



Viola Grace

Sisters of Silverwood
Book 3

Finding
Fiona

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Book 3 of the Sisters of Silverwood

By

Viola Grace

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Finding Fiona: Book 3 of the Sisters of Silverwood

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Chapter 1

Fiona Matthews started her morning the same way she did every morning. A hefty cup of coffee and a toasted bagel with cream cheese. With a quick bite, she set the items on the counter, knelt in front of the bed and located her keys where her sister's cat, Neelix had hidden them.

On her way back to her breakfast, she found the shoe the persistent feline had hidden and the hairball he left on the steps. He looked at her with disgust as she located every carefully stowed item from his midnight crazies. The consistent surprise in his eyes never failed to make her laugh.

Nothing could be hidden from her. She was a finder.

It had begun shortly after her stint at Camp Silverwood and had expanded with every following year as she gained control over her talent. In high school, she had been uncomfortable knowing where every classmate had lost their virginity and had no urge to help them find it.

When she found herself in the working world, she gravitated toward a job where her particular

skill was useful. Inventory management it had been. She had been in that line of work now for over ten years in a craft supply warehouse and her branch had the smallest loss in the entire chain. A record she was perversely proud of. As she headed to her petit car, her cell rang. "Yellow."

"Fee, where are my house keys? I can't find them again," her friend Sally asked.

Fiona leaned against her car while she concentrated. "They are under your couch, where you kicked them last night while trying to get your date out of his clothing." She could hear the embarrassment on the line.

"Ah. You're right. Thanks. And please, don't tell anyone."

"Have I ever?"

"Love you, Fifi."

"Snuggles to you, Salary." She turned off the phone and got into her car. It was time for work. She did so love to find things.

Work was as satisfying as it always was. She was climbing up, down, reaching under and over for her clients and stopping some of her inventory from walking out the door. She wasn't rude, but she was firm. With the scowls of her attempted thief in her face, she calmly and deliberately described where, what and how far in the paintbrushes were hidden. They were surrendered immediately and the thief looked to the ceiling for the invisible cameras.

She almost laughed. There was nothing in the building worth the price of the cameras. And if he had asked her, she could have pointed him to some of the sponsored brushes donated by artist for those who were starting out.

Her co-worker, Brenda ran up to her. and asked her, "Fiona, have you heard? A kid has gone missing near the mountains."

Fiona's senses snapped into alert immediately. "When? Are they looking for her yet?"

"They are asking for volunteers. People who have been up the mountain before."

"Brenda, can you take care of the shop this afternoon? I am going to see if they need another volunteer."

"Of course. We just got in those new oils. I will leave them for you to put out tomorrow."

"Excellent." She shrugged into her denim jacket. "If I am not coming in tomorrow for whatever reason, I'll give you a call." Dressing casual was her favourite part of the job. It let her do things like she was about to.

"Thanks. Good luck."

Brenda waved as Fiona trotted down the steps and headed for her car. She could still see the arm waving through the heavy glass of the door. Brenda sure loved to wave.

* * * *

The highway to the park where the child had gone missing was shockingly empty. Either no one had listened to the radio or they did not think that a small child could be harmed in a few hours. *Jerks.*

The lot had around thirty cars in it when she arrived. So, not all of the locals were complete assholes. Half an hour of registering and collecting her kit and she was ready to go searching the hills for little Mandy Sanders. She was six and a half.

Little Mandy had gone exploring while her mother and father were fishing off the dock of a nearby lake. She had been playing at the base of the dock, but had disappeared while her parents were landing a trout. By the time they thought to look for her, she was long gone.

An alert went out immediately and the local news ran the story. Mandy had been missing for three hours by the time the local sheriff had gotten the volunteers organized.

Fiona settled her safety vest and ignored the lewd comments about the fit. Her breasts did tend to be on the large side, but that was no reason for strangers to comment. It was her bright red hair that usually drew their eye in the first place. She blamed her mother for them both. Mom took the responsibility with good humour.

She hoped for Mandy's sake they found her and she could have that kind of relationship with her own mother. Mrs. Sanders's face indicated that it was her fondest wish.

Chapter 2

The search was underway. The searchers fanned out from the dock where Mandy had last been seen. Every other searcher called Mandy's name, but Fiona didn't know how effective that would be for an age where children were taught to avoid strangers.

She was too close to the others to use her talent, so she had to wait until they had worked their way deeper into the woods. Finally, she cast her mind into the woods to find the missing Mandy. A sea of green assaulted her senses, she saw a cave, trees and Mandy in a sunny yellow short set. The girl looked healthy and didn't seem to be under any duress. Thank goodness.

Slipping away from the other searchers while wearing a neon yellow and orange vest with flaming red hair was a feat of skill. Fortunately, it was not the first time she had engaged in this activity.

The path in her mind was clear, but the one in the material world was covered in mud and bugs.

Ick. She crawled over fallen logs, moved through thick brambles and finally, hours later, came out of the path to face the cave where little Mandy was standing, in her vision.

A girlish giggle and a shriek of laughter drew Fiona into the cave. It was clear and open as she wandered down into the darkness. After smacking herself on the head for forgetting the flashlight she had been issued, her trip into the tunnel was quite a bit easier, if no less creepy.

Another giggle drew her deeper into the darkness and a light began to gleam from the end of the tunnel. She spared herself the jokes about the end of the tunnel. Only barely.

The shriek broke the silence and Fiona rushed forward. The sudden flare of light all around her blinded her for a moment, but as her vision cleared, she saw Mandy riding a unicorn in an open section of cavern.

Wait. A unicorn?

Closer inspection confirmed that it was indeed, a unicorn. The horn was solid and didn't move as he pranced around in a circle. Perhaps Fiona had suffered a blow to the head while she was travelling? Sniffed a little too much paint thinner at work, perhaps?

The majestic creature continued to prance in circles to the delight of his passenger.

Fiona had no idea how to separate the two.

"Fiona Matthews. I am so happy to finally

meet you." A figure emerged from the shadows across the open cavern. He seemed to have no trouble picking her out of the darkness that was hiding her. Perhaps her flashlight wasn't helping, or perhaps it was the blinding light streaming out of the cavern.

She flicked the flashlight off and stepped forward. "I am afraid you have me at a disadvantage. Hiya, Mandy. Are you having fun?"

Mandy grinned at her. "I have a pony."

"You certainly do. How did you get down here, Sweetie?" Fiona was carefully approaching the animal and the child.

"The pretty man gave me some candy and promised that I could ride the pony as much as I wanted until you got here."

The *pretty man* was now in full view and he was indeed, pretty. Golden brown hair to his waist and pansy blue eyes with the body of a professional gymnast, which was easy to see as his shirt was wide open.

"And why was the pretty man waiting for me?" The male approached her with a deliberate swagger.

Was he strutting? She moved to put the unicorn between them, but the traitorous beast stepped back to leave them face to face.

"I will admit to a frisson of guilt by detouring the path of little Mandy here. But as you arrived on schedule, I am satisfied by the result." He

nodded to the unicorn who walked off with Mandy still on his back.

“Wait! Where is it taking her?”

“Why, back to the campground, of course.”

He sounded like it was the most logical thing in the world.

“Why did you abduct her in the first place?”

“My dear Fiona. You would never have come here if I didn’t have bait.”

The stun gun in his hand came up quickly. Too quickly for her gaze to follow. Fiona shrieked as everything went white.

Chapter 3

Waking up was hard to do. Every muscle in her body was screaming. Fiona raised her head and groaned. Either she was still in a cave or she had gone blind.

"Stay still. That electric shock is a bitch."

The voice was not the one pretty boy had used. This one was different, exhausted and far lower in pitch. "So, what are you in for?" Her voice cracked, but it had the desired effect.

He laughed, "Same as you. A pawn in Baenwik's plan."

"Is that his name?"

"He didn't tell you?"

"No. Like most men, he was all zap and run. Are we still in the cavern?" It was hard to see anything. There was no lighting at all.

"Deeper in the tunnels than you were. How are you feeling?"

"Stiff, sore, but otherwise intact, I think." A quick inventory of her body parts let her know she was in one piece. One aching piece.

"Good." Silence fell.

"What's your name? You obviously know mine."

"Ander. Ander Limon, at your service."

A small clink clued her into another fact. Ander was chained to something. "How long have you been down here, Ander?" She was carefully feeling around her area. She was sitting on a pallet of some kind and, when she turned her hands to frisking herself, she almost crowed in triumph. Her safety vest was gone as was her search-issued flashlight, but her personal wind-up flashlight was still tucked into her sock. So was her hunting knife. Yippee. She left the knife where it was, but started to crank up the flashlight immediately.

"What the hell is that?"

"A flashlight that doesn't need batteries." She finished the fifteen cranks and shone the light into the darkness around her. She was indeed on a small bed and there was one snag she hadn't counted on, the bed was on a tower of rock surrounded by a pit. The distance from the tower to the edge of the pit was more than ten feet. She would never be able to jump it on her own. "Son of a bitch."

"Yes, Baenwik certainly is that."

She swung the light toward Ander's voice and gasped as she saw his dark hair matted with blood and his arms spread to shackle them to the wall over twelve feet away.

"Not in my eyes please."

She moved the beam of light to survey his body and there was a lot of it to see. He was naked. As the light caressed his groin, she jerked guiltily and moved the light to examine his feet instead. "Sorry about that."

"Doesn't bother me. Look all you like."

He was smiling. She could hear it in his voice.

"He's coming. If you want to keep the flashlight, hide it."

Scrambling, she flicked it off and hid it down the back of her jeans. She left her shirt untucked to hide the bulk. Her shirt had just settled into place when light flooded into the room and pretty boy stood on the other side of the chasm.

Completely naked. That was obvious as the light was coming from him. Without clothing to block the effect, he was truly a beautiful sight to behold. And he was also the psycho that had lured her, stunned her and dropped her on a tower of rock with a precipice only a few feet from her hand. She wasn't falling for his obvious charms.

Plus, if she was completely honest, Ander was much more her type, and better endowed. As pretty as the psycho was, standing across from her, he had still kidnapped a child and shackled Ander to a wall to achieve his goal. Nutcase.

"Are you comfortable, my dear?"

Major head-case.

"I hope the stun gun didn't damage you too

badly."

"Uh, not too badly. I am sore as hell though. Why couldn't you just ask me to accompany you?"

"Because if you joined with Ander before I was ready, it would have ruined everything."

That was a puzzler. How long had she been down here? "But you just zapped me a few hours or not even an hour ago. How could my seeing Ander any sooner have ruined anything?"

"Ander must have told you when he first met you. He and you are arranged mates. Arranged by the Silverwood society." Baenwik's expression turned puzzled by her lack of response. "He said that he had told you all this when you started having sex."

She tried to keep her expression neutral. "Of course he did. But just because we are lovers does not mean I am tied to him in any way, shape or form."

He shifted in relief and turned to display his body to her. "My name is Baenwik and I am a much more attractive choice than Ander. His species breeds with other races while my blood remains pure."

She put on a coquettish face and tried to force a look of admiration through her eyes. "He was a little weak on the details of your races. Only that they were different. Could you explain your lineage?" This was obviously the correct thing to

ask as Ander groaned in disgust and Baenwik preened.

"I am born of the Lios Alfar. The elves of light. We pride ourselves on our pure bloodlines and strength of purpose. Ander is of the Svart Alfar, the elves of the dark. They ferry human souls to the afterlife and pride themselves on hunting. They were chosen by the Fae Council to be the mates of the new magic, but the Lios would not suffer such an indignity."

"So, you disagreed with the ruling?"

"I did indeed and came through the rift with seven of my brothers a few weeks ago."

"Other objectors?"

"Yes. We learned your language, but it has been difficult to get you alone. And given your talent, I felt I had finally hit on the perfect plan to get you to the Arena."

This was absolutely freaky. She had to have hit her head on the rocks. "Wait. Did you say Arena?"

Chapter 4

Baenwik executed a perfect bow, "Indeed, lovely Fiona. Ander and I will fight for your hand. In the traditions of our people."

She crossed her arms over her breasts in a defensive posture. "Are you insane?"

"To what do you refer?" He was genuinely perplexed.

"I am not a prize to be won. How do I get out of this madhouse?" She muttered the last half to herself, but both guys answered her with the same words.

"You have to choose."

"Choose what? To leave? I am choosing that right now, but it isn't happening." She sat down hard on the pallet and fought the urge to bawl like a child. Usually her mind could lead her through this kind of thing, but it was not giving her any outs. She was going to have to give a ton of thought to the right question for her talent. She could find herself, but when it came to finding a way out, her mind was remaining stubbornly

blank.

"Ander will be refreshed and then he and I will battle before you. The winner will have the right to press his suit for your affections." Baenwik looked puzzled, "This is the way things have always been done."

"And that is why evolution is my favourite thing." It was muttered into her chest. He was a lunatic and he was dragging two people into his delusion. A thought occurred to her, "How is Ander going to be refreshed if he is pinned to the wall?"

"He can recover at his post."

"No he can't, he is injured and needs to have his arms mobile and not strained from confinement for a fair fight. You do want it to be a fair contest, don't you?"

He remained silent and almost pouting.

"Don't you, Baenwik?" This was from Ander himself. He obviously was interested in the thought of being unshackled.

"Fine. Fine. But Winging will watch you the whole time. And you will have to attend him, Fiona. He will not try to escape with you shackled to the rock."

"I am not shackled to anything."

Baenwik smiled. It was not a nice smile. "You will be. You want him healed, then you tend his wounds."

"How the hell am I supposed to do that while

I am over here and he is over there?" She flapped her hand at the wall where he was shackled.

"You will remain where you are and I will come to get you when I have him settled. He won't be going far without you."

Another nasty laugh punctuated his statement and he strutted over to the wall where the only bit of normalcy in this nightmare was shackled. She didn't see him use a key, but the click and slither of chains releasing was unmistakable.

"Move."

Fiona also didn't see where the dagger had come from, but there it was. The place he must have hidden it in made her mind boggle. Ander was marched around the pit at knifepoint. As they left the cavern the, light went out.

Feeling vulnerable, she sat firmly on the pallet. Going over the edge was not the right way to survive. Baenwik had to be insane. It was the only thing that made sense to her at this moment. Ander seemed nice enough, but what the hell happened to him before she got here?

Again, she tried to find her way out. Nothing came to her mind. Only darkness. She hated darkness.

Hours may have passed, or only five minutes, but eventually the nutcase and the nightlight reappeared.

"Please come this way, my dear Fiona."

"It may have escaped your notice, as you were the one who placed me here, but I am on a rock surrounded by nothing." She really didn't want to get to close to the naked weirdo, but at least she had a safe haven.

"A moment, my dear." The freak extended his hand and a bridge of rock flowed from in front of her to the other side of the chasm.

Okay. That was odd. She was either inhaling some kind of vapour in the cave or something akin to magic was occurring. Either that or he was one hell of a special effects artist.

"Come over, please." He gestured with his hand for her to use the stone bridge.

"Are you insane? I have a fear of heights." She crossed her arms over her breasts and stayed seated. He didn't look happy. She had not seen the emotion on his face yet. Perhaps this scowl was cheer for him.

"You will cross the walkway, or I will come get you."

"That won't win you any courtship points." Her insecurities were rising to the surface. Perhaps she had pushed him too far?

"I cannot begin the courtship until you have chosen between Ander and myself. Get over here, *now*."

She conceded and rose to her feet. "Can you widen the walkway?" It was less than a foot wide and it was a long way down into the chasm.

"Gladly, my lady." His brows drew together and the path doubled in size. Sweat beaded his brow and he looked slightly pale when he finished, but at last it was a solid two feet wide and she was able to set foot on it.

Scuttling would have been a good description of the method she used to cross the bridge, but it would lack a certain dignity. "Okay. I am over. Now what?"

"Thank you. Now, if you would accompany me, please?"

It was phrased as a question, but Fiona didn't think she would like what would happen if she refused. He held out his hand for her to take and she took it in a courtly fashion, resting her hand on his wrist. In this manner, he led her through caverns, tunnels and, finally, a smaller alcove that had a bubbling pool of warm water.

Ander was next to the water. Chained to the wall and waiting. Still naked. Impressive. The cool air of the caverns was not having any effect. But if it was, oh boy.

"Fiona, please strip and extend your wrist."

"What?"

Chapter 5

“I am not going to strip.”

“You are, or I will cut the clothing from your body.” The dagger was back in his hand and he waved it lightly in her direction. “I will enjoy it, but I doubt that you will. Especially since you will have nothing more to wear when you have finished tending to Ander.”

A gulp was all that was heard in the small cave, aside from the burbling of water. “Not with you watching, I won’t.”

Baenwik watched her, carefully mulling over her statement. “Fine. I will remove myself for three minutes, which should give you enough time to get into the water. That should be enough to cover your modesty.”

It was all he was going to give her so she agreed. “Done. But I still need light and it tends to leave when you do.”

“I will leave you some light.” He made a few arcane gestures and a ball of light spun in the air, over the churning water.

"Great. Get out."

"You don't mind Ander watching?" He was suspicious, his eyes narrowed.

"He has seen it all already, and besides, he's unconscious."

He looked her over from head to toe and nodded reluctantly. "I will be back in three minutes."

With a sharp look at Ander, she took her equipment and hid it between her jeans and shirt. Her underwear she left on top. That would distract the pervert for a moment. Shoes and socks she left by the pile. With the horrible feeling he would catch her between the edge and the water, she jumped in and had just surfaced when Baenwik made his reappearance.

"Extend your wrist, please."

He was walking around the pool and trying to watch both her and Ander at the same time. He needn't have worried. She wasn't coming out of the churning water with him there. Giving in, she extended her arm and, in seconds, a cool ribbon of silvery chain looped around her and locked.

He hitched her to the ring that currently held Ander.

She had enough play in the chain to reach anywhere in the pool. Just not out of it.

"You know what will happen to her if you escape."

The bleary brunette nodded and slumped

forward.

Totally unsympathetic, Baenwik shoved him into the water and let Fiona struggle to bring him to the surface. It was quite a struggle, he was solid muscle.

"He is in your care. I will leave you a light. You have one hour to see what you can do about him." With a flexing of his own naked buttocks, he swept out of the cave.

She struggled with Ander for a moment until her feet were able to find a rocky shelf to deposit him. He was easier to move in the water than he would have been on land, but it still took a few minutes before he was settled in a way that guaranteed him not sliding back into the water. "Ander. Ander, wake up." She was slapping his face lightly and his eyes eventually opened to meet her gaze.

"Fiona. You are so lovely."

His voice was faint and she began to check his head for injuries. She found the gash that had caused the blood to matt his hair and she sighed in relief. Aside from his drowsiness, which probably indicated a concussion, there was no sign of additional swelling. His eyes were clear and focussed, and his speech was clear. She leaned forward to place her lips next to his ear in case Baenwik was listening. "Why does Baenwik think we are lovers?" His whisper sang across her nerves.

"Because that is what I told him."

"Why?"

"So he wouldn't kill you. If he loses the physical challenge, he will probably try to kill you anyway."

Not good. "What is the challenge going to entail? Can I help?" She didn't doubt for a moment that Baenwik would kill her if he lost. He had that air of arrogance to him, nothing or no one could keep him from his goal.

"Only by helping me recover my strength, so no."

Okay, that was slightly offensive. "Why can't I? What would you need me to do?" His hands tugged on her hair until she met him eye to eye.

"Me."

"What?" The hoarse whisper was more than a worry about being overheard, it was a reaction to the body she was leaning against and the look in those eyes. They were dim with fatigue, but still looked at her like he had seen every part of her naked a thousand times, and he wanted to do it a thousand more.

"Do me."

A quirk of a smile distracted her from the hypnotism of his gaze. "I fail to see how that will help anything, or is this some kind of last wish thing?"

"You know that some people have a particular magic, right?"

She knew that better than most, "Yes."

"My particular magic translates sex into energy. The Silverwood Society sent me out to protect you and I ended up getting bashed on the head and drained of my power."

"Uh, how did he do that?" Images flashed in her mind, none of them good.

"The dagger he is waving around. It created a temporary link between us. It is a slow leak of energy, but he is using far more than I had to start with. He is draining me dry and he will be right behind."

"But, if what you say is even remotely true, and it is a helluva pick up line by the way," his smile amused her. "Won't he just gain more power if you get stronger?"

"Not if I get enough power to heal completely."

"So, this is a fuck-me-if-you-want-to-live situation?" Her mouth twitched, but her hands went to his shoulders, massaging gently. His time on the wall had left knots in his muscles.

"More or less. I prefer to think of it as making love though." He lay back and let the soothing heat of her hands mix with the pounding of the water, appearing almost asleep, and harmless.

Yeah, right. He was as harmless as a sleeping tiger. "Where do I start?" Seducing a man who was almost unconscious was new to her. He wasn't going to press the seduction, but he wasn't

going to help her either.

"A kiss is always a good place to start."

The rocky ledge he was on was wide enough to take her knees on either side. She slid into place and leaned down for a kiss. His mouth was cool, firm and tasted like honey. She started and pulled away. "How is it possible that you taste like honey?"

"Genetic gift. I have a cousin who claims to taste like chocolate, but you won't be meeting him."

The tiny flare of possession washed over her, but she didn't care. She wanted another kiss. The second kiss was longer than the first and she felt a tingling in her nether regions almost immediately. His hands caressed her spine, stroking from shoulder to hip, over and over as she devoured his mouth.

She came up for air, gasping, and started to stroke his body as she knelt astride his hips. If it had to be done, she was going to get it over with quickly. She ran her fingers through his hair, careful to avoid the impact area, and was amazed at the length. It had looked so much shorter matted up. Taking a deep breath, she moved her body to line up her body with his below the water.

"You don't need to hurry, Fiona." His hands gripped her hips and kept her from sliding up and down on him.

"The faster you charge up, the faster we can

look forward to getting out of here.”

“True, but I don’t want you to hurt yourself. You are out of practice.”

His fingers parted her petals and slid into her, working her body’s moisture. She was panting and squirming against his torso. His other hand curved around her buttocks and one dexterous finger made slow circles on her other entrance.

She was panting, but in control until Ander dipped his head and took one of her nipples in his mouth. When his teeth came to grip her tightly, she shuddered and hissed as her body clenched around his fingers.

She put both of her hands on Ander’s shoulders and glared at him. He was glowing with amusement. Or perhaps it was a sign of his power. Either way, there was a moonlight quality to the glow that enveloped him.

“You don’t need to rush to give me what I need. I can absorb your release and use it for my own.”

He was stroking her back and sides from shoulder to hip again. She found it as arousing as she had the first time. Keeping eye contact, she lowered her hips until he was firmly lodged at her entrance. He didn’t say or move anything. She would have guessed he was afraid she would change her mind.

Slowly, in deference to his size, she rocked herself onto him. Each milestone beyond the head

of his cock was measured by his expression. She was not fully seated, but she had as much of him as she could take, and that was when she started to move.

Her body stuttered at first, trying to find a beat she could keep. She worked, twisted, rocked, shifted and squirmed on him until she found the rhythm that was hers. His eyes widened and he kept their gazes connected as her body's beat shifted faster. Rising and falling on him drove her further and further into his embrace until her breasts were rubbing against his chest with every move and his buttocks were bracketed by her thighs.

She wasn't so much riding him as wrapped around him. This time was for him. She moved arched, clenched and twisted against him to bring him pleasure. And he was watching her face while she did it. The moonlight was now streaming from him. His glow was outshining the ball that Baenwik had left behind.

Sweat was pouring from Fiona, from both the heat and exertion. She came again while riding him, stopping for a minute to freeze mid thrust, then she was all business. He had to have his turn or this would never be over.

"What is it, Fiona? What do you want?"

"I want you to fuck me until you cum." His eyes widened in shock, but with more strength than she thought he possessed, he lifted to her edge

of the pool and shifted her legs to drape over his shoulders. Standing on the floor of the pool, he had the leverage to drive into her until she squeaked out again as she came. Her arousal had increased to the point where he was buried to the hilt and he took full advantage of it, slamming into her with a riot of thrusts until he shuddered and called her name as the fairy light blazed out of his every pore.

Chapter 6

“Ander, do you know that you are glowing?”
Her arms shook as she tried to move off him. His arm around her hips kept her from moving.

“That was the idea, Fiona.”

The weak and exhausted Ander was gone. Even his hair seemed to have a new life.

“I told you how I generate my energy. This is how.” His hips lifted against her and the obvious strength of his erection was proof he was ready to go again.

“Can you hide this from Baenwik?”

He looked suddenly thoughtful. “I suppose I could.”

“Good, because I am still tied to this wall and the look in your eyes spoke of making a run for it.” He chuckled and she groaned. The movement within her was torture. Her nerves were still sensitised from the previous round. “Stop moving.”

“Aw. Sensitive?”

"Yes. Do you have enough of whatever it is you need?" She squirmed as his fingers traced circles on either side of her spine.

"I have what I need, but not what I want." His hands flattened on her back and pressure angled her head to his. The kiss was just as sweet, but a lot more thorough than the first had been.

She went limp against him and let him do what he wished. He caught on quickly. "Ander, we have just met, and this is neither the time nor place for this sort of thing."

He leaned his forehead to hers. "You are right, but I couldn't resist."

"You could have, you just didn't want to."

"You have a point." He released her.

His hands fell away and she was free to stretch and ease her well-used channel from his erection. "Oh, that feels better. I think my muscles were trying to take up that position permanently."

"Mmm. That sounds like fun."

"Shut up, you twit." He had the nerve to look insulted. "I have been abducted, stun gunned, forced to look at naked strangers, forced across a magical pathway and dumped into a tub with a horny so-called elf. I am tired." She swam back out of his reach and embraced the heat of the water to sooth her sore muscles.

He watched her closely, she could feel it. Every time she twisted, stretched or arched, his gaze was on her. She was rapidly getting to the

point of not-giving-a-frosty-fuck.

"Wash your hair, Ander. You still have blood in it." Her nagging tone was as annoying as she could make it. He obediently ducked his head beneath the water and didn't resurface. Fiona moved around the pool and was suddenly sure that she knew where Ander was. He was licking up the inside of her thigh.

His hands supported her weight, she didn't even have to fight to keep her head above water. His ability to hold his breath was amazing. A wonderful talent. She wondered if his mother was proud.

"Holy hell!" Her orgasm caught her by surprise. Her body twisted out of her control and slipped from Ander's hands. The water flooding her mouth surprised her, but not as much as the spasms of her body continuing as he did not stop his ministrations.

Fiona felt her lungs were going to give way the exact instant before he pulled her to the surface. Gasping for air became her highest priority. He held her up and she elbowed him in the throat before he let her go. Coughing to expel the water she had inhaled, she was still shivering with the shock of the unexpected orgasm and the near drowning when pretty boy came back.

"I see you are in much the same state as when I left you." His smarmy voice was directed at Ander.

She turned her head on the stone to look at her lover and he was in the same pose as when she had wrestled him into position.

"And you, Fiona? You seem the worse for wear."

"It's the heat. And working with an unresponsive patient. It makes me tired." She flipped the hair straggling into her eyes, back over her shoulders. Ander's eyes slitted open and he glared at her. Apparently she had insulted him. Well, fair was fair, he had almost drowned her.

"I have brought you a cloth to help you dry before putting on your clothing."

"Will you leave again? I would like some privacy."

"I am afraid that will not be possible. Your chain will not be removed until the contest for your hand is over."

"Who makes up these rules?" Her tone was shrill. Her mind was close to the breaking point. This was the stupidest thing that could happen on the weirdest day of her life.

And she had seen true magic.

The days at Camp Silverwood had been full of fun, but the nights were fantastic. They were called, drawn, to the lake where the magic had been awakened within them. She had always felt it, sensed something fantastic right at the edge of her mind. The whispered instruction had been all she needed to spring into life.

Now this idiot was trying to see her naked. Fine. "Give me the cloth." She clambered out of the water without further ceremony and stood stark naked in front of two very interested males.

"Uh, of course, Fiona." A suddenly sheepish Baenwik handed her the length of linen he was clutching.

She wrapped it around her once and used the trailing end to dry her hair. It was wild after her exertions. The water had only loosened the tangles. "Do you know if anyone is looking for me? Police? My friends?"

"Hmm. No they are not."

"Now, why would that be?"

"They think you are dead."

Her butt hit the stone with a painful thud, the silver chain slithered against the rock. "What?"

Chapter 7

“I left a simulacrum of you in the forest. I used your hair for the creation, so your dee-hen-ay will be intact.” Baenwik seemed pleased that he had gotten all of the vernacular correct.

She absently fumbled with her hair and felt the piece that was shorter than the others. “They think I am dead?”

“Yes. This leaves you free to pursue your magic.” He was happy. As if he had solved a problem for her.

“I don’t want to pursue my magic. I want to pursue my *life!*” The linen hit the floor and she advanced on him. She was furious and every muscle in her body felt it. She wanted to kill him, beat him and drown him in that damned pool. She was just getting up some speed when the chain brought her up short. Incoherent fury filled her and she kept lunging against the chain and screaming, the images of her friends and family mourning her, filled her mind.

Ander filled her vision as Baenwik fell back at the sight of her fury, “Please excuse me,” his fist

clipped her in the jaw and everything fell into an explosion of pain.

* * * *

Waking up was sudden. One minute everything was dark, then it was light again. This time it was all light, but the light was torches. Baenwik was done showing off for her. Now it was all about survival. His survival.

Fiona still had the delicate chain on her left wrist, but now there was one that matched it on her right. Her arms were bent behind her and she was seated on the floor of a cavern against a pillar of rock that was smooth on all sides. She was still naked, but now she was cold.

"I hope you are feeling better, Fiona. It pained me to see what Ander did to you, but you were a little overly emotional at the time." Baenwik leered at her.

Bondage turned him on, if his erection was any indication. Freak. Ander was slightly more in control and rolling his shoulders in preparation for battle. He was still keeping up his injured act. Well, Fiona hoped it was an act. If that was his true battle face, she was in trouble. He looked half asleep.

"When you count us down, we will engage in combat for your hand. Begin at ten and work backward."

Pretty boy looked like he was going to enjoy his victory. And if he won, she wouldn't be released from this pillar for some time. Ick. She looked at them both and weighed her options. She tried once again to find her way free. Images flashed through her mind of her, Ander and a great black horse. So, he was indeed her ticket out. Now she hoped he won. Really. It was a choice between the sex fiend and the pervert. She was picking the fiend. At least she could punch him. "Ten, nine" she kept counting and watching their readiness. When she reached, "Three," they both tensed and by the time she reached, "Two, one." They were lunging forward, arms at the ready.

She didn't know what she expected, but for them to stop inches from each other and use their energies to wage the battle was slightly anticlimactic. Moonlight and sunlight battled for supremacy. It was beautiful, but boring.

She watched Ander's muscles bunch and contract as he pressed his advantage. He had been replenished and his opponent didn't know it. Baenwik's shocked face was proof enough. He was being moved backward under the pressure of magic he was unable to tap to use for the match. The energy that he had originally stolen from Ander was dwindling too rapidly. He was burning too bright.

Each step that he was forced backward was another addition to the rage in his face. When he

reached the invisible lines they had drawn, probably when she was unconscious. They had certainly had the time.

With a final and deliberate blast, Ander shoved Baenwik out of the circle, then threw back his head and roared his triumph. "It is done. Free her."

"She still has to choose." He stood slowly and dusted his butt off.

"Release me and I will choose." She held the chains up for their perusal. "This isn't comfortable, boys."

Grumbling, Baenwik released the left wrist and then moved to the right. Honourably, he stepped away from her and gestured for her to choose. "Choose, the dark or the light."

She paced back and forth between the two of them. "The light has obvious charms, but so does the dark. I choose the dark."

Ander's face lit up and he took his position as her body guard and consort very seriously. Immediately he scooped her up and made a run for it with her in his arms. It was then that pretty boy made his move.

She was looking over Ander's shoulder and saw the dagger. It descended with all the subtlety of a hammer on an anvil. She squeaked in panic, but it was too late. Baenwik stabbed at Ander with a viciousness that belied his earlier manners.

He was a sore loser.

Chapter 8

Her squeak let Ander start to turn, but when the dagger parted flesh, he had to drop her. A fistfight ensued that made Fiona queasy. Pretty boy had been disarmed the instant Ander turned. Blood was everywhere, flowing down Ander's back and flying through the air as he struck at the golden madman.

Pugilism was a lost art for a reason, it was brutal, violent and bloody. Baenwik was bleeding now as well. His face was swelling in a most unattractive manner and she could see he was tiring quickly. However he had captured Ander to start with, it had definitely not been in a fair fight. As suddenly as it started, it finished. Baenwik was on the ground and Ander turned to her, exhausted.

"Can you find our way out?"

"Yes. Can you walk?"

"Yes. My steed should still be nearby. He would not have dared to injure him."

Fiona concentrated. It was clear to her. Dead

ahead and to the left. Straight on and out into daylight. She grabbed his hand in hers and started forward, "This way." She stopped and scooped up the dagger as they passed. They ran through the length of the cave, their bare feet slapping against the stone. "I should have stopped to put my clothes on."

"He burned them. After he discovered your knife and flashlight."

The torchlight was gone now, she was feeling her way through the caves longing for some illumination. Hmm. Her companion could glow, couldn't he? "Ander, do you have enough energy to glow?"

"No. I used it all in the fight. Why?"

"This would go a lot faster if I could see where I was going."

"You can't see in this light?"

"What light?"

"You should have said something. Come here."

The tang of sweat and blood mixed with the musk of male as he drew her into his arms. His fingers rubbed her back and buttocks as he pulled her flush against his body. His erection was a barrier, but his hands on her hips kept them firmly locked together.

He bent his neck, nestled his face in the hollow of her neck and inhaled deeply.

She returned the favour and soon had the

heady pulse of arousal running through her veins. She shifted against him and he changed his position and his grip. He took her mouth with his as his fingers teased her into a sensual frenzy, moving from her clit to her core and back again, using her own moisture to ease the way. His tongue teased her lips, his mouth drank from her and her eyes fluttered closed. As suddenly as her arousal started, it peaked. She moaned softly into his mouth and he chuckled.

“Enough light for you, my dear?”

Dazed, she opened her eyes to see his moonlight streaming from his skin. “Yeah. It should do. Any more might have killed me.”

“Ah, there is a reason that they call it the little death.” Ander twined his fingers with hers, “Shall we continue?”

“Yes, of course. This way.” Once again she led them through the caves, winding their way as rapidly as she could. She could feel the energy draining from her companion as rapidly as it had emerged. The dim light ahead of her finally outweighed the elf-light she was seeing by, and not a moment too soon. Ander was almost unconscious. “Ander. Ander! Where is your steed?”

He shuddered and looked around. His eyes were glazed with pain and exhaustion once again. “Over there.” He pointed to a copse of trees.

She led them carefully to the area he

indicated.

"His name is Abax." Ander had almost had it. He stumbled.

She hoped to find his horsy soon. "Abax! Come here, boy!" She called out and hoped like hell that he was still there. In the next instant, she remembered she could find him. Her mind showed her all the twists and turns through the underbrush and she knew that Ander wouldn't make it. He was exhausted and had lost far too much blood. "Ander. Ander!" She had to yell as he had begun to slump against a nearby oak.

He looked over at her.

She spoke clearly, "I have to find Abax. I will be back as soon as I can. Take the dagger and wait here for me." She waited until he nodded and then ran like a demented wood nymph into the forest. It wasn't hard for her to get to the makeshift enclosure, but the steed penned by hedge and leather was far more beautiful than she could have imagined.

Ebony and midnight blue fought for supremacy on this creature and the eyes were blue flame. The marble horn was a bit of a surprise.

"Abax? Are you Abax?" She had no idea what else it could be, but she thought she would be polite.

The unicorn nodded and gave a snort.

"Ander needs you, but he is too weak to come here. If I let you out, can you find him?"

Another nod and a hefty snort.

With trembling fingers, she freed him, her mind numb with the possibility of becoming a hood ornament on that horn. She had to open one section, then step inside the enclosure to move the bramble wall that had been installed. The instant it was open, Abax was on the move.

About fifty feet into the woods he stopped. He turned to her.

She moved slowly toward him and noticed him scenting the air. He smelled Ander, and probably his blood. That wasn't good, but she was ready to face it if it was her destiny to be a shishkabab.

Five feet from her, Abax stopped and knelt. He gestured with his head for her to climb on his back.

She did. Despite what romance novels would have you think, horsehide chafes like hell when the horse is dodging and weaving through the woods. Unicorn hide however, is like the smoothest of velvets under naked skin. She was certain she would be bowlegged for life, but otherwise unharmed from her travels. Just as she had relaxed into the rhythm of the ride, Abax stopped.

Ander was just ahead, slumped over the lower branch of the tree.

She wouldn't be able to hoist him onto the back of his steed. She slid to the ground in a hurry,

trying to make it to her elf as fast as she could. He was unconscious. She examined the wound on his back. It was still raw, but the bleeding had stopped and it was clotting over. "Abax. How are we going to get him out of here?" She felt a tear run down her face. It was frustration and despair.

An engine revved behind her and suddenly, hope kicked in. Where the unicorn had stood was now a car. It wasn't practical for the off-roading they needed to do, but it was better than letting Ander die.

This she could manage. Only barely. Her mind flashed back to manoeuvring him in the pool and how she had never thought to have to manage him on land. How naïve.

"Ander! Ander. Wake up and walk to your car!" She slapped him on the face. Then harder.

Finally he opened bleary eyes and looked past her to Abax.

She pulled, pushed and prodded him toward the car and, when the passenger door swung open, that is where she put him. The seat belt locked him in automatically and she sighed in relief. She stepped away from the car and was more than a little surprised to see the driver's door swing open for her.

She slid her naked tush onto the driver's seat and kept herself still as the belt crossed her and tightened to hold her fast. In seconds they were in motion and Abax proved that no 4x4 had anything

on him. They left the park and mountain in their rearview mirror as he reached speeds she didn't know could be engaged in on a public road.

Her terror of being pulled over while stark naked let her give Abax his head. She wasn't going to fight for control of a vehicle when she herself was in such a vulnerable state. "I wonder where he is taking us?"

"Silverwood." Ander was awake. Deep circles under his eyes belied the strength of his tone. He still wasn't out of the proverbial woods. "He is taking us to the Silverwood Society."

"Like the camp?"

"Yes. Like the camp. Only dedicated to the support of new magic in the modern world." He slumped back in his seat. "Abax will have us there in a few hours."

Chapter 9

Introducing yourself to new people was always awkward. More so when you had a naked elf in a car with you and your car decided to park itself in front of a group of strangers. She tried to open the door to ask for help, but Abax refused.

He revved his engine twice and a woman who was oddly familiar came to the driver's side window.

"Ander? What are you doing?"

Apparently Abax's form was well known around here. The car rolled the window down halfway.

"Hello. My name is Fiona. Ander has been stabbed, could we get some help?"

The engine revved.

"And some clothing?"

The woman moved away and spoke in rapid succession to a series of bystanders. A coat was immediately offered that the woman quickly passed through the window for Fiona. The second she was covered the doors sprang open. Three

men assisted Ander out the door with no care for his modesty. Apparently Abax was concerned on her behalf alone.

"You may not remember me. I am Artemis Whynot of the Silverwood Society." The features of the woman suddenly took on a most familiar form.

"Hiya, Arty. Where are they taking him?" She watched Abax change back into the dark unicorn.

"To the infirmary. Would you care to accompany him?"

"No. I would like a shower and some additional clothing, if you could find some. And perhaps some shoes?"

Artemis's gaze fell to Fiona's feet and she blanched. "As soon as you get out of the infirmary." She turned to one of the gathered men. "Kian, please carry the Lady Fiona to the infirmary. She has damaged her legs."

The man took two steps toward her and was blocked by Abax's marble horn.

Abax knelt for Fiona to mount him, so she did, only then noticing the blood spotting her legs and marking the pavement where she had stood. She suddenly felt lightheaded.

"Uh, all right. Abax, please take her to the infirmary. They will be able to assist her. Thank you." Artemis was bemused. Her face shifted between surprised and amused over and over.

It made Fiona dizzy.

Abax regained his feet and paced toward the building where Ander had so recently been transported to. Fiona was expecting to dismount at the front door, but that was not the plan the unicorn had in mind. He paced through the electronic sensors and the doors opened for him.

The staff at the infirmary were remarkably unfazed by the unicorn and rider pacing through their halls. When the admitting clerk asked her the infamous, "Can I help you?"

She shrugged at him. "I think he is looking for Ander."

"Ah, Reman? Please bring them to Ander's room." The attendant nodded with a slight grin. "Ander is having his wound cleaned and stitched. He will be uncomfortable, but awake."

"Thank you."

"You are welcome. Welcome to Silverwood." The clerk nodded politely and went back to his work.

"This way, please."

Reman led them through a maze of corridors and some of the things Fiona saw through the open doors amazed her. The inhabitants of this town were not all human, or elves. No wonder the doors fit the unicorn.

"Here he is. There are three beds in this room. Someone will be here to tend to your legs shortly." He nodded and carefully backed away.

Her steed pushed his way into the room

where his regular rider was being attended to. The steady clip clop of his hooves reverberated in the room as he walked up to one of the unoccupied beds nearest to Ander and stood still as attendants held the bed for her to dismount. She settled in the bed and Abax moved off to one side, standing sentry.

Ander had a flock of attendants of his own, stitches were being carefully applied to the torn and cleaned flesh of his back. He had his head turned toward her, "Fiona, were you injured?"

"Not by Baenwik. It happened later."

"They will take care of you here. Did Abax bring you in?"

"Yes."

"Ah. You found him then. Good. He doesn't usually take to strangers. Just ease up to him and he will be fine."

"I will do that. Get some rest."

"Okay. You are at Silverwood. You are safe now." He closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep as they finished bandaging him up.

The assistants turned to her as one, and she finally came to the stunning conclusion that, with the exception of Artemis, everyone she had seen here was male.

"You are Fiona Matthews?"

"I am."

"I am doctor Mythos. Welcome to Silverwood. You have injured your legs?"

“Yes, apparently while running for my life through the woods, I wasn’t careful about where I stepped.” She was still securely wrapped in the jacket when one of the attendants offered her a hospital gown. It wrapped securely around her instead of tying in the back. A much better design than those used by most hospitals.

They removed the jacket from the bed and started to treat her legs. Pain flashed every time they swabbed and cleaned her gashes and scratches. When they brought out two basins and had her soak her feet, she knew a pedicure was not the next step. She squeaked in panic as the pain radiated out from her soles.

Abax took a step forward.

Her attendants looked warily at the unicorn and, when she turned her head, Fiona knew why. Red flame flared from where the blue white eyes had been. He was upset.

Dr. Mythos looked to Fiona for help. “Can you calm him?”

“I can try.” She held out her hand to the unicorn and tried to radiate a look of serenity. “Abax. This is painful, but I have to have it done to get better. You will have to remain calm and quiet if you stay here. All right?”

He shook his head, flailing the horn around.

“Calm and quiet, or get out.” Her voice was stern and she crossed her arms over her breasts.

Abax nodded and his eyes returned to blue.

He relaxed his stance and shifted to a less threatening position.

Fiona nodded in approval and he tossed his head. "He seems fine now. I promise not to look like I am in pain. Even when I am."

The doctor nodded in approval and continued to supervise the cleaning of her feet. "Miss Matthews, I hate to say that you have quite a bit of damage to your feet. The surface that you ran across created lacerations that may have caused permanent damage to the nerves." He was matter of fact, but it was still hard to hear.

"I thought so, when I felt the damage and didn't feel the pain."

He nodded wisely, approving her acceptance. "There are a few treatment options that we can engage in once we have an idea of what the damage actually is."

"Fair enough." Although she was a little scared of what the actual damage would be, she didn't regret the manner in which she had gotten it. If she hadn't gotten Abax, Ander might not have made it. And without him, her life would be missing something.

Blinking, she analyzed that sentiment while flecks of debris were removed from feet that were now blissfully numb. Mythos had given her shots of anaesthetic while she had been talking to Abax. She had been relieved when she felt the shooting pain, but she had been unable to react. The cool

relief that took over her body from the knees down made her tear up with gratitude. "How is Ander doing?"

"He was very close to the edge, but you got him here in time. You are to be commended on your actions. Very few women would have been able to release a steed, let alone ride him without his rider nearby."

"Ander was nearby."

"Not awake and conscious. That is what the rider-steed bond needs. Without him awake and aware, he could not smooth the introduction of you to his beast."

Fiona refrained from mentioning that she had already met his beast. It fit within her perfectly. Her calm thoughts must have gotten through to Abax, because now he was an enormous dog.

"Huh. I didn't know he did that. Most steeds won't change shape unless requested." Mythos was surprised.

"He has done nothing but shift forms since I met him."

"That is unusual. But then, you are an usual mate. Ander was lucky to find you."

"Ander didn't find me. I was kidnapped." And with that sentence, everyone in the room rose in shock.

Chapter 10

Artemis strode through the door, the medical attendants cleared a path for her, “What did I hear? That you were kidnapped?”

This was a little confusing for Fiona. How did they think that she had gotten the lacerations on her legs and feet? Skipping merrily along? “How do you think that I had gotten all these cuts? Ander and I were running from Baenwik and I got Abax to help carry him back here.”

“Who is Baenwik?” Her confusion was evident. Her facial features flitted from one aspect to another. Not expression, actual faces.

“He is one of the Lios Alfar. He kidnapped a small child so that I would join the search and he had already clubbed Ander and shackled him to a wall. I was next.” With her feet wrapped in puffy white bandages and pain free, Fiona was heading into sleepy land.

“One of the Lios kidnapped you and tried to kill Ander?”

Fury and a type of disgust that Fiona couldn't

figure out swam across Artemis's features. "Yes. And kidnapped a human child, but he said he let her go. I really hope that he did." She couldn't keep her eyes open any longer. She felt herself drifting off.

Artemis was giving more orders in an authoritative tone. Someone named Henry was supposed to check on something. It was the last thing that she heard before she fell asleep.

* * * *

There was a warm weight on her chest. It had a soothing scent that she couldn't place. Her lids moved sluggishly open and she was facing a large dog with glowing blue eyes. "Hiya, Abax. Were you with me all day?" The tail wagging was all she needed. She gave him a hug and scratched him behind his ears.

"He was indeed. He was more faithful to you than he has been to me." Ander's voice was stronger and he was in his bed, propped up on pillows. "Not that I blame him. I would be resting my head on your chest if I could get over there."

"How are you feeling?" She turned her head to talk to him, but left her torso flat on the bed with the dog. He was happy, so she was happy.

"Better. I don't remember much of what happened after the attack in the cave." He flexed his arms and rotated his shoulders while wincing.

"What did happen?"

"You were injured, we made a run for it and I found Abax in the woods. He turned into a car and drove us back here. They brought you here and the rest is history."

"That doesn't explain how your feet were injured."

"I had to run through the woods a bit."

"Then why were my feet not injured?"

"You were incapacitated. I left you outside the caves, leaning against a tree, and I ran to get Abax."

"Why didn't I come with you?"

"Ander, you were bleeding to death, okay? There was no way I could have dragged you through the woods. And when I got your horsy, he was surrounded by brambles and I had to pull them out of the way. I used my feet." She was getting defensive now.

He closed his eyes and leaned back against the pillows. "I failed you as a protector."

She made her voice as sharp as she could. "No! You are alive, I am alive and we are safe. You did a great job as a protector." Abax growled and she soothed him with a stroke. "You as well, Abax. We would still be in the forest if not for you."

He grunted and settled as she stroked him behind the ears.

* * * *

"Lady, you have bewitched my steed." Ander was calmer now and looked over at his fearless steed of the Wild Hunt as she scratched his ears and ran her hands over the lithe body. He felt both foolish and jealous. After a few minutes she tired again and fell asleep. Abax remained with her and watched carefully as attendants came in to change the dressings on her feet.

Fiona was his match in every way. So it was logical for Abax to give his loyalty and affection to her. But nestling with her was a little extreme. What power did she have to take the attention of his steed from him?

He mulled the question over as they attended to the damage that had been done to her legs. Elven healing would have to be employed, or she would not be able to move painlessly again. Mythos was hovering over her feet now, magic flowing into her wounded tissues. She would never know how her feet had been healed, she would just assume that it had been the rapid medical care she had received. It was the way they had always dealt with humans.

Fiona's magic was finding and therein lay the secret of Abax's loyalties. Fiona was a hunter. She could find anything. And Abax was, first and foremost, a steed of the Wild Hunt. Ander almost laughed aloud as he figured it out.

The steed had given his loyalty to the best

hunter in the family. That was unmistakably Fiona. He would have to get used to being second best.

As long as she kept looking at him with trust in her eyes, he could manage.

Chapter 11

Waking up was a tricky thing. Fiona was still pinned to the bed, but a delicate wiggling of her feet had them feeling much better. The pain that had woken her several times in the night had faded.

It was her three visitors that had her befuddled. Well, four. Artemis was hanging back, near the door. A quick look to her right let her know Ander was gone, but Abax was still snuggled against her. He had shifted into a small cat, but his eyes were still the same.

"Fiona. We are so happy to see you again. It has been so long." The woman who came forward was familiar. "I am Westa Lucidine. Lucky. We met at camp. This is Valentine and you may remember Hannah?"

The familiarity came back to her in a rush. The girlish giggles, the late night tutorials on magic, given in complete and companionable silence. "Holy crap. How did you end up here?"

"The same way you did. We were stalked by

masters of the Wild Hunt. And we let them catch us. Well, all except Valentine. She was raised here." Lucky was taking up the bulk of the conversation, the other two were fluffing her pillows and checking on her bandages.

"You are able to leave the infirmary today, but because of your injuries, you won't be able to get around much for a few weeks. So, we decided to have an orientation meeting here today."

Valentine spoke, her voice like the light breath of bells, "As you may have noticed, Silverwood is full of elves and other magical creatures. All men."

"I did."

"They have volunteered to try and find mates among the humans, to bring more magic into the modern age. They came through a few years ago to acclimate themselves to modern times and, when the bearers of the new magic gained complete control over their talents, they left to court them."

"That would be us then. The girls from that year at Camp Silverwood."

"Yep."

"So, Artemis is one of them?"

"Yep."

"So, what is the grand plan here then? I already have my match."

"Why it is to help find matches for those who want regular women. We cannot simply let them run into the local population to beguile the local

women away from their men. They deserve women who are as exceptional as they are. That is what we are here for. Matchmaking."

"You have to be joking."

"I am not. Your talent is location. Lucky is luck, Hannah is out of body transport, and I am keyed toward love. The lasting kind, not the kind simply driven by lust." She paused and gave Fiona a long look. "Together we can find the women that will best suit the men, give them a description and tell them where to find them. It is cheating, but it is effective. We also need a lot of luck." She winked to Lucky and a rich laugh was the response.

"Henry had all the luck he needed."

"Henry had nerves of steel, Lucky." Artemis finally joined the conversation. "What this is all in aid of, Fiona, is that your talents will complete the group and make them more effective. If you are amenable, they will meet at your home and you can start going through the files of the men involved."

That last phrase threw her, "I don't have a home."

"Of course you do. Well, Ander does. Until you join formally with him, you will be his honoured guest."

"Like I have a choice." She was disgruntled. Being forced into close quarters with a man whose presence made her pulse beat in places she couldn't describe, didn't seem fair.

"Oh, you do. No man here can force his mate." Valentine took a deep breath before deciding to continue. "I was raped by one of the Lios when I was at my high school prom. They brought me here, castrated him and sent him back through the rift to Underhill. My mate was upset and he has not made a move on me in all the years I have been here. We live together, but until I am ready, he will do nothing."

Artemis chimed in, "The community at large supports Valentine and her right to choose when and if she will take Mythos to her."

"Mythos? The doctor?"

"The healer, yes."

"He has really gentle hands."

"I know. It was he who had to treat me after the Lios had savaged me." Valentine was sad, it was obvious. "I don't think it's an image he has ever forgotten."

No, it wouldn't be. How could a man try and seduce a woman that had been brutalized?

"I hear that the Lios are going to lose another member."

"Ah, has someone found Baenwik then?" The nasty pretty boy had been rather banged up when she last saw him.

"Indeed. He had nowhere to go. His own steed rejected his actions when he kidnapped the child. She is back with her family by the way. And she has a new pony." Lucky was smirking. It was

obviously extreme for a steed to reject a rider, and to choose a human girl over it was insulting to the elf involved.

"Where is he then?"

"My fiancé, Henry went to pick him up. With Hannah's Simon. He didn't have much of a chance." Pride in their men shone through. As well as a large dose of amusement. Apparently, these boys could play rough.

She flashed back to the fistfight between Ander and Baenwik. Yeah, these boys played rough.

Speak of the devil. Ander filled the doorway and stopped abruptly upon seeing the room full of women, "Ladies. I bid you good day." His tone was formal, the tone of one who had said these words every day for centuries.

Centuries? Where did that come from.

"Fiona. I see you have Abax firmly in your thrall. How are you feeling?"

Abax stretched and shifted back into his dog form.

The girls jumped back. "That is a steed? In bed with you? Holy hells!" Valentine uttered these words.

The dog on the bed simply wagged his tail.

Mythos approached with a wheelchair and the dog growled at it. "Abax, she cannot walk out of the infirmary. Her feet are too tender."

Fiona knew what he would do, "Ladies, you

had best get away from the bed. My ride is here." She spoke not a moment too soon. The dog jumped from the bed and the unicorn was standing next to her.

Ander walked toward the bed and the steed stood aside. "Fiona, it's time to go." He lifted her carefully from the bed and settled her on Abax's back, sideways to spare her feet being knocked around.

The unicorn immediately began a stately pace out the door and down the hallway, the steady clack of his hooves rang on the tile.

Ander walked in front of them and stepped into the sun an instant before they did. As soon as they had made their way into the bright light of the new day, he leapt gracefully to Abax's back behind her. He lifted her onto his lap and off they went.

The town of Silverwood was well organized, the central buildings—library, infirmary, town hall—were tucked into the middle of the town and the branches of houses ran from this central hub. Silverwood was a wheel and Ander lived on one of the spokes.

His home was a well-tended Victorian with a large garage and a stable in the yard out back. He was on about three acres of land and the spring in Abax's feet told of his happiness to be home.

He walked right up to the steps and let them off.

Ander carefully dismounted with her in his arms.

It was when he was settling her on the couch with her feet propped on a footstool, she remembered the gash on his back. "Ander! What are you doing carrying me around? You must have opened your shoulder."

"No. I am nearly healed. Mythos is a wonderful healer."

She watched him disappear into the kitchen and the noises of running water and a clatter of dishes let her know what he was doing. It was lunchtime. He was cooking.

Oh, lord. A drool-worthy guy who could fight, make love, believed in foreplay without penetration, and could cook. She was in trouble. Again.

Chapter 12

Ander's guestroom was well appointed, it had every amenity. And it was in the tower nearest the stable. She could watch Abax graze and frolic with some of the other steeds all she wished. The others all kept to pure horse forms, not the flashy unicorn of her buddy. He had a certain style that just made her smile.

She had noted when she was in the living room that there were scars from dog claws on the hardwood. Apparently he was a frequent visitor for Ander as well. For now, the steed was frolicking amongst his own kind and regaling them with whatever they talked about. If they talked at all.

"How are you doing this morning, stir crazy yet?"

Ander was coming up the stairs with a tray and she could hear footsteps behind him, light and feminine. Westa, Valentine and Hannah were all with him and took up chairs in her sitting room.

"The ladies have brought some files for you to

peruse. So, time to start you new job."

He deposited the tea tray in front of her, then leaned in to kiss her lightly on the lips. Her feet were still bandaged, but Mythos was scheduled for a visit this afternoon.

"Behave and play nice with the other ladies."

She made a face at him and waved him off. "Good afternoon. Time to earn my keep. Could one of you pour me some tea?"

Westa picked up the pot. "Of course. It is nice to see that you and Ander are still getting along."

"I don't have much of a choice. He pretty well has to deliver me to anywhere I want to go. I can't even make it to the ladies room without him knowing and picking me up, then reading me the riot act."

"Injuries of the feet are always difficult." Val spoke with the wisdom of someone who lived with a physician.

"Tell me about it. So, ladies. What would you like me to do?"

They broke it down. With Westa's luck and Valentine's ability to sense a match, they had found matches for several of the males. What Fiona needed to do was to take the information they gathered and to find the physical location of the woman in question. Once that was done, Hannah would take over and get all the small details of her life, like where she lived and what she did for a living.

“Okay. Let me have the first file.” They handed her a non-descript file of plain kraft brown. Inside however, it was nothing more than magical. Myron Northiwyk was an elf with some ogre heritage, looking for a wife in the Pacific Northwest. He wanted some freedom to roam and woman who enjoyed the outdoors. A generous spirit would be good, as well as acceptance from the human that he mated with.

Valentine and Westa had come up with his match. Nora Wyngate. She was smart, adventurous, had a loving heart and family in the northwest. She loved tall men with accents and broad shoulders.

A pen was suddenly in Fiona’s hand. Nora Wyngate. She ran her fingers over the name and suddenly her mind was blurring through pathways she could not even imagine. She did not see the woman, she just saw her location. It was how her talent worked. “I think I have it.” She looked down and was surprised to see the street address, city and state listed on the paper, beneath the name in a separate pen colour. The colour of the pen in her hand.

“That was fantastic Fiona! Perfect.”

“I will call it perfect when I find out if she is truly the one for him.” She handed the folder to Hannah who was holding her hand out for it.

“My turn.” Her hand held a pencil and she closed her eyes as she ran her fingers over the

writings of the other ladies. For long moments she was motionless, then began to draw. A woman with plain but dependable features was taking shape, she had a twinkle in her eye and the start of a smile on the edge of her mouth. With the face smiling, she went from plain to lovely.

Hannah documented addresses beneath the picture. Places of business, places of amusement. In another ten minutes, and one more cup of tea for Fiona, Hannah was back in her body and looking at her handy work. "She's pretty. If he can make his case, he will be one lucky ogre. Fiona. Your work was exact. Not only was the address correct, but the path you took was left open enough for me to get through. Nice one."

"You followed my pathway? Cool. Shall we do another?"

The ladies grinned at her. "It is addictive isn't it?"

"It is. Let's do some matchmaking." She rubbed her hands together. Until she was back on her feet, this was as good as it got.

* * * *

"Well, Fiona. Your feet are almost healed." Mythos was peeling her bandages off and, if she weren't head over heels for another elf, he would have made her heart swell ever so slightly. He was adorable. Soft golden curls, mocha skin and tender

green eyes, the colour of leaves. He could have stepped out of a tree and put on some clothing. She hadn't seen his file, but Fiona suspected that was the closest anyone would come to his origin. "That is fantastic. When can I start walking? Today?"

"You will have to be careful and confine your walking to the home for three more days, but if you rest every two hours and don't stay on your feet if they start to hurt, you should be fine." He was washing his hands in a basin and the assistant he had brought with him took the shredded bandages with him. A nod from her healer and she was alone.

She bent her knees and took a look at her very pink feet. Red stripes ran in random patterns across them, but the skin was intact and there were no more open wounds on either her feet or her calves. She was just in the rather involved process of standing when Ander came in through the door to the sitting room.

"So, he has given you leave to wander around and toughen your feet up?"

"He has indeed. Yippee. I am trying to decide where to go first. The living room or the kitchen?"

"How about the master bedroom?"

There was a heat in Ander's eyes that woke and answering flame low in her belly. "Um. I haven't been in there yet. It might be a good place to start the tour." She walked slowly and carefully

toward the door and after that the stairs.

Ander walked with her the whole way.

The smooth wood under her feet was almost warm, it had absorbed the heat from the earlier sun and was radiating it gently into the bottom of her soles. She had expected Ander to try and carry her off, but he simply paced next to her, occasionally extending his arm to her so she could balance.

His bedroom was the final goal. She had no idea of where she wanted to go after that, but she wanted to see his room. It was light and airy. Oak and cream. The surprising touches were a blue and violet splashed pillow on his bed and a comforter in matching colours folded at the foot of the four-poster.

She hobbled to the side of his bed and asked, "May I sit?"

"Of course. Are your feet sore?"

"A little. More of a throb than a pain."

"I am having that problem myself."

"What?"

He ran a hand across his obvious erection behind its denim prison. "More of a throb than a pain."

"Ah." With her hands braced behind her, she hopped up into his bed. It was as if she had given him some signal, because he gripped her ankles and rotated her so that her head was on the pillow. He bounced into bed next to her, still fully

clothed.

"Do you like it?"

"What? The bed. Yes. It is very nice."

"No, the house."

"Of course I do. I love living in a turret." Her smile was genuine.

"I had hoped that would be the case. When we were given styles to choose from, we had to guess at what the ladies would like."

"I like your house." She used her hands to cup his face and drew him down for her kiss. "I like you. And I want to try to feel you in me, on me and around me without our lives being at stake."

His eyes flared with heat, "I have been imagining you in a bed. Naked, dressed in nothing but your hair and my kisses."

"That sounds good. Go with that." He was already undoing her shirt and unsnapping her trousers. "Will you be naked as well?"

"Eventually. I have to pace myself or I will explode."

"What a shame. How long would it be before you could go again?"

"A quarter of an hour or so."

"Well then. By all means, pace yourself." He was delicately tracing the tips of her breasts with his fingers, learning her body as the experience in the cave had not let him do. She closed her eyes and let one sensation after another wash over her.

His lips at her breasts, trailing up her neck,

while his fingers learned her crevices and folds along with the curves of her hips and thighs. She didn't lift a finger. This time he was going to do all the work. Her body began to rise and fall with the strokes of his fingers and, all too soon, she was crying out her completion.

So, he had to start again.

This time. His clothes came off before he started and every inch of her body was stroked and caressed in its turn, building the recently banked fires of arousal far more quickly than she imagined possible.

When she was once more arching against his hands, he moved over her. And waited. And waited. Finally, she opened her eyes and met his dark gaze with all seriousness as he drove inside of her with short thrusts that allowed her body to adjust more rapidly. As soon as she closed her eyes, he stopped.

It was a pattern that he followed in the next hour. Every time she closed her eyes. He stopped. Mid thrust, while turning her on her side, but twisting her so he could watch her eyes, he would stop.

The only exception was while she was in the grip of her orgasms, he would continue then. She was exhausted and drained, but he was glowing. As he began his final flurry of thrusts, she almost sobbed with relief. When he came and his own eyes rolled back as he arched and spent within

her, she felt like cheering. Sometimes, too much was more than enough.

* * * *

She couldn't sleep. He was still bringing a new meaning to afterglow.

Ander gripped her shoulder and turned her toward him. "Fiona Matthews, will you marry me?"

Exhausted, delighted, in love and still practical, "If I say yes, will you want to make love right away again?"

"Probably."

He nudged her when she closed her eyes.

"Well?"

"I'll tell you in the morning. After tea, or perhaps on a walk to city hall. I don't want you to get over stimulated." His delighted laughter made her smile. Now she could sleep. And, as she started drifting off, she felt him slip a ring onto her finger. Just before sleep claimed her, she heard his whisper soft at her ear.

"Thank you for finding me, Fiona."

About the Author

Viola Grace was born in Manitoba, Canada where she still resides today. She really likes it there. Her hobbies have included cross-stitch, needlepoint, quilting, costuming, cake decorating, baking, cooking, metalwork, beading, sculpting, painting, doll making, henna tattoos, chain maille, and a few others that have been forgotten.

Her writing actively pursues the Happily Ever After that so rarely occurs in nature. A brilliant mind, with a twisted sense of humor.

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