

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



WIZARD'S THIEF

AMETHYST

CHRISTINE
D'ABO

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Wizard's Thief

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WIZARD'S THIEF

Christine d'Abo

Chapter One

Callie lowered her body from the stone opening that acted as a window and let herself drop into the blackness of the room. Her heart pounded so hard in her chest she figured the sentries would hear it and come running. Not that they'd be expecting an outsider to be stupid enough to break into the Warren.

She wasn't stupid, just desperate.

Turning her ear toward the door, she closed her eyes and strained to hear any indication that someone was outside. The silence that greeted her was more unnerving than comforting.

"Are you alive?" Tarin's harsh whisper filtered down to her from above.

"Yes. Shut up before they hear you," she spat back.

What the hell was she *doing* here? Of course, she *knew* the answer to the question and she hadn't any say in the matter, either. She was the only one small enough to fit through the window. And when Tarin wanted her to do a job, there was no arguing.

There had to be easier ways to survive in this godforsaken city than to work for a master criminal. Sneaking around the Warren trying to steal something that belonged to the wizard's guild was beyond stupid. Her life would come to a very abrupt end if anyone caught her.

"Go fetch, girl. I'll wait for you by the tree at dawn. You'd better not be late."

Callie watched as the shadowed head of her boss disappeared from sight.

"Coward," she muttered.

No getting out of this now. Not at least until she had the stone.

The bottoms of her deerskin boots didn't make a sound against the stone floor as she picked her way carefully through the storage room to the large wooden door. The

leather wrap she wore to pin her breasts down was pulled tighter than normal, making it hard to breathe. She'd have to be careful not to get too hot and let the leather chafe her skin.

Callie wrapped her fingers around the cold metal of the door's latch and said a silent prayer to the goddess that'd she'd be able to pull off yet another brilliant robbery. The hinges made a low scraping noise as she released the latch. The sound echoed in the room for only a moment before she pulled the door slowly open.

The inch of space between the door and the jam let in a blinding light, forcing Callie to let her eyes adjust. The hall outside was empty. *Good.* Tarin had chosen tonight because the wizards would be busy. She'd wanted to know why, but when Callie asked, she'd gotten a slap across the face instead of an answer.

"It's none of your fucking business why," he'd growled and grabbed her by the arm. "They'll be busy in the east wing. You'll be in the west. In and out."

Of course, it was *never* as easy as in and out, but she wasn't about to argue with Tarin when he was in one of his moods. The beatings were usually worth the satisfaction of proving herself right, but not before she had to sneak around a castle full of wizards who'd kill her on sight for what she was about to do.

Callie waited a full five minutes, listening to the sounds of the Warren at night. Only once did the rumble of voices reach her ears and she could tell they were nowhere near her.

Okay, girl, here we go.

Stepping out into the hallway kick-started her adrenaline, which made her head buzz with excitement. If anyone turned the corner, they'd see her easily. She needed to find cover. She jogged silently down the hall toward the nearest junction and peeked around the corner. Still empty.

Where the fuck are these wizards hiding?

Tarin's directions were running over and over in her mind. If all went well, she'd beat him back to the tree. Down the hall, two rights, fifth door on the left. Looking

around the corner again, she saw there were fewer torches lining the wall, casting longer shadows for her to hide in.

Perfect.

With no obstacles in her way, Callie made it to her objective without incident. She even let out a snort as she pushed the door open without having to pick the lock. Not only were these wizards arrogant, they were stupid too.

Once inside, she made her way toward the black chest that was housed on a plain stone altar along the back wall.

"Too easy," she said and she smiled in the dark.

This room seemed like any other used to store supplies. She was surprised that an item of the stone's worth would be kept in such an open, unprotected place. But when she stepped forward toward the chest, she felt the air around her change. The hair on the backs of her arms and neck stood on end. With every successive step she took closer, her skin tingled. Her chest tightened and she found it suddenly hard to breathe. *What the fuck? They must have cast a spell to protect this damn thing.*

She wasn't about to back down, *couldn't* back down or else Tarin would tear her apart. She had no desire to go through another one of his punishments.

Closing her eyes, she concentrated on relaxing her body, calming her nervousness. Callie slowly made her way to the altar, pushing against the spell. It was slow going, but she managed to climb the three stairs to where the chest sat. Now that this thing was in front of her, she could feel heat coming from the black wood of the chest. More likely, coming from the stone that was kept inside.

"This is such a bad idea."

She pulled her long, thin, metal lock-picking tool from her vambrace and dropped to her knees before the box. She should be able to spring this lock with her eyes closed. But the more she fiddled with the latch, the harder it was to find the release mechanism.

"Come on, baby. I need to get you open so I can get my ass home," she muttered.

With a small flick of her wrist she was finally able to pop the lock open. She was about to silently celebrate when she heard several voices coming her way. Pausing for only a fraction of a second to confirm what she was hearing, Callie cursed, yanked the tools out of the lock, snapped it shut again and jumped from the altar. The spell was still working, slowing not only her body, but her mind. The voices were almost outside the door.

Hide!

Her body sprang back to life. To her right, she saw a short bookshelf that held bottles, scrolls and things Callie couldn't identify. Nor did she have the time to worry about it right now. She managed to slide behind it into the small space between it and the door. She pulled her long legs tight to her chest behind the shelf and held her breath when the door opened.

Three men, three very tall *muscular* men, walked in. They didn't look around the room at all. Two made their way directly to the chest, while the third stood silently by the door.

"Hurry, they'll need it soon," one of the men at the altar ordered.

"It's not like they can do anything without it," the other said with a chuckle.

"Do you want to be the one to delay the bonding? I thought Nate was about to tear me apart."

"Can't believe that ass found a source."

"That's why he wants to hurry. In case she changes her mind."

Despite the fact the two men were taking the one thing she'd come here to get, Callie found herself ignoring them. It was the third man who'd caught her attention. Dressed in black as the others, she found she couldn't take her eyes from him. He was taller than the other two by at least half a foot. The wide expanse of his shoulders was barely contained by the black robe which was pulled open at his chest. Her heart pounded harder when she saw he wasn't wearing a shirt. She couldn't see the color of his eyes, but his hair was a dark brown which almost looked black in the torchlight.

Her body shivered as a wave of awareness raced through her. Her nipples tightened when he turned his head to the side and looked at the scrolls on the shelf just above her head. Violet. How could a man have violet eyes? Of course, he wasn't just a man. He was a wizard.

Her pussy began to tingle and silently she wanted him to look down, to see her balled up on the floor, hiding. She could practically feel the roughness of his hands on her skin, her breasts. His lips were set in a hard line, but she could tell they were full. Perfect for kissing.

Are you insane?

"Do you have it?"

Callie bit her bottom lip hard. The sound of his voice almost made her moan, sending tendrils of pleasure winding down her body, setting her on fire. She felt the dampness of her cunt flood her deerskin breeches. Her nipples were two sensitive nubs, the pressure of her leather wrap against them was almost too much for her to take.

"Yes, Raine. We're ready."

Raine. Somehow the name suited him. She could see the swirling energy barely harnessed inside him. He was a wizard of great power. Wanting to will herself to look away, Callie found she couldn't. He was too perfect. For the first time in her life, she wondered what it would be like to be under the power of a man like that. To give her body to him freely.

The other two wizards made their way to where Raine stood and nodded.

"Let's get this over with," the younger of the two said. "It's not like we're going to have any fun tonight."

He let them pass by him into the hallway without a word. Callie was expecting him to follow immediately, but when he didn't, she somehow managed to control her panic. He took another step into the room and looked around, slowly letting his gaze touch every object there.

He knows I'm here. Fuck!

Every instinct in her body was screaming for her to move, to somehow burrow deeper into the little nook that was protecting her from his sight. The rational part of her thief's mind knew that any such movement would mean her death.

So she waited.

When he'd finished his inspection, he gave his head a shake and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Fool," he muttered, spun around and slammed the door shut.

Callie's heart was still pounding a solid ten minutes after he'd left. Her body was screaming at her, throbbing, waiting for her to reach down between her legs and shove her fingers into her pussy. She didn't dare. Didn't dare move because she didn't trust herself at that moment. But once her mind got her body under control, she realized she had a much bigger problem on her hands.

"They took the stone," she groaned and dropped her head to her knees.

Could this assignment get anymore complicated?

Getting to her feet proved more of a challenge than she'd realized. She had to wait another minute for the circulation to return to her legs before she would risk walking. As she waited for the stinging to ease, Callie let her mind race through her options. She could leave the Warren right now, meet up with Tarin and explain what happened. That would certainly mean a fierce beating. She could try to run, of course, but he had a very long reach. The last time she'd tried to break free had cost her a week in the pit after he'd beat her to a pulp.

"I don't think so."

That only left her the option of taking her chances with the wizards. She shivered, knowing it wasn't much of a choice at all. At least their punishment would be swift.

And maybe she'd see Raine again.

With renewed determination, Callie slipped out of the hall and into the shadows. Having no idea where they would have taken the stone, she headed toward the east

wing of the building. The torches seemed to decrease in number as she continued to walk in the direction she hoped the stone would be. She also passed half-open doors that seemed to lead to private chambers. *This must be where they sleep.*

Peeking inside the door closest to her, she was surprised to see a large portion of the room was filled with a large bed and an equally large fireplace. There was a thick bear skin laid on the floor in the middle of the room and several large tapestries covered the wall. This chamber held very few personal adornments, though there were robes tossed on the bed. Someone slept in this room.

A loud moan immediately caught her attention and Callie ducked into the bedchamber, ensuring no one saw her. Being inside the room sent another tingling trail of invisible fingers over her body. Drawing a deep breath, she could smell the faint trace of a male musk. Curious, she tiptoed over to the bed where the robes were tossed. Callie felt another shiver of pleasure shoot straight to her pussy when she brought the robe to her nose and inhaled deeply.

Raine.

It was the same scent, the same feeling she'd had back at the stone's storage room. Knowing this was where he slept was enough to drive her crazy. She had to get out of here. Racing to the door, she checked to make sure it was still clear before she continued on. The muffled voices were growing louder. The single moan she'd heard earlier was now joined by a chorus of voices. Curiosity and a need to get far away from *his* room propelled her down the hall so she could see what was going on.

With every step she took, the sound of the moaning increased. Callie's body reacted to the noise, her already erect nipples sending jolts of pleasure to her pussy as they rubbed against her wrap. She wasn't used to this. Trying to ignore the sensations, she turned the corner.

Don't get sloppy.

Directly ahead of her at the end of the darkened hallway was a well-lit room. Thick, heavy tapestries covered both sides of the hall, presenting her with a perfect hiding

place. She moved down as far as she dared before slipping behind the curtain and creeping the rest of the way toward the room.

When she finally pulled the tapestry away enough to see what was going on, Callie forgot to breathe. There were at least a dozen wizards standing silently around the perimeter of what looked to be a small-scale amphitheatre. Dressed in the same black robes she'd seen Raine and the other wizards wearing, the group looked menacing. They were watching the four wizards who were on the floor of the stage. These four men were dressed the same, but they weren't standing there silently. An equal number of men and women were there with them—their robes were bright and colorful, in direct contrast with the wizards' black.

What took her breath away was what they were doing. One woman was on her back while her wizard pounded his cock into her cunt. She was moaning loudly, the voice she'd heard coming from down the hall. Two other women were on their hands and knees and Callie couldn't believe that the wizards were fucking their partners' asses. From one side, she saw a young man on his knees sucking the cock of the fourth wizard. She'd never seen anything like that before. It was intoxicating to watch.

Callie couldn't help herself and she stuck her head out a bit further than she should to get a better look at who was in the room. She couldn't see Raine, but that didn't mean he wasn't there. At the sound of another loud moan, she had to fight the urge join them. Her body was shaking hard from need and she was finding it hard to look away. Callie gave her head a hard shake. She was here to do a job.

"Ahhh! Fuck me harder!" one woman screamed.

"I can feel it...coming into me," the wizard fucking her gasped.

Callie gasped in fascination as the woman's face took on a look of pleasure and pain as she continued to cry out. Callie's own cunt was soaked, her juices drenching her breeches.

I have to get out of here.

No, she had to get the stone. She'd be dead if she didn't manage to pull this off. Closing her eyes and taking a deep breath, Callie moved out from the tapestry and scurried across the hall to throw her body beside the door. From this vantage, she was able to see the rest of the room. And there, clear as a summer's day, was the stone.

Callie couldn't believe how beautiful it was. The iridescent purple of the amethyst glowed in the dim light of the room, seeming to pulse at random intervals. She could feel its pull, fighting to not take a step forward. No wonder Tarin wanted it. A power that strong would make his organization unstoppable.

The moans of pleasure were turning to shouts as the wizards' voices joined the women. Shouts and groans crowded each other and she knew they were reaching their climax. And that meant they'd be leaving soon. The tapestry wouldn't conceal her well enough from a passerby, so she'd need to find a better spot until they left. She could hide in the stone's room and wait for them to return it to the chest and take it once they'd left. Then it would only be a matter of getting out of here.

She was about to return down the hall when she heard a door slam from down the hall behind her. Someone had returned to their chambers and was now coming her way.

Shit!

A quick look around and she saw her salvation. A staircase to her right looked like a promising location. With few other choices, Callie turned and climbed the long, winding stairs slowly, careful to look for any indication of an approaching sentry. When she reached the top step, she was surprised to find herself high above the amphitheatre on a balcony. Sliding on her stomach, she pulled her body to a spot where she was sure no one would be able to see her, but she had a clear view of what was happening below. She also had a perfect view of the stone. At least she'd know when they'd moved it. She could always find the where later.

With her body stretched out on the floor, the pressure on her pussy was almost painful. She had to open her legs slightly to make it more bearable. One couple was

now wrapped in each other's arms, kissing passionately. The woman was pulled tight against the wizard's chest as his hands caressed her back and neck. Callie longed to feel that type of connection with someone — anyone — at least once in her life.

The other couples looked to be close to the end as well. The young man was now on his hands and knees while the wizard was fucking his ass. She watched in unwavering fascination as the wizard reached forward and wrapped his hand around the other man's cock. He began to stoke it in rhythm to his thrusts. Suddenly the young man stiffened and a stream of cum spurted out of him. That seemed to be all the encouragement the wizard needed. He dropped the other's cock, grabbed his hips and cried out as he pounded mercilessly into him. When Callie didn't think he could continue much longer, they both collapsed into a heap on the floor. They too shared a passionate kiss that seemed somehow forbidden, but beautiful at the same time.

The other three couples weren't far behind. They were no longer separate, but instead now a tangled mess of bodies. The two women were lying on their sides, kissing each other while their wizards were pounding into their pussies. One of the wizards reached forward and pinched his lover's nipple, making her gasp and giggle.

"I'll have to remember you like that," he teased and pinched her again. The other woman bent her head and began to suck her friend's second nipple, which changed her giggle to a moan.

"Come for me," he demanded and increased the tempo of his thrusts.

Both women groaned and the second wizard licked his fingers and proceeded to tease his partner's clit. The shouts of their release mingled together and almost pushed Callie over the edge. She hadn't even touched herself yet! The men weren't far behind, both shouting a few seconds after each other. They all collapsed together as the four began to hug and kiss each other.

After a few minutes, the only noise that could be heard was the steady panting of the lovers and several satisfied mews of contentment. Callie's own silent pants echoed

in her ears as her body hummed with excitement. There wasn't a thing she could do to help herself either.

Now what?

As if in answer to her wordless question, a solitary figure took a step forward from the group of twelve that watched. He was older than any of the others in the room, but not by much. She took that opportunity to slide a bit closer to the edge. She still couldn't see Raine and couldn't help but wonder where he was.

"Brothers," the man's voice rang loud and clear in the room. "We welcome you to our fold. You can now take your rightful place as wizards of the Warren. Stand."

The command was obeyed and all five of the wizards rose to their feet.

"You've found the source of your power. The thing that roots you to the universe, that lets you move beyond simple magic tricks and into a realm of endless possibilities."

All five of the wizards offered their hands to their partners, pulling them up from the ground. Each and every wizard clung to their partners, caressing and stroking them.

"Brothers, cherish this gift that the universe has given to you."

The older wizard stepped back into the semicircle and the group of twelve walked in single file around the top lip of the amphitheatre and out the door. The group of initiates smiled and hugged each other. The first couple Callie had noticed was locked in another passionate kiss, one that had her heart pounding again.

"I believe you can continue that back at your chamber, Ty."

"Fuck you," Ty responded and the woman in his arms giggled.

Eventually the couples shuffled out of the room as well, leaving Callie alone and panting on the balcony. But more importantly, they'd left the stone behind, unguarded. She knew there'd be no way she'd be able to get her body to move silently, not given her current state of arousal. But she had to risk the attempt while she had a chance.

With all of the wizards out of the room, going back down the stairs wasn't an option. Pulling herself shakily to her feet, Callie searched for something she could use

to lower her body to the floor. Lying in a dusty pile of boxes were three long tapestries. After a little more digging around she found the long, heavy cords used to fasten the fabric to the wall, and began to yank them out. They were thick enough to support her weight and she managed to fasten them to the stone balcony rail.

The cord didn't reach all the way to the floor, but she wouldn't have to drop down as far as she had when she'd come in through the window.

"Easy as pie," Callie said and swung one leg, then the other, over the rail and slid down the rope.

Landing with a dull thud on the floor, Callie immediately dropped to a crouch. Not wanting to tempt fate, she quickly made her way over to the statue that held the glowing purple stone. The light had dimmed and she didn't feel the same heat she had back in the room. She stepped in front of the statue so that she was only inches away from claiming her prize and getting out of here.

As she brought her hands up to cup the stone, it suddenly began to glow violet. The bright light was almost blinding, forcing her to gasp and take a step back. Her heart began to race when she backed into the wall of a very hot chest. Two large hands clamped down on her upper arms and spun her around.

Callie found herself face to face with a very angry wizard.

Raine.

Chapter Two

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”

The look of shock on the young woman’s face would have been amusing to Raine if it wasn’t for the fact he’d caught her trying to steal the binding stone. Her large brown eyes sparkled and, for a moment, he found himself trapped, unable to look away. He watched a strange mix of panic, anger and something he swore was lust fly across her face.

Taking a deep breath, he could smell her arousal. It was the one thing that had helped him find her since he’d discovered her scent in his bedchamber. The only thing that could have enticed him to approach the Dais chamber during the binding ceremony. He almost lost his grip on her arms when she tried to jerk away.

“Let me go,” she ground out, averting her gaze from his.

“I don’t think so, little thief.”

Raine chuckled when she hit him hard in the middle of his chest with her fist. Her movements gave him a better view of the hellion he’d trapped. He let his gaze travel down the rest of her body, taking in every detail. Her brown hair was pulled back into a short ponytail, though a long strand had pulled out and now hung down over her eyes. The brown leather top she wore trapped her breasts flat against her body, giving her more of a boyish shape than that of a woman. Long leather bracers covered her forearms and no doubt carried a wide variety of tools. The soft deerskin breeches and boots were molded to her body, accentuating her shapely hips and rounded ass.

Then something completely unexpected happened. Raine looked up past the woman’s head and saw that the binding stone was glowing. *Glowing!*

“Impossible,” he whispered.

The sudden pulse that hit him would have dropped him to his knees if he hadn't experienced it before. The woman wasn't as lucky. He watched as her eyes rolled back into her head and her body pitched forward hard against his.

"Easy now," he said, wrapping his arms around her waist. "Breathe."

She moaned and he felt his body surge to life as her lips found his naked chest. She began to lick and kiss his skin, sending the blood pounding into his cock. "Stop, little one, it's the stone making you do this."

"Touch me," she begged, running her tongue over his nipple.

"It's not you. *Tamesis* be damned, stop that!"

The little spitfire was thrusting her pelvis against his growing cock, making it increasingly hard to think. He needed to call the others, have them deal with her.

"Please, Raine."

With three steps, he pushed her from the statue to the wall, forcing her head back to look at him. The shock of hearing his name on her lips pushed him to the limits of his tenuous control.

"What did you say?" he whispered harshly.

"Please," she begged with her whole body, grinding her hips against him.

"My name. You said my name."

"Raine."

The sound of it made his chest tighten, his blood race. It had been far too long since any one had said his name with anything but contempt or dismissal.

"Where did you hear it?" he shook her lightly.

A dawning of awareness broke through the haze of desire she was under. He watched as she shook her head and licked her lips. He couldn't help but wonder what her wet, pink tongue would feel like licking up his engorged shaft.

"At the storage room. For the stone."

He *had* felt someone then. He was surprised the others hadn't noticed the strange buzz in the air, the heaviness that pulled at them the second they opened the door. But they were still novices, having never been bonded with a person who could be their magical center. Their source.

Raine looked down into her lustful eyes and felt the coil of burning need begin to build deep inside. *This is impossible*. Sasha was dead. No wizard in the history of his people had ever been able to bond with a new source when theirs died. But his body hadn't responded to another in so long, he couldn't resist the temptation. He needed this, the urge to claim her, take her, was irresistible. The madness that was running rampant in her began to seep into him.

For the first time in seven years, he *needed* a woman. Fuck them all — he was going to take her.

Scooping her in his arms, Raine carried her over to the center of the Dais. He set her gently on the floor before shrugging out of his wizard's robe. He didn't want this to be about magic. He needed to remember what it felt like to be a man free of shame, to claim a woman for his own.

Now completely naked, he watched as her eyes roamed down his body. When she reached his now fully erect cock, she sucked in a breath. A deep blush colored her face, but modesty didn't stop her from reacting. Raine watched as she slid her hands up along her rib cage, over the leather wrap that bound her breasts and over where her nipples would be.

"Yes, I want to see you touch yourself," he said in a ragged voice.

Finding the ties on the side of the wrap, he quickly loosened them enough to be able to pull the tight clothing from her body. Two of the pinkest nipples he'd ever seen were freed from the enclosure as her breasts spilled out. Her breasts were large enough to fit perfectly into his hands.

She moaned and she bucked her hip when he squeezed her breasts, massaging the tender peaks with his fingers.

"It's a sin to have these beauties hidden away."

Leaning in, he captured a ridged nipple in his mouth. She cried out and drove her fingers into his hair, squeezing it tightly. Nestled firmly between her legs, he could feel the dampness of her cream seep through her breeches as she bucked against his naked body.

"So sweet," he said and continued to suckle her, flicking his tongue over the sensitive nub repeatedly.

She was panting heavily, squirming and moaning under his expert touch. Sasha had never responded to him like this. Raine couldn't think of anything more intoxicating.

"Please," she begged again, leaning forward to place a kiss on his forehead.

"Please what, little thief? What do you want?"

"I...please...*Laverna* save me."

He chuckled and nipped her nipple. "Your goddess can't protect you here. I'm the only one who can set you free. Tell me what you want."

Looking up into her eyes Raine saw her confusion and inexperience. If she'd been with a man, he hadn't treated her very well. But she knew enough because her gaze slipped down his body to his now-hidden cock.

"I want..."

"This?"

Reaching down, he loosened the opening of her breeches to slip his hand down the front. She immediately cried out, thrusting her cunt against his fingers.

"This?" he asked again, teasing the outside of her labia.

"Yes!"

Raine shoved his fingers deep into her pussy and felt her muscles instantly tighten around them. Her flesh was soft and wet and his cock was painfully twitching,

desperate to ram deep inside her. She was ready for him, as desperate for this as he was.

He smiled at her moan of protest when he removed his hand from her pants. Not bothering to explain, he reached down and tugged her boots off, tossing them aside. Next he loosed the opening of her breeches and tugged them down, sending them to join the rest of her clothing. Only once she was gloriously naked did he return to her. Raine slid down her body so his head was positioned inches from her wet pussy. He pushed her legs wide apart, opening her up for him. When he breathed in her scent, Raine memorized the uniqueness of it, branding her on him.

“What are you doing?” she asked, bracing her upper body on her arms.

“Shhh,” he whispered, before leaning in and running his tongue from her asshole to the tip of her clit.

Her legs clenched around his head and her moan echoed in the large room. The mix of sweat and desire was intoxicating. Raine knew he could lose himself in her, forget the world outside and all the evil that was in it. Here, pressed between her legs, he was in heaven.

“I want to hear you scream, little thief.”

She bit her bottom lip, closed her eyes and shook her head.

“Oh but you will. Over and over.”

“I can’t...please.”

“Yes, you can. Relax and let me show you.”

He sucked her clit gently into his mouth and flicked his tongue over the silky skin. In small, lapping strokes, he let his mouth prime her, get her ready for when he was going to ram his cock into her. Pushing his fingers into her, he felt her cream cover and coat them. Her muscles vibrated and he knew she was close. With one last push of his fingers, Raine withdrew and raised himself up to his knees.

“Your cunt is so sweet. I’m going to enjoy this.”

Her body stilled except for her panting. He thought he saw a moment of terror flick across her face, but whatever battle she was waging inside, her desire won. She opened her legs wide and arched her back toward him.

That was all the invitation he needed. Raine leaned forward and rubbed the head of his cock against the entrance of her pussy, coating them both with her cream. He positioned himself at her opening and began to push forward.

"You're so tight," he muttered.

"Don't stop."

But when the resistance became too much, he realized what it was that was holding him back. Raine tried to stop, but she wrapped her legs around his back and pulled him forward.

"You're a virgin?" he asked in disbelief.

But it was too late for both of them. She bucked her hips at the same time he thrust forward, breaking the barrier of her virginity. He tried to slow the pace, not wanting to hurt her, but she wouldn't let him. His little thief began to grind her pussy against his cock until Raine couldn't stop.

Sliding his arm under her neck, he began to thrust madly into her. He had to hold on, needing her to come before him. Her moans and cries came faster and faster as she got closer to her peak. Bending his head down, he captured her nipple in his mouth and began to suck her hard, flicking his tongue over her nipple in unison with the speed of his thrusts.

"Raine!" she shouted as her orgasm hit her.

Her body trembled and her hips bucked hard as her juices coated his cock, her pussy clenching hard around him. It was only then that he let his body go. One more thrust was all it took to drive the orgasm from him. But he couldn't stop. Over and over he continued to thrust into her until he'd squeezed every last drop of pleasure from their bodies.

Finally, he collapsed on her, pulling her close to him. A calm he hadn't felt in many years filled him, relaxing his body and mind. After a few minutes, he lifted his head to look down into her eyes. What he saw was a mix of wonder and disbelief. More gently than he could have imagined, she reached up and ran her fingers through his hair. When she leaned in to kiss him, Raine turned his mouth to let her lips connect with his cheek.

"This is a day of wonder indeed."

Raine pushed off her and snapped his attention to Ulric. His old friend and former teacher stood silently in the doorway with Ty and Lena, who were looking very much in awe.

"She was trying to steal the binding stone. I stopped her and..."

He looked down at her and the full impact of what he'd done hit him. He'd taken a virgin in the Dais. The binding stone was glowing.

"Impossible," he whispered.

"What's going on?" she looked from Raine to Ulric and back, her face a dark red.

The fear in her voice was so strong, he could almost taste it. Getting to his feet, Raine grabbed his robe and brought it back to her. Careful not to tax her body any further, he wrapped the too big robe around her shoulders.

"This will keep you warm," he said softly, rubbing her arms.

"Raine," Ulric took a step forward. "This is the first time in the history of our people that a wizard has been given a second chance by the universe. I am very pleased indeed to welcome a wizard of your power back into the heart of the Warren."

"No!" His shout filled the room, making everyone but Ulric jump. "This isn't possible. One source for one wizard. That's the way it's always been."

Anger and frustration filled every part of him. He'd been devastated when Sasha died, not only for the loss of her company, but for the loss of his power. He'd been reduced to a shell of who he'd been.

“Apparently not, my friend,” Ulric said softly.

Lena gently pushed past Ulric and Ty and walked quietly over to him. She was now dressed in a simple cotton dress, her hair falling unbound down to her waist. When she reached him, Lena took his hands in hers and smiled.

“We came looking for you. The storm outside came on us so suddenly, the lightening striking the ground outside the Warren over and over. We hadn’t seen a storm like that since Sasha died.”

As if to punctuate her meaning, a rumble of thunder echoed outside.

“My powers,” he shook his head. “This can’t be.”

“Raine, for the second time in your life you’ve found a source for your power. The thing that roots you to the universe and opens you to a realm of endless possibilities.”

The traditional words of the ritual sent a shiver down his spine. Without looking, he reached out and offered his hand to her.

“No,” she whispered.

All eyes turned to the small thief lying on the floor and Raine wanted to laugh. He didn’t even know her name. Before he had a chance to say anything, Lena came to the rescue. She knelt beside his little thief and brushed the hair from her eyes.

“Hi. I’m Lena. What’s your name?”

He didn’t think she was going to answer, but after a few minutes of Lena stroking her hair, she finally sighed.

“I’m Callie.”

“Callie, you need to take Raine’s hand and stand. Once you do that, I’ll take you someplace where you can wash and dress. Is that okay?”

Callie nodded once, looked at Raine warily for a moment before sliding her long fingers into his hand. He helped her rise to her feet, his heart pounding in his chest and the blood racing through his ears.

“Brother, cherish this gift that the universe has given to you.”

As Ulric said the last word, Raine felt his connection to his power return. He gasped and felt his body sway against her.

"Raine?" Ty asked tentatively.

"No." He shook his head trying to clear the sudden haze that descended.

Ty took a step toward him. "Let's get you back to your room."

"No. I have to go."

And he stalked naked out of the Dais and out into the rain.

Chapter Three

"What the hell just happened to me?" Callie asked Lena as she looked around the bedchamber she'd been given for the night. The walls were similar to the other rooms, covered with large, thick tapestries that held the heat from the fire. The thief in her noted there were no windows, the door her only means of escape. Not that the other woman had given her the impression she would need to run.

"Bath first, talk second. In you go," Lena smiled as she poured a vial of scented oil into the water.

Callie shot her a suspicious glance before letting her gaze drift over to the sinfully tempting tub. Hot steam drifted up and out into inviting wisps that beckoned to her. Lena laughed when Callie looked down at the robe that covered her naked body. Next to Lena, she was an ugly duck. Her breasts were too small, her legs too long and too skinny.

"I'll look away if it would make you more comfortable. But I have to warn you, clothing is usually optional around here. You'd best get used to it."

"What makes you think I'm staying?"

Lena only smiled. True to her word, she turned away and walked over to tend the fledgling fire that was taking shape in the hearth. Callie only hesitated a moment longer before letting the robe fall to the floor and stepping into the water.

The stiffness from her muscles was soothed instantly as the water in the deep tub came up to her chin. Her body ached from deep inside, ached in the places where Raine had been. His large cock had stretched her, filling her completely. She still tingled where he'd touched her. By the goddess, she wanted him again, but couldn't until she knew the significance of what had just happened. Callie didn't know what was going on, but she needed to find out.

The scent from the oil Lena had added began to work its magic on her, settling her mind. For the first time in years, she was being treated with respect. By the very people she'd been sent to rob, no less. Callie pushed her guilt away.

"Here, let me wash your hair," Lena said and walked back over to her.

Callie sat up enough to let the other woman pull the small tie that held her hair off her face. Instantly the shoulder-length strands slipped forward and framed her face, hiding her gaze from Lena's.

"Tip your head back," Lena chuckled. "I'll get soap in your eyes if you keep your head like that."

"Who are you?"

She hadn't meant the question to sound as harsh as it did. But if Lena noticed, she didn't indicate it.

"Well, you know my name, so I'm assuming you want to know what I do here at the Warren?"

"I saw you, back in that room. You and the others were..." The word *fucking* seemed too harsh. It had been Lena and Ty who'd been wrapped in a passionate kiss when she'd looked down on them. Lena, who seemed to hold the heart of a powerful wizard.

"Ah, so you saw the binding ceremony. It's hard for outsiders to understand. Even one who has gone through it herself. Close your eyes."

Callie blushed at the memory. Thankful at being able to close her eyes, she tried to block the memories of Raine as he thrust into her, claiming her virginity. She still didn't know what had come over her, the blinding lust that made her forget everything, why she was there and what her goal was. She didn't even want to think about what Tarin would do to her when she didn't show up at the meeting spot tomorrow.

Lena poured water over her hair, wetting it before rubbing in some sweet-smelling oil. Callie felt her body relax under the gentle massaging of Lena's fingers.

"I don't understand what any of it means," Callie whispered. She sighed when Lena began to massage her neck and shoulders.

"What do you know about wizards?"

"Avoid them at all costs."

Lena chuckled. "Our mothers must have spent time together. I was always told they were evil men, deviants, perversions of nature. I never understood what they did for our people. Then I met Ty. He changed the way I saw them all."

The wistfulness in her voice made Callie open her eyes and turn to look at her. "You love him. I could tell by the way you...kissed."

"Dunk your head," Lena said with a smile and gave Callie's head a gentle nudge.

Taking a breath, Callie dove under the surface of the warm bath water. She ran her fingers through her hair, rinsing the oil, soap and dirt out of it. When she broke the surface, Callie leaned forward and squeezed the water from her hair.

"Darling, what happened to you?" Lena gasped and ran her fingers down the long-healed slash marks that covered Callie's back. Callie shuddered.

"Nothing." That was a conversation she didn't want to have. Not now. Probably never. "I'd like to get out now."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. Please enjoy the water." Lena gave her shoulder a squeeze. "You wanted to know about the wizards. I'll tell you what I can. The rest you'll discover on your own."

Callie had expected the other woman to move away from the tub, but she didn't. Instead she continued to play with Callie's hair, running her fingers over and over through the strands as she talked until all the tangles and knots were gone.

"Wizards are different from the rest of us. And they're anything but evil. Only ignorance and stories they've spun for their own protection perpetuate that myth. Wizards are in tune with the universe. They are able to work magic, manipulate the

earth around them. Each one has a special bond with the earth. Ty can control growth. Plants, animals, people.”

Callie felt Lena’s fingers slow as she spoke of her wizard. Carefully looking up at her, Callie saw the far-away look in her eyes.

“You love him?”

Lena met her gaze and smiled so brightly that light seemed to radiate out of her. “Oh yes. He’s been courting me for the past year. Ever since I arrived here. Not that we had much of a choice, in a way. It was still nice—he made me feel so special. Lean forward and I’ll rub your neck.”

Callie didn’t argue, feeling suddenly very relaxed and a little sleepy. “Why did you come here?”

The fingers that were busily massaging her neck paused for a moment before Lena continued. “I’d rather not go into details. But I was getting away from a life that would have killed me. My mother intended to marry me off to a man who would have slit my throat given a chance.”

The shudder that rolled through her was one of recognition and sympathy. Having been in Tarin’s band for the past four years had been a brutal life lesson. She’d only been able to bear it because life at her father’s home hadn’t been any less cruel. She could only imagine what a woman as refined as Lena had felt, the fear that had gnawed at her when she realized the type of man her intended was.

“The wizards protected you,” Callie said simply.

“And Ty saved me. When I realized I was his source, our connection went so deep I can’t explain it to you. Not that I will have to. You’ll find that part out on your own soon enough.” Lena squeezed Callie’s shoulders before beginning to run her fingers through the wet strands of her hair.

“I’ve never met a wizard before. This is all so strange,” Callie muttered.

“Not many people have. According to Ty, even the king refuses to have anything to do with them. Except when he has a war to wage.”

Callie hadn't been born when the last war had been fought. She remembered the stories her father would tell her when he would drink too much. A wizard at war was a force few could stand before and survive.

“What did you mean by source? That's what...Raine called me.” She took a deep breath. “How am I a source? Source of what?”

“His power. Every wizard has the ability to tap into the energy of the universe, but that connection is fragile at best. Ty described it as taking a sip of water from the ocean. But when a wizard discovers his source, it's like finding a conduit, the ability to draw unlimited power from the world around them. But there is a catch. For every wizard there is only one person who can act as their source.”

Callie turned to face Lena, no longer aware of her own nudity. “Raine said it was impossible that I could be his source. Why?”

Lena didn't answer right away. Callie watched as her new friend's eyes teared up and she smiled a small, sad smile.

“Sasha was an elegant woman with a wicked temper. It also happened that she was Raine's source. It was an odd pairing, one that caught everyone off-guard, according to Ty. I only knew her briefly from her coming and goings from my village. She's dead.”

The words suddenly made Callie feel cold. “I'd like to get out of the tub now.”

Lena wrapped Raine's cloak around Callie's shoulders when she stepped out onto the cold stone floor. She smiled and led Callie to the fire and the fur rug where they both sat. Lena didn't say anything else, leaving Callie to her thoughts. She wanted to ask her more, but there was a knock on the door.

“Yes?” Lena called out.

The door pushed open and a man poked his head in the door and raised an eyebrow.

"Excuse me for one moment," Lena said and patted Callie's thigh. "Try to get some rest if you're tired."

Callie nodded, but didn't move until she was left alone in the room. "*Laverna*, I could use a bit of help right about now."

Instead of the goddess answering her prayers, Callie found herself yawning. When she yawned a second time, this time her eyes threatening to close too, she curled up in a ball on the fur.

"A little nap," she muttered.

* * * * *

Raine stood naked in a forest clearing near the castle. Water rolled down his skin in rivers as the lightening streaked across the sky above him. He barely noticed. With his eyes closed, he took a deep breath, pulling in the scents and taste of the forest. For the first time in three years, he could feel the energy around him. Invisible currents ebbed into his body, tentatively, as if the magic knew it wasn't supposed to be there.

It felt good.

"There you are," Ty's voice cut through the noise of the rain.

He didn't open his eyes, but felt his friend come up beside him. "You should go."

"Not until you decide to end this storm and come back inside."

He could feel the thread of the storm deep in his mind, but he couldn't quite grab it. Like a word stuck on the end of his tongue, refusing to be spoken. Raine tried to relax and let the energy take over, but he couldn't.

"Fuck," he muttered.

"You're trying too hard," Ty chastised with a chuckle.

"I'm not a fledgling. I know I'm trying too hard. It's just so...close."

Raine squeezed his eyes for another second longer before sighing. He turned to look at his friend who was leaning against a tree. Ty threw a robe at him and it instantly absorbed some of the rain from his skin.

"You know what you need."

"I'm not going to fuck her. She looks like a child. *Tamesis*, she was a virgin, Ty."

His cock sprang to life at the thought of ramming into the little thief's cunt. *Callie*. Her name was already weaving a spell deep inside him. The mere thought of it sending off sparks in his belly.

"If you want to regain your power, then you'll have to."

Raine yanked the robe on, but left it open at the chest. The stormy weather never bothered him, usually giving him a sense of peace and connection. Tonight he wanted to be far away from it. The last place he wanted to go was back into the Warren, but there was no place else. He was about to stride away when Ty caught him by the arm.

"You *do* want to regain your power. Don't you?"

Ty's steady gaze seemed to pierce into the back of Raine's head. His friend had a way of getting right to the heart of the matter.

"I don't know. The last time —"

"Wasn't your fault." Ty squeezed hard. "This girl isn't Sasha. So don't assume things will happen the same way. Go to her." Ty let Raine's arm drop, turned and walked away.

He let out a shaky breath and ran a hand through his wet hair. *Go to her*. The idea sent a jolt through his body straight to his cock. He'd fucked up their first time together. Been too rough, insensitive about her needs. He needed to fix that.

Raine took a step in the direction of the Warren and stopped. The thunder rumbled again in the sky, sending vibrations through the air around him. It seemed as if the energy of the forest gave him a silent push forward.

Before he let his reason convince him otherwise, Raine followed the path where Ty had been a few moments before. He *did* need to see this girl—Callie—if for no other reason than to explain what was going on.

As he approached the front gates of the Warren, he waved his hand sharply at the gates and they creaked open. The old habits were starting to come back to him faster than they should have. Thinking about it didn't slow him down though. His wet feet made smacking noises as he marched down the hall and toward the sleeping area. Lena was standing outside Callie's room, her hands clasped in front of her.

"She's sleeping," she said simply.

Raine had to force his jaw to relax. He couldn't stop his gaze from slipping past her to the door. He could feel Callie's energy beckoning him silently, inviting him inside.

"I won't wake her." He took a step forward.

Lena's hand was suddenly on his chest, forcing him to look directly at his friend's source.

"She's been abused. I don't know why she came here, but we've put her through enough tonight. Please, Raine, be gentle."

Guilt mixed with his growing desire. He knew the best thing for both of them would be to turn around, find his own quarters and stay there 'til morning. But with Callie this close to him now, he couldn't resist the pull. He needed to see her again. Raine looked Lena in the eyes again and nodded.

"I promise."

This time she didn't stop him when he pushed past her.

Neither the dim light of the room nor the long shadows cast from the fading fire could hide Callie from him. Already, his body was becoming attuned to her, reacting with the power she gave him access to. He made his way over to her sleeping form curled up in front of the fire. Her damp hair glistened in the firelight, an errant strand clinging to her cheek. Standing above her, Raine couldn't help but think she looked too

small. How did she take all of him into her? The memory of his cock thrusting into her washed through him again, dragging a moan from this throat.

Raine stilled suddenly when Callie rolled onto her back and moaned a response. The robe she was wearing pulled open, exposing her round breasts. Two pink nipples poked up at him, practically begging him to suck on them until she was screaming for more. He felt his body react to the luscious sight before him, tighten and burn, wanting to take her now.

Callie twisted again, this time her hand coming to rest on her breast just above her nipple. She moaned again and stretched, exposing more of her deliciously naked skin. With a shrug, Raine let his robe fall to the floor to pool at his feet. The heat from the fire couldn't compare with the heat radiating off his body now. *Reason be fucking damned.*

Dropping to his knees, he got as close to her as he could without actually touching her. He closed his eyes as he leaned in and took a deep breath. Her scent, a mixture of oil and something feminine clung to her. Raine memorized it, pulling it deep into his lungs and letting his body become accustomed to it. She was his other half.

Opening his eyes, he looked at her and could see she was dreaming. A sudden frown followed by a pout made her look innocent and tempting. Impulsively, he reached out and brushed a strand of her brown hair from her forehead. A jolt of energy snaked up his arm, tingling his skin as it went.

"Raine," she muttered softly.

With his cock now standing painfully at attention, Raine knew he was dangerously close to losing control. He wasn't going to hurt her again. Not after the last time.

"Wake up, little thief," he said, this time reaching out to touch her cheek.

Callie's eyes flew open, but she didn't move. Raine could hear her heart pounding and felt the rush of blood pulse through her. Her rich, brown eyes looked at him warily. Her body tensed ever so slightly, like she was ready to flee at any moment.

"I see Lena has been looking after you. Though you might prefer the bed rather than the floor."

"I'm so used to sleeping on the floor, I didn't even notice."

Her quiet voice seemed to fill the chamber. She seemed to lose some of her shyness when her eyes began to wander over his naked chest.

"I didn't think I would see you again," she said, her fingers reaching out to brush his thigh.

Raine sucked in a breath, but managed to hold his body still. "Whether we like it or not, we now have this connection between us. I need you if I'm to regain control over my magic."

Callie looked into his eyes and Raine saw her surprise. "You need me?"

He nodded and closed his eyes when her fingers began to slide back and forth over his thigh.

"And what if I say no? If I run away and never come back here again?"

"Then I'll lose that connection. I won't ever force you to stay with me."

He didn't expect her hand to suddenly wrap around his straining cock. He sucked in a breath and reveled in the feeling of her long fingers around his shaft.

"So I'm in control," she said with a note of wonder in her voice.

"I'm at your mercy."

"And you need this?" Callie leaned in and licked a single line from his balls to the tip of his cock. "Is that what you need, wizard?"

The groan that erupted from him was loud, echoing in the room.

"I think I might enjoy it here."

"Will you have me?" he asked, his body shaking from the strain of holding his impulses in check.

"On one condition."

Raine opened his eyes to look at her. "Anything."

"I want you to fuck me on the bed."

Chapter Four

Callie felt her body shudder under Raine's intense gaze. She watched the muscles in his jaw jump and a sudden flash of desire flare in his eyes.

"You know what you're asking?"

The tingle in her stomach spread to her pussy making her wet. "Yes."

That was all the permission he needed. Callie gasped when he scooped her up and carried her over to the down-filled bed. Raine laid her in the middle of the mattress and took a step back.

A shiver of awareness washed through her. She felt truly naked as he let his gaze roam over her body. Callie fought the urge to squirm, a part of her enjoying his intimate scrutiny. His gaze touched every inch of her, spending extra time on her breasts and pussy, the latter still partially covered by the robe she wore. After a minute, he still didn't move to touch her. Callie frowned.

"Is there something wrong?" Her voice was little more than a whisper.

"Nothing. Last time—" Raine shook his head. "Last time I didn't take the opportunity to get to know you. Know your body. I didn't want to make the same mistake twice."

Callie did squirm that time. "Is that important?"

For the first time since she'd met him, Raine smiled. A slow, seductive grin that made him look more dangerous than he had when he'd caught her stealing the stone.

"Oh yes. Very important."

He reached out and pushed the robe away, exposing her completely to him. The air was cooler than it was by the fire, making her nipples harden.

"So beautiful," Raine said and let his gaze trace a path over her.

Callie swallowed hard. No one had called her beautiful before. She knew he meant it too. Deep down, her body was responding to him, becoming in tune with his needs. She watched as he closed his eyes for a moment and several candles lit in the chamber. The light illuminated everything, chasing away the shadows. The extra light gave her a chance to really look at him.

The muscles in his arms and chest flexed as he clenched his fists. He wasn't as large as some of the warriors she'd seen pass through her village, or even ones she'd outsmarted to steal a prize. He was leaner, but still muscular. A thin trail of hair on his stomach drew her eyes down to his impressively full cock. Every inch of him was ridged, ready to pounce. She held her breath when he knelt on the edge of the bed and leaned over her. Eye to eye with him now, Callie could see the war he was waging.

"Touch me," he said, a harsh edge to his voice.

Her hands flexed, wanting to obey his command. But Callie knew there had to be more to this. *She* needed more than this. All her life she'd been ordered and controlled. Now she wanted to take the lead and be in charge.

"I don't think so." She let a sly smile of her own cross her lips.

When he growled low and deep in his throat, she almost gave in. Almost.

"You said you rushed things last time. I want to take my time, get to know what a man's body is like. I can't do that with you pinning me to the bed. Lay on your back."

She didn't think he would listen to her. But slowly he let out a breath, nodded and moved to lie beside her. Callie moved over to make room for his large frame. He was longer and larger than she'd remembered. Her body still hummed from their earlier round of sex. She shrugged out of the robe and pulled herself up so she could take in everything about him.

Reaching out, she let her fingers skim the muscles of his stomach. Raine sucked in a breath and grabbed her hand before she reached his cock.

"I thought you were going to let me explore?"

"You're going to kill me, little thief."

"If I were going to do that, you'd be dead already."

His chuckle shook the mattress. "I'll keep that in mind."

Callie pulled her hand out of his and shifted her body so her face was near the tip of his shaft. She breathed in deep, his male scent sending a pulse directly to her pussy, making her wetter than before.

"I can't believe you had this thing inside of me." Callie ran her finger up the length of his shaft.

Raine growled again. "If you keep that up, it will be back there sooner than you think."

She chuckled and dipped her head closer. Impulsively, she licked the end of his cock, enjoying the taste of his skin. His hand shot to her head and he wrapped his fingers in her hair. Callie loved that she could make him struggle for control, could feel his body shaking from anticipation. This was true power. She ran her tongue around the swollen tip of his cock and down along the length of him.

"I've never tasted a man before. I think I like it."

"I'll be the only one you ever do."

His words weren't threatening, merely stating a fact.

Callie licked a bead of fluid off the tip of his cock. "If that's true, then I better learn to satisfy myself with what I have."

When she brought the tip into her mouth, Raine groaned and gently pushed her head forward, encouraging her on. His taste made her head buzz and she eagerly lapped more of him. She let her fingers explore his shaft and balls, enjoying the feeling of them. Shifting again, Callie began to lick down the length of his shaft and gently sucked one of his balls into her mouth.

"*Tamesis*, you enjoy torturing me."

She gave the tip of his cock another little kiss before she slowly moved up his body. Making sure to spend extra time on his stomach, Callie breathed in his aroused scent as she kissed her way up his body.

"For the first time in my life," she said and kissed him in the middle of his chest, "I am the one doing the torturing. I think I know why men like it so much."

Not wanting him to respond, Callie attacked Raine with a fierce kiss. He pulled back instantly, his violet eyes dark.

"Don't."

She felt the air whoosh out of her lungs. "What?"

"You need control and I need you in my bed. But I can't give you...that."

Callie felt her body numb. He was just like all the others, taking what he needed and ignoring her. She was about to pull away when he suddenly rolled her over onto her back. His large body pressed her into the mattress, touching every inch of her. His erection was pressing hot and hard against her stomach, but he made no move to fuck her.

Raine braced his upper body on his forearm and reached up to caress her cheek. "No one told you I was damaged goods, did they, little thief?"

They hadn't, but it was something she could understand. "You need me, but you don't want to."

He tilted his pelvis forward, thrusting his cock against her. "We both need time. Something the universe has chosen not to give us. That doesn't mean we can't enjoy ourselves. At least until we figure the rest out."

Callie's heart was pounding almost as fast as her mind was racing. She'd never been the object of any man's desire. Never. And now that she had the undivided lust of a wizard, she wanted something else. Even though she knew it would never lead anywhere good.

Memories of the kiss Lena and Ty shared back at the ceremony flashed in her mind. The images made her buck her hips and sigh. "Okay."

Raine dropped his head to her shoulder and she felt his body shudder. When he licked the sensitive skin of her shoulder, Callie moaned. Her hands flew to his back, her nails digging in deep.

Raine nipped her neck and chuckled. "So this is how it will be between us."

"Please," she begged, arching her back in an attempt to get even closer to him.

"You've forgiven me?" He reached up and gently squeezed her breast in his hand. "You haven't even punished me."

"Raine."

"I see I'll have to think of my own reprimand then. Something that suits your fire."

Callie's body tensed when he dipped his head down and sucked her pebbled nipple into his mouth. His tongue flicked back and forth over the sensitive nub as he suckled. Her body ignited and she felt her pussy gush as every muscle tightened. With such a simple touch, he'd pushed her close to heaven, close to her release. She couldn't take her eyes off him and the sight pushed her desire higher.

Raine pulled back and looked up at her. "Yes, you like that. I can smell your approval."

He reached down to cup her pussy with his hand. Callie squeezed her eyes shut when he pushed a finger into her slick opening.

"By the gods, you're so tight."

"Fuck me, Raine."

In one swift movement, he sat up and pulled her legs with him. Her cunt was high in the air, the perfect angle for his mouth.

"This won't be much of a punishment, little thief. I hope you'll forgive me."

Callie couldn't think once his tongue began to lap at her. It was just like before, but more intense, knowing where he was going to bring her. That peak of ecstasy she

hadn't known existed before. His hot breath sent chills through her as his tongue circled her clit, teasing her.

"I could eat you all day. But that would be punishing you, not me."

Raine drove his tongue into her pussy, devouring her juices and pushing her so close to release. Callie bunched the blanket in her fists, trying to hold her sanity together. He draped her legs over his shoulder and pushed two fingers into her pussy, thrusting into her over and over.

She couldn't take anymore. Thrashing her head from side to side, Callie gasped for air. The orgasm roared over her and she screamed. Raine's hand never stopped, pumping in and out of her until she collapsed against him, unable to support her body weight any longer.

Callie had her eyes closed, her breath coming out in pants when she felt Raine climb up beside her. She felt his finger brush a tear away from her cheek.

"Did I hurt you?"

His voice sounded so concerned she couldn't help but open her eyes. "No. It was amazing."

That slow, dangerous grin slid back onto his face. "And very tasty."

The admission sent another pulse of need through her body. She reached up and slid her finger over his lips. They were still wet from her juices and temptingly kissable. Instead she reached down with her hand and grabbed his cock.

"Are you going to punish *me* now, or are you going to finish what you started?"

Thunder rumbled outside and Callie swore she saw something flash in his eyes.

"Is this what you want?"

Raine fully rolled onto her body and positioned the head of his cock at her pussy. Still, he held himself outside her, in complete control of himself. Callie wasn't about to let that continue. She wrapped her legs around his muscular back and tried to push him

forward. His locked arms began to shake and she watched as he began to lose his inner battle.

"I need this," she whispered.

Keeping his eyes locked on hers, Raine very slowly began to push into her. Callie couldn't look away, drinking in the subtle changes in his expression. The way his eyes widened slightly as he continued to stretch her to capacity. How his jaw clenched, keeping himself under control.

She also felt her body react to him. The dull ache in her pussy from when he'd taken her earlier eased from the wetness of her orgasm. Her nipples tightened, in desperate need of being touched.

When he'd finally reached as far as he could go, filling and stretching her completely, he stopped.

"Are you —?"

"Raine, don't stop."

He dropped his head once more to her shoulder and began to slowly thrust into her. Callie closed her eyes, blocked everything from her mind and allowed her body to simply feel. She tightened her legs around him, letting her feet slide over his tight ass. She kicked him lightly, like she was spurring a horse on. Raine thrust harder, faster, and Callie responded. When he nipped her neck again, she cried out and met his powerful thrusts with some of her own. Callie's mind went blank and all she could focus on was her rising pleasure and Raine's body.

"I'm going to come," she cried out again.

Raine growled and thrust into her madly as thunder crashed in the distance outside. Callie's body shook as her second orgasm washed through her a moment before Raine's body tensed and he pushed one last powerful thrust into her. When he finally collapsed on top of her, Callie tightened her embrace around him. They laid there silently for several minutes before he shifted to the side. Her body felt alive, as if a bolt of lightning had charged her. The tingling she'd felt in her pussy gradually spread

to the rest of her body. With Raine's arm and leg draped over her, she couldn't miss his body tense.

"Are you okay?" she whispered, the silence of the room almost overwhelming.

"A minute. Please."

She stayed that way for what felt like eternity before he finally lifted his head and gave it a shake.

"I forgot what this was like." His deep voice made his chest vibrate against her.

"What *what* is like?"

He opened his eyes and looked directly into hers. "This connection to everything around me. It's been a very long time."

Callie searched his face for some unspoken clue to the man she'd lain with twice, but she couldn't see anything. He was as much a mystery now as he'd been when he first walked into the stone's room.

"Describe it to me, this connection you have."

Raine brushed a hair from her face before running his thumb across her eyebrow. "It's an energy, like walking in a field before a lightning storm, except it's inside me."

"Everything tingles," her voice trailed off. "What?"

He sat up and placed a hand on her stomach. The spot he touched practically came alive under his hand.

"You feel it?" His voice held a note of wonder.

"Shouldn't I?"

"Sasha..." he closed his eyes and took a breath. "Our connection was different."

"So what does this mean? That I can feel what you do?"

He frowned and gave his head a shake. "I'm not sure. None of this is supposed to be able to happen."

A mistake. Callie rolled onto her side away from Raine and tucked her hands under her cheek. She shivered, but ignored the chill in the air.

"What in *Tamesis'* name happened to you?"

The sudden fury in his voice startled her. She would have rolled back to face him if he wasn't pressing her forward and examining her back. Callie felt his fingers trace the slash marks Tarin's whip had made. The wounds were old, but she knew the scars were hideous.

"Callie?" he pressed as his every moving fingers continued to travel over the rough terrain of her skin.

"It doesn't matter. It happened long ago, before I learned what was expected of me."

"Who?"

The single syllable held enough anger that she twisted around to see him. "It's not your concern."

"Of course it's my concern. You're my source. Everything about your life is important to me."

"Why?"

Raine opened his mouth to answer, but nothing came out. She understood him, understood the type of man he was. A powerful leader who'd been stripped of everything. And now that he'd regained even a small portion of his former life, he was terrified at the idea of losing it again.

Callie knew she would be too.

"I'm not Sasha. I realize you've only known me a short time, but you have to trust that I can take care of myself. I have been for years and I'm not about to stop now."

Raine stared at her, his fingers flexing against her naked back. "And you need to know that I'm in your life. Neither one of us chose this, but we can't undo what the universe has seen fit to create. You will have to accept that fact."

"Accept the fact you're a heartless *wizard*? I don't think so."

"Heartless?" Raine rolled out of the opposite side of the bed to stand at his full height beside her. "You know nothing about me."

"And you know nothing about me if you think I need protection. I was serious when I said if I wanted you dead, you would be."

"Why are you doing this? Fighting the inevitable? We need each other and the sooner you recognize that fact, the easier things will be."

Callie rose to her knees on the bed. "Easier for who? You? Can't handle a woman who can take care of herself?"

"You don't know what things will be like for you now."

"I don't need *you*. I can walk out that door, disappear into the underbelly of the king's city and be perfectly fine. My power is my own," she snapped back.

"Enough of this."

Raine stalked away, making it halfway across the room before Callie felt a sharp pain in her stomach. She was about to call out to him when she realized he'd dropped to his knees next to the tub.

"Fuck." She crawled out of the bed and made her way over to where Raine had fallen. "What's wrong?"

"I'm not sure." His hands were gripping the sides of his head and his eyes were squeezed shut.

"Let me help get you back to bed."

Somehow she managed to slide under his arm and struggled to get him to his feet. Being side by side somehow eased the pain for her and Callie was able to concentrate better than before. The two of them collapsed back onto the mattress and Raine kept her pulled close.

"I should move so you can rest," she said softly against his chest.

"No."

"It might help—"

“No.”

“What is going on?”

She felt him sigh.

“I have no idea.”

Chapter Five

The early morning air in the training arena still held the scent of last night's storm. Raine stood alone in the middle of the empty area, his eyes closed in concentration. He knew none of the others would be up this early and even if they were, none would dare approach him. Not before he had a chance to master his powers again.

The pain in his head last night could only be the full return of his magic. When he'd woken this morning, he felt different, calmer. He was able to focus better and feel the current of his power all around him. Raine knew he needed to practice, try to catch that thread. He'd slipped out of bed and somehow managed not to wake Callie. He dressed in his own quarters and came outside.

Gone was his traditional black robe in favor of his leather breeches and cotton tunic. He'd also taken the time this morning to find the long, black bladed knife he hadn't worn since the last war. The weight of it felt strange on his thigh, but reassuring. Magic wasn't infallible and Raine always believed in having a backup plan.

The large boulder that lay in the middle of the training area shone brightly in the morning sun. The taunting beacon had been the undoing of many fledgling wizards before him and would undoubtedly torment future generations. Raine took a deep breath and tried to concentrate on pulling energy from the air. The muscles in his neck and back began to throb from tension after a few minutes. Nothing. He dropped his chin to his chest and sighed.

"Fuck," he muttered.

Taking a deep breath, he tried to let the tension melt away. It had only been one night. He knew it normally took longer than a day for a wizard to fall into the rhythm of the magic. But nothing about this whole situation was normal. Clearing his mind, Raine tried to picture nothing but the flow of energy between him and the stone. He felt

the currents of power brush against him like the light touch of a woman's hand. Instantly, Callie's face came to mind. Images of her lying naked in his bed, writhing under his touch jolted him from his silent trance. Surprisingly, the stab of lust his memories elicited made him more in tune with his magic. Raine's heart began to pound and a shiver of awareness trickled down his back.

"What are you trying to do, stare it to death?"

Raine spun around to see Callie, dressed in her thief's attire, leaning against the stone wall that cordoned off the training area. Her face was flushed and her neck was pink from where his whiskers had rubbed her. His cock twitched in his breeches.

"What are you doing here? I figured you'd still be asleep," he said, a bit gruffer than he'd intended.

"I'm a light sleeper. What are *you* doing?"

Raine felt his chest tighten when she pushed away from the wall and sauntered over to him. In the morning light she looked different. He could see there was more color to her than he had first thought. Streaks of gold and auburn highlighted her brown hair. This morning she'd left it down so the strands brushed her shoulders and gave her a carefree look. He knew better.

"I'm...practicing. You shouldn't be here, you might get hurt."

"What, are you going to throw the rock at me?" she said with a smirk.

"No, I was going to throw a lightning ball at it. It's been a long time since I've had to do this. I'd hate to miss and singe your ass."

Callie laughed suddenly, the sound echoing in the quiet morning air.

"You'd have to catch me first. Why don't you try out your magic on something a little more challenging than a rock?"

"Because."

She rolled her eyes. "Oh, that's rich. I thought you were an all powerful wizard. One of the best your people had to offer. And you can't hit a rock?"

"Callie," he warned.

She stepped closer to him, her hands firmly on her hips and her chin tilted up. Raine's body reacted to her proximity despite himself. Without the cover his robes offered him, his growing cock would be painfully obvious to her if he didn't do something. He turned away and faced the rock again.

"So what can I do to help?" she asked, still standing too close to him.

"Nothing."

He tried to ignore the tingle crawling across his skin. But when she touched his arm, it set off an internal spark deep inside him. His gaze flew to hers and he knew she felt it too. Callie pulled her hand back and instantly grinned, despite the discomfort he saw in her eyes.

"Know what your problem is?" she asked, walking backward away from him.

"Please enlighten me."

"Things have been too easy on you. You need a challenge."

Raine wanted to laugh, so he frowned instead. "You think things have been easy for me?"

"Sure. You live in a mysterious castle with friends. Eat whatever you want, fuck whoever you want," she blushed as she said the words. "But you're just sitting around. You need someone to challenge you. Your magic will come back on its own."

"My magic is back. I just can't control it yet. And when did you become such an expert on wizards?"

"When I met you."

"Since you know so much about me, what do you suggest I do?"

Callie didn't respond and began to walk backward toward the boulder. With her back only a foot from the rock, she cocked her head and smiled seductively at him. Raine tensed when she pulled two short bladed knives from her leather vambraces and dropped to a crouch. By the god, he hadn't known she was armed.

"I suggest you defend yourself, Wizard."

Faster than he thought possible, Callie bolted at him full speed. Raine barely had time to react when she let out a frightful scream and launched her body at him. Her weight sent him flying backward and he landed on the ground with a thud that knocked the air out of his lungs. Before he could grab her, she'd rolled off of him and out of arms reach. It took a second, but he rolled over and braced his hands against the ground.

Callie was crouched once again, a predatory grin fixed on her face. "Missed me."

He felt the growl erupt from him, but made no movement toward her.

"Come on, Wizard."

"You're insane."

"No, I'm your source. And you need a kick in the ass."

She lunged at him again, but this time Raine was ready. He rolled away and withdrew his knife from the sheath on his thigh. They circled each other once, Raine never taking his eyes from her.

"That's better," she said and chuckled. "First blood?"

"I don't want to hurt you." But he did want to fight. For the first time in seven years, perhaps longer, he felt alive.

Callie lunged at him with one of her daggers and it took every bit of his concentration to move his body out of the way.

"What makes you think you're going to hurt me?" she taunted.

When their blades connected, Raine felt the sting of the impact travel up his arm. But as fast as it was there, it was gone again. Callie kicked at him, pushing him off balance and giving her a chance to back up. His growl of frustration was echoed by a distant rumble of thunder. They both stopped and looked to the sky.

"That sounds like progress," she said with a smile.

The fact he was feeling the energy, the magic, encouraged him. But he still couldn't control it.

Callie stood there staring at him, knives in her hands, grinning like a fool. "So can you fire that lightning bolt yet?"

Raine looked at her and felt a smile threaten to crack his lips. "I might kill you if I tried."

"Like I said, you'll have to catch me first."

This time she didn't run at him, instead bolting off to the side toward the woods. In a single smooth motion, she jumped over the fence and, laughing, disappeared into the brush. Raine didn't hesitate and ran after her.

By the time he made it over the fence and into the brush, Callie had disappeared. Forced to come to a stop and listen, Raine closed his eyes and tried to reach out. The increasingly familiar tingle of his magic was racing through him now, making his ears buzz. His body felt energized and he was surprisingly in control. Somehow, being with Callie helped the connection, made it stronger. Nothing like the link he'd shared with Sasha.

"You're not going to find me standing there."

Raine spun around, but he couldn't see her. "Callie?"

Silence answered him. He tried to use his senses and their connection to find her, with no luck. She wasn't far away, but he couldn't hone in on her yet. The wind picked up, masking any sounds she would be making. He reached out and calmed the light breeze. When everything stilled, Raine couldn't believe it.

From out of nowhere, one of her blades slipped around his throat, the cold press of metal making him freeze.

"Boo," she whispered.

He felt her body press against his, her breath coming out in pants by his shoulder. The fact she'd gotten so close to him without him sensing her was impressive. But now,

with her beside him, Raine's body reacted. His cock went painfully rigid and he felt his breathing increase to match hers.

"I surrender," he said the words quietly.

Callie didn't release him right away and, for a moment, he thought she would make good on her promise to kill him. Instead, she slowly lowered the knife, her fingers caressing his neck as she did. She was about to pull her hand back completely when Raine caught it. He didn't want her to move away, despite the wariness he felt about getting too close. It had been too long since he'd reacted emotionally to anyone, much less a woman. And for once he didn't want to let it go.

When she tried to tug her arm away again, Raine moved quickly. In a single motion, he spun her around, pushing her back against the nearest tree. Their eyes locked and he could see she was struggling with her feelings just as he was. His magic forgotten, he completely focused on her, to touch her the way he wanted.

He traced a line along her jaw and down her throat, enjoying the feeling of her soft skin. Her tight leather bindings held her breasts, hiding them from his hungry gaze. More than anything, he wanted to tug the top of the binding down to free her swollen nipples and devour them. When he looked back into her eyes, he saw she was blushing furiously. Obviously, she'd never been the object of any man's sexual desire, but he was surprised to find just how virginal she really was.

A very large part of him liked it.

"Where did you learn to sneak up on someone like that?"

Raine kept his voice low, smooth, not wanting to spook her. Callie frowned and he could see she still didn't trust him. Not that he blamed her. Instead of pushing further, he leaned in and kissed her neck. She shivered, her breath hitched and her fingers squeezed his arms. Her reaction sent the blood flowing harder to his cock.

"My boss. If you're not a quiet thief, you're dead."

"I'll have to keep that in mind," he said as he licked and kissed his way up to her earlobe. "You never know when you may have need of a good thief."

Raine spread his hand along the side of her ribcage. She was so tiny, far skinnier than she should have been. He slid his second hand up and circled her waist. Callie pressed harder against the tree, but she didn't try to escape.

As the desire rolled through him, Raine felt their connection deepen. He felt it resonate, center within him and open up his mind. When her fingers moved up his arms, he had to fight for control of both his body and mind. He lightly bit her neck and when she sighed, he nipped again.

Callie raised her leg, rubbing her inner thigh along his hip. He caught her under her knee and held her in place. Despite the barrier of their clothing, Raine pushed his cock against where he wanted to be. She bucked, grinding her pussy against him. He needed her badly. So much so, the world around them faded away.

His distraction made the sudden rush of magic flooding his mind a surprise, causing him to gasp wide-eyed. He threw his head back, looking at her, but seeing nothing.

"Are you okay?" Callie's hands were on his cheeks. "Raine?"

His pounding heart and dizzy head caused him to lean harder against her, his head to fall to her shoulder. Her strength began to seep into his body, snapping everything into place.

"Raine?"

"I'm...fine." He lifted his head and looked at her. "It's back."

The words sounded strange, almost as odd as the sensation of his magic returning. The puzzled expression on her face meant she didn't understand what he'd meant.

"My magic. I can feel my control of it now."

Callie bit her bottom lip as she ran her hands over his shoulders and down his arms. "What does that mean?"

Raine felt her press back against the tree even harder, squirming lightly under his touch. He knew she was feeling the change too, but didn't understand what was

happening to her. That she'd be more open to the energies around her and that would take its toll on her body.

Pressing his swollen cock against her, Callie groaned and tightened her grip on his arms.

"It means I can do this."

With his eyes closed, he turned his face up and focused on the sky. Within seconds he felt the change in the air, the cold moisture that always hit before the rain. Callie shivered against him and he felt her gasp as the first drops of water sprinkled over them.

"Wow," she said with a hint of wonder in her voice.

Opening his eyes, Raine couldn't help but smile. He'd done it. "Thanks to you."

The urge to lean in and kiss her slammed into him hard. The silent longing for closeness prickled along his back and threatened to push him closer. Something he'd never wanted to experience again. Something he desperately needed.

He brought his hand halfway to her cheek, pausing for a moment before caressing the flushed skin with the back of his hand.

"I didn't realize how beautiful you were."

Callie's breathing hitched for a moment, before she looked away from him. "Not really."

He reached up and tilted her face toward his. "Yes, really."

A distant rumble of thunder rolled through the sky as Raine leaned in. Callie bit her bottom lip, making it plump, red and very tempting.

"I thought you didn't want..." her words died away as he brought his lips a breaths distance away.

"I very much want. But I don't deserve to have."

He felt her suck in a breath, her aroused scent all around him, tormenting his body and mind. Still he held back, taking a moment to lift her knee higher still, angling her hips perfectly.

"Raine," she begged.

Her lips were soft as silk, warm and delicious. He moaned, but kept his contact light. He wanted to savor every sensation, burn this first tantalizing kiss into his brain. Callie tightened her grip on his arms for a moment before sliding her hands around his neck and into his hair. The gentleness of her touch broke through his imagined thread of control.

The rain began to pour, but neither of them noticed. Callie frantically pulled at him as he explored her mouth. She tasted sweet and forbidden, better than the finest wine. As he dueled with her tongue, his hands set out to free her breasts from their bindings. A single yank moved the leather down enough to allow one of her rose-red nipples to spring free.

"So beautiful," he muttered against her lips.

Raine moved his head to capture her pebbled peak in his mouth as he slid his hand up the thigh he'd held captive to the top of her breeches.

"Please," Callie said and whimpered when his hand moved underneath to find her pussy.

"*Tamesis*, you're so wet."

"I need you."

He pushed two fingers into her cunt and Callie arched against him. Raine knew if he'd slipped his cock into her now, he'd never be able to last long enough to make her come first. And he needed her to come first. Over and over he pushed his fingers deep inside her, teasing the spot he knew would push her over the edge.

"Come for me, Callie. I want to watch you."

As an added incentive, he leaned in and repeatedly flicked her exposed nipple with his tongue. With each lick of her nipple, he felt the muscles of her pussy clench around his fingers. When he brushed her clit with his thumb, Callie cried out.

“Almost,” he whispered.

This time he increased both the tempo of his thrusts as well as the pressure of his thumb on her clit. Callie’s body tensed for a second before she screamed his name. Her cream covered his fingers as her orgasm took her over. Raine didn’t stop until her body slumped against him. Then, slowly, he pulled his hand out.

Bending his head down, he captured her lips in a kiss. This one more gentle than the last. Callie sighed as she fingered his cheek and chin. Pulling away from his kiss, she finally opened her eyes.

“What about you?” Her words were soft, making her sound sleepy.

“I can wait.”

“No.”

Raine closed his eyes and made the rain taper off. “You’re wet and cold. We should go back to the Warren.”

“What about you?” she pushed again.

There was something about the look on her face, the concern in her eyes for him that threatened his inner balance. He didn’t want her to care for him. Didn’t want to go through the hurt if anything happened to her. He wouldn’t survive another heartbreak like that.

“We’ll worry about me when we get you dry.”

Callie stiffened and looked away. For a moment, he thought she was upset with him, but quickly heard what she did.

“Horses?” he whispered.

“The road is close, but they shouldn’t see us. The Warren expecting company?”

It had been a long time since he'd paid attention to council business, but he'd always been made aware of important events. Nothing came to mind.

"I want to see who it is," he said quietly, the sound of horses and their riders growing louder.

Callie nodded, pulled the leather binding over her breast and placed a single kiss on his lips. "Follow me."

Raine had a hard time following quietly as Callie moved through the brush. Her surefooted, silent steps hardly disturbed the fallen leaves on the ground. She led him to a wide tree a short distance from the road, giving them a clear view of the travelers.

The group of ten men, all well armed, traveled the road in pairs. Their silver cloaks, emblazoned with a blood red dragon crest, announced them as the personal guard of the king.

"This can't be good," Callie whispered.

"The king hasn't sent an emissary to the Warren in nearly ten years."

"What do you think it means?"

He brought a hand up to her mouth when the caravan stopped. The leader of the group turned his head and scanned the forest where they were hiding.

"Problem?" one of the men near the back asked in a bored tone. Raine recognized him as the magistrate.

The knight turned his horse and edged it partially into the forest. He made a sweeping gaze through the woods, hesitating slightly on the tree that kept them from sight, before continuing on.

"Wolf?" one of the other knights approached. "Do you want me to investigate?"

Wolf. Now that Raine had regained the use of his magic, he recognized the knight for what he was. A wizard.

“No,” Wolf said, giving his head a shake. “Let’s get our *esteemed* guest to his destination so we can get the hell out of here.” The group returned to the road and moved away in silence.

Callie let out a breath and sighed. “I thought he was going to see us for sure. How the hell did he know we were even here?”

“He sensed me. We need to get back to the others now.”

“Why?”

Raine bent down and kissed her forehead. “A visit from the magistrate means only one thing—war.”

Chapter Six

It took them longer to get back to the Warren than she'd anticipated. Instead of returning through the practice area, Raine led her along a well-worn trail and brought them through the front gates. The same entrance where the horses of the new arrivals still waited. She'd watched Raine examine the horse of the soldier who'd almost spotted them in the forest, Wolf. He wouldn't tell her what he was looking for, which only annoyed her further.

Something wasn't right here.

By the time they'd finished with the horses, the soldiers and the magistrate had been escorted into the hall and were standing around, looking less than pleased at having to wait. Callie slipped into the large reception hall behind Raine, despite his protests she should return to her room and rest. There were perhaps a dozen or so people in the hall, two of whom were Ty and Lena. Callie smiled at the other woman when she made eye contact, but refused to leave Raine's side.

He led her along the wall until they had a clear view of the guests. Only then did he stop, keeping his eyes fixed on the group in front of him. Raine frowned and crossed his arms across his chest as they waited. Callie couldn't help but sneak a glance at his hands as they gripped his biceps. *Lavena* be praised, the things he could do with those hands.

Why Raine was trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, staying away from the other wizards, she wasn't sure. Callie doubted he'd even think to mention it to her either. But she figured by the way he was standing stiffly beside her that it wasn't helping him to have her so close. He'd have to suffer because there was no way in hell she'd leave now and not know what was going on. People died from lack of information.

"Who are they waiting for?" she whispered.

Raine bent his head to hers, the heat of his breath teasing her ear and neck. "Ulric. He likes to remind the king we have our own rules."

"He's doing this on purpose?"

"The magistrate is a self-important, pain-in-the-ass. It will serve him well to wait."

Callie couldn't believe it. The only thing Tarin and his men feared more than the wizards was the king. The fact Raine didn't seem concerned about the blatant disrespect opened some interesting questions. Not only about the power of the wizards, but the seemingly lacking power of the king and his men.

Sighing, Callie reluctantly turned her gaze from Raine to watch the unexpected guests. Wolf was standing quietly to the side of the pacing magistrate, his eyes scanning the hall as well. She noticed that every time his gaze reached Raine, the younger man frowned and immediately looked away.

"Why does he keep looking at you like that," she asked him.

"Because he knows."

Bloody enigmatic wizard! "Knows what?"

"Where in god's name is he!" The magistrate's frustrated cry echoed in the hall.

Ty stepped from the crowd, his arms open wide. "Ulric will be here as soon as he can. If you'd only sent word of your arrival, we could have ensured a timely audience."

"He's kept me waiting long enough. I demand to know where he is!"

"The man will come when he's ready," Wolf's quiet, even voice filled the hall.

"Thank you," Ty bowed deeply to Wolf. "I'm sure you won't have to wait much longer, Magistrate."

When Ty turned and winked at Lena, Callie had to fight a smile. "They are really cute together," she whispered.

"Is that something you look for in a man, little thief? Cute?"

That time she did snort, drawing looks from several people around them.

"I didn't think so," he said and winked at her.

Callie was so shocked, her mouth dropped open. He was teasing her! The small smile that curved his full lips was a temptation greater than anything else. She wanted to reach for him and kiss him senseless. Her body kicked into a firestorm of desire, her breasts becoming sensitive. Totally oblivious to her internal turmoil, Raine turned his attention back to the drama unfolding before them.

How the hell could he do that?

"Here he comes," Raine said with a note of satisfaction in his voice.

Ulric walked unhurriedly down the hall, two other wizards flanking him. Unlike last night, Callie paid attention to the man who led the Warren. He was tall and broad shouldered, though not as large as Raine. His shoulder-length black hair was graying at the sides, but instead of making him look old, it added an air of sophistication. And this time she could see how powerful he was. She couldn't see his eyes from this distance, but she had the feeling that had she looked into them, she would see a man in complete control of the world around him.

Callie took a step closer to Raine and took comfort in his presence. Strange, considering she'd only known him less than a day. In that short time, he'd done more for her than any other man she'd known in her life.

"Magistrate, welcome to the Warren. Please follow me," he said with a faint smile on his lips.

"The king will be angry to know I was kept waiting for so long." The magistrate's face was red, making his blond hair look even lighter. "I demand an apology!"

"It was only for a few minutes. It could have been much, *much* longer." Ulric's voice took on a very dangerous tone and the magistrate took a step backward.

"I'll be bringing my men with me," he sputtered. "I'm not going to pretend to trust you."

Ulric nodded his head. "Of course, but only two. The room isn't large enough."

The magistrate jerked a finger at two men, one of whom was Wolf. Callie wished she knew what was going on. Why was Raine focusing so much on him?

"Ty, Raine, please accompany me," Ulric spoke the words normally, but they easily reached them at the back of the hall.

Raine tensed and Callie felt the urge to place a hand on his back. "What?"

She saw the muscle in his jaw jump as he drew in a ragged breath. Then he simply shook his head. "It's been a while since I've been involved with official business. Stay here."

"Fuck that. Where you go, I go."

"Callie," his low voice a warning.

Instead of answering, she made her way around the edge of the crowd, passing Ty and Lena as she went. She knew enough about Raine to know this was something he wasn't ready for. She wasn't going to abandon him now. Much to his credit, Ulric didn't look surprised when she stopped near the entrance to the corridor. He gave her a single nod, his gaze passing between them.

"This way, Magistrate," Ulric walked past Callie, leading the procession.

Raine fell into step at the back with her and she could feel his annoyance seething through. She knew there would be retribution later for her little display of independence. For the time being, she was safe.

They made their way into a smaller chamber off the main hallway. This was a part of the Warren she wasn't familiar with. She quickly looked around, making sure to memorize as much of the layout as possible. The main door was the only way into or out of the room, making her feel uncomfortable. Callie flanked one of the soldiers and tried to melt into the wall. Tarin would never let her be a part of a meeting like this, scared she'd use the information against him. In his case, he was probably right, but she wouldn't hurt the wizards. Not now.

Raine and Ty stood by Ulric, who now sat opposite the magistrate at the table. With the three of them so close, Callie couldn't help but be impressed. The power from the wizards was almost palpable in the small space, something the magistrate recognized. The man cleared his throat twice before he spoke.

"The king requires the services of the wizards. War is once more upon us and you are needed to defend our kingdom."

Callie's heart began to race and her stomach turned. The last war had taken thousands of lives, most of whom were farmers and tradesmen. It had been brutal and bloody and changed most of the men who'd fought in it. Her father had returned as a bitter, violent man, one who enjoyed taking it out on his daughter.

Ulric leaned forward, his sea green eyes boring into the magistrate. "And why does the king need our services? He has an army."

Raine's gaze moved from the magistrate to Wolf. The younger man didn't look away from Raine, but she saw him tighten his grip on his sword hilt.

"Are you refusing?" the magistrate's voice rose with his disbelief.

"Not yet," Ty answered.

"But I wouldn't suggest giving us a reason to say no," Ulric finished.

"The Magi are back."

Everyone in the room turned to look at Wolf. Wolf never once took his eyes from Raine.

"You stupid idiot! The king specifically said —"

"You know this for certain?" Ulric asked Wolf, his voice was suddenly strained.

"The reports were sporadic at first, coming several months apart. But over the past month, they've increased in frequency."

"Will you shut up?" the magistrate ground out.

"They need to know if you want their help," Wolf said and shrugged.

When Ulric didn't say anything, Ty place a hand on his shoulder. "You knew this would happen."

The magistrate huffed. "You sick bastards! I knew better than to trust you evil, arrogant—"

"I suggest you choose your next words *very* carefully," Raine's voice rumbled in the small confines of the room.

At the sound of his words, everyone except Ulric looked at him. The magistrate sat further back in his chair, as if the few inches of extra space would save him from Raine's anger.

"But he knew the Magi were back," the magistrate sputtered. "And he did nothing!"

"Of course he didn't know. Do you think they would sit around while bloodthirsty killers were roaming around?" Callie said, completely amazed at the stupidity of the man.

"Callie," Raine said, his voice low.

"No! This pompous ass marches in here and demands that you go to war and then accuses you of—"

"Thank you, Callie," Ulric said and smiled at her

His calm demeanor took all the fight out of her. Instead, she nodded and gave him a shy smile.

"It appears we have much to discuss, Magistrate. Might I suggest we let your men rest and eat while we talk?"

The magistrate looked more confused than anything else. He nodded, "Captain, please keep your men ready to move at a moment's notice."

"Of course," Wolf nodded, his gaze flicking between Callie and Raine.

"Raine and Ty, please make sure the men are comfortable," Ulric's calm voice held an edge of finality.

Before she knew it, Callie and the rest of the men were standing in the hallway. Ty looked like he was fighting a smile, while the magistrate's soldiers simply looked tired.

"If you would care to follow me," Ty indicated with his arm, "I'll see that you have a hot meal."

Callie was about to follow them when she felt Raine's fingers curl around her biceps.

"We need to talk," he said the words against her ear.

"I'm hungry. I haven't eaten since yesterday morning. Can't we —"

"Now."

He led her down a corridor that jutted away from the main hall and toward a poorly lit wing of the Warren. Despite his current rough handling of her, Callie knew Raine wouldn't harm her. Not really. Certainly not the way Tarin or her father would. As much as she hated to admit it, there was something thrilling about the way he touched her. Heat from his body rolled off him, mixed with his masculine scent rolled over her sending a shiver of desire through her.

Pushing a door open, Raine led her into a small chamber. She didn't have time to look around because he pushed her up against the wall, trapping her against it with his body.

"What the fuck was that?" he ground out between clenched teeth.

Her heart pounding in her ears, Callie swallowed hard. "What?"

"Your little outburst. Why the fuck were you even there?"

"I..." The words didn't want to come.

Not that her lack of answer seemed to quell his anger. "You've only been here a day. You know nothing about my people or our history. What gave you the right to force us into allowing you into that room?"

"What do you want me to say? I thought you needed me." She swallowed this time, fighting back tears of anger. "I wanted no part in any of this. I never wanted to come

here or to steal that stupid stone. And the last thing I wanted was to end up with a wizard by my side who makes me crazy every time I'm near him."

By the end of her rant, they were both panting. Not wanting to betray herself further, Callie pushed hard at his shoulders. "Let me go."

"No."

The simplicity of the word only upset her more. "I said let...me...go!"

Raine braced his hand against the wall and lifted his body off of hers. He was still blocking her escape and the closeness felt like it was squeezing her chest.

"What do you want from me, Raine? I don't even know who I am anymore."

Looking into his violet eyes, she saw his determination and a glimpse of his returned power. What surprised her was the confusion. She knew this was unfamiliar territory for him too, but she wasn't about to back down. Straightening to her full height, Callie moved dangerously close to him.

"You're not answering, so I assume that means you don't know yourself. As I see it, I only have two options. I can leave, go back to my life and leave yours to you. I'm sure I'll still act as your power source even over distance. Or you can let me learn what I need to become a part of this life."

He cocked his head to the side, his eyes narrowing. "You'd do that?"

Callie closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "Do what?"

"Either."

"Yes, I would. You're the only one who can open up enough to let me in here. The choice to leave is my backup plan. I doubt there is anyone here who would stop me. So, what will it be?"

But where the hell would she go? Her family was all dead. She couldn't return to her life as a thief for Tarin, could never see him again. Raine had shown her a completely different world, one where people cared for each other, loved one another.

He'd pulled her in kicking and screaming and now when she had the chance to leave, it was the last thing in the world she wanted to do.

After what felt like an eternity, Raine started to pull away and Callie knew she was about to lose. Lose what, she still wasn't sure, but she wasn't willing to find out. She reached out, grabbed his face and kissed him lightly on the lips. He didn't respond immediately, but slowly he parted his lips, allowing her to explore further. The stubble of his day-old beard felt rough, but wonderful, against her fingers. As she teased his tongue with hers, tasting him, she stroked his cheeks, temples and neck.

Callie gasped when he growled and pulled away, holding her at arms length. She felt his body shudder as he let out a breath, his eyes locked on hers.

"You don't know what you're asking me to do," his words came out as barely more than a whisper.

"Then show me, help me understand. Or can't you see me as more than a thief?"

"You *are* a thief."

"I'm also a woman."

Raine closed his eyes, his jaw clenched, causing the muscles to bulge. Still, he didn't release her arms, flexing his fingers instead against her skin.

"Tell me," she said in a tone desperately close to begging. "Do you want me to stay or go?"

That moment of silence stretched on forever, squeezing her heart with each passing second.

"Stay," he whispered.

How such a simple little word could make her that happy, Callie didn't know. But it did. Happier than she'd been in all her years. Before she realized what was happening, a tear slipped down her cheek. Raine reached out and brushed it away. When another quickly replaced it, he pulled her against him in a fierce hug.

Callie squeezed his shirt, clinging on as if her life depended on it. Maybe it did. If she were to leave the Warren, she had no doubt Tarin would find her and kill her for failing to get him the stone. And she didn't know what that would do to Raine.

Or what Raine would do to Tarin.

"You need to promise me something," Raine spoke against the top of her head.

"What?"

"Until you understand everything that is going on, you'll stay out of the way. If what the magistrate said is true, then we have a war on our hands."

Callie suddenly felt sick as her head began to pound. "Will you have to fight?"

"Now that I have my magic again, yes."

Looking up, she offered him a smile she didn't quite feel at the moment. "I'm pretty handy in a fight. I could watch your back."

"No."

In a blink, the caring she'd seen in his face was gone, only to be replaced with a flash of anger.

"I've lived my whole life with a knife in my hand. What do you mean *no*?"

Raine released her and backed away toward the door.

"When the fight comes, you will be far away. Safe."

"That is the stupidest thing —"

"Find Lena. She can find you a room for tonight and get you some food."

He spun around and stalked away, leaving Callie alone.

Chapter Seven

"I want to slap his arrogant face!"

Instead, Callie did the next best thing and kicked the wall. The pain from the impact of the stone wall on her toes jolted her away from the pain in her chest. Her heart was bruised far worse than her foot. Why had she let herself get weak, let him break past the defenses she'd taken years to erect? Everyone she'd ever tried to love had let her down—pushed her away. She'd been a fool to think Raine would be any different. Callie looked over when she heard Lena sigh. Her friend shook her head and gave a small smile.

"Killing yourself is only going to prove him right. That's the last thing you want to do. He'll be insufferable."

"I'm not some soft flower that needs his protection. I'm more than capable of looking out for myself in a fight. Why can't he see that?"

Callie walked over to where Lena sat on the bed and flopped down beside her. The feather mattress absorbed her weight and beckoned her to lie back. Fighting the urge, she looked over at Lena's serene face.

"Did you and Ty ever fight?"

The sudden burst of laughter from Lena made Callie jump, but she recovered quickly and began to grin herself.

"That much?"

"Ty just about killed me when we first met," Lena said and sighed. "He'd been sent to my village to discover the source of a poison that had been affecting the local crops. When he came to my mother's place and wanted to know about her herbs, I started yelling at him. He'd practically accused her of placing the poison herself."

Callie watched as Lena's face softened, clearly she was remembering those early days with Ty. Callie couldn't help but wonder if there would ever be a day when she'd think back to these days with Raine and smile like that.

By the goddess, she hoped so. She didn't want to live her life alone anymore. She wanted to stay in the Warren, live with the people who had suddenly become more important to her than her own life. For the first time her life was full of something good.

"Lena, what do I do? I need Raine to trust me if we are going to make this work between us."

She looked at Callie, taking her hand and giving it a squeeze. "I think what we need to do is make Raine realize you are not like Sasha."

"What did she do to him?" The pain of being unfairly compared to another woman picked at Callie. She was a fighter, but an unknown, dead enemy was something she'd never faced before.

"Sasha never wanted to be Raine's source. In fact, she wanted nothing to do with the wizards at all. She made Raine suffer every day they were together."

Swallowing hard, Callie had to ask the one question that terrified her. "How did she die?"

Lena gave her hand a squeeze, but didn't make eye contact. When she finally spoke, her voice was soft. "She killed herself."

Callie suddenly felt sick. Her stomach rolled as her body trembled. No matter how tough her life had been, she'd never once thought of giving up, giving in to the torment that threatened to consume her.

"By the goddess."

"What made it worse was she blamed Raine, told him she couldn't live life if it meant being tied to him. Being used in such a way that she had no control. She pushed a knife into her stomach after having taken something to keep the blood flowing."

No wonder Raine was having such a hard time accepting her. "How can I fight against what she did to him?"

Unfortunately, Lena had no answer for that.

"I think you need to show him the type of woman you really are. He's seen you as a thief and as the source of his magic. But he hasn't seen you as a woman. If you are serious, if you want to win him over, then you need to do this."

Callie had never thought of herself as a woman. Not really. She was treated as a useful tool by the men in her life. Either as a means to an end or as a punching bag. No one had ever seen her as sexy or alluring. That is, until she'd met Raine.

Slipping to the floor, Callie turned to Lena and stood straight. She was still wearing her thief's clothing, but for the first time, she wanted to be more than that.

"Help me," she said to Lena. Fear pounded through her harder than it had for any robbery she'd ever committed.

If she did this, then her life would never be the same.

* * * * *

Raine had spent most of the morning with Ulric and now he was exhausted. The Magi were on the move, claiming village after village as they moved closer to the king and his city. The Warren was safe enough, as the Magi weren't stupid enough to try a direct attack. But the wizards who would head out to do battle with them would be lucky to live.

And Raine would be leading them.

"I trust you're up to the task of leading our men?" Ulric had asked him.

"My power has returned, if that's what you are asking." And it had, stronger than before.

It was strange, but as the hours passed, he felt the reservoir of energy inside him grow, the storm building, waiting until the day he unleashed its energy. His control was there, but strained as he relearned what it meant to be a wizard.

Ulric looked up at Raine from his seat and smiled. It was something that rarely happened since the days of the last war. Not since Ulric's source, his wife, was kidnapped by the Magi.

"How is Callie? I see she's taken it upon herself to keep an eye on you."

Raine snorted. "My little thief thinks I need her protection. She wanted to fight by my side in battle."

"That may not be such a bad idea."

Raine's gaze shot to Ulric and narrowed on his friend and mentor. "Are you insane?"

"She has skills that the rest of us don't. She was able not only to sneak into the Warren, but to get her hands on the binding stone. No one else in the history of our kind has done that. Think of what she can do for us."

"No."

He made sure his tone left no room for argument. The last thing he wanted was for Callie to be put into harm's way.

"It may not be up to you, Raine. She has a mind of her own."

Thankfully, Ulric let the rest of his opinions on Callie drop. There was another important matter than they had to deal with.

"Ulric, we have a fledgling in our midst."

That piece of news caught the elder's attention. "Part of the magistrate's group?"

Raine nodded. He could still feel the other man even now. "Wolf, the Captain of the king's guards. I recognized him when I first saw him."

"So, my star student is to become a teacher," Ulric smiled. "Have you approached him yet?"

"Not yet."

"Why not," Ulric said and frowned deeply. "With the Magi on the march, we will need every available wizard to help us in the fight. If we can find Wolf's source in time, then we will be that much stronger."

"I'm..."

How the hell could he train Wolf, give him the guidance he needed, when his own abilities were so newly returned? Despite the fact he could now control his magic, there were still moments when he felt like a pretender. He shouldn't have been given this second chance, having done nothing to deserve it.

He'd been responsible for Sasha's death.

"You've been through a lot, my friend," Ulric said standing. "It's late. Return to your quarters. Find your Callie and make love to her. You've been blessed with a second chance. Don't question it, but enjoy what the universe has given you."

And with that, Raine now found himself standing in the corridor outside of Callie's bedchamber. His body still hummed from their earlier contact, his unfulfilled need pooling in his balls. He shouldn't be here.

He started to leave, even managing to get several steps away before his body refused to move any further. He bit out a curse, turned and stepped back to the door. Pausing for only a moment, he knocked lightly and waited for a response.

"Come in," Callie's voice drifted through the wood.

Stepping inside, Raine had to adjust to the darkness of the room. The glow from the fireplace did little to help him see where Callie was. But he knew she was close. Reaching out with his magic, he lit the candles in the room one by one. Only once they were all lit did he see her.

Raine's gaze locked on Callie as she stood silently in the corner. He could barely believe the transformation of his little thief into the goddess who stood before him now. She was dressed in a shimmering white gown, her brown hair falling free around her shoulders to frame her face. She was wearing a necklace, a single amethyst encased in a

circle of gold. The stone represented their binding, told the world that she was the source for a wizard.

Her simple gesture made his heart soar.

Callie reached up and fingered the edge of the stone. "When I asked Lena how I could show you that I'm more than the thief you see me as, she suggested this. She helped me make it this afternoon."

She took a step forward and Raine watched as she sucked her bottom lip into her mouth. He wanted to do that, taste her, run his hands over her body and into the silken strands of her hair. Instead he did nothing, waiting for Callie to make the next move.

When she did, it caught him off guard. Another step closer to him, she reached into her pocket and withdrew another amethyst, this one trapped in a circle of gold and fastened to a much larger gold chain.

"I made this for you." Her voice shook as she said the words and her gaze didn't quite meet his.

Raine reached out and lifted her chin until she couldn't avoid him any longer. When her eyes met his, he almost cursed himself for the look of uncertainty he saw. He'd done that to her, bastard that he was.

"It would be my honor to wear it," he said softly.

Callie smiled shyly as she reached up and fastened the gold chain around his neck. The stone was warm from being next to Callie's body. Her heat seeped into his skin, sending a small current of electricity through him. He could smell her scent, like an aphrodisiac teasing his nose.

"It suits you," she said, her eyes flicking between the stone and his face.

"So do you."

The look of cautious hope again drove home the fact he'd fucked things up between them. She may have been like Sasha in the sense that neither of them had asked to be

joined to him. But Callie truly wanted to try to make things work. That tempted him more than it should have.

Reaching up, Raine caught the stone that adorned Callie's throat, brushing his fingers against her skin as he did. She shivered at his touch and he caught the scent of her growing arousal.

"Your eyes are the exact color of the stone," she whispered. "When I first saw you I couldn't believe a man could have eyes like yours."

Raine stepped closer so their bodies were almost but not quite touching. Her body heat radiated out, warming him more than the burning fire. He could see her nipples had tightened under the silk of the gown, their dark areolas a shadow beneath the white material.

"Say something," she pleaded.

But he knew his voice had left him. Instead, he reached up with both hands and cupped her face. Callie sighed and closed her eyes as he ran his thumbs across her cheeks. In that moment, the dam that held his tender feelings back broke. Raine felt his heart swell for the woman who stood before him, a woman he barely knew. In a short period of time, she'd become his world.

"I would very much like to kiss you right now." His voice seemed loud in the quiet room.

Callie let out a small moan and tipped her head back, giving him access to her lips. It was all the invitation he needed. Instinctively closing his eyes, Raine brushed his lips across hers, enjoying the feel of her moist skin. He darted his tongue out and licked her bottom lip. Teasing her for only a moment longer, he claimed her mouth with his, driving his tongue deep inside until he was lost, drunk on everything that was Callie.

He felt her hands slide across his chest until she balled the cotton of his shirt in her fingers. Her sudden jerk brought his body hard against hers until he could feel her erect nipples rubbing against him. Needing to feel her naked skin, Raine broke their kiss and

tore at his shirt, sending it flying through the air. Callie began to work the bindings of his breeches, pulling them wide so she could ease them over his hips.

Now completely naked, Raine dropped to his knees before her, his hands gently squeezing her hips through her dress.

"I'm so sorry for earlier. But the thought of you being anywhere near danger nearly drove me mad." Raine placed a kiss on her stomach.

"I'm not Sasha. I may not have chosen you or this life, but it's so much better than anything I've ever had before. You don't know the gift that you've given me. I'd die to protect it."

Her fingers combed through his hair, sending a shiver through him. Anger at what the world had done to her began to mix with the passion he felt. She was strong, maybe stronger than he was.

When he looked up again, Callie was smiling down at him. She reached up and pushed first one shoulder of her dress down, then the other. The light fabric slithered down her body until it pooled around her feet at the floor. Now as naked as he was, Callie dropped to her knees and pulled his head toward her breast. Raine sucked at her nipple, swirling his tongue around her erect peak until Callie moaned with pleasure.

"I need you," she moaned, pulling him hard against her. "In so many ways, I need you."

Raine let out a growl, and wrapped his arms around her tiny waist. Lifting her up into his arms, he stood and carried her over to the bed. His cock was pressing hard against her hip, twitching with every pulse of his blood. He needed to be inside her sweet pussy, needed to be one with her.

But when he tried to climb over her body, Callie gave him a push.

"No. I want to be on top."

For a woman who'd been a virgin only a day before, she knew exactly what she wanted. Raine rolled over and stretched out beside her. Like she had before, Callie ran

her fingers over the length of his chest and stomach, exploring the feel of his skin. When her long fingers wrapped around his cock, Raine thought he would die.

"You're so thick," she said with a purr and bent her face to place a kiss on the end of his cock.

His shaft flexed, as if to beg her to take it into her mouth. Callie chuckled and licked the tip lightly with her tongue. "I have something else in mind."

Rising up on her knees, she straddled his cock, placing his tip at the entrance of her pussy. She paused for only a moment before letting the weight of her body push down, impaling herself. Raine nearly came from that one, simple stroke. Callie must have sensed how close he really was and held her body still, choosing to kiss and lick at his neck.

"You're so strong," she said in between nips. "So much power harnessed inside."

"Do you want to feel it? A small taste of what you've given me?"

Gripping her hips, Raine pulled Callie up a few inches only to push his cock back deep inside. The storm inside him was brewing, the electric current threatening to pour from him and overwhelm them both. But if he was careful, he could share a taste of that energy with her.

"Do you want it, Callie? To feel the magic?"

Another thrust and she sucked in a breath. Her eyes were closed tight and he could see the mix of pleasure and curiosity on her face.

"Show me," she whispered.

This was something Sasha had never wanted. She'd always been reluctant when he'd offered to share his magic. But not his Callie.

A deep growl erupted from him as he closed his eyes too, needing to concentrate on the feelings inside. As Callie controlled the rhythm of her thrusts, Raine grabbed hold of the current of magic that flowed from her to him. As their physical pleasure increased,

the release of orgasm approaching, he was able to redirect a trickle of the magic so it flowed back into her.

He knew he was successful when Callie's eyes flew open and she sucked in a haggard breath. The rise and fall of her hips faltered as a shudder rolled through her.

"Sweet *Leverna*!"

"Yes, that's what you've given me. So much that I can never repay you for."

"It's so...too much power."

Raine picked up the beat where she'd left off, thrusting harder and faster into her. He could feel her pussy grip his cock, the muscles twitching around his shaft.

"That is just a taste of what you do to me," he said as he thrust. "My little thief."

"Too much," she gasped and buried her face in his shoulder. Referring to his thrusts or the magic, he wasn't sure.

"Not enough," he cooed back to her. "I'll never have enough of you."

Faster and faster they met each others thrusts. Somehow, he could actually feel her orgasm approaching, feel her fight against the breaking pleasure. She wanted to prolong it, push it away as long as she could. He wanted it to go on too, to draw their bliss out until his soul shattered under the weight of their happiness.

His release was coming fast, mixing with hers. He could feel the rush of his seed as it slowly rose from his balls, being drawn from their depths by her cunt. It was too soon—he wanted heaven to last forever. But his body betrayed him as Callie gasped and thrashed on him.

"I can't...by the goddess, Raine!"

Callie's body tensed and he could actually feel her pleasure fuel his magic. The sudden rush of power blinded him, washing over what little control he had left. Their orgasms struck simultaneously, their cries mixing in the small room.

Raine didn't know what had happened after that. Time had lost all meaning as he lay in the bed, Callie's warm body draped over him. Somewhere in his mind, he

recognized her shiver as a sign that she was cold and, using his magic, pulled a blanket over them. He must have fallen asleep for a while because he jerked when he heard a noise come from the door.

“What?” his voice was harsh, at that moment hating the idiot who intruded on them.

“It’s Ty.”

Callie stirred awake, sitting up as Raine did. “What’s wrong?”

He wasn’t sure why he hadn’t noticed it right away, but Callie was right, there was a problem. An uneasy current ebbed around his friend.

“It’s Lena. Someone has taken her.”

Chapter Eight

Callie didn't know why, but she somehow felt responsible for Lena's disappearance. Ty, Raine and the others were going to start a search of the area. Wolf and his men had agreed to help as a gesture of goodwill. Naturally, this upset the magistrate, who fumed loud and long about the need to look for a skittish woman.

The man was damn lucky Raine had been there to stop Ty from killing him.

Not waiting for an invitation, Callie had gotten dressed and slipped back into her thief's attire. The only difference was the fact she left her necklace on, tucked inside her wrap. She'd been thrilled when she realized Raine had left his on as well, the stone nestled against the base of his throat. She'd joined the wizards and sources in the courtyard before they'd gone off to search for Lena.

She was the only source who was dressed and ready for battle, which really hadn't surprised her. The others had lived for so long under the protection of the wizards, they'd never needed to defend themselves. The fact that Lena was gone meant that someone was not only trying to hurt the wizards, but cut their connection to their power. They were all in danger.

"You shouldn't be here."

Wolf's voice was soft, but she couldn't miss the edge to it as he spoke to her. As he approached her, she could feel the pull of his power. *By the goddess, he was a wizard!* She took a step back, suddenly feeling overwhelmed. Why hadn't she felt it before? When her backward movement was stopped by a wall of heat, she knew Raine had come up behind her.

"Callie, he's right. We don't know what is going on or who has taken Lena."

His hand came up to caress her neck and she felt the warmth of his skin seep into her. Despite his words, something was different about him. Ignoring Wolf, she turned to face Raine.

With his arm draped over her shoulder, Callie was tempted to lean up against him. Instead, she held herself straight and looked directly into his eyes.

"I can help."

He didn't retort with a *no* as she'd expected. Raine reached up and brushed the back of his hand across her cheek. The touch was so gentle that Callie almost forgot everything else around them. It wasn't until Wolf snickered that Callie came crashing back to reality.

"I doubt there's anything a little thing like you could do."

She was about to snap at him when she felt Raine stiffen. "You know little about us or our ways. She's more powerful than you realize."

"And I'm better out there than you are. You and your men will crash around, letting whoever took Lena know where you are at all times." She rolled her eyes and crossed her arms across her chest. "I'll be able to track her better on my own."

Wolf's gaze moved from Raine to Callie, a frown playing on his lips. She could see he didn't understand what was happening between them.

"A wizard must trust his source that they know what's best," Raine's voice was firm and steady behind her. "If Callie says she can find Lena, then I believe her."

Callie looked up at Raine. "Really?" Her voice trembled from the weight of emotion she felt at his words.

"It scares me half to death, but yes. You're not Sasha."

That simple revelation, the understanding of her nature, meant more to her than all the money in the world.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"You're a fool," Wolf said, shaking his head.

Raine looked at the other man and grinned. "No. You'll understand yourself someday."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

She could tell by the look on Wolf's face, by the way he took a small step backward, that he knew something was different.

"He means what you think he means," she said.

Without stopping to think why, Callie stepped forward and took Wolf's hand in her own. He opened his mouth to say something, but no words came. His gaze was locked on where her hand touched his.

"You can feel it, can't you? The power in Callie. It's just out of your reach though, like the sound of rushing water on the other side of a door. You know it's there, but you can't get through to it."

Callie shivered as Raine spoke. She could see from the look in Wolf's eyes that he understood. That everything Raine said was true.

"How do you know?" his words were barely more than a whisper.

"We were all like you once. Not aware of who we were. Of what our potential was." Raine moved closer to Callie, only inches from Wolf. "You are a wizard. One of my line."

That explained why Raine had reacted to Wolf the way he had and why Wolf had almost spotted them in the woods. The two men were connected and because of that similarity, Callie was able to sense what Wolf truly was.

"Once we find Lena, we'll talk more. You'll have questions." Raine kept his voice low as he spoke so only the three of them could hear.

Wolf didn't speak, only nodding once. Callie had to pull her attention back from Wolf to focus on the matter at hand—finding Lena.

"Do we know it's the Magi who've have taken her? They couldn't have gotten so close to the Warren without you noticing, could they?" She asked Raine.

"It's unlikely. It could be a test to see how we will react."

Pulling her knives from her vambraces, Callie grinned. "Then we best show them what happens when they anger us."

Raine sighed. "If I demand you stay behind, you'll only follow. Won't you?"

"Of course."

"Then let's get going. But if anything happens to you, I'm going to kill you myself."

* * * * *

Callie crept through the dense underbrush of the forest several feet from the main road. She could hear Wolf and his men crashing off to her right, drawing as much attention to themselves as they could without it being obvious. Their plan had been for Callie to explore off the road, trying to track who had taken Lena.

And whoever it was, he was a pro.

She'd picked up his footprints leading off from the path they'd assumed Lena had been on. Callie could tell it was a man, and a large one at that, from the impression his feet had made in the mud. They'd sunk in even more when he'd lifted Lena over, presumably to carry her away.

What had been strange was the way those footprints would disappear from time to time, only to reappear many feet away. It was if the man was being lifted himself, carried by an invisible force.

Possibly magic.

As she moved, Callie could feel Raine behind her on the path. He was worried about her, but hadn't stopped her from lending her skills in the search. She'd have to thank him properly later for his faith in her abilities.

A sudden crack of a branch off to her left made Callie freeze in her tracks. The noise was gone almost as quickly as it had come, but she knew it wasn't a mistake. Someone was there. Silently turning, she carefully picked her way toward the sound. She stopped when she saw the forest thinned out into a small clearing.

Standing in the middle of it was Tarin. Lena was kneeling at his feet, her arms bound behind her back and her mouth gagged. Callie's heart began to pound when she saw the look of terror in Lena's eyes. Tarin held a long, black bladed knife by Lena's ear.

"Is that you, Callie? Finally dragged your sorry ass out of that fucking place, did you?"

She didn't move. She knew Tarin well enough to know he'd kill her the second he had a chance.

"Not coming out to play?" He taunted her in a soft, sing-song voice. "I guess you're not as stupid as you look."

He moved the knife so it pressed firmly against Lena's neck. "This is another stupid bitch. She thought she could get away from me. That her little bastard wizard could keep her safe from me."

Lena sucked a breath in around the gag as he pressed the knife even harder against her throat. Callie saw a bead of blood darken Lena's fair skin. Every muscle in her body screamed at her to spring into action, but she couldn't. She wouldn't be any help to Lena if she was dead.

"What do you want?" she asked, so softly she knew he'd have difficulty pinning down her location.

"That's a girl. Down to details." Tarin released the pressure of the knife on Lena. "The same thing I sent you in for—that fucking stone."

"Why?"

His head whipped around and he glared into the bushes close to where she was actually hiding.

"Not that it's any of your fucking business, but I have some very powerful friends who want it. If you want your friend to live, you'll bring me that stone by the time the moon is full in the sky."

Lena began to struggle, her cries muffled by the gag. Tarin took the butt of his knife and hit her on the back of the head, knocking her unconscious.

“Full moon rise, Callie. If you’re late, your friend here is dead. If you tell anyone, I’ll know and she’s dead. Come alone and with the stone.”

Before she could say anything else, the wind picked up directly behind Tarin and a dark void seemed to appear. Slipping an arm around Lena’s limp body, he pulled her backward into the void and, with a flash, disappeared.

Callie was left alone, her heart pounding in her throat. Looking up at the setting sun, she knew they’d call off the search soon. That wouldn’t give her a lot of time to get the stone and get back here in time to save Lena.

Knowing she no longer needed to keep quiet, Callie stood and jogged as best she could out of the forest. Stepping out onto the road, she looked over and unerringly found Raine’s gaze. Even at this distance she could feel him, the silent connection that pulled between them. She could see he was frowning.

Ty was beside him, his frantic gaze scanning the forest. When he saw Callie, he strode toward her.

“Did you find her?”

The mix of panic and hope made her feel guilty for lying to him. But if she were going to get Lena back in one piece, she needed to keep Ty far away.

“No. The trail disappeared deep in the woods. I couldn’t pick it up again.”

“Fuck,” Ty said and ran his hands down his face.

Raine squeezed his friend’s shoulder. “It will be dark soon. I suggest we head back to the Warren and rest. We can look again at first light.”

“I’m not leaving her alone out there!” Ty jerked his arm away and pushed past Callie. “Lena! Lena!”

Raine started to go after him, but Callie stopped him with a hand on his chest. “Leave him. He needs to do this.”

Hesitating, Raine stopped and instead focused on Callie. "You look tired."

"I am." At least that much wasn't a lie.

"It's not your fault you didn't find her. If the Magi are involved, then I doubt any of us will be able to track her down."

She wanted to tell him everything. It was killing her not to share what she knew, knowing when he did find out that Raine would never forgive her. That realization made her slump against him, the pressure on her shoulders suddenly more than she could manage.

"Let me take you back to the Warren so you can rest," he said and placed a kiss on the top of her head.

The temptation was great. But she needed to be alone to do what she needed to save Lena. "No. You stay with Ty. I'll be fine."

"Callie..."

"Please, Raine. He needs you right now. I'll head directly back. Promise."

She could see the silent war he was battling inside and felt guilty for what she was putting him through. Finally, he nodded.

"I'll be back soon."

When he tried to turn away, she grabbed him by the face and kissed him hard. When he opened his mouth to accept her searching tongue, Callie sighed. Then, just as quickly, she broke it off and made her way back to the Warren, praying she was doing the right thing.

Chapter Nine

Stepping into the stone's room, Callie felt a sense a déjà vu. It amazed her how much her life had changed in the short time since she'd first arrived in the Warren, and yet, how nothing was different.

She was still a thief stealing a powerful stone. But the reasons were far different.

Unlike her first time here, the protection spell no longer slowed her progress. She didn't even need her lock picking tools, having retrieved the key from Raine's room. But she hadn't moved to take the faintly glowing purple amethyst from its dark case.

"What the hell am I doing?" she muttered.

"I assume you're trying to save your friend."

Callie spun around to see Ulric standing in the doorway. He had a slight smile on his face, his hands clasped behind his back. Moving away from the stone, Callie suddenly felt the weight of what she was about to do crash over her. She almost ran to Ulric and felt relief when he came to her instead and embraced her in a hug.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't know what else to do."

"You didn't betray us, if that's what you're thinking. Tell me what happened."

It all spilled out of her, every detail. From how she'd come to be here in the first place to meeting Tarin and Lena in the woods. Ulric listened, never interrupting. When she'd finished, Callie sighed and wished Raine was here.

"What should I do?" she whispered.

Ulric set her an arms length away, and walked around her. When he picked up the stone and brought it back to her, Callie couldn't believe it.

"Take it," he said, placing the warm stone in her hands.

"What?"

"Your instincts were right. You need to go alone or else Lena will die."

"But if *Tarin* is working for the Magi, won't this give them power over you?"

Ulric didn't respond. Panic rose inside her and Callie didn't know what to do.

"I know you'll do the right thing." Ulric gave her arm a light squeeze and left her alone.

Callie wasn't so sure she could. She slipped the binding stone into a leather pouch and fastened it to her belt. With no time to lose, she bolted from the room and headed for the forest.

* * * * *

Raine was exhausted. They'd continued the search until the sun was completely gone from the sky. Ty refused to give up and it took two of them to drag him back to the Warren. He couldn't blame his friend. If it had been Callie out there, alone, Raine would have gone insane. He couldn't wait to get back to her now. Knowing she was safe at the Warren had made the last few hours of the searching easier.

As they approached the heavy gate that protected the Warren from outsiders, Raine could see a lone figure waiting for them. When they got close enough for him to recognize the person as Ulric, Raine knew there was a problem.

"I need to speak to you," Ulric said as soon as they got close.

Raine felt his stomach bottom out as his feet stopped working. Wolf and Ty stopped beside him, letting the rest of the search party pass by. When it was only the four of them, Ulric stepped forward.

"Callie is gone."

A bolt of lightning flashed across the night sky. Raine didn't move, didn't dare. He felt Ty shift his weight beside him, uttering a curse.

"Was she taken?" Wolf asked the question Raine was scared to.

"No. She's gone after Lena."

“What?” Ty’s startled cry jerked Raine from his numbness. “She knows where Lena is?”

“The man that originally sent her here to steal the binding stone has your wife. He threatened to kill Lena if Callie didn’t go alone – with the stone. She had until the moon rose full in the sky.”

“Fuck,” Wolf muttered.

“You let her go?”

The other three men turned and looked at Raine as thunder rumbled in the distance. The muscle in Ulric’s jaw clenched for a second before he nodded. “It was the only way. But she’ll need you.”

Raine didn’t wait. He was several strides away when Ty and Wolf joined him. “I’m going alone.”

“Lena is my wife, Raine. If you think I’m going to wait while you go after her, you’re fucking crazy.”

“Wolf, you have no stake in this,” Raine said, looking at the soldier.

“According to you, I’m a wizard. I think this very much involves me.”

That was it then. Without further argument, the three disappeared into the forest. Raine had to resist the urge to use his magic, not wanting to alert any Magi that happened to be there and knowing he needed to save his energy. Because once he got his hands on the people who’d threatened Callie, he was going to kill them.

* * * * *

Callie waited at the edge of the clearing until the moon was directly above her. A nervous thrill shimmered beneath the surface of her skin and kept her warmer than any fire. She shallowed her breathing and kept her body stone still. The last thing she wanted was for Tarin to discover her location until she was ready.

A bolt of lightning flashed through the sky, drawing her attention up. There was only one person who could do that. Only one person who would care enough to come after her. One person who could ruin everything if she didn't act quickly.

Raine.

The light above her was soon drowned by a light before her in the clearing. It took a second for her eyes to adjust, but where there had been nothing, now a fire burned in the center.

"Callie," Tarin called to her.

Looking around the tree, she could see he was alone. "Where's Lena?"

"Safe. Do you have the stone?"

"Let me see Lena or you'll never get it."

Tarin grinned, looking in the direction of her voice. "You always talked too much."

Despite his words, Tarin nodded to someone behind him and Lena suddenly appeared. She was still gagged as before, but this time she looked exhausted. Her hair was a tangled mess around her face and dark bruises were welling up on her cheek. Fury boiled in Callie and she wanted nothing better than to slit Tarin's throat.

"Now the stone," Tarin spat. "And I expect you to come out where I can see you."

Rising to her full height, Callie stepped around the tree and into the clearing. Tarin sneered at her, but made no move toward her. Without taking her eyes from him, she loosened the leather pouch from her belt and pulled the amethyst from it. The man holding Lena hissed, and for the first time, Callie really paid attention to him.

He wasn't as tall as Raine or even Tarin, for that matter, but she could tell he was powerful. She could feel a dark magic swirl around him, making her nervous. His eyes were completely black, hiding all emotion and sending a chill through her soul.

He must be a Magi.

"Let Lena go."

"Not until we have the stone."

"If you think I'm stupid enough to hand this over to you without Lena going free, you're insane. Let her go, Tarin. I'll stay."

Lena looked up, suddenly coming to life. She began to struggle, shaking her head madly. The magi gave her a hard shake, instantly silencing her rebellion. Callie knew Lena wouldn't be able to handle much more. She had to get her out of here quickly.

"Come on, Tarin. I know you're itching to beat the living shit out of something. You know I can take it."

Tarin didn't move and she knew he was trying to find a way to keep them both and the stone. She needed to give him a little added incentive. Quickly, she slipped the stone back into the pouch and raised it above her head. Without thinking, she brought the stone down hard against one of the boulders that was partially sticking out of the ground. The Magi holding Lena screamed and Tarin lurched forward. Just as quickly, Callie lifted the bag back up.

"Any closer and I'll finish it off!"

That froze them both in place. Tarin ran a hand down the front of his face, casting a look back at Lena.

"Settle down. We'll let her go."

The Magi gave Lena a shove, sending her falling to the ground. After a minute of struggling, she managed to get to her feet and took a step toward Callie.

"Free her arms. Now!"

Tarin pulled his long blade from his belt and quickly sliced through the bindings. Now free, Lena bolted to Callie, desperately pulling at the gag. Callie needed her safe before she could finish this.

"Lena, go. Run back to the Warren as quickly as you can. Now!"

Finally free of the gag, Lena gasped. "Callie, don't."

"Please run. Tell Raine I'm sorry," she whispered.

Why she'd thought to say it at that moment she wasn't sure. She knew he'd be furious at her for not telling him what she was doing. It was quite likely she wouldn't live through the night and she couldn't bear the thought of dying and Raine thinking badly of her. Lena seemed to understand, nodded and bolted for the trees.

Callie waited until the crash and snap of branches drew farther and farther away and she knew Lena was safe. Tarin's gaze finally drifted back to Callie, his eyes narrowing into small slits.

"I was looking forward to making Lena pay for leaving me. Now it seems I'll have to take it out on you."

The menace in his voice was cold and Callie fought to not show how much it affected her. She was about to retort when the Magi lifted his hand and sent a bolt of blue energy right at her. Pain lanced through her unlike anything she'd ever felt before, ripping a startled scream from her. She lost all control of her muscles and the pouch that held the stone fell lifelessly to the ground. Callie's body quickly joined it.

"That's better. Now, you see, Callie, I'm not very happy with you." Tarin's chuckle filled the silence of the night. "I plan on showing you just how unhappy once we leave here."

Paralyzed, she couldn't move when she saw the tips of Tarin's boots come into her line of sight. Nor could she protect herself when he kicked at her stomach. He continued to kick at her until Callie had to detach her mind from the pain, a trick she'd learned as a child. Raine's face drifted to mind and she wished she could see him again.

Just so she could tell him how much he meant to her. How much she'd grown to love him.

With a final kick, Tarin reached down and picked up the pouch and shook the stone out into his hand. She could see it was marked, but for the most part undamaged. So much for her first plan.

"You're lucky you didn't break this, Callie. Or I would have given you over to my friend. Here," he said and tossed it to the Magi.

“Why do you want it?” she managed to say weakly. The pain in her stomach was slowly traveling up through her chest and she prayed her ribs weren’t broken.

“There is a war coming. And my friends plan to win. They need that stone to stop the wizards. Kill their magic at the source.”

“And you’ve delivered it to us,” the Magi said, a grin etched on his face.

A loud clap of thunder erupted directly above them as a lightning bolt struck a tree behind the Magi. Tarin shouted and ran for cover as the tree fell forward. The branches struck the Magi, sending the stone flying through the air to land near the edge of the forest.

“Callie!”

She looked over at the sound of Raine’s thunderous roar. The sky erupted as wind and rain began to pound on them. Raine was standing there, a murderous look on his face, his eyes locked on her.

Callie wanted to cry. He was the most perfect sight she’d ever seen. Anger and fury, all directed toward the people who’d hurt her. Tarin tried to run, but a hurricane force wind pushed him back into the clearing, sending him stumbling to the ground beside her. Their gazes locked for a moment and Callie couldn’t help but smile.

“I think you’re fucked now.”

The Magi was back on his feet and began to unleash an attack of his own. His bolts seemed far weaker in comparison to Raine’s power. The Magi would try to land a bolt of energy on Raine, only for it to bounce harmlessly aside. The wind and rain began to pound on the Magi, throwing him around while Raine closed his eyes, arms outstretched, beckoning nature’s fury to come forth and drown him.

Callie wanted to help, *needed* to help him, but knew she couldn’t physically stand by his side. When a bolt of lightning struck the ground with a deafening boom, her gaze met Raine’s and it was then she knew. She was helping him. She gave him the very thing no other person could – she gave him her heart. The surge of love she felt for him

was strange and potent. Thunder rumbled, reminding her that she was now a part of this, something bigger than she could even comprehend.

The Magi screamed with frustration. He couldn't beat Raine, couldn't even touch him. When he looked over at Callie, she saw the realization on his face. He'd never be able to beat him as long as she lived. But even as he tried to move toward her, the wind stopped him, threw him back to the ground.

"Stay away from my wife!" Raine growled.

Not his source — his *wife*.

Callie wanted to cry.

When Ty and Wolf suddenly appeared beside him, she knew everything would be all right. The Magi hissed at them, pulling himself back to his feet.

"I'll be back, wizards. And next time I won't be alone."

With a hollow, scream, a dark portal opened behind him. Tarin struggled to his feet and ran toward the Magi when he realized he was about to be abandoned. He didn't make it in time as the portal closed, leaving him to his fate. Turning, Tarin stared at the men as the rain poured down on him.

"I'll give you information on their plans. It would be stupid to kill me."

Raine didn't answer him, instead rushing over to Callie. She couldn't stop the sob that escaped her when his arms wrapped around her body.

"By the gods, Callie. Are you hurt?"

"Raine, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me."

He held her close, and she felt his warmth seep into her skin, giving her strength. His body trembled and it took her a moment to realize what was happening—Raine was crying.

Looking up into his face, she saw the rivers of rain mingle with his tears. He brushed her hair from her face and placed a kiss on her forehead.

"Stubborn thief."

"Is Lena safe? Did you find her?"

"Yes, she's the one who led us here. I was so worried about you."

Callie's heart lurched at the tenderness in his voice. She reached up and ran a finger along the side of his cheek. "I love you."

They'd only been together a short time, but she knew her feelings would never change. Raine opened his mouth to respond, but nothing came out. Not at first. His violet eyes searched her face, looking for some invisible sign. She knew he doubted her, but also knew in his heart he believed too.

Pulling herself up, she kissed him. The contact was gentle, slow, loving. She felt the current of magic between them grow, deepen as Raine slowly responded. Callie sighed when he pulled her into his lap, his hand massaging the back of her neck. When he finally pulled back, he smiled at her.

"I...I love you too."

The words were barely a whisper in the steady falling rain. But as soon as he said them, the binding stone began to glow bright. The stones in the necklaces at their throats did as well, basking them both in a soft purple light.

Callie couldn't help but smile. "I'm not sure what that means, but I hope it's good."

"I don't know," Raine said and shook his head. "But I don't care at this point. Let's get you back to the Warren."

When she tried to get to her feet, he stopped her by scooping her into his arms. No longer having the strength to fight, she relaxed and enjoyed the fact someone was looking after her for a change.

"Move!" Wolf barked at Tarin from behind them.

Callie could only imagine the hell he'd be put through once the wizards got their hands on him. With any luck, his punishment would be long and painful.

* * * * *

Raine stretched out naked in his bed as the first rays of sunlight streamed through the window. After their skirmish with the Magi, he'd taken the opportunity to obtain newer, larger chambers on the second floor of the Warren and lock himself in with Callie. They hadn't seen the outside world for three days.

Despite having made love to her only a few hours ago, his body was primed and ready to go again. Callie was still sleeping, her body half covered with the blanket, preventing him from seeing all of her.

The scars on her back were clear though, and it still upset him to know how much she'd suffered at the hands of the men in her life.

No more.

He lightly brushed his fingers along the purple marks, tracing the path of where they led. Concentrating, he focused all of his energy, every ounce of magic he had and pushed it into healing her skin.

Slowly, the scars began to fade, smoothed out bit by bit. Callie twitched in her sleep until she came awake with a giggle.

"What are you doing?" she asked, sleep still clinging to her voice.

"Fixing past wrongs."

"It tickles."

Raine continued until there was nothing left but inches of creamy, unmarked skin. "There."

Callie spun around in his arms, her nose only a breath away from his. "Did I tell you that I love you?"

"Not this morning."

"I love you."

"I love you too, little thief."

As he bent his head to kiss her, he felt her fingers wrap around his cock. Moaning into her mouth, he gently rocked his hips, thrusting his growing shaft into her hand.

"I want you," she said against his lips.

"I noticed."

With a tug, he rolled on top of her until he covered every inch of her with his body. Callie parted her thighs, wrapping her legs around him. His cock fell to the opening of her pussy and, with a gentle thrust, was buried deep inside her.

Their lovemaking was slow, lazy, as the magic passed between them. Raine sucked her earlobe, teasing it with his tongue. Callie sighed as she began to increase the thrusts of her hips. He could feel the now-familiar pleasure begin to build deep inside, tingling along his back.

Callie moaned, a low, primal noise that told him so much. The urgency of his thrusts increased as he abandoned himself to the pleasure.

"Yes," she said and raked her nails along his back.

Raine dropped his head to her shoulder and shuddered when Callie licked a sensitive spot on his shoulder. He felt his balls tighten in response and he knew she'd draw an orgasm out of him in no time. But not until he'd had his fill of her.

Sitting back on his heels, he pulled Callie with him until she straddled his lap. With her sitting this way, he had easy access to her breasts. Sucking a hard nipple into his mouth, he felt her begin to move her body up and down on his shaft. In a matter of minutes, the moans of pleasure filled the room. All Raine could smell was Callie, her arousal and her soft feminine scent. It made his head buzz and his balls ache. When he didn't think he could last much longer, Raine reached down and circled her clit with his thumb.

Callie's body stiffened, her head falling back, exposing her neck. He lightly scraped his teeth along the soft skin of her throat, reveling in the feel of her moan as her orgasm approached. He was able to buck his hips in time with hers, keeping constant pressure on her clit until she screamed his name, her pussy flooding his shaft, coating it with her cream. She rode him until she'd used all her energy and limply fell against him.

His own taste of heaven was only moments away. He leaned forward once more so he could better fill her pussy, Raine covered her body with his and pounded hard into her. Her moans of encouragement was all he needed to push him over the edge.

"Callie!" he cried and spilled his seed deep inside her.

Sleep won him over for a short time and Raine woke to find Callie nestled close to his side.

"Promise me something," he whispered.

"Anything."

"You'll never keep anything from me again. No matter what you think I'll do or say."

"Never."

"I don't think I could live if anything happened to you."

He felt her fingers trace a lazy circle on his chest over his heart. "Yes, you would. But you'll never have to worry about that. You're stuck with me for a long, long time."

After a moment, Callie chuckled.

"What?"

"Tarin sent me to the Warren to steal a stone, but somehow I ended up with a wizard. I'm still not sure how that happened."

"You're a talented thief."

"A wizard thief."

They both laughed as they rose and welcomed the new day together.

About the Author

It took Christine a lot longer than the average bear to figure out what she wanted to be when she grew up. When she was home on maternity leave, she decided to take a stab at saving her sanity and sat down to write a romance novel. After dabbling with various sub-genres, she realized she really enjoyed creating strange new worlds and writing about sex. Whether due to the pregnancy hormones or sleep deprivation, she thought this was a great combination.

Many years later her kids are in school and she's back at her day job, but the writing bug is here to stay. When not torturing her characters, she's busy playing with her children or conducting "research" with her husband.

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

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