

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

LACEY THORN

Fanning
HER
Flames

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Fanning Her Flames

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FANNING HER FLAMES

Lacey Thorn

This book is dedicated to the following people:

To my brother who was the first to introduce me to fantasy and sci-fi books. I found a new love and I thank you for it.

To my little Chewie, you make me proud!

To my fellow froggies, may the pond waters ripple often with our waves of celebration!

And last but never least, to Shel, Mel, and Kel, who help me keep my sanity with plenty of girls' nights out!

Prologue

As it once was

Asme looked up at the man who had just placed an eagle on her lower right abdomen. The flesh was numb but she could still smell where it had been burned into her skin. This man called himself the prince. His brother still held her arms tight across her chest. All of the claimable women on her small island home were now held by their new mates. These men had stormed their island and forcefully taken possession of it and now them. Asme felt sorrow. Now they would all suffer the same fate because this man, this prince, had taken instead of speaking with the women and asking if they would share the bounty of their unblemished island home and allow the warriors to court them.

The high priestess of the goddess's temple had placed a curse on the Isle of Altair and all who now lived there.

"Then know this, Warrior. Because you take instead of seek, because you cause the goddess to weep. In this take heed my words to hear, for a time of reckoning soon will near. In five times five the Guardians will arise, five women marked by the goddess's eyes. Of fire, earth, water and air, four will become the Guardians of Altair. The fifth shall ply the mystic realms and draw them together in the valley of Elms. When the five are united in this mystic place, only then will the curse be lifted I place. Cursed to battle to hold what you take, this is the hand dealt you by fate. Warriors fierce with muscles and brawn shall pray for the day of the Guardians to dawn. For only through them will peace come at last. The Guardians united shall atone for your past. So protect and serve when once they appear, or be cursed to live forever in fear."

The prince of course had scoffed at the idea of a curse but the priestess had taken a dagger to her palm and dripped her blood on the altar before speaking the sacred words to begin their plight.

“Marked with blood to seal the curse. You have sealed your own fate and that of all of your warriors, Prince. You will know no peace until they come. Remember my words and guard them well. For if one shall die all will be lost.”

Asme had been given the task of making sure that all the women on Altair knew of the curse and made preparations for the coming of the Guardians of Altair. The high priestess had known that she could trust Asme to see this task done. After all, the high priestess was Asme’s mother.

So now she stood on the steps of the sacred Temple of the Goddess and witnessed the rite of Warrior Claiming Law. According to Warrior Law, which they would all now be subject to, once a woman was claimed, marked and bedded, she would be the undisputed bonded mate of the set or group of warrior brothers who had claimed her, a new way of life for them all. Only now when women were so scarce were the groups of brothers forced to share a mate instead of each seeking their own. Asme now belonged to the prince and his brother.

The prince stood and he and all the warriors in the courtyard yelled their triumph to the heavens. These men, who had suffered the loss of their home, their wives, daughters and mothers, now had a place to live and women to start over with. The prince held his hand up for silence and spoke to his warriors.

“You may now bed your mate!”

To Asme’s horror many of the women were pulled to the ground right there and mounted. As the women didn’t wear much clothing—their tops consisted of two scarves tied together behind their neck, wrapped around their chest, each cupping a breast and then tied behind their back, and skirts that fell to their ankles made of black scarves attached to a black band of lace—this wasn’t hard for the warriors to accomplish. The skirts were shoved up out of the way, the tops untied and moved aside.

Asme felt her own body being tugged down to the steps. The prince’s brother held her hands high over her head with one hand and untied her top with the other. The

prince knelt between her thighs, shoving her skirt to her waist before spreading her legs wide. He quickly untied the laces on the brown pants that every warrior wore but didn't remove his belt of weapons before pulling his long, thick cock out and placing it at her pussy. As she felt no lust for this man in this moment she was dry as could be.

The prince scowled down at her before spitting on his hand and using it to moisten her enough to allow his cock entry. Asme gritted her teeth and refused to cry out as he used her body for his pleasure. He was large and she had not yet known a man. Tears leaked from her wide-open eyes but not a word left her mouth. She could taste her own blood where she was biting into her bottom lip. The prince turned away from her face, bending down to latch onto one of her nipples. He sucked and fucked, using and abusing Asme as only a man can.

Once she thought she saw a look of compassion and remorse cross his face but it was there and gone too quickly for her to be sure. Finally he reached his release and spilled his cum in her pussy, throwing his head back and roaring his triumph for all to hear. Finished, he pulled from her and put his cock back in his pants and stood up to retie his laces.

"She's all yours now, Godar," he told his brother. But Godar just shook his head before he ripped a scarf from her skirt and started wiping her thighs with it. It was only then that the prince noticed the blood that marred the creamy skin of her still-splayed legs. His eyes flew back to her face and he noticed the bloody portion of her bottom lip that still bore the impressions of her teeth. Silent tears still seeped from her eyes and the sight of her like that tore at the ice that encased his heart. For the first time he noticed how young she was. He would have never expected her to be a virgin at twenty-four. Women in his culture were claimed on the passing of their twenty-first summer. He felt shame for what he had done to this woman he had taken as mate and that made him angry. "Do with her as you wish. I will see about turning this temple into a residence for us." With that he strode away and didn't look back.

Godar looked down at Asme and gently wiped her tears from her cheeks. He wiped the blood away as best he could and gently fixed her clothing before easing her into his arms and heading for the temple as well. Asme realized he was heading to the bathing room and realized he must have come across it when he and other warriors were searching the temple for women. He placed her on her feet, just inside the door. He pointed to one of the tubs of still-steaming water and pointed to himself before motioning to the door.

Asme understood several things then. The first was that this brother was nothing like the prince. No, this man seemed kind and gentle but she was still aware that he was a big man and, looking at his pants, one with a very big erection. Second was that he couldn't speak.

"You cannot talk, can you?" Asme asked of the silent Godar.

He shook his head no, yet at the same time she heard a velvety voice in her head say, *No, unfortunately I cannot speak to you, my love.*

She blinked at him in sharp surprise. "Did you say something?"

Now it was his turn to look surprised. He shook his head no once again and thought, *If only you could hear the words of my soul. I have so much to say, so much to share. I would tell you of how things were for us before and why the man you know as prince is not the man who I have always known and loved as brother. I would tell you of hearts broken by dying mates and children. I would tell you of a beautiful island that we called home and that is now no longer inhabitable. I would tell you how beautiful you are and that I wish nothing more than to see you smile.*

Asme was amazed by the fact that she really could hear him speaking in her head and thanked the goddess for this gift. She smiled at Godar and asked, "You only wish to see me smile? And what about that other weapon you now carry?" She glanced meaningfully at his straining erection.

Godar answered in his mind. *I would never take you without your consent. I will mate with you only when you are accepting of me.*

Asme stepped forward and placed her palms on his chest. "Perhaps we could start with a kiss, my noble warrior."

Godar bent to kiss her but stepped back as it dawned on him what had just happened. This beautiful woman who his brother had just claimed as their mate could hear him. She could actually hear the words that no one had ever heard before. *You can hear me*, he thought.

"I can hear you," Asme agreed softly. Then she tugged him down and kissed him gently on the mouth. She finally pulled away and stroked her hand down his cheek and over his jaw. She turned and headed to the tub, disrobing on the way.

I will leave you. He spoke in her head.

Asme turned, completely naked, and faced him. "There is no need. You are my mate now, as I understand. Besides I would love it if you would talk to me like you wished. I would like to know everything but especially about you and your brother."

So while Asme bathed Godar told her of all that the warriors had endured. He spoke of how they had buried their women and female children. How most of the warriors had hardened with the task. He spoke of how their island had started dying as well. First the fresh island water had been contaminated and then the lush plant life had begun to fade. There was nothing these strong men could do but leave and search elsewhere for a new place to call home. A strong storm had landed them on the shores of the Isle of Altair. That is how they arrived and claimed this island for their new home. Then they had discovered that not only was there fresh water and a food supply but women as well. The warriors sought to rebuild not only their homes but their culture and way of life as well.

"Is there no way to blend warrior and goddess law? Is there no way to bring harmony?" Asme asked.

Godar seemed to think about it for a moment before he smiled and nodded at her. *I have some ideas but I will wait and see how my brother responds before I get your hopes up, my love.*

Asme smiled. "What is your brother's name, Godar? Or am I to refer to him as Prince?"

His name is Micah, Godar thought with a sad shake of his head. He was rough with you and I am sorry for that. I will not make excuses for his actions for there are none but I will share this with you. Micah lost not only his bonded wife when the disease swept through our island but three young daughters as well. The oldest was just three, the youngest mere weeks."

Asme felt sorrow at his words. So there was more to this man, this prince of warriors than met the eye. He had loved once and lost everything. That would be hard for anyone. "What of you? Did you lose anyone special?"

Godar shrugged and thought, *Who could love a man with no voice?*

Asme sat forward and cupped his face again. "I could," she told him. "Your voice is more beautiful to me than any other I've ever heard." She kissed him thoroughly then, letting his tongue into her mouth and placing hers in his as well before easing away and sinking back into her tub of water. He smiled at her and stroked a finger down her cheek. She would learn much from this man with no voice. She would listen, learn and plan. She must see to the comfort and happiness of her own people and she must see to the preparations for the coming of the Guardians.

The old priestess, Asme's mother, had not been playing with words when she had informed the prince that Asme was already a princess. Asme and her mother were the last of the direct descendents of the goddess's blood line. Asme was known to everyone on the Isle of Altair and they all knew she was the last of the line of Mahiki, Blood Princess, a title given only to the princess who was of the direct blood line of the goddess herself. The title would end with her as the prophecy written in the goddess's book stated. Now Asme finally understood why the line of Mahiki ended with her. Because from this day forward nothing would ever be the same for any of them again.

Chapter One

Farrah had discovered her ability to make fire by accident when she was thirteen. She and her mother, Solame, had gone to the old temple, now the home of the Princess Asme and her warrior mates. While her mother spoke with the princess, whom Farrah had always known as Aunt Asme because of the close friendship shared by the princess and Farrah's mother, Farrah had stumbled upon a bow and quiver of arrows left unattended in the garden.

Farrah had only wanted to look at them and perhaps see how they worked. She was just trying to nock an arrow into the bow when an old woman, one of the elders of her people, came around the corner and yelled at her. Farrah dropped the bow and jumped back from it, startled by the woman she had not noticed was there. Then she heard laughter from a set of young warrior twins who followed the elder woman and one of the boys scooped up the bow as they continued to their mother, Aunt Asme.

Farrah felt consumed by anger at the sound of the laughter of this youngest set of her Aunt Asme's little warriors who even now continued to point and laugh at her. Adding insult to injury was that they were nearly half her age and knew exactly how to shoot the bow, how to nock the arrow, when she had no idea. This made her even angrier as she thought of the ways of a woman now that they all lived under Warrior Law. Girls were brought up in the same caste systems as their mothers but they all knew that once they passed their twenty-first summer they would be claimed, mated and if their mates were from a different caste then the women would be taken from all they knew and placed with their husbands' family.

Her Aunt Asme had at least persuaded her mate, Prince Micah, to allow the caste systems to remain and in the beginning the warriors had become a part of the caste of the woman they had chosen for mate. But as children were born and grew it became the

warrior way that mates joined the caste of their warriors. As the caste systems that made up each village were so different it was often expected that a woman would have to learn an entirely new way of life if she was mated outside her own caste.

Farrah was part of the fire class as was her mother. It was the job of the women of their caste to man and protect the village fire. They made sure the flame never died out. They cut and supplied the needed wood and kindling, they made sure the torches were lit at night and were never low on oil. They made sure the prince's home was never without. It was hard work but the girls' training began almost as soon as they could walk. These women were designated by their red veil tops, a symbol to all that they were the makers of flames.

Aunt Asme was a member of the healers. These women were trained in the art of healing the sick and wounded. They also were responsible for the upkeep and care of the animals, chief among these the *shebana* beasts, brawny four-legged creatures with a long mane and tail that the warriors often rode. These women were recognized by their black veil tops, a reminder to all that they often held the decision of life and death in their hands.

Also among the village were the women of the earth whose jobs it was to see to the planting and growing of food, flowers and trees. When something was removed from the earth and used by their people for food, shelter, or some other need these women saw to the replanting as well as the harvesting since the earth was sacred and no part removed was ever to be wasted. They wore the color green in their veils to show their tie to the grasses and leaves that covered their island home.

Next were the women in blue, a close resemblance to the flowing waters they oversaw. These were the ones who kept the water clean and life-sustaining. They carted the water into the main well in the village, ensuring that it never ran dry. Pumps were maintained so that no caste was ever without this greatest of all needs. These women held an enormous responsibility that was instilled in them as young children. For

without the life-giving sustenance of water everyone and everything would cease to exist.

Finally were the women in white. Farrah wasn't sure exactly what their job was but she always saw them out in the village. She knew that they always seemed to have a bird of some sort on their arm and she had often wondered if they weren't talking to these winged creatures in some way. She prayed to the goddess that she would not end up mated to anyone in this caste as she had a fear of the flying fowl.

All of this went through the thirteen-year-old Farrah's mind as she listened to the laughter of the young boys. At their age she was gathering kindling, helping to replenish the oil in the torches and doing various other chores that were expected of her. Yet here they were playing, and playing with a bow and arrow no less. Something Farrah would love to learn to use.

Farrah burned with anger. She clenched her fists tight and when she opened them there in her palm was a small ball of flames. She stared at it, mesmerized by the colors and warmth. Most amazingly of all was that it didn't burn. She was so transfixed by it that she didn't notice her Aunt Asme come to her.

"Farrah, put it out," Asme told her in a firm but quiet voice, seeking to draw no other attention to what Farrah held.

Farrah looked at her aunt with confusion.

"Now is not the time. Here is not the place," Asme told her before lifting her own hand over Farrah's and with a wave of her palm, the ball of flames disappeared.

Farrah watched as Asme returned to Solame, watched as they spoke in hushed tones, looking occasionally to where Farrah stood. Then her mother came to her and took her gently by the hand and led her home. That was the day that Farrah learned she was a Guardian with the power of fire in her veins. She was one of the five marked by the goddess as those who would save Altair from the constant battles that ensued upon the island shores.

Farrah studied hard to learn the full extent of her powers. She could bring fire forth in the palm of her hand and by the time she was fifteen she had learned to throw these balls where she wanted without incident. By the time she was eighteen Farrah was already a warrior's dream. She stood five foot eight and already had the lush body of a woman with her full breasts and hips that swayed enticingly when she walked. Her reddish-gold hair fell in a thick braid past her hips but curls were always escaping to bounce around her face. Her green eyes flashed fire as more and more warriors seemed to take notice of her.

Most left her in peace because of the long braid that hung down her back as a reminder that she was not yet of an age to be claimed as a mate. Yet one warrior had dared to follow her into the woods when she went to gather more wood. He had cornered her against a tree and Farrah was not naïve enough to believe that he wouldn't hurt her. Although rare there were instances when women were claimed before their twenty-first summer was reached. If a warrior wanted to claim a woman prior to then all he had to do was mate her. Once her virginity was taken, then by Warrior Law she belonged to the one who had claimed her. It was a rarely used way for a warrior clan to ensure they mated with the woman they wanted.

When the Latoni warrior went to touch her, Farrah let her anger consume her. She felt no fear, for by then she already knew that fear could prevent her gift like a door shutting and blocking it from reaching the surface. It was only when the Latoni warrior reeled back from her, screaming about his hands that Farrah realized she had the power to burn with her flesh. She had literally singed the top layer of skin from his palms and fingers when he gripped tightly onto her arms. She never heard for sure what Kiva Latoni told the other warriors but from then on all gave her a wide berth and Kiva was never seen without black gloves covering both of his hands.

When she was a few weeks from passing her twenty-first summer she was called to see her Aunt Asme. Farrah waited as long as she could, somehow sensing that her entire world would change with this one conversation. It was frightening just how right

she was. Asme was waiting for her in the old temple gardens. She greeted Farrah with a hug and kiss before leading Farrah to a bench that was hidden in the interior of the gardens and slowly sitting down. Asme waited for Farrah to take a place on the bench beside her before she spoke.

"I am glad that you came. There is much that must be done and little time to see it accomplished."

"What...what do you mean?" Farrah asked with a heavy feeling of unease.

"You are beginning your claiming summer and if what has reached me is true then we must get you away from here as soon as possible." There was no misinterpreting the urgency in Asme's voice.

"What have you heard, Aunt Asme? What do you fear?"

"It is said that when the day of your claiming comes the Latoni warriors will come for you. No one will challenge them for you. The Latoni have long harbored a grudge against you for what happened with Kiva in the forest, for the burns you left on his hands. None will stand in their way," Asme informed Farrah with a heavy heart.

"Sweet goddess. What do they plan?" The feeling of unease was becoming full-fledged fear now and Farrah was almost afraid to hear her aunt's reply.

"They plan to claim and mate you in the square and once you are officially theirs they will make your life hell. I know not what horrors they have in store for you but my sons have heard that the Latoni plan to take you with them wherever they go and provide you as *pani*."

Farrah gasped with horror. *Pani* were women who were offered to others by their mates. The Latoni brothers planned to let other warriors use her body in exchange for something the Latoni wanted or simply because they felt like sharing her. Such practices were not unheard of but they were frowned upon. However Warrior Law was clear that a woman belonged to her mates once she was formally claimed. If the Latoni bonded with her there would be no one who would help her. She could not let that happen.

"What do I do? I will not let them claim me! I will burn them to a crisp before I allow them to touch me," Farrah spoke sharply, enjoying the thought of Kiva Latoni awash in flames.

Asme cupped her face. "You will not have to do that. It has come to my attention that another Guardian has been found. I am hoping to persuade you to seek her out and stay with her. I believe that you will be well protected with her. I hear a calling in the wind, an urgency for you to go there."

"Another Guardian?" Farrah asked with awe. It would be incredible to meet someone who also wielded the powers bestowed by the goddess.

"Yes, she is said to have power over the very earth."

"But I have not heard anything of her," Farrah stated.

Asme smiled. "I have my spies everywhere. There is much that I know that others don't."

"When do you want me to leave? Where am I to go?" Farrah asked, accepting in her heart that this was the only way to be free of the Latoni.

"You will leave this very night. I pray that it will be soon enough. You must travel quickly to the village in the north. The Guardian of Earth lives there with her warrior mates. You will know her by sense. She will know you as well."

"By sense?" Farrah asked her aunt, her expression conveying her confusion.

"Like will recognize like," Asme informed her softly. "The goddess has touched you both and that will allow you to know when another Guardian is around. The only one you won't recognize will be the Mystic, who is shielded by the old magic even from the Guardians. Only when she is ready will the Mystic finally call to you and reveal her presence. That is when you will know the true calling of what it means to be an Island Guardian," Asme told her.

"So north through the woods to find the other Guardian? What if I run into someone else, someone other?"

"I will guide and protect you on your journey as only the Mahiki can. Trust in that and you will stay safe on your journey," Asme assured Farrah.

"Then I must hurry and say my goodbyes."

Asme shook her head. "There is no time. I have supplies for you at the edge of the garden closest to the woods. You must leave now, immediately. There is no time to spare." Asme hugged Farrah tightly as she took in the sorrow and fear on the girl's face. "I am so sorry, my love, were there any other way I would search and find it."

Farrah steeled her resolve and rose from the bench. "I am ready. I will not disappoint the Goddess of Altair," she looked at her aunt, "or the Island Mahiki."

Asme walked with Farrah to the edge of the garden, making sure Farrah found the sack of supplies. They would last just long enough to ensure her journey but not to interfere with what was destined to be. With another quick hug Asme watched as Farrah turned and disappeared behind the trees of the forest. The princess felt more than heard her noble warrior come to stand behind her.

She has departed? Godar asked in her mind.

"Yes, Farrah has started her journey."

Did you tell her of the other Guardian?

"Yes."

And did you tell her of what else waits for her there?

"No." Asme turned in her lover's arms and hugged him tightly. "There are some things that a woman should not know in advance. To forewarn Farrah might be to alter what must be, what is destined to be. I will not take that chance."

Godar eased his woman down onto the grassy earth beneath them. *And should I warn you of what I have planned?* his voice whispered in her mind as he made quick work of her clothing and his.

She spread her legs wide for his thrust and, arching her back, offered her breasts. “I know exactly what you have planned, my love,” she whispered into the air as her noble warrior once again claimed her, body, heart and soul.

Chapter Two

It had taken Farrah eleven days to travel through the forest to where she assumed the village must lie. She had been compelled to stop often and seek shelter in one of the many caves. She had run out of supplies yesterday and prayed to the goddess that she would make it to her destination before her hunger and thirst overtook her. Farrah heard a noise in the copse of trees ahead of her and moved quietly forward. She could feel a slow hum in her blood and remembered her Aunt Asme's words that like would recognize like.

Farrah stood silently in the trees, unwilling to disturb the threesome making love in the grass. There was a dark-haired man lying upon his back on the earth. A brown-haired woman was on top of him and there was a brown-haired man behind her, kneeling between the legs of the other two. Farrah could see the slide of cocks as the two warriors rode in and out of the woman's pussy and ass. The woman seemed to wallow in the feel of the two warriors taking her body at once. Farrah had traveled a long way to find this woman. At least she was fairly certain that this was the woman, the Guardian of Earth. This woman would be the one who would help Farrah to hide from the Latoni brothers.

She had not meant to come upon them while they were so obviously occupied with other things. She had hoped to find the woman alone and speak with her quietly with no one else aware that Farrah was even there. Farrah silently slipped back through the trees, thinking to hide until the threesome was through and only then approach them. Instead she backed into a very hard, very large, very warm body. A hand was quickly clamped over her mouth and her hands were held captive against her body. She could not bring flames without her hands and she could not control her sudden fear enough to heat her skin. She knew that she it was possible if only she could concentrate and

control the fear, which was something she was hopeful to learn from the other Guardian. What could Farrah do now? She could do nothing as they moved with her deeper into the trees until finally coming to a stop only when they were so far away that they could neither see nor hear the threesome at play.

Alexi held the squirming beauty close to his chest while Marcus stepped out in front of her. Bannen would be upset that he had missed this. Alexi and Marcus had come to congratulate the Savari warriors on the birth of their twins. The babes had been delivered hale and hearty just six weeks earlier. Instead, the brothers had stumbled upon this beauty. The woman had a rope of reddish-gold hair that hung past her hips and her eyes were almost the exact same fiery green as Erika's. In fact except for the hair color the two women could have been twins. The face was the same shape, the skin the same shade and texture. Marcus didn't know what to make of it. He did know that the girl was not yet claimed. He could clearly see her unmarked flesh above the band of her skirt. More promising still was that she wore the red top of the very caste of his mother. He did not recognize her, though, as one of the women from their village. She was not from here which meant that she had traveled to get to them. There were five small villages that lay at different points within the interior of the island and many small camps hidden in the trees along the shores. Marcus did not know which one she came from and at the moment he didn't really care. He had other things on his mind as he studied her from head to toe, taking in every tiny detail including the small red mole that lay on her neck, the only blemish he could see on her otherwise creamy skin.

He and Alexi glanced at one another and then quickly looked around, searching for whoever must have traveled with her but they could see no one. It was unheard of for a woman to travel unchaperoned, especially one who was as yet unclaimed as her braid and unmarked flesh proclaimed.

"Who are you?" he asked her. "Where are your travel companions?"

"I traveled with no one. I am by myself," Farrah mumbled, trying to speak around the hand that still covered her mouth.

"If my brother removes his hand, do you promise not to yell?" Marcus could clearly see the fear in her eyes. "We wouldn't want to see anyone get hurt." He nodded his head back the way they had come, indicating the glen where he knew she had to have seen the Savari warriors loving their woman Erika. This girl didn't know that he and his brothers were friends with the Savari warriors and that was more than okay with him. She seemed to want to protect the bonded Savari mates for some reason and that intrigued Marcus.

Farrah nodded her head in acceptance and Alexi slowly removed his hand. The Donan brothers all stood at six foot seven and this girl must stand at least five foot seven or eight, judging by where her head rested in the middle of Alexi's chest.

Marcus looked into her eyes. "I will ask you again. Who are you?"

"I am Farrah." When she refused to add more Marcus continued.

"Where do you come from?"

"I am of the fire caste." Marcus already knew that by the color of her top but once again she refused to add more. Marcus knew that she could not tell that he and his brother Alexi were also of the fire caste. Warriors did not wear caste colors as their women did. Marcus began bombarding her with questions faster than she could focus and answer them.

"Who are your people? Where do you travel from? Why are you here? Who do you seek? Why do you travel alone?"

Trying to catch her unguarded, Alexi quickly asked, "How old are you?"

"I will pass my twenty-first summer in a few days."

Marcus passed his hand over the unmarked flesh of her lower abdomen. "You are not claimed and yet you travel without protection."

Her eyes widened as she realized what she had given away but Marcus gave her no chance to speak. Moving quickly, he pulled the cylindrical weapon from his belt and knelt before her. Alexi realized what his brother was preparing to do and quickly

grasped her hands in his and crossed them over her chest. Marcus held the weapon against her lower right abdomen just above her skirt and used it to place the head of the wolf on her, marking her as the bonded mate of the Donan brothers from now on. They had played by the rules once before with Tamyra, the sister of the Savari warriors, and in the end had lost her. This time they would claim first and worry about consequences later. Besides if the girl was truly traveling alone then there would be no one to protest this action. Once she was marked and bedded there would be nothing that could be done anyway.

"From this moment forward you will belong to us. You now bear the mark of the Donan clan," Marcus informed her. "From this moment on, Farrah, you are the bonded mate of the Donan warriors and none will dare to interfere with our claim."

Farrah looked from the mark on her abdomen to the fierce warrior in front of her and wondered how everything had gone so wrong. She had done everything just as her aunt had told her. The warrior before her was huge with bulging muscles. Unlike other warriors his blond hair was cut short, just barely brushing his neck in back and shaggy over his ears on the side. He had gorgeous blue eyes that were filled with lust as he looked over her body. She could already feel the stiff erection of the warrior holding her against him. It was like a club pulsing on her back.

And now when she was so close to her goal she was taken. Now she belonged to these men. No one would do anything to help her now since these warriors had marked her here where no one else was present to challenge their right. It would be their word against hers and she could tell by the sensual passion she saw in the one before her and her own traitorous body's response to it that she wouldn't stand a chance against them.

All she could hope for was that she could still get to the other Guardian while they were so close to one another. Without any further concern for interrupting the pleasure of the three people in the glen, Farrah opened her mouth and screamed at the top of her lungs.

Instead of looking angry, the warrior in front of her just grinned and she could feel the laughter rippling through the chest of the one behind her.

Marcus leaned down and spoke with his lips just inches from hers. "No one can save you from us now, little one. We will not let any one take you from us. But if you require an audience for our first mating then far be it from me to deny you."

Farrah gasped in shock as she looked with dawning horror at the enormous bulge in the warrior's pants. They would kill her with their lust. She would never be able to survive a mating with such a man, never survive a mating like the one she had stumbled upon in the glen. And her death would be the end before there ever was a beginning. Faint with hunger and thirst and tired from her long, arduous trip, Farrah gave in to the darkness that called to her, fainting dead away against Alexi's chest.

Alexi lifted the girl into his arms while Marcus called out to the Savari men that they could hear rushing toward them from the glen. Marcus could only hope that Arik and Galen had been able to finish what they had started with Erika. He knew there would be time to learn more of their new mate, Farrah, when she awoke.

For now Marcus and Alexi would continue with their plans to visit with friends and celebrate the birth of such unique twins. Never before had a warriors' woman given birth to a set of twins who consisted of one boy and one girl. It marked a new change in the ways of old. It would be interesting to see what happened now for all around them.

First he would see that Bannen was sent a message of their new mate. He looked for his brother to arrive quickly. Tonight they would all find pleasure in the woman Alexi held cradled so gently against his chest. Marcus grabbed the end of her braid and began undoing it while they waited for the arrival of the Savari warriors and their mate. He was eager to have their sweet beauty bedded and fully claimed. Tonight would have to be soon enough.

* * * * *

When Farrah awoke she was lying in the center of a huge bed. She laid her head back down and sighed out her relief. It must have all been just a strange dream. Yet Farrah didn't believe that for an instant. She sat up and shoved the bed coverings aside. She was naked and when she glanced at the lower right portion of her abdomen it bore the head of a wolf. She ran her fingers across the brand and couldn't hold back the strangled "No" from her lips.

"Yes," Marcus spoke from the door. He and Alexi had placed Farrah in one of the guestrooms at the Savari home to rest while they waited for Bannen. They had each taken turns coming to check on her. Marcus had been the lucky one to be the first there when she awoke. He intended to take full advantage of that. "You belong to the Donan warriors now." His eyes smoldered with lust as he came toward her. He took in her naked frame with pleasure, the full ripe mounds of her breasts, the sweet curve of her hips, the red-gold curls on her woman's mound. He could feel his cock swelling larger with need.

Farrah seemed oblivious to her nudity and its effect on the very large warrior now standing beside the bed. "You have marked me but I am not claimed. The mark can and will be removed when I make that known."

Marcus smiled down at her. "Well then, little one, we must take care of the claiming now. I am more than ready." He waved his hand and brought her full attention to the erection straining the ties on his pants.

Farrah gasped and began to roll off the bed on the opposite side but Marcus was too quick for her. He caught her leg with his hands and used them to pull her over to the side. She kicked and fought but all too soon he had her exactly where he wanted her. Farrah's tailbone was at the very edge of the bed, her legs spread wide around the thighs of the warrior now standing between them. Marcus leaned into her, using his own lower body to pin hers down while he caught her hands in his and pinned them over her head. Her breasts arched into his chest, the nipples rubbing and chafing against him. Marcus placed her hands in one of his and moved the other to cup her face.

She looked up at him with big green eyes wide with fear and maybe just a touch of lustful curiosity. She was the most exquisite woman he had ever seen and he knew in that moment that he would never give her up.

He bent to her lips and nipped and licked at them while sliding his hand down over her neck and shoulder until he could fill his palm with the taut globe of her breast. He plumped and squeezed, rubbing his thumb over the nipple until it sat up and begged for the pinch he gave it next. Farrah gasped and Marcus thrust his tongue smoothly into her mouth, tasting her, devouring her, melting her.

Farrah was on fire in a way that she never had been before. Her skin was hot but it was not burning the man above her; no, instead he was the one burning her. Her nipples ached and throbbed for something. His pinch had sent a stream of fire straight to her woman's place and she could feel her thighs growing slick with her desire. Farrah wanted more and when Marcus began to pull his tongue from her mouth she wrapped her lips around it and sucked it greedily back into her mouth. Marcus groaned and bucked against her, letting her feel the full measure of his hard cock against her soft mound.

"I want to claim you now, Farrah. I want to fill your pussy with my cock." He looked down into her green, green eyes. "I won't let you go. I can't, so please don't fight me on this." He reached down between her sprawled thighs and eased a finger between the wet folds of her sex, finding and entering the very heart of her.

Farrah cried out at the intrusion but in truth, there was no real pain. It felt wonderful having his finger moving in and out of her. The flames inside her stoked higher, hotter, fanned by his actions and when he bent and sucked one of her engorged nipples fiercely into his mouth, the flames consumed her. It was like waves of fire crashing in her, over her, through her. She could feel the hard contractions in her belly, the rush of fluid dripping from her pussy to coat her thighs and his fingers.

Marcus could feel it also and that was exactly what he had been waiting for. He released her hands, pulled his saturated finger from her still-quivering pussy and undid

the laces on his pants. He was so close, so close to spilling his seed on her instead of in her. But Farrah placed her hands on his chest, trying her best to stop him. He had already placed the full head of his turgid cock at the tight entrance of her pussy. It would be so easy to plunge violently but Marcus called on what little control he had left and looked down at her flushed face, willing to see what she needed as long as it wasn't for him to stop. He knew he would stop if she asked him to, and that surprised him. He had used women before but with this one, his mate, it was different. She made him long for the love he saw expressed between the Savari and their mate Erika.

"Wait," Farrah murmured. "I don't even know your name."

Marcus smiled down at her, hooked her knees with his elbows and spread her even wider, pushing the head of his cock just a little farther within her snug depths. Farrah shuddered at the pressure but she could not deny that she wanted this warrior, craved his possession. Finally Marcus spoke to her, giving her what she needed to know. "I am Marcus Donan." He leaned down to her lips, his actions tilting and lifting her higher into him. "And you are Farrah Donan, my mate." With that he kissed her, swallowing her cries as he plunged swiftly into her untried channel. She was so tight around him, burning his cock with her wet heat, but it was her cry of untamed pleasure that pushed him over the edge.

He tried to slow his thrusts, to tame his need, to curb his wild hunger but there was no stopping, no control left. He was consumed by her, the way she was arching into his thrusts, the feel of her nails digging into the flesh on his shoulders, the cries of pleasure that poured from her lips. Marcus fucked her hard, plunging deep into her pussy with every stroke. He kissed his way down her throat, over her shoulder and finally to her lush breasts. He nipped at the tight bud of her nipple and when she cried out he sucked it hungrily into his mouth. He moved back and forth between her nipples while he rode between her thighs. He sucked and nipped, licked and bit and never once slowed the pounding rhythm of his cock in and out of her pussy.

Once again Farrah was consumed with the flames of pleasure. They crashed over her in never-ending waves, pulling her under and sucking the oxygen from her lungs. She heard Marcus cry out his own pleasure and was burned anew by the hot splash of his seed flooding her pussy. She was well and truly claimed now. There would be no going back. She now belonged to this man and his brother for the rest of her life. But the most startling thing to Farrah was how right it all felt to her as she lay sideways on the bed with her mate still buried within her, his breath hot on her neck. Somehow this man felt like home to her.

She was startled by the sound of someone clearing their throat from the doorway and her gaze flew in that direction. Standing there were two men both with long blond hair and the same piercing blue eyes as the man still buried between her thighs. A shiver of excitement trickled down her spine as she realized what their presence meant. She did not belong to two Donan brothers as she had thought but to three. Even as she tried to come to grips with this surprise one of the newly arrived warriors reached down and undid the laces of his pants, releasing his fully aroused cock so that it bobbed out in front of him. Goddess help her but she wanted him as well, longed for him but still she was startled by his next words.

"Should we not all claim her?" he spoke as he moved toward where she lay trapped on the bed.

Marcus finally seemed to notice that there was someone else in the room with them and he pushed away from her body, pulling his slightly appeased cock from her pussy and stepping from between her thighs. "I see that you have joined us, brother," was all he said as he turned away and the other man took his place between Farrah's thighs. Bannen was as tall and nicely built as Marcus but there was a sense of something raw and untamed about him. It might have been the way that his long hair hung unfettered around him calling to mind a more primitive nature. She felt the tingle in her sex when he stepped up to her and cried out as he pushed home. But he didn't even look at her as

he pushed his cock against her pussy, forcing it into her wet flesh. He was big and thick like his brother and he rubbed hard against her sensitive inner flesh.

Bannen threw his head back and rode at a gallop between her thighs. He had watched with avid eyes as she had taken every inch of Marcus and cried out for more. He was beyond the moment, lost in a need so demanding he was unable to stop. He reveled in her sharp cries that shattered the air around them. He pumped his cock into her tight pussy, fucking her as fiercely and roughly as he could. Wanting—no, needing—more, he pulled her legs up until her feet rested on his shoulders and bent down over her, forcing her legs to bend back against her chest and opening her even wider for his possession. She cried out louder as he fucked her more forcefully than before, slamming so completely into her it felt as if he touched her very womb.

“Ahhh...by the sweet goddess, her pussy is a tight heaven,” Bannen moaned as he continued to fuck her, so wrapped in his own pleasure that he failed to notice the tears leaking from her eyes and flowing quietly down her cheeks in sharp contrast to her cries of pleasure. He thrust three more times into her wet, tight heat before spilling his seed in pulsing waves. He stayed that way for a moment, her legs bracing his weight as he struggled to catch his breath.

“Get off her,” Alexi yelled, startling both Bannen and Marcus, who had been busy cleaning up and hadn’t been looking at their mate. Farrah lay on the bed, struggling to bite back her sobs. She was confused and ashamed of her body’s response to Bannen even if he was her mate. Maybe she was *pani*. How shameless was it to feel pleasure at a rough mating with a man she had never known before a few moments ago? She had felt beautiful with Marcus but he had easily walked away and left her to his brother. Maybe that was how it was with mates, but she would not, could not, handle being passed among them as if she were a convenience. Confusion swamped her and made the tears fall harder though in truth she was unsure what she was crying at. She could not deny that she had found pleasure with Bannen just as she had with Marcus. But what of them? Was their pleasure with her or just the act itself? She felt that Bannen had been so

focused on what she had between her thighs that it could have belonged to any woman. She felt cheap and dirty in a way that she would have never associated with what happened between mates. Was she so wrong to at least hope to know their names before they knew her body?

Bannen pulled back from her, eased her legs down and stepped back, pulling his cock from her tight pussy with a small popping sound. Three sets of eyes fell to the bloodstains on her sprawled thighs and Alexi stepped forward to offer comfort but Farrah only saw the last of her mates ready to lay claim. And the mere thought of how she might enjoy him as well caused her to pull away and shy from him. What would they think of her if she just spread herself for this third brother? As warriors they probably wouldn't care, probably expected it. But as a newly initiated woman she couldn't let go of the nagging voice of the Latoni brother who called her whore.

She held her hands out and tried to push herself farther up the bed. "No more, by the goddess, no more, I beg of you."

Alexi clenched his hands into fists at his side and, spearing each of his brothers with a look of cold contempt, turned and retreated out of the room. The sight of his mate cowering and crying on the bed, her thighs smeared with her virgin's blood and the remnants of his two brothers' seed would be a long time in leaving him.

Bannen groaned as he realized what he had done to their mate in his lust-induced haze. He had been neither gentle nor loving. He had treated her as if she were nothing but a vessel for their need. He reached out a hand to her but she looked at him with such disgust in her eyes that he felt shame at his actions. Closing his eyes, he managed to get a strangled "I'm sorry" out before fleeing from the room and the tears and pain in her big green eyes. He had lost one mate to death. Now he might lose this one to stupidity.

Marcus went to her but Farrah put her hands up and the look in her eyes stopped him cold. "I wish only to hold you, offer you comfort," he told her, not understanding why she looked at him that way. She had felt pleasure with him, cried out with it.

"And where was your comfort when you walked away from me earlier? You found your pleasure with my body and cared little about who was next," Farrah spoke, her voice almost toneless.

Marcus gritted his teeth and replied, "Bannen and Alexi are your mates as well. 'Tis expected that we all claim you, that you give us all equal use of your body."

Farrah glared at the warrior before her. "I am not your whore! You took me as mate and even then I knew not your names or even that there were three of you. You claimed me without ever giving me the chance to know you."

"You enjoyed our loving." Marcus refused to let her deny that. "I felt your release milking my cock. I heard your cries of pleasure."

A lone tear dripped down Farrah's cheek. "That was before you turned so easily from me and let another have me."

"Bannen is your mate too!" Marcus roared his frustration.

"How nice of you to share his name with me after you shared my body with him. How nice of all of you to take the time to share those little things with me!" Tears dripped down Farrah's cheeks now in a constant flow. "I will never forgive you for this," she told Marcus. "I will never forgive any of you for treating me in such a manner."

Marcus stepped forward and pulled her up onto her knees on the bed, holding her to his chest. "Forgive us or not, you are our mate and you will not forget that. Your body is ours just as our bodies are yours," he tossed her down on the bed. "I could make you want me again. Make you scream your woman's pleasure and beg me to have you again and again. What is it that you are truly afraid of Farrah? That we have yet to get to really know one another? Or that your body is already surrendering to us?" He let her go and turned to face the door. "We are your mates Farrah. There is no shame in what the four of us can give to one another." He turned back to her and shook his head.

Farrah continued to lay there her eyes dry of tears, confusion ripe on her face as she struggled to deal with the multitude of emotions bombarding her. Marcus ran a finger down her still wet cheek and whispered, "You will come to accept this, to accept us. If we are ever to know the true joys of our bonding then you must." Then with a shake of his head he left her alone in the room.

Farrah lay there not knowing what to feel, what to think, what to do. How could someone blessed by the goddess feel so overwhelmed and unsure? How did she deal with all the emotions filling her up? How did she learn to love three men and ensure that they loved her just as much? She curled into a ball on the bed confused and amazed. Even with all that had just happened her body was still tingly and taut as if it were waiting for the third warrior to stake his claim as well.

Chapter Three

Farrah was sleeping when Erika snuck into the room later. Erika had waited until her own warriors had gone out to spar with the Donan brothers. She and Arik and Galen had watched as first Alexi and then Bannen had bolted from the room and out of the house. Then Marcus had followed. Erika had listened to some of the conversation between Marcus and the woman in her guestroom. It hadn't been hard since both of them had yelled at different times. Now Erika planned to see how this young woman was faring, regardless of Galen's firm reminder to not interfere.

Erika carried a tray with fresh *palona* fruit and hard cheese as well as some of the island wine. She set it on the bedside table and looked at the girl curled into a ball on the bed. There was an electricity that seemed to arc through the air between the two women. Erika could feel a tingling in her body and somehow she just knew that this woman was one of them, one marked by the goddess's eyes, a Guardian. There was just a familiarity about the girl, a knowing of like to like.

Farrah awoke with a startled gasp. Her skin tingled and burned, the flames fanned to life inside her and she gasped for air as if she had just been brought back to life. She looked at the woman who stood beside the bed where Farrah still lay, looking at down at her as if Farrah were a long-lost friend or relative. Farrah smiled shyly up at her. "You are the one I seek, the one I have come so far to meet. You are a Guardian."

"Yes," Erika replied, "and I have a feeling that so are you. I am Erika Savari and I am happy to meet you."

Farrah smiled and nodded. "I am Farrah." She refused to acknowledge the Donan name even though she bore their mark in more than one way. "My aunt sent me here to find you. She has heard of you and thought that you could help to hide and protect me."

"How does anyone know of me?" Erika asked with shock. They had all been so careful to keep the knowledge that she was a Guardian secret. No one who knew of her identity as Guardian of Earth would betray her in such a way. Then Farrah's other words hit her. "Hide and protect you from what?"

Farrah's smile grew dim. "It doesn't matter anymore. My fate has been decided and the other can no longer hurt me. As for how my aunt knew...Well, you know her as Princess Asme, the Island Mahiki. I know her as Aunt Asme. It was she that sent me here to find you."

"You're the niece of the Mahiki?" Erika was awed by this knowledge and immediately clasped her right hand to her breast and bowed her head in honor.

Farrah shook her head and answered, "Not by blood but by bond do I claim her as aunt. She and my mother have been best friends for as long as I have known. It is through their bond that I have known her as aunt. There is no call to bow before me."

"Bonds can be thicker than blood and much more unbreakable. Don't forget that," Erika told her firmly. "Our bond will tie us the same way and I will know you as sister."

Farrah seemed enchanted by the idea of a sister and grinned before saying, "Aunt Asme said that you wielded power over the very earth itself. Is this true? Is that your gift from the goddess?" Farrah asked.

"Yes and perhaps if you will allow me to help you dress and share this tray of food with me then I can take you out of doors and show you what I can do." Erika's eyes twinkled with merriment as she added, "I am quite amazing, I assure you."

Farrah giggled with pure delight. "That sounds wonderful." Then her smile faded and she seemed to withdraw back into herself their brief moment of companionship pushed aside. "But I don't know if I am allowed. My mates are no longer here and I know not where they have gone."

"Allowed!" Erika scoffed. "You are a Guardian, blessed by the goddess's own hands." She slapped the bed next to Farrah. "I would advise you to remember that as

well. A Guardian seeks no permission. Better to ask for forgiveness than be denied to start with."

Farrah found herself smiling again. "I will do my best." She could already sense that Erika was going to bring mischief and delight into her life.

Erika helped her to sit up and turned away to lift the tray, allowing Farrah a moment of privacy to lift the covers high enough to hide her nudity. Erika turned back and placed the tray over Farrah's lap and helped herself to a wedge of cheese and a glass of the wine. She nibbled and kept watch while Farrah ate her fill of the fruit and cheese before draining her own glass of wine.

"How long have you been the bonded mate of the Donan brothers?" Erika asked softly.

"A few hours, I suppose," Farrah replied then jumped when Erika squealed and slammed her glass on the bedside table.

"What do you mean, only hours?" Erika demanded, shaking her head. "Perhaps you should start from the beginning and tell me everything. We are sisters of a sort, bonded more closely than if we shared blood, so there is nothing that you can't tell me." Erika moved to the other side of the room and picked Farrah's clothes up from the chair and carried them back across the room to her, giving Farrah time to collect her thoughts and decide where to begin.

"My aunt sent me here to protect me from a bonding with a different set of warriors." Farrah waved that away with a flick of her hand, refusing to discuss what she no longer saw as an issue. She was bonded now to the Donans and it would be suicide for any other group of warriors, especially the Latoni, to try anything now. "I traveled for eleven days to get here, guided by my aunt to find you. I had only just stumbled upon you and your mates in the glen when I ran into the Donan brothers, well, two of them at least." She blushed because she knew that she had just told Erika what she had seen the other woman doing with her mates.

"You just met them?" Erika was lost, not understanding how Farrah could have met and bonded with the Donan brothers in so short a span of time. As for Farrah seeing her with Galen and Arik in the glen, that she would not comment on, not with Farrah's discomfort so high. "But you are mated to them?"

Farrah dropped the covers to her waist and pushed them down far enough to show the wolf head on her lower right abdomen. "I bear their mark on my body." She pushed up from the bed and moved so that her legs dangled over the side.

Erika gasped as she saw the blood that still stained Farrah's thighs. Farrah hung her head but refused to hide what they had done to her.

"They left you this way?" Erika whispered with shock and then hurried to get a bowl of water and cloth and brought it over to the bed, giving the cloth to Farrah and holding the water for her while Farrah cleaned up. "How could they leave you this way?"

Farrah felt the tears in her eyes and was helpless to stop them from flowing down her cheeks.

Erika took the used cloth from her hands and put both it and the bowl of dirty water aside. She pulled Farrah off the bed and hugged her, whispering in her ear, "I am here for you. No matter what comes your way, I am here now. You no longer face anything alone. Did they hurt you?"

Farrah took a shuddering breath. "It was beautiful at first. Marcus made me feel so good, it was unbelievable, magical." She shook her head sadly, "Then he just walked away and let his brother take his place, let his brother claim me." She looked up at Erika. "I didn't even know Bannen's name until after he used me for his pleasure." More tears leaked from her eyes and trailed down her cheeks and Erika felt them fill her own eyes as well.

"Did Alexi hurt you as well?"

"No, he yelled at Bannen to get off me. He came toward me but I was too frightened at the time." Farrah shuddered with the memory. "All I could see at the time was the last of my mates ready to claim me."

Erika patted Farrah's back and then stepped away from her, bending to pick up Farrah's skirt and helping her step into it. "Alexi is a sweet man. I can't see him hurting you but then I couldn't have seen either Marcus or Bannen acting that way." Erika helped fasten the red top behind Farrah's neck and back. "Lust can do strange things to a man though. It doesn't make their actions okay, not by a long shot. They can have no excuse for why they treated you as they did."

Erika looked like a fierce warrior and Farrah actually giggled. "Are you going to beat them up for me?"

Erika nodded slowly and smiled once more. "I'll see to your warriors as long as you keep mine from interfering."

Farrah was confused. "Why would you need me to do that?"

"You cannot use your own powers against your mates," Erika explained. "Didn't your aunt tell you that?"

"I have a feeling that there is much she didn't choose to share with me," Farrah sighed.

"So what is your power?" Erika asked as she picked up the tray and, with Farrah following her, headed out of the bedroom and down the stairs to the bottom level of the house.

"I have the power of fire. I make flame with my hands," Farrah confessed.

"And your mates have no idea of this, do they?" Erika whispered.

"No, there was no time to tell them. You know more of me than they do," Farrah whispered back.

"Then you will have the last laugh, Farrah. They will be more than sorry that they hurt you and in the process angered the Guardians." Erika sat the tray on the great

wooden table and took Farrah's hand in hers. "For to anger or hurt one of us is to do the same to us all. Just remember when we find them to keep my own two warriors away so that I can deal with yours. Don't hurt my mates but buy me some time."

Farrah grinned with genuine anticipation. "I will do my best. But your secret will be out then. Are you sure that you wish to do this for me?"

"Your warriors already know that I am a Guardian. They have seen my powers with their own eyes and have protected my secret as have my own mates. There is also another here in our village who knows of me, Reanna. I will introduce you to her. She has become a great friend and helps me often to train and work with my powers. Then there is my mother Mama Erin and my mates' mother Mama Katya. I do not know how your aunt knew of me for I trust all who know of me with my life. I have to."

"The Princess Asme knows much and tells little," Farrah told her with a smile. "I believe that she knew I would be found and mated to the Donans but chose not to tell me. She has often said that there are some things that must be experienced without warning. I also know that your secret is safe with her. She would never betray you or any Guardian."

"I know that," Erika told her, "but thank you for saying it anyway. Now let's head out before our warriors decide to check on us."

The two women left the house and the small village behind, heading toward the woods. Erika had decided to bring the warriors to them instead of walking around searching most likely in vain for where their mates might be. That way if someone got knocked with a small boulder or slapped by a tree branch it would not look deliberate on Erika's part. She was angry at the treatment of Farrah by the Donan brothers. She didn't know what would delight her more, the Donan brothers' reaction to Farrah being a Guardian or the fact that the Princess Asme was Farrah's aunt.

Erika stopped at the glen where she always practiced, knowing that Galen and Arik would look here for her first. "I will show you a little of what I can do," she spoke

quietly to Farrah. "Then you can show me what you can do. That is, you can extinguish the flames as well as create them? You will not set the forest on fire or anything?"

Farrah laughed, the sound floating on the air around them. "Yes, I can control the flames. I can even give the illusion of fire when there is none."

Erika smiled big at that thought. "Now that I would like to see." She pointed to a spot a few feet from where she stood. "Have a seat over there and I will show you my amazing feats of power and control."

Both girls laughed at that and Farrah moved the small distance away to sit and watch Erika. Erika showed her small things at first, like making flowers burst from the ground in beautiful displays of color. She then worked with vines for a while, showing Farrah how she could make them grow and wrap around whatever she wanted using trees and shrubs to demonstrate. The next thing Farrah knew the very trees themselves were bending and swaying with the motions of Erika's hands. One of the branches touched the ground and Erika climbed right up on it and then made the tree grow taller than all the others around it, allowing Erika to see for miles around them. It was an amazing sight and Farrah was awed by this power that her sister Guardian held. Just as quickly Erika returned the tree to normal height and had the branch lowered once again to the earth and she stepped off and headed to Farrah.

"If I saw correctly then we are about to have company of the warrior variety." Erika linked hands with Farrah and pulled her into the middle of the glen. "I would guess that your mates have noticed that you are not where they left you and that my warriors are convinced my absence indicates that I am responsible somehow." She grinned broadly at Farrah and, then releasing their clasped hands, threw her arms into the air. The wind seemed to pick up, blowing both women's hair all around them as Erika called to the skies, "I call upon the goddess, giving thanks for the gifts bestowed. I call upon the goddess, asking wisdom to use them well."

Marcus stepped into the glen, followed closely by Erika's two mates and Bannen. Farrah did not see the one she now knew as Alexi with them. Marcus looked furious

and as far as Farrah was concerned that was fine with her. He stepped toward them and the ground began to tremble beneath his feet, stopping him where he was.

One of Erika's mates stepped forward to stand next to Marcus and the trembling stopped. "That will be enough, Erika. You will come here to me now and remove yourself from this." He looked angry as well and his next words confirmed it. "You are in enough trouble as it is for defying my orders."

Erika took Farrah's hand in hers once more before answering. "I don't think so, Galen. Do you have any idea why Farrah is even here? Any of you?" Erika glared at the men before them. "She was sent to find me. Me! She was not sent here to be claimed and used," she sneered the word and Marcus and Bannen both flushed, "by a group of warriors who cannot see the gift they have before them."

Marcus held his hand up and stated for all to hear, "Farrah is our mate and she will learn to accept this. Now if you will remove your mate, Arik, Galen, we will deal with our mate."

Farrah's eyes flamed a bright green as she felt the blood in her veins heat with anger. "You plan to force me again? Should I just disrobe and lie upon my back for you to save time?" Erika choked on her laughter at Farrah's boldness. Now this was the Guardian of Fire.

Marcus flushed again but this time it was with anger of his own. "I did not force you, Farrah. You accepted me willingly. It will not bother me to let them," he indicated Erika's mates who he had addressed as Galen and Arik, "witness your submission."

"That was before I knew that I meant nothing to you. That was before I knew how easily you could and would walk away." Farrah clenched her hands tight by her sides in hopes of keeping the fire burning so hot inside her at bay just a little longer.

Bannen stepped forward then, his head downcast in his misery. "It's me that you should throw your anger on, Farrah. I am the one who used you." He looked up and Farrah was lost for a moment in the depths of his big blue eyes that revealed the extent of his sorrow and misery. "I stood in the doorway and watched you with Marcus, heard

your sweet noises and witnessed the emotions cross your face. I let my need to experience the same thing take over and for that I am sorry. I let my lust go to my head and I took you with no thought to soft words and even less to soft movement. I hurt you and I will live with that for the rest of my life."

"You did not hurt me physically," Farrah whispered, overcome with the pain she heard in his voice saw in his eyes.

"I saw the blood on your thighs," Bannen exclaimed. "I saw your face."

"No, the blood was only because it was my first time and it was from Marcus not from you. The tears I cannot deny—nay, I will not deny—that they were partly from your treatment." She looked Bannen straight in the eyes, her green ones bright with new tears that pierced his heart like a sharp sword. "I didn't even know your name," she whispered to him. "I didn't even know that there were three brothers. One moment Marcus was there and it was wonderful and then there were two others in the room with us. Before I had time to even understand the significance of that Marcus was gone and you were the one standing there, doing what he had just done. And I didn't even know you. He was the only one of you that I even knew by name and he just walked away like I was nothing." She glared at Marcus for a moment before turning once more to Bannen. "Then there you were and you didn't even look at my face. You just took me and it was like I could have been anyone as far as you were concerned. It was demeaning as if I were no better than *pani*."

Both men gasped and it was only then that Farrah realized that Erika and her two warriors, Arik and Galen, were gone from the glen, leaving Farrah completely alone with her warriors. Here she stood with Bannen and Marcus, and according to Erika she could not use her powers to aid her in dealing with them.

Marcus stepped up to her then and pulled her into his arms, wrapping her against the long length of his body. "I did not walk away as if you were nothing, Farrah. I left you to one of your mates. I told you earlier that you belonged to all of us."

Farrah shook her head in disbelief. Could this big warrior not see that he was at fault? "You could have at least introduced me to your brothers and them to me! You could have at least tried to make me more comfortable! You could have done any number of things but instead you chose to turn away! Can you not see just how your actions made me feel? Can you not even try?"

"I know that you are mine and I will not let you go," Marcus informed her, his voice hard and rough. "I know that it took all I had to move from the sweet haven between your thighs and let another man there even though it was my brother. I know that I only have to think of you and I want you all over again." Marcus bent his head and took her mouth with a kiss that was as dominant and controlling as he was. He gave no quarter but took her prisoner, wielding his tongue like a sword and spearing deep into her mouth, tasting her everywhere, stealing the very air she breathed. He pulled back slowly, keeping his eyes on her flushed face, her swollen lips still wet from his. "I know that I would die for you a thousand times if only to stop your tears."

"I wish you would have expressed this to me earlier, Marcus," she murmured softly.

Marcus gave a slight tilt to his lips and Farrah's heart stuttered in her chest. "If I had been able to think at the moment then perhaps I would have."

Farrah caught movement out of the corner of her eye and realized that Bannen was going to leave them. She held her hand out to him and implored, "No, don't leave us, Bannen. Stay and let me get to know you, the real you. We are mated now, bonded for life. I would like to know who you are."

Bannen took a long breath and stepped to where she still stood in the circle of Marcus' arms and gratefully grasped the hand she held out to him. "I would like that very much."

"And where is the third of you?" Farrah asked the two warriors by her.

"I am here," Alexi called as he stepped out of the sheltering confines of the trees. He walked toward them but stopped a few steps away. "I am Alexi."

Farrah moved away from Bannen and Marcus and stepped to Alexi, pressing her body flush against his. "We have not consummated our bond yet," she reminded him before framing his face in her hands. "You understood my pain and walked away when I needed you to." She leaned up and gave him a damp kiss on his startled mouth. "I wish to thank you for that."

"Are you willing to mate with me now?" Alexi asked, holding his breath as he waited for her answer. He felt like he was going to burst in his pants. It had taken all of his willpower to walk away from her and he didn't know if he could do it a second time.

Farrah nodded her head but didn't look at him as she answered, "You are my mate."

Alexi took her chin in his fingers and tilted her head up, forcing her to meet his eyes. "That is not what I asked of you. I asked if you were willing, Farrah. I will not take you if you do not want me to. I will wait until it is what you wish as well."

She rubbed against him, making them both aware of what his body was saying loud and clear. "You would walk away again even with your need so great?" she asked him, quietly ignoring the presence of Marcus and Bannen behind them.

"I would do whatever you needed of me to ensure your comfort." He stroked his hand down her cheek and added, "I would only make you happy, Farrah."

Farrah smiled at Alexi, his words clearing her mind of any fear or doubt that still remained. "I willingly agree to consummate our bond with you, Alexi," she whispered to him.

Alexi crushed his mouth down over hers, his tongue finding its way into her mouth and tasting her, drinking her in. He took her under his spell and within moments she found herself naked on her back in the thick grasses of the glen. She had no idea when her clothing had been removed, she only knew that this man was kissing her in a way that made her forget everything else around her. He consumed her, calling to her heart with his own, claiming and binding it as surely as he was her body.

Alexi moved down her throat with nipping, sucking bites that fanned the flames burning throughout her higher and higher. When he bit gently at her hard nipple she gasped with pleasure as the wicked sensation tugged on something inside her womb. He stayed there, biting and sucking at her breasts until she was trembling with need, begging for his touch, screaming for him to stop yet knowing that she would die if he did. He worked his way down her taut abdomen and parted the wet folds of her pussy, plumped and swollen with need. His tongue licked and teased her, tasting all the secrets and desires that glistened on her sweet pink flesh.

With a groan Alexi drove his tongue fiercely into her quivering pussy, making Farrah buck and scream. He used his entire mouth for her pleasure, teeth and lips and tongue, to fuck her, suckle her, digging relentlessly for more. He used his thumb to rub back and forth over the distended nub of her clit, that pleasure pearl that assured him she was enjoying his every move. He was ruthless in his hunger for her, her taste, her moans of pleasure, her every little sound and movement. He ravaged her, tasting the flames of her desire on his tongue and always delving for more until she came for him, her sweet pink flesh flexing and gripping his tongue as he continued to consume her.

When he finally pulled away from her he was startled to realize that his brothers were still there with them, still watching their every move. Marcus and Bannen had already discarded their weapon belts, boots and pants and Alexi hurried to remove his as well. He could see the fire oil that Marcus was using to coat his cock and nodded his head at the unasked question. Alexi moved to his back on the grass and tugged until Farrah was sprawled over his big body.

Farrah was boneless with her orgasm and thought nothing as the hands lifted and positioned her until she could feel the pressure of Alexi's hard cock against her wet folds. He slid into her with a slow, easy glide but instead of moving her up and down his staff, he held her tight to him and that was when she became aware of the hands on the cheeks of her ass, spreading her. She jerked and cried out but Alexi held her to him and kissed her intensely, drawing her quickly back under his spell. She still felt the slick

fingers working her ass, getting her ready for a bigger, more intense penetration but she allowed Alexi to soothe and calm her, knowing that what was coming was inevitable.

She knew without looking that it was Marcus behind her, could tell just by the feel of his hands that he was the one stroking his slick fingers in and out. And she was starting to burn for his possession. She felt the need for something more there. She wanted something thicker and longer than his fingers. She was moaning and shuddering with a burning need for something, anything that would satisfy her body's growing hunger. "Oh, please...please..." she moaned.

Marcus pulled his finger from the gripping depths of her snug pink hole and quickly replaced it with the rounded head of his rock-hard cock. He pushed until he felt the give of her tight ring of muscles that allowed him to sink in just enough so that the sensitive head was buried fully between the rounded globes of her ass. Her cries joined his as he worked harder, his movement rougher until he was fully embedded in her ass, his cock rubbing against Alexi's through the thin membrane that separated them.

They began a rhythm that had one filling her and then the other. It was heaven, it was hell. It was everything that she desired and all that she feared. She was consumed by these men, these mates of hers. Marcus was pounding into her now, filling her ass with his huge cock. Alexi was slamming in and out of her wet pussy, spearing her with his own giant sword. Farrah threw her head back and screamed with pleasure, her gaze latching onto the bobbing erection of Bannen that danced before her eyes. He knelt beside them, watching his brothers share her while he stroked his cock with his hand.

Looking at him, Farrah wanted him as well. She met his eyes with hers and licked her lips slowly, letting him see her need. Bannen groaned and moved toward her until the glistening tip of his erection bounced before her lips. She opened wide and wrapped her mouth around the bulbous head of his cock and sucked hard. Alexi had latched onto one of her nipples and was sucking just as greedily from it as she was Bannen's cock.

The four of them were all moaning and groaning their pleasure. Alexi reveled in the firm pull on his cock as he fucked in and out of Farrah's juicy pussy. Marcus was consumed by the snug fit around his cock as he slammed in and out of the tight hot depths of her ass. Bannen was lost in the wet heat of her mouth, the flicker of her tongue and the suction as she pulled him closer and closer to the tight grasp of her throat.

Farrah was on overload. Her body was alive with sensations that it had never experienced before. Flames danced and flickered around the edges of her vision, her skin alive with the fire that burned hot in her veins, consuming her, burning her with the heat of her warriors. She shattered beneath them, around them, in them and felt their fiery releases as well, heat filling her pussy and ass as Alexi and Marcus reached their own shattering climaxes, the sweet tart flavor as it washed over her tongue as she struggled to swallow every drop that Bannen gave her.

They were so lost in each other that no one noticed the two men who watched from the cover of the trees, their faces red with rage. No one noticed the gloved hands fisted tight with anger or heard the whispered promise that she would still pay for her actions. Nothing and no one would stand in the way of vengeance.

Chapter Four

Farrah stepped out of the room that she had been given to share with her mates while they were at the Savari home and immediately ran into Erika who was holding her newly born twins in her arms. Farrah was thankful that her mates were willing to remain in the Savari household a little longer, giving Farrah time to adjust before they took her across the village to their own home. Soon to be her home as well.

"So you are awake," Erika said. "Dinner will be ready soon and I have just feed Galrik and Malia. I was going to spend a little time with them before they go to bed. Would you like to join me?"

"I would love to." Farrah sighed before asking, "You named one of your twin warriors Malia?"

Erika laughed and eased Malia into Farrah's eager arms. "I did. I named my little girl warrior Malia."

"You had a girl and a boy?" Farrah asked with shock. This was unheard of for them. Warriors were always born in twos or threes but they were always boys. Girls were born one at a time, never as twins. That Erika had birthed a set of twins that consisted of a boy and a girl was unbelievable. "How... How is that even possible?"

"'Tis a true blessing from the goddess upon one of her Guardians. My mothers and I see it as a sign that change is coming." There was no disguising the love that shown so brightly in Erika's green eyes.

"And your mates? What is their reaction?" Farrah wondered aloud.

"They are too in love with our children to care that one is a boy and one is a girl. They could not be happier," Erika said as she bent to nuzzle her face closer to Galrik, breathing in the uniqueness of his baby smell.

Farrah felt her heart clench with need—need to hold her own child in her arms, to nurse them at her breast. She settled Malia more firmly in the crook of her arm and smiled down at the fussing baby girl. She rocked her arm, gently soothing the tiny girl with the tender motion. “There, there, my pretty little angel. Look at how beautiful you are.” She placed a kiss on the tiny brow, rubbed her finger along the plump cheek and laughed when fingers wrapped tightly around the digit, drawing it to the already suckling mouth.

“She is as beautiful as her mother,” Galen said as he and Marcus joined them. Galen stopped next to Erika and eased his arms around both her and his son, tugging until Erika’s back was firmly against his chest and he could see Galrik over her shoulder. “And our son already shows his protective nature toward her.” He grinned as they all looked at Galrik’s little face where his eyes seemed to be firmly set upon his sister’s small figure in Farrah’s arms. He did indeed seem to be watching over her.

“You look good with a babe nestled in your arms,” Marcus said as he stopped next to Farrah, bending to place a kiss on her brow and run his own finger along the smooth flesh of Malia’s cheek. “I long for the day when it is our own child that you hold.”

Farrah smiled up at him and, finding his face still so close, kissed him chastely on his lips. “I too long for that day.”

Fire smoldered in Marcus’ eyes as he thought of just how they could make sure she conceived. The thought of her plump with child was erotic to him. He was close to taking her back into their room when Erika smoothly interrupted him.

“If you warriors will excuse us we’ll just put Malia and Galrik in their beds for the evening and join you at the table. There is much that we need to discuss together.”

Farrah knew that Erika was letting her know that tonight she would stand beside her while Farrah told her warrior mates about who she truly was and who had sent her here to Erika, to them. She hoped that they would be okay with everything.

Marcus kissed her once more before heading with Galen down the hall and stairs to the great room. Farrah followed Erika in the opposite direction and entered a big room

that she knew immediately was the bedroom of the Savari mates. Erika walked through it to a small door that connected to another room. The room was definitely where the babies slept. There was a large circular bed in the middle of the room surrounded all around by tightly woven pieces of smooth wood to protect the two children from rolling off the bed and being injured. Erika stepped forward and placed Galrik gently on the mattress then stepped back so that Farrah could do the same with Malia.

No sooner had Farrah placed Malia beside him and stepped back then Galrik squirmed and slowly moved until he was beside his sister. It amazed Farrah to watch his actions as he took his sister's hand in his and with that one small act both Malia and Galrik closed their eyes and seemed to go almost immediately to sleep. Farrah had never seen anything like it.

"They will sleep now," Erika whispered. "He will hold her hand all through the night and they will both sleep."

"That is the most amazing thing that I have ever witnessed," Farrah said as they stepped back through the door that Erika left open and returned through the Savari bedroom to the hall. "They are so close. Their bond is even stronger than I have ever witnessed in warrior twins."

Erika smiled and took Farrah's hand in hers and squeezed it. "I believe that it is because they are children of a Guardian and that the goddess must have blessed them in some way as well. I would not be surprised if all of the children of the Guardians were the same way."

Farrah's other hand flew to her stomach and lingered there while thoughts of having the children of her Donan mates went through her head. She would love every moment of it.

Erika placed her other hand over Farrah's and said softly, "When you conceive you will know. You will feel it like a warm ember and you will just know."

Farrah laughed. "I always feel flames burning within me. I am the Guardian of Fire."

Erika laughed as well. "This will feel different, trust me. You will know when it occurs."

With that they headed to the great room and the evening meal with five hungry warriors. Farrah felt a trickle of fear and doubt run along her spine. After dinner she would tell her new mates exactly who they had chosen and she could only pray to the goddess that they would still want her.

* * * * *

Dinner was over and everything cleared away and still Farrah had not found the courage to speak up. It was Alexi who brought the conversation to light as everyone was relaxing after the meal. Erika rested on a pillow on the floor below where Arik and Galen sat. Farrah sat opposite her on another pillow below where Marcus and Bannen sat while Alexi stood next to the fire chamber. The room was growing warm from the flames and all were feeling rested and content.

"So you came here to see Erika?" Alexi's question came out of nowhere, startling Farrah out of her own thoughts.

"I...well, yes, I did," Farrah admitted to the room in general.

Marcus ran his fingers through her hair, stroking and caressing her. "Why did you come to see Erika, little one? Who sent you on this task? And why?"

Farrah looked at Erika and was comforted by the nod of agreement that she was given by her new friend. "I was sent here by my aunt to find Erika and seek shelter until things settled down in the village where I am from."

"What sort of things?" Bannen asked, just beating Marcus and Alexi. "Shelter from what or who?"

"I was close to reaching the time of claiming and there was a set of warrior brothers who had let it be known that they and only they would claim me."

Marcus looked incredibly troubled by this fact. "You were already promised to someone else when we claimed you?"

Farrah turned to him and shook her head vigorously. "No, never would I have been promised to ones such as the Latoni brothers. That is why I was sent here to prevent that from happening. My aunt saw that this is where I needed to be. I believe that she sent me to you and Alexi and Bannen, Marcus. Although she didn't say that, I find it hard to believe that she wouldn't have known what fate held for me."

Galen laughed at that. "Who is this great aunt of yours, Farrah, that she would know so much? And why would she send you to Erika?"

Farrah looked first to Bannen then to Alexi and finally locked eyes with Marcus before disclosing, "My aunt is the Princess Asme, the last Mahiki of our great island home and knower of all. I came because she felt that this is where my destiny lay and because Warrior Law prevented her from stepping in to protect me in any other way from the Latoni warriors."

All five of the warriors in the room came to attention at these words. Before them sat the niece of their very own prince and his mate and the Donans realized that they had claimed her with no right. If the prince decided to deny their claim than there would be nothing that they could do to stop it, no way for them to keep her.

Marcus shot to his feet and pulled Farrah up to hers before him. He clasped his hands around her upper arms and squeezed, gaining her undivided attention. "I will not give you up or let you walk away from us. I will kill anyone who would dare to try...or I will die trying," he swore to her, himself and everyone in the room.

"As will I." Bannen stood and placed his hand on her shoulder.

"As will I," Alexi added as he joined them and placed his hand on her other shoulder. "We will not let anyone take you from us, Farrah."

Farrah could feel the tears in her eyes and smiled at her three brave warriors who were coming to mean so much to her. She could feel herself falling more and more in love with them with every moment. "Don't you see that is what I am saying? I know that Aunt Asme must have known that you would claim me and that the goddess must have declared it to be so. Aunt Asme told me to seek Erika for protection, knowing that

I would find you instead.” She reached up and cupped Marcus’ face with her hands, drawing his mouth down to hers for a quick kiss. “She must have seen that I would be claimed by you,” she turned and offered a kiss to Alexi, “and you,” and then to Bannen as well, “and you. She sent me to find a friend, knowing that I would find three incredible warriors as well who would protect me better than anyone else ever could.”

“Why do the Latoni brothers want you so badly? And why would no one else interfere with their claim?” Alexi asked.

Farrah felt a shudder run through her body as she thought of Kiva Latoni and his brother Kito and all of her warriors sought to comfort her with their hands and kisses to her temples and the top of her head.

“What did they do to you that you should shiver with such fear of them?” inquired Bannen, with fire burning in his eyes.

“When I was eighteen, Kiva Latoni followed me into the woods where I was working and tried to touch me, to claim me,” Farrah explained to them.

“At eighteen?” Erika was incredulous about this. “Is there no one to enforce Warrior Law in your village? How could that have happened?”

Galen pulled Erika up onto his lap and he and Arik held her close. “You have been well sheltered here in our village. You have not seen many of the things that other women in other villages have to deal with.”

Erika looked at Farrah. “But you lived in the village where the prince of the warriors calls home. You are niece to the Princess Asme. How could this have happened to you?”

Farrah smiled as she turned to face Erika, Galen and Arik placing her back snugly against Marcus’ chest. “There is much that happens there that probably never occurs elsewhere. The prince stands firm on the Law of Warriors’ Rights. It is an old and archaic law but exists nonetheless. It is the law that says once a woman is bedded she is claimed no matter her age. He also will not step in to interfere between a warrior and

his mate. My aunt says that he is often more giving than others in his struggle to allow warriors' rights."

"And what of a woman's rights?" Erika demanded sharply. "Are we not the givers of life? Are we not—"

Galen interrupted her with a chaste kiss, an offer of comfort. "You are indeed the givers of life. But not all warriors are just or true. I believe that the prince hopes by letting each warrior have control of his mate that it will bring the mates closer together, bind them. Unfortunately not all warriors have respect for women and for them it is not a good law. Some will find ways around it, ways to use it to achieve what they want. Such as a warrior who would follow an eighteen-year-old girl into the woods and try to claim her."

This brought the focus back on Farrah as they all thought of what could have been her fate.

"What happened in the woods? I know that he did not bed you." Marcus stated bluntly, reminding her and his brothers of the virgin blood that had stained her thighs. Farrah blushed bright red and glared over her shoulder at Marcus. She did not want to be reminded of what all had occurred in that room when she had lost her virginity.

"No, he didn't claim me with his body. He pushed me and he ended up with burnt hands for his effort," Farrah told them without revealing exactly how Kiva Latoni had obtained those burns. "As far as I know he still bears the scars on his hands from that day. He is never seen anymore without black gloves covering him from fingertip to wrist. I don't know what he told the other warriors happened that day but none of them came near me after that." She looked at Bannen then. "I fear them because they hate me for what happened to Kiva's hands that day. They seek justice from me. It was brought to my Aunt Asme's attention from some of her sons that the Latoni had let it be known that when my time came to be claimable that they were staking that claim. They planned to bed me right there in the courtyard for all to see and witness and then they planned to use me for *pani*." Everyone gasped at this except Erika who had already

heard some of this from Farrah. "No one would stand in their way because sooner or later they would all be allowed to use me in one way or another. Why save someone from a fate that will see you rewarded as well?"

"They will never lay a hand on you, Farrah. This is the promise of the Donan warriors. You are our mate now and you will be no man's *pani*," Marcus swore to her as Bannen and Alexi nodded in agreement. "We must call the elders of the village together and have the ceremony as soon as possible so that our claim cannot be questioned." Marcus turned to Farrah and stared intently into her eyes. "Will you submit to this? Will you agree to have a ceremony and all that it implies?"

Erika started to speak but Arik placed the palm of his hand firmly over her mouth, keeping her quiet while Galen tried not to laugh as he whispered to her, "You must not tell her of the ceremony before she attends herself. That is the way of it as you well know from our ceremony, little one."

Farrah looked from Erika and her mates to her three warriors and couldn't help but think that she was missing something really important. "I have no one here to stand in as my family."

Erika moved Arik's hand and said, "Yes, you do. You have me as a sister and —"

"You will not be attending her ceremony, Erika," Galen thundered from beside her. Just the thought of Erika watching the three Donan warriors being pleased, having her see their aroused cocks as Farrah pleased them on her knees was enough to make Galen taut with anger. "I forbid it."

Erika surprised them all by laughing gaily. "I was going to suggest that my mother stand in as her family. I am sure that her Aunt Asme would agree with me. I never once thought that I would stand as witness to the ceremony." Her eyes twinkled up at him, "Why, Galen, I almost think that you are afraid that I might see something that I like more."

Galen stood and growled then, with a quick move, threw his mate over his shoulder and smacked her firmly on her ass, making her squeal with delight. The

Donan brothers were all laughing out loud and Arik was grinning with what could only be anticipation. "Arik and I have all that you will ever need, Erika." Galen smacked her again on her ass before squeezing the round globe in his hand. "Perhaps you need to be reminded of that, little one."

Erika moaned in his arms, "Yes, remind me, Galen. You and Arik need to remind me just how lucky I am."

Galen shook his head and headed for the stairs with Arik right behind them. "Cheeky wench," he murmured to Erika.

Arik turned to the Donan clan and stated, "We will have to finish this in the morn as there seems to be something else that we need to do right now. We can plan the ceremony for tomorrow night and both our mother and Erika's can stand in for Farrah if that is okay with you." He looked at Farrah and waited for her nod before continuing. "Then if you will send for your mother as well in the morning, Marcus, the ceremony can take place at last light here in the great room where our own ceremony with Erika took place." Arik bowed to them and headed toward the stairs his brother had already climbed with Erika. "Then if you will excuse me it seems that I have a woman to remind how lucky she is." With one last grin to Farrah he leaped up the stairs two at a time, leaving the Donan brothers alone with their new mate.

"What does the ceremony include?" Farrah asked innocently. "I have never seen one before."

Marcus grinned down at her. "The ceremony is only attended by the parents of the mated and the elders. It is something that you need not worry about though, little one. You will know exactly what to do when the time comes."

Alexi grinned then as well and it was all that Bannen could do not to laugh when his brother added, "Perhaps we should go to our own rooms and express our luck as well."

"Ummm..." Marcus murmured to Alexi, "perhaps practice wouldn't hurt."

Farrah felt a little alarmed when all three of her warriors turned to her with big grins on their faces and used their hands to help guide her up the stairs to their room. She wasn't for sure what all would happen tomorrow but she knew that it would turn out to be the most significant day of her life. She prayed to the goddess that everything would go as planned with no problems or reservations from the elders at her lack of blood relatives.

When they entered the bedchamber they were using while they stayed in the Savari home, Marcus, Alexi and Bannen wasted no time in stripping Farrah out of her clothes. Within moments she was naked and lying upon her back on the bed. Bannen immediately spread her thighs and, leaning down, filled his lungs with the rich smell of her natural female musk before stroking his tongue through the plump folds of her weeping sex. Farrah keened and moaned as he laved her, tasting every inch of her pussy before thrusting his tongue where she felt so empty, begging for a richer taste.

Alexi worked her nipples using teeth, lips and tongue to suck them to turgid points of pleasure. He sucked them hard, opening his mouth wide and eating as much of her generous breasts as he could fit. While he worked one breast with his mouth he fondled the other with his fingers, pinching and twisting the nipple, keeping her on the sharp edge of burning need. Just when she felt she couldn't take any more Alexi would switch breasts, giving her a short reprieve before the slow, torturous pleasure would start all over again.

Farrah was lost in the sensations that Bannen and Alexi were flooding her senses with when Marcus appeared. For the first time Farrah really had a chance to see one of her warriors totally naked. Marcus stood beside the bed, watching his brothers feast on her, while his hand stroked slowly up and down the length of his cock. He had discarded his pants and weapons belt along with his boots and he was beautiful in his nudity. Farrah watched him, her eyes glazed with need, and slowly slipped her tongue out to moisten her suddenly dry lips.

Marcus groaned and squeezed his pulsing shaft, tightly reining in his control before climbing to his knees on the bed and moving toward Farrah's parted and panting lips. They were moist from her tongue and as he approached that tiny weapon of pleasure flicked out again, coating her lips so that they glistened. Marcus pressed forward until the weeping head of his cock bobbed in front of her gorgeous mouth. Gripping it tightly in his fist, he moved it until it was lined up perfectly with her parted lips.

"Open wide for me, baby," Marcus groaned out. "I want to feel your mouth on me."

Farrah flicked her tongue out again, stroking his cock and licking the drop of fluid seeping from the tiny slit before pulling it into her mouth with a husky moan of pleasure and opening wide for his first hard thrust. His hand remained wrapped around the base, the only thing keeping him from choking her with his length and girth. She sucked greedily at him, hungry for more of his salty treasure. She brought her hands up and he willingly let her replace his with hers so that she controlled how far his cock plunged. Her hand barely contained him, her fingers stretched wide and not touching around his wide girth as she continued to feed from him. She used her other hand to play with the tight sac beneath his cock, loving the feel of the taut globes enclosed there.

Marcus groaned and tunneled his fingers through her hair before grasping the locks tightly and using them to hold her in place as he thrust his hips. Bannen groaned against her pussy, taking immense pleasure in each drop of juice he could find with his tongue and fingers. Alexi pushed both of her breasts together and fed from them, sucking both turgid points into his mouth with hard, strong tugs.

Farrah moaned around Marcus' pumping cock, thrusting her hips high against Bannen's mouth as she felt her orgasm break through her. Marcus popped his cock free and smiled down at her, watching her eyes as she keened and cried out with her release.

"That was beautiful, little one," Marcus whispered to Farrah. "I've never seen a more beautiful sight in my life as you when you reach your pleasure."

He moved away then and Alexi released her nipples and moved up to her mouth, possessing it with a savage passion, eating at her lips and sucking her tongue into his mouth. Farrah lost herself in Alexi's taste and touch, wallowing in his kiss. When he finally pulled away Marcus lay down on the bed beside her and Alexi and Bannen helped her to mount him, her pussy perfectly positioned for his first rough thrust.

She felt hands on her hips holding her impaled while her rear cheeks were spread and fingers slicked with fire oil were thrust into her anus. The fingers worked quickly, stretching and lubricating her before another thick shaft was placed there and rammed home. She cried out as pleasure and pain ripped through her, only knowing that it was Bannen thrusting so hard and roughly inside her ass when Alexi knelt at the top of the bed and pulled her head up from Marcus' chest so that she could wrap her lips around his pulsing cock and suck it into the hot, wet heat of her mouth.

Her men groaned with pleasure, each of them finding what they needed in the tight clasp of her body. Marcus gloried in the tight, hot grasp of her pussy as he pumped slowly in and out of her. Bannen found his pleasure in the snug heat of her ass, pounding in and out with hard strokes that perfectly mirrored his brothers. Alexi groaned, the sound rumbling in his chest as he watched his cock glide between Farrah's plump lips, enjoying every caress of her tongue, every nip of her teeth and the greedy suction of her mouth. And Farrah immersed herself in them, their cocks, their mouths, their hands, their sounds of pleasure.

Bannen came first with a harsh groan that echoed through the room as he pulsed and spewed, filling her ass. When he finally pulled out with a groan Alexi pulled his shaft from her throat and quickly mounted her from behind, thrusting hard into her ass. Marcus matched Alexi's fast and furious pace and Farrah came, fire roaring through her veins as her body tightened like a vise around the still-plunging shafts of her warriors, milking them of their own rich seed. She soared higher, burned hotter with each new

pulse of semen that her warriors spent within her until she shattered, her vision graying and then going black as she tumbled into oblivion, a smile on her lips from pleasure too intense for her to handle.

Farrah floated there, never gaining consciousness as she tumbled into sleep, content in the knowledge that her warriors would watch over and take care of her.

Chapter Five

The next morning Farrah met Erika's friend Reanna for the first time. Reanna was just passing her nineteenth summer but already the warriors took notice of her. Who wouldn't, with her golden blonde hair and big blue eyes? She was taller than either Farrah or Erika who both stood five foot eight. Reanna stood five foot ten inches, which only made her appear more regal and graceful. There was something about her, some hidden quality that one couldn't quite put their finger on yet made it impossible to look away from her. She was grace and beauty on the inside as well as the outside and Farrah liked her immediately.

Reanna joined them as they went to Erika's mother's house on the other side of the village. Few had seen Farrah and she garnered many covetous looks until the warriors saw the wolf on her abdomen that proclaimed her Donan. Although they continued to look no one approached the women, no one would dare risk the anger of both the Savari and Donan warriors.

Erika's mother met them at the door and led them to the table where she had laid out some sweet cakes and fresh juice made from the island berries. Farrah was nervous but Erin seemed to be as nice as her daughter Erika. The women chatted about mundane everyday things until Erika finally spoke up.

"Mama, I need to tell you some things about Farrah." Erika explained to her mother before looking at Farrah and asking, "Or would you like to tell her about yourself?"

Farrah was unsure of what exactly Erika planned on telling her mother. That Farrah was also a Guardian? That she was to have a joining ceremony with the Donan warriors tonight and Erin was to stand in as her family? Where to start? What to say? She hadn't even said anything to Reanna yet and they had spent most of the morning together getting to know each other.

"I know that you are still unsure, Farrah," Erika encouraged her, "but I would trust both of these women with my life. I already have."

Farrah took a big breath, filling her lungs with air before taking the plunge and disclosing the greatest of her secrets. "I am also a Guardian."

Both women looked startled but it was Erin who spoke first.

"How is this? Where are you from? Not this village surely? A Guardian?" She looked to her daughter, asking questions with her expression that none but Erika could read.

"It is okay, Mama," Erika assured her mother, "she is what she claims. She was sent to me by the Mahiki, Princess Asme."

"The Mahiki sent you?" Erin asked with stunned surprise while Reanna just looked on with wide unbelieving eyes.

"Yes." Farrah finally found her voice again. "Aunt Asme, I mean the Mahiki, sent me to find Erika, the Guardian of Earth."

"Aunt?" Erin questioned.

"Not by blood but by bond as friends with my mother." Farrah explained the relationship between her mother and the Princess Asme. "They have known each other since they were girls."

"Your mother is Solame," Erin said, not questioning but knowing.

"Yes," Farrah smiled and shook her head. "Mama is called Solame."

"I remember her well," Erin told Farrah.

"You know my mother?" Farrah questioned.

"She and the princess have always been inseparable. To know one is to know both. Your mother showed much courage in the time of claiming," Erin told her. "Many looked to her for courage."

"I have always known she is strong of heart and mind as well as body," Farrah spoke with pride.

"And you are a Guardian?" Erin asked.

"Yes," Farrah answered softly. "I am the Guardian of Fire."

"Fire," Reanna sounded awed by this.

"Yes, I can make fire in the palm of my hand. I can throw flames. I can make you burn just by touching you. I am still learning what I can do."

"And is this why you were sent here? To Erika? To learn and train with her?" Erin asked.

"Partly," Farrah replied.

"She was sent here for me to hide and help protect her from the danger that was closing in on her," Erika proclaimed.

"What danger?" Erin demanded.

"It is not so important now," Farrah stated. "My danger ended when I was claimed by the Donan brothers. Their name will protect me more than anything else ever could," Farrah stated and there was no missing the emotion in her voice. Erin couldn't help but to smile at this young woman who was so obviously in love. Farrah was lucky that it had worked out that way for her as not all claimed women were so gifted to find love.

"How did you meet the Donan warriors?" Reanna asked, confused. "If you were sent to Erika then how is it that they claimed you?"

"Well," Farrah hesitated, unsure of how to word exactly what had happened in a way that would not reflect poorly on her warriors. Erika had no such problem.

"They stumbled on her in the woods when Farrah was searching for me," Erika explained. "Then they claimed her with no one else around to stop them. She never had a choice."

Reanna gasped, shocked that a woman could be claimed in such a way but Erin just smiled. "I don't think that you mind their actions so much now," Erin stated softly, eyes on Farrah.

"No," Farrah admitted, feeling the flush steal over her face, blushing, her cheeks bright red. "I have come to love them." It was the first time that she had spoken her feelings out loud and it was a little scary.

"You are very lucky then," Erin told her. "Not every woman is so blessed."

"Yes, I am blessed doubly by the goddess," Farrah smiled.

"But I wish to hear of this danger anyway," Erin demanded softly. "Why did the Mahiki send you here to us?"

"My aunt was forewarned by her sons that a group of warriors planned to claim me when my time came. There is some history between us, the warriors seeking to claim me and me," Farrah shook her head, knowing that Erin would not be satisfied with only that. "Kiva Latoni followed me into the woods one day and tried to..." she struggled to find the right word.

"I understand," Erin said, her face hard. Erika had been found in the woods once too but luckily it was by Arik and he had brought her home, no matter how much the sight of her lush body had enticed him to do otherwise.

"Anyway, when he touched me I burned his hands," Farrah said. "I burned them so badly that he still bears the scars under the thick black gloves he is never without. That is the day that I learned that I could burn with my touch, with my very skin."

"So then what happened?" Erin nudged her gently to continue.

"I'm not sure what he told the people of our village but I was given a wide berth after that. Then the Latoni brothers let it be known that when my time of claiming came that they would claim me in the village square in front of everyone. No one would stop them."

"They planned to use her as *pani*," Erika added, making her mother and Reanna recoil in horror. No woman would wish to have such a fate.

"My goddess!" Reanna exclaimed. "And there was no one to stand up to them? No one to stop them? But you are a Guardian! Surely you could have stopped them?"

"And exposed herself for a Guardian," Erin murmured. "No, to leave was the only true choice."

"That is just what I'm sure my aunt thought," Farrah agreed.

"I'm sure that she sent you to the Donans as much as to Erika," Erin told her with a smile. "I believe that there is probably little that she doesn't know."

"I believe that you are right," Farrah smiled back.

"That is part of the reason that we are here today, Mama," Erika interjected. "Farrah is to have her joining ceremony tonight and we were hoping that you could stand in as her family. I have been forbidden to attend." Erika added this last with a twinkle in her eye and a huge grin on her face. As Erin was the only other person at the table who had ever been present at a ceremony it was entirely for her.

Erin threw her head back and laughed and laughed until tears ran down her face. "I can just see the faces of your mates now, daughter. I am sure Arik and Galen were very adamant."

"Yes, they were," Erika agreed.

"Why do I feel like I am missing something very important?" Farrah asked.

"Me too," Reanna agreed.

"You will both learn at your own joining ceremonies and not a moment before," Erin told them. "And I would be delighted to stand in as your family, Farrah. I would consider it an honor."

"Thank you," Farrah nodded.

"Now then." Erin stood from the table and all three other women got quickly to their feet as well. "Let's go into my private gardens and see what you can do. You can put out the flames?" she asked Farrah.

"Yes, I can put them out," Farrah told them. "I can even give the illusion of fire and flame where there is none."

"Wow," Reanna said, awed. "I would love to see such a sight."

"I will show you gladly," Farrah replied.

By then they were in the garden and Erin led them to the very thickest part before showing them to a bench and sitting down. "Whenever you are ready, Farrah, show us what you will."

Farrah walked a little way from where Erin and Reanna sat while Erika walked to a tree close by and leaned against it. Farrah took several breaths before turning and holding her hands in the air. "I call upon the Goddess of Altair. I claim the very fire of the air. In my hands a gentle flame," Farrah opened her hands and each held a small ball of fire, "becomes the torch by your name." Each ball of fire shot up from her hands so that it looked as if her very hands were torches. "A soft caress of flames going higher," the fire burst from her hands shooting high into the air, "I thank you for my gift of fire." And the flames were gone. Farrah stood as she had when she started as if the flames had never been.

"That was amazing." Erika approached her, transfixed by what she had seen. "How did you do that?"

"What?" Farrah asked with confusion. "I have done nothing yet but ask for the goddess's blessing on my gift."

"Where did you learn to do that?" Erika asked.

"Aunt Asme told me that I should always ask for a blessing before using my power. A respect for what I have been given."

"But where did the words come from?" Erika needed to know. "Did the Mahiki teach them to you? Did she send some for me?"

"No," Farrah told her. "She said that I would just know what to say."

"So I should just know?" Erika was shaking her head.

"Listen with your soul," Farrah encouraged her, "and you will know the words. I heard you before and there are some that you already know and say. Just concentrate and the rest will flow from you."

Erika closed her eyes, raised her arms high over her head and listened intently to the call of her soul, searching for the words she needed. "I call upon the Goddess of Altair. The power of earth I wish to share." The earth began to tremble under them and the trees and all the greenery began to wave in as if moved by a wind that didn't exist. At least not at the moment. "No rock untouched, no tree unbent." It was as if the unseen, unfelt wind was trying to tear the very trees from the ground and toss them out of the way. "I thank you for the gift you sent." Erika dropped her hands and all was still and silent once more.

Reanna and Erin sat quietly on the bench, overcome by what they had just been blessed to witness from these two women, these two Guardians of Altair. It was an amazing sight and so far Erika and Farrah had only issued the call for the goddess's blessing.

"Show me more," Erin encouraged them. "I want to see everything."

* * * * *

It was much later that they all four returned to Erika's home to prepare Farrah for her joining ceremony. Reanna was bidden goodbye and headed to her own home while Farrah bathed and Erika and Erin sat beside her in the room to let her know what her ceremony would consist of.

"I am to be completely naked!" Farrah exclaimed in shock. "In front of everyone. I am just to walk in naked?"

Erika grinned, remembering how she had felt about that little fact as well but it was Erin who answered.

"You are to be free of restrictions...bindings," Erin tried to explain. "You go to them as you came into this world. It is a symbol of your rebirth from the girl you have been to the woman you now are. Every woman enters her ceremony the same way. You are not the first and you won't be the last. 'Tis the way it is."

"Who will be there? Will they be naked too?" Farrah glanced quickly to Erika. "Is that why your warriors forbade you to attend?"

Erika choked on a laugh. "Not exactly. There is a part of the ceremony where they will be, er...exposed though. That is why my mates were so adamant."

"Exposed?" Farrah was breathless with fear and perhaps anticipation as well.

"Let's just go through this from the beginning, okay?" Erin interrupted. "The only people there will be Mariska, who is the mother of the Donan warriors. Her mates are gone at the moment so you won't meet them yet. Then I will be there as your family. It will be only me as well as my mates have gone to find our sons and check on them."

"Any news yet?" Erika interrupted to ask.

"No, my dear," Erin told her, shaking her head sadly. "I have heard nothing from your fathers or your brothers."

"Is something wrong?" Farrah asked.

"My brothers Drago and Ulrik were to return home two weeks ago after two years of guarding along the coast," Erika replied softly, "but they have not shown up yet."

"I will pray to the goddess for their safety," Farrah told the two women.

"Yes," Erin answered, "we all will." She gave her head a slight shake, refocusing on the task before her, preparing Farrah for her joining ceremony. "Back to the ceremony, girls. The only other people in the room will be the three elders of the village. The oldest is a lovely woman named Isma. She will conduct the ceremony. The first part will be for your warriors. When you enter you will see a spot for you, as you have three warriors instead of two I'm not sure who you will stand between. You will know when you see it though." At the look of insecurity on Farrah's face Erin smiled and touched her gently on the arm that rested on the lip of the tub. "I will be with you. I won't let you down so don't worry. When your warriors have completed the first part of the ceremony then it will be your turn."

"What is their part? What do I do?" Farrah insisted.

"Their part is a simple claiming with words. You will stand and remain silent while they speak," Erin told her.

"I was not even aware of what my mates were saying at the time," Erika confided to Farrah and Erin. "I was so nervous that it just seemed to breeze past until it was my turn."

"And when it is my turn?" Farrah asked, her voice shaky with nerves.

"You will step away from your mates, turn to face them and kneel at their feet," Erin told her.

"What?!" Farrah exclaimed.

"You will kneel and begin your part of the ceremony," Erin continued as if Farrah hadn't spoken. "First you will kiss the boot of each of your warriors."

"Not in this lifetime," Farrah said with a fierce scowl on her face. Erika snickered and Erin continued. "This is to show your respect and obedience to your mates, a sign that you are willing to join with them."

Farrah was muttering beneath her breath now while Erika was trying hard not to laugh out loud at the mere thought of what her mother was going to disclose to Farrah next. Erin just continued on, ignoring both of them.

"Next you will use your mouth to pleasure each of your warriors, drinking of their seed—" There was no ignoring the screech that tore from Farrah's throat.

"No! No and no and no!" Farrah yelled. "I will not degrade myself that way in front of all those people."

Erika laughed but Erin silenced them both with a look of such anger that both women's mouths dropped open. "There is no degradation in what takes place between a woman and her mates except what you place on it. You drink from them to show how you will take care of them, provide them nurture and succor from your body while you take the same from them. You do this to show how well you will see to the needs of your mates, no matter what those needs may be. You do this because not to do this

would be to say that they were not worthy of you. You do this to show your love, Farrah, to them, for them."

Farrah shook her head, seeing the wisdom in Erin's words and knowing that she spoke the truth.

"Truth be told," Erika replied softly, "I was more than willing to pleasure my mates by the time I was required to. It was as if no one else existed for me in that moment but them, the three of us and the love we wrapped around us. There was no shame, no resistance, nothing but us, together, bonded forever."

Farrah took in the look of love and adoration on Erika's face and took strength in that. She knew that she loved Marcus, Bannen and Alexi and no matter how she felt about the ceremony itself she must remember and hold on to that love. She would do what she had to do because she loved them and wanted to spend the rest of her days with them. There would be no shame in conveying that to all who were present no matter how she was required to show it.

"I will be fine," Farrah assured them. "I will do what is expected of me gladly. I love them. There is no shame in what I share with them."

No one saw the shadow at the door. No one heard the harsh rush of breath as the man there listened to Farrah's pledge of love. But it was with a heart full of love and pride that Marcus moved away from the bedchamber door and went to find his brothers. They finally had the love that they had always wanted from the one woman who called to their souls. They were lucky men indeed.

* * * * *

Erin held Farrah's hand as she guided her into the great room where Farrah's three mates awaited her. She could feel the slight trembling in Farrah's arm but no one else would be able to see the nerves. Farrah's face was lifted high, her shoulders squared, her steps sure. She might be nervous but those watching her approach would never see it.

Farrah stepped up between Alexi and Bannen and when she was in position Marcus moved so that he stood directly behind her. They all stood facing the five other people in the room. One of them Farrah knew, Erin, and Farrah took comfort in the other woman's presence. One of them she recognized by the blonde hair and blue eyes as the mother of Alexi, Bannen and Marcus. She was a very beautiful woman and Farrah was comforted even more when she saw that the woman wore a red top as well. They were both of the fire caste and that would ease things for both of them, she hoped.

The other three people in the room were a woman and two men who were most probably the woman's mates. The woman she knew from Erin was Isma and the village elder. As the ceremony was mostly for the benefit of the women it was only right that Isma oversaw it. At Isma's nod the ceremony began.

Alexi and Bannen both turned to her and cupped her breasts in their hands. Marcus reached around her and placed one of his hands over each of his brothers'. Bannen spoke the words.

"We, the Donan warriors, lay claim to this source of nectar both for ourselves and for our children," Bannen declared in a strong voice that carried easily through the room.

"So it shall be," Isma replied.

The hands were moved and now Marcus cupped his hands over her stomach while Alexi and Bannen each laid one of their hands over his. Marcus was the one to speak this time, in a voice just as clear and loud as Bannen's. "We lay claim to this womb that it may nurture our seed and give it life."

"So it shall be," Isma replied.

Alexi cupped her face and turned it gently to him so that she could see the truth in his eyes. "We claim this gift granted to us with all we are, mind, heart, body and soul." Then he gently kissed her on the lips.

Bannen turned her to face him next. "We claim this woman as our own. Pledging to her our fealty and might." Then Bannen bent and kissed her tenderly on the lips.

"So it shall be," Isma replied.

Lastly Marcus walked around to face her, startling her when he bent to his knee in front of her and bowed his head. "We claim this sweetest of gifts with bended knee and humble spirit. Our hearts overflow with love for all she is and all she is destined to be."

Farrah caught her breath as Marcus stood and took her mouth in a passionate kiss that rocked her senses and set her blood afire. Could he possibly know that she was a Guardian or were his words just a stroke of fate?

It mattered not as now it was Farrah's turn. She tuned everything and everyone out, focusing solely on the faces of her mates, the men she loved. She and Marcus switched places and she knelt in front of her three warriors and willingly bent low to place soft kisses upon their boots. She looked up at them when she was done and came up to her knees. Their eyes were bright blue and she could see the shining light of love as well as the deeper, darker flames of lust.

She turned to Alexi first. He was her heart, the one of her mates who would always see to her comfort first. He had waited for her to ask him to mate with her, refusing to take what was not offered and in doing so had won her undying loyalty and trust. She pulled his laces free and worked his mighty sword from his gaping pants. Looking him in the eye, she nipped and licked at the rounded head that already glistened with the proof of his need. She used one hand to fondle his taut globes and wrapped the other around the base of his shaft before sucking it into her mouth with quick greedy slurps. She worked up and down his length, using teeth and tongue to urge him toward release. When she knew that he was near she took Alexi's rigid cock into her throat and used those muscles to squeeze every drop of sweet cream from him.

Alexi threw his head back and gave a low moan as Farrah sucked him dry and then gently kissed his spent rod before placing it once again in his pants and doing up the laces. His knees were weak and he gently reached down a hand and stroked his fingers down her cheek, letting her know without words how much her willingness meant to him.

Farrah glanced up at into the smoldering gaze of Marcus but moved away from him and placed herself in front of Bannen instead. Bannen, whose intense need for her overwhelmed and awed her. Here was her passion, the mate who brought her to a more primitive state of want and need. Their relationship had started out rocky, but how could you not forgive a man who needed you above all else? She slowly undid his laces, placing kisses along each new inch of flesh that was exposed until the bright red crown of his heavy sex bobbed out in front of her. She eagerly took him in her mouth, licking and sucking at his flesh while wrapping both of her hands around his thick width and squeezing up and down, still nursing the top. He came quickly, filling her mouth with the salty proof of his desire for her. She swallowed every drop before placing her kiss and slowly putting him away.

Bannen glided a hand through her hair, pushing a lock out of her face. His touch was gentle, his smile loving and she knew that he was content with her.

Once again she turned to Marcus and his eyes blazed down at her. She could see the evidence of his desire by the strain of his cock against the laces of his pants. She had meant him to be last although he might not understand why. This was the mate of her soul. Being with him was like coming home, like finding the other half of herself that she hadn't even realized was missing until suddenly there he was. She couldn't imagine ever being apart from him.

He didn't wait for her but ripped his own laces open and, gripping the back of her head, fed her every inch of his pulsing cock. She eagerly took it, sucking it deep into the back of her throat again and again as he fucked her mouth. She moaned her pleasure at his rough handling, at the way he gave her no choice in how much of him she took, instead thrusting fully with every powerful stroke of his hips. She ate him, milking him with her tongue and throat for his rich seed and when he finally gave it to her with a fierce yell she gobbled it down and sucked for more.

Marcus was the one to finally pull away from her, easing his cock from the tight suction of her mouth with an audible pop. Still Farrah licked and kissed him, unwilling

to pull away until Marcus tucked his still-hard flesh away and refastened his laces. He pulled her up to her feet in front of him and smiled tenderly at her as Alexi and Bannen turned to them as well.

Farrah smiled at her warriors, her mates. "I claim you also." She placed a hand on Alexi's chest. "My heart." Her other hand touched Bannen's face. "My body." Lastly she looked back into the eyes of Marcus. "My soul. No other before you. No other after you. I pledge to you my love, my life." The foursome embraced before gradually breaking apart so that Isma could finish with the ceremony and they could finally be alone again.

Isma stepped to them with Farrah once more standing between Alexi and Bannen and Marcus tall and strong behind her. Isma took Alexi's hand and placed it on Farrah's right breast then did the same with Bannen's hand on Farrah's left. The old woman then placed both of Marcus' hands over Farrah's stomach. "What love has bonded none shall tear through. May your love bear fruit." Isma moved back from them and, taking in the picture the four made, smiled and nodded. "May the goddess protect and keep blessing you always." Then Isma turned, taking the two men and two women with her as she left the room and the newly joined mates.

Farrah looked up at her mates and knew that their night of love had only just begun.

Chapter Six

It wasn't until late the next morning that Farrah finally met the mother of her warriors. When she left the bedchamber she headed down the stairs to the cooking room where Erika usually was with her two little ones. Erika was indeed there with Galrik and Malia but also present this morning were three other women. One was Erika's mother Erin, one was her warriors' mother Mariska and the other Farrah thought might be the mother of the Savari warriors who for some reason had been unable to attend Farrah's ceremony.

"Good morn, Farrah," Erin called to her, rising from the table to embrace the glowing young woman. "You were not properly introduced yesterday but this is Mariska, the mother of your mates, and next to her is Katya, the mother of Erika's mates, Galen and Arik."

"It is nice to meet you," Farrah told Katya before turning to Mariska. "Mama Mariska, I am grateful to finally meet you." Farrah couldn't stop the blush that turned her face a bright red as she recalled everything that Erin and Mariska had witnessed last night at the joining ceremony.

Mariska Donan just smiled and walked to Farrah and embraced her warmly before placing a kiss on her cheek. "I am happy to meet you, daughter. I am delighted in the woman who has won the hearts of my sons."

"Thank you," Farrah answered, waiting for the women to reseal themselves before taking a seat at the table and joining them. "I want you to know that I will do my all to take care of your sons."

"I know that, Farrah. I saw the love in your eyes at the ceremony," Mariska told her. "I am delighted that my sons have found such a gift."

"I believe that Mariska should be made aware of everything, Farrah," Erin told her. "She is your mother as well now and soon you will be moving to her part of the village. When you are here with Erika, Katya will help. When you come to visit me, I will be there. And when you are at your new home, Mariska will be there."

"Mama Katya knows already of me," Erika shared with Farrah. Katya, catching the relevance of the conversation, looked at Farrah with knowledgeable eyes, taking in the red of her top before whispering the one word, "Fire."

"Yes," Erin nodded. "Fire."

"What are you talking about?" Mariska asked. "We can all see that she is of the fire caste but what has that to do with anything?"

Farrah looked at her new mother and admitted, "I am the Guardian of Fire, blessed by the hand of the goddess to create and hold flame in the palm of my hand."

"By the goddess," Mariska exclaimed, "Is this true?"

Before anyone could answer Farrah held out her hand and a small ball of fire took shape there before she closed her hand and extinguished it. "It is true."

"And Erika? What has this to do with you?" Mariska was startled by the revelation that her new daughter was indeed one of the foretold Guardians.

"I am the Guardian of Earth," Erika told her.

"We trust you to hold these secrets close to your heart, sharing them with no one," Erin told Mariska. "Their very lives could depend on it."

"I... Do my sons know that you are a Guardian?"

"No. I have not shared this part of myself with them yet but I will," Farrah assured her.

"They already know that I am," Erika stated. "They as well as my own warriors and Reanna and the four of you all share the secret of who and what I am."

"I am truly blessed by the goddess for a Guardian to be given into my family," Mariska told Farrah softly. "I will keep your secret with my life. And yours as well," she added to Erika.

"There is one other thing that you should probably know," Farrah told her. "I was sent here by my aunt. Although she said that she was sending me to Erika I believe that she knew I would meet and mate with your sons."

"Who is this woman?" Mariska asked, though she already guessed the answer. Only one woman would be able to foresee something like that, the Mahiki.

"My Aunt Asme," Farrah whispered, "the last Mahiki."

"Your aunt?" Mariska asked with a small gasp.

"Aunt by bond not by blood," Farrah stated. "My mother has been close friends with the princess since they were girls."

"Ahhh... You are the daughter of Solame," Mariska nodded. "I should have known that. You look just like your mother. I remember her from before."

There was no need to say before what. Everyone in the room knew that Mariska spoke of before the warriors had come and life had changed for everyone on the Island of Altair. "And now you are my daughter," Mariska smiled at Farrah.

"I will not disappoint you," Farrah hastened to assure this woman who had given life to Farrah's mates.

"It is I who will strive not to disappoint you," Mariska replied, making Farrah suddenly aware of just how much the women would revere a Guardian. The Guardians were those woman blessed by the Goddess of Altair with the powers of earth, fire, water and air. When they were called together and joined by the Mystic the curse over the island would be lifted and the goddess would once more cloak them in her protection. It was only just dawning on Farrah how truly important her gift was.

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Farrah left the Savari home with Mama Mariska later that morning and crossed the village to see her new home. Marcus, Alexi and Bannen were off doing different things this morning and had thought nothing of leaving Farrah in their mother's keep for the day. She would have liked to see her home for the first time with one of them present but she knew that a warrior's day was full with training, strategy and maintaining the safety of the village and all who were in it.

Things seemed peaceful in this village but Farrah knew well the hardships that their warriors faced. Her own brothers had been killed in battle against men who sought to lay claim to the Island of Altair and its women. She had helped her mother to bathe and prepare the bodies for the funeral pyre. War was brutal. It indiscriminately killed those on both sides, with little thought to the ones left behind to pick up the pieces, to mourn, to live.

She had hidden many times on her journey from groups of the others who had penetrated from the shores into the interior of the island. It seemed that more and more of these men were coming every day and somehow their warriors fought and held them back. She could feel the time of change thickening in her blood, a call in her soul. Soon she and the other Guardians would be called forward by the Mystic. Together they would call upon the Goddess of Altair and plead for her protection once more.

Farrah shivered as a chill traced down her spine. It was as if a shadow had crossed through her as if the eyes of the ancients watched her. She glanced around but no one seemed to be paying any undue attention to either her or Mama Mariska. Farrah did her best to shake the feeling away and focus on the portion of the village that they were now entering, the homes of those in the fire caste.

Everything was familiar yet different. It was like coming home and yet it was not. Gone were the faces that she had seen every day of her life replaced with new ones filled with curiosity. Many women approached and she was introduced to more people than she could ever possibly remember. They were friendly and accepting, glad that the

Donan brothers had bonded with a mate at last. There were no harsh looks or jealous outbursts from the young women present, which was a relief to Farrah.

Mama Mariska approached a beautiful home and opened the door, leading Farrah inside and leaving the rest of the people outside. Farrah took in everything as Mama Mariska gave her a tour of the home, showing her the eating room and great room with pride for the elaborate furnishings before leading her up the curved staircase to the second floor and the bedrooms.

There were four of them but it was the main one that she was most interested in. Mariska must have moved her sons' things into the big room before she had gone to the Savari home for the joining. A large bed took up one entire wall and seemed more than big enough to hold her and all three of her warriors which she knew it was meant to. From this point on they would all share the same bed unless one of her mates was away or ill. The closet was already filled with their clothes as well as more skirts and tops for her that someone had already provided.

The bathing chamber was attached and the rounded wooden tub was deep and long, easily large enough for all of them to bathe together. She noticed the little details in the room, the flowers and soft drying cloths that were the same green as her eyes. She noticed the fragrant smell of the soap that she knew was meant for her. She was overcome with all that this meant. She was a claimed woman now, mated to a fierce set of warriors who might be called to take a greater role in the fight they constantly waged at any time.

Mama Mariska seemed to know exactly what Farrah was thinking for she took her hand and squeezed it tightly. "You must not think of what could be or what might come. You must enjoy every moment of the here and now and savor it."

"And your husbands?" Farrah asked the woman who was now her mother. "How long have they been gone? When do they return?"

"They serve one more year with the prince at the shores," Mariska said with a soft smile, "but they come home to me when they can. The prince is very good about letting

his men leave for a day every once in a while so that they may see family and know that all is well."

"I didn't know that," Farrah murmured. "My fathers were sent back home when my brothers were killed in battle. They stayed for a few months before returning to the shores and the prince. I know that they visited often but I did not know that the prince knew and allowed it. I always worried that they would be caught."

"You think so little of our prince?" Mama Mariska asked.

"I am finding that I know very little of him at all," Farrah admitted. "It was always Uncle Godar who was around from the time that I was a child. I never really saw the prince when I visited with Aunt Asme."

"The prince has always fought with his men," Mariska told her, "never once has he hidden behind who he was."

"I know that Aunt Asme always hurried in to him when he did come and I just thought that it was fear of displeasing him," Farrah spoke quietly, seeing things so differently now as she looked with the eyes of a woman. "Now I wonder if I knew anything at all."

"We all see things differently as we grow from child to woman," Mariska told her quietly. "One we see with our eyes and the other we see with our hearts."

"I have been wrong in so many things, Mama Mariska," Farrah said.

"You have been right as well or you would not be so blessed by the goddess," Mama Mariska told her.

"Yes," Farrah said. "She did bless me as a Guardian."

"I was speaking of sending you to my sons," Mama Mariska replied, making Farrah laugh as they both headed out of the room and back into the hall.

When they were once more in the cooking room Farrah noticed a door that she had not earlier. "Where does that lead to?" she asked.

"That is the room where I have been staying since my husbands have been gone," Mariska admitted. "My sons wanted me close so that they could watch over me for their fathers. Now that you are here I will move my things back to my own home across the way."

"You will do no such thing," Farrah told her adamantly. "If my warriors wanted you here to watch over you then here is where you shall stay. Your husbands are still gone and I would feel much better knowing that you are down here if I have need of you."

"You honor me," Mariska told her new daughter, with tears on her cheeks. "I would not wish to interrupt your bonding time with my sons. I know the importance of time spent alone."

"I will have that," Farrah replied, "and I will have it whether you are under this roof or another. You above all else should know that your sons would have it no other way."

Mariska laughed and hugged Farrah tightly for a moment before stepping back with a big smile on her face. "I am doubly blessed to have you for a daughter. Now let's get started on the things that have gone undone for the past day while I was away. I'm sure that we do things similarly to how you were taught. I will show you where we keep things and how we spend our day."

"I was always a gatherer in my village," Farrah spoke softly.

"Ahhh but you are a mated woman now so you will no longer be a gatherer," Mariska told her. "Now most of your work will be confined to the village and the Donan family homes."

"How many homes do you have?" Farrah asked.

"There is my home, my sons' home and my mother still lives here in the village with the widowed women. Each family who has someone living in the widow home takes turns every week keeping up the home. Next week will be ours but I would like to take you there this week to introduce you to my mother."

"I would like that," Farrah nodded. "For now, what do we do?"

The rest of the morning was spent learning the duties that would be required of her from now on. It was all relatively easy and she finished quickly. It would be up to her and Mama Mariska to make sure there was ample supply of wood and oil for the fire places and lamps in their homes. The supply was replenished every morning and by the time they had carted what was needed the morning was almost gone. While they had been out Farrah had been approached by one of the elders in the fire caste to become a trainer.

The newly mated women were asked to spend one afternoon a week training the younger girls in their duties. Farrah had been glad to accept as long as someone showed her where they went for wood and oil. She had been paired with another young woman named Imisha. Imisha was married to three warriors as well and had spent her entire life in this village so she knew everything about everything and most everyone. She was pregnant and welcomed Farrah's help on her teaching day because it was getting harder for her to do the more physical part of the training as she grew rounder and rounder with child. Farrah liked her instantly. She was actually looking forward to spending the following afternoon with Imisha learning and training as well.

When she and Mariska finally left the elder and Imisha it was midday. Farrah was grabbed and swung around as soon as they entered the house. She shrieked and kicked out until she saw the smiling face of Mariska then she calmed down enough to realize it was Bannen who held her so tightly.

"You scared me to death, Bannen," Farrah scolded but Bannen was anything but repentant. He turned her in his arms and consumed her with his kiss. When he finally pulled away he scooped her up in his arms and headed for the stairs, telling his mother that Farrah would probably be busy for the rest of the afternoon. Farrah heard Mariska's laughter behind them as Bannen bounded up the stairs and into the bedroom with her. He stood her on her feet and hurriedly undressed both of them before tossing her onto the center of the large bed and joining her there.

He bent to kiss her once more, his passion inflaming her own until they both burned with desire. He moved from her lips down the sleek column of her neck until he reached the mounds of her breasts and the tight buds of her nipples. He took one into his mouth sucking it voraciously while he plucked the other between his fingers. Back and forth he went between them until she was tugging at his long blond hair and begging him for more. He skimmed his lips down her soft belly, stopping and nipping of her flesh in several places before he reached the dewy curls of her sex. He inhaled deeply of her musky scent before swiping his tongue through her glistening folds.

He sucked and nibbled and licked greedily at her pussy, ravishing her with his lips and teeth and tongue until she screamed her release and filled his mouth with her sweet nectar. Still he ravished her, showing no mercy as he forced her higher and higher until she burst again, feeding his hunger with her cries of ecstasy. Finally when she lay spent beneath him Bannen pushed his way back up her body, shoving her legs wide and then moving them so that her feet sat upon his shoulders. He entered her then with a violent plunge of his cock that slammed into her core. He fucked her as greedily as he had eaten her, filling her repeatedly with harsh thrusts of his engorged cock that soon had her wailing and bucking under him as she crested toward orgasm again.

They came together, her screams piercing the air as his grunts of pleasure met and matched hers. She could feel the fiery wash of his seed in her womb as he forced his pulsing rod deep into her center, giving her every inch. She could feel her muscles contracting around him, squeezing and releasing with her own orgasm as she sought to milk him of every drop she could. They collapsed on the bed together with Bannen turning them to their sides at the last moment and wrapping her in his arms. He kissed her softly on the lips before pulling her close and relaxing into sleep beside her. She heard him whisper "I love you, Farrah" softly and her heart swelled with her own love for him but he was asleep before she could answer.

* * * * *

She woke later when Alexi and Marcus joined them in bed. She was pulled from Bannen's embrace by Marcus and placed roughly on top of Alexi. His cock pierced her core, making her cry out, but they held her still while Marcus prepared her ass for his own hardened staff. Alexi gave small thrusts, unable to remain still as Marcus hurriedly lubricated her with fire oil. She was wide awake and kissing Alexi intensely when Marcus finally entered her, his cock pushing all the way inside with one sharp thrust. They all moaned and cried out their pleasure as her mates began to fill her together, thrusting and withdrawing with fast, deep strokes that set flame to her blood and ripples of pleasure through her womb.

Bannen was awake then as well and eager to join in the love play. He tugged at Farrah's hair gently until she lifted her mouth from Alexi's and wrapped her lips around Bannen's bobbing cock. She took the entire head into the back of her throat with one swift plunge and sucked hungrily at him. Up and down she moved her mouth, matching the rhythm of the cocks that filled her until her mates were all moving as one within her, filling her every orifice with slippery pulsing cock.

It was like a beast had come to life inside her. She couldn't get enough of them. She pushed her body alternately against Alexi and Marcus, slamming against their cocks, forcing them deeper, wanting it harder. She bit and nipped along Bannen's length, conveying her hunger and desperate need for more, for everything. The rhythm changed grew fiercer, wilder, harsher until she was submerged in them and they in her. Their generous cocks were like fierce swords impaling her, shattering her from the inside out until she splintered into a thousand pieces.

She tasted the wash of Bannen's seed over her tongue and down her throat even as he cried out above her. She drank greedily of him as if she needed his semen to live. She felt the heat of Marcus' cum pumping into her ass while he continued to fuck her, refusing to stop while his cum shot from him in pulsing waves into her tight heat. And Alexi who thrust so high, so deep within her that she felt him at her womb releasing his

rich cream in hot jets that burned inside her, filling her with a white-hot heat that was different from anything she had ever known.

They collapsed in a pile on the bed, still joined as one, their flesh hot and sweaty from their intense loving. She felt an ember burst inside her and realized that Erika was right. She placed her hands softly on her belly, sighing contentedly, secure in the knowledge that life was beginning inside her womb.

Chapter Seven

The next morning passed quickly and Farrah set off to meet Imisha for her first day as a trainer. She hoped that she would be okay and not make too many mistakes since she was still new to this village and unsure of exactly where they went for things. There were certain parts of the forest that were used for safety issues as well as replenishing. You never took too much from one spot so the site for obtaining wood and kindling was always changing, giving Mother Earth a rest to replenish. But safety was the main concern of all.

Most of the time the women went gathering without warrior protection as their men were usually busy elsewhere. So the girls were taught never to venture out alone or to go where no one else knew where they were. As the invaders crept deeper into the interior of the island it became even more important to teach caution and unity to the girls. Farrah would gladly tell them of her travels and what she had seen if it meant that they would pay closer attention to what they were told.

She learned as much as the girls that afternoon and enjoyed herself immensely. There were twelve girls between the ages of thirteen and fourteen who Farrah and Imisha were in charge of. They split the girls into four groups of three and Imisha led them to the spot on the perimeter of the forest that they would use to collect wood and kindling. Farrah took over from there, showing them what pieces were good and which ones to leave for the forest. They spent several hours with both Imisha and Farrah taking turns explaining things and answering what seemed like a never-ending chorus of questions. When only one group remained who still needed to collect Farrah sent Imisha back to the village with the other three groups who had already gathered their loads.

"It is not much for us to wait," the very pregnant Imisha assured Farrah while rubbing her hands over and over her burgeoning belly.

Farrah smiled and shook her head. "There is no reason for us all to wait while they finish collecting. You take the others and return and I will follow shortly with our last group."

"If you are sure?" Imisha asked.

"I am sure," Farrah laughed. "Now go before you overtire and we are all forced to bind our wood together to cart you back."

Imisha giggled and patted her belly. "I am tiring more easily these days. Thank you, Farrah. We will return then and wait for you by the storage building."

With that Imisha led the first three groups of three back toward the village and Farrah turned to watch the three remaining girls search and find what they needed. She was so busy watching them and remembering what it had been like to be that young that she never heard the footsteps behind her. The wood came down heavily against the back of her head and she crumpled to the ground without saying a word.

The girls screamed and ran as fast as they could toward the village for help but the two men cared little. The Latoni had what they had come for and Kito tossed her easily over his shoulder and followed his brother Kiva through the trees toward the cave they had been using for shelter. Kiva clenched his gloved hands into fists as they walked, feeling the stretching of scarred flesh on his palms. He had been patient. He had planned and now justice was about to be his.

* * * * *

Chaos erupted when the girls returned to the village with the story of how Farrah had been captured by two men. Messengers were sent out to the Donan brothers and Mariska sent one to Erika and the Savari warriors as well. She sat and waited for them to arrive, unsure of what she should be doing to help. She prayed to the goddess for

help and guidance and protection. Above all she reminded herself that Farrah was the Guardian of Fire and could easily protect herself when she awakened.

Marcus was the first to burst through the door and Galen Savari was with him. She could see the fear in her son's eyes and would have given anything to make it go away.

"Where is she?" Marcus demanded. "Tell me it isn't true!"

"She is gone," Mariska whispered, "taken while in the forest with some of the girls. From what the girls said she was hit over the head and carted off deeper into the woods."

Marcus cried out his fury and Galen felt it as his own. "Find the girls and bring them to us, Mariska," Galen told her. "Perhaps we can find out more from them that will aid our search."

Mariska left quickly to gather the three girls together and bring them back to her sons' home. Enough time had passed that hopefully the girls would be much calmer now and maybe remember things more clearly.

Bannen and Alexi arrived shortly after Mariska left and one look at Marcus' face assured them that this was no joke. Arik was with them and crossed to his brother while they all spoke.

"It is true?" Bannen demanded.

"She was taken," Marcus shuddered as he replied.

"Where? When? How?" Alexi fired out questions that Marcus couldn't really answer.

"I received the same message that you did, I'm sure," Marcus told them. "She was with the girls in the woods helping Imisha with her class. She sent Imisha back with the first three groups and stayed behind herself with the last three girls. She was hit over the head and captured."

"Not again," Bannen whispered. "I will not lose another this way."

"We will not lose her," Marcus shouted, his voice echoing with anger and frustration.

"No, you will not lose her," Erika spoke from the door. "I will help you search for her."

"Erika," Galen began but she just ignored him.

"I am a Guardian and I can sense her," Erika told them.

"How?" Marcus wanted to know. "How can you sense her? Can you sense all that you meet?"

Erika smiled and shook her head. "She has not had the chance to tell you yet, I see."

"Tell us what?" Alexi asked.

Erika closed her eyes and whispered softly words that they could not hear.

"What?" Bannen stepped toward her and Galen and Arik moved to stand on either side of her.

Erika opened her eyes and looked at all three of the Donan warriors before answering. "This is not my secret to tell but I have no other option right now. Her life could depend on my going with you." Erika held her hand up before any more questions could be thrown at her. "I can sense her. She can sense me. Like will know like." The men looked confused by her words and she shrugged her shoulders with impatience. "Don't you get it? She was sent here to find me." They all still looked at her with unseeing eyes, frustrating her more as she realized that she would not be able to lead them to the answer but would have to hit them over the head with it. "She came to me not because I am a Guardian," Erika told them softly, "but because Farrah is a Guardian."

All five men stared at her with wide eyes, each processing her words but no one saying anything. Galen and Arik knew what it was to be married to a Guardian. The constant fear that she would be discovered and perhaps killed because of her gift was a

daily worry. There was also the fear of what was to be when the Mystic finally made the call and Erika had to leave. It was not easy to be mated with a Guardian.

Alexi was the first to speak. "Then she is not without resources to protect herself," he spoke aloud. "What is her power?" They all knew that Erika had the power of the earth. They had witnessed firsthand how she could manipulate the stones and vines when they had gone to look for Livya, the woman who had been responsible for the kidnapping and death of Tamyra, the Savaris' sister and almost mate of the Donans. Erika had found Livya first and almost killed her.

"She has the power of fire," Erika told them. "She is amazing. She can make flame in the palm of her hand and do the most wonderful things."

"You have seen this?" Marcus asked and there was no disguising the displeasure in his voice.

"Yes, I have," Erika replied tartly, not backing down. "I saw what you were unwilling to see. I looked where you wouldn't. When the three of you left her I was there to help clean the blood and seed from her thighs and wipe her tears. I was there to ask her about herself and I was the one she confided in."

Marcus, Alexi and Bannen accepted these words like a blow to their souls but said nothing to defend themselves.

"Enough," Galen interrupted Erika. "You overstep yourself, little one. What was is no longer and is not yours to discuss anyway." There was fire in his eyes when she looked at him and only then did she realize how her words had affected the three Donan brothers.

"I'm sorry," Erika told them, reaching out to grasp Marcus' hand in hers. "Galen is right—what was is no longer. I know that Farrah loves all of you. I have no reason to bring up the past and I beg your forgiveness. My only excuse is that I also fear for Farrah and was not thinking."

"You are a good friend to our mate, Erika," Alexi spoke while Marcus patted her hand and released it.

"We are all lucky to have you as friend," Marcus told her.

"How will you know where to find her?" Bannen asked, changing the subject. "Can you sense her now?"

"I know that she is still nearby." Erika concentrated and shook her head with frustration. "I will be able to sense when we are close to her. I will know if we are heading closer to her or if she is moving away from us. That is why I must go with you."

"Will you allow this?" Marcus asked Galen and Arik and Erika stomped her foot in anger.

"I do not need permission to search for a friend," Erika glared at them.

"No, you do not," Arik told her softly, pulling her easily against his chest and kissing her temple. "But you will have it nonetheless."

"We do not seek to limit you, little one." Galen pulled her to him next and tilted her face up so that he could look into her eyes. "We only seek to protect you as well. As Farrah's capture has proven being a Guardian does not make you invincible. Arik and I would die without you. Would you deny us the right to protect you?"

"Never, Galen, my love," Erika whispered before pulling his head down and kissing him tenderly on the lips, showing all her love for her warrior as well. Arik joined them and she kissed him just as gently before turning back to Marcus, Bannen and Alexi. "We will all go with you. I go nowhere without my mates."

"As it should be," Marcus replied and Erika felt no anger at those words. They were true. A mated woman should never head into the interior of the forest without her mates and an unmated woman shouldn't at all.

Mariska returned then with the three girls and their mothers in tow. They all entered and the girls immediately stepped closer to their mothers as the eyes of five such big warriors seemed to zero in on them. Erika shook her head and stepped forward to speak with the girls.

"You were all with Farrah Donan when she was taken?" Erika asked them.

"Yes," one of the girls spoke up and the other two nodded their agreement.

"Tell me exactly what happened from the time that Imisha left with the rest of the girls," Erika encouraged them.

"We were still collecting our portion of the wood and I was having trouble deciding what was good and what should be left," one of the girls spoke and it was then that Marcus realized that these girls might be blaming themselves for what had happened.

He stepped forward and knelt down so that he was just below eye level of the young girls. "None of this is your fault," he told them. "I hope that you know that no one blames any of you for what happened. We are happy that you all made it back to the village and were not taken as well."

The mothers all smiled at his words, releasing some of their own tension when they realized that the Donans wouldn't be angry or condemning toward their daughters. The girls seemed to relax more also, as if they had been feeding on the tension of their mothers.

"What happened when you were alone? What did you see?" Marcus asked softly, not wanting to scare the girls any more than they already were.

"I was just standing up with a load of wood in my arms when I saw them hit her," the smallest of the girls finally spoke up. "They hit her over the head and she crumpled without saying a word. I screamed and the next thing I knew someone was tugging on my arm and we were all running back to the village as fast as we could."

"What can you tell me about these men? How many? What did they look like?" Marcus asked.

"There were two of them," one of the other girls spoke up. "They had long dark hair and it didn't look very clean. They were big, as big as you and they wore the pants and weapon belts of a warrior."

All of the adults in the room sucked in a breath at this disclosure. "You are sure of this?" Marcus demanded of the girl. "She was taken by two men who looked and dressed like one of us?"

"Yes," the girl whispered softly, sensing the rise of tension in the air around her.

"What else did you notice?" Erika asked, afraid that she knew who had taken Farrah. "Was there anything unusual that you noticed about these two men? Anything different from these warriors?" she nodded over her shoulder toward where Arik and Galen stood next to Bannen and Alexi.

"No," the girl started to say and then her eyes widened and she started shaking her head rapidly up and down. "Yes! Yes, there was something unusual," she exclaimed. "One of the men wore gloves on his hands, black gloves."

"By the goddess." Marcus exploded back up to his feet, his voice like thunder in the room. "The Latoni have come for her."

"They will not keep her," Bannen swore.

Alexi was the one who spoke what all the men were thinking. "I will kill them with my bare hands for daring to touch my mate."

"As will we all," Marcus replied. There would be no mercy for the Latoni when they were caught. The Latoni had stolen the claimed mate of the Donans and by doing so had broken Warrior Law. Justice would be decided by and meted out by the woman's mates, in this case the Donans, when the warriors were caught. It wasn't hard to decipher from the looks on the faces of Alexi, Bannen and Marcus that death would be all that awaited the Latoni.

* * * * *

Farrah awoke slowly, the incessant pounding in her head making her feel weak and nauseous. She slowly slit her eyes open and quickly scanned around her, taking in the rough texture of the cave walls and the pebbled earth beneath her. She was lying on her side in a corner of the cave, forgotten for the moment by the two men who were in deep

conversation on the other side. Her hands and feet were both bound tightly, so tightly that her circulation had been cut off. She would not be able to use her hands to ply her power of fire. Her Aunt Asme had informed Farrah several times that she could make the flames with her mind and that her hands were not needed but Farrah had never figured out how to do this.

The two men, who she now recognized as Kiva and Kito Latoni, glanced over at her and Farrah closed her eyes and fought her body to remain still and keep her breathing deep and even. Her skirt was twisted high around her thighs and she could feel their eyes burning her flesh as they looked their fill. She held the shudders of revulsion within, praying to the goddess that neither man would approach and try to touch her.

Her prayers were answered for now as the low conversation resumed. Farrah listened intently, eager for their every word.

"We have to leave this place," Kito Latoni was telling his brother. "She is mated and they will come for her. It is not safe to remain here."

"We will leave soon," Kiva Latoni responded, flexing his gloved fingers, "but we will wait for her to awake first."

"Can you not wait until we are farther away from here to have her?" Kito asked, with disgust and worry in his voice. "You have become too consumed by her, brother, and now you risk us both."

"Leave then!" Kiva exploded. "I will deal with her myself. She played me for a fool once and I will carry those scars for the rest of my life. She will pay here and now. I only wait for her to awaken so that she will know who it is who thrusts so deep into her body. I want to see her eyes when she takes my seed."

"And this cannot be done when we are farther from here? She will pay, brother," Kito stated. "We will both see her made to pay. I just ask that you hold off a little longer until we are some place more secure, more safe."

"I have waited as long as I care to," Kiva thundered. "First I will brand her with my cock, mark her with my seed. Then I will mark her with fire, scarring her body as she

scarred mine.” Kiva’s eyes were dark with anger and a zealous compulsion to hurt Farrah, mark her as she had marked him. “Then we will leave her to her mates and see if they still want her with her body scarred as my hands are.” Kiva threw his head back and laughed, the maniacal sound filling the air and sending chills down Farrah’s spine. With her hands bound she was at the mercy of a madman and she already knew that mercy would be the one thing he wouldn’t give her.

* * * * *

They all set out together in the evening dusk, Marcus, Alexi and Bannen Donan joined by the Savaris, Erika, Arik and Galen. Mariska stayed at home in case someone sent word that Farrah had been spotted or in case Farrah showed up. Although they knew that she was a Guardian no one could shake the feeling of impending doom that shook them. They all feared for her safety and Erika was more afraid than anyone. For Erika above the others knew that there was more at stake than finding a mate. “*If one is lost, all will fail*” seemed to whisper through her mind, a startling reminder of all that could be lost.

They entered the edge of the forest where Farrah had been with the three girls when she had been taken captive by the Latoni brothers. All five of the warriors moved around, looking for signs of which way the men had taken Farrah. Alexi was the one to make the discovery.

“They went this way,” Alexi called, pointing to a place where the grass had been trampled and several branches of the bushes nearby had been broken off. “They are moving quickly.”

“Then so shall we,” Marcus stated as he led the way into the forest, following the path that had been left for them by the rush of the Latoni.

Erika stopped by the bushes and waved her hands over them, mending the breaks and returning them to their beauty. The grass grew up around them and flowers broke through the earth all around, filling the air with their scent. Galen smiled as he took up

his position just behind his mate, watching her restore order and grace to the lush vegetation around them.

They moved quickly through the forest, following the signs that led them deeper and deeper into the interior of the forest. The sun was setting and darkness was falling all around them, hiding the secrets of the passing from them. Finally Arik called a halt.

"We need to stop, Marcus," Arik called out, bringing everyone to a halt around him.

"We cannot stop," Bannen declared. "We must find her."

"Arik is right," Galen defended his brother. "It is getting too dark to see. If we keep going we might miss something and end up farther away from her instead of closer to her."

"We cannot leave her at the mercy of the Latoni for a moment longer than we have to," Marcus uttered.

"You are thinking as a mate," Arik told him quietly. "I would ask that you think as a warrior."

"And you could think as a warrior if it were Erika instead of Farrah?" Bannen spat out.

Arik's eyes flared but he did not lie to his friends. "No, I would be as crazed as you are. But I would hope that my friend would force me to see reason and not let me search blindly when if I only waited I could easily follow the signs again."

"You are right," Alexi agreed and, stepping closer to his brothers, he forced them to look into his eyes. "To continue now would be no help to Farrah and might even leave her with these Latoni longer. As much as it kills me to delay for even a moment longer, we must."

Marcus gave a cry of anguish that echoed all around them. "You are right, brother," he admitted hoarsely. "We must rest and wait for first light."

Bannen turned and walked away, unable to speak for the misery that filled his soul and tortured his heart and mind with visions of Farrah at the mercy of two such villainous warriors. Farrah had come to them for protection, for safety and they had failed her miserably.

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"She has been asleep too long," Kito Latoni warned his brother. "Do you think that I hit her too hard? Perhaps I have killed her."

"No," Kiva yelled. "Fate would not be so cruel as to deny me my justice."

"Then why has she not awoken?" Kito questioned.

"Perhaps her mates have worn her out," Kiva sneered. "It does not matter. I will wake her soon one way or another," he vowed. "Keep the fire hot. I have plans for it."

"You will mark her here?" Kito spoke as he added more wood to the fire, keeping the flames high and bright.

"Yes, I will," Kiva smiled. "I just have not decided which will please me more; her screams when the fire caresses her skin or her screams when my cock rips into her flesh. Both will please me greatly but I have yet to decide which to do first." He moved a hand down and rubbed along the swollen length of his shaft, anxious for Farrah to awaken so that he could begin.

"Shall we eat while we wait?" his brother spoke again, annoying Kiva once more with his constant questions.

"By all means let's fill our bellies before we sate our other hungers," Kiva agreed, sitting back and relaxing while his brother worked around the fire, preparing their meal.

It had always been this way between them. Kiva was the thinker, the plotter while Kito was the one who followed. Kiva had wished many times that he had not been cursed with a brother who was so simple but then again having one who was so easily manipulated had its own rewards. Kito would follow him anywhere, do anything that

Kiva told him to. This was the only time in their lives that Kito had ever questioned Kiva about something. One more thing to lay at Farrah's feet. She had been nothing but trouble since he had decided to mate her, always playing hard to get, running from him. He had thought his chance had finally come when he had cornered her alone in the forest. All he had needed to do was to mount her and his claim could not have been stopped but she had eluded him, still somehow burning him and getting away.

He looked down at his gloved hands and glared. Always he wore gloves now, refusing to let any see the seared flesh of his palms, the webbing that now connected his fingers. She had made him a freak, taken from him what no woman should ever take from a man. With his scarred hands and webbed fingers he could no longer use his sword with much skill, his hands refusing to do as he ordered them. So now he was less of a warrior, unable to help defend and protect as the others did all because of a whore in a red top.

He glanced over at her and filled his eyes with the sight of her creamy thighs, exposed by the way her skirt was caught around her. He could just make out the curves of her breasts and the dusky shade of her nipples through the sheer veiled top she wore. His body responded by growing harder, his cock long and thick behind the laces of his pants. He needed release if he was to think clearly. He would not take her while she lay unconscious. That would not give him what he needed, for it was her fear he wanted most, her screams of begging and pleading.

Still he found himself standing and crossing to where she lay on her side, the backs of her thighs calling to him. He knelt beside her and jerked her skirt high, exposing the globes of her lush ass and groaned with pleasure at the thought of taking her there. He pulled his laces free and released his cock into his hand, stroking up and down along its length while he looked at her and let his imagination run wild.

Farrah lay still, biting her lip to keep from crying out with her fear. She could no longer feel her feet or her hands and would be unable to fight Kiva if he chose to take

her. She felt his hands lifting her skirt and almost moved then but somehow she remained still and silent. She could hear his heavy breathing, hear him doing something with his hand. She held her breath and prayed to the goddess to help her. She heard the harsh groan that rumbled through Kiva's chest and with the splatter of his release landing on her ass, she knew what he was doing. Tears ran down her cheeks in silent waves, hidden from the men by the long hair that hung in her face. But it wasn't of herself that she was thinking when she cried but of her three warriors and how they would feel about her when they found her like this.

Chapter Eight

Sunrise was near and Marcus was restless and uneasy. There was a sense of urgency flowing through him, like he needed to leave now. Bannen and Alexi rested fitfully beneath a tree nearby. Arik and Galen lay on either side of Erika who was wide awake and looking at him.

"I must go," Marcus whispered to her, trying not to wake anyone else. "I feel as if I must leave now."

"Then go," Erika murmured back to him. "Perhaps her soul calls to yours. You must listen and follow your heart."

"You will let the others know?" he asked.

"Yes," Erika assured him. "We will follow you shortly."

Nodding, Marcus turned and followed the path that called to him. He could feel Farrah with his soul and he would not fail her this time.

Erika lay still, wrapped up in the arms of her two mates, knowing that if Farrah were calling to Marcus it would only be moments before her heart called out to Bannen and Alexi as well. Soon they would all be up and following the call that Farrah sent out. Erika could feel that Farrah was still near and she could also feel Farrah's fear. Erika closed her eyes and prayed to the goddess for aid.

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Dawn was near and Farrah had yet to move or awaken as far as the Latoni brothers knew. Truth was that at this point Farrah couldn't move. Her arms and legs were like dead weights, the feeling long since gone due to her tight bonds. She could feel the dried seed on her buttocks from Kiva's earlier release and it repulsed her. So far they

had not touched her in any other way and she was fine with that. She knew with the rising of the sun that her time was up. They wouldn't wait for her any longer.

She closed her eyes and thought of Marcus, the mate of her soul. Her capture would be torturing him, each moment apart like a lash against his heart. She yearned for him, his strength, his love, just the touch of his hand. Anything would be enough if only she were back with him safe and loved.

Next her thoughts went to Alexi, her gentle warrior, her heart. He above his brothers would mourn for her loss. Bannen and Marcus would remain stoic on the outside but Alexi would show his pain to the world, loving her with all he was. She longed for his tender embrace, his soft kiss. Mostly she longed for his sweet smile and ready laughter.

Then she thought of Bannen, her passion, her fire. He would be destroyed if anything happened to her. He was so rough on the outside but really like a child on the inside, needy for affection and love. And she loved him. Loved them all. No matter what happened to her, no matter what the Latoni did to her, she would survive and make it back to her mates. That was her vow as a Guardian.

She sensed a presence behind her and no longer cared to hide the fact that she was awake. She turned her head and looked up to see Kito kneeling there, looking at the dried seed of his brother across the cheeks of her ass. He seemed startled when she turned her head and looked at him and he jerked to his feet.

She licked her dry lips and whispered, "I can't feel my arms or legs. The bonds are too tight. Will you release me?"

Kito looked over his shoulder where his brother rested on a pallet in the corner of the cave close to the fire. "I... I shouldn't touch you until Kiva wakes up," he murmured, his gaze darting back and forth between her buttocks and his sleeping brother.

"Please," she begged him. "I cannot hurt you. I have no feeling left in my limbs. Kiva will be upset if I cannot feel it when he tortures me."

Kito snapped his gaze back to her, his eyes wide at her words. "He...he only wants to mark you the way that you marked him. You shouldn't have hurt him like that. He wouldn't have hurt you. He was only trying to help you."

Farrah had no idea what story Kiva had made up and shared with his brother but obviously it wasn't the truth. "Your brother tried to force me, Kito. I was eighteen and he wanted to mate with me."

"No. He told me about what happened," Kito shook his head vigorously back and forth and it dawned on Farrah how childlike his speech and mannerism were. Before, when Kito had spoken it had been with anger and worry and Farrah had overlooked what was right in front of her. "He was going to help you gather and carry the wood and you burned him. You shouldn't have burned him. That made him very angry."

"Have you ever made him angry?" Farrah whispered the question.

Kito shook his head up and down before answering. "I make him mad sometimes and he has to punish me. I try not to make him so mad though. I get really mad though sometimes and I speak without thinking." And in revealing his anger hid the fact that he was more like a child than a warrior fully grown.

"What does he do to you, Kito? How does he punish you?" Farrah asked and gasped for breath when the brawny warrior turned and showed her his back. She had never paid attention to him before other than to get out of the way when she saw either him or Kiva coming her way. Now she saw for the first time the scars that crisscrossed all over Kito's back. They looked as if they had been made with a knife, as if he had been cut repeatedly just deep enough to scar the flesh and make it hurt and bleed. How could anyone do that to another person, much less their own brother?

"Untie me please, Kito," Farrah whispered. "I don't want Kiva to take out his anger on you if I can't feel his punishment."

"Better me than you," Kito smiled down at her tenderly. "I am big, strong. I can handle the pain."

"Not this time," Farrah whispered. "This time he means to have me. Please release me, Kito. I'm begging you."

Kito glanced once more at his sleeping brother before kneeling back down beside her and taking a knife from his belt. He slipped it between the bonds at her wrists and cut clean through before moving down to her ankles and doing the same. Farrah bit hard into her bottom lip to keep from crying out when he took her hands and began to rub them briskly between his own. It was like a thousand fiery ants biting her flesh as the nerves tingled and screamed their way back to life. She couldn't contain the cries when he moved to her ankles and rubbed them just as briskly.

"What the hell are you doing over there, Kito?" Kiva demanded, coming to his feet as he woke at the sound of Farrah's cries. "Get the hell away from her!"

Kito backed away but not quickly enough as Kiva's blow caught him across the cheek and sent him reeling back against the wall. He landed hard, knocking his shoulder and bruising it on the rough rock of the cave walls. He cowered there for a moment, knowing through experience just how brutal his brother could be when he was angered.

"So you finally decided to wake and join us," Kiva glared down at Farrah who had managed to pull her skirt down and sit up on the floor in front of him, her back braced against the wall. "I am glad that you decided to, for I have plans for you."

He pulled his hand back and slapped her, the blow exploding across her cheek before she even realized what he intended. She hit her other cheek against the wall from the force of the blow and cried out as she felt her lip split and drip with her blood.

"I have anticipated this day for three years," Kiva told her, his eyes glowing with fury and hunger. "For three years I have dreamed of you at my feet, at my mercy, begging me not to hurt you. Go ahead, Farrah, beg me not to hurt you. Beg me to leave you alone."

"No," Farrah said, her eyes burning with her own anger. She could feel the fire in her blood, the building of flames within her searching for a way out. She clenched her

hands into tight fists, not willing to show her hand so soon. Bracing her hand against the wall, she surged up to her feet, preferring to face him while standing from this moment on. "Never will I cower at your feet. Never will I beg you for anything."

"You will beg," Kiva told her, his beady eyes filled with purpose. "You will scream your surrender to the skies before I am done with you. Kito, light the torch and bring it to me," he ordered his brother, never taking his eyes from Farrah.

"What-what are you going to do, Kiva?" Kito asked, afraid now that the moment of truth had arrived.

"Just do as you're told, brother, or you will be punished with fire as well," Kiva shouted, spittle spraying through the air. "Bring me the torch!"

Kito looked at Farrah and mouthed "I'm sorry" even as he lit the torch in the flames of the fire and carried it the short distance to his brother.

Farrah smiled at Kito, enraging Kiva further with her words. "It is okay, Kito. I am not afraid. Kiva cannot hurt me. Do what he tells you."

"Warrior whore," Kiva shouted with rage. "You will be afraid!" he promised her as he peeled the gloves from his hands and held them up in front of him. "You will know true fear when the flames lick your body and turn your flesh as mine."

Farrah gasped at the sight of his scarred hands. They were red, the skin twisted and knotted, joining his fingers in several places. He could not open them fully because of the thick skin that now covered him where her skin had seared him when he touched her. It was grotesque to look at and must have hurt very badly for a long time. She felt no remorse for what she had done though. Kiva Latoni had planned to bed her and claim her as mate three years before she was of claiming age. Seeing the scars that Kito bore on his own flesh, she knew that it would not have been a loving union as she had with Marcus, Alexi and Bannen.

"Fire does not scare me, Kiva," she told him quietly and lifted her hands into the air. "I call upon the caress of flames, the fire brought to life within my veins. What

burns to one shall cleave to me. As I will it, so shall it be." She lowered her face and looked at him then and her eyes seemed to glow with flames.

Kiva backed away from her and threw the torch at her feet, laughing joyously as her skirts caught and blazed around her. Farrah only smiled and lifted her arms again until she resembled a human torch. She didn't cower. She didn't scream. She didn't run or roll upon the ground in hopes of stopping the flames. Instead she smiled at him, her entire body bathed in fire, her hair like a rope of flames hanging from her head.

Kiva was the one who knew fear. Kiva was the one who screamed and scrambled back from her, struggling to get away as she stepped closer and closer to him. The flames seemed to leap from her in waves, trying to reach him and coming closer with every step she took. He turned blindly, searching for the door, for any way to elude her.

Farrah turned so that she blocked his way to the exit that Kito had already run out of when Kiva had first thrown the torch at her. She embraced the fire, reveling in its lover's caress along her skin and deep within her very blood. She tasted the true power of her guardianship for the first time in her life and gloried in it. Now she knew what it meant to be the Guardian of Fire. Now she knew that her hands were a crutch when her entire body could be the flame. The small balls of fire that she had thrown before were like child's play compared to what she could do now. She could burn higher, hotter, brighter than she ever had and she had Kiva Latoni to thank for showing her. Her laughter bounced around the cave and it was Kiva who screamed for mercy as she approached him where he was finally trapped along the far wall.

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Marcus had gone but a few miles when his brothers and the Savaris caught up with him. They never said a word but he knew that Alexi and Bannen were both angered that he had left without them. He couldn't worry about that now though. He could feel Farrah calling to him, her cries echoing in his head like the beat of the war drums that sounded with the sighting of every new vessel that landed on their shores. It called to him and refused to release him from its spell.

"Do you hear that?" Erika asked softly, her head tilted to the side like she was listening closely for something.

"I hear nothing," Marcus answered and the rest of the men nodded in agreement.

"What is it you hear?" Alexi asked her just as quietly, as if he were afraid to interrupt her.

"Someone runs quickly through the trees," Erika stated, a strange expression on her face. "I hear the earth calling to me in pain as he rips her apart in his hurry. He comes to us. Listen, he is near."

They all heard a thrashing off in the distance and looked again at this Guardian who spoke to the very earth itself. None were startled by her feat but accepted it easily as who she was. Instead they formed a wall around her, closing her inside the circle they made, protecting her from whoever approached.

Kito saw the warriors in front of him and knew that he had finally reached help. He fell to his knees in front of them, his chest and arms scratched and bleeding from his mad scramble through the thick foliage of the forest. "Please you must help me," he looked up and focused on who was in front of him. "You are them," he whispered, recognizing the three men from when he and Kiva had watched them mate with Farrah in the woods. "Farrah's mates."

Marcus lifted Kito back to his feet with a firm pull on Kito's shoulders and Galen and Arik closed in to hold Kito up while the three Donan brothers stood shoulder to shoulder in front of him. "What do you know of our mate? Tell me now where she is!" Marcus demanded.

"You must hurry," Kito whispered, fear overtaking him as he was surrounded by the five large warriors. "My brother has gone mad. He is going to burn her in the fire. I couldn't stop him," he mumbled. "I couldn't stop him."

It took all Marcus had not to hit Kito but Bannen wasn't so reluctant. His fist connected with Kito's nose and the noise of crunching bones filled the air as it broke and flowed red with blood.

"Stop." Erika stepped forward, pushing her way in front of the Donans, placing herself in front of Kito. "Did you not look at his face? Did you not see his back? He has been hurt enough!" Erika turned and faced Kito. Without thought she released her top and, shaking her waist-length brown curls forward, hid her breasts and pulled the veils from her chest, placing them gently against Kito's bloody nose. "I see that you have tried to stop your brother before."

"Yes," Kito whispered like an awed child. His gaze was fixed on Erika, seeing her as mother and savior.

"I thank you for trying," Erika told him, smiling softly. "Can you take us to where your brother has her? Can you show us the way?"

"Yes," Kito shook his head and groaned as his broken nose cried out with pain at the fierce movement. "I can show you."

"Here." Erika moved one of his hands up to his nose so that he could hold her top there by himself. "Hold this firmly against your nose and it should help to stop the blood flow. Now show us the way."

Kito turned and it was only then that the five warriors saw what Erika had already noticed. Kito's back was a mass of scars on scars, mutilated by a sharp blade and the madman who plied it. Bannen fisted his hands at his side, mad at himself for what he had done. This warrior in front of them leading them to Farrah was like a child and Bannen had struck him with anger.

Alexi placed his arm on Bannen's shoulder as they followed through the forest and murmured softly, "Do not worry on it. If you hadn't hit him then the blow would have been delivered from me or Marcus. Either way the result would have been the same."

Bannen nodded his head, knowing that his brother spoke the truth and feeling better for it.

They heard the screams before they even saw the opening to the cave. Marcus, Bannen and Alexi rushed forward with Kito while Galen and Arik made a protective barrier using their bodies to shield and protect Erika. She pushed away from them

though, shaking her head and replying, "It is a man's scream. Can't you hear it? I must go to her."

The Savaris entered the cave and were as transfixed as the Donans, who now stood along the wall just inside the cave. They all stared in horror at the sight across from them, too shocked even to move. Farrah was ablaze with blue flames from head to toe, her hair like a cascade of fire licking along her flesh like a lover's hand. Her clothes were gone and she stood naked and proud, facing the warrior who cowered and screamed before her. She paid no attention to those who now stood behind her, her attention solely fixed on the man who had wanted to hurt her.

That man, Kiva Latoni, was writhing in pain as flames licked and retreated along his skin, singeing and burning his flesh so that it blackened and smoked. His cries were so hoarse that they could barely make out what he was saying other than the fact that he was begging Farrah to stop. Farrah just smiled and used her hand to work the fire along his skin some more.

Erika smiled, knowing full well how Farrah felt, and secure in her link to Farrah as a Guardian that she was not afraid or even slightly worried. Arik and Galen, so well attuned to Erika, relaxed as well, their faith in their mate's abilities unflinching.

Bannen was the first of the Donans to break free of the spell that held them all so captivated. "Farrah," he screamed as he lurched forward toward her. She held her hand out to him and the flames died out and disappeared along her arm when he took it and clasped it tight in his own.

"I am fine, my warrior," she assured him softly. "I have been waiting for you."

Marcus and Alexi stepped up to her then. Alexi reached out for her other hand and the flames there flickered and died out as well. Marcus stepped up behind her, pulling her snug against his body before bending forward and tilting her head back for his fierce kiss of possession. The flames seemed to consume them both for a moment and then they too flickered and died and once again Farrah was wrapped in the arms of her mates, safe and loved.

Kiva still thrashed on the floor, beating uselessly at the flames still moving along his flesh. Kito moved forward to help his brother but Erika put her hand out to stop him. "No, Kito," Erika told him. "You cannot help him anymore. He is beyond you now."

Kito looked unsure and Erika whispered something to her mates. Galen stepped away from her side and placed his arm around Kito's shoulders. Kito's nose had finally stopped bleeding and Erika's veil slipped from his fingers and fell forgotten to the cave floor.

"Let us step outside now, Kito Latoni," Galen told him. "You have seen enough." Galen turned and glanced briefly once more at Kiva Latoni before looking to the Donans. "We will await you outside. Justice shall be as you wish." Then Galen and Arik put their right fist over their hearts and gave them a thump, a warrior's way of pledging acceptance and support of whatever decision was made. Warrior Law decreed that justice was in the hands of the betrayed, which would be the Donans, and only they could decide the punishment of Kiva Latoni and Kito if they so wished it.

Marcus, Alexi and Bannen took turns kissing Farrah, their hands stroking repeatedly over her flesh to assure them that she was indeed whole and well.

"Are you all right, little one?" Marcus asked softly, afraid of all that she could have been forced to endure while they had searched for her.

"I am fine, mate of my soul," Farrah assured him. "He did not hurt me."

Alexi turned her to face him and rubbed his finger gently over the split in her lip before brushing his knuckles softly along the bruise on her cheek. "Then where did these come from my heart? Did Kito do this?"

"No, never," she hurried to explain. "If it wasn't for Kito then I am sure that Kiva would have hurt me far more than these little things."

"You can not brush what was done to you aside." Bannen turned her to face him, his eyes blue chips of fire as anger coursed through him at the sight of her bruised and marred face. "They will both pay for what has been done."

"Put out the flames, little Guardian," Alexi whispered. "Justice shall be delivered by your warriors."

"You should not have harmed him thusly, little one," Marcus told her, stepping away and pulling a thick wand-like instrument from his weapons belt. "I would wish for him to feel every moment of his death."

Farrah looked up at them. "You mean to kill him?" she asked softly, already sure of the answer by the look in their eyes.

"He will pay with his life for what he attempted," Bannen stated calmly. "Now put out the flames and go join the Savaris outside."

"I will not be sent away like a child, Bannen," Farrah scoffed. "If punishment is to be given because of what was done to me than I should be allowed to see it as well."

"Put out the flames, Farrah," Marcus thundered. "Then you will do as you are told. You are in enough trouble as it is."

"Trouble?" she yelled. "Just what did I do?"

"You kept secrets from us, Farrah," Alexi replied. "You hid from us what you should have been the one to share and in doing so left yourself and us open for this."

"Now put out the flames and go, Farrah," Bannen said. "You will wait for us outside."

Farrah glared at them. Okay, so she hadn't found the right time or the courage to share with them that she was a Guardian but she had been working her way up to it. She looked over to Kiva and with a wave of her hand, the flames disappeared and his skin returned to the way that it had been, as if never touched by the flames. "He was never on fire anyway," she informed them. "It was just an illusion."

"Your skill is amazing." Alexi smiled down at her. "Now go so that we are not hindered in our need to punish by your presence."

So that was it. They did not want her to witness their ruthlessness in dealing with the man who had kidnapped and tried to hurt their mate. That she could understand and comply with.

She turned to go but Marcus stopped her with his hand on her shoulder while Alexi and Bannen moved forward to lift Kiva to his feet between them.

Marcus walked her to the far wall where he had dropped a pack on entering the cave. He bent and rummaged through it, pulling a blanket out and wrapping her in it before pulling her close once more and breathing deeply. "He did not touch you? He hurt you in no other way?"

Farrah smiled up at him and cupped his face in her hands. "He did not violate me or the bond we share."

"I would still love you if he had," Marcus whispered for her ears alone. "Nothing would make me stop loving you little one."

"As I will always love you, my soul," Farrah murmured softly.

Marcus squeezed her to him once more before turning her to the cave entrance and giving her a slap on the buttocks. "Now go!" he ordered but there was a small smile on his lips when she glanced back at him in mock outrage and his love shone clearly in his eyes.

Farrah stepped out of the cave and took a deep breath of the crisp cool air, tugging the blanket closer around her. She would never share with her warriors exactly what Kiva had done to her. There was no good that would come from them learning how he had used his hand to bathe her buttocks in his seed. That was a secret she would share with no one. She walked over to join the Savaris and Kito and noticed Kito's swollen nose still red with dried blood.

"Kito," she cried. "What happened to you? Are you all right?"

Galen and Arik grinned as Farrah mothered the boy-man and Erika took delight in informing her of how Kito's nose had come to look such a way. "One of your warriors hit him when he stumbled across our path in the forest."

Farrah thought for a moment. Marcus could be ruthless in his control over his emotions. Alexi was the one to use words first before ever raising a hand. She smiled softly, a woman's smile of secrets. "Bannen," she murmured with a smile and Erika nodded. Bannen was Farrah's passion, the most volatile of her warriors, the most easily riled. She couldn't imagine him any other way.

The sound of the whip against flesh was followed closely by Kiva's screams, both sounds rolling into each other and echoing through the forest. It seemed to last for an eternity and Farrah felt every lash as if it was against her own skin. Kiva's screams for mercy did not bring her satisfaction like she had thought, but a deep sadness filled her instead as she thought of the life wasted on Kiva Latoni. When she thought she couldn't take one more scream the sound was cut off and silence filled the air, somehow more profound and intense for its very stillness. In that moment she knew that Kiva's life was over, his blood spilled by the hand of her warriors. She would never know which of them had delivered the death blow that finally killed Kiva. She would never ask and they would never tell. It was enough that blood had been spilled.

Chapter Nine

Farrah reclined back in the large tub of hot water, grateful for a few moments of privacy. Her warriors hadn't let her out of their sight as they traveled through the forest back to their house. Mariska, Erin, Katya and Reanna had all been there to greet them, thankful that Farrah had been found safe and sound. Farrah considered herself very lucky to have them all as friends and family.

Marcus, Alexi and Bannen had gone into a meeting with the Savaris and several other warriors almost as soon as they had returned. Change called on the wind and the air seemed to constantly carry the beating of the drums of war. Farrah and Erika had been unable to really talk with so many people around but they had managed to speak briefly.

"Can you feel it in the wind?" Farrah had asked Erika.

"I can feel it in my very body," Erika replied. "The earth cries to me as she is soaked in blood and death."

"I feel it as well," Farrah admitted.

"Another one comes to us," Erika murmured before they were interrupted. And now sitting in her tub, that was what Farrah was thinking of.

Another one was coming. Farrah could feel it in the thickening of her blood and had no doubt that soon they would be joined by another Guardian. She was anxious to meet her, curious to now what power she possessed. The bond between Erika and Farrah seemed to grow stronger every day, their powers greatly increased when they were together. It was getting to the point where they could almost hear each other's thoughts. Farrah couldn't help but wonder what it would be like when the four Guardians were united together. And what of the Mystic? When would they receive her call? Why was

everyone coming here to this little village? Was Erika more than she seemed? Was she instead the Mystic?

"Deep thoughts, little Guardian?" Alexi murmured from the doorway where he was standing, arms crossed over his chest, watching her.

"Just thoughts," Farrah replied with a smile. "I was wondering when one of you would show up."

"Marcus and Bannen will be here soon. I left to see you." Alexi moved closer to the tub and held his hand out to her to help her from the water.

"Something is wrong," Farrah stated as she stepped out of the water and into Alexi's wide embrace. She used her heat to dry her skin and hair so that she would not soak him or the floor. "Can you tell me what has happened?"

"A council is being called by the prince," Alexi spoke into her hair. "Warriors from all villages are required to be present. We must make plans. More and more land on our shores every day and our soil grows red with blood."

"Who will go from here?" Farrah whispered, already knowing the answer in her heart and soul.

"I leave tonight with Arik Savari and several other warriors. Bannen and Marcus will remain here with you for now and I will return as soon as I am able."

Farrah looked up at him, understanding that he must go but unhappy with it all the same. Now she knew why Alexi had come to her alone. Marcus and Bannen were giving him time to say goodbye to her in private. "I love you, Alexi," she told him softly, rising up to her toes to place kisses along his neck and jaw. "Wherever you go know that my heart goes with you."

"And mine shall stay with you," he answered before sweeping her into his arms and carrying her into the bedroom, laying her gently on the bed and stripping quickly before joining her there.

No more words were spoken from their lips but their bodies were not so quiet. Fingers stroked and caressed. Lips soothed and enflamed. Tongues meshed and mated. Teeth nipped and marked. Farrah was captivated by Alexi and he was lost in her fiery heat. His kiss was filled with untold passion and she cried out for more but he left her wanting as he slowly trailed his way down to the turgid points of her nipples. He delayed there, nipping and sucking at her flesh, marking her as his before journeying lower across her flat belly to the dewy curls that graced her mound.

Alexi breathed deeply, taking her musky scent into his very soul before swiping his tongue through her juices and latching his lips around her clit. Farrah moaned beneath him, her hands tight in his hair as she spread her thighs wider, offering him all that she was. Alexi devoured her, using both tongue and fingers to thrust in and out of her tight sheath, drinking every drop of release she gifted him with and still wanting more. He couldn't get enough of her. Her taste intoxicated him until he felt drowned in her, consumed by her.

He surged to his knees between her thighs and Farrah eagerly grabbed his thick cock in her hands and placed him at her dripping opening, eager for his possession. Alexi thrust violently inside her, slamming his cock as far as it would go, reveling in the tight, wet heat that encased him. He plunged harder, faster, deeper, riding her as if his very life depended on it.

Farrah cried his name, urging him, encouraging him, loving him. Each powerful stroke of his hips dragged his engorged cock along the screaming nerves of her sheath, pushing her higher toward an orgasm that threatened her with its very intensity. She felt him tighten above her and heard his cry echo through the room as he pushed into her until they were as one. His seed filled her in hot quick bursts and her own orgasm slammed into her, through her, taking him along for the ride as she clasped around his cock with the muscles of her sex and drained him of every drop of cum.

She did not know that she was crying until Alexi bent his face to hers and licked the drops that ran from her eyes. "Do not cry, little Guardian," he smiled and continued

dropping kisses along her cheeks and jaw, tasting her tears on his lips and tongue. "I will be back soon."

"I love you, Alexi." Farrah wrapped him in her embrace, wanting to never let him go. "Know that I love you."

"Always," Alexi murmured. "I will hold those words to my heart always."

* * * * *

Just across the village in the Savari home Erika and Arik were enjoying the same embrace. His curved cock pleased her with every thrust as he brought her to one plane of pleasure after another. When he filled her with his own release it pulsed through her womb in hot waves that seemed never-ending.

"I don't want you to go," Erika told her mate.

"As you have a duty as a Guardian, so I have a duty as a warrior," Arik told her, rolling to his back so that she rested on his chest. "Do not make this any harder for me than I would for you. I will return soon. Galen will remain while I am gone."

"I will miss you with every breath," Erika swore to him.

"And I will think of you and Galrik and Malia with every one that I take," Arik assured her. "I love you, baby."

"I love you, Arik," Erika whispered, tears falling from her eyes and soaking into his chest. He held her tighter, wrapping her in his embrace, knowing that soon he would have to leave her.

Epilogue

Willow slipped through the trees, drawing closer and closer to the soothing waters that burst over the island shore in waves. The drums of war seemed never-ending lately, a constant echo in the air. Willow finally reached her watching place and settled in to keep her own vigil against the invaders that overran their shores. It wasn't long 'til she felt the presence of boats in the waters just offshore. Willow smiled, eager for what she knew she could do, what she must do, for her people.

She stepped from the trees, her long black hair falling to her waist in waves, the sides gathered back in a yellow ribbon that declared her claimable. Her green eyes flashed as she threw her hands over her head and called to the waters in the tongue of her mother's people, in the tongue of the Goddess of Altair.

"I call to the goddess, hear my plea. Let the waters flow through me. Fill me with thy icy cold, embrace me with a warmth untold. Of salt or fresh, from earth or air, where water flows, I am there. The goddess's blessing on my call." Willow threw her hands from her body and the waves broke from shore, surging back out from where they had come, carrying the boats of others far from shore. "A watery grave for one and all."

She turned to leave when her task was complete and was startled to see both Drago and Ulrik Mederra standing behind her, watching.

"A Guardian, as we suspected." Drago nodded to his brother Ulrik.

"We have waited patiently for you, Willow," Ulrik told her. "You can no longer hide from us. We have already received permission to claim you and take you home with us."

"I cannot leave!" Willow shouted, angry to be trapped by these two large warriors. Willow was tall at five foot eight but the Mederras were giants at six foot ten inches of

brawny muscle. They both had long dark brown hair and soft green eyes the same shade as hers. "The waters call to me and I must stay and listen."

"No," Drago stated, shaking his head and stepping up to her. He quickly wrapped her in his arms, turning her so that her back rested against his chest, her wrists locked in his grasp, her arms crossed beneath his. "Now is the time to listen to your mates and go with us."

"I have no mates," Willow stated, hating that she could not use her powers against them, had never been able to as she did the other warriors who bothered her.

Ulrik knelt at her feet and removed a cylindrical weapon from his belt. "You do now," he told her as he placed it onto the flesh of her right lower abdomen and branded the symbol of the Mederra, a white tiger, on her. "Now you are Willow Mederra."

"Please," she begged, "don't do this to me."

"You have left us no choice," Drago told her, refusing to feel remorse for his and Ulrik's following her and claiming her in the darkness of night. They should have headed home to their mother Erin and their fathers long ago but had stayed to wait for Willow to reach the age of claiming instead. Their baby sister Erika was mated to the Savaris now and had two children of her own who they had yet even to see. That would all change now that they had finally claimed the woman who they had both fallen hard for.

Willow was everything that a warrior could crave in a mate. She was strong and beautiful on the inside and the outside. They had sensed right away that there was something different about her and had not been surprised when they had followed her one night and seen her command the water with words and gestures. She spoke the tongue of their mother and something about her called to their souls, demanding that they claim her and take her to their home.

"Come, Willow." Drago tugged her hand and started back through the woods, toward the tiny encampment that lay hidden just inside. "Tonight we claim you as

mate." He looked her in the eye so that she would not misunderstand that they meant to bed her. "Tomorrow we leave at daybreak."

* * * * *

The old woman looked down on Altair, following closely the actions of the Guardians. Willow was impetuous and headstrong and the Mystic was wise to call this Guardian next. The Guardian of Water would learn much from the Guardians of Fire and Earth. And in turn they would learn the words of old from Willow.

The old woman shook her head as emotion swamped her, joy at how the Guardians were coming along yet sorrow over what had become of her beloved Altair. It saddened her greatly that nothing would ever be as it once was.

About the Author

Lacey Thorn spends her days in small-town Indiana, the proud mother of three. When she is not busy with one of them she can be found typing away on her computer keyboard or burying her nose in a good book. Like every woman, she knows just how chaotic life can be and how appealing that great escape can look. So toss aside the stress and tension of the never ending “to do” list. For now sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride with Lacey as she helps you to unlace and unleash the woman inside.

Lacey 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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