

Ogham (O' am) symbols, such as the one depicting Fate Be, were used by ancient druids to communicate complicated messages.



Fate Be

When looking at events in our lives, we have the opportunity to judge the results of those events through filters of past experiences. In effect, results are categorized as good, bad, or indifferent. When we obtain the ability to experience life without the need for judgement or categorization, we open ourselves to new beginnings and the acceptance of change without fear.

Chapter 1

Still shaken by last night's nightmare, I was not in the mood to talk about it—not even with my best friend Paige. As far as I knew, Kyle was in prison and was no longer a threat to me. Odd how even over the distance between us, he could make me quake.

Lake Cushman Health Clinic was the largest in North Mason County, but not large enough where I could avoid Paige's persistence.

"Hey, girlfriend," she said, her Polly Ana charm dripping from every syllable.

"Hi, Paige." I flipped through the charts for the day's clients. A new one was coming in at ten.

"So ... are you coming to Robin Hood's tonight? It's open mic and Jason will be singing." A guy she had been trying to hook me up with for months.

Paige had incredible luck with men and rarely settled for only one. She could have been a model with those dark, exotic eyes and jet black hair, but she chose a Physical Therapy career instead. Even though she stood a good six inches over me, Paige carried less weight and moved with the grace of a dancer.

Standing next to her was degrading enough, going out with her at night was a harsh lesson in rejection.

I feigned my best disappointment. "I have homework to do."

Paige arched her head and exaggerated a give-me-a-break

expression. “You’re taking a self-study course in herbs, a class you could probably write better yourself.”

“I’m not interested in meeting anyone right now.” I tried to skirt around her but getting past the nimble minx proved feeble.

Paige rested her fists onto those hips that put Haley Berry’s to shame. “He has money, looks, charm, and can sing. What’s there not to like?”

“The fact he has money, looks, and charm. Besides, what makes you think he even wants to meet me?” I moved right, then left. Paige was faster.

“I told him about you,” she grinned, her teeth white and straight as a pack of Chiclets. “He loves redheads, and women who eat health food.”

“Did you also mention I’m short, flat-chested, and hold a black belt in Aikido?”

Paige sighed. “Just give him a try.”

“Fine, can I pass now? I need to get ready for a new client.”

With a victorious smile, she moved aside, then her expression resembled a cat eyeing its next victim. “Lookie what the wind blew in. A gorgeous hunk of man flesh.”

Grace, our receptionist, greeted him with her typical charm. “You must be Daine Wolfson.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Paige nudged my side. “He even has manners.”

I glanced down at the folder in my hand. “Must be my new client. He’s early.”

“Well,” said Paige, “I’ll just have to entertain him for you while

you get ready.”

I stripped my massage table and dressed it with clean sheets. By the time I entered the reception area, Mr. Wolfson had completed his forms and Paige was doing a pre-examination of his arm, or was it his massive chest she was interested in?

“Perhaps I can show you some exercises that will help that shoulder of yours,” she said, her voice dripping with honey.

“Sorry, Paige, this one is Emily’s,” Grace said.

Paige offered one of her pirate smiles to the foreboding man. “I’ll make sure she treats you right.”

“Thank you,” he said, his voice deep and conservative. Not at all what I expected. The man almost acted embarrassed.

Paige brushed against me and whispered, “Treat him right, girlfriend. He’s not wearing a ring.”

I shook my head. Paige knew better than that. Patients were off limits. After looking over his intake form, I greeted him with an outstretched hand. “Hi, Mr. Wolfson, I’m Emily, your therapist. Are you ready?”

“Yes ma’am.” He stood, towering over me by at least a foot, maybe more. The dark blue button-up shirt he wore strained over a wide chest and biceps that rivaled Conan’s. Given the dark, smooth skin and jet black hair, he had to be Native American or a mix of such, if his last name was any clue.

Curious, I glanced down at his paperwork. The guy was a ... heavy equipment operator? His nationality was unchecked—interesting. “Follow me, please.”

My room was dark. I liked it that way. A candle burned at the

center of each wall, a fifth illuminated my work table. "Take a seat," I said, gesturing to the chair in the far corner. The furniture was simple, elegant, and made of dark cherrywood. I loved the smell of it, earthy with a hint of cinnamon.

On the north wall hung a huge Celtic cross with angels on both sides. The east wall had the Lord's prayer written upon it. The west wall displayed an ocean scene I had painted; a setting sun enriched with fiery clouds and a churning sea. Dark storm clouds hovered in the distance. The south wall was left blank.

The man studied the walls, with amusement.

"See something comical?" I asked.

"Evidence of an unfulfilled Christian with a slightly dark side; more interesting than comical."

"Unfulfilled," I parroted. "Perhaps your observation skills need work?"

"I didn't mean ..."

I cleared my throat, not really interested in hearing more of his unsolicited opinions. "Speaking of work, your occupation as a heavy equipment operator? What exactly does that entail?"

"Moving dirt, rocks, and the like using heavy equipment."

I jotted down his explanation, more because I needed something to distract myself than remembering what he said. "Tell me about your injury."

"I was building a rock wall, a boulder fell and my shoulder got in the way."

I flipped through the doctor's report. "Says here you tore the right supraspinatus tendon."

He shrugged. A man of few words; how refreshing.

“Okay. Looks like the doc wants you to have full range of motion before you begin physical therapy. Stand up please.”

He did with disturbing grace. The man was fit and agile. “Okay, I’m going to move your arm around to assess peripheral damage. Don’t try to help me, I need your arm to be completely relaxed.”

Assessing my size, he raised a brow, his full lips curving into a smirk. “Would you like a chair to stand on?”

My lips held firm, unwilling to voice a response. I lifted his arm. It could have been gold bullion for all it weighed. Not wanting to seem a fool, I jotted down a few notes, making an appearance that I found something noteworthy. In truth, his arm was too damn big and his shoulder too high for me to assess anything. “Please have a seat.”

“Certainly,” he said, not even trying to hide any trace of smugness.

Having completed my passive assessment, I almost relished moving on to the next. Given the extent of his injury, the tests should cause him to at least squirm.

“I’m going to have you move your arm in various directions and hold it there. Understood?”

He nodded.

“Any pain when I add resistance?”

“A little, ma’am.”

My finger pressed into his flesh. “Please don’t call me ma’am. It makes me feel old. Any pain here?”

“No, ma’am.”

I groaned. “A simple yes or no will suffice. Any pain here?” The trigger point I pressed should have set off a five-star alarm, but he didn’t even flinch.

“It’s ... uncomfortable.”

Uncomfortable? Geez, was this guy a masochist or something? “I’ll press it again. Let me know if the pain is a one, meaning very little, or ten, meaning unbearable.” I pressed the trigger harder.

“Two, maybe three,” he replied in a voice that dripped with indifference.

Bullshit. The bastard was lying. No matter, two more sessions and I would be rid of him. “Okay, take your shirt off and hop on the table, face up.”

As he unbuttoned his shirt, I wrote down my findings and treatment plan. When I looked up to see that magnificent chest, I gasped, and then immediately coughed as the air dried out my throat.

“Are you all right?” he asked.

“Water. I need water. Be right back.” I opened the door and walked straight to the water dispenser. What the hell was wrong with me? I had seen naked chests before, plenty of them.

“You look a little flushed, dear. Is everything all right?” asked Grace.

“Yes, just swallowed a bit of air is all. I’m fine.” Filling the paper cup with more water, I felt her eyes upon me. The woman was a mind reader, I was certain. Could she sense my embarrassment? I took the filled cup back to my room, avoiding the old woman’s observant stare.

When I returned, Daine laid face up on my table, his body too wide to rest his arms by his side. Lucky for him my table had extensions. I plugged them into the sides so he could rest his arms. “Better?”

“Yes, thank you.”

I noticed the tattoo on his right shoulder: three upside down exclamation marks entrapped in a dreamcatcher. Other symbols, ensnared in the web, surrounded them.

“It’s an awen symbol, protected by runes.”

“Interesting,” I lied, though I was slightly intrigued. My professional creed, however, prevented me from asking questions about something so personal. I applied oil infused with wintergreen and rosemary to relax the muscles. The man had pagan symbols tattooed on his shoulder. I knew something would be wrong with him. It certainly explained the comment about me being an unfulfilled Christian. Humans often mock what they don’t understand.

“Me being pagan bothers you?” The man’s ability to read body language was impressive, but annoying.

“Don’t be ridiculous. Your spiritual practices have nothing to do with me.”

“Uh, huh.”

Let it go, Emily, I thought. Focus on your job, nothing more.

“So, tell me,” he said, gesturing to the ocean scene on the wall. “The wild sea represents your flipped emotions, the dark clouds are confusion, and the fiery sun is your wild side. What does that bit of calm represent?”

He had noticed the small circle of calm water in the distance. No one else ever had, or at least they never questioned it. “What makes you think the mural is about me?”

“You painted it.” His eyes focused on the initials in the lower left corner: E. Dougherty.

I shrugged. “You read too much into it. Perhaps the calm is just a mistake?” Adding a bit of analgesic salve to his shoulder I began some deeper work. My fingers worked slow and deliberate, waiting for the muscles to unwind and release. When they stopped responding, I gave things a rest and placed a steaming hot towel on the area.

“No,” he said. “It’s not a mistake. Each wall has its purpose, even the blank one there.” He pointed to the south wall.

“I use that wall for assessing and measurements,” I explained.

“Interesting.”

I chuffed. “Hardly.”

He closed his eyes and recited the Lord’s prayer. His voice, deep and precise, calmed me. When he was done, his dark eyes met mine.

“You said that from memory?”

“Yes, I find the Bible fascinating. That prayer, in particular, is one of my favorites.”

I wanted to ask him if he was a Christian, but held back. It was unprofessional and none of my business. I removed the steam cloth and started on some passive stretching. Most clients would be crying by now, but he acted as if the pain was negligible.

“You’re very gifted,” he said.

My hands stopped for a moment, and then continued with the pin and stretch technique. “Thank you,” I said tersely.

“I was told you’re the best with injury recovery.”

I chuffed. “By who?”

“My doctor. He’s sent other clients to you in the past.”

“I’m sure there are others who are better than me.”

My muscles were getting fatigued after moving his massive arm up and down. I decided to end the session early. “I don’t want to overwork the area. I’m going to apply ice. When the timer goes off, you’re free to go. Okay?”

“What does the Lord’s prayer mean to you?”

I glanced over at the words I had painted on the wall. “Perhaps another time.”

“Have you always been this evasive?”

The man was not only direct, he was presumptuous in thinking I wanted to be here with him. “Always,” I said, smiling over my shoulder. “I’ll have Grace set up another appointment for you in two days.”

After washing my hands, and cooling off my face, I looked in the mirror for any more telltale signs that would indicate my ... discomfort. Good, nothing obvious stuck out.

Grace was at the front desk talking on the phone when I approached her. She smiled up at me and held up a finger. “Very good Mr. Dringer. We’ll see you then.” She hung up the phone but her smile remained. The silver-haired woman, with sparkling pale blue eyes, and skin as fair as a peach was considered everyone’s ideal grandmother. “Feeling better, dear?”

“Yes, thank you. Can you please schedule another appointment for Mr. Wolfsong?”

“Of course, dear.” She swung her chair around and began typing on the keyboard. The woman was older than dirt, but she was the most efficient receptionist the clinic had ever seen.

I went to the back room behind the reception area to complete my client’s forms and soap chart.

“Mr. Wolfsong, how did it go?” Grace asked.

“It was shorter than I expected, as was the conversation.”

“Is your shoulder feeling any better?”

“Yes,” He moved it around. “It’s not as tight.”

I glanced down at the chart and remembered I hadn’t done a post-treatment assessment. I walked around the corner and caught his eyes staring at me as if he had known I was back there.

“Is there a time that works best for you on Monday?”

“Ten works best.”

“Fine, I have you down for Monday at ten o’clock.” She handed him a card.

“Mr. Wolfsong, may I see you for a moment in my treatment room?” I asked.

“My treatment is over, or so you’ve said. I’ll see you on Monday.”

“But—” and ... he was gone.

“Everything all right, dear?” asked Grace.

I gripped the chart so hard, it formed a crease through his name. “I’m not sure I’m the right therapist for Mr. Wolfsong. Is there someone else who can treat him?”

“Doctor Fox specifically asked for you. We cannot change that

without his approval.”

“Fine, I’ll give him a call and get his approval.”

Chapter 2

“Dr. Fox? Hello, this is Emily Dougherty at Lake Cushman Health Clinic.” The pause on the other end of the line had me pacing.

“Miss Dougherty, what can I do for you?”

“I’m calling about a patient of yours. Daine Wolfsong?”

“Yes.”

More pacing. “I think he should see a different therapist.”

“May I ask why?”

He’s a nosy pagan that makes me uncomfortable, I wanted to say, but that would be unprofessional. “Um ...”

“Miss Dougherty?”

“Yeah ... I just think he would do better with someone else.”

“And your reason for this assumption?”

Yes, Emily, what was your reason? I bit my lower lip, my hands moist against the cell phone. “My workload is pretty full, is all, and I think he would get better attention from someone else.”

“I see.”

Did he? I questioned. God, I hoped not. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Releasing him from my care.”

“I haven’t, Miss Dougherty. I still require him to see you.”

“My schedule—”

“According to Grace, your schedule could accommodate a new client for injury recovery. My assistant checked before sending

Daine to you.”

“Still, I think—”

“Daine will continue to see you, Miss Dougherty. Thank you for your concern. It is noted.” Click.

“Dr. Fox?” I stared at the phone as if it had a technical difficulty. Had he just hung up on me?

Paige came around the corner to file her last chart. “Better get out of those scrubs. We leave in fifteen.” When I didn’t respond, she looked up. “Hey, what’s up?”

“Nothing.”

Paige came toward me. “Girl, you’re like my sister. I know when something is wrong.” She glanced down at my phone. “And there is definitely an issue. Did your ex-man-terror call or something?”

“No, Kyle’s still in jail as far as I know.”

“Well, whatever it is, let Jason DeBois sing your troubles away. If you’re lucky, he might take you home tonight and give you a little bootay.”

“You did not just say that!”

Paige rolled her eyes. “You know, a little sex might do you some good—loosen you up a bit.” She rolled her hips to emphasize her point.

Stuffing my phone in my pocket, I skirted around her to file my unfinished report. “Listen, I really do have some studying to do, so can we make it an early night?”

“Up to you, sweetie. But once you set your eyes on Jason, you might change your mind.”

Grace returned from the back room to gather her purse and keys

from the cabinet below her desk. “You girls have a nice night. I need to get home to watch *Game of Thrones*. Episode nine plays tonight.”

Both Paige and I looked at each other as if seeking confirmation for what we heard. “*Game of Thrones?*” we said in unison.

“Oh yes. I love that show, and this is the episode where Jon Snow battles the evil king. I never liked that king, he has no idea how to treat a woman. Any way, gotta skidaddle. Lock the door on your way out?”

We waited for the sweet old woman to leave before busting out into laughter.

“Didn’t see that coming,” said Paige.

“Right?” I agreed. “I thought she would be more into those British programs where an author solves neighborhood mysteries or something.”

Paige waved her hand as if whisking away dirt. “Go! Get dressed. Music starts in thirty minutes.”

When I returned from the back room, she assessed my appearance. “Hmm, not bad.”

I looked down at my blue jeans and pale green babydoll blouse. Nothing special, I shrugged.

“I like your hair down like that,” she said, grabbing her bag and coat. “It makes your eyes stand out like emeralds. I have some earrings in the car that will match that shirt, if you want to borrow them.”

Grabbing my sweater and bag, I followed her to the door, set the alarm and locked the handle. “Wanna take two cars?”

She wagged her finger. “Nice try, but no. If I drive, I determine

when we leave.”

“Fine,” I sighed, settling into the black leather passenger’s seat. She had a nice ride; silver Audi Quattro. Then again, when you grew up with money, you tended to have expensive things.

I looked out the window toward my black Jeep Sierra Sport. It looked so lonely in the empty parking lot.

With *Evanescence* playing on the radio, we pulled onto Highway 101. Paige’s singing voice mimicked Amy Lee’s with perfect pitch, but that was not surprising given how many voice lessons she had taken.

The full moon illuminated the Hood Canal with a bluish glow, creating a stunning silhouette of the distant hillsides. Fall was my favorite time of year in Washington. So many colors littered the horizon. In daylight, the hills looked as if they were on fire.

“So, how did that new client go?” Paige asked.

“Good,” I lied.

“He was hot.” Her turning down the radio, indicated this convo would not end soon. “Did he talk much? He looked like a talker.”

“Not really.”

She glanced over at me. “You’re being evasive, which means way more happened in that room than you’re willing to admit.” Paige was like a pit bull with a bone. She wouldn’t let go until she had all the juicy details.

I sighed, “Fine. He’s an over-opinionated pagan who thinks too highly of himself.”

“Wow,” she said, raising her brows. “You determined all that in the space of twenty minutes?”

“Yes.”

“So, you like him?”

“Can we please talk about something else?”

“Oh ... my ... God. You do like him. I knew it!” She bounced up and down in her seat.

“The man is a pagan, that makes him off limits.”

She banged her palms against the steering wheel in time with the music. “Just because he’s pagan, doesn’t make him bad, Em.”

“Tell that to my family.”

“You need to stop living to their ideals.”

My jaw ached from being held so tight. “I did, remember Kyle?” That bastard put me in the hospital.

Paige’s face grew somber. “How could I forget?” Silence followed—too much silence. She turned left onto Highway 106.

I reached over and placed my hand on her shoulder. “Hey, Kyle wasn’t your fault.”

Tears pooled in her eyes. “I wasn’t there for you when you needed me most.”

I had forgotten how torn up she had been from the incident. Apparently Kyle had affected more than me with his anger and aggression. “You are not responsible for his actions, Paige.”

Wiping a tear from her eye, she pressed her lips together and nodded. “Damn, look at me. This is not how I wanted this evening to go.”

“It’ll get better. Let’s listen to music, have some food and drink, and forget about life, okay?”

She reached over and squeezed my hand. “Now you’re talking.”

Friday night was a popular evening for the back woods restaurant that specialized in wild game and authentic entrees. It was a bit expensive, but the food was great and the music and drinks drew a familiar crowd to the small town of Union.

We found our favorite table up front, a small round number perfect for two. It was still a bit early for the music to start, so the bar was alive with conversation and locals aiming to gear down for the weekend. The place always reminded me of an old country home with cathedral ceilings, pine panel walls, and rugged wood furniture. The floors were rough oak without an ounce of finish left on them. Antique saw mill tools littered the walls, graced with just the right amount of rust to verify their authenticity.

The adjoining hotel attracted clientele who were looking for something rustic and adventurous. A complete contrast to the adjacent Alderbrook resort geared toward golf enthusiasts and spa junkies.

Beth, the Friday night barmaid, greeted us with a smile. "Hello ladies. What will it be tonight?"

"Hey Beth," I said. "I'll have whatever light beer you have on tap."

"I'll have a black and tan," said Paige. Wrinkling her nose, she added, "With a chaser."

"You got it," said Beth, returning to the bar.

I looked over at Paige who was already scanning the room for her next victim. "Kind of early for hitting the heavy stuff, don't you think?"

She shrugged. "It's been a long week. Thought I would get a head start on the weekend, ya know?"

“You do remember that you are driving, right?”

She dug into her bag and handed over her keys. “Here, just in case.”

“Great,” I groaned. It wouldn’t be the first time Paige hooked up with some male, only to leave me to drive back alone. Looks like tonight would be a repeat.

“Damn,” she said. “Look who just walked in.”

I followed her gaze and nearly choked. There at the bar was Daine Wolfson and some other man. My stomach twisted as if my nose had caught scent of something rancid. “Don’t look at them,” I whispered.

“Why not?” she asked, looking confused.

I closed my eyes, silently praying that Daine would not see us. When I opened them, I gasped. There was Paige, cozying up next to the men like a fox in heat. “Don’t come over here,” I chanted.

Great, they were looking right at me. The smile that Paige radiated made me want to choke her. I fingered the keys I had stuffed into my pocket. Now would be a great time to leave.

From the looks of it, the other man was trying to persuade Daine to join us girls. Daine mirrored my enthusiasm, shaking his head. Thank God. Dressed in a white button-up shirt and blue jeans, he looked good—too good.

Paige continued her flirtatious moves with Daine’s companion. He was only a couple of inches shorter than Daine, and not quite as muscular, but every bit as confident and foreboding. Leaning against the bar, he smiled down at Paige, enjoying all she had to offer. Of course he did. What was there not to like?

Beth set my beer down on the table, along with two stouts, dark as coffee, and Paige's black and tan with a whiskey chaser. The waitress offered a smile. "Looks like you two have company tonight." She gestured to the threesome who now studied me like hungry predators. I knew coming tonight was a bad idea.

I took several gulps of my light beer that tasted more bitter than I had expected. It hit my empty stomach like an errant tsunami.

The threesome made their way over, with Paige leading the pack. The smile on her face was loaded with intention I could only imagine. The woman had a way with men, but she rarely hung on to them for more than a few weeks. We had known each other since we were kids, always talking about how we would have our weddings together. Fat chance of that ever happening, I huffed.

In her sweetest voice, Paige said, "Look who decided to join us this evening."

I nodded to Daine, "Mr. Wolfson," I acknowledged, then looked to the other man, offering my hand. "Hi, I'm Emily."

He smiled and shook my hand as if we were lawyers meeting for litigation. "Dreyson," he said. The name was uncommon yet familiar. They took a seat across from me.

Judging by the stiff way in which Mr. Wolfson moved, I assumed his shoulder was hurting. When he saw me eying it, he frowned. A smidgen of guilt plagued me for having worked the trigger points harder than I should have. I fought the urge to massage it for him, knowing it was inappropriate and unprofessional.

Paige and Dreyson engaged in conversation, both talking as if they had known each other for months, not minutes. My eyes

narrowed.

“Can I speak to you for a moment?” I asked her.

“Um ... sure, yeah.” She smiled at the two men. “We’ll be right back.”

I drug her outside and past the line of smokers getting their last fix before the entertainment started. “Did you know they were coming?”

Her innocent expression made Bambi look like Godzilla. “Don’t be ridiculous! I only just met Dreyson tonight, and your new client this afternoon.”

“Dreyson does not act like a stranger to you.”

She stepped back and placed her fist on her hip. “Yeah, it’s called socializing. Try it, you might make a friend or two.”

“Wolfsong is a client, Paige. I cannot fraternize with him. I could lose my license.”

“And rules have worked so well for you so far, yes?”

I looked away.

“Look,” she said, placing her hand on my arm. “I know it’s hard for you, Emily, but you need to break out of this slump. Every day, I see you place another brick in that great wall surrounding your heart. I’m not saying you should find your life mate. I just think you should get laid now and then. Ya know?”

My face burned. Had she said that out loud? Judging by the darting eyes flashing our way, she must have.

“What happened to that wild friend I used to hang out with, the one who gave the bad boys a reason to be good?” she asked.

“I grew up.”

Paige stood back, pain etched in her eyes. She had taken years of flack from her family for not finding a husband and starting a family. Paige wanted kids but men never stayed around long enough. It was a sore spot with her and I knew it. If I was good at anything, it was casting verbal daggers with lethal accuracy. Not exactly a pride point.

“No,” she said. “You haven’t grown up. You’ve grown cold.” Turning away, she stormed back to the bar.

Chapter 3

I should go, I thought, playing with the keys in my pocket. Paige would understand. No, she wouldn't. Only five years ago she and I would go out and tear the town apart with our crazy antics. We had fun without fear, without regret. Kyle had taken that from me—and from her too for a time.

Had I really grown cold? A shiver ran down my spine as if the Angels were confirming Paige's accusation. I had left my sweater inside, along with my bag. There was no leaving. I had to face her—them.

“Hey, you got a light?” a skinny man said, his pants hanging past his hips.

“Do I look like I smoke?” I retorted.

“Okay, geez,” he replied, along with some unflattering nouns.

I'm not cold, I thought, pushing my way through the swinging doors.

“Hey, chill out, lady,” a man called out.

By the time I got to our table, Wolfsong was gone. Paige and Dreyson continued to talk, their drinks half gone. Wolfsong's remained untouched.

“I'm sorry,” said Paige. “I shouldn't have said those things.”

I smiled. The genuine hurt in her dark eyes melted my anger and pride to a pool of sappy mush. “No, you were right.”

A woman stepped up to the microphone, the lights grew dim and

conversations hushed. Her curly blonde hair looked green under the lights, and her colorful vest shimmered blue. She was the owner of the restaurant and bar, and made it a point to mingle with the clientele at every opportunity. “Welcome to open mic night, everyone. We have several familiar artists tonight as well as a few new ones. Our first artist is Wendy.”

A round of applause roared through the place as a young woman entered the stage, carrying a viola. “Hi, everyone. I’m Wendy. This is a song I wrote about my father. It’s called *Irish Seas Are Callin’*.”

The somber tune ramped up quickly, bringing images of a stormy night and a lone sea captain to mind. No lyrics were necessary. The music told its story through inflections, cadence, and tone. It was beautiful.

Three musicians later and Jason was introduced. Go figure, it was the man who asked me for a light outside; the one whose jeans were three sizes too large. What was Paige thinking? This guy was not my type at all. When he sang, however, his voice was husky and deep, reminding me of Chad Kroeger. Too bad Jason looked nothing like the lead singer for Nickelback.

... Daine ...

The opinionated therapist was softer, when she thought no one was looking. There was a depth to her I couldn’t shake. She listened to the music as if it were a poem spoken soft and sweet.

The song I had chosen for this evening seemed inappropriate now, so I dug through my music for a new piece. I found one I

hadn't sung in many months. Yes, this is a perfect one for tonight.

When my name was announced, Emily's face turned to stone. I smiled taking the mic. "Good evening, I'm Daine Wolfsong. I'm going to change things up a bit and sing a song for an acquaintance of mine." I met Emily's shimmering green eyes and loved the shade that pinkened her face. "This song was originally performed by Jeff Buckley. It's called *Hallelujah*."

Close your eyes, I silently pleaded. Let me see your softer side, Emily Dougherty. Holding eye contact with her, I strummed my acoustic guitar and imagined a time when she had a soul; a time when she was happy.

As I sang the first verse, her lips softened and her eyes locked onto mine. The connection was unmistakable, the one I felt the moment she told me her name; the one that terrified me. Not your type, my conscience warned, reminding me of my last disaster; a marriage to a woman who prized her religion above all else.

As I sang the chorus, Emily's eyes closed and she mouthed the words. The second verse brought tears to those emerald eyes as if the lyrics had struck a chord deep in her soul. When the song ended, she bolted from her seat and hurried down the hall.

The crowd cheered. "Thank you." I took a bow and left the stage, wondering if I had made the right decision in choosing that song.

In the prep room, I packed up my guitar and headed out the back door to place it into the car. If Dreyson and I had not driven together, I would consider leaving the lot of them behind and continue on with my life as if Emily Dougherty was not a part of it.

I didn't want the therapy and knew I would heal just fine without

it, but without L&I's approval, I could not return to work. The release had to come from my doctor and he was being stubborn and insistent about me seeing the red-headed vixen, despite my lengthy argument.

Why the woman attracted me was yet another mystery. She was far too religious for my taste and ... a redhead. I was attracted to blondes—sweet, pleasure-driven blue-eyed lovelies with meat on their bones. Emily was slender with fewer curves than a freeway, and an attitude that made a hungry Grizzly seem docile. I was better off without her.

As I slammed the trunk of Dreyson's white Volvo, I saw her near the huge water mill in the center of Robin Hood's herb garden. I should have walked away, but I didn't.

"Hey, you okay?" I asked.

She wiped her eyes and turned her back to me. "Fine."

"Yeah, you sound it."

She sank down on the concrete bench flanked by two small fountains. A glutton for torture, I took a chance and sat beside her. "Wanna talk?"

"Technically, I shouldn't be seen with you outside of work."

"Ah, yes, rules. You seemed to be plagued by them."

Her steely eyes turned toward me. "I could lose my license."

I looked around. "Well, I don't see anyone from the department of health taking photos, and this is not exactly a date. No rules have been broken."

Drying her eyes, she stood. "Well, I should probably get back inside."

“Yeah, me too.” I stood and followed her back. Before we reached the door, she turned to face me.

“You have a beautiful voice.”

I smiled, hoping to see the same from her. “Thank you.” Nope, she turned around again and opened the door, despite my efforts to reach it first. Independent to a fault.

The lights had been turned up, indicating that a break was in progress. We found our way back to the table where Dreyson and Paige sat deep in conversation. Odd occurrence for my friend. He was not exactly a relationship type. One rocky marriage and a disastrous divorce took care of that desire.

Given the way Paige flaunted that smoking-hot body of hers, she was not looking for anything more than sex, herself. They might actually be a perfect match.

“Hey, you two,” she said. Her eyes turned to me. “That was an impressive performance. The crowd went ape wild when you left. I think they wanted an encore. Who taught you to sing?”

“Gordon Lightfoot.”

Paige laughed. Emily sipped her beer, either disinterested in my answer, or lost in her own thoughts.

Dreyson leaned over the small table. “Listen, Paige and I are gonna take off. Would you mind seeing Emily home? I’ve taken care of the tab.”

“Yeah, okay.”

Paige pulled Emily aside. After a few heated words, Emily pulled keys from her pocket and slammed them into Paige’s hand. Years of working with heavy equipment blessed me with the gift of reading

lips. As Paige left Emily's side, she said, "Get laid, it will do you some good." The heated blood tinting the ginger's face told me she never indulged in such recklessness—interesting.

When Emily returned, she wore an expression of defeat with a hint of embarrassment. "I'm pretty tired. Do you mind if we go?"

Before she could reach the sweater on the back of her chair, I swiped it off and held it open for her. She slipped her arms through the sleeves and reached for her bag. Without looking back, she stormed out of the bar. I followed, curious whether she knew which car to find. She didn't.

Exasperated, she huffed, "Where's your bloody car?"

"Hoodsport. Where's yours?"

"At the clinic. I'm assuming Dreyson left you his keys?"

"Solid assumption."

"Where's his car?"

I held out my hand. She refused to take it. "Follow me." I led her to the opposite side of the building near the gardens. Walking her to the passenger side of the Volvo S90, I refrained from pressing the remote unlock button until my hand was on the handle.

"I can open my own door," she said.

"That was never a doubt, but I am a gentleman."

Was that intrigue on her face? Hard to tell. I opened the door, and then waited for her to settle in before closing it. "Seatbelt please."

She groaned, reaching over for the buckle and securing it to the latch. "Happy?"

"Always," I said, smiling. Reaching for my own buckle, I winced.

Using my left hand, I fumbled for the belt.

“Need help?” she asked.

Not really, but I didn’t want to squelch the tiny bit of compassion she struggled to show. “Yes, thank you.”

She unfastened her belt so that she could reach over me. Her breath smelled of beer, and her skin of something more woodsy—pleasing.

“Got it,” she said, pulling the belt across my chest and securing it to the latch. “I take it your shoulder is hurting pretty bad?”

“Like a mother.”

“I have some ointment at the clinic that will help.” She clipped her belt and settled her bag onto her lap.

The engine purred to life. Classical music poured from the speakers. I turned it down. Putting the gear into reverse, I backed out of the space and headed toward the exit. The drive up Highway 106 was a silent one but the tension was soothed by a piano solo performed by Jim Brickman.

“This is pretty,” she said, turning up the volume. “Are you a Brickman fan?”

I shrugged. “Yeah, he’s all right.”

“Can I ask you something?”

I smiled. “You just did.” She almost cracked a grin, but it was fleeting and gone in the space of a breath.

“Why did you sing that song tonight? It’s based on a story in the Bible, though you are clearly pagan.”

“Are you sure about that?”

She sat back as if offended. “You have a pagan symbol tattooed

on your shoulder and you sang a song about King David and his love for Bathsheba.”

“Some would argue that it is about multiple stories in the Bible, but perhaps they are just the lyricist’s inspiration.”

“Meaning?”

“To me it’s about a love so fierce, so compelling that it can be destructive and abusive as well.”

Her retraction provided a surprising glimpse into her past. I gave her time to process things as she stared out the window and nearly rubbed her hands raw.

“The title and chorus may suggest otherwise,” she retorted.

“Yes, hallelujah means everyone praise God, but it can also have other meanings.”

She scrunched up her face and shook her head. “That is the direct translation. You can’t just change it to suit your needs.”

“God created all things, correct?”

“Yes, but you don’t believe in God.”

“Being pagan does not mean you forsake God. It simply means religion is not a part of one’s path. If hallelujah means to praise God, then why can’t it also mean embrace life and all it has to offer, the good and bad, pain and pleasure.”

She chuffed, sat back, and folder her arms over her chest. “Love can change you, make you something you’re not.”

“Or it can turn you into something you were always meant to be.”

“Not in my experience,” she mumbled.

“Care to share?”

“No.” Her eyes wandered, staring outside but not really looking. What was going on in her pretty little head? I wondered. I would leave it be for now. Pushing her too hard would only drive her further away.

I pulled into the parking lot and parked next to the black Jeep I assumed was hers. “Wait there,” I said.

She was not used to taking orders, but the dominant tone I used was familiar. Her lips parted and her body remained as I had instructed, despite her rebellious nature.

I got out and walked to her side of the car to open the door. “Good girl,” I said, offering my hand. She took it with hesitation.

“I’m not used to ... gentlemen.”

I smiled. “Perhaps we can change that.”