



Loose Id

# *Kella's Charm*

DELIA  
CARNELL

# KELLA'S CHARM

Delia Carnell

Loose Id.®

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This book contains explicit sexual content and graphic language.

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Delia Carnell

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## Prologue

It was the first warm day of the spring season. The last of the snow had given way as the sun warmed the rocks and the river. Rayner raced his steed through the woods that led from his family manor to the neighboring village. On his heels rode Dag, his childhood tutor, mentor, and best friend.

At the top of the rise, Rayner paused, allowing Dag to catch up. He looked behind him and surveyed all that would be his. From the castle on the highest hill to the cottages dotting the valley below. The orchards and the animals. The responsibilities and the rewards. All would be his, save for the section carved from the eastern ridge by Torin, the chieftain whose family had held the most fertile acres for generations. That missing piece haunted him.

“You have plenty,” Dag said as his horse nosed against Rayner’s steed.

Rayner turned to his longtime friend and smiled. “You know my thoughts?”

Though his face wore the creases of years, his dark eyes were sharp. “Always.”

Rayner laughed and nudged his horse to follow the well-worn path. They trotted together down the hill toward the village. As they veered toward the river, Rayner stopped, listening. The sounds of laughter -- no, giggling -- floated on the spring breeze. Rayner

inched his horse forward into a thicket that surrounded a shallow pool formed by the flowing river.

“Rayn...”

Rayner turned around to face Dag. “Let’s just have a look,” he said in a low whisper. The giggling grew sharper, louder as he pushed forward and parted the bright green leaves to peek through.

Just as he had hoped, a bevy of young girls cavorted in and around the pond. Some little ones splashed in the water at the edge, a few approaching teen age swam and sprayed each other. One, the oldest, sat on a rock, sunning herself. They were all naked, their clothing tossed over bushes to the side. The little ones were all concealed by the water, but the one on the rocks --

Rayner sat mesmerized as he watched her. Hair as black as midnight fell to her waist, covering everything he wanted to see. Long smooth legs stretched out before her, crossed at the ankles, her feet perfectly arched.

As he watched, she stretched, raising her arms to the sun, lifting her hair off her neck, offering him the smooth curve of her spine and a hint of rounded bottom before the curtain of hair fell back into place. A light breeze stirred the thick black tresses and he strained to see more.

Suppressing a groan, Rayner felt a predictable hardening in his pants and shifted on his horse to ease the ache. He was seventeen years old; there was hardly a time when his cock did not dictate his actions. But this was different. This was a level of wanting he had never known. He must have this girl.

“Rayner.” Dag placed a hand on his shoulder. “They are children. This is not for us to see.”

“That one is not a child.” He nodded toward the raven-haired beauty on the rocks.

Dag refused to look. "Come away." He reached for the reins to his charge's horse. "We have places to go."

Reluctantly, Rayner let the older man lead him away from the bushes as silently as they had approached. He glanced back briefly over his shoulder, but the leaves blocked his view.

He turned back around and followed Dag out of the woods. He didn't know how; he didn't know when. But he would have that girl.



## Chapter One

Kella stared out the window, but her eyes saw nothing beyond the thick panes of glass. At a light tap on her chamber door, she slowly turned. Granya poked her head inside the room and gave the younger woman a sad smile. “Another visitor, milady.”

Without registering any emotion, Kella turned back to watch the rain beat on the glass. “No. No more visitors, Granya. I have had enough.”

She took a few steps into the room and reached out with a comforting hand. “They only wish to pay their respects, milady. Torin was loved.”

Aware of the hand caressing her shoulder, Kella fought back tears. “I know that,” she said in a whisper. “Just no more today.”

Nodding, the older woman retreated from the private chamber. Kella wiped at the moisture on her cheeks and stared at the rain. Three days ago. Three days. Her father had been tall and vibrant, his deep laugh booming through the castle, around the corners, and up the stairways. Today, his body lay in the arbor beneath the earth beside his beloved wife.

Things change so quickly

Kella sighed and let her hands drift down to the velvet folds of her mourning dress. The heavy fabric hung as thick as the gloom in the castle. She could not continue this way.

She knew she had to snap out of this grief and take control of the estate. There would be questions to answer, decisions to make --

Another knock on her door interrupted her thoughts. "What is it, Granya?"

"Please, milady. He will not go away."

Slowly she turned. "Who?"

"Lord Rayner." Her hands fidgeted. "He insists that he must see you now."

Her blood turned to ice. Had she thought she could not feel any worse? Her dear father so swiftly taken, and now Rayner swooping in like the buzzards circling the kill.

She started to order him away, but then changed her mind. Maybe better to get this encounter over with while she still wore the mantle of grief so heavy around her heart. Yes. Get it over with.

"I will see him in the tapestry room."

"Shall I fetch Ninian?"

Her father's right-hand man would be helpful later, but this she had to do alone. "No. I will see him by myself."

\* \* \* \* \*

Rayner stood near the fire in the small room. The heat was welcome after his ride across his land in the rain. He held out his hands to warm them, then turned to let the heat reach his backside. He was soaked to the bone from the late fall rain. The fire warmed his skin.

He heard her step in the hallway before she came through the door. As beautiful as ever, he thought, watching her glide across the floor toward him. She offered her hand, and he raised it to his lips.

"My very deepest sympathies, milady. Your father was a good man."

“Thank you.” She pulled her hand from his grip and gestured for him to sit in a chair near the fire. She sat too, in a matching chair beside his.

Rayner struggled to fold his tall frame into the delicate formal chair. He felt silly in the feminine room. Which was probably exactly why she had chosen to receive him there, he knew. She settled her hands in her lap, then raised her chin to meet his gaze. Defiant. He knew that about her. “I have come to offer my assistance.”

Her raven brows arched, then settled into a smooth line. “In what way do you think you can be of service, *Lord* Rayner?”

He didn’t miss her emphasis on his title. God, he loved the fire in her. The passion he knew that simmered beneath her icy surface. She would not let him forget the thing that had forced them apart over a year ago. He was nobility. He was to inherit the entire countryside. His match had been arranged for him before his birth. He’d forgotten that for a while. He’d wanted her since they were both teenagers. He’d thought a summer tryst would get her out of his system, but it did not. He wanted more of her, and would have gotten what he wanted had his father not put a stop to it. Again.

So, he’d let her have her little barbs. He deserved them. “There must be much to attend to. I would be glad to advise.”

“Ninian will offer all the advice I need, thank you.”

“Kella, Ninian is an old man.”

Emerald flames flashed in her eyes, but she spoke with a chill in her voice. “Older men are wiser.”

He nodded. “They are. But sometimes they are too old. Times change.”

He could almost see her bite back a retort. She carefully controlled her features. He watched her delicate hands smooth the fabric of her skirt, remembering those hands on his skin. A heated flash of memory caused his cock to stir, but he willed it to subside. This was

no time to think of her nails on his back, her lips on his cock, her tongue circling his balls. He could not be distracted. "Allow me to be some help to you."

Her hands stilled, and she met his gaze, unwavering. "At what cost?"

"Never a cost between old friends, Kella."

"We are not friends."

Was the fire going out, or was it her tone that put the chill in the air? Perhaps he had chosen the wrong approach. Perhaps he should make a business proposition. "All right, then. Forget the past. Accept me as a businessman. I will bring Dag and a staff to help you run the estate. We'll oversee the planting, the livestock, the children in the village, all of it. You won't have to worry about any of the work. We'll handle it all."

She repeated her question in clipped tones, as if biting off each word. "At what cost?"

"No cost, Kella." He leaned forward and took one of her hands in his, stroking it lightly. "Just deed over the land to me to make it easier for me to manage things for you. You can have the castle and your staff. I'll take care of everything else."

He watched incredulously as a smile formed on her lips. Small, at first, then widening. She started to giggle, reminding him of that spring day so long ago when he'd first spotted her on the rocks. Then she threw back her head and laughed out loud, like a man who's been too long at the tavern.

"Kella --"

Her laughter stopped as abruptly as the start had been gradual. She rose from the chair and flung his hand away from hers. With a swish of her heavy skirts, she was at the entryway, pulling open the heavy door. "Get out."

"Kella, listen to reason." He approached, attempting to take her hands again. "I only want to help you."

Angered, Kella stopped herself midway through a whispered chant. She braced a hand against his chest and pushed with all her strength. “Get out now before I call the guards to throw you in the dungeon.” With another mighty shove, she sent him on his way. “Get. Out.”

## Chapter Two

Kella tossed and turned in her bed. Another night lost to thoughts of Rayner. But this time she had more than her broken heart to keep her awake. The vibrations of the heavy wooden door still echoed through the Grand Hall when her father's most trusted advisor had summoned her to the counting room.

The satisfaction of turning down Rayner's ridiculous proposition grew bitter when Ninian told her the family's finances were of a grave concern. Her father had been so kind in caring for all the people in the land that he'd left little coin to get them through the winter, which was even now whistling around the turrets with icy breath.

So without either of them knowing it, Rayner had offered exactly what she needed. And she had thrown him out. Now she resided in the absurd position of needing to lure him back again.

She sat up and tossed the furs from the bed. How was she to accomplish this disturbing feat? Lure him back how? A chance encounter was hardly likely given the late autumn weather. She would probably have to wait until the feast of the winter solstice, when the entire countryside gathered in the grand hall as tradition dictated.

And then what? Then what? Flirt with him? Ask him to dance? Put a potion in his mead? That thought made her smile. For all the charms and spells that she had learned in her life, she'd never used one on Rayner. Never had to. The moment they'd met, the attraction had been instant. For both of them.

She lay back against her pillows and thought about him. The first time he'd kissed her. They'd nearly clawed each other's clothes out of the way, so eager to touch and taste. She smiled, remembering. The muscles and curves of his broad shoulders. The strength and beauty of his nearly perfect body. The thickness and length of his magnificent cock.

She had been a virgin, but he clearly had not. He knew far too well how to please her, make her sigh. Make her come. She sighed now, thinking about it. What magick of his own made her squirm just thinking about his tongue on her nipples? The heat built between her legs and lured her fingers there. She touched her slit and found the wetness. She was drenched in her juices just from the memory of fucking Rayner.

Slowly her fingers circled her clit, relishing each quiver and tremble. It had been so long. Closing her eyes, she could see him hovering above her as he probed her folds to find the perfect fit. She could all but feel him sliding into her, stroking, thrusting.

No! Pulling her fingers away, she sat up. She would not bring herself to orgasm while thinking about Rayner. She would not allow him that much power over her. Her body on fire, she got out of the bed and went to the high doors that led to her balcony. She needed the cold night air to quell her longing.

Dressed only in her linen nightgown, she began to shiver the moment she stepped a bare foot onto the cold stones of the terrace. Good. She wanted to shiver. She wanted to freeze if it meant she could forget about Rayner and his touch, his kiss, his extraordinary lovemaking.

Hugging herself, she looked up for the sliver of moon. The rain had finally stopped, but the night sky was still cloudy. There was no light to show her the grounds, the outbuildings.

She might have been alone in a thick ocean of blackness with only the frigid wind as her companion, whipping her gown around her bare legs.

She turned to go back into her chamber, but some odd noise caught her attention. Pebbles skittering against the castle wall, perhaps. She turned slowly in a circle but still saw only the dark of night. Thinking it was her imagination, she pulled open the door, heading to the light and the warmth of the fire. In the instant before her foot crossed the threshold, arms grabbed her from behind. Thick, muscled forearms circled her. Just as her mind formed the spell to break free, a gloved hand pressed a cloth against her mouth and nose. Then darkness swallowed her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rayner had his hands full just trying to pick his way home in the blackest night he'd ever seen. That he literally had his hands full made it all the harder.

God, she had made it easy for him. Who would have expected to find her standing on the balcony? She might as well have opened the front door and bid him welcome. He knew well which terrace to choose. Had he not been in and out that balcony a dozen times? He'd brought the sleeping elixir because he'd expected to find her in her bed. He didn't want the household waking up to her screams. But administering the sodden cloth had kept him from the confrontation that he knew would come as soon as she awoke. Which wouldn't be long, according to the alchemist at home.

He held Kella nestled in the circle of his arms as they rode. Expecting her to be in bed, he'd brought a woolen cloak to wrap around her for the journey. Even through the layers of fabric, however, he could feel the ripe perfection of her bottom as it rubbed against his crotch with every swing of his horse's gait.

Despite the circumstances, he took pleasure in holding her in his arms again. He let his chin drop and buried his nose in her thick black hair, inhaling the familiar scent of jasmine. It had been a very long time, but that fragrance brought all of it back in seconds. The



memories coupled with her sweet cheeks against his crotch caused his dick to stir. He shifted in the saddle, hoping to find a bit of distance. She was going to be angry enough when she woke. He didn't need to throw any extra fuel onto her fire by grinding his swollen cock against her ass.

Even as he had that thought, she began to stir. He tightened his arms around her, glad that he'd thought to bind her wrists. He knew her strength. He didn't want to tangle with her in the woods. Better to get her to his home as quickly as possible.

When she gave a soft moan, he leaned close to her ear. "Shh. It's all right, Kella. You're safe."

"Rayner," she mumbled on a sweet sigh. Then her entire body went rigid. "Rayner!"

"And the lady awakens," he said with a chuckle.

She began to squirm, aware that her hands were bound before her. He sought to soothe her with his voice, even as his arms held her prisoner. "Best not to fight it, milady. I have kidnapped you."

"Have you lost your friggin' mind?"

"Kella, please be still. If we fall off the horse we could likely break our necks."

Amazingly, she managed to twist her body around enough to look at him. He could almost make out the emerald richness of her eyes. Oh, but there was definitely fire there.

"Just be calm. We are almost to the manor house. You know I won't hurt you."

She made a sound that was alarmingly like a growl, but she turned back around and sat still, though rigid in his arms.

He was not a man of vanity, but he couldn't help being pleased with himself that the kidnapping had gone so smoothly. She sat as regal as a queen in the circle of his arms astride his horse. So far, so good. Now he only had to send the message to her family and wait for them to respond.

Their ride was slow going in the dark and the cold, but eventually they reached the trail leading to his home. He handed his horse over to the surprised stable boy and prodded Kella into the castle. Finally they reached the room where he intended to hold her captive. He lit the fire that had been laid by his order and turned to face her.

He held out a hand. "Come and warm yourself."

She only glared in response. He knew that look too well. She had a stubborn streak that could make a man tear out all his hair. Fine. Let her be cold. It went against his grain to give ground, but he walked the few steps between them. Placing his hands on her shoulders, he pulled her cloak snugly around her. "It will be dawn soon. Try to get some sleep before the day begins."

"Must you leave my hands bound, *milord?*" She poured venom into the emphasis of his title.

He took her two hands in his own. His large, work-roughened hands dwarfed her more petite ones. Cradling them, he ran his thumbs over her palms in delicate circles. Then he lowered his head and placed a gentle kiss in the center of each. He was sure he felt her fingers curl just a bit in anticipation of stroking his cheek before she stifled the impulse. When he raised his head, he met her icy glare. "Yes," he said. "I think so for now."

Without another word, he let her hands fall, then turned and left her for what remained of the night.

\* \* \* \* \*

With a flick of her wrist, Kella cast a spell to remove the ropes that bound her. How foolish of Rayner to think that he could hold her against her will. But how fortunate for her that he had developed this ridiculous plan. She had not expected getting close to him to be this easy. Now all she had to do was make him think he wanted to help her. That shouldn't be too hard.

She rubbed her wrists as she turned slowly to examine the room. It was a rather small bedchamber, but it would do quite nicely. There was a window beside the bed. On the other side stood a small table with a pitcher of water. Some furs were stacked in the corner. She took a couple of them and threw them on the bed.

With one last spell to draw the heat from the fire closer to her, she snuggled into the furs and closed her eyes. It was no doubt going to be a busy day. She needed all the rest she could get.

### Chapter Three

Kella was sure she had only just closed her eyes when the loud creaking of the door hinges woke her. In the second it took her to realize where she was, the furs were flung away and she lay exposed in her nightgown.

“How did you get free?” Rayner bellowed.

She looked up at him, still not fully awake. “Is it the lack of sleep that makes you this disagreeable, or is that just for me?”

“I tied those knots myself.” He picked up the discarded pieces of rope and examined the ends. “Who helped you?”

Now she was awake and enjoying the perplexed look on his face as he studied the pieces of rope. It was almost as much fun to watch a man discover his failings as it was a mortal. Here she had the benefit of both. “I’m sure it wasn’t tied as tightly as you thought, milord.”

His raised eyebrows told her that he didn’t believe her. He knew that subservient tone wasn’t natural, and he probably guessed that she mocked him. It might be a better idea, she thought, to remember that he had kidnapped her, however it suited her plans.

“Now that you have me here ...” She pulled a fur close to her bosom. “... what do you intend to do with me?”

He stared, his steely blue eyes penetrating the distance between them so sharply she could almost feel the razor-fine blade slice into her soul. “I have brought you some clothes.” He reached for a bundle that he’d dropped on the floor and tossed it to her on the bed. “Get dressed. Breakfast will be here soon.”

With those words he was gone again, leaving her free to giggle at the way he’d puzzled over the ropes. Better be careful though, she thought as she reached for the clothing. It would never do to have him think she enjoyed this little escapade.

She picked up a fine linen chemise and shook it out. There was also a velvet gown in a rich shade of green shot through with strands of gold. But no shoes, she saw. He intended to leave her barefoot to thwart an escape? Or he simply hadn’t thought of them?

Just as she started to change into the clothes, a sound interrupted her. A rhythmic tapping came from the window. Dropping the clothes, she ventured to the wall and peered through the glass. “Schuyler!” Her spirits lifted when she recognized the falcon that had been her pet since childhood.

Quickly she opened the glass and let him into the room. He would have seen her leave last night and followed to be sure she was all right. As he perched on the small table, she stroked his feathers. “It’s all right, my friend. This is exactly what we want. Now you go back and carry a message for me.”

She looked quickly around the room, but there was nothing to use. Opening her hand, she mumbled a few words. A small quill and a scroll of parchment appeared in her palm. She scribbled a note to let her family know not to worry, then rolled it up and tied it to the leg of the bird. “All is well, my Schuyler.” She held out her arm for him. “Now go back home.”

The bird lifted off from his perch and sailed up into the blue of the morning sky. Kella reached to close the window against the autumn chill. As she turned around, the door crashed open for the second time.

There stood Rayner, hands on hips, blond hair falling in morning disarray over his forehead. She loved the way that one front piece curled. She had run her fingers through it many, many times. But she quickly dismissed that thought when she saw the storm in his expression.

"I told you to get dressed."

"And I will." She drew the fur more tightly around her. "If you will just leave me --"

In one long stride he was before her. "Leave you? *Leave* you, milady?" He jerked the fur away and left her shivering in her nightgown. "What do you think you possess that has not already been a feast for my eyes?"

A little tremble sped through her at his reference to their many intimate times together. Not wanting him to know, she squared her chin and stood defiant before him.

"Do you think I have forgotten the silk of your skin?" He laid a hand against her neck. "The scent of your hair?" He lifted a tangled tress and brought it to his nose. Dropping it, he let his hand graze her nipple. "The slope of your breasts?"

Instantly aroused, her body betrayed her. It was impossible to maintain her haughty attitude when her breasts ached for the stroke of his hands. Her nipples grew as tight as early buds at the thought of it. He must have seen it in her eyes. She knew the moment he recognized the desire that had always heated between them. His hand came back to her breast, holding it lightly in his palm while his thumb passed back and forth across the aching tip.

She sucked in her breath, but her gaze never wavered from his as he continued the exquisite torture with his thumb. The rough fabric of her gown only added to the sensation.

The lips of her pussy drew together as she struggled to keep from squirming, so badly did she want to feel his hands between her legs.

As if he read her mind, Rayner gathered up the folds of her nightgown and pulled it over her head. Naked but for her amulet on its silver chain, she stood before him, still not allowing herself to move for fear that she would drag him down to the bed with her and fuck him 'til neither of them could speak.

Her heart pounded as he laid a hand at her waist, still not speaking, still not releasing her from his penetrating gaze. His fingers trailed down along the curve of her hip to the tops of her thighs and sought the sweet darkness in the thick black curls between her legs. Using only one finger, he separated her slit and found the aching nub that was so desperate for his touch.

She stifled a cry and laid a steadying hand on his muscled forearm. She would come in only seconds, she knew, so starved was her body for his touch. His strong finger stroked the inner folds and circled her clit. "You are quite wet, milady."

His voice betrayed his own calm with the huskiness of want. Slowly he pulled his hand away and raised it to his own lips, sucking her juices from his fingertips. She watched, hungry, as his tongue swiped the length of his finger, wanting to feel that tongue on her.

She forced herself to breathe calmly, waiting to see what he would do next. But she was disappointed as he reached for the clothing and pulled the linen chemise over her head. Next he gathered the velvet morning gown and dragged it over her as well. With a not so gentle touch, he turned her around and pulled at the laces of the bodice, tightening them against her spine.

When he turned her back around, he smoothed the fabric against her cleavage and then dropped his hands to the sides. "Your breakfast will be here momentarily," he said.

Then he was gone.

Kella sank to the bed, barely able to breathe. Her entire body trembled from wanting him, wanting his fingers to keep rubbing her clit, wanting his cock to fill the void left aching since the last day he'd made love to her.

She leaned her head against the bedpost and closed her eyes. Could she play this dangerous game? Could she get the help she needed to save her lands and her people without losing her heart?

Perhaps it was already lost.



## Chapter Four

Rayner closed the large door and leaned against it, exhaling raggedly. How had he let that happen? She was a hostage, dammit, not his personal sex toy. His legs trembled from the sheer energy required to hold himself up after the restraint he'd used in walking away from her. He'd wanted to throw her down before the fire and fuck her until he'd forgotten every sleepless night, every empty day since he'd last touched her.

And she had wanted it. He hadn't missed the bare hunger in her expression when he'd pulled his hand away from her pussy. She wanted him to fuck her, wanted it as much as he did.

Drawing in a deep breath, he straightened to his full height and started away from her chamber and toward the kitchen to fetch some breakfast for her. But he had barely turned down the long corridor when Dag, his friend and mentor, stepped out of the shadows and fell into step beside him.

"A word, if you please, Lord Rayner."

If Dag called him by his title, this would not be a pleasant conversation. He had not conjured an excuse before the older man had a firm grip on his upper arm, propelling him

into a vacant chamber. Patiently, Dag took a torch from the wall and set the fireplace to blazing before turning toward Rayner.

"I just thought you ought to be aware, my lord ... there is talk that you have kidnapped Lady Kella, daughter of our good friend Torin, who was laid to rest this past day."

Rayner turned toward the hearth, avoiding the gaze of the man who knew his lies before they'd escaped his mouth. "I wouldn't say kidnap."

"Ah, then it is not true. You did not slink in under cover of darkness and sequester her in a locked chamber within?"

Now he lifted his head in his own defense and looked at Dag. "It is common practice."

The older man arched one silver brow. "Common practice?"

"These clans have controlled each other with hostages for hundreds of years."

To this Dag made no reply, just stood before Rayner, tall and strong, staring him down.

"It's true!"

"Is that what you told yourself when you bound her and took her away from her home and family?" He shook his head. "Your great-grandfather was a Viking invader. Your father and grandfathers struggled to be welcome in this land despite the bloody legacy thrust upon them. We have lived in peace all these many years of your life, and yet --"

Now he leaned closer, eyes scant inches away from Rayner's, as he spoke deliberately and with great strength. "You jeopardize all that we have gained here by taking Kella from her home."

It aggravated Rayner that Dag was always right, but he'd gotten used to it over the years. He let his guard down and spoke openly to his mentor. "It's the only way I could think of to get her back."

"Since going to her like a civilized man and courting her was out of the question."

"She threw me out!"

“Because you tried stealing her land as the way to win her heart? Did you learn nothing through all the lessons your father bade me teach you?” He never let his anger rise to the surface, but Rayner recognized the disapproval in Dag’s voice. “We exist peacefully with our neighbors here. Even if they do take hostages clan to clan. *We* do not.”

The truth of it battled inside Rayner against his desire to have Kella whatever the cost. He met the gaze of the older man, unwavering. “Today, we do.”

It was the disappointment in Dag’s eyes that bothered Rayner the most. But he stood firm as the older man turned away. Pausing at the door, Dag looked back at Rayner.

“Then at least feed her properly.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Kella jumped like a startled bird when the door opened. Here he was again, this time carrying a large tray. Her breakfast, she supposed. She wanted more than that, but she wasn’t likely to get it.

“Your breakfast, milady.” He set the tray on the small table beside the bed.

Despite the aromas of sausages and butter teasing her empty stomach, she wouldn’t give him the satisfaction. “I’m not hungry.”

That seemed to anger him. “Don’t be silly. You need to eat. Everyone needs food for strength.”

“I shall eat when I get home.”

He ran a hand through his hair, a sign of his impatience she recognized. “You are not going home soon, Kella. It is time you realized that.”

She went to the window and looked out, hoping for a wistful look as she played this charade with him. “Why not? What is this about?”

"It is very simple, Kella. I want your land. I have always wanted your land. For your safe return, Ninian will turn over to me the deeds to your manor and the surrounding village."

She felt confident that she could negotiate a better deal than that, but she must not let him know that he was offering exactly the help she required. She continued to stare out the window as she spoke. "A year ago, when you dallied with me, was that for the land as well?"

The silence stretched as she waited for his answer. A yes would devastate her. A no would show his weakness. Her heart pounded as she waited for the word. She closed her eyes, barely breathing. Finally she heard his hand on the door. "Eat. You need the strength."

And then he left.

Coward! She spun around to see only the door as it slammed behind him. She paced the tiny room, fuming. That he had not answered the question gave her hope that he truly cared for her, but what did it matter if he was promised to another? She tortured herself with those questions for the next few minutes until he came crashing through the door again.

She squared her shoulders and lifted her chin. "Don't you ever knock?"

"I don't have to." He carried a heavy iron manacle which he fastened to the bedpost. "Everything here is mine." Reaching out, he took her arm and snapped the other end of the manacle around her wrist. "Including you."

The movement forced her onto the bed, but she managed as much dignity as possible. As if the irons could hold her! The very second he left the room, she'd have them off. But for now, it humiliated her that he would think of her as his possession. "You may trick my family into giving you my land, but you will never possess me."

Towering over her, he bent to lay a hand on her cheek. "You have belonged to me since the first day I laid eyes upon you."

She felt the glint that lit her eyes. "At the pool? When your teenage cock twitched at the very sight of me?"

His glare turned icy. "We have never spoken of that day. You knew I watched you?"

Of course she knew, the idiot. She had heard him coming and removed the spell that hid them from anyone's view. It was by careful design that he spotted her sunning on the rock. She had wanted him, plain and simple. It didn't take magick to bewitch a male. "You enjoyed watching me."

"As much as you enjoyed baring yourself before me." His embarrassment at being found out overclouded reason. "You slut."

The word was a barb that pricked her soul. He knew her better than that. He knew that all her sexual favors were for him and him alone. There had been no one before; there had been no one after. She raised a hand to slap him at the insult, but he was too quick. She lunged, but the manacle stopped her. She could not reach him with her hand, so she kicked at him with her bare foot.

His right hand grasped her ankle and held it taut. "And just where did you intend to place that kick, milady? Here?" He laid her foot at the crotch of his breeches. "Was it your wish to bruise my balls? Make them even bluer than they have been of late?"

Feeling his cock stir against the sole of her foot, she raised her gaze to his face and found there a wicked smile. "Yes, you make me hard, Kella." Slowly he moved her foot in a small circle against his aching balls. "You have not lost that talent."

"I did not think I had." She had always thrived on the power of affecting him so swiftly and so deeply. The exhilaration came to her now, even as her body responded to the promise of sex. Her nipples hardened and strained against the fabric of her underclothes. Slowly, she moved her foot in a gentle rhythm up and down his shaft. It grew even harder at her touch. She worked her toes to the top of his breeches and tugged at the waistband.

His hand tightened around her ankle. With his other hand he loosened his pants and pushed them down. His cock sprang free, as magnificent as she had imagined in the long and lonely nights without him. As he watched her face, she fucked him with the arch of her foot.

Up and down, she rubbed him from the base of the shaft to the red and swollen tip. He drew in a breath when her big toe found the slippery fluid on the very end.

Still she continued the dance on his cock. He closed his eyes and threw back his head, his fingers moving on her ankle, guiding her to the most sensitive spot. Leaning back, she raised her other leg and encased his shaft in both of her feet. Her heels sank gently into his balls as the tips of her toes stroked the long shaft.

"Kella!" He gave a strangled cry, then pushed her feet away. Quickly he pulled off his boots and stepped out of his pants, kicking them away.

She felt the moisture flood into her pussy as she watched him. He wanted to fuck her, and she was going to let him. Nothing in the world mattered except having him inside her until she screamed. She scooted backward on the bed to make room for him. Then she spread her thighs. "Yes, Rayner. Yes."

On his knees on the bed, he shoved the heavy gown up around her waist and ran his hands over her belly, along her hips and up the insides of her thighs. With one hand still locked to the bed frame, she raised the other one over her head and grasped the intricate wooden bar that formed the headboard. Bracing herself, she lifted her hips toward Rayner, inviting him.

He rose above her, his hands on either side of her shoulders. She looked into his eyes as his cock bobbed against the entrance to her mound. "Now," she whispered.

She felt the wet tip rubbing against her in the soft tangle of curls. He teased her with the tip inside her thighs, along the edge of her slit, against her clit. "Rayner, now."

"What, Kella? Now *what?*"

He teased her aching pussy, prolonging the moment of joining with her. But she felt him tremble, knew his need was as great as hers. He could not last much longer. She lifted her hips, straining to take him inside. "Now," she whispered again. "Fuck me."

She heard a low moan and could not tell whether it was hers or his as he slid into her. He was long and hard, filling her emptiness with a heat that had been too long missing. The manacle kept her from embracing him, so she wrapped her legs around his waist and let him lead the ride.

He slid into her, fucking her with a desperation that matched her own. He sank all the way to his balls into her hot pussy, then pulled his shaft almost completely out before he pushed into her again. Each time he pumped into her, she rose to meet him to better feel the rub against her swollen clit. Too many sensations to name filled her as he increased the rhythm, stroking more rapidly.

Rayner plunged into her again and again as she reached for the perfect release that was just beyond her grasp. It began deep inside her, coiled in some hidden recess within her body. A vibration, a hum, a tremor that rippled outward in every direction. He must have felt it too because his breath came in gasps as he thrust faster and faster into her, building and building with every stroke until finally, finally she arched her back and rose one more time to meet him before the ultimate cry sprang from her.

“Rayner!” She shouted his name even as his come shot into her, thick and hot. She could feel his cock pulse from the release. He collapsed on her, his hot breath fanning her neck. She lay very still, savoring the feel of him inside her, on top of her. Her arms ached from the awkward position of the chain, but she did not move or speak.

Her heartbeat began to still, as did his. His breaths became more measured, more even. Finally, he rolled off of her and sat up. He snagged his pants with a foot and pulled them on, standing to fasten them. He looked down at her, her skirts still bunched around her waist, baring her pussy.

“Yes, milady,” he said as he reached for his boots. “You are my possession.”

Then he turned and left, his boots in his hand.

## Chapter Five

It wasn't one of his best days. First, he'd been up all night kidnapping Kella. That after he'd already made the long ride from manor to manor once that day. Then he'd fucked her like a teenager. Enjoyable, but it took a lot out of a man to put forth that much energy.

While it would have been desirable to draw her close to him and snuggle beneath the furs while the fire warmed the room and the autumn rain beat on the windowpane, that scenario didn't really work for the lord of the manor and his attendant responsibilities.

So Rayner went about his business as if he didn't have Kella chained to a bed in his castle. As the day wore on, the lack of sleep and the excess of impatience began to take a toll. It was nearly supper when Dag cornered him in his private chamber.

"How long do you intend to keep her chained like an animal?"

He ran a hand through his unruly hair and sighed. "Until I am no longer tormented by the very thought of her."

Chuckling, Dag placed a boot on the hearth and leaned in toward the fire. "So until you're dead, then."

"Why does it always sound like you're on her side?"



"I didn't realize there were sides." He removed his foot from the hearth and straightened to his full height, which didn't come close to Rayner's, but was imposing all the same. "It is my job to point out your mistakes."

Feeling like a caged animal himself, Rayner paced the chamber. "The mistake I made was letting her get away a year ago. Now I have her back. It will be all right." He stopped and looked at his mentor. "I will make it all right."

"By keeping her prisoner? You do remember, don't you, all the animals that you wanted to tame as pets when you were a boy? The falcon? The fox that you found in the trap struggling to free itself? What did I tell you then? What did your father tell you?"

Rayner knew it was the events of the past twenty-four hours that had his anger so near the surface, but he couldn't quite stop it before it got out. "I am not that boy!" he shouted. "And she is not a wild fox!"

But Dag did not rise to the bait. He remained as calm as he always was, the steady influence that had helped shape Rayner's life. "Then stop behaving like a boy. And stop treating her like the fox."

What he really wanted was to pick up something and smash it against the stone walls. What he did instead was sink into the chair before the fire and stretch his long legs out in front of him. "You are right," he said.

And this was the main thing that had so unsettled him during the long day. How angry must she be? How upset? How lonely? It was a horrible way to treat anyone, and he'd done it to the woman he loved. In his mind he'd justified it by telling himself that it was the only way to make things work out for both of them. He allowed himself to admit now what a stupid idea it had been.

"You are right," he repeated as he stood. "I will go to her now."

All the way down the corridor and up the twisting stairs that led to the chamber where he held Kella, Rayner debated the best things to say to her. He had to let her know how

much he cared for her, but she was certain to be angry. He couldn't blame her for that. It was time to stop playing this stupid game and just be honest with her. He saw now how easy that would be. This was Kella. They didn't need pretenses. They knew each other inside out.

But when he opened the door and saw her standing at the window, looking out at the rain, he forgot all he'd told himself earlier. "How the hell did you get out of the chain?"

Slowly she turned only her head to pin him with her rich emerald eyes. "You have left me here alone this entire day like some trophy you've captured, and you dare to question how I broke the chain?"

He rushed forward and picked up the pieces of metal that lay discarded on the bed. "This is not possible."

"Apparently it is."

Holding the broken pieces in his hands just like he had done earlier with the rope, he looked up at her, a new kind of awe growing inside him. Could it be? He had heard these rumors his entire life, but he had always discarded them. Besides, wouldn't she have told him before this? Wouldn't he have noticed something? He saw the firelight glint on the silver disc around her neck. He had never seen her without it. "You are a witch."

The words came in a flush of breath from his lips. Not a question, but still he looked to her for confirmation. She continued only to stare at him, her arms folded serenely across her chest. She was beginning to threaten him just a little, the way her eyes sparked with green flames. Instinctively, he took a step backward, but he was already against the edge of the bed.

"Sit down, Rayner."

"Kella, what --"

"I said sit down."

He felt a push against his chest and found himself seated on the bed. And yet she had not moved as much as a twitch. She stood in the same pose, arms folded, long delicate fingers resting lightly against the opposite arm.

All of his life he had heard about the Druids. He had seen the stones. He had listened to the stories of the old people as they talked about coming to this strange new land and finding mysterious things that they could not understand. But he was a man who needed to see things for himself, and so he'd pushed it aside in his mind.

Until now. Now when he was face to face with irrefutable evidence. And it was the woman he loved. Holy hell, could this day get any worse?

"Kella --"

"I would advise you to shut up."

He didn't dare protest. What might she do to him? Especially now when she was clearly full of anger. So he sat perfectly still, not speaking, just looking at her, waiting to see what she would do next.

For a long moment, she continued to stare. Then she took a step forward, so that only an arm's length separated them.

"Now," she said in a voice as sweet as an innocent maid's. "Let's see how *you* like being the trapped animal."

In the instant that a protest formed on his lips, he felt that swoosh of energy again and was left speechless. Somehow he was pushed backward again until he sat against the headboard. With a loud clank, his left arm slapped against the frame, encased in an iron manacle. Before he had a chance to speak, the same thing happened to his right arm.

He pulled against the irons, but they held fast. He could struggle, but it was useless. He was completely at her mercy. And yet that didn't scare him. This was Kella, after all.

The bands at his wrists were just tight enough to hold him without hurting. He looked up at her, waiting to see what she would do next.

She tilted her head, as if contemplating a variety of options. Her gaze raked over him from his bound hands along his chest down to his feet and back up again, settling at his crotch. Instantly his dick began to swell. Was she doing that, or was it just the anticipation of what she *could* do that had him stirring?

“Kella --”

She held up one hand, and his clothing ripped apart and fell to the sides, leaving him nude before her. She swiped her other hand through the air, and her dress and chemise fell in a pool at her feet. The last of the daylight left them, leaving only the fireplace to illuminate the room. Kella's skin glowed as the flickering flames danced shadows around the room. Rayner feasted upon the sight and felt his body harden to granite.

Her dark hair fell almost to her waist in soft curls. Her breasts were round and perfect, tipped with rosy nipples that pebbled as he studied them. Her long legs were smooth and sleek, meeting in the dark juncture that was his paradise. He never grew tired of looking at her. If his hands were not bound, he would have them on her silky skin right now.

But his memory was vivid. He cupped his palms and knew the heavy feel of her breasts. He imagined flicking his thumbs across her tightened nipples and remembered the soft moan that would escape her. He ached to move his tongue across the inside of her thigh and listen to the sharp intake of her breath as he found her clit.

That these were only memories meant nothing to his body. His cock stood tall and strong as she continued to gaze at him. As he watched, she bent and took his feet in her hands, pulling his legs until he lay flat on the bed, his arms above his head, straining against the chains. Then cuffs appeared around first one ankle, then the other, locking him into place.

Spread-eagled and helpless, he could only imagine what plan she had for him. She seemed to ponder it for a moment, looking up and down his body, as if she couldn't decide where to start. He strained against the irons that held him on the bed, but could find no

release. She could do anything she wanted, and he could do absolutely nothing to stop her. He did not know that feeling, but it intrigued him. Always the aggressor, never had he known the role of passive participant. His body grew ever more taut at the prospect.

“What next, my witch?” he teased her.

“Witch?” She knelt between his legs on the bed. “You think only a witch could hold this power over you?”

She placed one hand on each of his thighs. Just that delicate contact made his cock jump in response. He longed to touch her, but all he could do was watch to see what would happen next.

“Is it a witch who does this?” Bending, she laid her tongue at the very base of his cock and swiped slowly and gently to the tip. Her hair fell in a silken curtain around her and caressed him from thigh to chest. She looked up at him. “Is it?”

He could barely breathe, and she expected him to speak? “No, Kella. It is just you. Just you.”

She met his eyes for a long moment then lowered her head again. To his delight, she bathed his shaft with her velvet tongue. Up and down she stroked him, over and over, her hands still resting lightly on his inner thighs.

When he thought the pleasure could not possibly become more intense, she bent further forward and took his entire cock into her mouth. He pulled against the restraints, wishing to get closer, but she had complete control. She took him all the way into her mouth, then exquisitely slowly she rode the shaft until only the tip was between her lips. Then back down again, encasing him in the velvet warmth of her mouth.

Up and down, sucking and licking, until he thought he might explode. Many times in the past she had laved him with her talented tongue, but never like this. The helplessness from the irons around his wrists and ankles heightened the intensity of the experience. He thrust his hips forward as much as he could. When he thought it could not possibly get any

better, she slid his cock out of her mouth and worked her way down to his balls. One by one she took each orb into her mouth, suckled it, and then let it rest to attend to the other.

Back and forth she worked with her tongue and lips until Rayner thought he would go crazy from the sensations. His entire body trembled as the heat and pressure built in his groin. He wanted to fuck her. He wanted to be so deep inside of her pussy that he couldn't tell where he ended and she began.

But he was helpless. Helpless and slowly going insane as her tongue continued to work on him. And at the very moment when he thought he would come, hot and thick into her mouth, she released him. How did she know that? How did she know that one second longer was all he could stand?

"Kella --"

"Do you like it, Rayner? Do you like being locked up and at my mercy?"

Who was this woman? Where had sweet and loving Kella gone? Or had this wanton witch been there all the time? "Yes." He could barely rasp out an answer. "Yes, I do like it. But I want to fuck you."

She leaned over him, her hair sweeping across his abdomen, her nipples grazing his chest. "You want what?"

He closed his eyes and begged for control. He didn't want to spurt all over her like a randy teenager, but just the incidental motion of her body across his was going to make him explode, so primed did she have him from her perfect mouth. "I want to fuck you, Kella."

Like a snake, she slithered forward until she was stretched out on top of him. His cock was pressed between their bodies. His balls ached for the release he only hoped would come soon. As she slid on him, the moisture in her slit bathed him. God, he wanted to touch her, to roll his thumb across her clit, to make her whimper just as she was making him.

She arched her hips and rubbed her pussy against his shaft, up and down, with her eyes closed and head thrown back. He could feel it each time the tip of his dick met her clit. He

moved his hips, trying to find the entrance, trying his best to sheathe his aching cock inside her velvet wetness. “Kella --”

“What, Rayner?”

Gods be damned, but he was going to beg. He wanted to fuck her so badly that he was about to beg for it. Never in his life had he felt this way. But if he did not fuck her soon, he would die. “Kella, please let me fuck you.”

“Please?” She slithered to a sitting position, her slick pussy just above his dick. “Did you say please, Rayner?”

“You heard me.”

“I heard you beg for it.”

He could barely stand the tension in his balls. “Yes, Kella. You heard me beg.” His breath was coming in short, hot bursts. “Please let me fuck you.”

“Since you asked so nicely ...” She raised her hips, the tip of his cock just barely touching the inside of her crease. Then slowly, so painfully slowly, she lowered herself, taking his cock into her warm, sweet pussy.

He all but groaned as she sheathed him. Then she began to ride him, moving her hips in an erotic dance as his dick settled deeper and deeper inside her. In the firelight, he watched her body move on his, her dark hair fanning around her like a cloak. He pulled against the chains, but he could not move. He wanted to caress her tits, to squeeze her nipples, to guide her hips as they rolled on top of him. But he could not move. He could only lie on the bed and watch as she fucked him.

She looked directly into his eyes while she rode him. Her hands were light upon his abdomen, but as she neared her own peak, she straightened and moved one hand behind her back to cup his balls. The added sensation was more than he could take. His shaft was white-hot, and his balls tight. He felt it start at the very base of his dick. The thick fluid pulsed along the ridges of his cock and shot out as his entire body convulsed. His hips bucked,

trying to get even deeper inside her, and he heard a strangled cry. From his lips or hers? He didn't know. He didn't care. She was coming around him, even as his dick continued to throb. He felt her pussy tighten and contract.

And then she collapsed on top of him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Senseless, Kella mumbled the words that made the irons vanish. Now that it was over, now that she'd found her release, now that she had proven her point, she wanted his arms around her. If he noticed the change in her attitude, he didn't say. Gently he wrapped his arms around her and held her against his heart.

She lay that way for long moments, just absorbing the feel of him, letting his heart pound against her cheek. Her breath grew long and regular just as she felt his grow calm from the rise and fall of his chest. His long fingers tangled in her hair. He stroked her lightly. Very lightly.

She hated to break the spell, but things were different now. She lifted her head and looked at him. She had expected him to be near sleep, but his brilliant blue eyes were alert and watching her. She sat up and pulled a fur around herself, suddenly shy.

Now would come the questions. She'd had all day to think of answers. She hoped they were good ones.

He raised his hands to her face and swept her hair back, pulling it into a tight fist behind her head. All the time, his eyes never left hers. Slowly he opened his fingers and let her hair fall around her. She shook her head to get it out of her face. He laid one hand against her cheek and caressed her with his thumb. "So all day long today, you could have left at any time."

She tried not to lean into his palm, but she couldn't help herself. "Yes."

"Then why did you stay?"



*Because I love you!* she wanted to scream. *Because I can't stop loving you no matter how hard I try or how many potions I drink!* But she couldn't let him know that. She gave him a sly smile. "And miss what we just did?"

"Gods above, Kella. That was amazing." With a hand behind her neck, he pulled her face to his for another kiss. "But that isn't really why you stayed."

"No." She struggled to keep her voice from trembling. She wanted to tell him everything, to lay her troubles at his feet and ask for his help. He had loved her, after all. But she couldn't take the chance. He was still after her land. She couldn't hand it to him with nothing in return. She needed help, but not at the cost of losing everything.

His thumb brushed across her cheek. "Why do you hesitate, milady?"

She summoned a saucy smile. "Call it girlish vanity. I just wanted you to know that you do not have control over me."

"You made that point extremely well." He rolled to his side, keeping her tight in the circle of his arms. "And yet ..." He raised a hand and cupped one breast in his large palm. Despite herself, she gasped. "I have always found it rather easy to make you tremble and moan with just my hands."

Again he aroused her, this time with the pad of his thumb across her nipple. So soon her body craved more of him. So soon her nerve endings ignited with desire. She drew in a breath and let her own hand go on a search as well. She found his shaft, relaxed and spent. Even as her fingers curled around the base, it began to swell and stiffen in her grip. "I would say there is no contest, Rayner. We each have this effect on the other. It has always been so."

"Mmmm ..." Smiling, he closed his eyes as she ran her fingers up and down his cock. She stroked it a few times, then felt for the solid weight of his balls against her palms. "My God, you have made me hard again."

"I can feel that." She continued to stroke. "What do you intend to do with it?"

Smiling, he opened his eyes and met her gaze. "I intend, milady, to fuck you like a tavern whore until you scream from the pleasure."

"Braggart," she teased, but he lowered his head to take the nipple he'd been stroking into his mouth. Her fingers tightened around his dick as she threw back her head. The sensation shot through her from the swollen nipple to the crease between her legs. She wanted him in there, hard and swift.

She was still wet from before, but as his insistent lips tugged on her breast, the moisture pooled in her pussy yet again. It would be a slippery ride, but a ride she intended to take, nonetheless. Penetration was trickier lying face to face on their sides, but not impossible. Kella raised her leg and wrapped it around Rayner, settling her heel against his fine ass. The hand that still circled his shaft guided him toward the waiting crease. His hand left her breast to caress her thigh and draw her ever tighter around him.

Kella moaned as Rayner slid into her. Any moment that his cock was not imbedded deep in her pussy was a moment of loss for her. He filled her up, made her complete. How had she lived these long months without this? How had she not shriveled and died from the lack of this exquisite torture? She needed Rayner as surely as she needed the water from the stream and the air in the hills. He was her elixir of life. Without him, she was an empty shell.

But now, now as he shifted to take his ride deeper into her valley, she hugged her thigh around him and closed her eyes. If this was to be all that she ever had, then she would savor each moment.

As she met his thrusts, his hand went to her ass, pushing her in the rhythm that he wanted. She responded, meeting him mound to balls each time he plunged, digging her heel into him for more power.

"Kella." Thrusting, he whispered her name. "Kella, open your eyes."

She obeyed, heavy-lidded from desire, meeting the Nordic ice of his gaze.

"Look at me when you fuck me."

“I know who I fuck, Rayner.” She threw back her head and laid a hand on his chest, but never let her gaze waver. “I know who fucks me.”

“It was never better. Never better, Kella. You are the only woman who makes me this crazy with desire.”

“That’s comforting to hear with your dick inside me.” She tightened the muscles in her thighs and brought him closer. “Shut up and fuck me.”

Laughing, he bent to bite playfully at her neck. But even as she felt her orgasm begin to build, he pulled out of her. The loss was overwhelming. “Rayner --”

“Shhh ...” He silenced her protest with a hand to her slit. “Not yet. It will not be over yet.” But even as his fingers stroked the fluid velvet between her legs, she neared climax again. He must have felt it because he stopped and left her hanging yet again.

“Turn over, Kella. I want to take you from behind.”

Her eyes widened in anticipation. There was nothing about making love with Rayner that she did not like. But some things excited her more than others. This was one. They both sat up. She moved to crouch on her hands and knees, presenting her ass for Rayner to behold.

“Gods above, Kella.” He ran a hand along the slope of her spine, down to caress each cheek, then back up along her rib cage to cup her breast. “You are more beautiful, more woman than I remembered in my fantasies.”

Pride swelled in her at his admiration. She turned her head to look at him over her shoulder. “So you have missed me, Lord Rayner?”

“Despite everything, Kella, whatever came between us, you have to know sex is not always this good between a man and a woman.”

She shook her head, her hair fanning around her as she did. “And how would I know that?”

Disappointment showed in the furrowing of his brows. "You have had others as splendid as this?"

"No."

He positioned himself on his knees behind her, his hands on her ass. "Then what?"

His cock rubbed against her cheeks. She could feel the strength and hardness of its length as he teased her with the tip. She faced forward and moved her hands to the bed's headboard, seeking the leverage she would need to move against him once he entered her.

His dick slid against the slick folds of her pussy. "What, Kella? Why would you not know?"

With his hands gripping her, he found the entrance to her pussy and eased forward. She braced her hands against the headboard and pushed back, taking him all the way into her. "Because there has been no other."

That knowledge seemed to quicken his desire as he plunged and withdrew, plunged and withdrew, setting the pace. She felt him deeper inside of her from this position. The tip of his cock, she was sure, nudged farther and farther with each thrust. He filled her so completely that she could barely think.

And when she was sure there were no sensations left to feel, he moved his hands from her ass to her breasts. Cupping one in each hand, he teased the aching nipples with his fingers. He stroked faster and trailed one hand down along her rib cage to her mound. Fingering his way into her seam, he found the moistened pearl, swollen and ready for his attention.

She gasped and gripped the headboard more tightly, hanging on with every ounce of energy she could summon. He was thrusting more deeply into her than she had ever imagined possible, all the while torturing her clit with his persistent fingers. As hard as she could, she pushed back against him with every thrust, hungry to take him deeper and deeper inside of her until finally she could stand no more. Every muscle in her body contracted as

the climax rolled over her from pussy to nipples to toes. It crested and curled inside out, and she screamed with the shuddering release.

Rayner, too, came with a thundering cry, his seed spurting forth into her. She felt it, hot and wet, bathing her inner walls. Her pussy throbbed and pulsed around him as slowly her breath came back. Slowly her pulse steadied. Slowly her fingers relaxed their grip on the dark wood.

Spent, his cock slipped out of her. His arms came around her, and he raised her to him. They were both on their knees, her back nestled against his broad chest. He wrapped his arms around her and softly kissed the juncture of her neck and shoulder. "I should have known you were a witch," he said, moving his lips over her skin. "Because you cast this spell over me long ago."

She smiled at that, but a tremble shot through her, reminding her of who she was and why she was there. "I am not supposed to use it for my own gain."

"Don't worry yourself about it. There was no magick needed to have me do this with you." He gathered her hair into one large fist and let his chin rest on her bare shoulder. "Oh, how I've missed you."

She leaned back, deeper into his strong embrace. "And I you."

But left unspoken was their reason for parting. Agnetha's name had not been mentioned. Kella let him ease her down onto the bed. He rose to bank the fire, then returned to lie beside her, pulling the furs comfortably around them. So he intended to sleep beside her all night? Would no one miss him?

She lay her head on his chest, feeling his heart beat, strong and steady. She could not allow herself to care about it. Not as long as the future of her family was at stake.

## Chapter Six

The rosy cast of dawn crept in through the window when next she opened her eyes. The manor would be stirring to life. Chores begun. Animals tended. She lifted her head from Rayner's chest. He had remained the entire night. While it pleased her tremendously, it also troubled her. What was his plan for her? To keep her as a concubine? What would happen if Ninian sent the land documents he requested? What then?

She dismissed it all from her mind. Waking beside Rayner was too rare a treat to waste with worries. She relished this uncommon chance to study him while he slept. His blond hair curled over his forehead. His lashes lay like a Chinese fan against his cheeks, hiding the ice blue of his piercing eyes. His face was beautiful to her with its sculpted planes and slight dimple at the chin.

He was a beautiful man. Strong, too, she thought as she allowed her hand to glide over the muscles of his arm, along the line of his shoulder and down to the firm ridges of his abdomen. True, he was lord of the manor, but he worked side by side with those in the stable, the fields, the woodshop, and the forest. He was a physical man, not the soft, bookish sort.

His skin was fair, but springs and summers in the sun had tanned him to a light bronze and bleached the hair on his chest to a golden sheen. She let her hungry fingers feast on the feel of him, so long had they gone wanting for a touch of him.

Little by little, the rosy hues lightened as the sun crested the hills to the east. A rooster crowed in the yard. Whether from the sound or from the delicate tracing of Kella's fingers on his skin, Rayner stirred. He opened his eyes and smiled, capturing her wandering fingers in one hand.

"My Kella." He raised her fingers to his lips and kissed them lightly. "How nice to wake with you. I thought perhaps it had all been a dream."

"No dream." She propped her head on her open palm to better look at him in the morning light. "But the sun brings a new day with questions to face and answers to find."

He circled her hand with his and held it against his heart. "Questions?"

"Surely you do not intend to hold me here." She pulled her hand from his grasp. "As if you could."

"Details, milady. Details." He captured her hand again. "We shall work out an arrangement that benefits all."

An arrangement? Her heart felt heavy at that word. What sort of arrangement could possibly make her happy? As much as she loved her family, she did not think she could live as Rayner's mistress, even if it meant their financial survival. Nothing short of marriage to him would satisfy her, and that option was not available. Just the very thought of sharing him with another woman made her stomach twist into knots.

"Don't let it trouble you," he said as he slid his hand behind her neck and pulled her to him for a kiss.

And how could she worry when his lips slid across hers? When his tongue probed inside her mouth? When his hands moved over her skin? This morning kiss awoke her entire body. He pulled her forward until she lay across him, her nipples hardening as they brushed

the hair on his chest. How exquisite the feeling of arousal at his hand! She reached for his cock and found him hard and ready for her again.

"Like last night," she said, throwing a thigh across his body to sit on him as she had done when he was chained. "Except this time, I want your hands free to roam my body."

"Gladly, milady."

He cupped both breasts in his large hands as she moved on him, searching for him. Already her pussy was wet in anticipation of the ride. He gripped her hips and guided her as she found the tip of his cock. Closing her eyes, she arched her back and shook her hair out of the way as she eased her body down, taking him into her inch by throbbing inch.

"Ah, Kella," he groaned as she began to move on him. She murmured in response as he filled her.

"Rayner!"

The lovers jumped at the shriek of his name. Kella whipped her head around to see Agnetha standing in the doorway, her hand on the latch. As if a child caught in a petty theft, Kella's cheeks flamed. At the same time her heart all but exploded in her chest. Here was the reality that must be faced, but please the gods, not like this. Not naked with Rayner buried deep inside her.

Swiftly Rayner gathered Kella close and turned, grabbing the furs to throw around her, shielding her nudity with his own body from the intruder at the door. "Agnetha, get out!"

"I will not! Not until you explain why *she* is here!"

Hidden now beneath the furs, Kella struggled to find a space to see what happened. Rayner leaned in and whispered something to her, something she couldn't understand. It might have been an apology, or a phrase meant to soothe her. She couldn't tell, so loudly did her heart pound in her chest.

And then he left her. He rose from the bed in all his regal naked beauty and wrapped a fur around him as he yelled at Agnetha to leave. But Agnetha stood her ground, hand



gripping the door latch so tightly her knuckles turned white. With a single glance back over his shoulder at Kella, he grabbed Agnetha by the elbow and propelled her from the room.

The moment she was alone, Kella flung the furs back from the bed and got up. Her hands balled into fists as she paced the small chamber. How foolish! How childlike! How ridiculously optimistic! To think that her life could entwine with Rayner's when she had known for all these months, season past season, that he could not be hers. That he would never be hers.

She set her chin and dashed tears from her cheeks, grabbing the garments from the floor beside the hearth. And even if Agnetha did not stand in the way, she thought as she stepped into the heavy gown, it would not matter now. Now he knew that she descended from Druids. When he had the time to think about it, he would be frightened and repulsed by it.

Bewitching every latch that blocked her path through the castle, Kella found her way to a courtyard. The sun had fully risen now, but frost still sparkled like crystals on the ground. She shivered and pulled the cloak more tightly around her as she hurried to the stables.

Peering around the doorway at the horses within, she muttered a short charm to make a bridle fall from its peg on the farthest wall. When the stable boy went to see what happened, Kella ducked into the closest stall and led a magnificent black steed out into the sunlight. She had neither saddle nor reins, but she had been riding since she was a toddler. Easily she vaulted onto the horse's back and took off across the grounds, her fingers wound in the thick mane.

The cold wind seeped into her cloak, but she ignored it as her heart beat in time to the black steed's huge hooves on the frosty ground. Digging her knees into his muscled sides, she coaxed more speed from him until soon they reached the bottom of the hill. She turned briefly for a last glimpse of Rayner's castle before heading into the forest toward home.

\* \* \* \* \*

“How the hell did she get into the castle?”

Rayner stormed into the library, shouting before he even saw Dag sitting next to the window, an open book on his lap. He looked up calmly at the intrusion. “As I recall, you kidnapped her.”

“Not Kella!” He stabbed his fingers through his hair, so intense was his exasperation. “Agnetha!”

Dag slowly closed the book and laid it on the table next to him. “As we speak, your father spins in his grave.”

“I know. I know. I know.” Rayner threw himself into a chair and stretched his long legs out, propping his boot heels on the hearth. “What in the hell is wrong with me? This is not like me. I’m never this flustered, this out of sorts, this ...” He threw his hands up in the air. “... stupid!”

Dag studied his fingertips, fitting his hands together as the point of an arrow. “When you were twelve.”

“But I’m not twelve. I’m twice that! It’s time I was married and settled in. There should be offspring, strong young boys to help me and to carry on the line.”

“And did you not just say that your betrothed is even now within the castle?”

“God’s blood! I do not want Agnetha! I’ve never wanted Agnetha!”

Dag nodded slightly. “I think the fact that you are unmarried at four and twenty shows that to all of us. Including the lady in question.”

He brought his feet to the floor with a loud clunk. “Agnetha knows I don’t care for her? How? I’ve always been kind to her.”

“Well, there is the fact that you called off the wedding.”

“My father died! It is not proper to celebrate a union while mourning a parent.”

“Oh, too true.” Dag nodded again. “And so you have rescheduled the nuptials for when?”

Rayner muttered a curse. If he lived to see a century pass, this old man would still be there, throwing daggers at him. And yet, his aim was always true. His father’s passing had been a sorrowful event, but Rayner had welcomed the opportunity to postpone the wedding. Of course he had not set a new date. He didn’t want to marry Agnetha, despite his late father’s wishes.

“If you don’t intend to marry the girl, perhaps you should give her leave to marry another.”

Rayner lifted a brow. “This marriage was arranged before my birth. How am I to break the promise made between our families?”

“Have you spoken with her?”

“Of course I have. Just this morning when I steered her out of the chamber where I --” He stopped abruptly, remembering the scene Agnetha stumbled upon.

Sighing, Dag stood and went to the fire, poking at the wood to bring the flames higher. “Just for a moment, let’s think of how Agnetha must feel. Knowing that you love another woman, would she be that eager to marry you? What kind of life would she have, constantly wondering whether you have ridden over the meadow for a tryst with Kella?”

“It was never for either of us to decide. Happy or not, this union must go forth.”

“Why?”

Rayner stared at the flames leaping toward the chimney and the cold outside. Why indeed? Because a noble man did not dishonor his family by breaking vows long made.

He turned his face toward his mentor and spoke quietly. “It is not my choice to make.”

“A small parcel of land, perhaps the far edge of the forest where you have no care to ride, could be a soothing balm on the injury of broken bonds.”

Land! Rayner could no more give up a parcel of land than cut off his arm. Taught to respect the land, to honor it all his life, he had no wish to give up even a handful of earth. "I cannot."

The older man arched a brow. "You cannot? You would rather marry a woman you do not love, give up the lifetime of happiness you deserve? Over a parcel of land?"

It was impossible. The proposition went against everything his father had taught him. Land was always the most valuable commodity. But Agnetha's father had long expressed his interest in the edge of the forest nearest his own estate. He knew he could strike a deal with the man and untangle himself from the fate he did not choose, and be free to live his life with the woman he truly loved. The woman who stimulated his brain as well as his body. The woman who even now was alone and likely afraid in the chamber above.

Still, doubts crept in. "There is a problem."

Dag chuckled. "Only one?"

"One that will require some finesse. Kella thinks I kidnapped her in order to obtain her land in ransom."

Dag laid down the poker and turned toward Rayner, a small smile lighting his face. "And why would she think that?"

"Stop smirking at me! It is as if this entire scenario were arranged for your amusement!"

At that the old man threw back his head and laughed. "You have been my source of amusement since your father set you in my charge at your birth. Not a day has passed that you did not bring me much to smile over."

He laid a hand on Rayner's shoulder. "I have taught you well, as your father intended. You will figure it out." He ambled toward the door.

Rayner rubbed at his temples where a headache that promised to be a giant throwing boulders against his skull had just started to chink. "There is still one other problem."

Dag stopped and turned back toward the fireplace. Propping one boot on the hearth, he waited until Rayner met his gaze. “You mean the magick?”

Rayner’s first reaction was surprise, but Dag always knew everything. Why would this be different? “You already knew this.”

“You will remember that I hunted with Torin when he was a young man. Your father sent me to build that alliance.”

“So it is true? They all have the gift?”

“I believe it is hereditary.”

“Hereditary!” The implications of that ran swiftly through his mind. “I don’t want offspring who can turn me into a toad!”

Dag chuckled and headed back for the doorway. “Of all the complications that lie before you, that one is the least of your worries!”

Rayner cursed beneath his breath as he watched Dag leave the room, wishing he held a goblet so that he could throw it against the stone hearth with a satisfying clang. Instead he sat back down in the chair and stared into the fire, as if there he would find the answer to all his troubles.

Give up the land, or give up the woman he loved?

That was a choice no man should ever have to make.

## Chapter Seven

With winter solstice barely a fortnight away, the air grew colder and colder. Kella shivered most of the way home, sustaining herself by thinking of drawing a tub near the fire and heating water to soak in. She welcomed the promise of that heat, but she also wanted to wash every trace of Rayner from her body. She smelled his sex on her, and she wanted that gone. She needed no reminder of the paradise she'd enjoyed until it was so abruptly ripped from her this morning.

As soon as she turned the steed over to a surprised stable boy, she rushed into the kitchen and laid logs on the fire. A young serving girl dashed off to inform the household of her return, while another helped her heat large kettles of water to pour into the tub. Finally she peeled off the clothes and stepped into the tub.

"Shall I take these garments to be cleaned, milady?" the young girl asked, gathering the gown and cloak Rayner had provided.

"No." Kella sank into the steaming water, allowing the heat to seep into her frozen bones. She leaned her head back on the rim and closed her eyes. "Burn them."

Tears hovered near the surface, as they had all the long ride home, but she refused to indulge them. How foolish to think that Rayner could be hers! How weak to allow her body

to betray her. She sat still, eyes closed, feeling the warmth of the water on every inch of her body, every place that Rayner touched. Almighty heavens, just the memory of that had her nipples hardening. A quiver ran through her from the pit of her belly outward. Her hands resting lightly on the edges of the tub tightened at the memories.

A rustle of fabric announced the arrival of a woman. The serving girl, she thought, bringing linens or robes. Having no wish to speak, she kept her eyes closed, feigning sleep. There was more rustling, and then wonderful aromas seeped into her consciousness. Flowers and spices, both sweet and pungent at once, they offered a soothing combination. She sighed.

“Lavender reminds me of spring.”

Kella smiled at the voice despite herself. She opened her eyes. “Emlyn.”

“I heard you were bathing. I thought perhaps these would help you to relax.”

She watched Emlyn scatter the dried petals into the bath water. Though her tone was light, Kella recognized the expression in her eyes. Concern. Question. “I’m all right.” She attempted to assure her friend. “I was just very cold. I needed the warmth of a bath.”

“Then this should help. Let me wash your hair for you. It’s quite a mess.”

Kella raised a hand to her hair and felt the tangles bunching it. She must look a fright, not having groomed herself for two days. Too, riding hell-bent for leather across the meadow this morning had not helped. No wonder the stable boy had seemed frightened when she turned over the horse. He thought she was an old shrew! Before she could even speak her reply, Emlyn dipped a pitcher into the water and poured it over her head.

“Just relax,” she said.

Kella did, allowing her friend to apply the soap and rinse water to her hair. She closed her eyes and just absorbed the scented oils, the flower petals, the warmth of the water, and Emlyn’s expert hands as they massaged her scalp. This was what she needed, what she longed for far more than the warmth of the fire: the soothing touch of someone who loved her. Rayner may be an expert at pleasuring her body, but it was her soul that needed a caress

right now. Emlyn seemed to know that as she hummed lightly while she worked the soap and hot water through her hair.

"Let's get you out," Emlyn said as she finished. "Your water's cooling."

She slipped into a robe and sat on the hearth to stay warm. Emlyn sat behind her and began to comb her long black hair to dry it. Kella couldn't have asked for a more peaceful moment. But it was the calm before the storm, she knew. Emlyn was waiting to hear what happened.

She pulled the robe tightly around her and leaned toward the fire, her head back. "I'm afraid I may have ruined everything."

"Probably not." Emlyn drew the comb through Kella's hair with long, easy strokes. "Why do you think so?"

"I did not get Rayner's help, and I escaped rather than having the land offered as my ransom."

"You could have escaped at any time. Why did you today?"

She closed her eyes when Emlyn hit a snarl and waited while she patiently untangled it. "Agnetha was there."

"That's not unusual, is it? Aren't they engaged?"

"Well, yes, but after what happened I had let myself believe ..."

"What happened?"

Kella drew a long breath and let it out slowly, feeling the comb go through her hair. Emlyn was like a sister. They had shared everything. No need to keep secrets now. "I spent some time with Rayner. I let myself believe that things could work out between us. Until Agnetha showed up this morning while we were --"

That she broke off abruptly hid nothing. "I think I understand," Emlyn said.

Turning, she took Emlyn's hands, holding the comb between them. "Oh, Em! I need to go to the Field of Enchantment."



Her friend's brows shot up, but there was no scorn on her face. "You have never had need to go there before."

"Before, I was careful. This time ... these times ... I paid no attention. And I know which phase of the moon shines above us. I can't --" She paused, reluctant to even say the words. "I can't complicate things any worse than they are."

"So just in case you and Rayner have created a life, you want the herbs that will destroy it."

Kella's fingers tightened around Emlyn's hands. It sounded so cold when she said it out loud. Of course she would love to see the child created by her union with Rayner. But not like this. Not while he planned to wed Agnetha. Not when her future was so uncertain. "I can't take that chance."

Emlyn took her hands away and started to stand up, pulling Kella with her. "Then let's go see Granya. She can tell if you are with child."

"No!" Kella backed away. "I don't want her to know what I did with Rayner."

For a moment Emlyn only stared, but a smile began to form on her lips and lit her eyes. "Then you need to stop showing it on your face every time you say his name."

Kella sank back down to the hearth and buried her face in her hands. "I am such a fool," she muttered.

"No, just a woman in love." Emlyn sat back down and put an arm around her shoulders. "But don't worry. I saw the same look on his face the other day."

"You did not!"

"Oh, I'm quite sure I did." Placing a fingertip under her chin, she lifted Kella's face to meet her eyes. "What else is bothering you?"

The trouble with being so close to Emlyn was that she could never hide anything from her. "I have to go to Ninian and tell him that I failed. We did not get Rayner's help."

"Oh, I think he knows that already. What is really bothering you?"

She turned her head away as tears stung her eyes. This would bring shame upon her family. She was the lady of the manor now. She could not set such a bad example. When at last she spoke, her voice was but a whisper. "I used magick on him."

"On Rayner?"

Kella nodded, still not meeting the eyes of her friend.

"Mmm. Yes. That you will have to tell Father."

"He's going to be angry."

"Most probably."

The two women sat in silence on the hearth, their heads together, Emlyn's arm around Kella. Finally, Emlyn spoke. "Did you turn him into something?"

"No. I --" She struggled with it, but to say it now to Emlyn would make it easier to say it aloud to Ninian later. "I shoved him onto the bed and conjured chains around his wrists and ankles."

Emlyn gasped. Kella buried her head against her friend's shoulder in shame, but the shoulder moved. First there was a slight hitch, but soon the shoulder shook with the giggles that Emlyn could no longer suppress. It was contagious. Kella lifted her head and began to laugh along with her friend. They threw their arms around each other and collapsed into a fit of hysterics born of the tension from the past few days and the relief that Kella was home and safe.

"Well, I'm glad to see you young ladies are happy."

They sobered immediately at the commanding voice of Granya. Kella struggled to straighten her robe and compose herself. She felt as if she were a small child caught casting spells on butterflies.

Granya attempted a stern expression, but the twinkle in her eye gave Kella hope. "If it would not be too much trouble, milady, Ninian wishes to see you when you're dressed."

Who were they kidding? Kella was the leader of the household by heredity, but Ninian and Granya ruled from their wisdom. She could only hope to one day possess enough skill and knowledge to take their places.

She pulled the light robe around her, clutching the folds at her breast and squaring her chin to attempt a sense of dignity. "Please tell him that I will be there at once."

\* \* \* \* \*

Dressed and groomed properly, Kella sat in the counting room and waited for Ninian to enter. She couldn't shake that feeling of being a child on the verge of a reprimand. Since she'd grown up motherless, Granya had always filled that void in her life. Ninian was a trusted friend to her father and by extension to her as well. These were people she both loved and respected. Were it not for her father's unexpected death, he and Ninian would even now be preparing the grounds and the buildings for winter.

Everything changes, she thought. By the circumstance of her birth, all responsibilities fell to her now. Both Ninian and Granya owed allegiance to her, but Kella was not vain enough to demand servitude. What mattered to her was the successful operation of the manor and the village. She would defer to the older and wiser couple for as long as they cared to offer their aid.

She was highly embarrassed to now face them with the truth that, rather than helping, her actions had made the situation more difficult.

But face them she would. She straightened her spine and gripped the arms of the chair tightly, remembering lessons her father had taught. Always admit your mistakes because that was the best way to learn. Apologize, offer remedies, and move on. That much, she could do. At the sound of footsteps in the hallway, she stood.

"My dear child!" Ninian surprised her by taking her hands into his and bending to place a kiss on her cheek. "How happy we are that you've returned unharmed."

"And I as well," she murmured, grateful for his kindness.

"But of course, we knew Rayner would take good care of you." He let go of her hands and sat in a heavy wooden chair. Granya entered the room and closed the door behind her. She also took a chair, leaving Kella no choice but to take her own seat.

Their kindness comforted her nerves, but she knew there were still consequences to face. She smoothed her skirts and settled her hands in her lap before speaking. "Sir, I am very sorry that I did not secure the help we needed from Lord Rayner."

Ninian put a hand to his mouth and coughed, stealing a look at Granya. What was that about, Kella wondered. Some secret that they held? She looked at the older woman, convinced that she saw a look of warning pass from her to Ninian. She looked back at Ninian, who stroked his beard with the long fingers of one hand.

"That is regrettable," he said at last.

"Now that I have had some time to collect myself, I believe I can approach him in a businesslike manner and seek his help."

"Hmm ..." Ninian continued to stroke his beard, as if he were in a play and could not remember his lines. "Well, let's just put that aside for the time being. I understand there is another issue?"

Kella's face burned as the shame of her next admission heated her blood. She drew a calming breath and willed her voice to be steady. "Yes, I'm sorry. So terribly sorry, but I did magick on Rayner."

Ninian's mouth drew into a tight line. He nodded. "That is what I was told. Did anyone witness it?"

"Oh, no! No! It was just -- We were alone."

"And what was his reaction?"

Oh, gods above! How could she answer that question? He loved it! He absolutely loved being chained to the bed while she rode him. She cast her eyes down and squeezed her hands together, her interlaced fingers turning white. "He was ... surprised."

"I should say so!" Granya spoke for the first time. Although her tone was brisk, it was not chastising. Kella took hope and raised her eyes to meet the gaze of the older woman.

"We teach our children from the moment they are aware of the power, that they must never use it for harm --"

"Oh, I didn't harm him!"

Granya ignored the interruption. "And they must never use it in view of those who do not possess the same abilities." Silence stretched before them, the crackling of the fire making the lack of words more pronounced. Finally Granya spoke again. "Why did you do it, Kella?"

She felt tears threatening to spill. Too much had happened in the past few days. She'd only just buried her father when all of her emotions with Rayner had been ripped open again. A tremble caused her stomach to dive, but she squared her shoulders and lifted her chin, blinking away tears that she dared to fall. She would offer no excuses. "He made me angry, and I responded. I wanted to show him he could not control me."

"I assume that point was made."

She looked at the dear, kind lady, then shifted her gaze to Ninian, who also looked at her with the kindness of a parent. Their expressions were sympathetic, if stern. She knew that no matter what awful thing she may have done, they still loved her. "I suppose," she murmured.

"Well, if no one saw, I see no need to involve the high council." Ninian stood, as if he had to hurry off to other tasks. "Nothing to be done about it now. Granya seeks your counsel on the festivities of the winter solstice. I leave you ladies to it."

That was all? Not even a reprimand? Kella stared in wonder as Ninian left the room, his long robes flowing across the floor in his wake. He seemed to be most eager to end the conversation and get out of the room. Relieved, she turned to Granya smiling, ready to occupy her mind with the small details of the feast.

The older lady returned the smile and stood, holding out her hand. "Come. Let us talk in the kitchen. We must prepare the menu."

## Chapter Eight

Rayner urged his horse to go faster as he galloped over field and stream back to his home. One more obstacle overcome. The meeting with Aksel had gone well. At first he had protested, insisting that the marriage take place, but the parcel of land Rayner presented had been too rich to refuse.

Aksel offered him a meal and goblets of wine as they pressed their seals to the parchment. It had been a pleasant meeting until a piercing scream shattered the mood. Somewhere inside the castle, a woman had shrieked. Rayner thought it had been Agnetha, but Aksel assured him there was nothing to worry about. Agnetha would be fine, Aksel promised. She had other suitors to choose from now that she was released from the old arrangement.

Rayner smiled as he topped a small hill and pressed on toward home. In the end, the choice had been simple. Kella was worth more to him than all the land he held. He should have seen the easy solution sooner. More difficult tasks lay ahead, but he was prepared to face them with valor and honesty. First, he had to make Kella forgive him for his stupidity. Then he had to confess that he'd never been after her land except as a way to get to her.

Finally, he had to be educated about the magick so that he didn't embarrass or offend her and her family.

Not impossible, he thought, urging the steed toward home. But it had to be soon. They had already wasted over a year apart. He didn't want much more time to pass before all was settled.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kella drew her cloak tightly around her as she crossed the grounds to the burial place of her family. A circle of stones marked the grave where her father had so recently been laid to rest. If only she'd had one more chance to talk to him. There were so many questions to ask. Winter solstice was only one week away, and she'd done nothing to secure the coin Ninian had told her they lacked.

She looked at the grave next to Torin's, that of the mother she'd never known. Touching her fingers to her lips, she blew a delicate kiss to the mysterious woman. That she had been well loved by all was no secret. Perhaps she would have known what to do at a time like this.

She turned back to her father's resting place and sighed. What would he do about the rapidly approaching winter and the help they needed to survive it? Surely he would not have given anything over to Rayner.

Just the thought of Rayner caused her heart to pound heavily in her chest. How she missed him! It had been so much easier to carry on without him these long months before the intimacy of a few days ago. Wounds that had become tolerable were now raw again. She wanted him more than ever, but he could not be hers. Agnetha was a startling reminder of that.

The sun rose high in the sky, but she shivered anyway. Soon there would be snow on the ground and the ponds would ice over. Her fur-lined cloak offered protection, but the cold winter wind found its way inside. Time to head back to the safety of home and the



warmth of the fire. She paused before turning and looked toward the woods just past the clearing of the graveyard. Did she see a movement in the trees?

She cocked her head to one side, listening. Yes, there was the sound of a horse and a flash of color in the drab skeletons of the leafless forest. Her heart pounded as she recognized the outline of the tall figure on the huge black steed. She stood still and waited as he approached.

"It is cold to be out, milady," he said by way of greeting when he drew near.

"I was headed back." His presence so flustered her that she could not think what to say. Why was he here? Could it be to see her?

"Please allow me to assist." Leaning over, he stretched out a hand to pull her up onto his horse. "I can get you to warmth more quickly."

Kella could think of little that would warm her more quickly than sitting astride Rayner's horse in the circle of his arms, but she was reluctant to indulge that wish.

"Have you elixir this time, Lord Rayner?"

He flashed his wide white smile. "No, I have learned my lesson, milady."

The crystal sparkle of his eyes dissolved any wish she may have had to protest. She gave him her hand and let him help her onto the steed. They had to arrange her skirts and cloak without either of them falling off the mount, but soon she was comfortably seated astride with Rayner's arms around her. Closing her eyes, she leaned back against his chest and absorbed the feel of his body against hers. She felt the movement of his chest as he drew a breath in and let it out, the warmth touching her neck.

She wanted to speak; she wanted to tell him how much she'd missed him these past few days and how she would do anything, anything at all, to be with him again. But she could not. Agnetha would always be there, keeping them from being together the way they both wished. It just could not be.

He urged the horse to a light trot and headed back across the castle grounds. But as they approached the stable, he turned the horse and stopped. "I'm sorry," he said, his voice close to her ear. "I can't go on."

"What is it?" She turned, but in the small space, she could not twist enough to see his face. "Rayner, what is wrong?"

"I can't dismount and hand over the horse to your stable boys. Not right now, anyway."

"Why not?"

Chuckling, he put his hands on her arms, stroking them lightly. "Holding you this way has made my cock stand up."

His hands found her hips and jerked her bottom closer to him. She felt the solid ridge of his cock against her despite the clothing between them. Desire uncurled through her bloodstream like a snake slithering into the sun. Every inch of her body was on fire in contrast to the frigid winter air. She could feel the moisture gather in her crease, longing to take him inside her.

"Go this way." She pointed away from the barn to a smaller building nearby. "It is storage of feed for the animals. Your horse will be quite happy there."

Rayner clicked a signal to the steed, and they headed toward the other outbuilding. With every trot, the sway of the animal caused Kella to move against Rayner's bulging crotch. She placed her hands on his thighs and gripped him tightly as they rode. When they reached the small building, he dismounted first, then put his hands up to pull her down to him.

His hands on either side of her waist, he brought her close to his body and eased her down slowly, her body sliding the length of his and pressing against his cock. He groaned audibly at the sensual contact. Kella turned in his arms and looked up to meet the desire on his face.

"I cannot be with you for a heartbeat and not want to be inside you," he said just before he brushed his lips over her face.

Kella pushed back the hood of her cloak and looked all around them. The surrounding grounds were empty, gray and icy from the winter about to begin. At the nearby outbuildings, smoke curled from the chimneys. But this small place stood empty. She took Rayner by the hand and led him inside, his horse trailing behind them.

The horse happily found a trough of oats and settled into munching. As soon as they were alone, Rayner took her into his arms. He laid a hand against her cheek and looked into her eyes. "From the moment I went back to the chamber and found you gone, I have wanted nothing but to hold you again."

The memory of Agnetha was a sharp pain through her body. "I had to leave, Rayner. I could not stand it."

"Shhh ..." He kissed her, possessing her with his lips and tongue, stroking the inside of her mouth as sensuously as his cock had stroked the inside of her pussy. The moisture flooded her, and she throbbed for wanting him in her. He pulled back and drew a ragged breath. "We will speak of it later. We will speak of all things. But now, my Kella, I must have you."

A few steps behind her was an empty stall. The wooden floors were littered with enough hay to cushion their bodies. Rayner took the cloak from around her and spread it on the floor, then pulled her down. On their knees, he kissed her again, his hands traveling the length of her body from thighs to waist to the line of her neck. He fussed with the top of her gown and found his way in to caress her breasts.

Kella gasped as his thumbs stroked across her nipples, already hard from the cold. He rolled them between thumb and forefinger, causing a shiver of pleasure to shoot through her as if there were a direct line from nipple to clit. Her pussy ached for his touch there, but he made her wait as he lowered his head and took one tight bud into his mouth. She gasped and

threw back her head, gripping his upper arms to keep from falling, so intense was the pleasure of his lips on her breasts.

Breathing heavily, she laid a hand against the ridge in his breeches, slowly stroking up and down. In response, he suckled more hungrily at her breast, his hands kneading the heavy globes. He was a starving man, and she the beggar's banquet.

At last, he tore his mouth away, his breath coming in deep gasps. "You bewitch me, Kella. You make me a savage at your touch. I want to fuck you, and hard. I want you to scream from the pleasure."

"It is no spell, Rayner. It has always been this way between us."

He grabbed at her skirts, finding a way to the treasure within. She yanked his breeches down, delighted when his cock sprang free. She took it in her hands and bent to sheathe him in her mouth. The low animal moan told her he wanted more. Up and down she stroked him with her mouth, loving the way she could make him feel, relishing every sound that emitted from him. He laid his hands on her head, entwining his fingers through her hair, and guided her as she fucked him with her mouth.

She put her hands on his thighs to give herself more leverage and continued to bathe him with her tongue. One hand slid up between his legs and found his balls, tight and ready to explode. She fondled them in her palm while her mouth continued to work on his shaft.

"Oh, Kella!"

She didn't need his words to tell her that he climaxed. His come shot into her mouth, hot and thick. She sucked him dry and swallowed every drop, savoring the taste of the man she loved, savoring too, the knowledge that she could do this to him, give him this much pleasure. Slowly she let him slide out of her mouth. She looked up at him, at his clear blue eyes, and smiled.

But he did not smile back. His expression was one of purpose as he found the bottom of her gown and fought his way inside the heavy fabric, pushing aside all the layers of undergarments to reach her flesh.

He worked a finger into her folds and found the wetness there. She gasped when he touched her swollen clit. Sucking him had so aroused her that she knew it would take only a few strokes to drive her over the edge of her own climax. He added another finger and moved in a leisurely rhythm, back and forth over the slick flesh.

His eyes never left her as he stroked her pussy. His fingers moved in rhythm as he watched her every breath. "Come on, Kella." He rubbed the most sensitive spot. "Come on. Scream for me."

She gripped his upper arms tightly and shuddered, knowing release was just seconds away. She didn't want to give in to it, didn't want it to be over so soon. She wanted to stay there with Rayner all day with his hands on her, with his eyes watching her. She never wanted this moment to end. And as she had that thought, he pressed harder against her clit, and the trembling began. From her slit to her nipples, wave after wave washed over her, and she screamed for him, as he had asked.

Hardly able to breathe, she felt his arms go around her. He drew her close to him and put his hands in her hair. She felt his heart beating inside his chest, fast and hard, the same as hers. But gradually as his skillful fingers combed through her tresses, her breathing slowed, her heart rate settled. She looked up at him, and he lowered his lips to kiss her in a delicate brush of mouth on mouth.

"My Kella," he said on a long sigh. He reached behind her and smoothed her cloak on the hay, then lowered them both to a more comfortable position, still keeping her safe in his embrace. She reclined and snuggled against him, keeping close to his heart.

"I had thought to speak with you when I arrived." He chuckled. "I'm afraid I could not speak once I touched you."

A satisfied smile curved her lips. She loved that she could make him lose control. No amount of magick would ever compare to the allure of great sex. Still, doubts crept in as reality crystallized around them. None of their problems were solved. What news did he bring? "There is time for speaking now."

"Indeed there is."

Against her will, a sense of dread filled her, and she shivered. He reached for the edge of the cloak and drew it around her, mistaking her fear for cold. It could have been the longest day of summer for all she cared. What new thing would keep them apart now?

"What did you come to tell me, Rayner?"

"Astounding news. News that I never thought possible." He laid a hand aside her cheek and turned her face to meet her eyes. "Aksel has released me from the agreement to wed Agnetha."

"Rayner ..." She said his name on a whisper, almost as if she would break some fragile spell if she spoke too loudly. In her mind, shuttered doors flew open, heavy chains dissolved, sunshine streamed into windows. She almost dared not believe it to be true. "How did this happen?"

"A simple business arrangement. That's all the promise ever was. Business. I gave him something that he wanted more than having his daughter marry into my family. I gave him a small parcel of land that will be entirely his."

Land. Again it was the land. Well, this time it worked in their favor. Rayner was finally free. Free to ... She stopped herself mid-thought. Free to what? Even as she wondered what would happen to them, he pulled his arms away from her. She struggled to sit up as he refastened all his clothing, then posed before her on one knee. He took her right hand in his and brought it to his lips, placing the most delicate of kisses there. When he lowered her hand, he looked at her, his eyes darkening to a deeper blue with the serious expression on his face. "Would you do me the honor, milady, of becoming my wife?"

Wings sprouted on her heart, she was sure, because it soared. Her hand in his closed around his fingers, holding him as if she were afraid he'd float away if she didn't keep him in her grasp. "The honor would be mine, Lord Rayner, but ..."

He cocked his head to one side. "But?"

Would she regret this hesitation? Kella thought she would regret it if she did not hesitate at least long enough to cast all her doubts aside. "You came to me on the day of my father's burial, Rayner. You asked me to turn over my deeds." She paused, choosing her words carefully, picking her way through a briar patch to the garden on the other side. "Is this just a business arrangement as well? Marry me, obtain my lands?"

He released her hand and straightened, laying his hand across his heart. "I swear on my mother's grave, I am not entering into this to get your lands. And I must confess ..."

He dipped his head, but not before she saw color high in his cheeks. "It was you I wanted that day, not your lands. I used it for an excuse. Even when I kidnapped you, it was never for ransom."

Now he sat on the bed of straw and pulled her down beside him. "It was always you, Kella. After standing in the room with you that day, I could not continue until I touched you, until I sank my shaft into your velvet warmth again. But it is so much more than that. It is your fire, your spirit, your wit. I want that as part of my life. Always."

Kella burrowed into the space against his chest, his strong arm around her. Could any words have been more perfect? How long had she dreamed of hearing him speak to her just that way? She closed her eyes and smiled, measuring the moment for future memory. All the rest of her life would be held in comparison to this shining moment when Rayner asked her to become his wife.

"And just so there is never any fear in you," he continued, stretching out one long leg before him. "I have my counselors right now drawing the papers that will keep our manors forever separate. Your land will never be mine."

“Nor yours mine,” she replied in a whisper. How quickly her heart grew heavy again! So wrapped up was she in the marriage proposal, she had forgotten her allegiance to her people. They were counting on her to secure the help they needed from Rayner. This arrangement would make that impossible. How could she accept this marriage proposal and forsake everyone who counted on her? And yet she could not bring herself to turn him down. She had longed for this moment since she was a silly girl. Now it was here; she had no wish to ruin it.

And she wanted to marry Rayner! She wanted desperately to be his wife, to have him in her bed every night for the rest of her life. To stand beside him, work beside him, laugh beside him. No, she would not turn him down. And yet, there had to be a solution. “I must speak to Ninian,” she said in a soft voice.

“Of course! Of course!” Rayner got to his feet, pulling her up with him. “And I must ask him for your hand. In the absence of a father, I would seek permission from your most trusted ally.”



## Chapter Nine

Kella allowed herself to be whisked along into the manor house. Ninian quickly arranged a meeting. Servants poured mead, arranged fruit on trays and plucked chickens to turn on the spit. The castle hummed with an undercurrent of excitement as Rayner sat with Ninian in his office.

While they met, Kella sat at the dressing table in her chamber as Emlyn brushed her hair. “We must dress you in your finest gown!”

“Why?” Kella frowned. “He has seen me today already in this one. And he asked me to marry him anyway.”

“Because!” Emlyn dashed to a trunk in the corner and unloosed its leather straps. “It is the day you became engaged. You want to look radiant.”

“The gown shall not accomplish that.”

Emlyn stopped pawing through the gowns to turn and look at her friend. “What is wrong? Surely you are not having second thoughts.”

Kella put a hand up to her mouth, as if she could swallow her fears. No second thoughts about how much she loved Rayner, but plenty of thoughts about whether it was the best thing for her to do. How could she celebrate this joy when so much remained unsettled?

Emlyn came and knelt before her, putting her hands on Kella's and pulling them away from her face. "What is it? Why do you hesitate?"

"You were there when Ninian described how dire our circumstances have become. No solution has been found for that yet. Rayner has taken steps to make sure our properties remain separate. If I ask him to change that, he will think I'm the one who hopes to profit from our union."

"And you think he would deny you? You think anything would stop him now?"

She didn't know. She could only compare it to her own feelings. "As much as I love Rayner, I would not marry him if I thought it was only a ploy to gain control of the manor. Why should I expect different from him?"

"I think you should speak with him." Emlyn tightened her fingers around Kella's hands. "Don't let this stand between you and the happiness you have sought for such a long time."

Kella fought to calm the churning of her stomach. "I am afraid."

"Don't be afraid." Emlyn stood and stepped behind her friend to finish pinning gold braid into her hair. "Go talk to Father."

"Yes, I will do that."

\* \* \* \* \*

Properly gowned and groomed by Emlyn, Kella hurried through the corridor in search of Ninian. She moved stealthily, wanting to avoid Rayner until she'd had the chance to discuss her fears and work out a solution to the problems facing the manor. She found him in the counting room, his head over a book, as always. Granya stood beside him, also studying the account book.

They looked up at her entrance and smiled. "I have sent a girl with Rayner to show him a guest room," Granya said. "He will have supper with us and stay the night."

"Thank you," she murmured. Her fingers found the silver amulet around her neck and twisted the chain nervously. "If I may have a word."

"Certainly," Ninian replied.

"What is wrong, Kella?" Granya asked. "Your face does not carry the joy of a newly betrothed woman. Have you changed your mind?"

"No! Of course not. I have dreamed of marriage to Rayner for a long time. It is just ..." She broke off, unable to form the words. Her stomach lurched and rolled, and she feared she would embarrass herself, so sick did this dilemma make her feel.

Both Granya and Ninian came around the large wooden table to her side. Granya took her hand and led her to sit in a chair. "Your face is as pale as the snow, child. What is wrong?"

"I have spent some time explaining the magick to Rayner," Ninian offered. "He does not fear it."

Kella shook her head. "No, it isn't that. It's the help we need for the winter. Rayner has taken great pains to keep all finances separated. Now I can't ask him to give us anything for the winter."

Ninian straightened and heaved a deep sigh. Granya glared at him. "You see?" She slung her words at Ninian. "You see what you have done, you meddling old man?"

Ninian turned to Granya, his eyebrows raised. "I made a vow!"

"You made a vow," Granya mimicked. She reached out and thwacked him on the back of the head. "There is what I think of your stupid vow. You should have asked me in the first place. I could have told you this whole idea was stupid."

Kella looked from one to the other, confused and shocked. "Won't one of you please tell me what is happening?"

Granya poked Ninian in the ribs. "He will."

"I will sit." Ninian drew a chair near to Kella. "And I will tell."

"Please do."

"It was your father's idea."

"Don't be laying this on Torin," Granya exclaimed. "May he rest in peace."

"Well, it was!" Ninian shot back.

Leaning forward, Kella grabbed Ninian's robe and pulled him to face her. "I don't care whose idea it was. Tell me what you are hiding from me!"

Ninian took a moment to settle his robe about his lap. Too long a moment, Kella thought. He was stalling for time. She didn't know why, but at least she was no longer afraid. Her fear had been replaced by curiosity. Not to mention the amusement of seeing these two spar with each other.

Finally, Ninian let his hands go still and looked at Kella. "Your father was worried about your future. As he lay dying, we talked about you. And Rayner."

Kella started to interrupt but Ninian raised a hand to silence her.

"We all knew how devastated you had been when you broke it off with Rayner. We all wanted to see you get back with him. Your father suggested that we send you to Rayner to ask for help. He thought putting the two of you together again would heat up the passions that you so obviously hold for each other."

Kella's cheeks flamed as she thought of how accurate that assessment was. It was impossible for them to be together and not touch each other. Intimately. But her father knew that? She grew more confused rather than understanding. "But if we needed help anyway --"

She broke off at the look on Granya's face. She remembered seeing that look before, when she met with them days ago to confess to doing magick. "Wait a minute," she said slowly, comprehension dawning. "We don't need help."

The old man's gray eyes held hers for a long moment, then at last he shook his head.

"I don't believe this!" At least the fear was gone. Now she was angry. "You would play with me like this, like I am a toy? A doll? Something to arrange for your amusement?"

“It wasn’t for anyone’s amusement.” Granya spoke softly now. “It was Ninian’s way to honor the memory of his dear friend. To do as he bid on his deathbed.”

In the space of time it took for Kella to absorb those words, the anger melted. How foolish she had been not to understand the grief Ninian would feel at the loss of Torin. She was not the only person who had loved him. And to know that some of her father’s last thoughts had been concern for her future touched her in a place deep within her heart.

As tears burned her eyes, she held out her arms and drew Ninian into an embrace. “Well, now he can rest easy, can’t he? Because I am to marry Rayner as he wished.”

After a long hug, Ninian drew back. “I’m sorry I deceived you, Kella. I should have told you the truth.”

“No matter.” She wiped the tears from her cheeks and smiled. “Everything is fine now.”

Granya gave Kella a hug, then drew back. “Now let us go to the Great Hall and find our guest. We must drink a toast to Lord Rayner. And soon to be Lady Rayner.”

## Chapter Ten

The marriage took place on the morning of the winter solstice. The union was celebrated at the annual feast. All of Rayner's family and friends were in attendance along with the villagers from both lands. Even Aksel came with his wife and two sons. Agnetha, they explained, had traveled across the land to visit distant relatives.

It was late in the evening before the couple were able to retire to Kella's bedchamber to enjoy their first night together as man and wife. Slightly nervous, Kella stood before the fireplace and watched as Rayner poured wine. The gold braids and trims of her wedding gown caught the light and threw it dancing round the room. Rayner brought her wine in the manor's finest goblet of gold encrusted with emeralds that matched her eyes. She took it from him with an unsteady hand.

"You tremble, my love?" He covered her hand with his own. "Are you cold?"

"No, it's just ..." She took a sip of the wine, then set the goblet on the mantel. "Well, we are married now."

"That we are." He placed his own goblet next to hers.

She stood entranced, watching the fire reflect in his Nordic blue eyes. This man, this gorgeous, kind, clever man, was hers. From now until forever, nothing could ever tear them

apart again. After yearning for so long, it seemed a dream now. "I feel as if I must be careful, or I will wake up and find it never happened."

"Oh, it happened, milady." He lifted her fingers to his lips and kissed her ever so lightly on the back of her hand. "You are mine. And I am yours. Forever. And now, we begin this union with my worship of your body."

Just his words caused Kella to draw a breath. He let go of her fingers and laid his hands on her shoulders. "This wedding gown is lovely, but the greater beauty, I know, lies beneath it."

Slowly he pulled the long gold cords that laced the gown in the front. One by one he freed each eyelet and spread the fabric. Kella watched his long tanned fingers working the laces and felt her nipples harden. Soon those fingers would be on her breasts, she knew. Already her pussy quivered in anticipation.

He took his eyes off the gown, watching her expression, but still his fingers worked. At last the fabric was free. He gently eased it down her shoulders to fall in a pool at her feet. Next he began the same process with her linen undergarments. Finally he had her naked but for the gauzy white cloud at her feet that was her bridal garb.

As slowly as he had removed her clothes, Kella raised her hands to her hair and loosened the combs that held it high off her neck. The tresses fell around her like a thick black cloak. And still she stood before the fire, waiting for Rayner to continue.

His gaze moved over her, lingering on her breasts, their nipples hard and rosy against the ivory of her skin. When his eyes moved down to the juncture of her thighs, she felt the moisture in her crease, just as if he stroked her with his hands. Still watching her, he pulled the strings to his own clothing, removing tunic and breeches to the floor as well. Boldly naked before her, he held out a hand to her. She stepped over the clothing, and he picked her up, gathered her close to his heart, then placed her gently on the bed.

He sat on the bed beside her and looked at her again from the top of her head to the tips of her toes. She felt as if he caressed her, so intense was his gaze. Finally, he stretched out beside her on the bed. Slowly and deliberately, he wound his hands into her hair and kissed her neck. Then his tongue ran over her shoulder, across her throat and downward, ever downward until her reached the peak of one breast.

When he took her nipple into his mouth, she gasped. As he suckled there, he put his hand on the other globe, massaging with his palm as his thumb ran back and forth across the nipple. The sensations overwhelmed her. She lifted her knees, shifted her hips, squirming from the tension tightly coiled now as he continued to lave her breasts. She moved her hand on the linens, seeking his cock. When she encircled the swollen shaft, he moved his hand from her breast to take her hand away. He moved back to her breast and again, she reached for his cock. Again he moved her hand away. His lips pulled at her nipple, causing her to squirm on the bed. She could not be still. She laid a hand against his ribs, then slid it down to his thighs, finding once again his stiffened shaft.

For the third time he gently moved her hand away. Finally, he lifted his head and looked down into her eyes. "You have done me the honor of becoming my wife. I would worship your body this night. Close your eyes and relax."

"But, Rayner, I --"

He laid fingers against her lips. "Shhh. Relax. I would worship my wife, please."

*Please.* He said please. How could she deny that request? Kella closed her eyes and lay still, absorbing the sensations as his lips returned to her breast. He teased and laved the nipple with his tongue, nipped it with his teeth and massaged it with his lips. His golden soft hair teased between her breasts as his mouth traveled that valley to her belly.

He traced the line of her ribs with his hands, his mouth following. His tongue explored her belly button, then traveled lower to the dense curls that covered her sex. She moaned



when he parted her thighs and placed his mouth against her pussy. He kissed her gently then pulled her lips apart to find her clit, glistening in the wetness he had caused.

His tongue was rough velvet, stroking and pulling the tender pearl. Sensations more intense than she had ever known radiated outward from the heated depths of her pussy as his tongue worked the little round bud. She arched her hips and met him, as if he thrust within her. And when she thought she could stand no more, he reached a hand to her breast and rolled her nipple between thumb and forefinger.

She came in a torrent of sensation, screaming his name. And he did not stop. His tongue and lips assaulted her pussy through the orgasm, never letting up. He ate her as a starving man eats, as if he would never have enough of this even if it continued without end.

Finally he lifted his head. She watched him through eyes nearly closed as he came up beside her and gathered her into his arms. He placed kisses in her hair, on her forehead, her cheek, and finally on her lips. She tasted her own juices on him, and her heart swelled that he would love her that deeply, that thoroughly.

She put her hands in his hair and pulled him to her, desire building again, as if she had not just come only moments before. His mouth on her pussy was wonderful, but she wanted him inside her. She wanted to lie back and have him fill her with his magnificent shaft. She wanted him to ride her as if a wild steed.

He knew her well enough to read her thoughts. He rose above her and put his knees between her thighs. The tip of his shaft parted her lips, still so wet from his worship of her body. With all his weight on his hands he looked down at her as his rigid cock found its home. "Look at me, Kella. I want you to look at me when I fuck you."

Her eyes never leaving his in the glow of the firelight, she wrapped her thighs around his waist and arched her hips to meet him. Slowly he filled her, the length of him buried deep in her aching pussy, still trembling from the orgasm he had wrenched from her. He

dipped his head to nibble at her breasts as he pushed as far as he could go, then ever so slowly pulled out again.

She pushed up, aching to take him deeper, not wanting to lose even an inch as he stroked. Gradually he quickened his pace. Gentle stroke became vigorous thrust. In and out he moved, faster and faster, his balls slapping against her ass as he moved inside her. She dug her fingers into his shoulders as the climax built in her. It was close, very close, but she wanted to wait for him. She wanted to come together on the first night of their marriage. But she was so close to spiraling over the edge.

“Rayner!” She shouted his name. “Come with me! Now!”

“Yes,” he answered though his voice was barely more than a breath. “Yes, my Kella. Yes!”

And with one final thrust, they both cried out. Her pussy throbbed around him even as he shot his seed into her. She came in a thundering wave of pleasure that rolled through her from head to toe and left her breathless. Rayner collapsed his arms and rolled to his side, bringing Kella to rest in her favorite spot beside his heart. He smoothed her hair back out of her face, and kissed her. And with legs and arms entwined, they fell asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kella stood at the door to her balcony on the first night of winter, the first night of her life with Rayner and looked out. Sometime during their moments of passion, a light snow had begun to fall, blanketing everything in purest white as far as she could see. Crystals of ice began to form in the branches of the nearby trees, as if in a fairyland. She pulled a fur around her and smiled, so light was her heart for the first time in many days.

Rayner missed her in the bed and came to stand behind her, looking out at winter's dressing. He put his arms around her and pressed her to his chest. “All is well, my love. Come to bed.”

“I know.” She turned in the circle of his arms and looked up at him. “I just don’t want this night to end. Do you think about the future, Rayner? About our lives? Our children?”

“I think of this as the beginning of an amazing adventure.” He bent his head to kiss her. “Just a question, my love. About the children. Will they be ... gifted?”

A mysterious smile turned her lips. “Do you mean will they be able to slap chains around you at their will?”

He blew out a breath. “Yes.”

“Oh, I hope so, milord. I do hope so.”

 THE END 

## **Delia Carnell**

Delia Carnell has been making up stories since she was old enough to hold a Barbie in one hand and a Ken in the other. While on the journey to novelist, her employers have included a community college, a computer leasing agent, an upscale department store, a meat packing plant, a CPA firm and a food distributor. Her positions ranged from entry level customer service agent to CEO.

An avid reader, she first began writing when she didn't like the ending of a book she read and set out to create one she thought better suited the story. She believes the first step in writing a book is to choose the music that underscores the setting and theme. It could be anything from Mozart to Aerosmith to Celtic Harp, as long as it fits the mood.

Delia lives in Florida in the middle position of a three-generation household. Having never outgrown fairy tales and magic, she holds a well-worn Annual Pass to a nearby castle and its surrounding worlds. Her interests include cross stitch, movies, travel and football.