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By Ashlyn Chase



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I Dream of Dragons
My Wild Irish Dragon

Praise for Ashlyn Chase's Flirting with Fangs series:

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"Merges the paranormal and real world seamlessly... Truly entertaining."-*Long and Short Reviews*

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Editorial Review

Review

"Chase brings dragons and other mythical creatures to life in this fun story. With leprechauns, witches, vampires, ghosts and Mother Nature herself, the hijinks will have readers laughing out loud. The sparks between the two main characters jump off the page. The dialogue is witty and snarky. Readers will enjoy this book." - *RT Book Reviews, 4 Stars*

"What is sexier than a dark-haired Irish musician? Perhaps one who can also shift into a fire-breathing dragon. Chase launches her new paranormal-romance series, Boston Dragons, with a tale filled with her trademark fantasy-paranormal characters, snarky dialogue, and sizzling heat." - *Booklist*

"This story has it all, laughter, tears, magic and sizzling heat. ...A fun, paranormal read that had me chortling out loud one moment and fanning myself the next." - *Nigh Owl Reviews, 5 Stars, Top Pick!*

About the Author

An award winning author, Ashlyn Chase specializes in characters who reinvent themselves, having reinvented herself numerous times. She has worked as a psychiatric nurse, and for the Red Cross, and has a degree in behavioral sciences. She lives with her true-life hero husband in beautiful New Hampshire.

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Chapter 1

Thunk.

"What the hell?" Rory picked himself up off the floor beside his bed, rubbing his sore hip. Three little men dressed in green stood by his bedroom door. One of them looked angry, and one of them was trying not to snigger. The other seemed like a neutral party with his hands in his pockets.

"Rory Arish, you're being charged with theft," the angry one said.

Rory blinked and stared at the little men. "Theft, is it? What is it I'm accused of stealin'?"

"Me gold. All of it."

Rory scratched his head. "Lucky, is it?" he asked, trying to put names to their faces.

"If you're talkin' about me name, it's Clancy. Lucky is me brother." The man with his hands in his pockets withdrew one and waved at Rory. "If you're talkin' about your day, I'd say this is the unluckiest of your whole long life."

The red-haired man who'd been trying not to laugh moved his hand, uncovering his short, red beard. "Nobody steals from leprechauns and gets away with it-no matter how big you are."

Rory sighed. "There's been some kind of misunderstandin'. I haven't stolen anyone's gold-or anythin' else for that matter. Do you see anythin' worth stealin' here?" He spread his arms wide and swiveled, indicating the whole sparsely furnished room.

He and his sisters had moved from the crumbling castle on the cliffs to the caretakers' cottage a few years ago. The Arishes hadn't changed much, leaving the cottage about the same as when the caretakers had lived and died there.

"Move your arse, dragon," the angry one said. "March me to my gold!"

"I will not march anywhere," Rory said. "Especially when I don't know where your feckin' gold is."

Clancy balled his fists.

The gleeful one muttered, "Oh, that did it."

"Be quiet, Shamus," Clancy snapped. Then he focused his attention on Rory again. "Mr. Arish, I'm trying to be reasonable, but I'm not a patient man. Now, admit what you did and rectify the situation, or we'll be forced to end the treaty between our people."

Clad only in their nightgowns, Rory's sisters appeared in the doorway behind the little people. Well...behind and over them. Even at five foot five or six, the girls were easily twice the size of a leprechaun.

"What's goin' on here?" his sister Chloe mumbled as she rubbed the sleep out of her green eyes.

"Apparently I'm bein' accused of a crime I did not commit," Rory said.

His youngest sister, Shannon, piped up. "Crime? What crime?"

Clancy whirled on the girls. "Mayhaps one of you took me gold. We don't know if it was your brother or not, but it had to be the work of a dragon. Who else would have the strength to move it?"

Rory rubbed his forehead. "Now wait a minute. Me sisters didn't steal anythin' either."

Clancy pointed a finger at Rory. "Then you admit it! It was you!"

"I admit nothin'." Rory's annoyance was growing now. Fine, wake me up. Accuse me of something I didn't do. But don't go pointin' fingers at me sisters!

"It could have been any one of you...or all of you colludin' together. The punishment will be meted out to each and every one until somebody confesses."

"Punishment?" Chloe laughed. "I'd like to see you try."

Oh shite. That was probably the worst thing she could have said, but leave it to Chloe to poke the beast. Even though they came in pint-sized packages, leprechauns possessed powerful magic. Either Chloe didn't remember the treaty because it was signed when she was so young, or she didn't believe the leprechauns held the power to protect or expose her and her family. But how else could their castle in the cliffs have remained hidden from humans for all these centuries?

It's true that the bulk of it was built underground with entrances in the cliff's caves, but there was one turret, like a large rook on a chess board, in plain view. It was for the few humans brave enough to live near dragons, plus the royals had posted a sentry there to see anyone coming by land.

Clancy narrowed his eyes at the three of them. Finally he said, "You leave me no choice! You will march to the cliffs-now. If one of you doesn't confess to the crime before you get there, I will cast you into the ocean

and ban you from ever setting foot in Ireland again! In fact, you'll be banned from all of the United Kingdom!"

"Ha!" Chloe said. "Nobody's goin' anywhere."

* * *

Moments later, dragons Rory, Shannon, and Chloe Arish bobbed on a raft just off the western shore of County Kerry, Ireland. They had been marched, against their will, to the edge of the cliff, and then magically transported to the raft. Rory, head of his clan, shook his fist at the little bastards dancing and laughing on the cliff above them, right next to his clan's, now fully exposed, ancient castle.

"You can't do this! Our people have coexisted for centuries. You're violatin' the treaty signed by our ancestors," he roared.

Shamus, the most gleeful of the three redheaded leprechauns, yelled back, "We don't know who signed it. We weren't there. Maybe the dragons forged our ancestors' signatures."

"Why would they do that?" Chloe yelled. "We were protectin' each other. Your people with your magic and our clan with our might."

"Ha! Look who's high and mighty now," Shamus called back.

"This is the same as murder!" Chloe yelled. "You know damn well this raft won't make it across the ocean. And look what you're doin' to me poor sister." She pointed to Shannon, who was lying prostrate on the lashed logs, sobbing. The bastards hadn't even let her say good-bye to Finn, her intended.

Lucky elbowed Shamus. "She has a point."

"About a cryin' sister? Who cares?"

"Not that. About the murder part."

Clancy stroked his red and gray beard. "We should give them a worthy craft and enough food so they don't starve."

Shamus's delight faded fast. "You're not goin' soft on these thieves, are you? They took your gold!"

Clancy leaned in close, but Rory's superior hearing picked up what he thought was an admission of doubt.

"We didn't take your damn gold!" he shouted at the leprechauns.

"You did," Shamus insisted. "Who else but a dragon would covet our treasure?"

Rory set his hands on his hips. "Oh, I don't know... Everyone?"

Clancy finally addressed his brothers. "They should be kept alive. If we don't find the gold in their keep, we may have to question them some more."

Lucky nodded. "I agree."

Suddenly the dragons found themselves on a fishing trawler, probably large enough to make it across the sea

if the weather was perfect the whole way.

"There. Now they have safe transport and all the fish they can catch," Clancy said.

Shamus let out a defeated sigh. "All right. I guess that covers our arses."

"Speaking of arses," Rory yelled. "What do you little shites expect us to do for money if we land somewhere? Are we to sleep on the docks and starve while we look for work?"

Lucky said, "Certainly not." He turned to Shamus. "There are women aboard."

Shamus rolled his eyes. "Fine."

A dozen plastic cards rained down on the dragons, bouncing off their heads.

"Ow," Chloe said. "You bastards did that on purpose." Then she picked up one of the credit cards and yelled, "Who the hell is Molly McGuire?"

Shamus shrugged. "Does it matter? She probably won't miss it for a bit."

"Surely we can have the treasure that you know belongs to us," Shannon pleaded. "All you're missin' is gold. We have jewels, antiques, silver..."

Clancy nodded and a jewelry box, a harp, and a silver tea set appeared on the deck. Suddenly the ship dropped a little lower in the water.

"There's more below," Lucky yelled.

"And what about our clothes?" Chloe called out. "Our instruments!"

Clancy tossed his hands in the air and said, "Do I have to do everythin'?"

"I'll get them," Lucky said. A moment later three small suitcases and their only means of income, the family's musical instruments, landed on the deck.

Suddenly Shannon shimmered off her nightgown, shifted into her dragon form, and flew at the cliff. Before either Rory or Chloe could scold her for changing in broad daylight, she bounced off an invisible barrier and landed in the sea, stunned.

Chloe gasped. "Shannon! Are you all right?"

A curl of steam escaped Shannon's nostril. She righted herself and flew at the cliff a second time-faster, as if speed could break through whatever magic barrier the leprechauns had created. Again she bounced off and landed in the ocean. This time her eyes were closed and her wings were limp as she floated on her back.

"You killed our sister," Rory yelled. He shimmered off his sweat pants, shifted into dragon form, and swooped down to grab his precious baby sister's limp body. After he'd returned her to the deck of the boat, he shifted back to human form and put his ear to the soft part of Shannon's scaly chest, listening for one of her two heartbeats. Rory always suspected her softer nature was a result of those two hearts. He sometimes wondered if she'd also gotten Chloe's, because his middle sister could seem a bit heartless at times.

He heard a few faint beats. Ah, she's alive. Damn good thing too, or I'd have found some way around that

barrier to toast every one of the little bastards and serve them as s'mores.

Lucky and Clancy leaned over the cliff and appeared somewhat concerned. Shamus folded his arms and said, "If she's dead, she killed herself."

Clancy whirled on Shamus. "Shut your trap."

Shamus's back stiffened, but he didn't argue with his brother.

Shannon groaned and her eyes fluttered open. She shifted back to human form and touched her head. "Ow."

"What were you thinkin', Sister?" Chloe demanded as she rushed over with a tarp. "I get the first time, but the second? Did the first bump on the head knock the sense right out of you?"

"Finn... I need to see Finn. How will he know what happened? He'll think I've just run off and left him."

"No, he won't," Chloe said. "You two have been joined at the hip since you were sixteen. He'll know somethin' is drastically wrong."

"And that's supposed to comfort me?" Shannon moaned.

Chloe just held up the tarp while her sister shimmered back into her nightgown. Soon Shannon was bawling again.

Rory began fiddling with the controls in hopes of getting the boat started. He couldn't stand it when his sister cried. "Try to buck up, Shannon. I'll do whatever I can to get this vessel to a safe haven. From there you can call or text or whatever you want to do to him."

Chloe smirked. "I'm sure she wants to do more than that to him."

Shannon let out another wail, and Rory narrowed his eyes at his middle sibling. "You're not helpin', Chloe."

At last the engine caught and he pushed the throttle forward. They sped west. Eventually he'd figure out all the controls and possibly even hit Iceland.

* * *

Amber, along with the other flight attendants, boarded the plane from Iceland back to Boston.

She noticed a young red-haired woman with her adorable daughter-the resemblance couldn't be missed-seated in her first class section. She thought she heard the woman explaining to the little girl that she could have snapped her fingers and they would have been home instantly, but she didn't want the girl to think that was the normal way to get around. The little girl nodded and her big, blue eyes didn't blink, as if the explanation made perfect sense to her. It made no sense to Amber. She must have misheard.

All was going well until a bit of turbulence ruffled the plane's smooth path. Amber happened to be standing next to the mother's and daughter's seats.

The captain announced over the intercom, "Sorry, folks. We seem to be experiencing a bit of rough air."

At that moment the plane bounced dramatically, and Amber braced herself against the passenger's seat and the overhead bin. "No shit," she muttered under her breath.

The woman giggled as if she had superior senses and had heard the inappropriate comment over the engine noise.

"Please be sure your seat belts are fastened," the captain continued. "Flight attendants, return to your seats and buckle up. It's going to be a bit bumpy."

The woman seemed to be glancing at Amber a little more frequently than she'd expect-almost sizing her up.

Oh well... If she's going to lodge a complaint against me, it will take the decision to quit or not to quit out of my hands.

Amber had been flying the skies ambivalently for several years. After high school, she didn't have the money for college and didn't know what her major would be, so rather than waste her mother's hard-earned money, she'd decided to go to work. She figured as soon as she discovered her passion, she could go to college and by then she'd have a bunch of money saved up for school. Maybe it was time...

A few hours later they made a safe landing in Boston, and Amber waited to deplane after everyone else.

The redheaded woman and the adorable mini-version waited until they were the very last passengers.

Amber couldn't help being a little nervous. Did the woman want to confront her on her language? Chastise her privately? She wouldn't blame her. The little girl didn't act as if she'd heard Amber swear, but using such language was inappropriate nonetheless. Yup, it was definitely time to think about finding another job. This had to be a sign of burnout.

Ah, good. The woman walked past her and disappeared into the crowd. Amber headed for the airport bathroom.

When she entered the restroom, the redhead was washing her hands.

Damn it. She hadn't seen the woman enter, but here she was. It must be a sign. Amber would have to stop trying to avoid her and just face the consequences of her stupid remark. Or maybe the woman wasn't upset at all. Better to keep it casual and see.

"What a beautiful little girl," Amber said.

"Thank you," the woman responded, beaming. "She really is a great kid."

The little one giggled and nodded.

"Awww... What's her name?"

"Nikki," the mom said. "And I'm Brandee." She extended her clean and now dry hand to shake Amber's, so she grasped Brandee's hand for a firm handshake. Brandee held it a little longer than necessary and a smile spread slowly across her face.

What was that about?

A woman in a crisp business suit joined them and stood next to Brandee. She seemed happy to see her. It wasn't unusual for travelers to bump into people they knew at the airport, so Amber didn't think anything of it until...

"I might have a candidate for you," Brandee whispered to the businesswoman, who gave Brandee a smile.

"Do you now?"

Brandee tipped her head in Amber's direction, but she was already on her way to a stall. When she turned to close the door, she saw the woman pat Brandee on the head and say, "Good girl. I'll take it from here."

Brandee didn't seem to mind the businesswoman's condescending behavior. She simply smiled and then addressed her child. "Is it time for a diaper change, honey?" The toddler nodded.

When Amber exited the stall, Brandee and Nikki were gone and the businesswoman was washing her hands...again. Must be a germophobe.

She observed the flight attendant until Amber glanced at her and smiled. She was about to tell the woman to have a good day when suddenly she wasn't there. The whole restroom wasn't there! She wasn't there. She was surrounded by fog and couldn't see a thing. Where the hell am I? Suddenly the fog cleared and she was alone. What. Just. Happened?

* * *

By some miracle, Rory and his sisters made it to Iceland. They stood on the shore, shivering.

"I need a coat and a place to get out of this wind," Shannon said.

"We're all freezin' our arses off," Chloe snapped.

"At least the leprechauns gave us our clothes," Rory said. "Jeans and sweaters are better than your nighties."

Chloe snorted. "To be sure. That was so feckin' nice of them."

Rory's teeth chattered. "I spotted a cave off the south coast. We have our own source of heat. If the place is private, we'll be safe. But as far as coats are concerned, if either of you have a suggestion, let me know."

Chloe withdrew a credit card from her pocket. "I think Molly wants to go shopping."

"You can't!" Shannon said. "That doesn't belong to you."

"These are desperate times, Shannon," Chloe hissed out between her teeth.

"Look," Rory said. "The credit card company will reimburse Molly. I'll take Shannon to the cave I saw, and we'll get a fire going. Then I'll come looking for you. Where do you think you'll be, Chloe?"

Chloe bit out some kind of oath. "Sure. Baby our baby sister some more. That'll really help her get along in the real world."

Rory set his hands on his hips. "If we split the chores, we'll be comfortable that much sooner. We can stand here and freeze to death while we argue, or you can give me a direction so I can come find you in an hour or so."

"Fine," Chloe said. "I'm headin' northwest." She pointed a long, un-manicured finger at a building right off the dock. The place looked like a clothing store with all sorts of outerwear in the window. "What size do you wear?"

Rory rolled his eyes. "Just buy me somethin' extra large and extra warm."

"You can send Molly whatever-her-surname-is a check to cover it later," Shannon said.

Chloe laughed. "Yeah, I'll do that. I'll be sure to give the police our return address too."

Rory grabbed Shannon's wrist before he started swearing and marched off in the opposite direction.

"You don't have to drag me, Brother. I'll come willin'ly."

He sighed and let go. "Thank the gods. At least one of you can be reasoned with."

Although she had to run to keep up with his long-legged strides, she caught him. "Chloe's not really upset. It's just her way."

"Well, I'm glad you're not that way. Otherwise I'd probably be an only child by now."

Shannon laughed.

It was the first smile he'd seen from her since they'd left Ireland. He knew she hadn't accepted their lot. It was just a tiny truce until the next hissy fit. He also knew better than to bring up the name Finn Kelley or she'd begin to weep again.

How had he wound up in these circumstances? They hadn't done a thing. The leprechauns had hidden their castle from humans for centuries, and for the last several years, while the castle crumbled, they'd lived quietly in a cottage on the property far down the dead-end road, away from prying eyes. Suddenly they had been dragged from their beds and marched against their will to the castle, which was no longer hidden but standing-albeit crumbling-on the cliffs in plain sight of the ocean.

When the leprechauns demanded that the Arishes produce the gold that was missing from their coffers, Rory had thought they were daft. Apparently Clancy had discovered the loss and had convinced his cronies that the dragons' love of treasure had finally gotten the better of them.

When Rory and Shannon reached a deserted part of the coast, they found a large cave in which they could make a temporary home. Dragons weren't seafaring creatures, and he was glad to be on solid ground.

Shannon's face screwed up and tears glistened in her eyes.

Oh no. Here we go again.

"What it is, luv?" he asked, dreading the answer.

"Is this what we've come to? Livin' in some hard, dank cave? I miss our peat fire and our lovely flowered sofa. There's not a comfortable spot anywhere."

Rory patted her shoulder. "I need you to make it as homey as you can. Just start a small fire and keep it goin'. I have to fetch Chloe and show her where we are. The three of us will put our heads together and come up with a better plan soon."

Shannon's gaze dropped to her feet. Not long after, he saw shivers rack her body and a fat teardrop fall from her chin. "I hope Chloe gets us some warm boots-I mean Molly."

He thought he'd pull out every last hair on his head if he had to put up with his soggy sister much longer. "Come now. How can you start a fire if you're just goin' to put it out with tears?"

She took a few deep breaths, and he could see her trying to wrestle herself under control.

"That's a good lass. I'm sure you can warm the place a bit while I'm gone. Just don't move so Chloe and I can find you again."

"What am I supposed to keep burnin', Brother? Rock?"

Do I have to think of everything? "We'll bring some newspapers and branches back as fuel and give you a break. For now, just heat the rocks with your breath. That may produce a bit of steam, but it'll warm the air."

Shannon sighed, then took a deep breath and blew out a stream of fire aimed at the cave walls.

"Perfect. Thank you, luv. I'm off to fetch our surly sister." Before Shannon could think of anything else to complain about, he rushed out the cave's entrance and picked his way over the rocks toward town.

* * *

When Amber finally reappeared in the airport bathroom, she mumbled, "I need a vacation," and went straight home to her apartment building. She thought she must be losing her mind and just wanted to lie down-after having a much-needed drink. She ignored the sign on the elevator door. It was in small print and official looking. Probably a notice that the landlord would be spraying for bugs or something. She spied the same notice on each tenant's door as she fumbled with her keys. At last she let herself into her apartment and grabbed the notice, intending to look at it later.

Dropping her flight bags outside the kitchen, she took a mini wine bottle out of the fridge. She glanced at the notice on her way to the living room and almost dropped the bottle of Chardonnay. An eviction notice?

"Holy mother!"

"I'm right behind you," a woman said.

That caused Amber to whirl around and repeat herself loudly.

"I said, I'm right here!" The white-robed woman slapped her hands over her ears. She had long, thick, white hair. Her robe was belted with a vine of ivy.

"Hey, aren't you the woman from the bathroom? Brandee's friend?"

"Sheesh. Have a seat, girlie. We need to talk."

Amber hesitated. The woman wasn't carrying a weapon, although something about her seemed ultimately threatening. As if to affirm the feeling, thunder rolled and the sky outside the window darkened. Amber stumbled backward and sat down hard on her beige linen sofa.

"That's better," the woman said. "I'm aware you don't know who I am, so I'll introduce myself. I don't have time for your disbelief, so save me the trouble and just go with it. Okay?"

Amber nodded woodenly.

"Good. The truth is, I'm Mother Nature. Those who know me call me either Goddess or Gaia. That's my title and my name. You should begin by calling me Mother Nature just to drive the point home."

Amber heard herself say, "Okaaay," in a little girl's voice.

"Here's the good news. You won't have to worry about that eviction notice. I have a job for you, and it won't matter where you live. I know you're getting disenchanted with your job as a flight attendant."

"How do you know that?"

The woman smirked. "Really? I'm Mother freakin' Nature. I know just about everything. If people were meant to fly, I'd have given them wings." She cocked her head. "Why did you become a flight attendant anyway?"

"I-uh. I wanted to see the world."

"You mean you wanted to meet a rich businessman and do a little traveling before you settled down. How's that working out for you?"

Her back went up. "He doesn't have to be rich."

"But relationships with men in general aren't working out. Right?"

She sighed. "Not so much. Every guy I get close to assumes I'm cheating when I'm out of the country and eventually finds a 'backup,' or he's just pissed because I'm not around much. And don't even get me started on the pilots."

"So, how much of the world have you actually seen?"

Amber grimaced. "Pretty much the same routes over and over again."

"So...nothing but the same foreign airports and hotels."

"You may have a point."

"Of course I have a point. I always have a point. I don't chat with mortals for my health. Speaking of my health, spreading all that noxious jet fuel so close to my ozone layer is the most harmful thing you can possibly do to me. Did you know that?"

"Um...not really. Is it?"

"Sheesh. How dumb can you be? You blow a hole in my sunscreen, and you think I won't get burned?"

"I...I don't really make those decisions."

Mother Nature-or whoever she was-rolled her eyes and sat down on the chair across from Amber. "Well, you may be able to make those decisions in the future. I want you to be my muse of air travel."

Amber's brows shot up. "Huh? You're offering me a job? As a...what?"

Mother Nature sighed. "I knew you'd have a hard time believing all of this. I gave you a trusting nature but also let you develop some healthy skepticism. Look, I don't have time for a lot of chitchat. I'm in desperate

need of some modern muses. You've met one of them. Brandee is my muse of photography."

"I thought muses took care of poetry, dance, and other ancient arts."

The woman let out a groan. "Exactly. The original nine are useless in this modern age. I tried to get them to reeducate themselves in new areas, but it's been a disaster. I can't even get the muse of epic poetry to rap-or the muse of dance to crunk. And forget music videos! Technology is way beyond them, and I can't wait any longer for my muses to catch up. Your world is growing too fast. Therefore, I've begun the task of finding a few modern muses. Any questions so far?"

"Um, yeah. A few hundred..."

"Well, hold your questions for the end. I'll pair you with someone who'll have the patience to answer them. In other words, not me."

Amber wanted to throw her hands in the air and say something sarcastic, but she still wasn't sure how crazy this woman was-or she was, so she just waited.

"Good. Let's see now..." Gaia tapped her chin as if deep in thought. "I know. I'll pair you with Brandee since you've already met and she's the one who recommended you. That way if she doesn't answer your questions thoroughly and you screw up, it'll be all her fault."

This insulting woman was trying Amber's patience. How could she get the woman out of her apartment? Playing along with her was getting old.

"Why don't you give me Brandee's phone number? I'll give her a call sometime."

Mother Nature frowned. "You still doubt me, glitter tits?"

"What did you call me?"

"Look down."

Amber was bare to the midriff and indeed her breasts were covered in glitter. She gasped and tried to cover herself with her hands.

"Relax. I've seen them before. Heck, I made them."

Amber was struck dumb. If she protested, who knew what the woman...or goddess would do. "I-I..."

"Mother Nature" waved her hand and Amber was wearing her uniform blouse again. Then the self-proclaimed deity shouted at the ceiling. "Brandee, I need you."

To Amber's shock, the redheaded passenger from her latest flight appeared in her living room.

"Yes, Gaia. How may I be of service?"

"This is the woman you recommended for the muse of air travel, correct?"

Brandee turned to Amber and offered a friendly smile. "Yes. I liked her immediately and thought she'd fit in with the others. As you know, I can sense people's innate goodness and I'm a very good judge of character."

"Well, she needs to talk to someone like you or Bliss. One of my modern muses. She has questions, and I don't have the time or patience to answer them."

"Understood," was all Brandee said.

The woman looked relieved and smiled. "Thank you. As a reward for your help, I'll send an influential customer to visit your gallery tomorrow."

Brandee grinned. "Thanks! We're doing quite well, but I can always use more-"

"Yeah, yeah." Mother Nature disappeared into thin air and Amber let out the breath she'd been holding in a whoosh.

"Where did she go?"

Brandee shrugged. "Who knows? She likes to hang out in her office building on State Street, but she could be creating natural disasters like floods or earthquakes. You just never know with her."

"Is she really..."

"Mother freakin' Nature? Yeah, she is." Brandee chuckled. "You probably pictured someone wearing rainbows as a halo and patting kittens, didn't you?"

"Well, no, but I didn't think..."

Brandee sat next to her and lowered her voice. "You didn't expect a sarcastic crone with the patience of a gnat, am I right?"

Amber chuckled. "Well, no."

"You'll get used to her. You should meet my friend Bliss."

"She mentioned something about a person named Bliss."

"Yeah. She's rather famous among us muses, having been the only one gutsy enough to refuse Mother Nature's generous offer."

"Generous offer? I never received any offer sounding remotely generous."

"Really? Huh. I guess you didn't get that far. Gaia never expects her muses to work for nothing. She rewards us handsomely-usually with our greatest desire. But Bliss..." Brandee shook her head and sighed. "She stood up to Gaia and said no, even with a money tree growing right in the middle of her man's living room."

"Her man, huh?" Amber mumbled.

"Ah!" Brandee said. "Could that be what you want? A boyfriend?"

Amber snorted. "No. I've had plenty of boyfriends. What I'd like is a stable guy who won't cheat on me. I don't seem to be having much luck finding one of those."

Brandee set a sympathetic hand on Amber's shoulder. "We've all had our share of failed romances. If it isn't one thing, it's another, but both Bliss and I are now 'blissfully' happy, if you'll pardon the pun. So, if what

you want is a wonderful, faithful man to love, marry, or live with, I'll mention that to the goddess."

"No! Oh no. Don't do that yet. I think I'm leaning more toward Bliss's reaction than yours."

Brandee raised her eyebrows. Then she smiled and seemed to relax. "You know what might be a good idea? If we include Bliss in this conversation."

"Ugh. Please don't. I can't stand any more people popping into my living room. I'm quite convinced I'm losing my mind as it is."

"Oh. Sorry. I forgot what it was like in the beginning. Of course your head is probably spinning. It's natural to doubt your own eyes and sanity. Why don't I give you my address on Beacon Hill? Let the dust settle and meet me there tomorrow. I'll ask Bliss to stop by, if you actually show."

"If I say I'll be there, I'll be there. Unlike some people, I can be counted on to keep my word."

Brandee winked. "I knew I liked you for a reason. Here's my gallery." She held out an empty hand, and then a business card appeared.

"Whoa. Neat trick."

"I'm not a magician. I'm a minor goddess. Take the card and turn it over."

Amber did as she was told. Brandee pointed to the card and a different address appeared on the blank side. "That's my home address and phone number on Mount Vernon Street."

"Fancy."

"We like it. Come by at noon. I take a lunch hour at home to feed the baby. Although I'll be meeting an important client tomorrow, and I don't know the time yet." She waved away the thought. "If I'm late, my husband will let you in."

"Are you sure? I mean, Mother Nature mentioned someone influential kind of offhandedly. Do you think it'll really happen?"

"She keeps her word too. Well, except when she's bellowing empty threats. Then we're just as happy she doesn't." Brandee smirked. "Well, toodles. I'm going to meet my family for lunch and will leave you to doubt your sanity for another twenty-four hours."

And with that, she disappeared.

Amber was doubting her sanity. Just out of curiosity, she peeked down the front of her blouse. "Yup. Covered in glitter. I'll be damned."

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