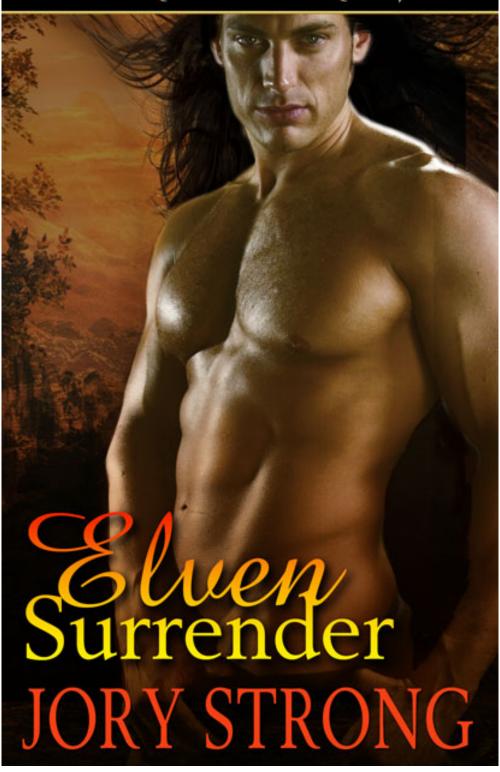
Ellora's Cave Presents



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



Elven Surrender

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ELVEN SURRENDER

Jory Strong

Chapter One

Silver Delacroix wiped her palm against the soft leather of her pants. The magi were making her nervous tonight. Powerful or weak, they glided through the nightclub like sharks in search of prey. More than once she'd seen one of them brush against a witch, as if testing for the presence of something beyond a willingness to couple.

She'd ignored it the first few times she'd seen it. Sorcerers—or magi as they liked to call themselves—might have an endless thirst for magical knowledge and a willingness to sell their services to anyone with the coin to pay for it, regardless of right and wrong, but they came to the club for the same reason coven-bound warlocks, the male counterpart to witches, did—to sate the needs of the body, or one particular organ anyway, and not the mind.

That was the usual case, but tonight... Something was different.

Whatever had brought the magi out in such numbers, the women, other than the nulls—humans without magic—should be safe enough. And even then, the nulls only had to worry about the sorcerers casting a spell and taking them as brides.

One of the circling magi stopped next to a group of witches and was welcomed with sultry smiles. Silver wondered if she was imagining things after all as she watched them flirt. They were a day away from the Turning Ceremony welcoming the spring. It stood to reason the sorcerers were out in such large numbers because they were responding to nature's call to mate.

"While I'm responding to Aunt Fenella's earlier discussion of The Mark," Silver muttered. And feeling guilty because she hinted to those of us going through the Rite of New Beginnings that it would be best to stay home – and here I am, out among the magi.

Who are just horny, she tried to convince herself but slid into uncertainty as a more powerful sorcerer than the one who was talking to the witches glided by so close their skirts swayed.

Silver's stomach lurched. Under normal circumstances the magi stood little chance of taking a witch as a wife. But if The Mark appeared on a witch's palm, she lost all her magical abilities until the next Turning Ceremony arrived to mark the change of season. She became a null, a prize for a sorcerer.

A witch made null could be ensorcelled and bound through wedding vows. Her children would have magic in their veins. Her knowledge and skills would become the sorcerer's because once married to him she would no longer be part of a coven.

Instinctively, Silver stepped into a group of talking women and out of the path of a magi so he couldn't brush against her. The women paused in their conversation, greeted her with icy disdain. Elves.

Chilly eyes and waist-length hair, sensuous lips thinned into straight lines, they made it clear without bothering to speak that they viewed her as inferior. But then elves were a clannish bunch who let few outsiders into their world.

Silver shrugged their wordless opinions away. With her ears hidden, she could pass for their companion—if their expressions didn't announce otherwise.

There were times when she wondered if her unknown father was elf. By all accounts her mother had been beautiful and powerful enough to enchant any male who came into contact with her. But as far as Silver knew, there were no half-elves, and beyond that, she certainly couldn't claim to have the spell magic of an elf.

They were a deadly race, capable of turning a human into a toad or leaving one barking like a mad dog for offending them. She, on the other hand, was competent, but nowhere near as gifted as her mother was said to have been or as gifted as her aunt and cousin were.

With a sigh she stepped away from the elves and pushed through the crowd, heading toward the bar. It'd been a mistake to let her cousin Joelle talk her into coming

here. They should both be at home, whispering and speculating about the direction their futures would take when the coven met for the Turning Ceremony and the Rite of New Beginnings.

It was the moment they'd both worked toward, studying and learning so they could take their places as full witches. At the conclusion of the Rite they would find out what town they would make their home in, which territory would be theirs to care for.

Silver imagined she'd be given an area to the west and north, somewhere remote and with a small population—a mining town above the snowline maybe since she had an affinity for fire and for locating veins of precious metals. Joelle would probably remain in New Holyoak. It was a much-coveted position, to be allowed to stay in a place not only dedicated to learning and training but where there were numerous large covens. It was a far cry from the isolated existence awaiting most witches and warlocks.

In addition to learning where they would serve, they'd be told which warlock family to look for a husband in and be given permission to form a union. Though her father was most likely a null, and she herself wasn't as powerful as most of the others in the coven, because of her mother, Silver was considered a blood witch and the choice of a mate was important.

In the days before The Purge, magical bloodlines were a source of pride, but they hadn't determined pairings. Witches and warlocks mingled and married freely. It didn't matter if a witch with strong healing abilities mated with a warlock whose gift was for seeing the future. There were plenty with a variety of skills and the existence of a small coven in each village or town was a usual occurrence.

The Purge changed that. Witches and warlocks were hunted down by superstitious nulls, then by followers of one religion or another who wanted to completely eradicate the old ways, the ways steeped in mystery and magic. Most of the witches and warlocks from the thirteen ancient clans had been burned at the stake or stoned or drowned.

Misery soon came to the null population. There was no one to cure their ills and listen to their troubles, to guide them in their lives and help them avoid the wrath of the fey and elves.

Slowly the suspicion and paranoia yielded to desperate pleading for the witches and warlocks to come out of hiding. There were offers of housing and land, food and clothing.

Charlatans emerged to claim the bounty. It forced the witches and warlocks to follow lest more hardship and grief be caused by the impersonators.

The Purge had succeeded in decimating the number of blood witches and warlocks. There weren't enough for each village or town to have even a single practitioner to serve them, much less a coven. As a result, making the right marriage and having strongly gifted children had become vitally important.

Anticipation managed to chase some of Silver's anxiety away. She was ready to leave her aunt's house and gain her own territory. She was ready to have a husband to build a future with.

Hasty couplings might satisfy the body for a time, but they didn't fill the place in her heart that longed for her own family, for a sense of belonging, for — She knew only that no man, null or warlock, had ever made her feel the things she dreamed of feeling.

Her mother had died in childbirth, her father was unknown, and while her aunt provided a home, Silver had known isolation there too—love filtered through a wall erected by guilt. Her aunt was her mother's twin. According to coven law it should have been Aunt Fenella who left New Holyoak and served in the isolated region where her mother had died. Aunt Fenella was the weaker witch. But instead of sending her, the coven elders had sent Silver's mother instead, perhaps in punishment but more likely in the hopes it would make her settle on a single warlock and take him as her husband. Instead she'd gotten pregnant though no villager had stepped forward to claim paternity when Silver was born, and no clues to who her father was could be found in her mother's house.

None of that matters now, Silver told her herself as she reached the bar area. She wasn't completely her mother's daughter when it came to men. They weren't an endless strand of polished gems to her, each as beautiful and interesting as the last—or the next. She might dream about having two men in her marriage bed—cocooning her in love and security—but she would find happiness with one rather than find loneliness in variety.

Theirs was a monogamous society. The marriage vows, once said, were permanent and binding to both parties. And given the need to strengthen the bloodlines, few witches or warlocks married for love though with the right pairing, it almost always took root and flourished as they built a life together.

Despite the fact she wasn't as strong as some of the other blood witches, more than one warlock had made it clear he would welcome a chance to join his future with hers. They were men she could come to love. But she hungered—not just for tenderness but for a dominant lover who made her ache, who possessed her completely even as he protected and loved her.

Heat coursed through her veins thinking about it. Her clit stood erect and her cunt lips were swollen, wet, waiting for a lover's mouth, a lover's tongue. She dug the fingernails of her left hand into her palm and reminded herself that she still wasn't free to have what she wanted most—not yet. Not until the coven met and the Rite was performed.

"What can I get you?" the bartended asked.

Silver turned to look at him. Fey. He was new to her but she still asked, "I'm looking for my cousin, Joelle. Have you seen her?"

"She an elf?"

His question startled her. The fey should know she wasn't elf even if he couldn't see the tips of her ears.

He pointed in the direction she'd just come from. "Saw five or six of them over there."

Silver opened her mouth to correct him but gasped instead as pain lanced through her left palm. It burned so sharp and deep that tears sprang to the corner of her eyes.

Dread filled her. It chased the breath from her lungs and made her heart pound wildly. She stared down at her fist, willed herself to open her clenched hand.

The buzzing in her ears drowned out the sounds around her. The grayness at the edge of her vision formed a tunnel, blocking out everything but the sight of her hand. Slowly, one by one, her fingers uncurled to reveal *The Mark*.

* * * * *

Wraith In Shadows watched as his half brother, Tynan Carved From Stone, stepped from the thick forest and into the light-and-dark pattern of the moonlit field. *So he came – alone*. He hadn't been sure Tynan would, but he'd hoped.

Years of intrigue and politics played out by others had all come down to this moment. They'd been raised as enemies, groomed to claim their father's position. They could pass for twins but they knew each other only through rumor and distant regard.

It was on the basis of those rumors that Wraith had sent a message to Tynan, inviting him to meet, suggesting there was a way to keep their honor and yet avoid a fight to the death in order to claim their father's position as Lord of the Southern Borderlands.

If one of them had been born before the other, the ascendancy would be clear. But whether truth or political fiction, their births were said to have occurred at the exact same time.

Elven law was clear and ruthless. When there was no absolute line of succession, those who would lead must be willing to fight to the death—either magically or physically. In their case, whether one of them elected not to fight or the victor granted the loser a stay of execution, those who'd spent years maneuvering for this moment would work to ensure that the one not claiming their father's position didn't live long enough to become a future threat.

If Tynan had been like their father, self-absorbed and pleasure-seeking, ruthless without the redemption of caring for the people under his stewardship above his own political and sexual agendas, then Wraith wouldn't have proposed this meeting. He would have fought the man who was related to him by blood and only one of them would have left the battlefield alive. But he had reason to hope, reason to believe Tynan was honorable, driven to unite the various clans where their father seemed to delight in dividing them.

The earth could be capricious. It was capable of providing a wealth of abundance or harrowing depredation. The elves could be the same. These lands bordering on those invaded and settled by the humans had long been viewed as cursed and uncivilized.

Deep in the heart of elven territory the royal court was one of breathtaking splendor and gentility, of virgin forest and herds of winged horses. Fey creatures rarely bothered to hide themselves and unicorns were easily found.

Much of the magic on the southern, outer edge had leached away. Many claimed it was because of the humans.

Wraith suspected the true blame lay with the elves, and more specifically, at his dead father's feet. But he also believed that if he and Tynan joined forces and worked together, they could free the borderlands from the disharmony gripping it.

Tynan studied the man who was his brother. They were of equal height, their raven-colored hair worn long and straight in the custom of their race. Almond-shaped eyes were outlined with a thin line of black, as though The Mother had wanted to draw further attention to the beauty she'd bestowed on her elf creations.

They looked alike except for the color of their eyes. Wraith's were dark, like the forest at night or the shadows he could command, while his were the green of polished jade and moss.

He'd been curious and pleased by Wraith's unexpected invitation to meet. Honor demanded they both step forward to claim their father's title and position in order to undo some of the damage wrought during his reign. But the prospect of killing his half brother didn't sit easily with Tynan and he'd hoped to find a way to compromise.

Tynan cursed himself for not searching for it earlier, for not anticipating their father's unexpected and unnatural death. The answer was somewhere in the past, in another time, perhaps even in another elven territory. Then again, the outcome of his search probably would have been the same whenever he'd started looking for a solution in earnest.

He was no scholar. From the time he could walk his fascination had been stones, finding them, cutting and polishing them, offering them to the craftsmen who could fashion them into jewelry beautiful enough to sell to highborn nobles and members of the royal family.

As soon as he'd taken an interest in the scrolls documenting elven history and law, suspicion had fallen on him. He'd felt the surreptitious glances, would have laughed at the sudden onslaught of tasks requiring his attention if his heart hadn't been heavy, weighed down by the knowledge his mother's hand would be found in the scheming.

She was Earth Clan, but not the nurturing warmth of sun-kissed soil. She was barren tundra and hard ambition.

From his earliest moments of selfhood he'd pledged to be different than his parents. He'd fought not to let his mother's plans for power etch themselves into him the way grooves formed from the continuous dripping of water on stone.

He'd turned away from offers of easy sex, had kept his heart shielded and his cock safely contained in his pants despite his desire for a wife and the fierce urge to fuck that had him waking morning after morning in twisted sheets with a seed-coated belly. It had gotten worse lately, his dreams remaining unfocused, the gray of storm clouds or barite, though the woman who writhed unseen against him was always the same.

Until he'd received Wraith's message yesterday while in New Holyoak to trade the last of his stones, he'd never seen his dream lover. But this morning as he awakened

with lava-hot semen rushing through his cock, he'd seen silver-colored eyes in a face so beautiful his heart cried with joy and pain.

Maybe the unknown woman would play a part in the crisis now looming in front of him. Foreseeing ran in his family. Or perhaps she was only a manifestation of his desire to find peace and prosperity not only for himself but for the borderlands.

With a sigh Tynan put his thoughts aside and said, "I'm glad you asked to meet. I'd hoped to have something more than an olive branch to offer before sending you a message."

The dark knot of tension in Wraith's chest dissolved into mist. Those simple words confirmed the rumors of Tynan's honor and the carefully gathered evidence that he was different from his mother and their father.

It had taken Wraith years of hidden study to find a possible solution. He hadn't done it openly for fear the written histories would be altered or simply disappear. His duties as a hired bodyguard had masked his quest and given him an excuse to travel between the various elven enclaves and territories. He'd finally found what he was looking for in the libraries of a Fire Clan enclave in the western borderlands—a precedent set long ago by two half brothers who claimed to have been born at the same time.

Though Wraith's spies had already provided an answer, he asked, "Is your heart already claimed?"

If Tynan thought the question odd or offensive it didn't show. "No," he said, his answer accompanied by a smile with a hint of something that might be labeled discomfort, there and then gone so quickly Wraith couldn't be sure.

"Neither is mine," Wraith said, "which is just as well. If you are willing to share a wife, then we can claim our father's position jointly. A clear line of succession will be restored with the birth order of our children."

"You found a law?"

"A precedent."

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Unbidden, the dream face with the silver-colored eyes flashed through Tynan's mind. He rubbed his chest, remembering how his heart cried with both joy and pain in that instant when her features were finally revealed to him.

He'd thought he reacted to her beauty, but now he knew the true source of his emotion. Discovery coupled with loss. Pleasure meshed with sacrifice and responsibility. On some level his heart had understood that the dream was a prophecy and the woman a reality, though she wouldn't be his alone.

Tynan's hand dropped to his side. "I've had a recurring dream since puberty," he said, wishing he could call the shadows and shield himself from the moon's light in order to hide the flush of color working its way up his neck. "It's gotten stronger since our father's death, more powerful. Last night I saw her face for the first time."

Surprise flickered in Wraith's eyes though Tynan had the impression it was directed at a sudden, unexpected thought rather than at his admitting to the dream.

"Foreseeing runs in your family?" Wraith asked.

Tynan nodded.

"Mine as well." There was almost an imperceptible shift in Wraith's stance, a subtle leaning forward. "What color was her hair?"

"The black of onyx."

"And her eyes?"

"Silver. You've dreamed of her, too?"

"Not a dream," Wraith said, "but an obsession I should have questioned. I have a cottage nearby. Come, I want to show you something."

Chapter Two

Adrenaline coursed through Silver along with horror and fear. Her heartbeat took up the chorus, thundering *Run*! *Run*! with every thump against her chest.

She had to get away from the bar, away from the sorcerers. Somehow they'd known The Mark would appear tonight, that's why they were circling like sharks, brushing against the witches.

If one of them managed to ensnare her— Instinct jerked her head around. Her feet began moving even before she saw one of the most powerful of the magi pushing his way through the crowd in order to get to her.

She had no chance of escaping even the weakest of sorcerers if she stayed in the club. None of the other witches would interfere or move to protect her once they knew she was *marked*, null, without magic, her place in the coven uncertain until her fate was resolved.

Silver ducked behind the bar. The fey bartender's attention didn't waver from his show of juggled, spinning bottles and poured liquor.

The use of magic for anything but emergencies was forbidden inside, but even a human male would be strong enough to corner and subdue her, to maneuver her past the boundaries of the club. For a marked witch, this place was a trap leading to only one destiny – becoming a sorcerer's wife.

She got to the exit between bar and stage. Razor-sharp gazes bored into her back as she pushed through the door and into the warm, night air.

Silver ran. There was no point in trying to make it to her aunt's house. Now that the magi knew which witch was marked, they would spread out, the weaker ones hoping to get lucky and intercept her when she tried to get to a place of safety.

As her legs pistoned and the air whooshed in and out of her lungs, Silver's thoughts spun like a roulette wheel. Only instead of black or red slots, faces flashed through her mind, witches who would offer her sanctuary until the Turning Ceremony.

Frantically she tried to settle on a destination. But as she dodged first through alleys and deserted streets then through backyards planted for summer gardens, she realized there was no place of safety. The club was on the very edge of town, close to the border where long ago the elves drew a line and dared humans to encroach any further. To get to even the closest witch who might shelter her would require her to double back and traverse an obstacle course rich with mages.

Without her magic she couldn't feel the tracking spells, but she knew they followed her, leaving a trail for the sorcerers who cast them. If she stopped she'd be caught. If she turned back she'd be caught.

Silver passed through a final backyard. In front of her, beyond a buffering strip of unclaimed land lay the thick, dark forest of the elves.

She'd trespassed in them before—more than once when the need for healing plants was great. But never at night.

Her lungs burned and her sides cramped as she pushed herself forward. Even to gain a blood witch as a bride, the sorcerers would think twice before following her into elven woods under a nearly full moon.

She'd be safe from the magi tonight, but from the elves... She had no choice. Daring a glance behind her and seeing movement, Silver plunged into the night-dark forest.

* * * * *

Tynan barely noticed anything in Wraith's home beyond the carving of the woman. The wood was smooth and warm against his palms as he held it reverently, cupped in two hands though it extended beyond them several inches on each side.

He was amazed at the fine detail, at how the shadows and stains caused by age and exposure to the elements gave the impression of dark hair and lighter eyes. Wraith had captured her exquisite beauty, found and revealed it in the wood.

"Is it her?" Wraith asked.

"Yes."

"I've been working on it for months. Driven to handle it even after long days of travel. I should have known what it meant. But even after I found the scroll setting a precedent for how we could claim our father's title and position without bloodshed, I didn't guess."

Tynan traced the sensuous curve of the woman's mouth with his thumb. He followed the elegant neck down to the swell of her breasts. He was rock hard just looking at the statuette, barely able to keep from taking himself in hand.

"My dreams are impossible to ignore and yet I didn't consider that they might hold the answer until today," he said, loath to return the carving but afraid he would embarrass himself if he continued to fondle it.

Reluctantly he handed the statuette back to Wraith. He took a moment to look around, hoping the distraction would ease the ache in his testicles and the throbbing of his fully engorged penis.

Wraith's living room was warm, comfortable, a welcoming refuge from life in the elven enclaves—not what he would have expected of someone who guarded others for a living and was gone for long periods of time.

There were numerous chess sets around the room, each crafted with the same care as the woman revealed in wood. As Tynan studied them he contemplated how they would go about finding the unknown woman. Though he was sure he knew the answer, he asked anyway, "She's not familiar to you?"

"No. Not even in my dreams. I uncovered her features only with each stroke of my carving knife."

Tynan nodded, his gaze drawn back to the figurine. Consciously or unconsciously, Wraith's thumb traced the same path his had taken—lips, neck, the slope of breasts—then lower, over hardened nipples.

A foreign hunger pulsed through Tynan's cock. In a heartbeat his recurrent dream was expanded to include images of watching as the woman in it writhed in pleasure under Wraith's hand, of being watched as she thrashed in orgasm in his care.

Whoever she was, she was destined for them. If their births had been orchestrated long ago by calculating women who desired power for themselves and their clans, then hers had been brought about by natural forces intent on restoring harmony to the southern borderlands. "I think she must be near," he said.

Wraith nodded. "Given your dream and my carving, as well as us both being in this area at the same time, it would be reasonable to expect she is also close by."

Like human sorcerers, elves rarely cast spells together, but as Tynan watched Wraith's thumb glide over the smooth abdomen and reach the place where the uncarved wood kept the sweet secret of the woman's mound hidden, he knew what had to be done. He was Earth Clan. Wraith was Wind Clan. If they joined in a summoning spell she wouldn't be able to resist coming to them.

The wind knew no boundaries and would find her.

Stone and wood would yield to form a path for her to follow until she reached them.

* * * * *

Silver's side ached and her face stung from the branches that clawed her as she fought her way through the thick elven woods. When she got to a tiny clearing she stopped and doubled over, fighting for breath and willing her heart to slow its frantic pace.

Behind her the forest slowly returned to its normal rhythm. The silence caused by her frenzied flight gave way to the call of night birds and the croaking of frogs. Her fear faded under the soft glow of the moon. It didn't subside completely, but the panicked horror dissipated and flowed away on a spring breeze. Silver opened her fist to look at The Mark.

It was in the form of a circle though it contained smooth sections as well as patterned ones. A rippling line made her think of water. A jagged one made her think of mountain ranges. A spiked section was repeated in the very center of the circle. It made her think of flames and she wondered if that's why her palm had burned when The Mark appeared.

Why? Why me?

She spent only a second on the question because she already knew there was no answer. Witches, warlocks, sorcerers, nulls, even among themselves they couldn't agree on what The Mark meant and why it appeared.

A noise in the woods brought her head up. Crackling leaves and rustling branches had her standing upright again.

The odor hit her first, a second before she saw the feral yellow eyes. Wild boar, maybe, or a fey creature out for some fun, or perhaps even a sorcerer using the pig to hunt her.

She took a cautious step backward and the boar lowered its head. Even though it was almost completely shrouded in the darkness of the forest, its tusks gleamed yellow and wicked.

Silver continued backing away slowly. Surreptitiously she looked for an escape route. A shiver of surprise slid down her spine when the wind rustled, parting the dense undergrowth and revealing a path. She slipped onto it just as the boar's massive head was captured in the moon glow of the small clearing.

Instinct shouted at her to hurry, to run. And she listened.

* * * * *

Wraith's body tightened in anticipation. She'd been closer than either of them imagined. As soon as they'd cast their spell they'd known that instead of waiting days for her to come to them, she'd be there before even a single star faded from the sky.

He glanced at Tynan and saw the same tension and need written on his brother's face. He wasn't sure if they were feeding off each other's desire in the same way their magic had been stronger when merged, or whether the reality of the woman's existence had them both hard and anxious, hungry to make her theirs.

Tonight was fated. Wraith believed it deeply, totally. There was no other explanation. He and Tynan were meant to share this woman and in doing so, bring harmony and prosperity to the southern borderlands.

His cock throbbed as spell magic rippled past him on the breeze, arriving ahead of the female and opening the path for her even as the same path was being closed behind her. Beside him Tynan shifted position. Their shoulders touched in an unplanned gesture of unity just as undergrowth parted and tree branches bent to reveal her.

Exquisite. Enchanting. Wraith's breath caught in his throat and remained lodged there until he saw her storm-colored eyes flash with fear. He reached for her at the same time Tynan did. He saw her intention to turn and flee and the horror in her face when she realized the woods had closed around her, trapping her.

"Forgive me for trespassing. I'm being chased and seek only to remain safe until the Turning Ceremony," she said, holding her hands out in an instinctive gesture to ward off an attack.

Shock rippled through Wraith when he saw the mark on her hand. She was elfling—On the Cusp of Change. That she was here in these woods, afraid of them and speaking of the witches' ceremony meant she'd been raised human and was unaware of her heritage, unaware of the elven magic building inside her until it could be triggered by a spell.

"We intend you no harm," Tynan said, remaining still though he wanted to rush in and enfold her in his arms. Elfling. He needed no other proof she was created for the purpose of restoring harmony.

Matings between humans and elves were rare and half elf offspring were never knowingly left among humans. If a casual coupling resulted in a child, the newborn was stolen by their elf parent and raised in the enclaves until the mark appeared and the spell cast to trigger The Changing.

That the elfling in front of them thought she was human meant she was pure of affiliations and political aspirations despite the Fire Clan symbol in the center of the circular mark. She was On the Cusp of Change and would be wholly theirs once she became elf.

"You are safe with us," Tynan said, unable to stop from taking a small step closer, from lifting his hand and pressing his palm against one of hers.

Heat streaked straight to his cock and made him gasp. It wasn't the magic of the Fire Clan that caused his reaction, but the first touch of flesh to flesh.

"You are safe with us," he repeated. "I'm Tynan Carved From Stone and this is my brother, Wraith In Shadows."

His penis jerked when she wet her lips. His testicles pulled tight against his body when Wraith's palm covered the elfling mark on her left one.

She trembled, just a little, as the last of her fear faded. "My name is Silver, Silver Delacroix."

"Come inside. Take shelter and stay the night with us."

"I'm not elf," Silver said. She couldn't imagine they'd mistake her for one and yet the way they were both looking at her and the offer of their names instead of a curse made her wonder.

A coil of heated need formed in her belly with Tynan's quick smile. A wash of arousal escaped her slit when Wraith said, "Then come inside and pay the penalty for trespassing on elven lands. Tynan and I will make sure you find pleasure in the payment of it."

As if afraid she might bolt, their hands slid to her wrists and encircled them, lightly restraining her even as they stepped forward. Their nearness was overwhelming, intoxicating to her senses. Elven beauty was unparalleled and these men were chiseled perfection.

Her thoughts swirled. Images of having them as lovers tumbled through her mind quicksilver-fast as desire coursed through her bloodstream, tightening her nipples and swelling her cunt lips in its wake. Disbelief rose to temper the heat of need. Elves might enjoy the lustful, nearly worshipful way humans looked at them, they might see it as their due, but she'd never known an elf to either invite or compel a human into their bed.

Her gaze dropped. Doubt fell away when she saw the thick, identical erections pressing against the front of their pants.

Even if she hadn't been rendered null by The Mark, she was no match for them. They could easily enchant her with a spell. But as she stroked their cocks with her eyes and watched them grow fuller behind the concealing cloth, she knew they wouldn't need to.

They offered security and safety. No sorcerer would find and claim her while she was with them. And beyond that, they were a living fantasy, a chance to have two lovers at the same time before she went through the Rite of New Beginnings and took a warlock husband.

She shivered, nervous and excited, feeling as if she were on a dangerous precipice, but unable to turn away from it. Their hands tightened subtly on her wrists.

"Don't be afraid of us," Tynan said, leaning in, sucking at her lips, coaxing her into opening her mouth for him and tangling his tongue sensuously with hers in gentle persuasiveness.

Silver moaned when his free hand cupped her breast. She arched into his touch like a cat begging to be stroked.

He answered her plea with a quick curve of his lips against hers, with a press and swirl of his palm against her hardened nipple, with a deepening of his kiss.

She almost cried out in pain when he abandoned her mouth and breast. But then Wraith was there.

His fingers tangled in her hair, forcing her head back. His mouth covered hers and his tongue breached the seal of her lips in a possessive taking—different from Tynan's touch and yet just as enthralling.

She whimpered. Years of fantasizing about a dominant lover left her yielding, welcoming his touch as readily as she'd welcomed his brother's.

Wraith plundered, claimed. He left no place in her mouth unexplored. He left no doubt in her mind as to how thoroughly he intended to fuck her.

His cock ground against the juncture of her thighs and sent bolts of fire through her clit. Her cunt clenched and released, clenched and released, soaking her panties in arousal and filling the night air with the scent of it.

They were both breathing hard when Wraith lifted his mouth, both flushed. His dark eyes glittered in the moonlight.

She glanced at Tynan and trembled when she saw the same intensity in his face. There was no thought to protest, no thought to do anything but surrender herself to their care when they ushered her into the cottage.

Without a word they led her through the living room and into the bedroom. Candles lit with a flick of Wraith's fingers and a silent spell. A romantic glow spread across a huge bed resting on a platform only inches above the polished wooden floor.

Self-consciousness assailed Silver. She became aware of the sweat dried on her skin from her furious run to escape the magi. "I need to bathe," she said. It came out little more than a whisper.

Another flick of Wraith's fingers and light spread to a room adjacent to the one they were in. They released her wrists but followed her when she stepped into the bathing chamber.

For a long moment Silver could only stare at her surroundings in awe. So little was known about elves. They might mingle with humans but they didn't share the details of their lives or culture.

Only magical beings intimately tied to nature could create a room like the one she was standing in. Steam rose from a sunken tub carved out of sparkling rock. Around it there was a garden of exotic plants and vines, each with delicate, colorful blossoms of breathtaking beauty.

"This is exquisite," Tynan murmured, his voice holding the same awe she felt.

Silver turned away from the inviting tub in order to look at his face. Confusion must have been written on hers because he smiled and said, "This is Wraith's private retreat. I'm seeing it for the first time also."

Next to Tynan, Wraith stripped out of his shirt, drawing her attention to the smooth chest and well-defined muscles. She was mesmerized by the sight of his dusky, golden skin, unable to look away until Tynan shed his shirt as well.

They were a matched pair except for their eyes and manner, alluring and tantalizing, a fantasy no human could resist. Her breath caught in her throat when their hands went to the front closures of their trousers. Misgiving made her reach out and place her fingers on their wrists, halting them before they freed their cocks and filled her with a desire there'd be no turning away from.

She was suddenly afraid she'd continue to long for them after she married a warlock and settled in some remote location. Yet at the same time, she was equally afraid that if she turned her back on this chance to be with them, she'd forever regret it.

Tynan's smile was tender as he captured her hand and brought it to his chest. His heart beat sure and steady against her palm. The heat and smoothness of his skin made her toes curl and her cunt clench.

"Trust us to care for you," he said.

Wraith took her other hand. Instead of carrying it to his chest he pressed it against the hard ridge of his erection. "Trust us to pleasure you."

Silver shivered. Her hesitation dissolved under a wave of hot need. She pulled her hands from theirs and began unbuttoning her shirt.

Chapter Three

Nothing could have made Wraith look away as Silver freed the buttons on her shirt with fingers that trembled slightly. The scent of her arousal was headier than the most exotic and rare of the blossoms in his bathing room, and yet it was the sight of her bravery mixed with nervousness that pierced him, enthralled him.

Her vulnerability, the hint of fear she held because of their magic, her ignorance of what she was and who they were was an aphrodisiac. He'd coupled with women before, more of them than he cared to remember and none he considered other than a casual interlude.

They'd all been elves, coolly beautiful, confident elegant females who'd hoped to form a political alliance on behalf of their families or who'd hoped to rise above their caste by snaring him as a husband. The passion had been orchestrated, contained, *civilized*.

It would be different with Silver. She didn't know the rules of elven society, the customs deemed necessary among a race of people whose life spans were measured in centuries rather than decades.

He'd never encountered an elfling raised among humans before, never considered how freeing it might be. The few he'd met had been raised in enclaves, elf in upbringing and only waiting for the mark to appear so they could be changed.

His body tightened as Silver's shirt fell away and she slowly began unwinding the band of cloth used to bind her breasts. His cock throbbed so fiercely he could barely tolerate the feel of his trousers against it.

Wraith forced himself to take a deep breath. He gripped his penis through the fabric of his pants and resisted the urge to free himself.

When she was naked, he would order Silver to kneel at his feet and finish undressing him. He'd watch her storm-cloud eyes darken with lust as she obeyed him.

Everything about her, from the way she glanced at him through lowered eyelashes to the way she responded when he kissed her, told him she would accept his dominance.

The thought of a submissive woman sent icy-hot lust pulsing through his shaft. It was a fantasy he'd never permitted himself to explore with any female—until now.

As the cloth fell away and Silver's breasts were revealed in the candlelight, Wraith was filled with animal hunger. Her dark nipples made him want to bite and suck, to kiss down her flat belly and rip her pants off so he could wallow in the scent of her.

He wasn't alone.

Next to him, Tynan's chest rose and fell in rapid succession. He'd already freed the closure of his trousers.

A low moan escaped from his brother and Wraith looked up to see Silver's eyes measuring Tynan, her lips glistening as if she'd licked them at the sight of his engorged cock.

Her fingers lingered at the waistband of the sleek leather pants she was wearing. A hesitant, almost shy expression formed on her face.

Wraith's cock jerked, leaked. "Take them off," he ordered.

Silver's cunt spasmed with Wraith's command. She rubbed her fingers along her waistband, finding comfort in the subtle stroking of her abdomen.

She hadn't anticipated them following her into the bathing chamber, hadn't imagined herself stripping in front of them. It excited her, and yet at the same time she was nervous. With other lovers there'd been foreplay, heated touches so even before they saw her cunt they were prepared for the bare, smooth skin.

She had no idea what elves found appealing. But the thought of Wraith or Tynan going soft with disgust was a blow she didn't want to sustain.

A needy whimper escaped when Tynan stepped into her and his cock pressed against her belly. He cupped her breasts and kissed her softly, repeatedly.

Arousal escaped from the head of his penis. It wet her skin like a sensuous lick.

"I'll help you," he whispered, his hands leaving her breasts in order to glide down her sides and over to the fastening of her pants.

Silver put her hands on Tynan's chest. The rapid beat of his heart matched her own. She met his eyes though she remained very aware of Wraith only a step away, waiting for her to obey him.

Exquisite need rolled through her when Tynan loosened her pants enough to slip his hand inside and cup her mound. Her confidence returned in rush with his low moan, with the desire she saw on his face as he petted her smooth flesh and ran his fingers through her slick heat.

"You're walking a dangerous line between assistance and interference, brother," Wraith said, his voice holding both menace and warning. "I told *her* to strip."

Tynan circled her engorged knob, coated it with her arousal before reluctantly removing his hand from her pants and kneeling at her feet. Without a word he unlaced her soft ankle-high boots and slipped them from her feet.

She'd never thought of her feet as erotic, but his touch made her vitally aware of how sensitive they were. When he shackled her ankles in his warm hands, she felt bound to him.

He and Wraith were beautiful, exotic, magic given perfect form and breathtaking features. In her most private fantasies she'd never imagined being desired by elves.

"Do as my brother commanded," Tynan said, stroking his thumbs over the inside of her ankles, the heat of his palms traveling through her veins and making her cunt lips swell and part even further. Silver's gaze met Wraith's. She opened her pants further then pushed them off her hips along with her underwear, let them fall to where they were greeted by Tynan's hands.

As she stepped out of them she reveled at the way Wraith's dark, dark eyes found her bare pussy and remained there. She thrilled at the way his face tightened when Tynan's hands settled on her hips and he leaned forward to nuzzle and lick at her woman's folds.

Silver whimpered and spread her legs willingly for Tynan's wet kiss and probing tongue. Her fingers anchored themselves in his shiny black hair as she gave herself up to an eroticism she'd only dreamed about, having one man pleasure her with his mouth as another watched and hungered.

Tynan's cock pulsed and throbbed against his belly. Streaks of fiery lust racked his testicles as his heart thundered in his ears and he struggled for breath.

She was slick arousal and silky sensation, so intoxicating that every second he lingered between her thighs he risked coating his stomach with seed as he did when he dreamed about her. Nothing had prepared him for how thoroughly he wanted to surrender himself to her.

Years of loneliness, of waiting, of feeling isolated fell away as he inhaled her scent and thrust his tongue into her slit. She was his. Theirs. And tonight he intended to pleasure her with his mouth, with his cock, with everything he was—to give himself to Silver and at the same time forge a bond with both her and Wraith that would last for centuries.

Reluctantly he forced his mouth away from her erect clit and wet folds. He wanted to be the one to claim her cries of release, to feel her channel spasm around his tongue. But honor and instinct demanded that he and Wraith share her first orgasm.

Somehow he managed to get to his feet, to shed his boots and trousers. He took his cock in hand and groaned when Silver's eyes darkened at the sight of him gripping

himself, alternating between fucking through his fist and holding himself tightly lest he come.

His buttocks clenched when Wraith ordered her to her knees and she went willingly, obediently. He couldn't look away when she peeled his brother's trousers down.

Wraith's cock was beaded with arousal, the veins on the underside thick. Tynan expected his brother to demand that Silver suck his penis into the dark heat of her mouth.

Their eyes met, clashed. He saw in Wraith the same battle he'd fought, to be the first to have her, to not only demand Silver's surrender but to surrender himself to her.

Their race wasn't psychic, but in that instant he and Wraith reached an unspoken agreement. Tonight they would concentrate on pleasuring her, on seducing her so thoroughly that when the moment of change came, she wouldn't resent them for making her elf.

They would allow the night to proceed seamlessly, without judgment, without trying to selfishly make and hoard pieces of it for themselves. Once she was theirs—elven—there would be centuries in which to make private memories with her.

Wraith ordered her to remove his boots so he could step out of his trousers. She ducked her head, attended to the task with submissive, alluring grace.

It wasn't a fantasy of Tynan's, to command a woman, but as he watched his brother dominate her, his cock grew harder and his balls tighter. He imagined himself ordering her to bathe him, to glide soapy hands over every inch of his skin before he relented and did the same to her.

A shudder went through him. He was too close to coming to play with her in the sunken tub now, but later, after they'd experienced the first rush of passion... Later he'd slip into the heated water with her and give himself over to her care.

His brother's face tightened in struggle. His hands remained clenched at his sides, fighting the urge to clutch her silky hair in his fists and hold her in position while her lips and tongue kissed and laved his rigid cock.

With a casualness he didn't feel, Tynan reached over and removed a segment of the vine grown specifically to serve as a hair tie. He braided his long hair then sat on the edge of the sunken tub before slipping into it. The heat of the water made him shudder and long for Silver's sheath. He took himself in hand again and watched as Wraith lost his battle for control.

Wraith could barely keep himself from shaking under the onslaught of lust assailing him. He felt like a stallion in the presence of a mare, snorting, quivering with the need to mount her and thrust his penis into her slick channel.

"Put your mouth on me," he ordered, unable to stop himself from spearing his fingers through her hair.

His hips jerked when Silver's tongue darted out to wet the lips he urgently needed to feel on his cock. The glances she was giving him from underneath her eyelashes had his heart pounding, his breath coming in little more than pants.

"Put your mouth on me," he repeated, tightening his grip on her hair—a silent threat that he'd force her even though they both knew it wouldn't be necessary.

She took him in her hands first, encircled his penis with one while the other cupped his heavy testicles. Wraith's hips bucked, once, twice as he fucked through her fingers in a desperate attempt to get to her mouth.

A groan of pleasure erupted when she finally obeyed and took the tip of his cock between her lips. He nearly went to his knees when her tongue washed over the smooth head before probing the slit.

"More," he said, uncaring how close he sounded to begging, how desperately he needed her.

Silver had never felt so full of feminine power, so alive and desirable. She could feel Tynan's heated gaze roaming over her back and buttocks. She could feel his hunger as he watched her pleasure his brother. Having him witness what she was doing excited her, made her wetter than she'd ever been.

Wraith's thick cock and dark commands had her cunt spasming and silky moisture coating her inner thighs. She spread her knees, wanted to share her arousal with Tynan.

Her hand prevented Wraith from going deeper into her mouth but he tried to do it anyway. His engorged shaft pushed through her fingers, teased her with the feel of satin over steel, the hot, summer-wind taste of him.

His cock throbbed against her palm as if his heart had taken up residence there. That she could have this man as her own, even for a night, was an intoxicating thought.

With a moan she began sucking, laving him with her tongue.

Wraith's reaction was immediate, intense. "Yes," he panted, buttocks clenching as he doubled over and began thrusting with each pull of her mouth.

She took as much of him as she could, reveled in the sound of his harsh breathing and groans of pleasure. It was raw emotion and naked passion, unlike anything she'd ever experienced with another man.

His fingers left her hair to roam over her back then around to cup her breasts and take possession of her nipples. He was rough, dominant, his fingers reclaiming the control so she sucked in the rhythm he set, whimpered and hungered for what he was willing to give her.

Tynan left the water, drawn by the sight of Silver's swollen folds and wet inner thighs. He no longer cared if he disgraced himself by coating his belly with his own seed. He couldn't stay away.

Wraith's face was a mask of agonized pleasure. A light sheen of sweat coated his chest as he thrust in and out of her mouth.

For a split second Tynan wanted to rip Silver away from Wraith's cock. Instead he tightened his grip on his shaft and promised himself that later he'd know the feel of her lips and tongue on his penis.

Satisfaction rippled through him when he cupped her mound with his hand and was welcomed with a rush of liquid arousal. She rubbed against him like cat greeting a favored companion. He stroked her engorged clit then thrust into her with his fingers, allowing Wraith to control the rhythm as her sultry heat burned him and her sheath clung to him.

Silver moaned and whimpered. Her world was reduced to hot sensation and erotic need as lust pulsed from her lips to her cunt in a nearly unbearable sexual current beginning with Wraith and ending with Tynan.

She sucked harder on Wraith's cock, took him all the way to the back of her throat as she thrust against Tynan's fingers, fucked herself on them until she swallowed Wraith's release before finding her own.

Tynan grimaced as he looked down at his abdomen and chest. In the moment Wraith came in her mouth, the hot wash of his seed had erupted as well.

He plucked another piece of vine then gathered Silver's hair. When it was braided he lifted her into his arms and got into the tub with her, letting the water carry away the evidence of passion.

His heart sang at the way she wrapped her arms around his neck and settled on his lap, content to let him care for her. "Stay," he said, plucking a small blue fruit from a vine and crushing it in his palm to make soap.

Silver laughed. "Not you too. One dominant male in the room is enough."

Wraith selected a yellow fruit before joining them in the water. Amusement lightened his features. "Then I'll say it, 'Stay'."

I could get used to this, Silver thought as they bathed her, refusing to let her do it.

Don't think like that, her heart warned, reminding her it would be foolish to dream of anything more, to expect anything more. If The Mark was indeed a portent signifying that The Goddess intended her to walk a different life path than the one she'd trained for, then there would no doubt be another sign providing direction—but it wouldn't lead to them.

Even if she wasn't a witch ready to go through the Rite of New Beginnings and gain a territory to serve, there was no future to be had with Wraith and Tynan. Elves were clannish, secretive. They let few outsiders into their world. And though she'd traded with some of them and enjoyed the exchange, the attitude of the females at the club was far more common.

It doesn't matter. Enjoy the here and now. Enjoy them until tomorrow night, she told herself, thoughts of the future falling away along with the bath water when Tynan rose with her in his arms.

Carefree joy filled her heart when Wraith summoned a hot breeze to swirl around them and dry their skin. Anticipation built with each caress of heated air and at the way Wraith's eyes roved over her hungrily.

"I'm ready for bed now," she whispered, wanting to witness the effect her words would have on them.

The breeze fell away abruptly, only a breath faster than it took Tynan to carry her to the low bed and place her on it. She moaned when he came down next to her and claimed her mouth in a kiss that left her twisting, pressing against him in an effort to get him to cover her body with his and thrust into her.

Wraith joined them. He grabbed her wrists and pinned them down to the mattress with one of his hands while the other slid over her abdomen on its way to her cunt. Silver arched and spread her thighs when his fingers found her, rubbed over her swollen labia and throbbing clit.

"Please," she begged the moment Tynan lifted his mouth from hers.

Tynan felt close to begging himself. He was overwhelmed, torn by conflicting desires, wanting to experience all of her at once.

When Wraith claimed her mouth Tynan gave into the driving need to explore her breasts. He slid down until he could capture a dark nipple in his mouth.

Her moan of pleasure was a siren song. He licked, laved, suckled hungrily as his hand joined Wraith's between her thighs.

She was so wet, so responsive, so purely passionate. There was no subterfuge, no ambition guiding her reactions. What she gave them, she gave freely in response to the pleasure she found in being with them.

His penis throbbed urgently against his belly. Arousal beaded on the tip. He wouldn't coat himself with seed, not again. The next time he came it would be in Silver's slick channel or welcoming mouth.

Lust roared through his veins like molten lava, like stone melted in heat so intense it couldn't be survived. He wanted her, needed her. In a moment it would be him begging, him whispering *please* over and over again.

The image of her plump, flushed folds filled his thoughts. The desire to finish what he'd begun earlier drew him away from her nipple. He wanted to taste her release and feel her orgasm against his lips and tongue.

Wraith yielded her sheath as soon as Tynan got there. His arousal-coated fingers claimed the nipple Tynan abandoned, squeezing it in time to the thrust of his tongue.

Silver burned from the inside out. Wraith's dominant claiming of her mouth and breast had coils of lust tightening in her belly. Tynan's hungry assault on her cunt had her crying with need.

She didn't stand a chance against them. There was no place to hide from the pleasure, no cell in her body that could resist their demand to yield, to give herself over to pure sensation and let them witness her release.

Wraith's tongue thrust in and out of her mouth with the same unrelenting determination as Tynan's fucked into her slit. They drove her up and over until one orgasm after another rippled through her and she was left limp, sated, content—until she saw their cocks.

They were both fully engorged, the veins on the undersides standing out stark against the steel of their shafts, the heads purpled and glistening. When she licked her upper lip, remembering the silky texture and summer storm taste of Wraith, another bead of arousal appeared and pressed a wet kiss to his belly.

A shudder of need passed through Tynan as her gaze settled on him. He was on his hands and knees, crawling up from her cunt, his testicles hanging huge and heavy between his thighs, his penis a hard line against his muscled abdomen.

The sight made her sheath spasm. A shiver of remembered orgasm passed through her and she wanted to give him the same pleasure he'd given her, to take his cock in her mouth and love him with her lips and tongue until he knew the ecstasy of release.

Wraith still held her wrists pinned to the mattress. His hand remained possessively on her breast. His dark eyes were hard with the promise of more dominance.

A lightning strike of erotic desire whipped through Silver, striking her clit and making it pulse. "Let me have Tynan while you fuck me," she whispered.

Wraith's eyes flashed, a carnal storm in pitch-black night. "You heard her, brother," he said, then wrenched Silver up and positioned her on her hands and knees.

Chapter Four

Silver shivered in anticipation. She widened her thighs and immediately took Tynan's cock in her mouth when he knelt in front of her. She was too needy to tease, too desperate to torment him the way she'd done with Wraith.

If Wraith was the wildness found in a summer storm, Tynan was the earth in springtime, fresh and exhilarating, throbbing with promise and potential. She sucked his penis, took him deep, hard, and filled with heady power when he nearly whimpered at the pleasure she was giving him. It was ecstasy returned a hundredfold when Wraith forged into her channel.

Tight. So tight. Despite the arousal dripping from her slit, Wraith fought for every inch his cock claimed. He felt as primitive as the earth from which The Mother had created elves, as powerful as the storm-filled skies of The Father's domain.

He groaned when he was fully seated, panted and shuddered as her sheath tightened and released on his penis like a hungry mouth, sucking him as she was sucking his brother. Ecstasy, it was the ultimate surrender of will, and yet he'd known nothing else since the first touch of his lips to hers, the first tangle of his tongue with hers. He might dominate her but she commanded his pleasure, his future.

He nearly came when Tynan began begging, thrusting wildly as Silver took him between her lips. Wraith had never shared a woman before, had only rarely fantasized about it, but as he watched his brother's cock forging in and out of Silver's mouth, his testicles pulled tight against his body and his penis grew so swollen that he couldn't remain still any longer.

Wraith closed his eyes and gave himself over to mindless pleasure and raw passion, to lust so hot it became molten, liquid hunger. His breath charged in and out of his chest. His heart raced, its beat a wild uncontrollable pulse surging through his cock and making his hips buck until his shout of release filled the bedroom.

Even after the last of his seed escaped, white-hot shards of soul-stealing pleasure continued to pierce him and make him tremble. He felt weak, boneless, satisfied in a way he'd never dreamed possible.

He would have collapsed on Silver, buried his face against her neck as his chest covered her back but somehow Tynan had kept from answering the siren song of her mouth. Wraith grunted when his brother pulled Silver out from under him. He dropped to the sheets and turned on his side so he could watch.

Emotion raged through Tynan, tender and fierce, all-consuming as he placed Silver on her back and settled on top of her. He'd waited a lifetime for this moment, resisted temptation and the lure of easy sex so he could couple with the woman destined for him, the woman who'd plagued his dreams with heated sensation but remained elusive until now.

"Silver," he whispered, shivering as her arms encircled his neck and pulled him to her for a kiss. He could taste himself and Wraith on her. He could taste all the seasons, all the elements. She was everything, their future.

The elfling mark on her palm sent a flame of heat straight to his cock. Deep inside her he could feel the magic building, getting ready to change her into what she was meant to be.

A shudder went through him at the thought of losing her. If their paths hadn't crossed in time...

Tynan deepened the kiss. His tongue tangled with hers as a touch of fear made him anxious to claim her. When her legs went around his waist, trapping him against her flushed, heated skin, he moaned and bucked against her smooth cunt and belly.

In, he had to get inside her. He needed to feel the hot, slick muscles of her sheath holding him, burning him, welcoming him.

"Silver," he whispered again, rising enough so his cock head found her entrance.

"Please, Tynan, please," she said, lifting, impaling herself on him and surrounding the tip of his penis with wet, fiery ecstasy.

He gave in to the desire that had built over a lifetime. With the first thrust he pushed all the way in and surrendered himself to the rightness of being with her.

There was no room for thought, no reality other than her sultry depths and the rub of her tongue against him as they clung to one another. He wanted to climb beneath her skin and live with her there. He settled for plunging wildly in and out of her, for swallowing her cries of release and giving her his own.

Trouble, Silver thought afterward as the covers were pulled up and she snuggled underneath them, held securely between Tynan and Wraith. She was in trouble.

The nagging twinge in her heart warned how easy it would be to build a fantasy around them—Wraith whose dominance thrilled and freed her, Tynan whose easy manner and tender touches made her feel cared for. She could love them. She could make a life with them. The Mark she'd looked upon with horror suddenly offered freedom from a path she'd once eagerly looked forward to treading.

Silver turned away from the thought before it could take hold, before doubts could form and deepen. No one knew what The Mark truly meant or why it appeared.

It would be gone soon enough. *She* would be gone. But she wouldn't regret this night even if it meant leaving for her new home alone and remaining that way until she could look at a warlock and not compare him to Tynan and Wraith.

There was no future here. There was only the moment. She closed her eyes and savored the feel of being held between Wraith and Tynan as she drifted off to sleep.

* * * * *

Silver woke to a room warmed by a spring breeze and smelling of exotic flowers. Sunlight filtered through gauzy curtains and birds sang in nearby trees. Her lips curved upward in a smile. It was a fitting way to wake up after a night of fantasy.

For a moment she luxuriated in the warmth radiating off Wraith and Tynan. At some point they'd rolled onto their backs but they'd remained close, pressed against her as if even in sleep they wanted to keep touching her.

Don't, her heart warned. Don't make it more than it is.

She'd never been casual in her choice of bed partners. Always before they'd been warlocks or nulls who were friends first and friends afterward, men who understood she wasn't free to give her heart until she finished her training and went through the Rite of New Beginnings.

Silver opened her palm and looked at The Mark. If anything it seemed more pronounced, darker and deeper than when it first appeared.

It had followed her into her dreams, the circle spinning wildly, the spiked lines in the center burning until she'd felt turned inside out, recreated. She closed her hand and eased into a sitting position, preferring to contemplate the men still sleeping on either side of her.

Stray tendrils of hair had escaped from their braids, but not enough to cover the delicate tips of their ears. She leaned down to study Tynan more closely.

He was mouth-wateringly gorgeous, beautiful and yet fiercely masculine. In sleep he was his brother's twin. Awake they seemed as different as night and day.

She wondered what he did with his time, what his interests were. A glance around the bedroom revealed carved chess sets, some finished, some in the making.

If she hadn't known otherwise, she would have guessed this cottage was his, that he tended the exotic garden in the bathing chamber and created the tiny playing pieces with his hands. Both required gentleness and patience.

Maybe not so different after all, she thought, turning her attention to Wraith and growing wet. He'd pulled the covers past where his cock nestled beneath a small thatch of downy pubic hair. Even soft he was alluring, making her imagine kissing down his chest and taking him in her mouth.

Tynan moved and she turned to find him watching her. With a casual sweep of his arm he tossed the covers off to reveal his hardened cock.

"Bathe with me," he said.

They slipped from the low bed, parted company only long enough to attend to more private business before sliding into the heated water of Wraith's spring-fed tub.

Silver selected a blue fruit from one of the bushes and crushed it in her hands. "My turn," she said, urging Tynan onto the ledge beneath the water's surface.

She lathered his chest and shoulders, positioned his arms on the edge of the sunken tub. "Stay," she murmured, giving him the same command he'd given her in the bath the previous night.

Tynan's laugh turned into a groan when she straddled his thighs and rubbed her mound against his jutting cock. She'd thought to tease, but the feel of his erection against her clit tempted her to rush.

Later, she told herself, remembering her earlier questions about him, wanting to take more than just the memory of sex when she left. "What do you do when you're not visiting Wraith?"

"Until recently I hunted for gems. The most valuable of them I cut and sold to merchants and craftsmen."

"And Wraith?"

"He's been a bodyguard to merchants and nobles."

"But not anymore?"

"No. Duty requires that our paths merge now."

Tynan took her hand in his and rubbed his thumb over the elfling mark. Though his body craved pleasure, his heart rejoiced in these moments of conversation.

He was glad for the chance to talk to her, to try to prepare her for what was to come. Her fate was written in stone, her destiny clear to him. She would become elf. She would he his wife and Wraith's.

Time was running out and he was forbidden from explaining the meaning of the mark. It was one of the most closely guarded secrets of his race. Still, he longed to ease her way, to offer her a future as appealing as the one she currently envisioned for herself. His conscience demanded that he not steal her dreams for the sake of his own.

"And you?" he asked. "If you choose to go through the Rite of New Beginnings, will you remain in New Holyoak?"

Silver shook her head. "No. By custom only one warlock and one witch offspring from each home is allowed to remain here. My aunt and uncle raised me. My cousin Joelle is the most gifted new witch in their home."

"What of your parents?"

"My mother died in childbirth without revealing the name of my father."

"So you will be sent away?"

"I'll be given a territory elsewhere."

"This is something you want?" He stroked her palm again and watched as her gaze settled on the mark and her expression grew pensive. "Tell me," he coaxed, abandoning her hand in order to pull her against his chest so they touched more intimately. "Does your heart demand that you serve as a witch?"

Silver ran her hand over his shoulder and up his neck, stopping when she got to his ear. She traced the outer shell then gently explored the delicate tip. His beauty clogged her throat with emotion, or perhaps his question had caught her at a vulnerable moment, juxtaposing fantasy against reality, highlighting the uncertainty and insecurity brought on by The Mark.

Perhaps the Goddess had looked into her heart and seen it was filled with a desire for a husband and children, a home to call her own instead of dreams of serving those in her territory. Perhaps that's why The Mark had appeared. And yet she did want to use her magic and training to aid others. She did want a life that held meaning. Tynan shivered as she stroked the tip of his ear. His cock throbbed against her mound and belly, making sexual hunger curl and build inside her.

Silver looked into his moss-green eyes. The tenderness she found there compelled her to answer his question honestly. "A witch's path is the only one I know."

"Wraith and I can show you another," he whispered before he captured her mouth and thrust his tongue against hers.

Hope flooded Silver, but she listened to the silent warning of her heart and allowed it to be swept away by heated need. She unbound his hair, combed her fingers through the luxurious black locks before returning to his ears.

Tynan groaned and shuddered. His hips jerked and his cock ground against her clit each time she stroked the sensitive tips.

"Enough," he panted, pulling her hands away from his ears when the kiss ended. Eyes that had been full of tenderness only moments earlier now blazed with fiery desire.

"Enough?" Silver teased, rubbing her hardened nipples against his chest, rising so the tip of his cock slid along her soft, swollen folds.

Tynan caught her hips, lifted them further and thrust upward, partially sheathing himself in her depths. "I was wrong," he said. "Not enough, but more."

Silver slid downward, taking all of him inside her. "You feel so good," she whispered, bracing her hands on shoulders. "Lean back. Let me make love to you this time."

"Anytime. Always."

He was chiseled perfection, a face she could spend a lifetime looking at. Her eyes never left Tynan's as she moved so his cock head kissed her entrance, then lowered so he pushed through her cunt lips and was swallowed by her channel.

He shuddered each time she rose. He groaned each time she took him all the way inside.

Small waves formed in the bath water around them. Swirling heat added to the sensation.

Endless spirals of desire twisted inside Tynan. He felt enthralled, completely captured in another's magic. She was liquid fire and pure temptation, a fantasy made flesh.

"Kiss me," he begged. And moaned when she took his mouth.

Her tongue twined with his, rubbed and stroked as her hard nipples pressed against his chest and her channel repeatedly swallowed his cock.

Each kiss was followed by another one, by a whiplash of desire.

Her movements quickened as their hunger grew. His buttocks flexed and jerked as he thrust upward. When her sheath tightened and rippled in orgasm, he was helpless against the need to come inside her.

Wraith gave them a minute to settle before he entered the bathing chamber with a plate of sliced fruit. He joined them in the water, his cock hard, throbbing, rigid against his belly.

It'd taken sheer willpower to stay away while the sounds of their lovemaking filled his cottage. Even now he wanted to bend her over the edge of the tub then kneel behind her on the sunken ledge and thrust into her. A shiver went through him as another image quickly rose to replace that one—a dark fantasy of spreading her ass cheeks and claiming her in a more primal way.

Wraith closed his eyes to regain control. He would take her—soon. But first he wanted to spend tender moments with her, as Tynan had done. He wanted to show her another side of himself before they ran out of time.

The magic was building rapidly inside her. Tendrils of it were beginning to reach out as if calling for the spell that would make her elf.

If she'd been raised among them then she would know what the mark on her palm signified. But she'd been raised among humans so the knowledge was forbidden to her until after she'd been changed and had time to learn their ways.

Her conversation with Tynan had given him hope, made him less fearful that she'd resent the loss of her old life. Still...

Wraith set the plate of fruit on the ground near the tub's edge. "I thought you might be hungry," he said, greeting her with a gentle kiss.

Silver couldn't help herself. Her eyes ate their way down his body until they got to his thick cock. Despite the number of times she'd already orgasmed, her cunt clenched at the sight of his engorged penis.

"I'm very hungry," she said, wondering if the nearly overwhelming sexual attraction was what all nulls felt in the presence of elves. Before The Mark appeared she'd never been so needy, so ready to take and be taken—but then she hadn't known Tynan and Wraith either.

Next to her Tynan laughed. His hand found her spine and slid downward, making her arch her back as if she were offering her breasts to Wraith in order to satisfy *his* hunger.

Wraith didn't hesitate. He captured a nipple and starting suckling.

Silver lost herself to sensation. She pressed into him, lifting off the narrow ledge to do it, cried out as Tynan's hand slipped between her thighs to cup and rub her mound.

Heat. Incredible heat. Her clit throbbed with it. Her cunt lips filled and parted as it pulsed through her, starting at Wraith's mouth and burning through her until it reached Tynan's palm.

There was fire in her veins, in her core. It was hotter, more intense, the same and yet different. Instead of burning her from the inside out, this time it seemed to reach for Wraith and Tynan, as if it would pour through her and into them.

She raked her nails over Wraith's back then freed his hair from its braid so she could spear her fingers through it and hold him to her. She needed him, needed the feel of his mouth on her, sucking in tandem with his fingers on her other nipple, synchronized with Tynan's movements between her thighs.

Pleasure rippled through her, unstoppable. And still the heat built, reached for them until it was nearly unbearable.

Wraith's fingers replaced his mouth. Lust glittered in his eyes. "Come for us. Now," he commanded and like a forest fire out of control, orgasm raged through her, fast and furious, decimating any resistance and changing the landscape in its wake.

Silver slumped against Wraith. She whimpered softly when he repositioned her so her legs were on either side of him and his cock was a hard ridge against her belly.

"I'll feed you first, then I'll take what belongs to me," Wraith said, satisfaction in his voice along with desire.

He selected a slice of pear and held it to her lips. Silver took the fruit he offered, licked the juice off his skin. He fed her another piece. This time she sucked his fingers clean, both of them remembering when it had been his cock between her lips.

Her nipples tightened when Tynan's knuckles touched the nape of her neck and spine as he freed her braid. She moaned when he combed through her hair with his fingers, shivered with pleasure when he began brushing it, pressing hard enough so each stroke scraped erotically down her back.

Silver luxuriated, not just in the heated water and exotic setting, but in Wraith and Tynan's attention. The Mark burned where it touched Wraith's chest, made her feel open, as though there was a conduit from his heart to hers. It felt the same when she touched Tynan, the core of her reaching for the core of him. She felt surrounded by magic, immersed in it—not just the spell magic of elves but a more profound magic, as if her destiny was entwined with theirs.

When she started to turn away from the thought, to slam hope behind the closed doors of her heart, her earlier conversation with Tynan whispered through her mind.

Jory Strong

Does your heart demand you serve as a witch?

A witch's path is the only one I know.

Wraith and I can show you another.

But would she be brave enough to take it if they did?

Chapter Five

Wraith shifted Silver from his lap and onto the hidden ledge. When he stood, her breath caught. With the water lapping at his thighs, he looked like a pagan god rising from the sea of creation.

His cock glistened, hard and wet, ready for her. "Let me take you with my mouth," she said, and his breathing grew unsteady. His fist clenched at his sides.

"No," he panted. "Put your knees on the ledge and lean over the edge of the tub."

Silver obeyed instantly, spreading her thighs without being told so he could see her flushed, parted folds and exposed slit.

She expected him to immediately thrust into her, to shove all the way in with a single stroke. Instead he palmed her buttocks, gripped them possessively as his thumbs glided along the flesh on either side of her back entrance.

The touch was darkly carnal, forbidden, leaving her feeling exposed and vulnerable, aroused despite the hint of erotic fear curling in her belly. "Have you ever known a man here?" he asked, rubbing a thumb over the pucker of her anus.

She jerked in reaction, felt her channel flood with moisture even as she fought the impulse to close her thighs and sink into the water. A whimper escaped when he circled the rim of her back entrance. "No," she whispered.

"Then Tynan will prepare you so I can take you here."

Wraith leaned down, kissed and licked the base of her spine. "Later we'll fuck you together. Would you like that? Do you want our cocks inside you at the same time?"

"Yes."

There was no hiding how much she wanted it. It was in her voice, in the arousal-scented air around them, in the way the small tremors ran through her.

Tynan returned the brush he'd been using on Silver's hair to an artfully concealed storage area among a collection of rocks and small sculpted bushes. Wraith's eye for subtle design pleased him and at another time he'd enjoy studying the intricacies of the bathing chamber. But at the moment he could only look away from Silver long enough to locate the small pearl-like beads filled with a lubricating substance.

He plucked one of them and rolled it between his fingers. His cock throbbed when his gaze shifted to Silver's smooth buttocks and the tiny rosette waiting for him.

Tynan shuddered. He couldn't resist the urge to lean in and run his tongue through her wet slit.

He wanted to suck on her lower lips and clit, to fuck her repeatedly with his tongue and hear her sweet cries of surrender. Instead he crushed the bead as Wraith's hands returned to caress her buttocks and hold them open.

Tynan rimmed her back entrance with his fingers, coated her opening in preparation for Wraith to take her. It was beyond erotic, beyond anything he'd ever imagined—to share a woman this way, to intimately ready her for pleasure with another man.

He didn't care that Wraith would be the first to take her virgin orifice. Though they'd been strangers before, now they were bound by more than the shared goal of restoring harmony and prosperity to the border region they'd rule together. They were bound to a woman, their future tied irrevocably to hers once she became elf.

It was different for elflings raised in an enclave. Though their magic was as weak as a human witch or warlock's, they were taught the words and gestures necessary to control their power once they passed from half human to fully elf.

Silver was full of wild magic. It was no small matter to see an elfling raised among humans through the change. Because she hadn't been taken in as an infant or small child, she hadn't gone through the necessary welcoming rites.

When she arrived at the Cusp of Change, he and Wraith would have to bind their magic to hers as they triggered the spell making her elf. It was a joining that couldn't be undone, a safeguard built into their race.

If other elves had seen the mark on Silver's palm they would have left her to become fully human. But as Tynan worked a lubricated finger into her back entrance, he felt a sureness that went soul deep. This was meant to be. She was meant for them.

The magic was building inside her. It was like a flame licking over him, filling his cock and testicles and heart—ready to rush in and consume him but in the process make him whole. When he and Wraith took her together and called the spell, earth, wind and fire would meld together in a passionate conflagration.

He captured his cock with his free hand, stroked it from base to tip as he worked another finger into Silver. Her moans filled the bathing chamber and were joined by the sounds his own rough, fast breathing. The way she rocked back and forth, wanted this as desperately as he and Wraith, was an aphrodisiac more potent than any produced by a spell.

Heat rolled off Wraith. Muscles flexed in his arms with the strain of watching. When Silver began begging, asking to be fucked, Tynan knew his brother wouldn't be able to hold himself back.

"Enough," Wraith said and Silver closed her eyes in anticipation. She'd dreamed about being taken like this, of being readied for two lovers.

A whimper escaped as Tynan's fingers left her and Wraith's cock head pressed against her opening. He was silky heat, velvety steel.

She pushed back on him, enticed him, felt thrilled when his breath became ragged as he slowly penetrated her. Fire burned up her spine and settled in her nipples. For an instant she wished they were in the bedroom so she could lower her chest and rub the pebbled tips of her breasts against the bedding. But then Tynan was out of the water and kneeling in front of her, cupping her, tweaking the hard points between his fingers, tugging at nipples made more tender by the suckling they'd received.

Lust shuddered through her, not only from the dark carnality of Wraith's penis claiming her, but from the sight of Tynan's cock and heavy balls, from the feel of his hands on her breasts and Wraith's on her pussy. She took Tynan in her mouth, moaned against his hard flesh as Wraith seated himself fully.

The fire quenched earlier returned in a rush, burning hotter, fiercer, demanding even more from her. It roared, so loud she couldn't hear her heartbeat, couldn't think as Wraith began moving, fucking in and out of her forbidden entrance.

She felt more powerful each time Wraith thrust, each time she sucked hungrily on Tynan's cock. The passion built, filled her like gathered magic.

Their ragged panting and moans became the words of a spell. Wraith's fingers circling, stroking, tugging on her clit became the trigger. She came before they did, clenched and shuddered then reveled in the sounds of their shouts of release as they gave her their essence.

Afterward they settled in the heated water of the tub. Wraith took her hand and turned it over so The Mark was visible.

Fear whispered through Silver. It was even darker, even more pronounced, as if her future was being branded into her palm.

He traced it with his thumb, opened his mouth to say something but before he could speak an unnatural wind poured into the bathing chamber.

"Trespasser?" Tynan asked.

In answer Wraith released her hand so his own could trace patterns in the air. The motions were accompanied by words spoken in a language she'd never heard.

The surface of the water in front of them silvered like a mirror used for scrying, then filled with the image of her cousin standing in a small clearing. Silver gasped when Wraith's hands moved as he began a new spell. She grabbed his wrists to still their motion, scared of the expression on his face.

"Please don't punish her for trespassing. That's Joelle. My cousin."

The darkness cleared from Wraith's face like a wind chasing away a storm. He twisted in her grip so his fingers encircled her wrists. Heat flared between them. Her pulse thundered against his palms just as his pulse throbbed against hers—beating together as though they were connected by something deeper than lust.

She felt his smile. It flowed into her like a summer breeze.

He leaned forward and gave her a tender kiss. "Do not fear for your cousin. Her trespass is forgiven if worry for you brings her into elven lands."

Their hands fell away though immediately Silver sought renewed contact. She found Wraith and Tynan's thighs underneath the water and smoothed over their muscles as she studied the images captured by Wraith's scrying spell.

Joelle looked frantic. It surprised Silver, and humbled her. Despite having been raised together, she and Joelle had never been as close as sisters.

Early on, before puberty, she'd been the stronger witch and Joelle had resented her for it. But after puberty, when Joelle's abilities grew until she became the more powerful one, they'd lived peacefully together.

They spent a great deal of time with one another though they didn't exchange secrets. Joelle seemed to relish the task of helping Silver learn spells she'd already mastered, and in exchange, Silver often accompanied her cousin to clubs.

Silver laughed softly as her hand encountered Wraith and Tynan's cocks. Every witch's spell required hard work and discipline, while her ability to attract the opposite sex with her elven looks came easily and grew more pronounced each year. Not only did she attract them for herself, but for anyone she was with, including a cousin who'd been blessed with magic but cursed with a face and figure that didn't draw men to her.

Now, seeing Joelle's worried expression and frantic calling, Silver felt a warmth toward her cousin that she'd never felt before. She hadn't known Joelle was capable of doing a tracking spell, but that she'd done one then followed it onto elven lands... Silver's eyes teared at the risk Joelle had taken.

"I need to tell her I'm okay," Silver said, standing, letting her hands trail upward over wonderful masculine flesh because she couldn't bear to break the contact with Tynan and Wraith.

The mirrorlike surface of the water dissolved, taking the scene with it as Wraith and Tynan also stood. The three of them got out of the water and once again Wraith called a warm wind to dry them off before they went to the bedroom.

Silver tugged on her leather pants and shirt, not bothering with undergarments. Wraith and Tynan pulled on their trousers as she laced her boots. When they remained barefooted she said, "You're staying here?"

Tynan knelt. His warm hands cupped her face. "You'll return?"

All it took was a touch, a look, and longing filled her, need. The thought of leaving them at all, even for just a few minutes was unbearable. The thought of leaving them for good—

"Yes." She forced herself to make light of the ache filling her, to see only the immediate future. "Wraith promised the two of you would fuck me at the same time. I'm going to hold him to his word."

Tynan leaned in and kissed her, a slow thorough twining of tongues. "It would be best if we weren't seen," he said when his mouth left hers. "No human is supposed to leave our lands unpunished if they're caught."

Silver laughed and glanced up at Wraith. "I can see your point," she teased. "Your woods would be full of trespassers if each of them had to pay the same penalty I've had to pay."

Wraith pulled her to her feet and gave her a punishing kiss. Every possessive cell in his body argued against letting her go alone, but Tynan was right. It would be better if she soothed her cousin's fears then quickly sent her on her way. The magic in Silver was almost at its peak, almost ready to be called by the spell that would change her.

Worry and fear squeezed his heart until it raced. He realized in that instant that he wanted to give Silver a choice about the future. Yet there was none. She was destined to

be his wife and Tynan's, to aid them in returning harmony and prosperity to the southern borderlands.

"Go," he said, stepping away from her.

Reluctantly Silver left the bedroom. Thoughts of her cousin made her want to hurry but the desire to remain with Tynan and Wraith slowed her. She felt caught in quicksand, as though the magic she'd possessed before The Mark was trapped inside her rather than gone, entwined with Tynan and Wraith's and desperately struggling to keep her with them.

The sensation was so real that her heart worked hard in her chest and her lungs labored for air. She stopped halfway into the living room, paused to catch her breath and fight the nameless panic filling her.

Silver tried to use the beauty surrounding her to regain control of her frantically racing heart. The carved chess sets soothed her, as did the image of Wraith hunched over, patiently carving the intricate pieces. But when she saw the partially finished statue on a table, her calm was shattered by its likeness to her.

"I've dreamed of you," Tynan said, kissing the side of her neck. "Wraith found you another way. Come back and we'll show you a different path than the one you've always thought to walk."

Tears flooded her eyes. Both men groaned and crowded in, kissing the moisture away, holding her until the riot of her emotions settled. She wanted to stay, to give in to the hope blossoming in her chest but concern for Joelle forced her out of their arms.

"I'll just go to the clearing, then come right back to you."

The door opened at Wraith's command. Beyond it, the wall of trees and brush parted to reveal a path. Silver kissed both men before hurrying away while she had the will to do it.

"I don't like this," Tynan said as the path closed behind her.

"Neither do I."

They remained where they were standing, struggling against the urge to follow her. Finally Wraith turned. He motioned to an elegantly crafted mirror mounted on the wall. "We can watch her from here."

* * * * *

"Thank the Goddess," Joelle cried as soon as Silver stepped into the tiny clearing. "Oh, thank the Goddess."

Silver staggered backward when her cousin launched herself. She wrapped her arms around Joelle, returning the unexpected hug with an equally fierce one.

She was reeling with emotion, her mind spinning from what she'd read into Tynan's confession and Wraith's carving.

Did it mean what she thought it did? Could they possibly have a future together?

Only the wetness of Joelle's tears had the power to draw Silver's mind away from thoughts of Wraith and Tynan. "I'm okay," she said, giving her cousin another hug before disengaging.

"You have The Mark?" Joelle asked, her features drawn, her hands clenched at her sides in tight fists.

"Yes." Silver turned her hand over to expose the circular pattern.

Joelle sobbed. "Oh Goddess, forgive me," she said, grabbing Silver's hand and holding a medallion between their palms.

Chapter Six

Horror stopped Silver's heart for a beat. It froze her lungs for an instant as a scream of denial rose up but couldn't escape. Though she couldn't feel the sorcerer's magic, she knew a spell had been woven into the coin.

The sense of betrayal deepened when she realized why Joelle had insisted they go to the club last night. Somehow she'd known what was going to happen.

Agony ripped through Silver. The Mark made her null—helpless against the sorcerer's spell that rendered her unable to fight, unable even to shout for help. Tears of rage and confusion and pain fell in a steady stream, a perfect outward reflection of the tears Joelle was crying.

Joelle sobbed again before turning away, her expression revealing her shame. "I prayed the dreams weren't a true prophecy, Silver. I prayed they were just nightmares because the thought of being sent away, of marrying in haste so I wouldn't be alone in some desolate village was terrifying. All I've ever wanted was to stay in New Holyoak. But then I heard Mother talking with some of the elders. They had the same the dream.

"They all agreed. The Mark would appear on your palm the night before the Rite of New Beginnings and if you came to the Turning Ceremony, then you'd stay in New Holyoak. I'd be given another territory and over time you'd become the most powerful witch in the coven."

Joelle began walking, her hand gripping Silver's tightly, ensuring that the medallion remained pressed between their palms. Inside Silver screamed, pleaded with her cousin to allow her to speak so she could tell her she had no intention of taking her place in the coven tonight. But the magic making her walk peacefully away from Wraith and Tynan kept her mute.

Tears gathered and fell more rapidly. Her heart grew heavier with each step. If they were watching her they could easily think that seeing her cousin had made her change her mind about returning to them.

"Oh, Goddess forgive me, but this is the only way," Joelle said as soon as they got to a wider path.

A knot formed in Silver's stomach. She recognized where they were and how quickly they'd be off elven lands.

Last night she'd entered the woods from a different location. She'd run blindly, worried about getting away from the sorcerers chasing her—only she hadn't truly escaped them.

She knew what was coming even before Joelle said, "Etienne's not as handsome or as powerful as some of the magi, but he's less arrogant. If I were a null, I'd be happy with him as a husband. He'll make sure you're happy—with a spell at first—but it won't be terrible. He promised the spell would work both ways. By the time it fades the two of you will be in love. And if the prophecy comes true, you'll grow very powerful. You'll find a place for yourself as a sorceress."

Joelle picked up the pace. "Etienne, hurry! Hurry! If you want a wife you need to come here. Now!"

Silver willed herself to fight the panic and horror. Etienne Durand was a decent man and less arrogant than most magi, but she wouldn't be bound to him without a fight. She wouldn't accept this as her fate.

* * * * *

Pain lanced through Tynan's heart. He wanted to wipe the mirror clean as soon as Silver left the clearing with her cousin.

The tears streaming down her face cut him like the sharp edge of stone and made him bleed inside. She'd gone to reassure her cousin, she'd promised to come back immediately—yet it was obvious she wasn't returning.

"No," he said, his voice hoarse with emotion. "No," he repeated, unwilling to let her go without a chance to coax her into staying.

"No," Wraith growled and the air filled with the menace of an impending storm.

They left the cottage, their magic rising up, joining and entwining in a way that spoke of fated destinies, earth and air spells linked and rippling out before them.

* * * * *

The sun was high and the sky free of clouds, but the closer they got to the elven border the darker and more hostile the forest grew. Unnatural winds howled along the path, whipping Joelle's words backward along with their hair.

Hope surged to life in Silver's chest again. It pounded through her veins in time to the rising panic of her cousin's racing heart.

Please, Silver prayed silently, knowing elven magic was responsible for the menace around them. *Let them reach me in time*.

But even as her prayer finished, Etienne emerged from the trees and hurried toward them. The sight of him caused Joelle to lunge forward just as a small sapling swayed and bowed in front of her.

It whipped across her ankles, tripping her and sending her to the ground. Silver started to tumble after her but was caught by a limb and slung backward, ripping her hand from Joelle's.

Silver scrambled to her feet and ran. The wind aided her, pushed her so roughly she nearly stumbled.

Joelle's shout chased her along with the sound of running feet and the beginning of a spell.

Hurry! Silver's heart screamed. Hurry!

She rounded a curve and slammed into a hard male chest. Tynan's arms enfolded her immediately, trapping her hands at her sides and nearly crushing her in a hug that resonated with the same emotions she felt. Behind her, racing footsteps came to an abrupt halt. Next to her Wraith cast a spell. In a heartbeat silence reigned, so pure that even the birds and insects honored it.

As soon as Wraith saw the sorcerer he understood Silver's tears as she left the clearing with her cousin. She'd been ensorcelled, led away unwilling. He knew enough about human custom to understand immediately what the magi hoped to gain because of the elfling mark on Silver's palm. A wife. What he couldn't grasp was why Silver's cousin had betrayed her.

It didn't matter. Time was running out. The magic inside Silver was nearing its peak. They'd be lucky to get back to the cottage before the spell needed to be cast.

"Put the trespasser on her knees in front of us, brother," he said, barely able to keep his hand off his cock when Silver looked up at him through dark eyelashes.

He took a minute to study her, making a show of looking her over as if he were a farmer studying a mare at auction. "She appeals to me. I think she could serve us well given that we don't have time to arrange for another. What do you say, brother?"

"I'm in agreement."

"Good." He tilted his head and widened his stance, hoping the magi and Silver's cousin were both too frightened to notice the stiffness of his cock pressing aggressively against the front of his pants. To Silver he said, "You will surrender yourself, attending to my brother's needs and my own until we free you, or you will live out your life as a bird, warning of the dangers of trespassing on elven lands. Choose your punishment, human."

"I'll stay with you," she whispered, sounding so deliciously submissive that his penis pulsed and leaked.

Wraith shifted his attention to Silver's cousin and the sorcerer. For an instant he was tempted to utter the curse that would strip them of their powers and render them permanently null, but he refrained from doing it. Instead he stripped them of their will and put the same spell on them that they'd intended for Silver. Then he sent them away, lost in a haze of infatuation that would last until they were safely married.

As soon as they were out of sight he scooped Silver into his arms and kissed her deeply, gently, possessively.

"I was running back to you," she said when he lifted his mouth from hers.

"I know."

He claimed her lips again, kissed her hungrily before setting her down.

Tynan immediately pulled her into his arms. Pain at her near loss, pain over what she must be feeling because of her cousin's betrayal echoed through his heart. "Be warned, we will never free you," he said, pressing kisses to her neck, her cheeks, the corners of her lips.

"I don't want to be free," she said.

Urgency filled him and he captured her mouth, sucked on her lips until she opened for him. A tremor of need, of emotion rippled through him and his arms tightened. She'd haunted his dreams for years with the promise of exquisite passion and true intimacy. He'd felt as though he was being ripped into shreds when he watched her leave the clearing with her cousin.

In so many ways they were still strangers, but there was an utter rightness to their union. He had no fear of giving his heart to her as well as his body. They were meant to be together.

Tynan rubbed his tongue against hers, desperate to get as close to her as possible. The magic rose up inside her to greet him. It poured down his throat and went straight to his cock.

When his hands went to the front of her shirt, Wraith's fingers gripped his wrist, stopping him. "Let's finish this at home," Wraith said.

Denial shuddered through Tynan. His penis screamed in protest, wept with its need to get inside Silver. But he knew Wraith was right. This wasn't the place to call the magic that would change her.

Reluctantly he ended the kiss and stepped away from her. He took her hand in his, unable to stand complete separation. Wraith claimed her other hand and they hurried back to the cabin and into the bedroom.

"Strip," Wraith said, peeling his trousers off.

Silver shivered at the sight of his cock. She removed her shirt and let it join his on the floor. Tynan's sole article of clothing was added to the pile.

Tynan knelt in front of her, removing her boots the way he'd done the previous night, then tugged her pants off so she was standing naked before them. She opened her legs, whimpered as he kissed her bare mound and thrust his tongue into her slit.

She'd told herself that if The Mark was a portent signifying The Goddess intended her to walk a different life path, then there would be another sign providing direction. Tynan's dream and Wraith's carving of her, their words and touches—they were arrows pointing toward her destiny and she intended to go where they took her.

Betrayal was still a heavy weight in her heart, but it lightened as Tynan made love to her with his mouth. Liquid hunger poured into her with the touch of his lips and tongue, desire so potent she would have sunk to the floor if Wraith hadn't positioned himself behind her.

His hands claimed her breasts. His cock pressed against the crevice of her buttocks. "Do you want both of us?" he whispered, tracing the shell of her ear before fucking into the sensitive canal.

"Yes," she moaned. "Oh yes."

His fingers tightened on her nipples. "Then beg for us. Tell us how much you want to feel our cocks inside you."

Arousal gushed from her slit, sending Tynan into a fevered frenzy. She bucked and jerked, fucked herself on his tongue and ground herself against his mouth. It wasn't enough.

A raging inferno burned out of control inside her. One that would never be extinguished, but only brought under control by their touch.

She begged. She pleaded. She impaled herself on Wraith's cock as soon as he lay down on the bed.

Even lying beneath her, he still dominated. His kiss was a carnal demand that left her whimpering, pleading with her lips and tongue, with the softness of her body for him to let her have Tynan, too.

She shivered when Wraith's hands stroked down her back and settled on her buttocks, parting them, using her own arousal to lubricate her back entrance for his brother. She cried out at the feel of Tynan's cock head pressed against her opening, shuddered as he fought his way in, stretching her, making her feel full of magic and man.

It was dark fantasy and pure eroticism, to be taken by both of them, to hold their cocks inside her in shared intimacy. She moaned between them, felt as if her skin could no longer contain her emotions.

"You're ours," Tynan said. "Completely ours. For always."

"Tell us," Wraith demanded.

"I'm yours. For always," she whispered, her inner muscles tightening on their cocks, sucking at them, pleading with them to start thrusting.

Tynan kissed her shoulder and neck, almost unable to bear the incredible sensation of being inside her at the same time as Wraith. Heat and magic radiated from her core, reaching with an insistence that could no longer be ignored. It was time.

He began the spell and Wraith joined in, their words spoken in a seamless blending of voices. It was torture to remain still, but at the same time, it was darkly erotic to feel his brother's cock alongside his, separated by only a thin barrier.

They were both straining, nearly panting by the time the final words of the spell were said. Between them, Silver whimpered and shivered and begged for them to fuck her. There was no choice but to answer her pleas.

Groans and feminine cries of pleasure filled the room. Hips jerked as hands and mouths roamed. Flesh pressed and rubbed desperately against flesh.

Lust burned through their veins, pooled until there was only thrusting, retreating, claiming—the shouted sounds of unparalleled release as orgasm slammed through them and the magic that had been unleashed took them under.

They were still clinging to each other, still breathing heavily and trembling with spent passion when consciousness returned.

Silver felt different. Alive. Magical.

Around her colors seemed more vibrant. The air pulsed with potential.

She rubbed her cheek against Wraith's, lazily stroked upward until her fingers could tease the delicate tip of his ear. He bucked and grunted, started to harden against her belly.

Behind her Tynan chuckled. He rose onto his elbow, smoothed the hair away from her face before taking her earlobe into his mouth.

Her nipples tightened instantly, became hard knots against Wraith's muscled chest. "Again?" she asked, amazed at how quickly they could recover, thrilled by how often they wanted her.

"Always," Tynan said, releasing her earlobe.

Fire streaked through her when his mouth closed around the top of her ear. He sucked and laved, traced the shape of it with his tongue until sudden understanding made her go rigid with shock.

When her fingers replaced his mouth in exploring the pointed tip, he said, "Forgive us for making you elf without asking you first. It was the only way to keep you with us and make you ours."

Disbelief. Hope. Fear. Joy. So many emotions cascaded through her at once that she was left mute.

Wraith leaned in. He kissed her gently, reverently. "We'll spend a lifetime ensuring your happiness. Tell us we're forgiven for not allowing you a choice. The window of opportunity for changing you was small and so much was at stake."

Silver's heart grew full. She could come to love these men, deeply, irrevocably—she already felt the first stirrings of it.

"I forgive you," she said, reaching for him only to still when she saw her palm.

The Mark was gone.

"Let us show you true magic," Tynan whispered, his lips going to the sensitive tip of her ear again, his cock hard and ready against her buttocks.

Wraith's eyes darkened with an erotic storm. He took her hand, placed a kiss on her palm. "Surrender to us," he demanded. "Your destiny is to be our wife."

"Yes," Silver whispered, more than willing to embrace a future with them, to share her bed with Wraith and Tynan wrapping her in love and security.

About the Author

Jory has been writing since childhood and has never outgrown being a daydreamer. When she's not hunched over her computer, lost in the muse and conjuring up new heroes and heroines, she can usually be found reading, riding her horses, or hiking with her dogs.

Jory welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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