine. I don't even know you." Whirling, she flounced off up the stairs toward the bedroom.

Galahad watched her go as irritation poured through him. Along with a healthy dose of fear.

Was the dragon right?

Merlin's Cup, he hoped not. He'd been around long enough to know they had the beginning of something good, something he'd never encountered in all his centuries seducing Majae. There was a warmth about Caroline he rarely saw in Magekind women, an honesty and lack of calculation. And, of course, there was that innocent sensuality.

Too often Majae seemed barricaded behind ennuï, wariness or cynicism until almost nothing he did could reach them. But Caroline was so deliciously open, her uninhibited reactions aroused him as much as her pretty body did.

He wanted more time with her. He wanted to nurture and protect the fragile seed between them, watch it grow. It was going to be marvelous.

But only if she wasn't destroyed by a Truebond.

WELL, that had been pretty damn plain. Galahad wanted nothing whatsoever to do with a permanent relationship with her. After all his talk about being nothing like Dominic, he was cut from the same cloth after all.

The trick now was to maintain a strictly business relationship until they got Geirolf's little cult taken care of. She'd keep her distance and stay out of his bed, and...

"Caroline," Galahad said from behind her.

She straightened her shoulders, wiped the hurt from her face, and turned, determined to keep this light. "What can I do for...?"

He snatched her into his arms, and his mouth came down on hers, hungry and devouring. Caroline stiffened instinctively, but he didn't let her go.

Oh, she thought, he's going to be a pain in the ass.

9

OVER the next three days, Caroline discovered how right she was. She never found out if Galahad

would take "no" for an answer; he made it impossible for her to get the word out of her mouth.

His centuries had taught him things to do to a woman's body that lit Caroline's up like the Eiffel Tower on New Year's Eve. He wove wicked spells with his mouth and his tongue and his big, hard hands that put to shame anything she could do with her magic. He whispered velvet threats that made her knees go weak, then carried every one of them out—bending her over, spreading her wide, pinning her against the nearest wall. All so he could work his thick erection slowly into her tight flesh, sink his fangs into her throat. And take her, over and over.

Those damn vampires didn't help. She'd set wards on the complex—a kind of magical burglar alarm, designed so that nobody but Caroline could sense them when they activated. But they never went off, and the vampires never came back. She kept checking, but the place remained empty of all but its ghosts.

While Galahad's home was full of him.

She knew he was after something. This felt almost like a feral kind of courtship, as if he were staking his claim on her.

Gaining possession.

But he'd said he didn't want her in terms that left no room for romantic illusions. So what the hell kind of game was he playing? And what should she do about it?

Because he was definitely getting to her—and not just with the impressive sex. Hot as he was, that wouldn't have done such a good job of chipping away at her mental barriers.

No, what got her the most was the lazy, drifting time just after he'd taken her and just before sunrise, when they lay in bed together watching the dragons play. That was when he'd tell her about the places he'd been, the times he'd seen, the amazing events he'd witnessed. Hearing the reality behind the legend never failed to enthrall her. It quickly became hard to remember why she needed to keep her distance.

Sunset on the fourth day found them nicely settled into their routine. She sat in bed polishing off a breakfast steak under Galahad's watchful eye—he said she needed the protein—while he did his evening sword exercises.

Chewing a piece of sinfully tender filet mignon, she watched him parry invisible attacks, sword flashing, his big, naked body moving with a dancer's grace.

The psychic buzz of her wards activating made her sit up an instant before the vision fell on her like an anvil.

Four of them held the naked girl spread across the altar. Over them stood a blond woman who held a snaking knife in one hand and the grail in the other. The blonde's face was twisted with savage anticipation that matched the black eagerness in the eyes of her followers. Caroline could feel their hunger to see blood spill. She froze, a scream clawing at her throat, unable to move or think as the poisonous images poured into her consciousness.

Then it was over, and the vision's hold snapped. Caroline flung herself out of bed so fast she fell on the floor. "Galahad!" Sick horror clawed at her as she scrambled to her feet, but she had no time for emotion now. "They're back!"

He stopped and lowered his sword. "The cultists?"

"Yeah. They've captured somebody. They're getting ready to sacrifice her on that damned altar."

His handsome face went cold. "Armor us up and open a gate. Let's see what's going on."

A gesture called their mail around them. Then carefully, she opened a gate just large enough to give them a view of the sacrificial chamber.

Just as her vision had predicted. Four cultists held the naked girl across the altar as the blond priestess lifted her knife. Galahad cursed softly. "I don't like this, but it doesn't look like we've got time to play it safe."

"I don't need much time," Caroline reminded him in a low voice. "Soren gave me that spell, remember? Keep them from killing the girl, and I'll do the rest. It'll take me sixty seconds, tops, to do the chant."

"Can you do it from here?"

She hesitated, her eyes locked on the struggling girl. "I don't think the gate could handle the energy flow."

"Yeah, I figured." Galahad drew his sword and prepared to leap. "Sixty seconds is all you get, Caroline. If you can't pull it off, they're going to be all over us."

She took a deep breath and expanded the gate to full size.

The girl screamed and bucked in her captors' hands as the blond female priest drew the point of the knife down her chest, just barely drawing blood.

"Go." Galahad growled.

Taking a deep, desperate breath, Caroline charged through the gate, aware even as she leaped that he had plunged in after her.

She emerged into Realspace at a dead run, Galahad roaring his war-cry at her heels. The vampires jerked toward them. Caroline's full attention locked on the grail, she started chanting the first words of Soren's spell.

Black triumph flashed over the priestess's face. "Yes!" The blonde bared her teeth, threw the knife aside, and conjured a power blast.

Shit, the cultists had been expecting them. Caroline had to break off the chant to call a shield.

But even as the priestess's blast bounced off her magical barrier, something hit her hard from behind in a magical assault that sent agony slicing into her skull.

Galahad bellowed.

Caroline spun, ready to defend herself, but Galahad was already charging the three armored vampires who'd hit her from behind. She started to send a blast toward the nearest of them, but another spell hit her like a fastball pitch to the skull. The world pinwheeled as she went flying.

Caroline hit the stone floor with a teeth-rattling jolt. Struggling to rise, she lifted her head to see a ring of vampires closing in on her. Their hands glowed and smoked with magic. Desperately, she turned to look for the grail. If she could just hit it...

But even as she spotted the gleam of gold in the priestess's hand, the cultists opened fire.

GALAHAD saw Caroline go down under a hail of power blasts and roared a denial. Surrounded by vampire warriors, there wasn't a damn thing he could do to save her. Fear clutched at his chest with burning fists. He sent the nearest bastard's head flying with a single stroke of his sword and lunged toward her. Sensing something else coming toward him, he thrust his sword up in a parry. His frenzy gave him strength, and he knocked the vampire's blade aside, then buried his own in the man's chest so hard his victim's feet left the ground. Jerking his sword free, he ducked, avoiding another vampire's wild swing.

But there were just too damn many of them, and he knew it. At least thirty armored vampire warriors had gated in behind them the minute he and Caroline had entered. Even he wasn't good enough to take them all.

They'd been royally suckered.

Somebody dove for his legs. Galahad dodged aside, but a second warrior slammed into his hips, knocking him hard to the ground. He tried to roll away, swinging and kicking, but two of them landed on top of him. "That's it, fucker, you're done!" somebody sneered.

"I'm going to rip out your hearts, you whoreson bastards!" he roared, but then more of them piled on, crushing the air from his lungs. Brutal fingers clamped over his sword arm while others grabbed his left wrist. He felt his helmet being pulled off, but there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it. The steel rim raked the side of his face with a vicious sting. Hot blood rolled. He managed to choke in a breath. It smelled of old blood and rank bodies.

A female hand reached in and wrapped around his face. Before he could sink his fangs into her palm, she shot a blast into his head. Fire ripped along his nerves and the world went white.

GALAHAD came to naked, hanging in midair. Caroline was cursing steadily, viciously. For a moment, he felt a spurt of joy that she was still alive.

Then he opened his eyes and sucked in a breath.

She'd taken the girl's place on the altar. They'd stripped her of her armor—and apparently her powers, because one of the bastards was fondling her breast, and she hadn't fried him.

But she badly wanted to. That was evident from the rage and terror ringing in her voice. "Get your stinking hands off me!"

"Oh, I don't think so." The blond woman smirked down at her as the other vampires laughed. She held Geirolf's Grail in one hand and a dagger in the other.

"You've got very pretty tits, witch." She hefted the knife, grinning. "At least for the moment."

Furiously, Galahad fought the spell holding him, but he couldn't move at all. He knew they'd left him alive only so he could take Caroline's place on the altar when they'd finished with her.

The original victim lay bound and gagged on the floor off to one side. Evidently they were saving her for dessert.

The priestess bent over Caroline with the knife, crooning obscene threats the way another woman might promise pleasures to a lover.

Galahad's desperate, bitter gaze fastened on the grail. They'd been so damn close. If only she'd been able to complete Soren's spell. Hell, if only he could work magic...

He'll be your conduit.

Galahad jerked in his bonds, remembering Soren's prediction that they'd Truebond. *That's it!* Hope shot through his chest.

The cultists knew Magi couldn't work magic, so logically they hadn't bothered to place a nullification spell on Galahad. If he Truebonded with Caroline, she'd be able to send the spell through the link with him.

It could work. Soren had implied it would work.

But... a chill stole over him as he thought of what contact with his mind might do to Caroline. It could destroy her as thoroughly as the witch's knife.

But what choice did they have? If there was any chance at all, they had to take it. He'd simply have to protect her somehow.

Assuming, that is, they could form the bond. It would be easier if Galahad had been the one to change her into a Maja, but since he hadn't been, he'd need some other way to reach her.

Closing his eyes, Galahad sought inside himself, searching his mind for some trace of her.

"Arrhhh! Bitch!" Caroline screamed.

He flinched. *Running out of time ...*

Don't think about that.

Caroline. Caroline arching beneath him, her eyes vague with the hot pleasure of her rising orgasm. The scent of her, pure femininity, the taste of her mouth, of her sex. Her wicked sense of humor. The terrified courage on her white face as she'd prepared to jump through that gate.

Caroline.

There she was—a delicate, ghostly presence in his mind. A fragile link, formed unconsciously when they'd made love.

That had better be enough.

Concentrating hard, Galahad sent his mind flying out along it, reaching desperately for her. He hit some kind of resistance—the blanking spell—but he forced his way through.

Contact.

When he opened his eyes, a ring of fanged faces grinned down at him, gloating lust in their eyes. Sick terror gripped his soul, mixed with a woman's helpless vulnerability. He could feel the pain of cuts slashing across Caroline's sensitive breasts. *They're going to kill me*, she thought in horrified despair. *They're going to torture me to death and kill me ...*

Galahad sent his thoughts into the swirling terror that held her. *Caroline !*

Galahad! How did you... ? What are you doing?

We've got to Truebond , Caroline. If we bond, you can send the spell through me.

I can't! They've taken my magic! Galahad, they're going to kill me!

Despite his own fear, he sent a wave of calm authority along the link. *No, no, listen. Nobody can take your magic, they only put a dampening spell on you. But there's no spell on me. If we Truebond ...*

I can send the spell through you! Oh, God. We've got to do it now! She gasped as the knife raked over her flesh again. The cut was shallow, but the sting was vicious and terrifying. *Jesus, Galahad !*

Reach for me, Caroline!

The link snapped into place with an almost audible click.

THE touch of Galahad's mind was like standing on the edge of Niagra Falls—a great, pounding mental presence, ancient and profoundly alien. *Come to me*, he whispered in her thoughts. *The Truebond alone isn't enough. You've got to be within my mind to work the spell .*

Despite her fear of the cultists, she knew a moment of even greater terror. The vast weight of his mind could rip hers to shreds. There was no way she could survive.

Sharp pain sliced across her ribs, and Caroline jumped against the hard hands that held her. "I'm getting hungry, Marilyn," one of the male cultists said over her head. "Quit playing with that knife and plunge it in. We'll feed while she dies."

"Patience, Roger," the priestess purred. "This is the best part."

And once they finished with her, Galahad was next. She was the only chance either of them had. With a mental howl of terror, Caroline plunged through the Truebond and into his consciousness.

Images bombarded her, too fast to process—faces she didn't recognize, whirling past like leaves in a hurricane; a blade biting deep into a man's neck; the reek of spilled intestines; a castle burning around her; flames leaping and crackling as heat seared her skin; a woman's throat beneath her mouth, the give

of flesh yielding to her fangs; someone's sex gripping her cock; Morgana's voice purring lewd instructions; her own laughter...

Drowning, blinded, Caroline screamed.

"Listen to the gutless little slut," Marilyn laughed. "I haven't even started yet, Maja. Just wait."

But she knew in a moment it wouldn't matter. Galahad was destroying her.

Caroline! His voice spoke in her mind. She felt him fighting to protect her, to block the memories, to shield her from the black images roaring through her mind. Warm, soothing, strong, he cradled her. *All of this is just detail. It doesn't matter. Touch me.*

A bubble of silence formed around them like the eye of a hurricane. They were alone together. Even the cultists disappeared.

Suddenly he no longer seemed like some impossibly ancient predator, but a man. A man who struggled with a thankless, hellish job, yes, a man who despaired even as he continued to fight. A man she'd held and touched and loved. A man as vulnerable and lonely as she was.

Oh, a small voice said somewhere inside her. *It's you.*

Yes.

Caroline opened Galahad's eyes and looked across the chamber at the altar where the vampires held her pinned.

She was inside him. The barrier that had blocked her from her magic had been left behind.

"*Iscoffargia't'rike per*," she said in Galahad's deep voice. The vampires looked around, startled.

Marilyn realized what was happening first. "Oh, holy fuck!" She lifted the blade to plunge it deep.

But even as it descended, Caroline and Galahad roared, "*Kaavi ITA!*"

Magic exploded from them in a flaming, boiling wave, whipping the knife from the priestess's hand. Marilyn screamed as the spell hit Gierolf's Grail. She tried to throw the cup aside, but it was too late. The grail flared black and imploded, sending a blazing magical shock wave expanding outward.

The magical burst bit Marilyn and her vampire assistants first, vaporizing them instantly.

The watching vampire warriors bellowed and turned to run, only to vanish as the shock wave hit them, too. Even then it kept going. Caroline sucked in a breath as it shot over Galahad and slammed right through the complex walls.

The spell holding Galahad broke. He dropped to his feet with a grunt of satisfaction.

Caroline opened her own eyes and stared at the ceiling of the chamber, then lifted her head cautiously.

Galahad strode naked across the chamber toward her. She rolled off the altar and fell into his arms with a shriek of mingled relief and pleasure.

But just as he lowered his head to kiss her, they heard a tiny whimper. They stiffened warily and looked around. "What the hell was that?" Galahad growled.

The girl they'd come to save lay looking at them, her eyes huge over her gag.

"Oops," Caroline murmured. "Forgot." Reluctantly they drew apart and went to free her.

10

CAROLINE lay on her back on Galahad's bed. Gloriously naked, he leaned on one elbow swirling a strawberry in a bowl of frothy cream. "You know, I think I like this Truebond thing. Open up."

Lazily, she complied. He stroked the creamy berry into her mouth. She closed her lips around it and sucked gently, knowing the sight—and the mental image of what she imagined sucking instead—would drive him crazy.

"Are you goldbricking, or did you actually accomplish your mission?" Morgana demanded from the foot of the bed.

Caroline screeched and sat up. Only belatedly did she remember to zap jeans and T-shirts onto both of them. "Don't you knock?"

"No." The witch rocked back on her spike-heeled sandals, cool and elegant in a white suit that contrasted brilliantly with her black hair. "Nice conjuring. Next time set wards instead, and I won't be able to do this."

Bitch, Caroline thought.

That pretty much sums it up, Galahad agreed through their bond. Aloud, he added, "What brings you barging in, Morgana?"

"Do you still need help taking that little nest of yours?"

Disgruntled, Caroline drew her legs beneath her to sit up. "No, it's taken care of. We returned the surviving victim to her family, and the police think the cult that kidnapped her died in a fire."

Turns out the Satanists had a house on the surface above the complex. Caroline had conjured it into charred rubble and added a few bones to give weight to the explanation.

The victim herself remembered nothing, thanks to Caroline's merciful alterations to her memory.

"Congratulations," Morgan said impatiently. "Where's my cup?"

Oops. "Ah... we destroyed it."

"What?"

One explanation later, the Liege of the Majae wore an expression of speculative pleasure that made Galahad more than a little uneasy. "So that explains it." Catching his lifted eyebrow, she said, "Remember the vampire nest in Peru I told you about? It wasn't going at all well when a wave of magic rolled across the battlefield. I estimate fully a third of the enemy simply disappeared on the spot. Vaporized. Same thing happened to the forces fighting Arthur and Lancelot."

Caroline's jaw dropped. "A third?" A wicked grin crossed her face as she considered the implications. "And there were three cups. My spell must have wiped out all the vampires who were turned from that particular grail."

"Obviously. You do still have that spell, I assume?"

"Sure." Remembering the way Soren had transferred it to her, she winced. "I'll... write it down for you." Hastily, she conjured a piece of paper with the spell and handed it over. Though why the dragon hadn't done the same for her was another question entirely.

Morgana accepted it with a smile of pleasure. "All we have to do now is find the other two cups. Destroying them will be a hell of a lot easier than trying to kill all those cultists one at a time."

"Don't count your chickens, Morgana," Galahad warned. "They're not going to give up the cups without a fight."

The witch gave him a vicious grin. "Too bad." She turned, reading the spell and started absently toward a gate that had appeared in the middle of the room. Just before she stepped through it, she looked back at Caroline, her expression more than a bit smug. "I knew we needed you."

When the witch was gone, Caroline turned a disbelieving look on Galahad. "You stayed with *her* for a decade?" Then, reading an all-too-vivid memory of just what he'd found so appealing, she picked up a pillow and socked him with it. "You hound!"

"Now that's just offensive." Galahad plucked the pillow out of her hand. "I'll have you know I'm far more wolf than dog."

"We'll see about that when I make you sit up and beg."

But just as she was about to get her revenge, a deep rumbling voice filled the room. "Before you two start your mating ritual—I gather the spell worked?"

"Yes, Soren, thank you," Galahad said, pouncing on Caroline and wrestling her onto her back.

"Yeah, thanks. Galahad, cut it out!"

As they rolled and fought like puppies, the dragon, clinging to the side of the cliff, shook his massive head. "Mammals." Catching sight of a tempting shape standing above him on the edge of the cliff, Soren started climbing up the mountain face to meet her. "But it's not a bad idea. Come here, you."

CAROLINE squirmed as Galahad stretched her out and pinned her down, both wrists pulled up above her head by one of his hands. "Now," he purred, "are you going to get rid of this shirt, or am I going to eat it off?"

She glowered at him in mock temper before making it disappear. He lifted his head to contemplate her hard nipples with predatory interest. "That's better."

Caroline swallowed and licked her lips as he slowly lowered his head. The first hot flick of his tongue over the delicate peak made her jump. Through the Truebond, she caught an echo of how she tasted to him: slightly salty, deliciously feminine, uniquely Caroline.

He adored it.

And so he indulged, suckled, licked, nibbled. Slowly, enjoying the sensations she felt through the Truebond. *No wonder you like this.*

She moaned agreement and arched against him, then gasped at the feel of his hard, muscled weight while he enjoyed her lean, satin softness. "Let me go. I want to touch you."

"I don't think so." He tightened his grip on her wrists. "I like it just like this."

"Mmmmm." It did feel good. "But you're not fooling me. You're afraid you're going to lose it." Deliberately, she gave him a slow, sinuous wiggle, sliding her belly over his erect cock in a way that made him groan.

Oh, so that's how you want to play, he said through the link. *We'll just see who loses it first.*

Oops. Tactical mistake.

Too late. He reared off her and rolled over onto his back. His cock bounced, pointing cheerfully at his chin. *I'm challenging you to sixty-nine. Whoever comes first... Well, doesn't exactly lose.*

I was thinking that.

I know. Extending his arms over his head, he stretched, arching his back. The sight of that big body twisting against the sheets made her mouth water. "What are you waiting for? Mount up." He was thinking that a millennia and a half of kinky experience should allow him to blow her out of the water—so to speak.

Pride stung, Caroline glowered at him. "We'll just see about that, SirFangsalot." She sat up, swung a leg over his chest so her behind was in his face, and settled down to eye his cock.

Galahad simply grabbed her by the hips and pulled her to his mouth with such breathtaking strength she yelped. The cry became a gasp as he gave her a long, sampling lick.

She felt the smug satisfaction in his mind. *What are you waiting for? Get busy.*

Give me a minute. Caroline contemplated the length of his cock and swallowed. *I'm trying to figure out my plan of attack.*

Ha!

Hey, all you have to do is nibble. I've got to engulf this telephone pole.

He liked the description enough to reward her with a long, wicked swirl of his tongue. *Well, if it's too much for you, I'd be happy to tie you up and find somewhere else to put it .*

Pervert.

Not so. He sipped deliciously on sensitive flesh. *You're just a sheltered English teacher .*

Not anymore. To prove it, she took the thick shaft in one hand, angled it upward and swooped her mouth down over the head. Closing her lips, she began to suck.

He liked that.

So did she. In fact, she liked the startling sensation of wet heat so much that she stopped, just holding him in her mouth. That felt pretty good, too.

He slid one long finger into her sex and closed his lips over her clit. Sucking hard, he sent a sweet firestorm blowing up her spine. His cock jerked in her mouth in reaction to the glorious echo.

You know, he thought when the fierce sensation faded, *I think I'm winning. Where'd I put that rope ?*

I wouldn't bring up the bondage idea to somebody who could chain you to this bed so fast your fangs would spin. Determined, she started suckling his velvety cock head again, trying to ignore the delicious sensations coming through the Truebond .

He licked. She worked another inch of cock down her throat. He suckled, swirling his tongue around her clit. She caught his balls in her free hand and cupped him gently as she bobbed her head.

A second finger joined the one in her cunt. He pumped slowly. She drew off him to lave the head of his erection while she stroked the shaft.

And every single caress from either of them sent delicious waves through both, the pleasure doubling and trebling.

The climax roared out of nowhere, so blinding and ferocious his bellow blended with her startled cry.

When the hot wave passed, she lay collapsed over him, dazed, vaguely aware of the taste of him. *Oh .*

Wow.

She twisted her head around and grinned back at him. *Did Sir Galahad, badass of the known universe, just say "wow" ?*

A faint flush rose over his arrogant cheekbones. *That was you .*

It was not! You lying vampire! She rolled off him and grabbed the pillow. Before she could hit him with it, he grabbed her and dragged her beneath him.

Grinning, he settled down on top of her. "Oh, no, you don't. You lost. I'm claiming my prize."

"Hey, you came first! Yours triggered mine!"

"I don't think so." He lowered his head and kissed her slowly, thoroughly. She opened for him with a breathy little moan.

When he broke the kiss, she threaded her arms around his neck. "You came first."

"I did not." He reached down and drew her legs apart.

"Did, too."

"Actually, the whole point is moot, because *I* am the big, strong vampire and I'm going to bang you like a drum."

"Well, I'm the witch and I say..." He thrust his cock deep. "Wow."

Galahad grinned and rolled his hips. "I aim to please."

"Ooohhhh. You don't need much recovery time, do you?"

"Nope." Another breathtaking thrust.

The double sensation of her pleasure and his made her arch her head into the pillow. Hunger ripped over her, so sudden and hot the teasing mood died a quick death. She slung both legs over his working butt and grabbed his shoulders, sinking her nails deep.

Fiercely they ground against one another, the unbearable delight whipping through their bodies with every thrust.

Goaded, driven, they thrust and thrust and...

Detonation.

Hot, sweet waves poured over them, burning and delicious until they were left spent, curled together in a sweating heap.

Long moments went by before Caroline was capable of speech. "Damn. Is it going to be like that every time?"

"I hope not. I'll starve." He'd been so intent on taking her, he hadn't wanted to stop long enough to feed.

She laughed. "You romantic, you."

I love you.

The thought, coming out of nowhere, made her blink. She blinked again when she realized he meant it.

What was more, she loved him, too. Caroline sensed the wave of satisfaction from him at the thought.

But that's just not possible, she protested. *We've only known each other... the Truebond.*

Galahad rolled off her and pulled her onto his chest. *I'd have fallen in love with you anyway.* He grinned up at her, his smoky blue eyes wicked. "You're loveable."

"But I'm just a schoolteacher, and you're *you*. I..." She broke off, realizing she didn't even believe that anymore. If she'd been ordinary...

"You'd never have survived the Truebond with me. Hell, you wouldn't have come to get me to begin with. You'd have hidden in your little house and pretended you hadn't seen a damn thing." His expression grew grim. "And those bastard vampires would have handed Arthur, Morgana, and Lancelot their heads."

"Oh," she said faintly. Then her voice strengthened. "I love you, Galahad."

"I love you, Caroline." He drew her close, his eyes dark and deep as they met hers. "Marry me."

"Yes. Oh, yes." Hungrily, she kissed him.

NEITHER of them saw Soren fly past the barrier spell. Twisting his head around, he grinned at Morgana, who sat astride his neck. "I do good work."

"We do good work." She turned to look through the barrier at the couple entwined in passion, then gave him a wicked smile. "Would you like to do a little more?"

A hot light appeared in the dragon's eyes. "Oh, yes. But this time, *you* change form."

Morgana sighed. "Very well. But you make such a lovely man." She twisted, let herself fall from his back, and transformed, great wings beating.

He admired her sleek black scales. "You're not so bad yourself. Come here."

She gave him a toothy dragon smile and soared away with a tempting flick of her tail. "Only if you can catch me."

"Ah, I do love a woman who plays hard to get..." He flew off after her into the glowing Mageverse night.
