

EVE THE IMMORTAL

MODERN FAE NOVELLA 1.5

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THE bright flash of light outside the cottage door tore my attention away from the knife-wielding Fae I was supposed to be battling, just long enough to allow her inside my defenses.

“Pay attention, human. You make this too easy.” Arabella gripped my upper arm with one hand. The point of her knife hovered inches from the fabric of my tunic, which was stretched tight across my abdomen.

“I’m sorry. It’s just...” I glanced over to the tiny faerie fluttering near the basket of honeysuckle hanging outside the front door of the cottage. “Be right there!” I shouted.

Arabella squeezed my arm tighter. “Ignore the sprite. I’d hope your life would be more important to you than the mail delivery.” She released me, pushing herself away as she sheathed her knife.

“It’s just practice. You’re not actually going to try to kill me. Again.” It had been a few months since she’d tried to eliminate me for knowing too many of their secrets. Our relationship had improved since then, but not so much that I

had full confidence she wouldn't try to kill me again if I gave her half a reason.

"And I suppose you think a real opponent would just hold on while you check your messages? Fiona made you immortal, Evelyn, not invulnerable." She paced over to where she'd left her cape.

"Just give me a moment to deal with this, and then we can go again. I'll do better this time. Promise."

"Can't." She swung the cape across her shoulders and flipped the hood over her head. "Private lessons are over for the day. Time for me to get back to my duties."

"Okay. I'll practice that new attack before our next lesson." I rotated my shoulder to relieve an ache that had developed there.

"You'd better. I don't plan to go easy on you just because you're my cousin's mate." The words were barely out of her mouth before she'd disappeared in a blink of bright-blue light.

I hadn't gotten used to that term, "mate." In their world, there wasn't any place for boyfriends and girlfriends. You were either paired, or not. That pairing didn't have to be a permanent arrangement, or even an exclusive one, but it did imply a mutual commitment. I didn't mind the commitment part, but every time I heard someone use the word "mate" to describe my relationship with Liam, I cringed a little. Just another odd faerie thing that would take some getting used to, I supposed.

"Hello, there." I stopped below the hanging basket and waited for the sprite to finish feasting on the honeysuckle nectar. Its mothlike lime-green wings beat as fast as a hummingbird's against its back as it hovered just above my head, making it difficult to get a good look at its tiny body.

The key to transactions with sprites seemed to be per-

sistence. Any Fae home adorned with sprite-friendly flowers could receive messages. But, as I'd begun to realize after three months of trying and failing to get the little brats to hand over my messages, they were mostly in it for the sweet nectar. If I waited patiently for this one to finish, I'd be here all day. But I couldn't nag it, either. The key to getting messages delivered, as much as I hated it, was small talk.

"Lovely weather we're having today, don't you think? Just a few more weeks until it's officially spring." I paused. "I've heard the Fae have a charming spring festival. What's it called again?" I tapped my finger against my chin, feigning forgetfulness. I knew perfectly well what they called their beloved spring festival, and I'd not yet met a faerie who could resist talking about it.

As expected, the sprite extracted its long nails from the petals, licked the dripping ends, and turned toward me. A miniature humanoid male torso, naked to the waist and attached to ridiculously muscular thighs for so small a creature, hovered in the air at eye level. He angled his beaked nose at me as he jabbered in a tongue I hadn't yet learned. When he paused, he grinned at me with a flash of sharp teeth, waiting for a response.

"That's nice." I smiled back.

His tiny eyes narrowed, and he huffed his displeasure, then disappeared in another flash of blinding-white light. Two envelopes floated to the ground at my feet. I still couldn't quite make sense of the message system the Fae had developed. Apparently, they had a fondness for written correspondence. My cell phone had no reception anywhere in their realm, but I could receive e-mail. Only, there were no computers. My e-mail came handwritten and sprite delivered. How it got off my phone and onto paper, I still hadn't figured out.

I scooped up the envelopes and headed inside to find Liam. One envelope had his name written on the back, the other had been addressed to me. I itched to open mine, especially once I read that the sender was my best friend, Angie. I wished I could tell her that her e-mail had been transcribed into formal written correspondence delivered by a nectar-loving winged creature not unlike those depicted in children's stories. Sprites were possibly a little more frightening in the flesh, but they were still diminutive and magical. She'd love it, and I could never tell her.

Liam caught me around the waist and pulled me to him as I entered the room that served as the cottage's kitchen. "There you are." He swept my low ponytail aside so he could kiss my neck. "Mmm. Sweaty."

"Eww." I pushed him away and handed him the envelope that had been addressed to him.

He took one look at the writing and dropped it onto the table. "Not 'eww.' I was watching you out there. You're definitely improving. Nice work." He plucked my envelope from my hand and set it next to his on the table.

"Hey. I wanted to read that." I faked a pout as I linked my arms around his neck.

His hands gripped my hips as he pulled me tight against him and leaned down to kiss my lips. My fingers curled through the long locks of hair at the nape of his neck, and I fell into his touch until the room seemed to disappear. Letter forgotten, all I wanted was to be closer to him.

A beam of sunlight cut through the window, making me squint to block out the brightness, and reminding me that the morning was slipping away. I broke off the kiss, but Liam continued to trail kisses down my jaw and along the side of my neck. A quick glance at my watch, possibly the only clock

in the faerie realm, confirmed that I needed to be at Uncle Oscar's lecture in an hour.

"So...I need to be back at Lydbury soon," I said. My body did not want him to stop, but if he kept going, I wasn't going to be able to resist the temptation to skip class.

He leaned back, meeting my eyes. "Are you sure?" He raised an eyebrow.

"If your cousin hadn't kept me drilling all morning, we might have had more time." My hands slipped down until they rested against his chest.

He kissed my forehead. "It is important that you learn to defend yourself."

"Ugh. You sound just like her." I pushed against his chest, and his arms released me.

He grinned. "Well, don't tell her, but this one time, I think we're in agreement." He swatted at my butt as I walked away to get a glass of water.

I flashed him a fake-surprised look over my shoulder. "Shocking."

"Unheard of, really." He picked up his letter from the table and stared at the handwriting on the back of the envelope. "I suppose I should see what our queen wants from me."

I set my glass down so I could rip open the envelope that contained Angie's message. Reading it through once, quickly, was enough to make me suck in a breath. I scanned through it again to make sure I'd read it right. "Crap."

"My thoughts exactly." Liam tossed the parchment down onto the table. He ran a hand through his hair, sighing.

I caught a glimpse of her signature before Liam retrieved the letter, folded it, and stuffed it back into the envelope. "What does Fiona want?"

He shrugged. "The usual ambassador stuff. I'll go visit her

after I drop you off and get it sorted. What's yours say?" He peeked over my shoulder at the letter I held.

I held it up for him to read. "Angie is coming to visit."

"Oh." He took the paper from me, frowning as his eyes scanned the page.

"Yeah. And she wants to meet you." I stood on tiptoes to reach over his arm and point out the relevant section.

"I see." He handed the letter back to me. "It's not that I don't want to meet her. I really do. It's just..." He waved a hand toward his head and wiggled his finger at the points of his ears.

"Yeah." I folded the letter and set it in the compost bin. I'd respond to her actual e-mail when I got back to Lydbury and my laptop. "I guess you'll glamour up, and we'll hope she doesn't ask too many questions?"

He laughed. "Right. This should be interesting."

"You don't say." Keeping my life in the world of the Fae separate from my life in what I kept thinking of as "the real world" had been getting increasingly complicated. I started down the hall that led to the cottage's two small bedrooms.

He followed me. "Would you like to clean up a bit before I drop you at Lydbury?" He reached out to run a hand along the curve of my hip, which was still covered by the running tights I'd put on for my sparring session with Arabella.

I buried the urge to respond to his touch. "I think I'll just shower and change there." I shoved dirty clothes and toiletries into my overnight bag. "If you can drop me in my room, they might not know I was gone last night."

He stepped up behind me and wrapped his arms around my waist. "Are you still sneaking out to see me?" he asked, nuzzling my neck.

"What am I supposed to tell them? That I'm going to your

place for the night, but I somehow don't need a car to get there? It's not like I can explain to them where it is you live, or how they can reach me if they need to get in touch." I sighed and leaned against him, letting my head fall back onto his shoulder.

He smiled against my skin. "True. That does make it a touch more difficult." His words breathed warm air across my collarbone. "You could just move in with me, you know. There's plenty of room here for both of us now that Ari and Fi moved out."

Fiona had taken Flida's room when Liam moved back in, but Arabella and Liam hadn't lasted long as roommates. Shortly after Liam returned, Arabella took to spending her nights in the barracks with the Queen's Guard, satisfied that Liam, and the two guards who patrolled outside the cottage, could keep Fiona safe in her absence. But that arrangement didn't last long, either. Now Fiona had her own cottage, complete with an office and a receiving room to meet with her Court, or her subjects, and Liam lived alone in his mother's old cottage.

"I'm not sure how I'd explain that to my aunt and uncle, or to my parents, for that matter," I said. As much as I wanted to move in with Liam, my new secret life with the Fae had made everything in my old life much more complicated. It didn't help that I couldn't even transport myself between Lydbury and the cottage without one of them taking me. In theory, I could just hike to the cottage after a long trip by train from the small town near Lydbury. Except, I didn't know where exactly to find the entrance to their realm.

"I suppose just running away to live with me is out of the question?" He knew the answer to that.

"Definitely." There was no way I was going to abandon my

family and friends, no matter how much I loved Liam.

“Just thought I’d ask in case you’d changed your mind.”

“If I change my mind, you’ll be the first to know. Most likely because I’ll be standing around with my bags packed, waiting for you to pick me up.” I couldn’t hide that tiny bit of frustration that seeped into my voice.

He stepped around me until he stood between me and my overnight bag, then tilted my head up until my eyes met his. “I’m sorry it has to be like this. Would you have been happier if I’d given up my place among the Fae to live with you?” He paused, then added, “I still could, you know.”

I shook my head. “We each swore an Oath to serve and protect the Queen of the Fae. You know we’re not backing out of that.” This was what I wanted. I’d chosen to be part of this world. Now I just needed to figure out how to manage my life in both places. Keeping secrets wasn’t one of my strengths, and I didn’t want it to be, but that’s what I’d agreed to do. I rose up on my toes to press a kiss to his lips.

He cradled my face in his hands as his mouth met mine. I relaxed into him, savoring the way our bodies fit together like we were made to do just this, forever. And we would, too, long after my family and my friends were gone from this world. It was a thought that frightened me a bit, and one that snapped me out of the pleasure I’d found in Liam’s arms.

“We should go,” I said.

He groaned. “Whatever Oscar’s teaching today, I’d be happy to review with you. Here. In bed. Preferably naked.” His thumb found the strap of my sports bra peeking out of the collar of my shirt, and he slid both the strap and my shirt down to expose my shoulder so he could kiss it.

I laughed. “Despite your very tempting offer, if I don’t return to Lydbury soon, they’re likely to figure out I’m not in

my room and start worrying.”

“All right.” He looped his arm through the strap of my overnight bag, then snuggled me into his arms. “Ready?”

I nodded against his chest. “Ready.”

Air disappeared, sucked from my lungs like I’d been dunked in freezing water. When we resurfaced in my room at Lydbury, I filled my lungs and opened my eyes. Liam dropped my bag on the floor and toppled us onto my bed. He leaned over me, propped up on one arm.

“As much as I would love to stay and help you clean up, I shouldn’t keep our queen waiting.” He kissed my forehead and then the tip of my nose.

“I understand. Tell her hi from me, okay?”

“I will.” He pushed himself to standing, straightened his tunic, then ran a hand through his hair. “I think she has a diplomatic assignment for me. I’m not sure how long it will take, but I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“More than a day or two?” I asked, sitting up.

“Maybe. I’ll try to send you a message if it will be longer than that. You’ll be all right?” He caressed my cheek, and I leaned into his touch.

“I doubt anyone will try to attack me at the museum or the university, and you’ve restored all the protection spells around Lydbury.” I pushed off the bed and placed my hands on his shoulders. “I think I’ll be fine.”

“He can still—”

I held up a hand to cut him off. “I know. But he doesn’t scare me.” Nigel hadn’t returned since the night before Fiona’s coronation. I didn’t think he would, either.

“He should scare you.”

I rolled my eyes. “He helped us.” No matter what I said, I hadn’t been able to convince Liam that Nigel wasn’t that bad.

“Just be careful.” He gripped my waist and tugged me closer.

“I will. I promise.”

“Right. Well, I’ll be back soon.” He leaned down to kiss me, then let go and took a step back.

“Liam?”

“Yes?”

“Try to use the door when you come back? You know... instead of just appearing somewhere in the house? It makes it way easier to explain how you got here when you arrive like a normal guest.”

His cheeks shaded pink. “I’ll try to remember.”

“Love you.” I pounced forward to give him one last kiss.

“I love you, too, Princess.” His nickname for me brought a smile to my lips, as always. He squeezed my hand, then disappeared in a blink of light.

I sighed. My Fae time was over for a bit. Time to switch back to being Eve in the Real World.

To read the rest and find other books in the Modern Fae Series, visit <http://bit.ly/ModernFae>.



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Elizabeth Menozzi is an award-winning writer of science fiction and fantasy with romance. A former Midwestern girl, she currently resides on Orcas Island with her husband. In her spare time she is a competitive swimmer, reluctant runner, and devourer of books.

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