

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



LOVE ME
Strong
RENEE FIELD

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Love Me Strong

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Edited by Briana St. James

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LOVE ME STRONG

Renee Field

Chapter One

Pain sliced deeply across Nylu's stomach, causing her knees to buckle. She stifled the groan. Her fingers gripped the damp, rotting leaves of the Dark Forest's muddy ground, desperate for support. She found none.

She was on the border of the Dark Forest and All Saints Lake. Her goal—shelter, before the Maida warrior women discovered her and before the heavens opened with their threatening downpour. The thickening trees, dense and foreboding, caused alarm to skitter down her spine, mingling with another sharp cramp. The Dark Forest conjured up every scary story she'd been told as a child. It was forbidden territory. It was dangerous. It was her only hope.

Nylu crawled across the manicured lawn on her knees. The grass was the only thing separating Maida lands from those of the Dark Forest. Casting another glance at the perfectly formed shrubs and well maintained buildings that reflected Maida society, her heart sank with the realization that her only hope was the wilds of the forest. All Saints Lake sat to her right, but swimming across that terrified her even more than the dense brush of the forest.

A third cramp rippled across her enlarged stomach, causing her breath to be sucked from her. She knew without any doubt that the cramps had turned into deadly contractions. Finally managing to crawl into the forbidden forest, she sank beneath the thick, prickly hedge, her eyes closed in searing pain as she fought to assert some control over her body's desire to give birth to her son right there in the mud.

After a few minutes the all-encompassing pain dissipated. She picked up her pace, one hand holding her stomach, the other pushing a thick thatch of brambles out of her way. Blood dripped from her arms and face, but she ignored the deep scratches. In fact, a part of her welcomed the scrapes—it kept her focused and awake.

For the past week she had managed to avoid the Maida warriors because she had traveled along the edge of the Dark Forest at night. Terrified she'd be discovered and equally alarmed at the strange sounds that came to life in the dark, she was determined. *No one is going to take my son from me!*

That thought sobered her. A large thorn sliced her right arm. Holding the bush high above her head she shuffled underneath it, still managing to move forward in her awkward state. An open patch devoid of brush was ahead of her and she could see a large mountain with a small opening.

Thank you. Silently, Nylu prayed the Saints were listening to her today. She stilled herself. She didn't hear any Maida warriors but she knew enough to be cautious. Just as a fourth contraction ripped hot and heavy through her body the heavens opened and rain pelted down. Within seconds she was soaked to the bone. Worse, she was bleeding. She felt the sticky warm substance run from her clenching womb down out of her vagina onto her scratched legs. Fear jumped to life within her. For one moment she considered turning back to Maida lands. Then she thought better.

The Saints would have their way, one way or another, but she would fight until her last breath for the freedom her boy-child deserved. The guilt of how he came to be still weighed heavily on her soul.

Mustering her courage, she crawled up and over the largest boulder. Standing on her tiptoes with a stream of now pink blood flowing down her legs she reached for the second rock only to twist her ankle in the process, falling sideways to the ground. The full force of the contraction racked her body. She bit down hard on her hand to halt the scream threatening to spew unhindered from her.

To give birth now, with the Maida warrior women so close, would mean a life of servitude for her son, if he somehow managed to live through the birth. There was a part of her that bravely acknowledged she deserved whatever fate the Saints threw at her because she had mindlessly taken the life of one man to spare her own. That was the joy of the Maida fertility curse. When a Maida woman became fertile she had to have

sex with a fertile man or she'd go insane. *Why did I ever wish for my cycle to come?* Nylu vividly recalled the physical ache her body had undergone...the intense craving for sex that had overwhelmed her. The euphoric rush she'd experienced when the physical joining had happened with her chosen male would never leave her. Nor would what had happened next. Watching the man rapidly deteriorate before her eyes was something she'd have to live with for the rest of her days.

Celt swore under his breath. Leading the silent band of rogue male warriors along the embankment between the Dark Forest and All Saints Lake, he prayed none of them noticed the woman lying helplessly to their left. They didn't have time to stop or help...not that he thought of that at all.

Their goal today was food. It was that simple. To get food they had to haul the nets they had cast in the dark last night from the lake. Fishing from the lake on any day was perilous, but with two groups of Maida warrior women patrolling the area, it was now treacherous.

"Hey, stop, Celt. There's a woman hurt over there."

Celt attempted to ignore Dirk's whispered words. Before he could order his second-in-command to continue on, Dirk walked over and knelt next to the woman. Celt shook his head. Didn't Dirk know women of all sorts were trouble—plain and simple?

"Come here, Celt, she's really hurt."

Dirk motioned him over. The last thing Celt wanted to do was see the woman. "Leave her. We don't have time for her." He forced himself to continue moving.

Dirk stood and glared at him. "She's about to give birth and things don't look good."

Celt stopped and turned to look at his buddy. He sighed. He knew Dirk's stance. Hands on his hips, chin notched up with eyes glaring with fury at him. Dirk was not going to leave the woman. Stomping over, Celt assessed her with one glance.

She was young, only about twenty cycles, and she was clamping her legs together in a futile attempt to stop her body from giving birth. *Stupid woman.* She was soaked and chilled, and blood oozed out of her vagina. *Not good was an understatement.* Her hair was plastered to her head from the rain and her face and arms were scratched to pieces from the thorny brambles.

"Please don't let them get me."

Her voice surprised him. It was steady, clear and there was a musical cadence to it that soothed him. Celt watched as a contraction seized her. More blood seeped from her. Even with the increased blood flow she obviously felt running down her legs, she stifled her scream, digging her fingers into her hands. She had courage. He liked that.

"Save him."

She stared straight at him, panting the words out the minute the contraction lessened.

Still standing, hoping his height would make her fear him, Celt asked, "Why are you here?"

"What, do you plan on interrogating her now or should I simply slit her throat to put her out of her misery? By the blessed Saints, Celt, she's bleeding to death. We need to do something now, not later, if she's going to stand a chance and you know that." Dirk snapped the words at him and his eyes darted daggers at Celt.

Celt clamped his lips tightly together before he told his second-in-command what he really thought. "We can't help her." He turned his back to the woman.

"Bastard! When did you become one? Last time I looked we took care of our own and this here woman just said she's giving birth to one, in case you missed that part. Is that why you're running?" Dirk turned his attention back to the woman.

Celt wished he could clamp his ears shut. They didn't have time for this. A woman, no matter what, was a distraction. Especially a helpless one who was bleeding. Between contractions Celt heard what he dreaded. The woman found out a week ago she was

carrying a boy. After learning the boy would be taken from her the minute he was born, she had braved the unknown, vowing to save him or die trying.

"Please, I'm begging you, try to save him." Her breath came in hard and fast pants as she fought the contractions that were preparing her body to push.

Celt growled low in his throat, already wishing he had more gumption and could simply walk away. "I'm not making any promises."

"That's good enough for me," said Dirk. "Help me get her to that cave up there."

Celt rolled his eyes to the heavens looking for support. As usual he found none. "Fine. Campbell, MacLeod, Foster and Byron...you four bring the nets in before we all catch our death from this freezing rain. Take whatever you catch back to camp. You, Kelvin, go back to camp now and bring me the large pot and fill it with fresh water and bring back any material you find that's clean. Satisfied, Dirk?"

Celt issued the commands while kneeling and reaching down to help move the woman, who was sticky and wet from the rain and her own blood. Dirk had the grace to nod and not say anything else. Celt shook off his buddy's offer to carry the woman. She was surprisingly tiny. In fact, she looked to be all belly.

"Thank you." Her almond-shaped hazel eyes stared at him in trust and wonder.

"Don't thank me yet." He maneuvered them both up to the cave's entrance. "You're bleeding and that's not a good sign. I might not be able to save the baby." *Or you.* Celt kept that thought to himself.

"All I wanted was his freedom." She fisted a hand into her mouth to stop a scream while her body tensed.

"Freedom is a woman's luxury. In case you haven't noticed it's not a notion most Maida men get to experience."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't. Save your strength. You're going to need it." He wiped the long wet strands of her hair off her face. Scrambling into the cave, he settled her down onto the cold hard

ground, wishing he could conjure up the tools he was afraid he might need. It was then Celt said a silent prayer to the Forest Guardians asking for their help, thankful Dirk had left to help bring back supplies. The last thing he needed to explain to his second-in-command was why he was on his hands and knees, bowing his head to the ground while mumbling words in a language that had come to him months ago. Without a doubt he knew Dirk would think he had succumbed to a forest sickness that made him lose his mind. *If only it was that simple.*

Celt knew that with the night fast approaching, he was going to need special privilege. The only way to do that was to appease the blasted Forest Guardians, who he'd come to silently fear and respect. Five cycles ago he had learned the hard way that the Guardians were not to be toyed with. Tonight he wasn't about to take any chances.

"What's your identification number?" Her lyrical voice now sounded weak and strained.

Celt's entire body tensed. *Identification number?* He fought not to release her hand as anger mounted to the surface. "I am not a number. I am a man. You may call me Celt." He gnashed his teeth together.

She nodded, a wan smile flitting across her weary face a second before she went unconscious. The flow of blood turned dark cherry red and ran unhindered out of her womb. Death loomed large and thick in the small cave, causing Celt to shiver. On his knees, head bowed, he started praying for the woman's life, surprised at himself that he actually did care. Women after all were the bane of his existence. All his life they treated him like a slave, yet here he was begging the Forest Guardians to spare this young woman's life. The irony of it was not lost on Celt.

Chapter Two

Eight months had passed since that eventful day and slowly Nylu had grown into a routine with the Maida rogue male warriors. While still not fully accepted because she was a woman, she did try her best to help out with chores and all the men liked her cooking. Still though, the raw memory of giving birth took her breath away. The babe, her boy-child, had died. Nylu had tried her best. *At least he died free.* She clutched at that thought just like she looked to Celt and Dirk for support. Both had saved her when they could have let her die, alone, with only the dark of the forest as her witness.

The smell of cinnamon wafted through the encampment. Nylu turned the flat *b'anach* over on the makeshift pan. She was making *b'anach*, a special treat the men loved. It was simple but there was nothing easy about getting the supplies to make it. Ground *whila*, *gayla* eggs, cinnamon and *topa*. The eggs and cinnamon were easy enough since the camp was home to a dozen *gaylas* and a large cinnamon tree stood within the center of the clearing. Securing *whila* was a dangerous job. She had begged Celt not to bother with it. Chancing his life wasn't worth a meal.

Out of the corner of her eye, Nylu watched the ruggedly handsome and fun-loving warrior called Dirk walk toward her. Dirk, like most of the rogue men, chose to go shirtless when the weather permitted. He was a good head taller than she. Broad of shoulders, he had equally muscular legs encased in black breeches. His long blond hair was tied back with a leather thong and his sky-blue eyes were always merry. He was the charmer of the group.

Nylu turned her attention back to the *b'anach*, noting it was getting harder and harder to ignore the effect the males had on her. She flipped the fragrant *b'anach* over so she could sprinkle more cinnamon on the top, praying her perked nipples would flatten just like the *b'anach* before Dirk got closer.

"Here, let me help."

Dirk crouched to his knees to observe her. As usual his thigh brushed hers, the contact zinging through her nerve endings with an intensity that caused her breath to hitch.

"You okay?"

"Yeah. Do you want me to teach you how to make these?"

Nylu asked that because Dirk thoroughly enjoyed her cooking lessons. He gave her thigh a light squeeze and looked into her eyes.

"You bet."

Nylu nodded as her eyes tracked the man now walking into camp with a large sack of the ground *whila* over his shoulder. The man who now haunted her dreams. The leader of the rogue band of men who made her palms sweaty and her heart race with erotic desires she never wanted to taste again.

He was the tallest of the men. She knew her head would come to rest at his breastbone. He always kept his shoulder-length dark blond hair tied back. Like all the men he was shirtless. With the sun peeking throughout the large branches she could make out his muscled arms, back and washboard stomach. His tanned skin gleamed like flecks of copper. Tight black breeches framed his ass and strong legs gave way to a long torso with lean hips.

Celt was exactly how she pictured an ancient warrior. He even sported facial hair—something unheard of for Maida men. None of the other men in the group did, and his light-brown beard separated him from the group. It also intrigued her. Countless days and nights Nylu had wondered what his whiskers would feel like on her fingertips and, worse, on her skin. But Celt made it plain as day she was not welcome amongst his group of men. He was fierce and gruff when it came to her but there was a soft, protective side of him.

She watched as his forest green eyes zoomed in on her and Dirk. He smiled at Dirk and walked over to join them.

"Took you long enough. We were about to eat all of these ourselves," said Dirk, giving Nylu a playful wink.

"You were, were you?" His brown eyebrows rose slightly as his green eyes gazed at her. Nylu realized then he was flirting with her. Her face instantly heated. Her palms grew sweaty, her heart rate accelerated and her panties creamed with desire. Swallowing the lump that formed in her throat, she turned her attention back to the meal.

Dirk rose from his crouch. "Celt, you made Nylu burn the *b'anach*. That's yours by the way."

"Think again, my friend."

"Oh, I'm not thinking, I'm telling."

"Stop teasing him, Dirk. Thanks for the *whila*, I'll make another batch." Nylu watched Celt gently deposit the sack next to what amounted to her makeshift kitchen area.

"It's all right, Nylu...don't go to any trouble on my account."

"It's no trouble. I want to. After all, you did just risk your life for this meal." She flashed a brave smile at him, meeting his eyes, taking the time to let him see the fire in them.

He smiled but Nylu sensed his hesitation, like he was purposefully being careful with his reaction to her. Part of Celt was a total mystery to her. Months ago she gave up asking him how he saved her. He didn't want to talk about it. She understood that only too well, but still she sensed he didn't want to discuss it for entirely different reasons than she wanted. He had tried to save the babe, she knew that. She also knew she'd had a fever for weeks. Celt hadn't given up on her, though. And it was because of him that she was alive today.

Once she had the strength he took her to the small grave they had dug for her child. She had been touched by their kindness. Nylu often visited the small grave with the handmade wooden cross, seeking comfort. Sometimes she found it, while other times

sorrow racked her. Dirk would often come with her, but never Celt. Nylu wondered about that, but she wasn't about to press Celt. He wasn't a man who liked to be pushed. He was his own boss and he had to be in order to keep these men alive and free. And freedom for them meant life. These men would rather die than ever be someone's domestic laborer again. It was a life she had fought for in vain, for the babe who had come too early.

Nylu discovered daily how much each of the men wanted to learn new things. Take for instance Dirk asking her to teach him how to make *b'anach*. They all wanted to be self-sufficient. They all wanted to keep their freedom. They, like her, would fight for it.

Celt turned his attention to a few of the men who had returned from their latest fishing expedition. He always worried about the men when they went near All Saints Lake and he never allowed any of the men but him to take the night shift. Things came alive at night in the Dark Forest, which was now her home. Things none of them dared discuss. Always though, Nylu felt as if Celt kept watch over them...his protection a shield against the forest's creatures.

"I'll teach you how to make *b'anach* if you will teach me how to use that sword." Nylu swept her long hair off her forehead.

"It's not up to me." Dirk kept his husky voice low. "You need to ask him." He motioned to where Celt was.

Nylu sighed. "I've asked him and he always says no. What's he afraid of?"

Dirk smirked but there was an odd twinkle in his eye she didn't like. She knew Celt's second-in-command wouldn't say anything more. The men were loyal without a thought. They didn't completely trust her because she was a woman. Even though she understood that, it hurt.

Nylu realized she was a woman who couldn't stop thinking about Celt. How his long fingers would feel against her sensitive skin, how the rough scrape of his beard would brush against her breasts, how his weight would feel crushing his bare skin against hers. A moan of desire slipped from Nylu's lips.

"Thinking naughty thoughts, Nylu?"

Dirk's husky voice slid through her. She was not immune to him either, but it was most certainly Celt who made her instantly wet and feverish for the feel of his hands all over her skin.

"Don't you wish?" She teased him by flashing a grin at him as she crouched down next to the fire. Turning the last *b'anach* over she piled them onto a clean plank of wood, which acted as a makeshift serving tray for the group.

Dirk crouched behind her, his hand sliding intimately around her waist. He tucked himself up against her. She felt his heat on her back and closed her eyes to the passion he was evoking within her.

"What I wish, Nylu, is for a kiss."

Keeping her back to him, Nylu made sure to ignore him. She laughed, hoping the teasing note in her giggle would reassure them both they were simply flirting. There was nothing wrong with flirting. They weren't being serious. It was all playful.

"Dirk, what are you doing?"

Celt's gruff voice was like cold water on the simmering passion Nylu felt. Instead of letting Nylu go, Dirk drew her body closer to his, making his playful intentions much more serious.

"I'm asking Nylu for a kiss if you must know." His voice was slightly gruff but also teasing. That was the charm of Dirk. He always looked to defuse the tension with a joke when things got too explosive.

Nylu watched Celt cross his arms over his chest. His face looked strained with worry. "A kiss? Why?"

Dirk laughed and let her go. Watching the tight muscles in his belly caused a butterfly effect in hers.

“By the Saints, Celt, I don’t go telling you who to kiss. I want a kiss. Why? Have you forgotten what a kiss feels like? Maybe Nylu here will have to give you kissing lessons.”

Celt used his quiet, baritone voice as he stepped closer to them. “Kissing Nylu is not a good idea.”

“Why, because it wasn’t your idea?”

“No...just because, that’s all.”

Tension flared like a tangled knot through Nylu. Celt knew. He knew all about the passion, that simmering ache that fed her body...that tangible pulse she’d experienced – the dreaded Maida fertility curse.

Abruptly she stood up. “He’s right. Kissing isn’t a good idea.”

Dirk moved up with her, once again reclaiming her body. The feel of his rigid erection pressed into her backside and heated her with desire, causing her to bite the moan threatening to slip from her lips. The urge to lean her body further into what he was so blatantly letting her feel throbbed through her, making her head slightly dizzy with passion. He leaned into her small frame, ensuring she felt and heard his word.

“Celt’s just pissed because I asked to kiss you. We all know that’s exactly what he wants to do to you.”

That got her attention. “What?” She tilted her head slightly, a flare of goose bumps from Dirk’s husky voice rising to the surface of her skin.

“You do, don’t you, Celt. Just be a man and admit it. Not like it’s going to kill you.” Dirk nuzzled her neck, ensuring Celt witnessed the act. Hunger, fierce and alarming, speared through Nylu. She squirmed out of Dirk’s hold, needing space to breathe, needing room to gather her crazed thoughts.

Celt invaded her space, stepping in front of Dirk, asserting he was the man in control, the leader. Gone was Nylu’s precious space. Instead the scent of him, all male

with the combined fresh cedar woods, sailed into her senses. "Oh, I want to kiss her all right but there you're wrong, Dirk...it could kill you. Right, Nylu?"

"I-I-I..." She stumbled in a feeble attempt to tell him he was wrong. Instead she notched up her chin and looked over his shoulder, directly into Dirk's questioning gaze. "He's right, Dirk. Kissing me isn't a good idea, because it will kill you. Right? Isn't that what you wanted me to admit to? I said it. You satisfied?" This time she turned her bold and equally hurt look to Celt.

Dirk shouldered his way past Celt. Nylu stiffened when his arm snaked around her shoulders. "By the Saints, Celt, you can be such a prick sometimes. It was just a kiss, that's it. You've hurt her feelings. I was just playing around."

This time Celt leveled a penetrating stare at his second-in-command. "I'm not kidding. No kissing. You clear on that, Dirk?"

"Yeah, whatever you say, boss man. Come on, Nylu, let's eat and leave his majesty all to his gloomy self."

"Actually, Dirk, I've lost my appetite. You go ahead and eat. I need to take a walk and stretch my legs for a bit." Without waiting for their approval, she turned, fleeing into the forest while she could, careful to ensure neither of them heard her choke on the tears that threatened to fall. Crying wasn't going to help her. The only thing that would help her was something she had vowed never to do again in her life. Thankful the fertility curse was just starting to take hold of her body and mind, Nylu vowed this time she'd be the one in control. She'd make her own destiny. She accepted her own fate and if that meant dying then so be it, because never again would she take another man's life to save her skin.

Chapter Three

The increased Maida warrior patrols were making life difficult for his band of merry men. *Merry men my ass.* Celt fought against the injustice of their lives. They were forced to live in the woods like wild animals all because they were men—all because Maida women feared them. That he knew firsthand. While he could almost sympathize with the Supreme High Fertility Council's view of men, he didn't feel they should all pay for the mistakes of their forefathers.

Everyone had learned a lesson from the last Great War. In fact, the Maida race had almost been wiped out. *Talk about a harsh lesson.* It was because of the last Great War that women did not trust men today. More than a hundred cycles later, men, who had nothing to do with the war, were treated no better than animals. Maida women continued to view all males as being personally responsible for the near death of the planet, Alvaron.

For twenty-five cycles he had lived that life as a domestic aide. He woke when the alarm rang, he ate the food they delivered to his cell, he slept when forced to and he had learned what they wanted. That knowledge enabled him to save Nyly's life but not that of her son. That knowledge he held precious. But with knowledge came understanding.

He smirked as he fought to keep awake in the dead of night. It was his turn to patrol the edge of the Dark Forest and he had no intention of letting his band of men down. He forced another piece of the *estra's* bitter root into his mouth and chewed, allowing the juice to filter into his stomach. He'd end up with a slight bellyache in a few minutes but the plant's properties would keep him awake.

In five cycles of being forced to live in what he silently called no-man's-land, on the edge of the Dark Forest and close to All Saints Lake, learning the properties of the vegetation had become his own special task.

A mid-sized black *squawk* scurried down a large tree trunk. Stealthily Celt took the bow out of his leather backpack and drew an arrow tight against the taut line. With deadly precision he aimed and fired. The large furry rodent died instantly.

Celt approached his prey cautiously, well aware of the trees' powers. An arm's length away, the large tree that looked like it could almost touch the dark clouds moved. He caught the movement from the corner of his eye and stilled. A large root snaked around his feet but still he didn't move. Instead he bowed his head slightly, acknowledging the tree.

"A gift for you, my friend." As usual, Celt was thankful no one was with him. In fact, that was why he usually took the midnight to dawn patrol. The root slithered away from him and with lightning precision it grasped the fallen *squawk*, yanking it underground. He shivered, but remained standing with his head bowed in submission.

A large grumble from the tree was his only answer. Five cycles ago when he had escaped the Third Colony medical center because his Maida supervisor had discovered his secret, he had fled to the forest for protection. Being fertile was a secret he had maintained for ten cycles after learning what happened to the men chosen for the Selection ceremony.

He had been fifteen, a lanky gangly youth, forced to clean the floors and make up hospital beds. He had found a man hiding in a hospital closet shivering and ranting about being the chosen one, fucking a woman all night, and then the crazed man had started to foam at the mouth. Celt closed his eyes in shame, still recalling his actions that night. He had panicked, not wanting to believe the man. Fleeing the closet, he ran to his supervisor and watched as a team of women doctors rushed to the scene. Even then he had been unable to leave the man. Hiding, he watched as they injected the man with what he had naively thought was medicine meant to cure. Then the women had chuckled as the man took one last ragged breath and died.

“That was a sad case. Bloody bastard. How did he even get in here? Doesn’t matter now. Clarice got what she wanted and needed. She said he was the best fuck of her life. It certainly was the last of his life.”

The words had shocked the air out of Celt’s lungs. The knowledge that the crazy man’s rant was true kindled a smoldering fire within him. At that very moment, he knew what he had to do. He had to pretend he was infertile. He worked his way from cleaning laborer to lab technician and once there he easily switched specimens when he was forced annually to provide a sample of his sperm. He did the same thing with his buddies. Then he planned their escape.

He was the first to leave. A month later the others would follow. In actuality escaping the pristine medical center had been easy. After all, no male had dared to escape before so they weren’t expecting an educated one to flee into the wilds of the forest. It was as simple as walking out into the dark of the woods when it was his turn to empty the trash. No one would even miss him until the morning, when a Maida woman would come and unlock him from his small eight-by-eight holding room. They called it a bedroom. Celt knew it was his cell.

Remaining undetected by the Maida warriors had been the hard part. The only place to go was the forest. He had heard that the Maida women wouldn’t venture far inside and now he knew why. There was no safety in the forest, but what choice did he have? *None*.

That first night, shivering with the cold and tasting fear at the back of his throat as it churned his stomach, he had watched the trees come alive, not quite believing his eyes. Moving to the edge of the forest he watched the lake, not trusting the churning dark blue-green waters either.

A second *squawk* ran at him, breaking his thoughts as his body started to shake with the beginning of the night sweats he’d started having two cycles ago. He took aim and smiled, realizing his men would have a tasty breakfast. Then he weaved his way back to camp.

The pain that lanced through his body caused him to sprawl face-first on the ground. Instinctively Celt balled himself up and fisted his hand inside his mouth to stifle his scream. Something was happening to his body, something he had no control over, something that most definitely was not right. Celt stilled, his sensitive hearing picking up brisk movements through the woods.

Then he saw them. A herd of wild deer-like creatures. They were mostly males with a few females in the group. Their upper torsos and arms were human-looking but midway down their stomachs they turned into deer, complete with tiny hooves. As they drew near he noticed all the males had dark blue tattoos on their arms, faces and chests and all had braided hair.

“Well, lookie what we found here lying on the floor in the Dark Forest. What do you think, Princess, should we keep him?”

Celt slowly moved to his haunches, breathing through the pain still throbbing through his body, making him feel flushed and sluggish. He turned his eyes up and looked at the strange creatures. One particularly regal-looking female in the group moved toward him while being flanked by armed warriors. All of the males were armed with small knives and bows and arrows on their backs.

“You be Maida. Why are you in the Dark Forest, Maida man?” The woman’s voice was lush and seductive. He noted she wore nothing on her upper half, but she had a crown of thorns nestled on her head.

For one moment Celt wondered if he was hallucinating but he highly doubted that. He’d come to learn that nothing was as it seemed in the lands beyond the well-manicured, completely organized Maida territory.

“I mean you no harm, Princess. I got lost.” Celt hated the need to lie but there was no way he was about to inform them of his encampment when he didn’t know if they were friend or foe.

He watched as the Princess inched closer and then she sniffed him.

"Ahh, Maida man, you tell lies. It matters not. The Forest Guardians have marked you and you are beginning the change. You must have pleased them greatly for them to bequeath you such a gift."

Celt could have sworn there was a sarcastic quality to her voice. He had no idea what she was talking about. The Forest Guardians didn't give him a gift, they had simply let him live.

"I will inform my friend Rowena of another like her in the Dark Forest. She will be most pleased. Come, we depart." The Princess moved away, not once bothering to look over her shoulder. Then again she didn't need to. Not one of the male warriors took their eyes off him.

Rowena? Celt wondered if she was referring to the lost Maida woman who had ventured into the Dark Forest around the same time he had.

"What are you?" He called out his question with the desperate need to know more about his surroundings.

"We are Betikhans. If you have need of us ask the tree wraiths to find us."

He watched her gently reach out and caress a hand slowly around the trunk of a large tree. Spellbound, the tree leaned into her answering hand with a gentle caress of its own. Then a creature that looked more treelike than human disentangled itself from the tree to follow after the Betikhan group, almost skipping along merrily behind them.

"Take a good look, Maida man, at that thing. Soon that's what you're going to be." The words were snarled at him from one of the male Betikhans. Too startled to do anything but stare at their departure, it took a few moments for the words to sink into his mind. When they did he realized the stark truth of them and a dreadful shiver passed through him.

Celt rubbed his eyes as the dusk of evening started its fast descent within the Dark Forest. Only once the sun touched each tree did they finally go to sleep, their tall limbs gracefully pointing to the heavens. Gathering his strength, Celt made his way back to camp. *I won't turn into one of those things. I won't let that happen. These men need me.*

Nylu was the first thing he spotted as light from the dawn crested over the motley encampment. She was always the first person his eyes were drawn to. He cringed, hating the lust that soared straight to his cock.

She was awake and that wasn't good. As he walked into the camp he heard the soft whimpers and noticed the tears that glistened on Nylu's cheeks.

Dropping the *squawk* he drew near. "What's wrong?" The cinnamon scent of her hair sailed into his being and he had to fight not to bend more toward her head for a better whiff.

"I'm not ready. I thought I would be. I..." She hiccupped on a quiet sob.

"Tell me." Celt knew his tone was harsher than he had meant but fear for all their lives coated his thoughts.

"All I think about is sex."

She lowered her chin to look at the ground. "Fuck!" Celt ran his hands through his hair. He could tell by her quivering chin she was on the verge of real tears and those he couldn't deal with.

"Go back to bed, Nylu. Get some rest. We'll discuss this later." Trusting eyes scorched his heart and soul. In eight months this woman who had dared the impossible, all to grant her son the right to freedom, had wormed her way around his hardened heart. That wasn't good. While he didn't mind waking up with his cock hard and throbbing for her, knowing he could at least take the edge off later with his own hands, he did not want to feel any real emotion besides lust for her.

However, with her undergoing the dreaded Maida fertility curse he was left with little choice. She would have to leave. It wasn't safe for her to be around the men. He would not put his men in jeopardy because of her ache for sex. He on the other hand would have to take control and if that meant forcing her into exile or leaving her behind as they journeyed toward the Fourth Colony, he would do it. He watched her small body snuggle down into the makeshift bed and sighed. *I am royally screwed.*

A few days later they were about a day from their rendezvous with the men from the Fourth Colony. Celt and Dirk would enter into the bowels of the sewer system and open the outer hatch, allowing the six men who had made contact with Celt a cycle ago the chance to finally escape. The trip was dangerous. Even reaching the colony placed the entire group at peril. That was why Celt had insisted that Campbell and MacLeod stay behind to guard Nylu.

A visit to the outskirts of the colony was Celt's annual affair. In fact, he visited each of the four colonies once a cycle. All contact with any men was a cautious affair and only undertaken at night. And it was only ever done by Celt. He would watch the night-shift workers, paying special attention to the refuse workers. Then he'd zone in on one to make his approach. They all seemed to have heard of his band of rogue warriors, which constantly surprised him. When he had escaped he hadn't planned on anything much besides living. Gradually, he had come to realize the men needed goals. His personal goal, while far-reaching, was freedom for every Maida male. Equality for men as well as women. For those men who wanted to escape he offered hope if they pledged their lives to him. He knew it was a draconian measure but in his heart he also knew the men needed leadership.

"She's moaning and mumbling in her sleep again," grumbled Dirk.

"Fuck, this isn't good," Celt said as he moved closer to where Nylu slept.

"What I'd really like to do..."

Celt leveled his cold eyes on his second-in-command. "Don't even say it."

"You're not the only man here," snapped Dirk.

Before Celt could respond both men's eyes were drawn to the breathtaking sight of Nylu. She threw off the blanket and proceeded to touch herself. Her tiny hands traveled over her breasts, tweaking her nipples through the thin material. For one moment Celt was thankful she at least slept in her clothing.

"By the blessed Saints, I didn't think my cock could get any harder."

Celt moved away from Nylu to join Dirk on a log by the smoldering fire. Dirk shifted around uncomfortably.

Celt couldn't take his eyes off Nylu's slender hands as she molded them to her own breasts, pushing them up and then pinching where her pointy nipples peeked out of the fabric. "It's the fucking curse. The symptoms are getting stronger." He groaned with desire and frustration.

"Your cock as hard as mine?" asked Dirk.

"Fucking harder." Celt wiped sweat off his brow. He was hot and there wasn't even a full raging fire at his back.

When Nylu parted her legs both men drew in their breaths sharply.

"Wouldn't you like to be those fingers?" Dirk rubbed the hard bulge in his breeches.

Celt fought with his hands which itched to follow Dirk's, anything for relief. "We should stop her." *I can handle this. I will get a grip on my raging hormones. Too bad Nylu can't.*

"If she knew what she was doing and that we were watching she'd whack us with that wooden spoon of hers."

Dirk's teasing tone was his attempt to lighten the mood. Celt simply nodded his head. In a trance both men watched her slip a hand into her pants and work herself into a sexual state. In the silence of the forest they could hear her moans become more labored, and without realizing it their breath followed suit. She bent her legs and opened her knees and undulated her hips until she climaxed, instantly falling back asleep, her body sexually satisfied for the moment.

In the distance Celt heard his friend pant, "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

It was then Celt knew what his friend meant, as he too came hot and sticky in his own hand, not having realized he had been stroking his engorged cock until it was too late.

"I think I'm going to like this Maida curse," said Dirk, hoarsely.

Reality caused Celt's cock to instantly go limp. In stark terms he was going to have to explain what the Maida curse really was to Dirk and the other men of his group. Then they'd understand why he'd have to force Nylu into exile. If any one of them fucked her they'd be dead. *Like I said at the get-go, women are nothing but trouble.*

Chapter Four

Nylu woke long before anyone else and realized instantly by the wetness on her thighs and her pulsing pussy that it had started again. *The curse. My curse.* Her breasts tingled, her nipples were already puckered and her cunt was wet. She steadied herself with a sharp breath. *I have to go.* She knew that was the only way to protect Dirk and Celt and all the other men.

Dawn was about an hour away. She knew she had to act now. She scurried away, slinking deeper into the forest, not once looking back. Tears clogged her throat but with an inner resolve she hardened herself to the task at hand. *I can do this.*

She walked until the sounds of a roaring river caught her attention. She didn't hesitate. Marching forward, Nylu stripped off her shirt and yanked off her worn breeches to dip a toe into the cold water. She shivered but then plunged her feet into the cold water. Naked, she kept walking until more of the turbulent cold water claimed her.

Both men gasped at the sight their eyes were savoring. The crest of sunlight streamed across Nylu's naked body and lust pounded straight to both men's cocks. Then Celt realized her intent. Anger overrode lust in a heartbeat.

"She's going to drown herself." Dirk came to the same conclusion as Celt.

"Not if I can help it." Celt bounded to his feet and plunged headfirst into the raging river. He felt Dirk's body break through the turbulent waters next to him. Both men grasped her arms and yanked her out of the deep river. Panic seized Celt's heart. She was lifeless.

Together the men worked to carry her ashore and then Celt laid her down on the small pebbles.

"She's dead. She's dead. I can't believe it," said Dirk.

"Shut up!" Celt opened her mouth so he could breathe life into her. He forced the air from his lungs into hers and felt the moment when she responded, sputtering water out of her mouth. He rolled her to her side, letting her spit more water out of her stomach.

"Thank the Saints." Dirk moved to her other side. He had removed his shirt and Celt watched his second-in-command gently drape it over the cold, shivering pale woman.

"Why the fuck did you do that?" Celt's voice was rough with anger, adrenaline and fear. He'd examine the fear part of that later.

"You should have let me die," she answered, flatly.

That he didn't like.

"Maybe." He forced himself to move away from her still-shaky body.

"Fuck you, Celt," said Dirk.

Celt watched as Dirk moved to embrace Nylu, offering her comfort and warmth. Two things he wanted but couldn't offer. He turned to walk further away. He didn't like seeing Nylu in his buddy's arms, but he also knew he had no right to be angry. Dirk was only doing the honorable, manly thing, whereas he had no idea what to do. *Maybe I should have let her drown.* Even as he thought that he knew it wasn't true. He wanted her with a burning ache that left him tossing and turning whenever he slept. In the past weeks he'd spilled his seed more than in the past ten cycles. The same was also true of Dirk. If the curse didn't exist Celt knew Dirk would have charmed her into his bed. That idea he also didn't like.

"Celt, come here," said Dirk.

Celt watched as Dirk scooped Nylu up into his arms and moved her to the soft green grass on the embankment next to the stream. He didn't want to go anywhere near them, but he complied.

"Is there anything we can do to ease her ache, without—?"

"You know about the curse, Dirk?" Nylu blinked, her hazel eyes wide open, clearly surprised.

Both men nodded. Celt was pleased he'd taken the time to explain to his second-in-command what he'd learned about the Maida fertility curse.

"Then why didn't you let me die?"

It was a question Celt kept asking himself. Dirk however had no qualms about his actions.

"You mean too much to us, Nylu. We will help you through this."

Celt watched as she twisted her long hair into a tight ponytail, squeezing as much water out of it as possible. She squinted her eyes as she assessed them, her gaze staying a minute longer on him. He felt her penetrating stare to the marrow of his bones.

She wrapped her arms around her chest, causing Dirk's shirt to outline her still-wet breasts. They were round, the size of oranges and would fit perfectly in his hands. Celt fought to look elsewhere, but it was a losing battle.

"There is nothing you can do to help me. I need to leave."

Celt shook his head. "And go where?"

Nylu shivered. "Anywhere is better than here. You two have no idea what it's like."

"Then explain it." Celt desperately wanted to understand how her mind worked.

"Yes, explain it, Nylu." Dirk sat next to her on the bank.

Celt stood his ground, staring purposely down at both of them. He needed to keep his distance.

She looked up at him, beseechingly, her light green hazel eyes wide and innocent. He almost laughed. *Innocent my ass*. There is nothing innocent about her. Celt knew she'd spread her legs simply to appease her own itch.

A long throaty sigh escaped her lips, which were back to their lush full red color. In fact, they looked ever plumper than usual. Celt dug his worn boot into the soft grass.

"I didn't know it would kill him," he heard her say. He harrumphed without thought.

"Stuff it, Celt." Dirk glared angrily at him.

"She's lying." Celt watched as she shook her head.

"I wish. You have to understand that when this itch...this sexual itch starts to take hold of us, we can only last so long. Without sexual fulfillment, without a man's fertile seed released inside our cunt we slowly lose our mind. I wish I could say I don't remember it all, but I do. I remember picking the man at the Pleasure Seeking Ceremony. I remember him being brought into the room. I remember him being willing—"

"Because he didn't know any better." Celt knew he was being a bastard but he needed to her face the hard facts.

Slowly, Nylu stood. "I know that now."

Celt tried hard to ignore how Dirk's shirt clung to her small frame, outlining every curve on her tiny body and how it tapered to rest just below her round ass.

"Continue, Nylu." Dirk remained sitting.

"He wanted it as much as I did. He was naked. We both were and then we—"

Celt took a step toward her. "Fucked."

"Yes...then we fucked."

"Tell Dirk what happened next. Tell him how that man begged for his life. Tell him what you did to him."

Celt felt Dirk standing next to him, his breath fanning his face.

"It's all right, Dirk." Nylu placed a soothing hand on Dirk's shoulder. "He's right. I spread my legs and fucked that man until he died. There, you happy? Yes, he begged for his life and all I could do was watch horrified as spasm after spasm racked his body until they took him away, a shell of a man."

"They took him away to be put down like some rabid animal." Celt closed his eyes as the rush of painful memories surged to the surface.

Nylu moved toward Celt. "And that's why you should have let me die!"

"No," said Dirk.

"She's right." Celt wiped his face. "We can't help her. She's doomed."

Dirk elbowed him out of the way. "You are such a prick, Celt. If we pleasure you does it slow it down?"

"What?" asked Nylu.

"You heard him. Answer the question." Celt looked across at his buddy, hoping he didn't expect a miracle.

She nodded. "I guess it would help with that desperate itch. But honestly, I don't know."

"Then that's what we're going to do."

Dirk's answer caused Celt to laugh. "Fuck, Dirk, you're playing with fire. We can't keep pleasuring her for eternity."

"No, but we will pleasure her until you can talk to those fucking guardians you're always mumbling to and ask them for help." Dirk's eyes were knowing and calculated as he turned them on Celt.

Celt wondered how long his friend had known. As if he read his mind, Dirk answered. "I've been watching you for some time now, Celt, so don't try denying it. We've all felt strange things in the Dark Forest, you're not the first. I know something is happening to you. I don't know what it is, but in the meantime, we're going to help her. We'll pleasure you and keep that itch of yours at bay. Celt will find a way to get rid of the curse for good."

Dirk dismissed Celt to turn his attention back to the slightly startled Nylu.

Yeah, the only way to save her is with my dick lodged in her cunt, that's how. Celt longed to say that, but instead he answered, "Fine, have it your way. We'll pleasure you together." Now where that notion came from he had no idea. He saw Dirk stiffen.

Dirk nodded but Celt caught the mischievous gleam in his eyes. "So let's get started."

Both men turned their attention to Nylu, whose mouth was gaped open, clearly surprised by the turn of events and the depths to which they'd go to keep her sane and alive.

"Dirk, you sit on that log over there. Take off that shirt, Nylu, and sit on his lap." Celt's cock was already rigid in sweet anticipation. *Down boy.* He had to be the one to keep a rational mind, because clearly his second-in-command was insane to follow him.

Dirk smiled and then gamely moved to sit on the large log. Nylu walked behind him. She turned to give Celt a questioning look. He motioned for her to remove her shirt, wondering if she'd comply. When she did, he heard Dirk groan and felt his own breath hitch. Her breasts were the perfect shape and size, round and bouncy. Her areolas were dark brown and both nipples were already peaked.

"You have beautiful breasts, Nylu."

Celt fought not to growl as Dirk's words penetrated his lust-filled brain. Sharing a woman had never entered his mind and it went against his nature, but he knew having Dirk around would force him to behave.

"Now, sit on his lap and spread your legs. You, Dirk, play with her breasts," said Celt.

"With pleasure." Dirk did as instructed while Celt moved closer.

Once he was close enough Celt knelt down so that he was eye-level with Nylu. "You understand I'm going to make you come."

He watched as her pupils dilated, the sexual tension already building within her body. She bit her lower lip and nodded, keeping her eyes downcast. Celt sucked in her

lush cinnamon scent combined with her aroused musky odor. It was the best perfume he'd ever smelled and he ached to bottle it, just so he could undo the stopper and sniff it at his leisure.

"Look at me, Nylu, as we pleasure you." Celt watched as Dirk massaged her breasts, lifting the undersides of them up as an offering to Celt's mouth. Celt didn't hesitate. He took a peaked nipple deep into the recesses of his mouth, loving how she arched her back into Dirk's body while tilting her chest closer to his greedy lips. With one eye he watched as Dirk's other hand played with her other nipple, twisting and tweaking it until she moaned in pleasure.

"Nice perky breasts," he said.

Celt took the second nipple into his mouth, snaking his hand down to her mound. She stilled, attempting to clamp her legs together.

That won't do at all. "Dirk, spread your legs wider. I need to play with your pussy, Nylu."

Dirk moved his thighs wide, forcing Nylu's legs to open automatically.

"I'm going to slip a finger into your cunt." Celt felt his balls bunch tight in the confines of his breeches.

"Fuck I'm so hard," mumbled Dirk, his hands moving to Nylu's waist.

"Me too." Celt muttered the words while sweat formed on his forehead.

"This might not work." Nylu's fear danced to life in her eyes. Her nostrils flared with arousal as her body shook.

"It will. We don't have a choice." Celt knew he needed to reassure them all. "Now, relax." He waited another second and then moved his hand to her pussy. "You're so unbelievably wet." He slid the palm of his hand over her slick, already swollen pussy lips, loving the feel of her soft dark pubic hairs.

Nylu groaned. Her body shuddered as pleasure spiraled through every nerve ending in her highly sensitive system. He felt her move her legs further apart, providing

him with easier access. He watched as Dirk moved a hand to her mound also. Then Celt watched Dirk's fingers open her cunt wide, exposing her pulsing core, allowing him room to finger her tight pink opening. And he did just that. He plunged first one finger and then a second into her, pumping her hard, as Dirk kept her wet, red pussy lips open. The experience was the most erotic thing to ever happen to Celt. His cock was on fire, so hard it hurt, but still he didn't stop.

She ground down onto his fingers but still he kept pumping them into her pussy, hard. Knowing he needed to bring her over the edge.

Then he withdrew. He had to taste her. He just needed to.

"Brace your feet on Dirk's knees. I'm going to lick you." Celt moved to rub his own cock within his breeches as Nylu obeyed. Her pussy and ass cheeks were openly displayed to his view. *By the Saints, heaven.*

"Fuck, you get the best view."

Celt knew Dirk was trying to keep the mood light. "Lean back, Dirk." Celt knew he sounded as breathless as he felt.

Dirk shuffled back, bracing his hands on the grass behind the log. The action forced Nylu's body to lean back as well, exposing her glistening cunt to the world. It was such an erotic pose, Celt fought hard not to spill his seed. He took a calming breath and then leaned into her.

Her musky cinnamon sex scent sailed again through his body and this time it was his body that shuddered with the thrill of passion. He placed both hands on her inner thighs, forcing them open more. Then he leaned in and gave her a long lick, moving his tongue down her cunt to her ass. He felt her entire body shiver. Then without preamble he plunged his tongue into her cunt, loving the wild taste of her as he proceeded to lick her pussy until she cried out with pleasure. Still he didn't relent. He circled her opening one last time and then only once she finished shuddering did he move to nip her swollen nub. She almost jumped from the sheer ecstasy of it. So Celt kept up his assault,

sucking hard on her clit until she cried out a second time, climaxing hard, her cum spilling out onto her thighs. Only then did her body go limp.

Dirk gently fingered her wet opening, plunging his own finger deep into her drenched pussy. Celt watched his buddy then suck on his own finger so that the taste of her was also on his own tongue.

Celt couldn't blame him as he licked his own swollen lips again. He loved that her scent was all over his face, her cream even coating his beard. He almost didn't want to wash again.

He motioned to Dirk that he'd take her. He scooped her off Dirk's lap, allowing his buddy to take care of his own need. He heard Dirk's guttural groans and felt a twinge of sympathy for what he was going through. But only a little. He was equally hot and hard.

"Nylu, I need you to help him. Take that cock of his into your mouth." Celt kept his tone rough.

She simply nodded, her eyes slightly dazed and spent with passion. He let her feet touch the grass. She walked naked to where Dirk stood, his back to them. He watched through hooded eyes as she gently placed her hands on Dirk's back, forcing him to turn around. Understanding then dawned on Dirk.

"You sure about this, Celt?"

Celt nodded.

"Suck him." Celt watched Nylu kneel. Dirk spread his legs wider like a warrior. His cock was already in his hand, taut with need. Celt couldn't pry his eyes away from the sight. Nothing in his life had prepared him for this. He thought he'd feel jealous, but instead a fire burned in his limbs, in his cock as he watched Nylu first tenderly lick his buddy's shaft, noting how it was wide at the base but tapered toward the top. She opened her mouth wide, bringing all of his turgid flesh within the recesses of her mouth.

Watching a man get pleased wasn't new to Celt. A lot of men took comfort in each other's arms because of how they were so harshly treated by the Maida women. However, he had never seen his buddy with that look of rapture on his face as Nylu's pert mouth sucked him off. Celt realized that the erotic sight of it thrilled him. A tingle started up from his toes, circled his balls and had his cock leaking pre-cum with a vengeance.

Dirk closed his eyes in ecstasy, his hips lightly jutting forward as he picked up the tempo. Nylu's hand clamped around the width of Dirk's cock and pumped it, working him into a feverish pitch. She even reached down to squeeze his balls, wrapping them tightly in her hand, while she continued her up and down motion at the base of Dirk's throbbing cock.

"Fuck, that's good. She's so hot, Celt." Dirk groaned as need came hot and hard on him.

Celt watched Dirk grip her hair. "I'm going to come, Nylu."

Nylu sucked harder on Dirk's cock until he thrust hard into her, stuffing her mouth full of his cock, coming hard. Still Nylu finished the job with precision, gently licking Dirk's cock clean until he was limp.

Then with regal grace she rose and walked toward him.

"I want your cock in my mouth too."

The words caused Celt's toes to curl. His nostrils flared with want and his testicles bunched up tight with passion while his dick throbbed with need that had him gnashing his own teeth.

"You heard the lady. She wants to suck you, Celt."

A fully satisfied grin spread across Dirk's face. Dirk nodded his head to Celt, the movement granting permission that he was okay with watching the act.

"Later." Celt was amazed he could sound pissed off when lust was boiling his blood and probably turning his cock purple. "Let's get back to camp."

Dirk stood and adjusted himself. "Yeah, wouldn't want you to feel a moment of pleasure or anything like that, now would we."

The mocking tone wasn't lost on Celt. "I said later."

"Maybe once you start thinking of that dick of yours you won't act like one."

Dirk brushed past him. *Now what did I do to make him mad? He's the one who just came in Nylu's mouth for the love of the Saints.*

Intent on watching Dirk storm off, he forgot about Nylu for a moment. The minute her small hand touched his arm, his entire body became acutely aware of the woman at his side.

"Do you really think you can save me?" she asked.

The way her eyes looked at him with such hope and honesty he could have melted. *I am such a bastard.* He had just made her give his buddy a blowjob, all because he could. *I'm no different than those Maida women who made me fuck them senseless when I didn't want to.* He fought not to shudder from the intense memories that assaulted his mind. Infertile women didn't pose a risk to fertile men and for that he'd been lucky.

"I didn't mind." Her shy soft whispered words were clear in their intensity. "I actually liked it knowing you were watching me."

And I liked it way too much. Instead of voicing that, he watched her lick her lips. The need to taste her, to have her tongue deep throating him crashed through him. Before Celt could question his motions or motives he grasped her small shoulders, hauling her to him to claim her passion-plumped lips. She didn't hesitate.

Nylu groaned and opened her mouth wider, allowing him to plunge his tongue into her mouth. Celt tasted Dirk's cum and instead of feeling repulsed, it fueled his fire. His tongue circled her teeth, delighting in her feminine moans. Her hands twined up around his head, clutching at him for support. The feel of her tight nipples rubbed his chest and the urge to take her like a wild beast here on the forest floor stole through his thoughts. Knowing that was tantamount to committing suicide. Abruptly, Celt released her lips and took a step back from her quivering form. He cleared his throat twice

before he got control of his raging hard-on. "That's good, because you'll be doing that and more before I can find a way to cure you. Now, get dressed."

Celt knew he was back to being a hard-assed bastard and issuing commands, but that was better than what he really wanted to say, which was *get the fuck on your knees so I can pound my cock into that tight cunt of yours*. He ran a shaky hand through his hair and wiped his face, the scent of her sex still close to his skin and heart. He took a calming breath and watched her gather her clothes and round a large bush to dress.

She was mad at him. It saddened him how much he liked her hot and horny for him, for them, but that wasn't going to help her. He needed to have a heart-to-heart talk with the Forest Guardians and that wasn't going to be fun at all. Celt shook his head, trying to figure out a way to help her, fearful he'd gotten himself into something bigger than he could handle.

Chapter Five

All the men were asleep, totally exhausted after what they'd been put through today, and Nylu didn't blame them. The weather had turned cold and wet but still Celt had marched them on well past dusk. They were scouting out the area closer to the Fourth Colony a day ahead of schedule. Nylu knew he'd pushed the men hard because he was mad at himself and her and he didn't know what to do.

She was no better. She had mixed emotions about what had transpired. The timid part of her nature said she should be repulsed with allowing Celt and Dirk to pleasure her, but she wasn't. In fact the more she thought about it the more sexually turned-on she became so she tried not think about it.

When Celt had stormed back into the makeshift camp, hours after she and Dirk had returned, he had immediately barked orders for them all to get ready in one hour. The knowledge she could offer pleasure to two men who were friends pleased her immensely but she wasn't sure the idea thrilled Celt. He had seemed to enjoy watching her with Dirk but it was as if he had conflicting emotions about it. One minute he had liked it and then it felt to her like he had withdrawn from her, hating himself for daring to give in to the passion he felt for her. She understood the need to be cautious but she certainly wasn't about to let either man put their cock in her. She valued their friendship too much to wish a painful death on them, or any man again, for that matter.

A ragged groan drew her attention. She recognized instantly who it was—Celt. Over the past few months he'd begun to have vivid nightmares. Often feigning sleep, she'd watch him thrash around, only for him to be jolted awake, sweat gluing his hair to his head. Nylu wasn't sure what came over her. Maybe it was the new sense of freedom she'd gained within a day. Boldly she moved to where he'd made his sleeping pallet. Lately, he'd taken to sleeping either close to or curled up around a tree.

Sometimes it was almost as if he became a part of the tree. No one questioned him but she had begun to hear grumbling among the men who were worried he was starting to go sick in the head. Nylu doubted that.

Before she reached Celt she felt the presence of Dirk behind her. She stilled but her heart started to accelerate as she recalled the joy she'd felt in having his cock wedged deep within her mouth. Both men were spectacular to behold. Where Dirk was charming and flirtatious, almost bold in his desire for her, Celt was silent and dark. His eyes, though, always watched her movements. Now after what had happened this morning she knew Celt wanted her as much as Dirk, but he wouldn't willingly take her. *Not yet, anyway...maybe in a few days.*

Dirk's large arms wrapped themselves tenderly around her small frame. Without hesitation he began to knead her breasts. She arched her body into his embrace, feeling his rock-hard erection press against her ass. A second loud groan from Celt drew her attention.

"Think you can help him, Nylu?" Dirk moved her long hair off her neck so he could whisper the words into her ear as his other hand pinched her left nipple hard, causing her to gasp with pleasure.

"I don't think so." Her voice was a mere whisper.

"Yes you can, Nylu. I think he's dreaming of you. I think he's picturing that wet mouth of yours wrapped around his cock. Look for yourself."

Dirk's words forced Nylu to look at Celt. Sure enough the thin blanket had been tossed away and one of his hands was fisted tightly around his raging cock. He pumped it, even though he was asleep. Nylu licked her lips as need, hot and fierce, coiled through her like a living vine.

"I know you just want to suck him, baby, but before you do that I need you naked. Now."

Without her consent, he started to help her disrobe. The fact she didn't stop him said much about what had transpired within the last few hours. She realized she should

be annoyed but at the same time a part of her was thrilled to be ordered around by Dirk. Usually it was Celt issuing commands at her. She nodded, loving how Dirk's hands skimmed her body as she moved out of his embrace so she could remove her breeches. She'd been so exhausted after their arduous hike that she, like most of the men, had fallen asleep without eating or disrobing. The feel of the cool night air electrified her skin, causing slight goose bumps to form.

"Now, Nylu, I want you to suck him hard. Make him come in that pert little mouth of yours. Can you do that for me...will you do it for him, baby?"

The question caught Nylu by surprise. "Yes, but what if—"

"Don't you worry about the what ifs. I'll take care of that and you later. That's a promise I can't wait to deliver." Dirk moved his hands from her front to skim them over her ass. "By the Saints, I love this ass of yours." He gave her a tender kiss on the lips. "Now do it...before I come right here."

Nylu fought not to giggle. Dirk always knew what to say to defuse the situation. She cautiously moved forward and then knelt at Celt's side.

"That's it, baby, wrap your mouth around his cock."

Nylu watched as Dirk moved to kneel behind Celt's head and she wondered what he was up to. Then her eyes got diverted to Celt's hand as he pumped his cock. It was swollen, thick like the rest of him and long. She gulped. Need and passion fueled her movements. She longed to have her lips wrapped snugly around his turgid member. Gingerly she moved her lips closer, while wrapping her own hand around his. The minute her hand touched his, heat fired itself to every nerve ending in her body. She moved her lips lower, gently coaxing the head of his cock into her mouth.

Instantly Celt awoke. "What the fuck are you doing?"

Nylu didn't say anything as she continued to move her head up and down, loving the warm satiny feel of his hard cock deep within her mouth. She felt Celt tense and heard a slight scuffle.

"By the Saints, Dirk, release me!"

Celt's voice was a ragged whisper. Raising her head slightly Nylu peeked up. Dirk had Celt's head nestled between his strong thighs and was holding Celt's arms down with his hands, bracing all his weight on them.

"Celt, man, stay still. Nylu's going to give you the pleasure you deserve so don't be such a prick about it."

"Get the fuck off me if you want to live to see another day!" Celt ground the words through clenched teeth while attempting to wrestle his arms free.

"Take his cock back into your mouth, Nylu, and suck him hard."

"Don't you dare—"

That was all Celt could say because the moment Nylu's mouth once again descended on his raging shaft he groaned deep with need.

"That's it, baby, suck him deep," said Dirk. "You want to watch her mouth suck that cum out of you, Celt, because that's exactly what she's going to do no matter what you say. The choice is yours."

While Dirk issued that ultimatum, Nylu moved a hand to cup Celt's balls, loving the warm feel of his testicles as she rolled them in the palm of her hand. A deep rumbling groan soared through Celt's body and she grinned in her femininity that she was capable of giving him such pleasure.

"Okay, man. Fine. Suck me, Nylu!" Celt's hips thrust upward as he gave himself up to her charms.

"I was hoping you say that, Celt. Nylu, baby, climb over Celt's legs and spread them. It's my turn for a taste of that pussy of yours. You suck him off while I eat you. And you, Celt, get to watch." Dirk smiled with glee.

Celt panted hard. "This isn't right."

"I want it," said Nylu, obeying Dirk's instructions.

"By the Saints, Nylu, you're going to be the death of me," said Celt.

Nylu maneuvered her naked body over his legs so she could part them for Dirk.

"You sure about this, Dirk?"

"Watch us, Celt, and enjoy," teased his buddy.

And watch Celt did. Nylu repositioned her mouth, this time lower, sucking one of his tight balls into her mouth, loving the feel of his sac as she rolled her tongue around it. Celt thrust his hips up to meet her, while her hand wrapped around the base of his cock, which was throbbing for release.

Then Nylu felt it. Dirk's tongue gently licked her ass cheeks and then he nibbled on them as he dipped his head lower, moving his mouth to her wet cunt. A shudder racked through her as the erotic imagery of what the three of them were doing came alive in her mind. They were all naked. She had Celt's cock in her mouth and Dirk was eating her pussy, lapping at her cream like there was no tomorrow. The pleasure of it was blinding in its intensity. The keen knowledge that this was forbidden to Maida women, that it was deemed ugly and degrading to women by the Supreme High Fertility Council, caused her core muscles to clench more with need.

The minute Dirk moved his tongue out of her wet opening he plunged two fingers into her pussy, which clenched his digits greedily, eager for release.

"You taste like cinnamon. I could eat your pussy all day, Nylu. But I'm going to watch Celt come hard in your mouth. Swallow him, baby."

Dirk's words were an encouraging enticement. His sin-filled command almost caused her to come but she fought the release as she plunged Celt's cock deep down her throat, relaxing so she could let him slide even deeper.

"Fuck, man, I'm going to come, Nylu." Celt bucked into her welcoming mouth, while attempting to pull out.

"Come inside her mouth, Celt. Do it!" said Dirk.

Nylu gripped Celt's balls tight with one hand as she pumped his cock hard, while managing to snake a finger down to the crack of his ass. She heard Celt's ragged groan the minute before she tasted his hot seed on the back of her throat. She swallowed all of his warm juices, wanting the taste of him to become absorbed within her. Then

reasoning fled when Dirk moved back to her wet cunt. This time he flicked his tongue over her sensitive nub while he pumped his fingers into her pussy. Then his tongue licked at her asshole, laving her until she squirmed with renewed passion. Dirk then moved his other hand to her ass, teasing her puckered hole with a finger until he gently stuffed it inside her. She had two of his fingers inside her cunt and one in her ass and loved the feeling of being stuffed with him. The minute he started to move his finger with serious intent in and out of her ass, she came hard, throwing back her head as pleasure made her limbs heavy, satisfaction tracing all elements of shame away.

Celt's hands drew her up his naked body. Once again her nipples pebbled to life simply with the feel of him.

"Come." Celt motioned for his second-in-command to scoot to Nyly's other side. "Thank you," said Celt, meaning it for the both of them.

Nyly sighed, content at last to be able to please him, thrilled to have Celt on one side of her and Dirk on the other.

"Sleep in peace, buddy. We'll chase those evil thoughts away." Dirk's teasing tone eased whatever awkwardness there was between the three of them while he draped an arm behind Nyly's neck, bringing her warm body flush to his.

Nyly turned her face toward Celt, watching as his tired eyes closed in slumber, the curve of a satisfied smile creasing the normally harsh planes of his face. She sighed, totally pleased with herself, loving the feel of the two men bracketing her in their warmth as their bodies each spooned to her form. More than that she felt comforted knowing she'd finally been able to do something right by Celt.

Chapter Six

Celt tried hard to rationalize that what he and Dirk were doing with Nylu was for her own sake, not theirs, but he knew that was a lie. The unexpected had happened last night and Celt knew he could never go back. He wanted Nylu with a vengeance. The need to brand her as his, to make her come while he thrust his cock inside her sheath, rode him hard and that wasn't good. He knew that the minute his cock found relief within her sweet pussy he'd die a horrible painful death, quite literally become a crazed animal. That was what the Maida fertility curse did to a man. Oh sure, Celt wasn't opposed to sex. He'd been forced to have sex with a lot of Maida women, but they had all been infertile. He hadn't needed to worry before. Now he did all the time.

He'd awoken early and slipped from the warm cocoon of Nylu's body next to his. Celt needed answers. Something was happening to him. Something he had no control over and he feared it had a lot to do with the bargain he'd made with the Forest Guardians after he'd been bitten by the *asp* five cycles ago.

At the time he'd been bitten, the poison had worked its way fast through his bloodstream. He'd thought he had become delusional when four beings appeared before him telling him they were the Forest Guardians. He had begged for his life and they had granted it, informing him that now his soul and skin was theirs to do with as they pleased. They had told him they controlled the magic within Mother Nature and they were the rulers of the Forest. It was their duty to ensure the balance of nature was kept in check. Celt was told to make sacrifices to the tree wraiths, never thinking he'd actually see one come alive. He was also told when the time was right they would contact him.

Over the course of the past few months he'd tried to ignore the nightmares but he no longer could. The Forest Guardians wanted him. He was afraid he would become one of those tree creatures. The thought terrified him more than fucking Nylu senseless.

"I'm here." His loud voice boomed through the dense forest. Alert, he watched the trees for any signs of life. It never paid to become complacent within the Dark Forest. One minute you were safe and then in a heartbeat the tree next to you could be munching on you as a snack.

"Ignoring us will do you no good." The rumbling voice brushed his skin and consciousness with fierce power. The sound was rich and vibrated the tree leaves. Celt wondered if they too shook in fear. Quickly, he quelled that thought.

"He is Maida, what did you expect?" said a second voice.

"Obedience," said a third, more feminine voice.

"You cannot force the change on him. The Prince of the Forest must be contacted," said a fourth voice, sounding more in control than the other three.

"What are you talking about?" Celt didn't like their line of questions, or answers for that matter, and he really hated not being able to see who was speaking. At first he thought it was the trees themselves come to life, but when the air around him vibrated with life, he knew then the Forest Guardians were spirits.

"We saved your life. You owe us." The feminine voice swayed in a seductive brush through his mind.

"Need I remind you, the Prince has the final say," said the voice of reasoning.

"I say we send him to the Prince," said another voice.

Planting his feet firmly in a warrior stance, Celt said, "Wait a sec. I'm not going anywhere."

"He will go see the Prince. Make it so," said the feminine voice.

Celt didn't like how mocking her voice sounded but before he could ponder anything further a thunderous roar shook the Dark Forest and a dozen trees were instantly felled by the blast.

"They dare treat us like that!" There was a note of concern and anger that came from the voice of reason.

"Maida weapon incoming," said the second voice.

Celt watched spellbound as a blue haze filled the Dark Forest. The cannon blast was easily deflected as the forest's shields held, keeping everything within safe. How Celt knew that mystified him.

"Go to the Prince. Tell him we are at war. We will hold them for as long as we can, but hurry." There was real urgency and fear in the feminine voice.

"Who is this Prince I'm supposed to find?" Celt attempted to stand on his own feet when a third blast shook the ground, causing him to madly grip a tree limb for support.

"Rowena—that cursed Maida woman—her mate needs to know of this. You must find the Prince of the Forest. The tree wraiths will guide you, as twill the Betikhan herd coming your way. Go now," said the booming voice.

"Wait a sec. I need to know, am I going to turn into one of those."

"We saved your life. You owe us." The voices spoke in unison, causing a shiver of dread to settle within Celt.

"Then I'm not going," he said.

"What?" A roar of outrage over his refusal to jump to their commands came from the feminine voice.

"I won't be turned into a tree wraith. You must put a stop to whatever is happening to my body or else I'm not going to the Prince." Celt was pleased he was able to sound so sure of himself when he felt nothing but fear, especially since more incoming Maida weapons blasts were bouncing off the shield. *Then again what do I have to lose? Nothing.*

"Fine, have it your way. Now make haste. Get the Prince. We can't hold them back for long."

"Is your word binding?" Celt wasn't about to get tricked. He'd had enough of that from other females.

"It is binding, Maida man. Now go."

Celt nodded. He garnered all the information he needed and then ran back to camp. Even with the shields, the trees were all swaying from the force of the continued assault.

Celt couldn't believe this was happening. The Fourth Colony was on the other side of the small river and they were sending cannon fire directly into the Dark Forest. But why? What had happened that the Maida guardswomen felt the need to penetrate the forbidden forest? He knew those questions weren't going to be answered at the moment.

"There you are, Celt. What by the Saints is going on?" Dirk shouted at him while racing toward him with the men and Nylu in tow.

Celt gulped. He wasn't about to tell Dirk he'd been in the forest talking to the Forest Guardians.

"Change of plans. Follow me." He moved to a path that had appeared to his right. A path he knew the tree wraiths were making for him to follow as a way to get to the Prince of the Forest. He was so thankful he would never turn into one of those creatures that he planned to say a special thank-you prayer to all the Saints.

* * * * *

Two hours later, they were all hot and sweaty once again. The path, while fairly easy to follow, took them uphill. They had reached the end of the Dark Forest. Celt looked down at the raging river beneath the cliff, his breath hitching in awe and fear. *Just how by the Saints are we supposed to get down?*

"What is that?" Nylu's hand shielded her eyes as she framed it against her forehead to look up into the bright sky.

Celt heard his men complaining and he could almost feel their fear of the unknown but he was proud they all stood their ground as an army of mythological creatures appeared directly from the sky.

"Don't do anything. They might be friendly." Celt was pleased to see his second-in-command silently gesture for the men to stand down.

The roar of wind whistled over their heads and then they all gasped. Creatures of myth stood directly before them, magnificent and spectacular to behold. They were Pegcentaurs, part horse and part man with keen intelligent eyes and massive wings. The largest of them was the beast in the front who had rust-colored hair. He shook his head, tucked his wings into his body and moved toward them, transforming in mid-stride to become a giant of a man.

"I am Rusty, leader of the Mage Pegcentaur Clan. What have you done to the Dark Forest?" he demanded gruffly.

Celt moved to intercept the man. "We did nothing. We are men who have escaped from Maida lands. It would appear that the Maida women have launched a war on the Dark Forest."

The two men stood shoulders apart, each judging the other. It was Rusty who spoke first, breaking the tension.

"You are marked by the Forest Guardians. Why?"

"What's he talking about?" asked Dirk, who could hear everything that was being said.

Celt didn't have time to explain. "Yes. They want me to seek the Prince of the Forest."

"I just bet they do." A gleam of mischief lit up Rusty's eyes. "Nice to see another Maida woman."

Rusty moved toward Nylu. Celt intercepted him, flanking his body protectively in front of Nylu, whose eyes were round with shock. He felt more than saw Dirk move to flank her other side to protect her. Celt watched as the Pegcentaur's nostrils flared.

"She is in heat!" Rusty shook his head and looked less than pleased.

Heat? Comprehension dawned on Celt. The Pegcentaur could scent Nylu's fertile cycle and that wasn't good.

"Death awaits you mortal Maida men if you fuck that one," said Rusty without any fanfare. "I will take her off your hands. My men will appease her sexual itch."

"No!" shouted both Celt and Dirk in unison.

Celt watched Rusty tilt his head to the side to observe them. "I do not have time to argue with you. My clan will take you to the Prince of the Forest. We will converse there. Come." He ushered over the other Pegcentaurs. "Get on our backs and hold on tight."

"You are kidding me, right?" Dirk shook his head and crossed his arms over his chest. He didn't move an inch.

Celt smiled. "They could have killed us long ago but did not. I believe their intent is good. What have we got to lose?"

Dirk frowned. "Our dignity. I hate flying...not that I've ever done it before, but being in the air seems wrong when you've got two good feet."

"Are they real?" Nylu poked her head around Dirk to look at the Pegcentaurs.

"Afraid so," replied Celt.

"They are beautiful."

Celt hated the rush of lust he felt for Nylu the minute her musical voice uttered the words. He exchanged a worried look with Dirk. Dirk returned his own with a smirk. "The timing of this is bad."

"I like that one there with the black mane," said Nylu, unaware the men were talking about her.

"I just bet you do," replied Celt, fighting not to growl. He had a sneaking suspicion the Pegcentaurs were listening in on their conversation, especially since the one Nyllu had remarked upon turned and smiled at her and then proceeded to gamely wink at her.

"If he does that again he's dead," growled Dirk.

Wisely Celt remained silent.

"Maida men, are you afraid to mount us? My word is true. We will take you to the Prince of the Forest. Get on now!" commanded Rusty.

Celt knew their time was up. He took a deep fortifying breath and willed his legs to move. He nodded to his men to follow suit. He approached their leader and watched spellbound as the man flashed back into the magnificent creature.

"On you go." Rusty bent one knee so Celt could mount him with ease. "Now, hold on."

That was the only warning Celt got. One minute they were safe on the ground and next he felt the rush of the wind whip through his frame. It was a highly intoxicating, wild moment for him. Celt closed his eyes in ecstasy, loving the unfettered feeling of moving through air.

Rusty's movements were fluid and graceful. The large Pegcentaur swooped down and then up so they were soaring above more forests, across a large lake and onto a wide open plain. It was here that they landed. One minute they were in the air and next they were rooted back to the ground. Celt almost did not want to dismount. He had loved flying so much he was sure his heart and soul were still soaring through the clouds.

With somewhat wobbly feet he dismounted, pleased Rusty had knelt all the way so he could disembark gracefully. He backed up when Rusty stood and flashed himself back into a man. He further stilled when the man-beast grasped his shoulders.

"The Forest Guardians have marked you with honor and I am pleased. Your soul and heart are pure. And I will be pleased to have you join us as one."

"Thanks," replied Celt, having no idea what Rusty was talking about.

"Now where is that wee Maida woman?" said Rusty.

Everything within Celt froze. "You can't have her. She's mine." *Just where did that come from?* He dared to break the tentative friendship with these wild creatures of myth over a woman.

Rusty turned his head to look at Dirk, whose complexion was pale from his flight. "And here I was thinking she was his."

"It's complicated." Celt helped his second-in-command, who had fallen to his own shaky knees.

"You Maida men make things complicated. The choice is not yours. It is hers." Rusty looked at both Dirk and Celt and then watched Nylu gracefully stroke the black coat of the Pegcentaur she had ridden.

The same Pegcentaur who had smiled and winked at her. Celt hated the jealous rage that jumped to life within the pit of his stomach.

"Come, I need to introduce you to the Prince of the Forest. News of war between Maida and the Dark Forest is not going to make him happy and when he's not happy neither am I, trust me on that score," said Rusty.

Celt heard everything Rusty was saying but still he couldn't stop his legs from moving to where Nylu stood beside the large wild Pegcentaur.

"Your hair is sooo velvety smooth. It feels amazing." Her body leaned suggestively into the Pegcentaur, who was smiling in awe.

"It would be my pleasure to service you," said the beast.

"Touch her and you are dead," said Celt, through clenched teeth. He grasped Nylu's arm hard and hauled her to him.

The Pegcentaur actually snorted and laughed at him. "What, you puny Maida man...you think you can take me on and win? You are mistaken."

"Zane, that cocky talk of yours is going to get you in trouble one of these days." Rusty flanked Celt's side.

"This here man thinks I'm beneath him," said Zane.

"He doesn't know our ways. But Zane is right, Celt. He can service this woman and live, whereas you...I'm not so sure," said Rusty.

"Let's get one thing straight here. The only person servicing Nylu will be me, is that clear?" said Celt.

"And let's not forget me," echoed Dirk, standing up slowly so he could make his way to where all the action was taking place.

"I thought it was forbidden for Maida women to have more than one man," declared Zane, flashing from Pegcentaur form to a man in the blink of an eye. The fact he was naked and extremely well built wasn't lost on Celt.

"The choice is up to the Maida woman," said the soft, sexy voice coming from Celt's back.

When Celt turned he got the shock of his life. There standing before him was Rowena, the one who had gone missing into the Dark Forest a few cycles before he had made his escape. He knew it was her from all the wanted posters that had been tacked up throughout the medical facility. Only it wasn't completely her. She was half horse and half Maida.

"It is I, Rowena. Who are you?"

Celt was pleased she didn't ask for his identification number. "I am Celt. This is Dirk, my second-in-command. We are free Maida men."

A gasp followed as Rowena flashed into her true Maida self. "You please me greatly, Celt, and it would be my honor to introduce you to my husband, the Prince of the Forest. Tulon, show yourself."

A hum of energy vibrated around Celt and his men. Goose bumps formed on Celt's skin and all the hairs on his body stood on end. A flash of vibrant white light filled the

space and then there before Celt stood the most beautiful creature he could imagine. A unicorn, who casually turned in slow motion to become a man.

"The Forest Guardians have chosen wisely and bequeathed you a great gift, Celt of Maida. Your heart and soul are pure. When the time is right I know you will do the honorable thing. Now, tell me about this war."

Celt quickly disclosed all the information he could, even the strange things the Forest Guardians had said to him. A few minutes later they were ushered into a private dwelling and given food and water. It was more luxurious than what they had become accustomed to.

"I will make plans. For now, rest and sleep. I must go talk with the Betikhans." The issued decree came from Tulon, who remained very much a prince whether he was in centaur or human form.

"Thank you," said Celt.

Tulon advanced to him, clasping his shoulders in a warrior embrace of friendship and trust. Celt felt honored.

"The woman you share must be attended to or else she will go insane as you know. Pleasure her well, Maida men, but remember the choosing is always hers."

"Can you help her?" Celt desperately wanted the answer to be yes.

Tulon shook his head, the wild mane of his black hair swaying gently around him. "Sadly, no. My attention must turn to the war. Can I count on your men?"

"Certainly. My men want freedom and this could be our one chance to secure it."

"Freedom is the right of all sentient beings, Celt, and your quest is truly honorable. Remember though with freedom comes responsibility and sometimes the good of one must be sacrificed for the good of many." Tulon gave him one last glance and then left.

Celt was left pondering Tulon's words a moment before Nylu stumbled through the door opening.

Instantly, Dirk scooped her up, bringing her body to the wooden pallet which was piled high with soft animal skins. "She's burning up."

"It's that curse."

Nylu's hand slid through Dirk's hair in a gentle caress. "What's that yummy smell? Oh, it's you."

Dirk's started to disrobe. "We're going to have to make her climax, Celt."

A part of Celt desperately wanted to leave while the part below his waist eagerly bucked to life.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Strip." Dirk uttered the words while climbing to Nylu's side of the bed.

"You sure about this?" asked Celt.

His second-in-command glared at him. "Stop asking me that. I'm okay with it. She's okay with it and she needs us. You going to run or are you going to put that cock of yours to good use?" The grin Dirk flashed to tease Celt into accepting that his words were true did lighten the load resting within Celt's heart.

"Don't forget, Dirk, our cocks can't go in that cunt of hers. You clear on that?"

"Yeah, I got that part but maybe our cocks could go somewhere else." There was a heightened suggestive tone to Dirk's voice that made Celt gulp.

"Just what are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking once we make her climax you can come in her mouth while I fuck that sweet ass of hers."

Celt closed the distance between Dirk and Nylu. "Her ass is mine."

"Whatever you say, Celt. You're the boss," replied Dirk. There was a wild passion raging behind Dirk's eyes that caused Celt's own heart rate to increase.

The notion of fucking Nylu's ass while Dirk had his dick in her mouth was an erotic enticement he couldn't ignore.

"Now, don't look all glum. She needs this and trust me she'll like it," said Dirk, tweaking Nyly's right nipple. Celt watched it pebble to life. His mouth instantly went dry as longing to suckle her breasts raced through him.

He's right, we do need to fuck her if she's going to live through this. The realization hit Celt that Nyly really had no say over her body when the fertility curse hit her and that insight made it appear to him that what he and Dirk were doing to her was in her best interest. *Half-truths will have to do.*

Shedding his clothing with quick movements Celt moved to the bed. Dirk had already removed Nyly's clothing and was currently suckling on her right breast.

"The other's yours," teased Dirk.

On his knees, Celt took the tip of her nipple into his mouth, playing with the pebbled nub until she arched her back into his embrace. Her hand slid over his head and arms, bringing him closer.

"I love this."

The musical quality of her voice and that delicious cinnamon scent that engulfed her when she went into heat washed through Celt's senses, causing his already swollen cock to get even harder.

Together Celt and Dirk played with her breasts, bringing that sexual flush of desire to life. With their skillful ministrations Nyly's body throbbed for release. Celt moved to her lips, needing to claim them. She eagerly opened her mouth, welcoming his tongue deep inside. Her hand yanked on his head, bringing him even closer. Celt didn't need to look to know what Dirk was doing. He felt his buddy move down Nyly's body and realized he was going straight for her pussy. Celt's tongue lightly grazed Nyly's teeth, playfully skimming them until she was paying more attention to his mouth than to Dirk's. He moved his attention to her pale neck. He suckled hard, bringing her flesh into his mouth and then gave into the animalistic urge to bite her neck and mark her truly as his. She gave a groan of acceptance, arching her neck into his mouth that

feasted on her, tasting her coppery tinge of blood. The minute he realized what he was doing, actually sampling her blood, a rush of power sharpened his senses.

"Celt, you want some pussy?"

Celt hadn't realized Dirk had moved from Nylu's cunt until his buddy was on the other side eyeing him with a weary, hard penetrating stare.

"You all right?"

"Fine. I want her ass."

"Suits me. She's cooling down, coming around more to her normal self."

"Thank you," mouthed Nylu, turning clear focused eyes to both men.

"It's our turn, Nylu, and we thought we'd try something different. You up for that?" asked Dirk.

Chapter Seven

Nylu grinned, feeling more in control of the burning fire raging through her body and the steady pulse throbbing through her pussy. *Something different?*

"I don't want any of you to get this curse." She rose slightly up off the pallet onto her arms to look at Dirk on one side and Celt on the other. Sandwiched between their hard-planed bodies, she felt totally protected and cherished. *These men are trying their best to help me get through this. They could have just let me go crazy or drown.*

"What did you have in mind?"

Celt skimmed a hand down her stomach. Nylu opened her legs to his explorations, enjoying the feel of his fingers in her pussy. She arched a knee to give him better access to her wetness. He plunged a finger in and then trailed the evidence of her desire down from her pussy to the crack of her ass. She stilled.

"Relax. I promise only enjoyment."

Celt's voice was a rough breeze of warmth on her skin. His eyes focused only on her. She knew he was asking permission and while a part of her was terrified it might be too much for her so soon she wasn't going to back down, especially since she knew it would please the both of them.

"You're going to have to tell me what to do." A moan of desire slipped from her when Dirk skimmed his fingers down her back and nibbled on her ear. Shivers spiked to life along her sensitive skin.

"Turn over," said Dirk.

Complying, Nylu turned into the soft animal skins, loving the feeling of their bristles on her skin. She arched her neck up and watched Dirk move from her side to her front. He stroked his cock with pure masculine grace. Her eyes were glued to the

sight of his hand fisted around his thick rod, watching as he pumped his cock up and down. A devilish grin spread across his face.

“You like?”

His teasing question brought warmth to her. As always Dirk was releasing the tension in her. Nylu nodded.

“You’re really going to like what Celt’s going to do to that ass of yours,” said Dirk.

Before she could question what Celt was up to she felt the weight of his body lean over her exposed rump and back. Scorching heat sailed into the marrow of her bones, curling her toes. Instinctively, she arched her back into his chiseled chest. A tender kiss from his wet lips on her spine stilled her movements.

“Mine.”

The word was a possessive growl. Nylu took complete delight in it, savoring the hidden meaning behind it. Her stomach clenched with butterflies while she smiled. Celt trailed a slow line of fire with his kisses, taking time to pay attention to every bump along her spine. A gasp of pleasure escaped her.

“You like, Nylu?”

Like Dirk, Celt was seeking her permission.

“More,” she breathed out.

For a moment, Nylu got diverted from Celt’s tender kisses. Dirk was standing in front of her with his cock an inch from her mouth. She wet her lips and opened wide. The minute she did so, he gently pushed his thick shaft inside her welcoming lips. She sucked, tasting his sweat and essence, and it fueled her desire. Celt moved to her ass, his fingers playing with the slit between her butt cheeks. Understanding finally dawned on her. Celt was going to take her, truly make her his and put his cock inside her ass. Her pussy lips quivered in sweet anticipation. His hand went lower, seeking her wetness. He repeated his actions until the tight hole of her ass was lubricated with her own juices.

Celt then moved lower to lick her hole, teasing the puckered rim with his tongue, laving at it until she was pushing up her ass, eager for what he had in mind. The entire time she kept sucking Dirk's cock. Nylu, while a novice in the arts of sexual pleasure, was pleased she was able to accomplish the task at hand.

"Your ass is so beautiful, Nylu. I want it."

Celt's heartfelt words rooted deep within Nylu. Over the course of the many months she'd spent with him this was the first time she had ever heard Celt voice what he wanted. Normally, all his careful words revolved around the good of the men he oversaw. *He wants me. Truly wants me.* Nylu smiled around Dirk's cock.

"Who wouldn't want that ass, Celt," said Dirk. "Everything about you, Nylu, is beautiful. By the Saints that mouth of yours is going to kill me."

She flashed her eyes up to look at Dirk. It was a seductive look and she knew it. Her tongue curled around the base of his cock. She wished she was more on her knees so that she had better leverage to use her hands that ached to cup Dirk's weighty balls.

As if he read her mind, Celt repositioned her so that her ass was leveraged higher up on the bed and she was on her knees, freeing her hands. She cupped Dirk's sac, squeezing it slightly.

His pant of "Yes" informed her she was on the right path.

The cool air of the dwelling settled on her exposed rump, causing her to shiver. Immediately the heat of Celt's cock stoked her inner fire. She felt him settle his weight onto her back and then she felt one of his fingers lubricated with her juices slide into her tight asshole. He slowly invaded her opening and waited until she grew accustomed to the feel of his finger inside of her. Nylu wiggled her ass to entice his movements. Sure enough he did just that, plunging first one finger and then withdrawing to slowly push two more digits into her virgin hole. The nerves lining her tight hole jumped to life, sparking with passion.

"Do it," said Dirk.

Closing her eyes, Nylu let the intense imagery of what she was doing wash through her. *Here I am on my knees about to let a Maida man take his pleasure in my ass while another comes in my mouth. I should be ashamed of this. But I'm not. We're doing nothing wrong. All three of us are simply pleasuring each other. There is no sin in this.*

"Nylu, you sure about this?"

Celt's tender baritone voice broke through her thoughts. Removing Dirk's cock from her mouth, she answered. "Yes. I'm sure. Do it."

That was all the encouragement Celt needed. He groaned and then his weight was once again settled over her. She felt his cock head nudge into her tight hole and still. A second later it slipped all the way in. She felt him stiffen, his arm muscles bulge with tension on the sides of her. He was waiting for her to set the initial pace. That knowledge warmed her. Like before when it was just his fingers in her ass, she wiggled her rump. Placing his hands on her hips he plunged his cock in and out of her ass in swift measured strokes that quickly had her body spiraling toward another orgasm.

Dirk, not to be outdone, bent down to tweak her nipples. She had half expected him to put his cock back into her mouth. She smiled, understanding he was letting Celt and her seek their pleasure.

Between Dirk's skillful fingers twisting her nipples into tight buds and Celt pounding into her ass, the fever of release quickly took over Nylu. The minute Dirk moved his fingers to her wet pussy, tweaking her pebbled nub, she climaxed hard.

A stifled groan of desire and an eloquent curse informed her Celt had followed suit. Gently he withdrew. Expecting him to immediately leave her, she felt rewarded when he trailed a line of kisses back from her rump up to her spine toward her neck.

"You are mine."

"Yes," she said.

"Not bad, Celt. Now it's my turn."

In the heat of the moment, Nylu had forgotten for a second that Dirk had not found his release. She let Celt scoop her body up onto the pallet. His chest was to her back and the feel of his beard, how the soft hairs brushed her skin, had her pussy once again throbbing for more. Celt turned his attention to her breasts. "Pleasure him well, Nylu."

Dirk moved to the side of the pallet, which was raised slightly up off the carpeted ground. It was the perfect height for them. Cocooned in Celt's warm arms she lifted her head up, opened her mouth and clamped her hand around the base of Dirk's cock. He groaned loudly with pleasure.

"Fucking great, Nylu. Celt, watch. I know you like to. I certainly enjoyed watching you fuck her ass," said Dirk.

The erotic prose coming from Dirk flared heat between the three of them.

"Yeah, I do like to watch you, Nylu, with Dirk." Celt's admission was heartfelt with passion.

Nylu took Dirk's cock out of her mouth. "I like knowing you're watching too."

"You do?"

"Yeah, I really do, Celt."

Dirk took his cock in his hand, bringing her attention back to her task. She smiled, loving the heat in Celt's eyes as her mouth once again settled over Dirk's rod. With Dirk's shaft in her mouth it was hard for Nylu to concentrate solely on sucking him off. Celt stopped talking so he could play with her pebbled nipples. Then his fingers moved to play with her wet pussy. His finger slid in and out of her cunt, mimicking Dirk's swift movements with his cock.

Cupping Dirk's testicles in one hand, Nylu gave them a squeeze. She opened her mouth wider, accepting the girth of Dirk's cock. He plunged it deep into her mouth twice and then came, his hot spurt of seed sliding easily down her throat. She licked his shaft clean. He leaned in and kissed her, stroking his tongue inside her mouth. Celt's hands moved back to her breasts, playing with the undersides and then skimming the tops of her puckered nipples.

The two of them are going to be the death of me. A giggle of delight escaped Nylu.

"What's so funny?" Celt slid a skillful tongue inside her ear. She hissed with pleasure.

"I was just thinking the two of you really are going to pleasure me to death." The minute Nylu said the words she wished she hadn't. Celt stiffened behind her, his hands leaving her slick skin. Dirk stood up and quickly turned to find his clothing.

"Sorry, I shouldn't have said that." Nylu wished with all her might the tension would dissipate. She let Celt slide out from behind her.

"You can die, Nylu if we don't pleasure you. That's why we're doing this. Don't ever forget it. I know I don't."

Nylu felt cold with the stark truth of Celt's words. She watched as he too picked up his discarded clothing. She clutched an animal skin to her, needing the warmth of the soft hide next to hers. "I don't ever forget. It's my life. I know what's at stake."

"Do you?" asked Celt.

She nodded.

"You do realize we're only prolonging the inevitable. Sooner or later what Dirk and I are doing to you isn't going to work. Sooner or later you will need the fertile seed of a Maida man to come inside that sweet cunt of yours."

Standing now fully clothed, Dirk closed in on Celt's space. On his face was a look of cold fury. "You said you might be able to help her."

Nylu watched as Celt shook his head. "No. I said I'd try to help her. I don't know of any magic that will fix what's taking place to her body. We're running out of time and I haven't come up with any options. The outcome doesn't look good.

"Fuck you, Celt."

Standing, Nylu took a deep breath in. "Don't, Dirk. He's right." Nylu turned her attention back to Celt. His head was bowed down and he looked dejected and defeated. *This isn't going to do.*

"I know you're trying, Celt, and thank you. I have faith in you. If there is a way to fix what's taking place within my body you are the one who will find it. If not, then it's as the blessed Mother Saints have decreed. But I ask one favor of you."

Lacing her fingers together, she continued. "If I get to the point where I don't know what I'm doing and I'm about to fuck a Maida man who doesn't know about the curse, kill me."

Dirk gasped. Celt raised his head to look her square in the eyes.

Nylu needed him to promise her this much. It was her last request. "Promise me. Give me your word as a warrior...as a free man."

A full minute passed before Celt nodded. "I give you my word as a free Maida man."

Wisely, Dirk remained silent.

"If we're done here, it's time to meet with Tulon. I need to find out how the men can best be used in this war. Dirk, stay with her." A second later Celt slipped out the door.

Dirk moved to Nylu's side. He placed a strong arm around her shoulders, hugging her body for comfort. "He'll find a way to stop this."

"You mean the war?" Nylu looked up at Dirk. She wished with all her might it was Celt's arms tucked around her shaky shoulders.

"No. I mean you. He's in love with you, Nylu. You are his."

Moving out of his embrace, Nylu harrumphed. "Love. I don't think so. You heard him...he's just doing this because it's the honorable thing to do."

"Now there you are wrong. He's doing this because he has strong feelings for you that he might not be able to voice and maybe not show, but I know. We've been together since we were toddlers, assigned to work the refuse section."

Nylu felt her eyes grow wide in disbelief. "Refuse? How long were you stationed there?"

"Ten cycles. Then we both got placed in the laundry room of the hospital but Celt always liked to help out. He was quickly scooped up by the wardens in the hospital and trained as an intern. With his help and smarts, he taught me how to read, write and learn math and he even put in a good word to the wardens about my work ethic. I got recruited as an intern a cycle before he escaped. He's really smart. He'll find a way to cure you, I know."

"Sounds to me like you're going more on blind faith." She picked up her shirt that had been lying on the carpet and ignored the flare of hope Dirk's words sparked.

"Blind faith is better than nothing. Don't give up on him. You're the only woman I know he's ever willingly pleased."

Nylu whipped her shirt on. "I don't understand. Are you saying he's a virgin?"

Dirk laughed loudly. "Hell no! You understand when a Maida woman picks a man for sex we don't get a choice. He's fucked his fair share of infertile Maida women, but never willingly. The choice was his. Make no mistake about it. Celt wanted to make you his and he did."

Fully clothed, Nylu turned to Dirk. "But you wanted me also."

He nodded, casting his eyes to the carpeted ground. "I'm not stupid, Nylu, I know you feel more for him than me, but I can't change my feelings. Yeah, I want you...I'd have to be a blind man not to."

His teasing tone and smile released the breath she'd been holding. He grasped her to him and gave her a warm hug. "This isn't a competition. I love Celt like a brother and would lay my life down for him. Yeah, I have feelings for you but at the end of the day I want both you and him to be happy."

"But what about you?"

"I'm always happy. But Celt, he's different than the rest of us and has always been so. He's driven. He's always been a natural leader for the men but now, even more so. Things will change for Maida...mark my words it will be because of him. He will be the

one who will ensure all men truly live a free life. Or he will die trying.” He gave her a quick kiss on the forehead and then released her.

The prophecy of Dirk’s words brushed over Nylu’s skin like a lover’s caress. Freedom, a poetic word that filled a heart and soul with longing. She had never understood that before until she realized what carrying a male child meant. *Change is good. I’ve never been with two men before and that change I certainly welcomed.*

Chapter Eight

Things aren't going well. Celt eyed the end of the latest battle. For the past moon cycle he and his men, along with Tulon and Rusty's Pegcentaurs, had done nothing but fight day in and day out against the Maida women.

Now most of the Dark Forest lay in ruins. The once majestic tree branches that had reached to the heavens were now burnt splinters. Gray ashes of wood charred the landscape. Death clung to the air, heavy with its fire-encrusted smell. It caused his heart to lurch in fear. *What will happen if they succeed in destroying the rest of the forest?*

Celt didn't want to think about that. As it was he felt like he was losing his mind. With every acre of forest destroyed he heard hundreds of agonized screams in his head. He knew those voices were the trees themselves and the tree wraiths, creatures who had bound themselves, with the help of the Forest Guardians, to protect and nourish the woods. They continually bombarded his thoughts. Begged for his help. Celt didn't know what else he could do. Daily, he did hand-to-hand combat against the Maida warrior women, slaying dozens of them, which only made him feel more anguished. *When did it become like this? When will it end? Maybe freedom isn't worth it.*

"Well, these Maida warrior women are tenacious, I'll give them that." Dirk wiped mud and splatters of blood off his face.

"They are fools. If they succeed in destroying all of the Dark Forest, Mother Nature will destroy them."

Tulon's angry words whipped through Celt.

"What do you mean?" Dirk moved to where Tulon had flashed from a unicorn into a man directly next to Celt.

Tulon's face was taut with worry lines that hadn't been there a few weeks ago. He looked angry, annoyed and sad all at once. The fact the majestic Prince of the Forest felt

torn and wasn't able to put a stop to the advancement of the Maida warrior women caused a tremor of fear to slide down Celt's spine.

"Life is a balance. They think by destroying the Dark Forest it will put a stop to all thoughts of freedom the Maida men throughout all the colonies are having. It won't. They may succeed in burning down the forest but their actions will only enflame the idealism of freedom more. My fear is that Mother Nature will put a stop to them for good."

Dirk looked at Tulon in disbelief. "You talk of Mother Nature as if she were a real thing."

"She is," answered Celt. "I feel her in here, next to my heart. I feel her sorrow with the destruction of the forest and the land. I hear her shouting at me to do the honorable thing." Celt hung his head wearily. "I have no idea what that is."

Tulon's gentle touch on his sore shoulder made him instantly feel better. "When the time comes you may surprise yourself. But for now, you two must tend to the needs of your woman."

"We left her at camp." Celt immediately raised his head, inhaling that cinnamon scent that sailed through the thick ash-filled air, informing him without sight she was close.

"You might not be able to save her."

Tulon's words knifed through Celt's heart. Even though he and Dirk fought daily against the Maida warrior women, they also took time every night to sexually satisfy Nylu. It had become the one source of pleasure he had come to look forward to. The three of them, naked as the day they were born, often joked together, sharing a mutual desire to find pleasure when their world had obviously gone crazy. They also laughed when their male hands contacted with each other's slicked flesh.

Sometimes Celt caught an unguarded look of passion on his buddy's face but he wasn't yet ready to examine what that could signify. It didn't mean he didn't want Nylu all to himself. He did. But he understood the necessity of their actions. Nylu's life

was at stake. Four weeks since the fertility curse hit Nylu and he was no closer to finding a cure. That scared Celt. In his heart he knew he could no longer exile Nylu to the dangers of the forest and he knew without a doubt she'd never go back to Maida lands. Equality and freedom for all was something she longed for just as much as the men. And because of her idealism, Celt loved her more than any words he could voice. Instead he kept his thoughts to himself and found solace in her arms and body, loving her sweet unique womanly scent that clung to his and Dirk's skin.

The intense longing to plunge his cock deep within her pulsing pussy often pushed him dangerously close to action. He knew that tantalizing thrill was also something Dirk felt. Wisely, they had refrained from the act.

Dirk walked over to where Nylu stood. Without thought or inhibition, she slid her lush body next to Dirk's. The possessive part that lived within Celt growled in annoyance.

"Sharing is a hard thing to do, especially when you love her."

"What are you talking about, Tulon?" asked Celt.

Tulon shook his head. It was a slight movement but Celt knew he hadn't fooled the Prince of the Forest. "In your heart, you love her and she loves you."

Reaching for his fallen wooden spear, Celt grimaced. "It's not that easy."

"It's not that complicated." As usual Tulon tossed the words with deadly accuracy.

"We can't be together. You know all about the Maida curse. If I fuck her I die."

"Yes, unfortunately I understand your predicament all too well, Maida man, but sooner than later it will come down to one choice. Even you know that. I must leave you and find Rowena. Fingers crossed she had luck seeking a diplomatic meeting with the Supreme High Fertility Council."

"Isn't her mother the ruler of that council?"

"Again, unfortunately yes. She doesn't like me or anything that isn't Maida. The fact both her daughters deserted her, fleeing from the controlling and well-organized

Maida life filled with its feminine rituals that are used to control men...to keep them as slaves...well, that doesn't sit her in favor with her mother at the moment. When both Rusty and I did meet her mother it wasn't exactly a tea party." Tulong gave a hearty chuckle. It helped dispel the sense of doom that hung over the darkening ash-filled sky.

"Did you flash into a unicorn?"

Curiosity ate away at Celt. The picture of the prim and proper, straitlaced woman who ruled the Supreme High Fertility Council watching as the men her daughters married flashed into living mythological creatures caused Celt to smile in earnest.

"Yes we did."

"I would have loved to see her reaction," said Celt. He kept his eyes on Dirk and Nylu, noticing how she caressed his buddy's arm in a sensual way.

"I am not proud of what happened. It upset both Rowena and Tyrana greatly to see their mother break down into hysterical tears. We quickly left. Rowena was upset for days and Rusty was mad at me for attempting to make the ruler of Maida understand. But what was I supposed to do? I am Prince of the Forest, guardian of all the magical creatures that live on this planet. It was my duty to attempt to reason with her."

A weary note of resignation slipped into Tulong's voice, forcing Celt to pull his attention away from Dirk and Nylu. "You tried. That's all anyone can ask. That's exactly what we're doing here. Maida men deserve freedom, free will, free choice as much as any Maida woman. This is our last stand. This burnt forest is it. We must stop their ignorance and get them to see reason instead of fear, because, Tulong, it is fear of the unknown...fear of change...fear of losing their way of life that has caused this war."

Tulong grasped Celt's shoulders in a warrior embrace and stared hard into Celt's eyes. "I understand your words more than most, Celt. I am honored that the Forest Guardians saved you and marked you, because in your heart is purity and goodness. You are right. This is our last stand. We will succeed because failing is not an option."

Tulon grinned, delivering a squeeze to Celt's shoulders. A tingle of warmth settled deep within Celt, filling his heart and soul, renewing him with a strong purpose of hope. To have the Prince of the Forest trust him was a great honor.

"Now, however, you must turn your attention to Nylu. She needs you."

Those sharp words caused Celt to turn his head and look for them. He couldn't spot them.

"They moved deeper into the forest for privacy," said Tulon. "I suggest you join them. Wish I could." Tulon chuckled and then turned and marched away before Celt could say anything.

Celt wished he could laugh but what was happening to Nylu wasn't one bit funny. Sure, tasting her sugary-sweet cunt, watching her climax over and over again and letting her suck his cock was bliss, but Celt knew she was losing the battle with her body. Last night he and Dirk had had to make her climax five times simply to get her fever to ebb. She had been so tired afterward they hadn't even taken pleasure themselves. Instead, neither had said a word. Each had cuddled to her side, he spooning his body up against that round ass of hers, while she hugged Dirk.

Finding Dirk and Nylu together in a bright patch of green seemed at first a surreal picture after the charred landscape he'd just left.

"She's really bad, Celt."

Nylu lay on the grassy blanket fully naked. Her skin had that feverish glow, her eyes were glazed, her nipples pointy nubs all puckered with desire and her lips were plump. She was a picture of desire, a female nymph whose body needed sex to live.

"I'm burning up. It's no longer helping. You can't save me. Just let me die." Her plea tore into him. To never hold her body close to his again. To never smell that musky ambrosia of her sex, to never hear her pant his name as she climaxed from the pleasure he so lovingly and unselfishly gave her body, Celt couldn't stand it. However what choice did he have?

Day by day she was losing that precious mental balance. Her spirit was starting to ebb. That perky optimistic personality of hers didn't shine nearly so bright and that, more than anything else, plunged the knife into his heart more. He didn't want her to go insane. And he didn't have a cure to fix her. Lately, after battling the warriors, they'd enter the makeshift tent only to find her sitting and staring into space. Celt wondered if she sat there all day. The cold reality of what was happening to her actually eased a bit of the guilt he had suffered watching that Maida man die. The women, like the men, didn't have much of a choice. The dreaded fertility curse ensured only one thing – only one would live.

"You need to leave us, Dirk."

"Fuck you. I'm staying. She needs our help."

Dirk stood, placing his hands on his hips as he looked from Nylu back to him. "Don't even think it, Celt. I swear to all the Saints...don't you even think it."

"I made her a promise."

"Fuck that promise."

A rustling noise drew both of their attention back to Nylu. She had spread her legs and was currently trailing a hand down over her body. Celt knew that as forward as she had become with the two of them, playing with herself would never occur to her. This was what happened when the Maida fertility curse took over.

"You like?" The soft musical lilt of her voice licked hot flames through his body. His cock hardened as a rage of desire sunk into him.

Silently, he and Dirk watched as Nylu got braver with her own explorations of her slick, heated body. The air around them sizzled with the combined scents of the living forest and Nylu's cinnamon-sweet sex. It was an intoxicating mix. Celt felt his breath hitch when Nylu plunged a finger inside her cunt. Her glistening arousal gleamed at both of them. Her swollen pussy lips, pink and flushed with desire, was a picture he loved looking at. The urge to bend down and lick her sweet essence shook him. She bent one knee up, exposing her nether lips, and with one hand opened her lips so they

could see her glistening, aroused core, bright red with desire. The other hand found its way to her already peaked nipple. She deliberately twisted the tight brown bud until she was moaning with the need for release.

"By the blessed Saints she's amazing," said Dirk.

Celt noticed that Dirk was about ready to drop his pants. Placing a hand on his shoulder he stopped his impending movements. "You need to leave. Now!"

"Don't fucking order me away from her. She's mine also." Dirk looped his thumbs inside the waist of his pants.

"I will not ask you again, Dirk. Leave. Now. All will be okay. I promise."

Dirk turned and looked at him at precisely the moment Nylu uttered one of those purely sexual womanly sighs that made a man think of nothing but plunging his cock over and over again inside her tight sheath. Celt felt his teeth gnash together in frustration. He ran a shaky hand through his messed hair, reaching for calm.

"I'm leaving, Celt, but your fucking promises rot."

Celt watched his buddy stalk off. There was nothing he could say that would make him feel better but what had to be done with Nylu had to be now. It wasn't fair to her and to all of the men nearby. She was distracting them from their main purpose. It was paramount they stop the Maida warriors from destroying the Dark Forest. This distraction they all didn't need. And he had to save her. Watching her die a little more each day was killing him.

I should have let her drown. Even as he thought that he knew it wasn't true.

Bending down so that he was on his knees beside her, Celt looked at her. *She's so small and beautiful, and so trusting. She doesn't deserve to die.* He admired her perfect hourglass shape, round full breasts and small hips that led to lean legs that had become more muscular over the past months. Long brown eyelashes framed her almond-shaped eyes. It took him a full moment to realize she'd opened her eyes and they looked clear, no longer crazed with fever.

"Thank you," she said.

"For what?"

"For fulfilling your promise. Thank you. I want you to know something, Celt." He watched her pause, taking a moment to gather her thoughts. "You are the best man I have ever known. I feel truly honored that you let me stay with you and your men. You are a leader. Don't you ever forget that."

"I don't know what to say to that, Nylu."

She smiled. "It was just an observation I needed to make. Thank you. Thanks for being considerate and thanks for trying."

Celt snickered. "You think I'm considerate."

She placed her small hand on his leg. The heat of her palm awoke the desire he had tramped down. "I know you're considerate."

Just then a large volley whizzed past the treetops.

"I thought the battle was done for the day," said Nylu. Her eyes went instantly wide with fear.

"So did I."

"Then do it quickly."

"I really can't believe I'm having this conversation. The fact you're lucid might mean you'll be okay."

"Was I lucid five minutes ago?"

He shook his head.

"That's what I thought. I don't remember leaving the camp and I certainly don't recall taking all my clothes off. It's getting worse. I know that. You and Dirk know that. There are hours I can't account for during the day and it terrifies me that I can't remember what I was doing. This isn't me. It's time for this to end. You tried, so thank you."

Celt felt a wall of grief seize him. "I didn't really try, Nylu."

She touched his cheek, her soft palm resting like a light feather against his skin. "Yes you did. You and Dirk both tried but I know your sacrifices."

He tensed. "What do you mean?"

"You don't want to talk about it so I never brought it up but I know what you do in the night when you think we are all asleep. Thank you for that."

Celt gulped with shame. Every night he'd trek deep into the Dark Forest until he felt it was safe enough to kneel down and offer prayers to the Forest Guardians. He'd begged for Nylu's life, slicing his wrists, shedding his blood for her in the hopes they'd heal her like they had cured him from the deadly *asp* bite. All to no avail. Trudging back weary and exhausted he always made sure his sleeves covered his wrists. By morning the cuts would be healed. Even though a bargain had been made between he and the Forest Guardians, ensuring he wasn't about to turn into a tree wraith, Celt knew a part of the forest essence still lived within him.

A second volley cropped off a large treetop close to them.

"It's not safe here." He attempted to pull her up. She fought him.

"Don't, Celt. I want to end my life here where it's green. Please just do it." Her hazel eyes filled with tears.

"No." This time he hauled her naked body to his. Not being able to stop himself, he cupped her soft mound in the palms of his hands. Her head rested at his heart. She linked her arms around his head and stood on her toes, her lips a breath away from his before he realized the curse had taken hold of her once again. Uninhibited, she rubbed her breasts against his shirt.

"Kiss me."

He heeded her plea this time. In reverence he gently traced the outline of her lips. His tongue danced around first the lower then the upper lip, taking time to lick and nip them in places. She opened her mouth in a welcoming invitation that he took. Plunging his tongue inside her mouth, she met his duel with her own. Her tongue boldly

explored his mouth, skimming over his teeth until he was squeezing her ass in an attempt to get closer.

Wanting to feel his skin against hers, Celt stripped with fierce movements, needing to have the taste and feel of her imprinted on him one last time. By the time he was naked, Nylu was all moans and groans. Her body was hot to the touch, while her hands raked over his in desperate strokes of desire. She grasped his cock in one hand, pumping his rod with swift hard strokes that soon had him groaning madly with desire.

Letting Nylu tug his body with hers back to the grassy blanket, he no longer cared that volleys were still continuing to rain down around them. *Maybe I'm coming down with the Maida curse.* He wanted to laugh that idea off but didn't. There was a voice loud and clear echoing inside his head that was shouting at him to take her. Make her his. Offer her to the Dark Forest. Sacrifice her to the Forest Guardians.

The clarity of those thoughts sucked the very breath from him. *No*, he shouted inside his head. Nylu would not be anyone's sacrifice. If anyone was going to be a sacrifice it would be him.

The feel of her warm hands cupping his sac released him. He was going to do the honorable thing. He was going to save Nylu by giving himself to her. He would willingly plunge his cock inside her sweet pussy, taste heaven and then die.

I will be your sacrifice, he shouted to the voices raging around in his head.

So be it.

There was utter silence, a void of all sound as Celt turned to Nylu. Determination spurred his caresses. He felt Nylu part her legs, tempting him into her deadly ecstasy. This time he was going to sample all of it.

Kissing her hot sexed body, he took his time to play with each nipple. She loved having them kissed and nipped so it was with delight he was able to apply his skills to them without sharing them with Dirk. Moving further down her now sun-kissed body

he found the juncture of her sex, her soft brown hair encouraging further exploration. She didn't hesitate to open her legs wider for him as he settled between her thighs.

"I love the taste of you."

Celt knew by this point she'd be unable to respond in words. The curse made rational thought for her impossible. All her body craved was climaxing...anything to take the deep, throbbing sexual itch that racked her body away. Her only cure though was fertile Maida seed. That he had plenty of. With the late afternoon sun as their witness he was going to give her what she really needed – his semen.

Forking his tongue into her glistening pussy he lapped up her juices, tasting that sweet delectable cinnamon flavor of her essence combined with her womanly musky sex. Pebbling her pearly nub until it was a tight peak of desire, he slid his body up hers. Normally at this point, he'd plunge a finger into her cunt and watch her climax. Today he was about to let his cock get the ultimate pleasure.

"Don't."

Celt barely heard the word of warning she was attempting to pant out through the thick sexual haze of longing tearing through her. However, he did feel her hands attempt to push him off her.

"You promised...you'd kill me." Her neck arched as a flush of desire caused her to gasp.

Pushing his cock deep inside her wet pussy in one swift stroke, he said, "I lied."

Nylu didn't say anything else as her body took up that ancient mating ritual. Her nails skimmed down his back, digging deep into his ass as she clutched him to her. Her passion anchored her to him. He rode her hard, pounding all his lifetime's desire into her. This would be it for him. This would be the only chance he'd have to make love to her and he was going to make sure it was memorable.

Grasping her legs, he brought them up to his body, exposing where they joined to his gaze. It was an erotic sight he wanted seared into his mind when he went into the light. He kissed the insides of her feet and she mewled her pleasure, the climax tearing

through her with ferocious strokes. She arched up off the grass, bucking into him, clutching him with all her might. The minute the wave crested, he released her legs, needing to set a new pace.

While Celt knew he wouldn't have time for a long, slow lovemaking, he was going to take a few minutes to deliver a few thorough, long strokes. The sweet reward of the sensation of almost pulling out of her drenched pussy with her fingers clutched in a death grip to his ass cheeks caused his eyes to roll back in ecstasy. Deliberately slow, he pulled his cock out of her wet cunt, ensuring his cock head remained tipped into her entrance. Only then did he slowly push it back in, ensuring the nerves inside her pussy felt every inch of his rock-hard erection.

Following a rhythm as ancient as the beginnings of Maida life, he plunged into her, letting his emotions take them on the journey they so much deserved. He could have sworn he felt the tip of her womb as he speared his cock over and over again into her cunt. Dipping his finger down to her nub he tweaked it hard, letting the second climax take hold of her. The minute he felt her inner muscles clench like a glove around his cock, he came, giving her what she ultimately needed, desperately yearned for...his seed. This time when she came, she came with a shock of reasoning.

"No, Celt, no...you promised me."

Her cry unleashed something even wilder within him. His cock sprang back to life. Her eyes widened in disbelief.

"Guess I'm not dead yet."

"Good, then that means I get to join you," said Dirk.

With his cock still imbedded deep within Nyly, Celt watched Dirk approach. "How long have you been there?"

"Long enough." Dirk yanked off his shirt and breeches in swift strokes.

"You are not putting your cock in her pussy."

"Who said I was," teased Dirk, moving to Nyly's head.

Understanding dawned on both Nylu and Celt. They had talked about this but only in the “what if”. Now, it seemed Nylu’s one desire to have both men inside her was about to become a reality.

“You okay with this?” Letting his cock flex inside Nylu, Celt watch her lick her lips.

“Yeah, I’m okay with it. Are you?”

“Oh yeah, I’m sure,” Celt said.

“Well, now that we got that worked out, let’s do it,” said Dirk.

Celt slowly withdrew from Nylu’s warm sheath. He moved over to a large tree and sat closer to it. His cock, still slick from their lovemaking, dripped their combined juices onto his thighs. He patted his lap for Nylu to follow. Gracefully she got up and moved to him. Grasping her hips, he nudged her down onto his once again hard shaft. He hissed with pleasure, the tight feel of her pussy a welcome haven.

“Bend over more.” He took her head in his hands so he could claim her plump lips. Kissing her senseless, Celt felt the moment Dirk moved to her back. Through hooded eyes he watched his buddy’s hands skim over Nylu’s body. From the gasp of delight that escaped Nylu’s parted lips, Celt surmised Dirk was kissing her tight hole, lubricating it.

Forcing Nylu’s attention back to his lips, Celt plundered her mouth with his tongue. His actions mimicked what they were about to do. She arched more onto him, letting Dirk position her the exact way he needed. She stilled and tensed slightly the moment Dirk’s cock poised at her puckered entrance.

“Let him in, Nylu. We’ve got you.” Celt breathed the reassuring words into her mouth. He felt her relax and a guttural grunt from Dirk seconds later told him his buddy’s cock was deep in her ass. Celt dragged in a ragged groan, feeling the length of Dirk’s shaft extend along Nylu’s inner walls. Celt wanted her ass, but didn’t dare let Dirk take her pussy. He was not about to pass along the death sentence to his one and only true friend.

A friend who had come to mean a lot more than he realized.

"Thank you, Dirk," said Celt.

Dirk flashed a smile at him. "Trust me, buddy, it's my pleasure."

"That's not what I mean."

Dirk's eyes seared him. "I know exactly what you mean."

A gasp of pleasure and a smile of satisfaction took over Nylu, breaking the slight sexual tension that had grown. "By the Saints, this is incredible."

"You're incredible." Dirk nuzzled her neck with kisses.

Celt flexed his hips, pushing his cock deep inside her. It didn't take the two men long until they found a rhythm that fit all three of them perfectly. It also didn't take them long to climax. Between Celt's cock deep within her pussy and Dirk's thick shaft wedged tight in her ass, Nylu experienced an intense orgasm. Celt released his warm seed deep inside her again, hoping it would heal her and take away the dreaded Maida fertility curse. Dirk came long and hard inside of her, his groans of satisfaction echoing in the forest.

Dirk was the first to withdraw. Celt gently removed Nylu off his body. All three lay panting on the grass, the tall trees of the Dark Forest bending over them to shelter them from prying eyes.

A sharp pain sliced through Celt causing him to instinctively roll into the fetal position.

"What by the Saints is happening to him?"

Dirk's voice told Celt all he needed to know. He had paid the ultimate price for his pleasure. *Well, better me than him.*

"No, I won't let this happen again. I won't," said Nylu.

Wanting to get up but unable to do so, Celt's body went into a seizure. His brain zapped painfully like it was being electrified.

"You should leave, Nylu."

Thank you. He couldn't voice the words he so desperately yearned for. He'd tasted heaven inside Nylu and wasn't disappointed. Dirk would make her leave so she wouldn't witness him become a rabid animal. *Thank you, Dirk.* Panting madly with the effort to take a breath through the slicing pain his body was rapidly going through, Celt said one last prayer to the Forest Guardians.

A grief-stricken howl of outrage filled Nylu. *Not again. I won't let this happen again. I won't.*

Bending down, she bowed low to the large tree behind which Celt lay, thrashing madly around on the grassy ground. "I give thee my life for his. I trade my life for his. I willingly sacrifice myself for him. Save him."

Stealing Celt's dagger, she didn't hesitate. Nylu sliced her wrists, allowing her blood to bleed out onto the forest floor. She was doing exactly what she had witnessed Celt do countless times when he thought none witnessed his praying. She only hoped this time someone would listen to her plea.

Nylu felt Dirk sit down beside her. For a moment she feared he was going to haul her away from the horrible death scene taking place before her eyes. Instead, out of the corner of her eye she watched the unthinkable happen. Dirk bowed low to the tree like she had and uttered the exact same words, following her actions to slice a thin strip of skin from his wrists.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm doing what you're doing. Saving him. I give thee my life for his. I trade my life for his. I willingly sacrifice myself for him. Save him."

A blinding flash of light appeared before both of them. Inside the light came four distinct voices.

"This was not foreseen."

"Two lives for one overrides our bond on him," said the second male voice.

"These Maida have pleased Mother Nature very much with their unselfish acts. She has granted their requests."

The soft, whispering feminine voice brought hope to Nylu. Wisely, Nylu held her breath. Knowing this was the time to voice her truest desire, Nylu bowed her head lower.

"Blessed Saints, I would willingly sacrifice myself if you would kindly put a stop to the Maida fertility curse. I willingly give you my life."

Without hesitation Dirk followed her words. He grasped her hand in his and gave her a reassuring squeeze. Together they watched their blood seep down their arms to fall, drop by drop, to the ground.

"They ask too much," said the first male voice.

"They are willing sacrifices," answered the female voice.

"No!"

Celt's voice cut deep through Nylu. He was alive.

"I will give you myself willingly." He crawled to her other side, catching her hand with a gentle tug on her fingers.

Tears clogged deep within Nylu's heart. To have him alive only to have him willingly give himself to the Saints so that the Maida women, the same women who treated him like a slave, would be freed from the fertility curse broke her.

"This is not your curse, Celt. It is mine. Ours. You deserve to live and you deserve your freedom. All men deserve freedom," said Nylu. She wasn't sure where she got the bravado to utter those words but it felt right.

"The Maida woman is correct, Celt, this isn't your curse," said the female's voice.

"I love her," said Celt.

His words unleashed the torrent of tears she had been holding in check.

"Why does the female cry?" asked the first guardian with the loud baritone voice.

Before anyone could respond the wind gathered force, knocking Nylu, Celt and Dirk over. A hum of power seeped over them. A calmness that stopped the pain of all that had happened, seeped into Nylu.

"Mother Nature has fixed everything," said the female voice. "You three have restored her faith in the Maida race again. All is well. The war is over. You men will be free and the curse is no more. And we, the Forest Guardians, release you, Celt, from your bond to us. Go thee well and live long, Maidians."

Getting back to her knees, Nylu looked at Celt and Dirk. Then she looked beyond the men and smiled. The forest had been restored to its dark beauty filled with tall thick trees. Both men had offered themselves to save her and to save all the Maida women from the curse. Both. Nylu then noticed she and Dirk were no longer bleeding. Their cuts had been miraculously healed.

"Thank you."

Celt's husky voice surged through Nylu. She realized then that even though both had done everything together it was only Celt she truly loved.

"I love you," she said, turning to Celt. "Thank you."

Nylu felt the guardians dissipate.

"Glad to have you back with us, Celt," said Dirk, standing.

"It's good to be back," said Celt.

A moment of awkward silence filled the Dark Forest. "Well, that's my cue to leave," said Dirk.

"No." Celt stood up and grasped Dirk in a fierce hug. "I love you, buddy."

"I know. But it's not in the way I want."

"I'm sorry," said Celt.

"Don't be. I want you to be happy. You deserve that."

Celt stepped out of the embrace. "So do you."

"I am happy, Celt. I'm happy knowing you are. I'm not a complicated man." Dirk chuckled as he too took a step back.

Halting Dirk by placing her hand on his arm, Nylu was surprised to feel Celt's arm embrace her waist. "Thank you for all you did for us...for all of us," she said.

"Yes, thank you," said Celt.

"For you two, anything. Now, I'm going to explain all of this to Tulon so you two can have some privacy. Promise me this time there won't be any more Guardians involved."

Nylu smiled. Once again Dirk's teasing tone eased her. In Celt's warm embrace she watched Dirk leave. Celt kissed the back of her neck, causing goose bumps to jump to life.

"Did you hear me? I love you."

His honest words caused her sex to throb with a hunger the likes of which she'd never known. Not even when she'd had the curse had she felt so wild, so free, so in love with another. To know she could love him with all her heart, soul and body and he could love her the same set her free.

His cock nudged against her ass, his hard proof of his arousal telling her all she needed to know.

"With the curse lifted I plan to make love to you like I've wanted, every day, every night for the rest of my life."

"It's a good thing then that the war is over too." She loved being able to tease him. Turning into his warm embrace, she realized they were both still naked. "Show me."

Those words were barely out of her mouth before Nylu found herself leveraged up against a large tree. The wooden tree bark bit lightly into her back, but she welcomed it. Her eyes widened with excitement. "What do you have in mind?"

"I plan to show you," teased Celt.

Nylu was stunned. The breathtakingly beautiful smile that filled Celt's face was one of a man totally at peace with himself and the world he lived in. The minute his cock entered her she too felt that peace. Wrapping her legs around his waist, his hands cupped her ass. With the tree behind her, she let him set the wild pace of their lovemaking. She rode his cock until the tight cords of his neck informed her he was about to come deep inside her. Her sheath pulsed as the orgasm tore through her body. But unlike before she felt her heart and soul soar with it.

With his cock wedged deep within her cunt, she realized that together they had found the true meaning of freedom. To love, and be loved in return, was truly free.

About the Author

Vivacious by nature, I'm either baking or thinking up my next love scenes – talking about mixing ingredients. Trust me, the recipes are always delicious, especially if chocolate's involved. I juggle writing in between my demanding four children and have discovered some of my best plot themes while driving the mini-van to and from places. I love a good night out on the town where I can discard the mom profile and dance to my heart's content.

Writing has always been my passion. I strongly believe in soul mates and feel eternally lucky that I snatched up mine. The wilder side of me comes out in my erotic writings, where I fuse lustful fantasy with the paranormal edge. I thoroughly enjoy making up worlds, hunky men who cause me to go weak in the knees and intelligent women who can also let their hair down.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and e-mail address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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