

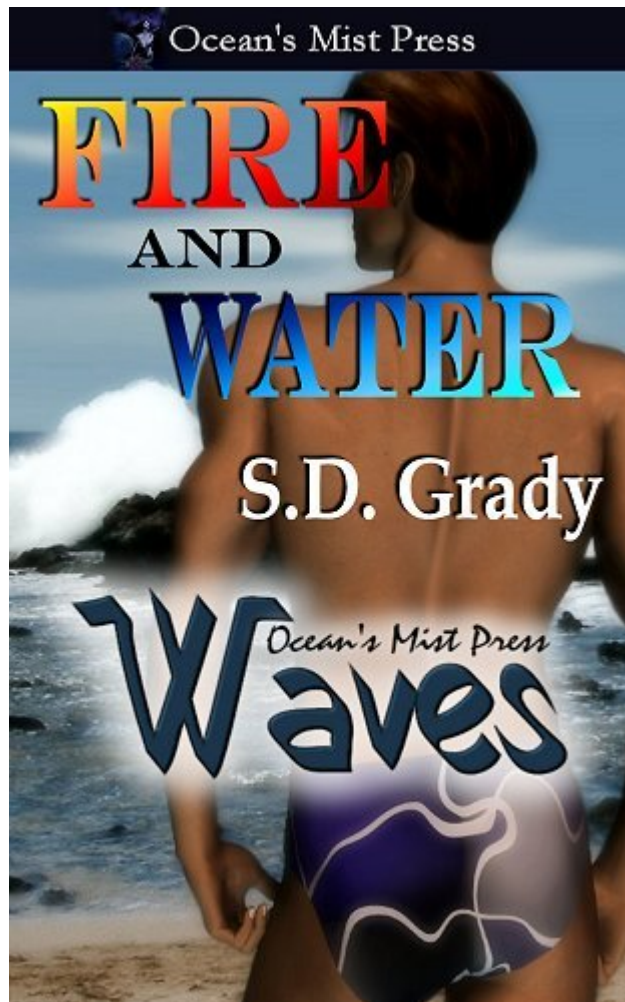


Ocean's Mist Press

FIRE AND WATER

S.D. Grady

Ocean's Mist Press
Waves



Fire and Water

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Fire and Water
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DEDICATION/ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

For my knight, Richard

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~*~

Myrric stood upon the stone ledge, overlooking the vast Swan Plain engulfed in battle. The cries of men and beasts clashing and dying drifted to his protected perch. He closed his eyes, sending out a seeking tendril of thought. How many mages were wielding the fire against him?

He brushed a lock of black hair from his narrow face. The wind of war tugged at his loose shirt of maroon linen. The embroidered badge of flame held by a hand indicated his rank as a Fire Mage; one who could direct the heat of the earth to burn, blast or melt anything in his path.

Determining that only three mages stood against him, and two of them nothing more than fire callers, he began to draw the Fire to him. Myrric muttered words of power, low and mysterious; the sound dancing amongst the storm of war. Sparks crackled about his head. Lightning shot across the plain. The fireball began to take shape between his hands, a seething mass of heat and destruction. His chest, wide and powerful with youth, heaved as he intoned the final forming words.

He aimed the fireball at the rear of the enemy's line, where their archers continued to send raining death over the boys and men of The Army of the Moon. The power left his fingertips, still drawing more definition from the depths of Myrric's being as it flew. Myrric grinned, reveling in the release.

The sensation of casting was the closest thing to the thunder of passion in his veins. His body hummed with anticipation as his rod thickened while the heat of a volcano grew about him. The battle plain below him became unfocused as the fog of fire enveloped his very being.

The earth shuddered beneath him. The air shifted about him. Myrric's power faltered beneath a fresh onslaught from a new elemental quarter. His jaw firmed, taking a deep breath. The scent of charred wind blew across his face, the current shifting about him.

Myrric opened his eyes. Standing before him was a girl, no older than his youngest sister. Her hurt, anger, and purpose clear in her crystalline green gaze.

"You will be no more," she stated with a certainty that had Myrric scrambling to bring his shields into place.

But nothing could have stopped her. The waif tilted her head back, summoned the powers and directed it at the mage before her.

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Myrric's knees collapsed as his fireball was reversed and sent back to him and in him with the force of a shrieking, vicious tornado. As his life faltered, Myrric cast one last spell, hoping to negate the untutored powers of the girl before her.

The blast wiped the Plain of Swan clean.

The man halted before the barred doors of the Hall. Tired and cold, he turned to the young woman perched atop the shaggy pony. "Is this it, ma'am?"

She nodded, her eyes glued to the portal sealed against such mortals as her escort. "Come," she gestured, "Help me down."

She looked about her, the mixed emotions of coming home warring with the fear of judgment that was surely due her.

The mountain peaks cloaked in winter's white climbed in all directions. Calm embraced the very air about them.

A slot in the heavy timbered gate opened. The porter asked, "What is your need?"

"I am Arlynn, Healer of Illis. I must speak to Mother Salias." She wrapped her voluminous cloak tightly about her.

Only a moment passed before Arlynn was granted entrance into the only haven she knew. Arlynn followed a novice to the cloister walk where she was bid to wait the arrival of the leader of their order.

At the moment Arlynn spied the elderly healer, emotions carefully shielded during her long journey erupted into despair. Arlynn dropped to her knees and bent her head in supplication. "I am lost, Mother," she murmured in a choked voice, tears streaming down her wind-blown cheeks.

Mother Salias placed her gnarled hand on Arlynn's golden tresses. "It can never be as bad as it appears my little one."

"Little one," Arlynn repeated then laughed gently as she stared at the azure robes of Mother Salias, "I am most certainly not a little one anymore." She gestured to her swollen belly covered in a serviceable brown cloak, the child due within the month. She turned her head up to the head of her order, "I have done a monstrous thing that I cannot hide from. But I know not where it is I can go. No village would have me as their healer now. I have most assuredly corrupted my powers in my attempt to find peace and follow the pull of my magic." She paused, her face falling into lines of grief. "I am sorely afraid for the child of the

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union. Its power has been sullied even before the light of the sun can bless it."

A cloud gathered at Mother Salias' wrinkled brow. "Whatever do you mean, little one? Your powers of healing would protect a potential child from any possibility of corruption..."

Arlynn shook her head vehemently. "Nay. My powers cannot protect the child from its father."

Mother Salias pulled at Arlynn's hands with her own gnarled ones, gesturing the young woman to rise. "Clearly you have much to tell me, Arlynn. Come break bread with me. Your travels have wearied you. Perhaps sharing the knowledge of your burdens will lighten them."

The two women walked down the ancient cloister walk of the Healers Hall, one grey and large with age. The other golden in youth and heavy with a child conceived in joy and sorrow.

Arlynn ripped the coarse bread and dipped it in the bowl of tea. The memories of the many simple meals taken with her sisters here at the Healers Hall gave her weary mind comfort. The cold mountain air blew through the small slit windows high in the hall, snowflakes drifting gently down to the stone floors. A roaring fire in the massive marble fireplace heated the large white furs that covered the low rough couches where the sisters gathered for their meals. Arlynn shivered. Surely the Earth was throwing its frozen fury at her disobedience.

"So, little one, tell me..." Mother Salias invited Arlynn.

Arlynn fought to find a steady voice as the emotions and memories of her treasonous acts taunted her. She took in a deep breath and began:

"It was several days after the Battle over Swan and I was working with the many wounded. I had been taken from my village, Illis, to help ease the burden of the Surgeons. So many mages and soldiers had been harmed in that final burst of fire and light. It was rumored in the village that the enemy's High Mage Myrric had been responsible for the horrid surge of power; the burst that laid low every man on the battlefield.

I had no time to measure the power of each patient. There were so many needing surcease from the pain. Exhausted, I failed to shield myself from anybody. That must be how it started.

There was this man whose arms were charred from his fingers to his elbows. He lay mute, not crying or writhing from the excruciating pain. I paid little heed to this but quickly lay my hands over his heart and

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sent him a surge of peace. But instead of the energy surging into him, an odd thing happened..." Arlynn's voice faded as the memory washed over her.

Arlynn jumped back from the low pallet, her fingers still singing from the surge of power that just leapt from the man lying there. "Sun and Mother!" she muttered under her breath. Only then did she feel it; a warming sensation of intent. She turned her eyes from her fingertips to the face of the stranger.

Black, fathomless orbs containing the knowledge of the stars speared into her soul. Moments passed. Arlynn felt her entire being held to that spot. Unfamiliar feelings of longing deep in her stomach sent a heated blush to her cheeks. Her vision blurred at the edges. Nothing existed except for him.

Even dulled by the pain he was beautiful. Black hair, deep as ebony, fell to his broad shoulders. A chest of steel narrowed to...the rough sheet concealed the rest of his intriguing body. His nose was thin and sharp; reminding Arlynn of a hawk's beak. And then the lush lips pursed to speak, even as agony blurred his words.

She breathed. Her hands instinctively reaching for his, to provide the healing power needed for her to hear him. She had to hear him. Her heart slammed in her breast with the urgency of a crazed beast.

She touched the charred skin and sent a tendril of healing light out to him. And then it happened again.

A blinding bolt of power, black with force, shot back through her arms. Arlynn cried. Such agony! Her brow furrowed as she realized it was not of the body.

She slipped quickly into a trance, seeking the source of the black power. His arms, while burnt, were causing the man no pain. Some other healer had been there, and the pathways were repairing themselves quickly. He would begin to generate new skin and tissues in a manner of days.

Her mind stopped and checked the major organs. They were all healthy. She could still hear muted cries in the distance. Locked in his mind, she thought. Perhaps the blast had frightened the poor man.

She set to soothing the childlike reactions. Fire, loneliness, anger, and unstoppable power all vied for supremacy in his tormented mind.

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The fire she extinguished with a cooling touch. The anger she turned aside with a kind word of love, the loneliness—a kiss on his temple, the power...

What could she do? The mage's power raged unabated. Yes, Arlynn realized. A mage. One of the many used in battle. He must've been ready to spend a spell when the Blast occurred. The unspent power still required an outlet, now that it had been called. That was preventing this man from telling her of his hurts.

Catching his tossing head between her hands, Arlynn begged him, "Give the power to me, my lord. I shall see it safely away and then you can rest."

Once again she was caught in a vortex of dark brilliance. His eyes, distraught with pain, reflected a need for acknowledgement. Arlynn's breath hitched as those black eyes skated over her lithe figure.

In all of her eighteen years she had never known the desire of a man. As a healer, she was untouchable to most of the population, held above them as a superior being. Now, in an instant she knew what it was he wanted, what he needed.

Arlynn smiled. "I can give you what you need, and you can give me your pain."

Still unsure, the man with eyes of night agreed.

She braced herself for the onslaught. She bent over his head and placed a kiss on his lips. Not a benison of healing as she had given him before, but a kiss of sharing.

His lips were hot and hard as molten steel. She poured her cooling healing into his mouth, an ocean's wave to soften his attack. Even as her skin heated, his pain and power cooled, ebbed and drew away on the tide. Unaware of any other wounded soldier or hard working healer, the pair moaned. Steam began to curl and seep through their minds. Eagerly Arlynn licked at his mouth, desiring to find the source of such impatient heat. Seduced into a moment of trust, she did not feel it come.

The fire of his un-cast spell swept through and over them, extinguishing their passion. The complete cessation of awareness and knowledge was of such ecstasy and agony, Arlynn knew she would seek out the master of the power for the rest of her life.

Arlynn the healer, whose power came from the oceans, collapsed next to the war mage, whose fire power withered in the glory of their union.

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"So, you joined with a Fire Mage," Mother Salias commented.

Arlynn studied the older woman's face fearing to find condemnation there. "I know it is forbidden, Mother. I felt I had no choice. He required help."

"Were there no other healers there? They would've provided a shield."

Tears trickled down Arlynn's cheek; her well of sorrow bottomless in its depth. "There were many, Mother. But we all were working beyond our abilities. The devastation from the blast was unprecedented. The generals were unprepared to handle the damage. I did what I thought best..."

A sharp shake of Mother Salias' head silenced Arlynn's desperate justification. "You did not think."

Arlynn studied her hands as she wrung them. "No, I only did what I had to."

Mother Salias sucked in a deep breath. "So, I suspect your powers are now in remission."

Arlynn nodded in shame.

"And his?"

Despair washed over Arlynn. "He is dead, Mother. I negated his powers and now he is dead."

"How, child?" The question held no hint of condolence.

Arlynn looked deep within her soul and stared at the memories of her few moments of happiness she had found with the mage. They washed over her as she told the rest of the story.

Arlynn awoke in the small Healers barracks, the cot creaking under her weight. As the fog of sleep left her, emptiness reverberated deep within herself. As a manner of habit she reached out around her with her healer's magic to see if all was well with the world. There was nothing. Instead of the healthy throb of a living and breathing community, a vast blank pit echoed in her heart. Panic stole over her.

Sitting up she recalled her last actions. Desire still licked at her nerves, anxious to be reignited. The mage...what had happened to the mage? What had happened to her?

Arlynn's hands shook as she donned the working garb of a village healer, a narrow, pale blue full-length shift and a leather jerkin with a

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badge of the Healer's ocean on her shoulder. She paused before the small looking glass and quickly plaited her thick, straight blonde mane, binding the end with a narrow leather strap.

Hoping to maintain a façade of indifference and general well-being, she stopped briefly in the common hall to eat a bowl of porridge and chat with her friends before running to the thin pallet where she had left her last patient. It was empty.

Arlynn stopped a young serving maid, "Where is the mage with the burnt hands?"

"He's been taken, Healer."

"Taken where?"

The maid shrugged Arlynn's hand from her arm, "To the generals, Healer, for questioning."

"You mean for debriefing after surviving the battle against the High Mage Myrric."

The maid gave Arlynn an odd look. "Didn't you know? That was the High Mage himself. The generals want the power of the enemy for their own use. I expect he is being questioned as we speak..."

Arlynn pelted across the central square of the town, heedless of the many people she knocked over. She couldn't understand the desperate pressure in her chest, but she knew she had to find the mage right now. Her breath came in gasps. She arrived at Headquarters in moments.

"I need to see the prisoner immediately!" she panted.

The guard eyed her closely, but kept his words civil when he noticed the blue badge of the Healer on her tunic. "Is there a reason why?"

Arlynn paused. Why, indeed? She knew with a certainty that if she didn't see him right now, she might pass out. His danger licked at her like a whip lashing across a criminal's back. But what reason to give the guard... "I wasn't done with my healing when he was taken. He won't be able to stand the interrogation without a complete healing."

The guard raised an eyebrow. Arlynn gulped but answered the question in his eyes with a straight back and stubborn chin.

She followed the guard through several corridors until they reached a door to an inner room with no windows. She was bade to enter by a gruff voice within.

The dim chamber was lit only by a brace of candles on a table where a clerk recorded the questioning session. The mage sat on a stool,

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his charred hands bound behind his back, his head nodding listlessly. A thin trail of blood trickled down his chin.

Heedless of the military men present, Arlynn approached the mage. She knelt before him, hoping to find some vestige of consciousness.

"Myrric?" she called softly.

He looked up.

As Arlynn's pale blue gaze locked on Myrric's black glare a shock wave of power surged between them. Myrric looked stunned.

"What have you done to me?" his gravelly voice weary and scornful.

Arlynn looked up at the general present. "I need some time alone with the prisoner, general."

The cynical, grizzled man with a short sword at his waist shook his head. "Your efforts to heal the High Mage would be wasted, Healer. Either Myrric will stand for us during the next battle or he will be executed for his crimes. Don't waste your powers on him."

Arlynn struggled to find an answer. She knew she had to have something from the beaten and bloody man before her. Even now the power arced between them, invisible to the clerk and general. The spell he had begun to cast on the battlefield was not complete yet. Arlynn needed to finish it, or never heal another person again. Her powers were locked up tight in the spell.

She settled for telling a half-truth. "Even so, general. I cast a healing spell on him and it was incomplete. I must finish it before my powers can be used for the benefit of our troops. I was unaware of his identity when I began."

The general appeared to consider this. After only moments he executed a short bow, "As you require healer. The clerk and I will leave you."

The door closed and the heavy lock clicked into place. Myrric studied Arlynn closely.

"When I woke, I had no powers. What have you done to me?" he asked in a hard tone.

"Nothing more than what you did to me," she answered evenly. She reached towards his arm. He flinched in anticipation of the impending effect, but his restraints held him in place.

"You were casting a spell before you passed out on the battlefield," she murmured as her hand settled above the burns on his arm. Power

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and passion erupted between them. The blue peace of healing waters lapped against the crimson sparks of fire.

Arlynn watched Myrric fight the odd effects of their melding.

"What were you casting?"

His mouth grimaced, "A fireball."

She considered. "So, you did not get the chance to send the power out from you. It now sits in me."

His black eyes watched her carefully.

"But my power lies in the oceans, not the fires." She paused seeking for a way to let him understand what was happening. "The surge of power I took from you ebbed away for a bit on the tide. But now it is a cresting wave and it needs to be used somewhere." She bit her lip. "I could heal you. Your power would be restored and our armies would not withstand the next Blast you send our way."

He began to twist, pulling at his bindings.

She stood, settling her hand on his cheek. He stilled. "But then my powers would ultimately be used to hurt, not heal. I could not bear that." She bent over, her breath heating his lips. "But such power...it must be used for something." Sparks began to fly through the air.

Myrric eyed the temptress before him warily. Myths and legends were passed down at the School of Fire and War of a woman made of water, light and joy. Surely the elfin child with eyes the color of the sea and a touch that set his blood boiling could not be...

"Let me help you, Myrric," her moist lips whispered. "Let me take all the anger away. Let me give you joy."

"Joy?" he laughed roughly. "I have never known joy. It is not for such as I."

Her fingers, soft and agile traced his cheek. Memories of heat and contentment surged forth.

"Nonsense, Myrric. What you have given me, I am not sure. But I do know what I cannot do. I cannot allow you to take that power and kill more people." Her breath teased the small hairs near his left ear. "I can only heal." Her hands demanded more as they crossed his chest. "I can only love."

Myrric shook his head. "Nonsense. You are just one more soldier sent to end my powers."

"No. I can see it now. I'm sure you can see it too. Look deep within, Myrric."

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He took a cleansing breath, slipping into a light trance and saw. There, nearly lost in his confusion was a plain of scorched earth. Standing in the midst of the tragedy was a pair of lovers. Under their feet the earth heaved with life reborn, green things returning to the battlefield.

Myrric opened his eyes. "What is your name?"

"Arlynn."

"What I see I doubt."

The siren climbed onto his lap, her arms twining about his neck, drawing him nearer. "Mayhap you are doubtful because you have never known joy. What is coursing through my veins in this instant," she paused as she kissed his brow and cheeks, "is much too strong to doubt."

Her lips drew a long kiss from his. Myrric's heartbeat increased with the demands she placed upon him. Opening his mouth, her tongue plunged in. Flames, banked to coals since the day before, sprang to life. He forged the link between them, heating the liquid desire her hips and breasts assaulted him with.

The two separated, desperately seeking air.

"Are you doubting me now?" she demanded.

Myrric shook his head. Peace stole through his soul as she tugged at his breeches.

"What are you doing?" he asked inanely.

"I have no idea." Her voice shook.

"Look at me," he demanded.

Arlynn's hands paused in their efforts to release Myrric from his breeches. A single strand of golden hair hung over her blue eyes as she turned a crimson face to his.

"What are you doing?" the question was softer this time.

Arlynn's chin quivered as she tried to find the words for what she must do. After taking several deep breaths she said, "I'm going to give you all the love you need. I'm going to heal you."

It was a simple as that, Myrric realized. Even though his hands were bound to a chair in his enemy's land, this girl was going to lay her life down with his, releasing him from the torment of his calling.

"Kiss me."

Arlynn paused only a moment, drinking in the acceptance and joy, yes she found joy, in the shrewd black eyes of her patient. She leaned forward once more and set fire to his lips.

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She sensed a commitment from him to their actions that spurred her own emotions. Sweat gathered between her legs, anticipation furled her nipples tightly against the rough fabric of her shift. Sensation was all! No longer contemplating the significance of each motion, Arlynn drowned in the lava pool of passion.

His rough beard scratched at her cheek. Arlynn tilted her head back, seeking cooling air only to have his teeth begin a taunting path down her throat.

Seeking relief from the torrent of flame, she pulled at her jerkin and shift, baring her breasts to the flashing tongue of her captor. She guided his tongue towards an aching peak. Lightning streaked through her breast to her stomach and flooded her pussy with dripping desire.

Arlynn's hands wandered lower, encountering the rigid length of his erection beneath her. Even so his mouth continued to suck and nibble at her breasts. Agony, delight, cooling waterfalls, and deep pools of longing urged Arlynn on towards an unfathomable reward.

Unlacing his breeches and freeing his penis from his linens, Arlynn grasped the silken rod. His lips and teeth became even more demanding as her virginal touch discovered the wonders of the male body.

Arlynn raised herself up, straddling his lap and lowered herself down. Her knees supported her on the thin edge of the stool he sat on. Arlynn paused when the tip of his cock nudged at her entrance. Echoes of Mother Salias' guidance and teachings warred with the draw of the power of her and Myrric's joy.

He looked up. Arlynn's breath caught. There were no stars now hiding in his face; only the shining face of the Moon, smiling and cool, eager to lead her children on into the never ending night.

"Come, my dear, it's time we went home." He smiled and it speared Arlynn's heart.

She lowered herself onto his cock, ever so slowly, allowing each and every inch of her body to caress his. Until her barrier prevented any further movement.

"Do it." His voice a raspy shadow.

Arlynn nodded, leaned into her lover once more and sharply descended.

The branding of her soul was unexpected but welcomed. A flood of happiness overtook the angry heat as she moved upon him. The

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rhythm of old Arlynn found as his hips rose up to meet hers. Her heart nearly erupted as the urgency of completion approached.

His teeth sank into her collarbone. At the sharp pain, Arlynn closed tightly about his shaft. They grunted. And then sighed. She nipped at his throat, then sucked as hard as she dared. His hips bucked wildly as he attempted to throw her off, each movement driving them closer. Closer to the end.

Her nails scarred his neck. His mouth clamped about a nipple. Fury, a cascade of urgency, fire and the rush of the tides took them up and tossed them into a place only Arlynn and Myrric would ever see.

A flash of light exploded about them.

Joy! This was joy.

The following morning Arlynn joined every person in the encampment to witness the execution of the High Mage Myrric. She couldn't calm her nerves. After their electric joining the day before, Arlynn had been afraid to heal anybody else all afternoon. Enormous surges of blue and red power licked at her nerves, barely contained in the joy she felt at the new life in her womb. Her fingers lingered at her collar bone where she would always bear his mark.

Something wondrous and frightening had happened between her and the High Mage. It would surely require a pilgrimage to the Healer Hall high in the mountains to understand all the consequences of her actions. But right now, she could only try to contain the confusion in her heart.

She barely recognized the bloody body that was carried to the chopping block. She knew he was unconscious. She had felt each and every blow delivered to his body over the long night. She was linked beyond any reason to his every pulse.

The moment that the axe fell, severing his head from his body, Arlynn suffered a complete surcease of power. Death licked at her soul. Grief poured over her. Her life had ended.

Mother Salias' hands lay on Arlynn's womb, her eyes closed in a deep trance. A frown gathered at her brow and then a smile.

Arlynn still could not stop the tears. Eight months had passed since the father of her child had been executed. Eight months since she

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could feel the pulse of the village's well-being. Eight months since she had woken each morning with a purpose.

Mother Salias returned her hands to the depths of her robes. "Do you know why a union between Fire and Water is forbidden?"

Arlynn shook her head, tired of trying to figure out what would become of her and her child.

"Well, a Water and Earth union builds on the healing and growing powers inherent in their quadrants. Likewise, Fire and Air fuel the fury of their ability to tear things down. The children of such unions usually have stronger powers than their parents. It is the way to build a better tomorrow."

Arlynn nodded her understanding.

"And a union between Fire and Water or Fire and Earth usually results in the charring of the healing powers." Mother Salias paused, a smile dancing at the corners of her mouth. "Hence, those unions are discouraged for the benefit of all involved. But..." she raised a finger, "Once, just once in a great while the Sun and Moon send us a Healer powerful enough to balance the vagaries of war. It appears that was you."

Arlynn blinked.

"Your son, nay, the son of the High Mage and the High Healer will be able to bring peace to us all."

Arlynn tried to understand. A day when her village would not be threatened by the enemy? A year when extra cattle were not needed for the army? A year when all she needed to do was kiss a scratched knee or bruised finger...

"Your son will be a mighty mage capable of utilizing both your healing powers and his father's fire powers. He will bring balance. He will let us rest."

Stunned, the only question Arlynn could summon was, "Why?"

Her chin was grasped firmly, "Because you took Myrric's fury and turned it into life with your love. That is no small thing, little one."

Doubt still assailed Arlynn, "But was it right?"

Mother Salias stepped back, considering the question. "Think on your child, little one. Is his existence right?"

The day Arlynn held Myrlynn in her arms, a gurgling child with the moon in his eyes and the sun in his hair, she knew. It was right.

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AUTHOR BIO

S.D. Grady is a romantic, having always believed that Happily Ever After really does happen. She married her college sweetheart, raised two cats and dedicates herself to bringing fantastic and passionate stories to her readers. Always on the lookout for new ideas for stories, she reads avidly, writes constantly and pays homage to the NASCAR gods weekly.