



CHAPTER ONE

PART ONE

A smile curved Felicity Forrest's mouth when her cell phone rang and she saw the name that flashed across the screen. "Hello."

"Are you ready for tomorrow night?" Cyn asked.

Felicity was taking the Tube back to her flat in London to get ready for a weekend with Cyn. Her friend planned to celebrate her birthday by getting utterly pissed and then getting laid. She'd encouraged Felicity to find someone too, regardless of her nasty break-up six months ago. Felicity wasn't really over it, and didn't plan on opening herself up to getting hurt again, but after all it *was* her best friend's twenty-fifth birthday. The two of them had been friends ever since attending university together, so for her sake, she'd try to sound energetic and positive. Cyn kept going on and on about being a quarter of a century old, to which Felicity just rolled her eyes.

She wanted to grab a pint or two and go dancing, but Felicity had never been comfortable on a dance floor. On the outside, she projected a false confidence about her curves—she'd come to terms with the fact that she'd never be a tiny little tart—but dancing made

her more aware of her size. And gyrating would only draw attention to her lack of rhythm.

“Right, it’ll be smashing.” Just because Felicity didn’t enjoy her way of celebrating didn’t mean she’d ruin it for her friend. She wasn’t an out-and-out liar, but little white lies were always good for sparing the hurt feelings of a friend, weren’t they?

“Rubbish! Don’t lie to me.”

Felicity sighed. Unfortunately, Cyn almost always knew when she wasn’t telling the truth. It defeated the purpose of filtering those little nuggets that Felicity knew would sting. She wondered why she hadn’t learned by now that it was easier to be honest, even when it hurt like hell.

“It’s just... You know that I don’t dance.”

“How long have I known you?”

She could see where her friend was going with this. They’d had countless conversations about Felicity letting her hang-ups get in the way, but right now an emotionally draining break-up was making her edgier than usual.

“For a long time, and you know I bloody love you too, but I don’t relish the idea of bouncing my bum around and making a fool of myself.”

“Felicity, you’re stunning. I really wish you could see that. You sparkle on the inside and there’s nothing more beautiful than that.”

Felicity smiled even though Cyn couldn’t see her through the phone. She’d always hated that ‘beauty comes from within’ bollocks, but it didn’t sound so cliché when Cyn said it. And Cyn was the only one who knew how vulnerable Felicity could be about her body. It was easier to be a bitch to anyone else who made her feel like crap.

“I promise we’ll have fun,” Cyn said. “Besides how long has *it* been?”

“How long has *what* been?”

“How long has it been since you’ve been shagged proper?”

“As a matter of fact it was just the other night,” she fibbed. No

need telling her she'd helped herself in the shower. Cyn would argue that it didn't count at all.

"Right," Cyn said, sounding totally unconvinced.

Felicity could picture Cyn rolling her eyes. "All right! Not since I broke up with William. Satisfied?"

"No, and neither are you. We should remedy that this weekend."

Felicity wasn't ready. Not bloody likely she'd be prepared to let someone into her bed, or anything else for that matter. She and William had been together nearly four years, and they'd lived together for three of them. She'd been the one to break it off with him, but that didn't make it any easier. When you're with someone you've grown comfortable with, sometimes you overlook the bickering and fighting, because at least you have someone to take to weddings or introduce at parties. Someone who'd put up with your crazy family on Christmas. Although, he had made a total arse out of himself at the last family gathering.

And William never understood her job as a paranormal investigator and blogger for *Everyday Supernatural*. He'd called it a tabloid rag that wasn't worth her time or talent. Most of the pieces she'd blogged were about cases that turned out to be anything but supernatural, but the few times she'd come across something that couldn't be explained by a very real and human element were moments she'd never forget.

Felicity loved to discover the truth. Her job was certainly never boring, and the blog gave her an opportunity to travel. But her constantly being on the go wasn't why they'd split up.

They'd been together long enough for him to see the vulnerable side that Cyn knew all too well. Except William used it to fight unfairly. Especially when he drank too much, which was more often than she cared for. Felicity could hardly stand to look at herself toward the end of their relationship, and to maintain any sort of self-respect she decided she wouldn't stick around and let him make himself feel better by tearing her down. She swallowed the lump in

her throat as she remembered their last fight—the one that had ended it once and for all.

“Felicity?”

“Sorry, I was distracted.”

“No you weren’t. You were thinking about that good-for-nothing shite that broke your heart. I swear I could kick him right in the teeth.”

Felicity laughed. Cyn always spoke her mind even if it wasn’t entirely appropriate, but at the moment she was glad her friend lacked a filter. “Then you’d be sitting in jail for your birthday, and what would be the fun in that?”

Cyn let out an overly dramatic sigh. “Right you are.”

“Is your sister coming out with us tomorrow night?”

“I asked her, but she and Jack are having dinner with his parents this weekend. It’s the first time she’s meeting them, so I forgive her lapse in sisterly duties.”

Felicity raised an eyebrow. “Sisterly duties?”

“Yes, getting me pissed for my birthday, of course.”

Felicity laughed, just as her phone buzzed with an incoming call. It was her boss. Cool air wafted past as the tram stopped and the door slid open at the stop before hers. A stream of people fled the crammed compartment while another multitude pushed past to take the place of the ones who’d departed.

“I’m going to have to let you go. I have a call coming in,” Felicity said.

“Speak to you later,” Cyn said before the phone clicked and Nathan’s voice sounded in her ear.

“Felicity?”

“Yes.”

“I have an assignment for you,” Nathan said around what sounded like a mouthful of food.

“Can it wait until next week? I’m taking Cyn out for her birthday. Remember?”

“I’m afraid not, and I’ve already made accommodations for you.”

“What’s the assignment?”

Felicity couldn’t help the excitement she felt bubbling in the pit of her belly. The adrenaline spike was a familiar sensation that always rippled through her whenever there was a new mystery to solve.

“There’s rumours of a púca haunting on Inis Mór. There’s a local priest who seems to be at the root of the story, and some real estate developer is building one of those golf resorts that are so popular on the mainland. I reckon he’s trying to take advantage of the island’s spectacular ocean view and the tourists that visit, but recently there have been accidents on the construction site,” Nathan said. “And it appears that a púca is to blame.”

She could hear the amusement in his voice. Likely it was some local behind the whole thing. There was usually a reasonable explanation, but their blog readers loved watching the story as it unfolded. Felicity would have to research this one. They’d received tons of reported ghost sightings, a fair share of vampires, and even claims about the true location of the Loch Ness monster, but she’d never heard of a púca.

“What’s a púca?”

“They’re shapeshifters that can take the form of horses, rabbits, or goats, but they always have black fur and glowing eyes. They can bring good luck, or they can be quite mischievous. I think this one is of the mischief-making variety, given the accidents that have been reported.”

“Accidents?”

“It’s harmless, really—just some missing tools and minor injuries—but it leads me to believe that someone really doesn’t want this resort to be built.”

Felicity sighed. That had been exactly what she was thinking as he relayed the story. Some of the initial excitement at the prospect of her new assignment deflated.

Not so supernatural after all.

“Why send me to investigate then?”

“The priest has been quite insistent about the local legend, and he sent an interesting photograph taken by one of the locals.”

“That’s nothing new. Isn’t there always some dubious photo that surfaces?” Felicity asked.

Everyday Supernatural had photographs sent to them all the time. Usually you could easily tell they’d been tampered with because of the sloppy photo editing.

Nathan laughed. “Right, but after examining this one we couldn’t prove that it was a fake.”

“I think I’ll take Cyn with me. We had plans, but she won’t be sore with me if I tell her we’re going on holiday.”

“I don’t know about that. I don’t think taking her to a remote fishing village for her birthday is quite what she has in mind.”

Felicity imagined he was probably smiling that goofy grin he always got anytime he talked about Cyn. He’d always been sweet on her, and although Nathan was her boss, he was also a friend. She didn’t have the heart to tell him that Cyn didn’t see him as anything other than a brother, so she changed the subject instead. Besides, Felicity had been to Ireland, but she’d never been to the Aran Islands and really didn’t know what to expect.

“So there’s not much for her to do while I’m investigating?”

“I suppose Cyn could sit at the pub and get pissed there just as well as she can here, but the island is only a few kilometres and about eight hundred people occupy it.”

Felicity wouldn’t mention that was plenty of people for Cyn carry out her birthday shagging mission.

“Well I won’t need to rent a car then.”

“No, you can cover most of the island on foot or rent a bike. You’ll fly into Shannon and from there take the ferry in Doolin to Inis Mór. I’ll make arrangements for Cyn too and email you the details later.”

“Thank you, Nathan.”

“Or I could always entertain her while you’re gone.”

Felicity loved her friend to pieces, but she also knew Cyn confused love with a lot of other things, like sex, or having a few good

laughs. In their university days, sex seemed like an expression of rebellion. Pity the man that finally turned her head, because Cyn wouldn't know what to do with love if she even tried. Poor Nathan had been in love with her since the moment he'd laid eyes on her, but she would only ever think of him as a friend. Felicity had tried to tell him gently. He just didn't want to hear it, and so she side-stepped the issue whenever it came up.

"I'm sure you could, but I'd best start packing and tell Cyn I'm stealing her for the weekend."

"Call me when you get there. Or after you talk to that priest."

"I will."

"Speak to you later," he said before hanging up.

She immediately rang Cyn.

"Hello."

"I know you had a different idea, but would you like to go to Ireland with me tomorrow? A holiday is a much better way to spend your birthday."

Silence hung as Cyn considered her proposition.

"Why the sudden change in plans?" she asked.

"I have an assignment, but I promise that we'll still have fun."

"Will there be dancing?"

"It's Ireland."

"Mmmm. Then there'll be hot Irish men that I can fu—"

Felicity cut her off. "Precisely my point. So what do you say?"

"I'm sure they've got plenty of pubs and I have no doubt that I could find someone I like well enough to bang."

Felicity laughed. She knew Cyn almost as well as Cyn knew her. That had been exactly what Felicity had figured her friend's response would be when Nathan mentioned the remote locale. "Okay, so it's settled then."

"Quite. What's the assignment anyway?"

"Apparently, there's a púca haunting."

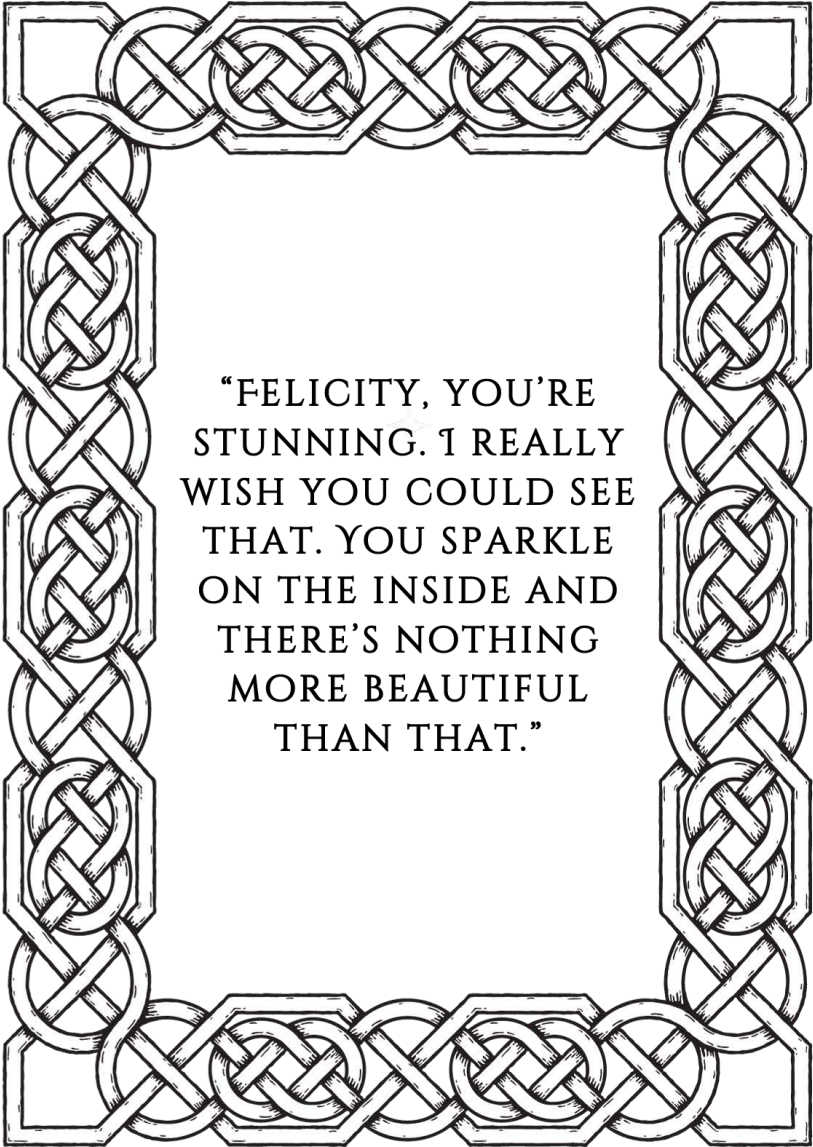
"What's a púca?"

Déjà vu.

“Some sort of shapeshifting horse.”

“A horse? I see.”

Felicity could tell she was trying really hard not to laugh. And in truth, if she ever had to tell anyone other than Cyn that she was going to Ireland to look for a shapeshifting stallion, they'd probably look at her cock-eyed. Finally she arrived at the Shoreditch High Street station, which marked yet another unlucky piece of real estate that had been hipsterised and filled with a tribe clad in skinny jeans that would never look good on her. But at least the rent was affordable.



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