

ONE

So, Knight was right—I hadn't exactly surrendered myself to the idea of going on a date with him. In fact, I'd been doing a damned good job of trying to talk myself out of it because the sensible part of me thought it wasn't a good idea to mix business with pleasure. Granted, Knight and I didn't work together anymore (not in the technical sense of him being my boss), but I still managed to find myself on cases with him, so for all intents and purposes, we were working together. And as any smart person will tell you, business should be just that, business.

Okay, so that was the practical side of me. The less practical side of me couldn't stop thinking about the last kiss Knight and I shared in my kitchen—when I'd been straddling the incredibly hot man, er Loki (Knight is a creature called a Loki—forged from the fires of the Netherworld god, Hades), and played the game of “let's see how far my tongue can go down your throat.” I would've actually had sex with him right then and there if it hadn't been for my best friend who coincidentally was staying with me. And, really, looking back on it, I'm glad Sam was my roommate that evening because I wasn't quite ready to surrender to my more carnal feelings for Knight. Not yet anyway.

So you're probably wondering what in the hell is wrong with me, right? Why would I not want to get involved with an incredibly hot and mostly nice guy? (Well, Knight can be a bit of a cocky bastard but I guess that comes with being the head of the Association of Netherworld Creatures here in Splendor, California—think police detective). So, yes, he's the best looking guy I've basically ever seen in my life and yes, he seems to be into me; but I guess I have hang-ups, namely my ex-boyfriend, Jack, who cheated on me and really screwed me up.

My first issue with Jack is that he's human. Now, before you start thinking I'm some sort of weird alien life form, I'm not, (although I once spent about five hours transformed into a mass of green goo). I'm a fairy and I'm attractive, if I do say so myself. I'm also a law enforcement agent working as a consultant at the moment for ANC Splendor, and, yes, for Knightley Vander.

But, back to the subject of a date with Knight. Yes, I'd gone back and forth, basically having a full-blown argument between my rational side and the side of me that hadn't gotten any in a while. The side that hadn't gotten any in a while won, but, not for the reasons you might be thinking.

I'd decided to go on a date with Knight for two reasons: First, because he mentioned that he didn't think I would go on a date with him—that I'd talk myself out of it (I guess he's beginning to know me better)—and I wanted to prove him wrong. Second, as I mentioned earlier, Knight is a Loki which is a creature I'd never come across before, since they seem to only exist in the Netherworld. But, that's not why I wanted to go out with him...Knight has this weird condition, for lack of a better description, where his eyes start randomly glowing. So, naturally, I was curious as to why the hell his eyes glow and he said he'd tell me the hows and whys of it but only if I agreed to go on a date with him.

Sigh.

So, here I was, dressed in my evening best and waiting for the Loki to show up. I was wearing a short red dress with long sleeves and a plunging neckline. The material had to have Spandex in it

because it seemed to hug my curves. And, no, I hadn't magicked this one although, as a fairy, I could have, had I wanted to. Sometimes, though, it just takes too much creative juice to make your own clothes; after a while, my wardrobe starts to all look the same. This outfit was purchased from the Juniors' section of Macy's in preparation for my date with Knight.

Looking at my reflection in the mirror, I stepped into my black stiletto heels and said a silent prayer that I wouldn't stumble and kiss the pavement. Truth be told, I really wasn't used to high heels—I preferred my tennies because they were the best shoes to fight in. When you're in law enforcement, you never know when you might need to pull out a can of whoop-ass. And pulling out a can of whoop-ass is definitely easier when you aren't wearing stilettos. But, tonight, I planned to leave the whoop-ass cans to Knight, that is, if we even needed them.

I ran my fingers through my elbow-length honey gold hair, covering the tips of my ears. As a fairy, my ears come to points at the top and I'm not exactly thrilled with them. I always wear my hair down to cover the points. I once actually considered getting ear surgery but decided I wouldn't allow myself to be so vain.

My eyes are green, as in the color of emeralds, and I've got an oval-shaped face with decently plump lips. People seem to think I'm pretty but I don't really see myself that way. It's not like I'm self-conscious or anything—I'm just less concerned with my looks than with making sure my body is fit and healthy. That's because, really, as a fairy, my body is my best weapon. Beauty won't save you in a fight.

As I glanced at my small frame (I'm five-foot-one), I was pleased to see that, if anything, I looked leaner. Yes, my breasts still filled out my C cup bras and my hips remained on the curvy side, but the rest of me was solid, sculpted. My muscles were well defined which was good news—it meant I'd be that much faster and better when it came to combat.

At the sound of the doorbell, I grabbed my black leather jacket and my purse and, after nearly tripping over my ridiculous heels, I started for the living room.

I glanced through the peephole and after ensuring it was Knight, I pulled the door open.

“Hi,” I said.

Knight didn't answer. Instead, he made it very obvious that he was taking me in from head to toe, his gaze pausing a little too long on my bust. Well, it did serve me right, I guess—the dress had a pretty deep neckline and I was wearing my Wonder Bra.

“Um, hello Knight,” I grumbled again and pointed to my face as his eyes continued to ogle my bust line. “If you're waiting for my boobs to talk, don't hold your breath.”

A huge smile appeared as his gaze moved back up to my face. “Nicely done, Dulce.”

Knight, as I mentioned before, is basically the definition of gorgeous. He's insanely tall, (I'm not exactly sure how tall but over six-three for sure). He's like looking up a flag pole. His hair is pitch black and his eyes are blue, that is, when they aren't glowing. Tonight he had the beginnings of stubble decorating his chin and cheeks and looked every inch the rogue that he is.

“Thanks, are you ready?” I asked, never exactly comfortable with compliments, especially compliments from a Loki.

“Aren’t you going to say I look nice?” he asked, holding his hands out as I examined his figure. He was wearing dark grey slacks and a black v-necked, short sleeved, dress shirt. The sinewy muscle of his forearms hinted to the fact that this guy was built like an ox—strong, almost intimidatingly so.

“You look very handsome,” I said reluctantly and managed a half smile. “Handsome” didn’t even begin to express the way he looked. “Handsome” paled in comparison. “Killer sexy” might have been more apropos.

“Wow, handsome huh?”

“Stop trying to get more compliments out of me,” I retorted and started for the door, grasping the doorknob. “So where are you taking me?”

“It’s a surprise,” Knight answered and offered his arm. I closed the door behind me and then took his arm, silently appreciative of the fact that he’d offered it. It definitely would make walking down my driveway in stilettos that much easier.

“You look beautiful, by the way,” Knight said and snuck another glance at me, this one at my backside. “Not that you don’t always look beautiful.”

“Thanks,” I answered and felt something warm boil up inside me—something decidedly girly and decidedly unlike me.

“I was pretty surprised you didn’t talk yourself out of our date,” Knight commented as he opened the passenger door of his silver BMW M3 for me.

I smiled up at him. “I came close, believe me.”

He chuckled. “I DO believe you.”

He walked around to the driver’s side and opening the door, seated himself before he glanced over at me again. “So what made you decide to see it through?”

I shrugged and figured I’d go for honesty. “I wanted to find out about that eye glowing bit.”

He nodded and looking over at me, offered me a boyish smile. “I had a feeling that would do it.”

“So seeing as how we’re on a date and that was the agreement, spill the beans.”

He chuckled again as he started the engine and the Beemer purred beneath him. I couldn’t help but think everything would purr beneath him.

“Our date isn’t over yet,” he said with an evil smile. “I’ll tell you at the end of it.”

“I thought you’d probably milk it,” I said and shook my head, sighing over the injustice of the whole thing.

“Gotta pull out all my tricks with you, Dulce.”

For the next ten minutes, we made small talk as Knight managed to break more than one traffic law as we drove through downtown Splendor. There weren't many people out and about for a Friday night, not that Splendor was a happening spot. In fact, it wasn't happening really at all. It was more of a bedroom community, although we did have a decent population of Netherworld creatures.

Those with super human abilities had come out of the proverbial closet fifty years ago. Even though things had definitely simmered down since the dawning of the truth regarding the fact that vampires, werewolves and witches not only existed but had also been living among humans undetected for hundreds of years, we were still subject to ignorance and misunderstanding.

Knight pulled into the parking lot of Bliss, a nightclub that had just opened and played rival to the only other night club in Splendor, No Regrets, which was run by the vampire Bram, whom I guess I could call my friend.

“I thought we were doing dinner and drinks tonight?” I asked, turning to face Knight.

He shrugged and coaxed the Beemer into a spot by the back door. Then he glanced over at me with a wide smile as he turned the engine off and opened his door. “Will you just trust me?”

I undid my seatbelt and was about to let myself out when Knight appeared beside my door and opened it for me. Yes, he was lightning fast but I wasn't really surprised. As a Loki, Knight has a plethora of powers but he'll never tell me everything he's capable of. That relegates me to picking up on his abilities here and there, basically whenever he feels like showing off.

I took his proffered hand and stood up, quickly finding my balance. “You know, Bram won't like the fact that we're here and supporting his competition,” I remarked, feeling a little guilty over the fact.

“What the hell do I care?” Knight asked with a bit too much acid in his tone. Yep, Knight didn't like Bram and vice versa. I think it was because they were both jealous of one another.

“Well, I care because I need Bram's support,” I answered, throwing his nasty tone back at him as we started for the door of Bliss. Bram seemed to walk the line between good citizen and outlaw. I usually kept a blind eye to his less than noble pursuits because he was good about giving me leads when it came to catching the bigger bad guys.

“What Bram doesn't know won't hurt him,” Knight answered dismissively and, nodding his head at the bouncer, the smaller man approached the double entry doors and held one of them open for us. Knight offered him a smile and allowed me to enter before he came up behind me, putting his hands on either side of my hips as he steered me through the crowd.

I glanced back at him with a frown to which he merely responded with an innocent grin. Facing the club again, I took in my surroundings, immediately making note of the exit routes. Hey, you never know when you're going to need one. As to the club itself, the place was pretty packed. A strobe light highlighted the patrons as they danced in the center of the room, making the crowd appear like some sort of pulsating, throbbing creature. Timbaland's “Scream” belted out through

the speakers and I felt myself hungering for a Captain Morgan and Coke. The dance floor was square and large, and a bar occupied the far corner, while lounges fringed the sides.

Knight tightened his grip on either side of my waist and piloted me through the mass of undulating people, pulling me into him when some drunken guy stumbled out in front of me. The guy looked embarrassed and quickly allowed the crowd to swallow him up again as Knight directed me to an empty table which boasted a few purses and...Trey's manbag?

“Surprise!”

Before I had the chance to think another thought, Sam, Dia and Trey all jumped out from wherever the hell they'd been hiding and greeted me with large smiles and jazz hands. I felt myself go into fight or flight mode and had to calm myself down, talking my heart out of having an attack while I took a deep breath.

“What's going on?” I asked, turning to face Knight with total confusion written on my face. It's not like it was my birthday or anything.

Knight smiled smugly and nodded at the booth, motioning for me to take a seat. “I thought you needed a night out on the town with your friends because you've been through a lot lately.”

And that was the truth. I'd been through a crap load lately. Hmm, within the last six months, I'd nearly been killed by a Kragengen shape shifter—a voracious predator that had been feasting on some of Splendor's citizens. And if that weren't enough to cause my stress levels to spike, more recently, I had to defeat a Dreamstalker, who attacked me under the guise of my dreams. But, wait, it gets better...I also suffered through the tragedy of learning that my old boss, the prior Head of the ANC, not to mention my very close friend, Quillan, had been double dealing all along and turned out to be one of the bad guys. Yes, I had had one hell of a year.

I glanced at Knight and smiled. Sometimes he did things that surprised me, things that were not in line with his tough guy persona. Sometimes he made me wonder.

“Girl, you need a drink!” Dia said with a huge smile as she enveloped me in her arms.

Dia Robinson was one of my newest friends but that didn't diminish our friendship, which was bonded strong. Dia was the Head of the ANC for one of our bordering communities, Moon. She and I worked very closely on the last case which involved the Dreamstalker.

“It's so good to see you,” I said as I held her tightly, taking in her bright red halter top and matching pants. Red must have been her favorite color because it seemed she was always wearing it. I had to admit, it did compliment her beautiful chocolate skin and the perpetual glow that seemed to surround her. Dia was one of those people you couldn't help wanting to hang out with.

She pulled away and smiled down at me with her full, beautiful lips just as my best friend, (a witch working for the ANC), Sam, appeared and gave me a big hug. Then it was Trey's turn. Trey is a hobgoblin, also employed by Knight and the ANC, and, although I'd never cared for him much in the beginning of our acquaintance, I definitely considered him a friend now.

“Sup, Dulce?” he said, lifting his chin like he thought he was Eminem or something.

I couldn't help my laugh. Trey is anything but cool although he tries so hard to play the part. He's short, overweight, always sweaty and perpetually lusting after anything with boobs. But he's got a heart of gold.

"Thanks for coming out tonight, Trey," I said.

"Okay, what's everyone drinking?" Knight asked and offered us all a cheery grin. He took everyone's orders while I sat down at the table and the other three followed suit.

"Wow, this is a surprise," I started. "And you drove all the way from Moon, Dia?" Moon was a good two-hour drive from Splendor.

"Honey, there's no way I was going to miss it. 'Specially when your Mr. Sex on a Stick said I'd better make it out or suffer the wrath of the Loki." She paused for a second or two, running her perfectly manicured nails against her lips. "Course, that's a punishment I just might want to sign up for!"

"Oh, God," I muttered. Dia was like a cat in heat whenever she was around Knight. However, all women were like that really. "I'm happy to see you, Dia."

"And I'm happy to be here, girl. Got to know your BFF a little better," she said, glancing at Sam who just smiled.

"Yeah, I guess I was sort of passed out during our introduction," Sam said with a smile. The truth of the matter was that Sam had been in a coma. She'd been one of the Dreamstalker's victims and Dia, Knight and I had worked tirelessly to save her. But, I didn't need any more reminders of the hell my life had been lately. Instead, I fully intended to drink away the memories and lose myself in the moment—surrounded by the people closest to me.

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Two hours later and I was inebriated. I'd downed four Captain Morgan and Cokes and now found myself dancing in front of Knight, who was sitting at our table with his legs stretched out before him, watching me with a glimmer in his eye as he sipped his whiskey.

"So I thought you wanted some alone time with me?" I started, swaying my hips to "All The Right Moves" by One Republic. "What happened to that?"

Knight smiled and I felt something blossom in my stomach—something repressed, something carnal. I wanted him.

"Of course I want some alone time with you."

"So why didn't you take the opportunity tonight?"

He shrugged. "Because tonight is about you. It's not about what I want. It's about what you need and I thought you needed a night out to release some steam."

I nodded and suppressed the incredible desire to throw my arms around him and kiss him. Sometimes he was just so...nice. "Thank you."

“You’re welcome, Dulce.” He sipped his whiskey again, his eyes never leaving mine. “I’m trying to prove I’m not a bad guy.”

I was taken aback and stopped dancing, instead swaying with inebriation. “I don’t think you’re a bad guy.”

He shrugged. “Maybe not, but you’re still holding back.” Then he laughed. “You’re a tough nut to crack. The toughest I’ve come across yet.”

“Maybe that’s why you keep coming back?”

He sipped his whiskey and his eyes began to lighten, an eerie glow usurping their otherwise bright blue. His damned eyes were glowing again, the same way they had the first time I’d seen them do it—when we were at Bram’s restaurant. I bit my tongue, wanting to ask him what the deal was but I knew he wouldn’t enlighten me. Not yet—our date still wasn’t over.

“Nope, that’s not why I keep coming back,” he said simply and the glow in his eyes died away. Before I had the chance to respond, Sam came up behind me.

“I have to pee, Dulce, wanna come?”

I didn’t want to come but it was unspoken girl law that if your friend had to pee, you had to accompany her. I nodded and smiled at Knight in apology as he smirked. I wasn’t sure why, but I was convinced his gaze didn’t stray from us as we made our way through the crowd, eventually disappearing into the bathroom.

“So are you going to have sex with Knight later or what?” Sam asked, her words slurring until it sounded like she was talking underwater.

“Sam!”

She waved away my faux shock. “Come on, Dulce, when are you gonna give the poor guy a break?”

“Ah, so you’re on his side now?” I asked in mock annoyance, propping my hands on my hips.

Sam started for the stall but didn’t stop talking, she just raised her voice. “I think we both mislabeled him. Knight’s not a player. He really likes you.”

I sighed deeply, not really sure what to think or what to say. All I was sure of was that I really didn’t want to wait in the bathroom for her, listening to her pee. “I’ll wait outside for you.”

I started for the door and exhaled all my tension. Did Knight really like me or was he actually just a player? Would he treat me as badly as Jack had? Would I even be dumb enough to put myself in that situation again to begin with? I mean, I liked my life as it was. Granted I really didn’t have much of a romantic life, but did that really matter? I had friends...

“Dulcie.”

It was like I was in slow motion, my brain trying to place the voice but finding it difficult with my alcohol-induced stupor. But, when I focused on the man standing before me, complete with his sickening sweet smile, I wanted to throw up.

“Jack.”

I didn't even recognize my own voice. Instead, my heart was hammering and my blood seemed to be increasing in temperature, boiling me from the inside out. My breath was coming faster and shallower and it was all I could do to stay standing.

“Wow, didn't think I'd see you here.”

“Yeah,” I managed to reply as I tried to get control of myself. *Dulcie, you can handle this. Just calm the hell down. Just act cool.*

Jack looked the same as he had all those years ago. Still tall and dashing handsome; still the same warm brown eyes I'd lost myself in; still that charming, boyish smile. His eyes raked me from head to toe.

“You look great, like you haven't changed since the last time I saw you.”

The last time he saw me...the time I'd caught him in bed with another woman. And then all the emotions, all the feelings of anger and hurt started churning in my gut again, feeling as fresh as if I'd just walked in on him again.

I didn't realize my hands had fisted at my sides until I glanced down at them. My body absolutely and totally wanted to knock him out. And that was when I realized I needed to just walk away. Before I had the chance, I was blocked by what looked like an Amazon. She approached Jack and took his hand and it was like *déjà vu*. She wasn't the same woman I'd walked in on all those years ago, but that didn't even matter. Standing beside him, she was his height—a full six feet. And she was gorgeous with long black hair and boobs that were so big, she could probably get away with driving in the carpool lane.

“Who's this, Jack?” she asked in a sweet voice laced with alcohol.

As far as my buzz was concerned, it had packed and moved out at the exact moment I found myself standing in front of my ex.

“This is Dulcie,” he said with that same smirk, his eyes never leaving mine. They were hungry, predatorily so. “My ex.”

The woman's eyes widened. “The fairy?”

Jack was a human and, apparently, so was this chick. Her humanity was something that should have struck me immediately since I have the ability to detect Netherworld creatures from humans as soon as I get close to one. I can tell a werewolf from a vamp from a goblin from a ditzy brunette in less than three seconds. But, where the hell that ability was right now was anyone's guess.

“Yeah, the fairy,” I managed to answer.

The woman smiled, revealing a set of perfect white teeth set behind sumptuous, full lips. I could never accuse Jack of dating anyone less than beautiful. “Well isn’t she just the cutest, lil’ thing? I could just pinch her, she’s so cute, like a lil’ lightnin’ bug.”

That was when I realized she had a southern accent. Scarlett O’Hara had just lost all her charm and, as God was my witness, I’d be damned if I ever drank another sweet tea.

“Yeah, I’d say Dulcie has some lightning in her,” Jack said with a laugh and another carnivorous gaze, this time at my bust.

Even though I wanted to either blast their righteous smiles off their righteous faces or, at the very least, run away and hide, I did neither. My feet were cemented in place like my ankles had just gone on strike.

“You okay, Dulce?”

I heard Knight’s alto voice come up behind me at the same instant that his arm weaved through mine and his hand found my waist, grasping it and pulling me into him. I couldn’t even speak, and from the looks of it, neither could the skyscraper. Instead, she just stared at Knight like she’d never seen a god before.

“Hi,” she said and paused for a few seconds. “Who are you?”

“Knight.” He glanced down and offered me a little smile, squeezing my side as if to say he knew exactly what I was going through and that he was there for me, that he would see me through this. Then he faced the woman again and extended his hand. “I’m Dulcie’s fiancé, it’s nice to meet you.”

At that moment, I wanted nothing more than for the room and everyone in it to melt away around us, leaving only Knight and me. He’d saved me. Just when I thought I was going to shrivel up and die, he’d ridden in on his white steed and slayed my dragon.

“Hi, Knight,” the woman said in as flirty a voice as she could muster. “I’m Sunshine.”

Knight chuckled and shook his head. “I’ll bet you are.”

“And I’m Jack,” the jerk in question said as he thrust his hand out and the smile he’d been wearing only seconds before was now nowhere to be found. Instead, he wore a deeply etched frown and it was obvious he was put out either because I had a fiancé or because his date was still staring at Knight in total and complete appreciation.

“Good to meet you,” Knight responded, without offering his hand in return. Instead, he glanced down at me and smiled. “Was wondering where you’d gone to, Dulce.” Then he started to walk away, pulling me with him and when he smacked my ass and smiled at them, he added, “I just can’t get enough of her, she’s so damned beautiful,” I didn’t even mind.

When we were out of their line of sight, he looked at me with concern in his eyes. “Are you okay?”

I just nodded, still feeling shell-shocked. Then I glanced up at him and felt something that I hadn't felt in a long time, something I couldn't even characterize but it was real and pounding its way through me. "Thank you."

He just nodded. "Sorry about the ass smack but wanted to play it up."

"No," I was quick to respond. "I mean it... thank you."

Knight didn't say anything for a few seconds but bit his lip like he was trying to find just the right words. Then he turned to face me and there was something deliberate about his expression. "Dulcie, he's an asshole, you know that, right?"

At first I was confused because it wasn't as though Knight had ever met Jack, so how could he know the situation between us? But then it suddenly occurred to me that Knight knew exactly who Jack was. He knew because he'd inserted himself in a dream that I'd had about Jack a long time ago. That was one of Knight's abilities—he could basically hijack my dreams whenever he wanted to.

"Trust me, I know he's a jerk. I was just surprised to see him, that's all."

"Okay," Knight answered although he didn't sound convinced. "Did it weird you out at all? I mean, what I said?"

"Weird me out?" I shot back at him with a little laugh. "No, you were like my knight in shining armor."

He chuckled. "No pun intended?"

Warmth suffused me as I glanced back up at him. "No pun intended."