



ENCHANTED LOVERS

HEALING HANDS

KRIS NORRIS

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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

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Kris Norris

Dedication

To Shelley, Lisa, Andrea, and Carollyne. You ladies are amazing and I thank you for never asking me to stop talking about my books. I'm truly lucky to have such fabulous women in my life. Here's to riding the old biddy bus together in years to come.

To my amazing family, who think I'm famous, just because I'm me.

To the talented and brilliant folks at TEB. Claire, Alexa and all the cover artists who make my work shine. I couldn't ask for a better company to work for. Thank you for believing in me and always having time to answer my questions.

And a special thanks to Chris. I'll never be able to show you how much I appreciate your wisdom and patience. You're one-in-a-million and I can't imagine ever working without your guidance and care. Guess you're stuck with me now!

Prologue

Keegan fell to his knees with a harsh curse. He braced his weight on his hands, stumbling to rise, only to be knocked across the back. Pain splintered through his body, spiralling inwards, purging the air from his lungs in a loud hiss. Rough stone connected with his cheek followed by the warm trickle of blood down his forehead.

“Well, well. What have we got here?”

Sharp nails bit into his scalp, jerking his head upwards. Dark eyes glared down at him, the woman’s ruby lips turned up into a cruel smile. She wore a crown of red crystals and was dressed in the most erotic battle leathers he’d ever seen. They were tight to her skin, accentuating her overly large breasts and slim narrow hips.

“You wear the seal of the Kingdom of Garinth, do you not?”

Keegan could only nod, his throat too dry to speak. He moaned as the woman released him, pushing him back to the floor.

“Excellent. You’re just the *type* of man I’ve been searching for.” She laughed, a shrill sound that sent shivers down his spine. “How fortunate for me you decided to invade my land.”

His head snapped up. Invade her land? He’d done nothing of the sort. He’d merely stopped to seek shelter from a storm when he’d been ambushed and knocked unconscious. And if his memory served him correctly, he’d been outnumbered seven to one.

“No.” He choked the word out. By the Gods, he hurt. What in all the Heavens had they done to him?

“Are you implying Queen Vestna of Corand is lying?” The woman shot him a sly smile. “That could be considered treason. A crime punishable by death in my land.” She sashayed over to him and placed a cupped hand under his jaw, lifting his head until his eyes met hers. “But don’t worry. I have no desire to kill you...yet. As a matter of fact, I’m going to give you what every man dreams of. His very own virgin to tutor.”

She released him again, giving his head an affectionate pat. “You do like women, don’t you?” she taunted. “I’ve heard several stories about Garinthian men, and I’m not certain

which one to believe. Either you have trouble fucking women in general, or you prefer men.” Her smile widened until her teeth gleamed. “Either one works for me.”

Queen Vestna waved her hand at the women standing at his side. Red flames flickered around him, flashing pain through his body until he collapsed. “Take him to the basement and chain him to the wall. Mira’s Rite of Passage doesn’t begin for two more nights, and I want him on the verge of death when we take him to her.” She laughed. “A fitting gift.”

The Queen strutted back to her throne, her attention now focused on the two men kneeling beside her ornate chair. They were dressed in tight leather pants with matching, open vests. She smiled as they bowed before her and began untying her clothes.

“Oh, and sisters, make sure our guest knows what’s expected of him. I don’t want to risk losing our magic.”

The women nodded, dragging Keegan back through the doors. He watched as the men bared the Queen’s thighs, drawing her legs apart and exposing her sex to their gaze. They were just beginning to feast on her when the doors to the room closed behind him and he descended into the depths of the castle.

Chapter One

Mira sat beside her window, wishing the mist slowly veiling the land would curl into her chambers and steal her away. Today was the beginning of her Rite of Passage, and in less than a week, she'd be forced to surrender to the Ritual of Sisterhood. And if Queen Vestna had her way, she'd still be a virgin when the Ritual began.

A shiver of fear tingled over her skin, making it bead beneath her modest dress. It wasn't the threat of death that frightened her, but dying never knowing the touch of a man. Having her first coupling be her last. She huffed, wondering how the Queen would avoid providing her with a proper *tutor* as decreed in the sacred scripts. Not that any of the Kingdom's tutors wanted her. They'd all made their revulsion for her *uniqueness* quite apparent. But breaking the oaths would shatter the spell cast on the Kingdom centuries before, robbing the Queen of the very power she treasured more than life. While Mira knew Vestna wouldn't risk losing her magic just to punish her, there was no doubt the woman would go to extreme lengths to see Mira fail.

Mira cursed as thoughts of the Rite tightened her nipples, rubbing the taut buds against her dress. How long had she dreamed of having a man touch her? Of teasing her body to life with his hands and tongue. For months she'd laid on her bed, imagining large, strong fingers caressing her body. They'd dance along her skin, making it quiver with need. She could feel them graze across her nipple, rolling it as his warm breath tempted her other breast. She'd arch into him, spear her fingers through his hair, lock him to her chest as his lips descended around her peaked bud, drawing it inside his mouth.

Her whimper drifted through the air as her fingers imitated her thoughts. She'd discovered how to apply just the right amount of pressure to send a bolt of desire straight to her sex. With every tweak, the feeling increased, building the moisture pooling between her legs until she felt it seep out, coating her velvety lips. It was all she could do not to lift her skirt and slip her fingers along her narrow slit, gathering the cream as she swirled it around the small nub just above her sheath. But it wouldn't help. It'd only build the need until she'd

be forced to lie on the bed, clutching her abdomen as the painful contractions of her womb spiralled through her. She needed a man to cure the curse...Hells, she needed a miracle.

Mira bit back another curse, allowing her hands to fall to her side. The last thing she wanted was to get her body even more excited. The pain had only grown worse over the past few days, and if she didn't conserve her strength, she wouldn't survive the next five days. She sighed and turned back to the window just as the door to her chamber burst open. A gathering of women filled her room, stopping an arm's length away. She rose from the chair as they parted, moving aside one by one as the Queen emerged through the centre.

"Hello, Mira. How wonderful to see you."

Mira stared at the Queen, her hands clenched at her sides, until one of her sisters hissed. She glared at the crowd, waiting a few seconds more, before lowering into a proper curtsy.

Queen Vestna smiled, seemingly pleased with Mira's show of obedience. "As you know, today is the beginning of your Rite of Passage, and as decreed in the royal scripts, you are to be given a proper tutor to prepare you for the Ritual of Sisterhood."

Mira's mouth opened in shock before she had the good sense to snap it shut. She gazed around at her sisters, feeling the hairs rise on the back of her neck, before finally settling on the Queen. "Yes, Your Majesty."

"You seem surprised, Mira. Surely you didn't think I'd risk the security of the entire Kingdom just to hurt you?" Vestna laughed and waved her hand towards the door. "No my dear. In fact, I've found the perfect specimen for you. Sisters!"

The Queen clapped her hands, the sound echoing off the stone walls. Mira looked over the woman's shoulder just as a man was dragged through the door and dropped at Mira's feet. He was dressed in what had once been a white, silk shirt and battle leathers, but they'd been reduced to mere scraps clinging to his skin. Long red welts covered his back and she could tell by the pale colour of his skin, he'd lost a fair amount of blood.

Mira's stomach heaved in protest as she sank to the floor and brushed the long brown hair from his face. His features were strong and lean, nothing short of beautiful. Tears gathered, held back by her thick lashes, as she looked up at the woman she'd once called mother. "What have you done to him?"

"Whatever do you mean, my dear?"

Mira stood up, anger fuelling the power inside her. "He's been tortured. That's against Corand law unless our two Kingdoms are at war!"

"He trespassed on my land and injured four of my warriors. That justifies my actions," snapped Vestna. "Besides, it's nothing you can't..." The woman scowled as she skimmed her gaze along the length of Mira's body, "*fix*."

Mira felt the woman's hatred as she stepped back and smiled at the crumpled man at Mira's feet.

"The text doesn't dictate *how* your tutor's presented, just that you receive one."

"But..." Mira's voice trailed off as she watched Vestna smile. It seems the Queen had found her escape after all. Mira took a step forward, no longer able to contain her power from surging forth, covering her skin in a pale blue light. The smile faded from Vestna's face as the woman stared at her. Around the room, balls of fire sizzled to life, floating above the other women's hands. Mira barred her teeth, wanting to extinguish their fire with a rain of blue light. But just the thought of inflicting pain on the women heaved her stomach again.

She clenched her jaw, unsure of her next move when a strangled moan drew her attention. She glanced down at the man, feeling his pain course through her body. He wasn't going to last much longer.

Mira gave her mother one last glare before stepping back, allowing the colour to fade from her skin. Then she bent down, and ran a gentle finger along one brawny arm. "Does he have a name?"

Vestna merely smiled. "As you can see, he was most reluctant to speak to us. All we know is that he hails from Garinth."

"Garinth!"

"Now, now, Mira. You can't believe every rumour you hear." The Queen laughed and headed back to the doorway. "I'm certain you'll have better luck with him than we did. Despite the numerous sisters I presented to him, we weren't able to get a response, if you know what I mean. You have five days to prepare for your Ritual. I suggest you make the most of them." Vestna stopped, and glanced back over her shoulder. "It really is a pity you can only hurt us with your power. It might have saved your life."

Mira watched the women as they filed out of her room, their smug smiles fading into the shadows. This was her punishment for being different. For caring. She turned back to the man, feeling his muscles tense beneath her fingers. Despite everything, he was still fighting.

“Easy...” What was she supposed to call him? Milord? Captain? Heavens, he could be a King for all she knew.

A sigh feathered over her lips, making them tingle. There was no mistaking her body’s need, but she’d be damned if she’d force a man to *prepare* her. Besides, from the rumours she’d heard, it wouldn’t matter anyway. Garinthian men were supposed to possess some sort of mystical restraint that prevented them from coupling with just any female—or as some of the stories went—males. If none of her sisters could get the man’s shaft to harden, she doubted she’d fare any better.

Another long, low moan drew her attention back to his face as she watched his lips twist into a grimace. They were full and pink and she would’ve given anything to taste them. Feel their velvety softness surround her breasts, suckling her nipples into his mouth. Revel in their warmth as he kissed a path down her body, skimming across her plump nether lips. But the poor man was just a stone’s throw away from death, and if she didn’t act fast, he wouldn’t be alive to lust over.

Mira pulled at his shirt, removing the torn scraps from his body. More welts crisscrossed his lower back and cuts and bruises covered his chest. She considered removing his pants, but couldn’t seem to take that last shred of dignity from him. There was just something about him that radiated respect, and she wasn’t going to be the one to shame him.

She looked at his massive structure and decided dragging him to the bathing chamber wasn’t an option. Instead she fetched a bowl of warm water, and spent the next several minutes cleaning his wounds. By the time she was finished, blood flowed from several cuts and more had been uncovered from beneath a layer of dirt.

“Filthy witch,” she cursed, feeling disgust well inside her. They’d tortured him on purpose. Not just to sway his feelings towards her, but to mock her gift.

She shook her head and laid her hands on his chest. Then she closed her eyes, allowing the power she’d quenched to surround her, moving through her body and into his. The pale blue aura glimmered to life again, swirling in the air as it crept over his torso. He groaned as her magic began weaving his battered body back together. Wound by wound, cut by cut,

until the worst of his injuries were nothing more than a pale scar. One hour turned to three, as she dug deeper, knowing she couldn't rest until the very blood her sisters had spilled once again pumped through his veins.

His body twitched beneath her hands as her strength began to wane. She allowed one last surge of power to flow into him before pulling back and watching the last remnants of blue flicker across his skin. A small smile touched the corners of her mouth as his expression eased, his face no longer contorted in pain. He mumbled something she couldn't quite make out, then drifted off, his luscious lips turned up slightly at the edges.

"Sleep," she said, finding just enough energy to toss a thick blanket over his body before collapsing on the floor beside him.

* * * *

Keegan rolled to his side, a strange feeling prickling along his neck. He eased his fingers down his side as he reached for his sword, only to find it gone.

Hells!

He slanted his eyes open, his body primed for battle, as he looked around the small chamber. It was made of stone, the grey colour shadowed in the setting sun. He tried to stand, when images of the past two days tumbled through his head, making the room dip and sway. They were nothing more than scattered fragments, but he remembered enough to know his life was in danger. If he didn't escape soon, something warned him he never would.

He growled and pushed to his feet, heaving a woollen blanket off his body as he braced his trembling weight against the wall. He needed to get back to Garinth, before his captors staged an attack. With his eldest brother, Gareth, still entombed in a witch's curse, only Roland stood at his father's side. And the lad was still more boy than man. Keegan couldn't allow the bloodline to die, not before one of the brothers had seeded an heir, though he'd had little success at that.

Keegan shook the doubts away, looking over his shoulder, drawn to the figure curled up on the floor a few feet away. The woman was small and curvy, nothing like the other

women he remembered. They'd all been tall and strong, with a beauty best described as dangerous. But she looked so innocent he found it hard to believe she'd ever hurt anyone.

He cursed, knowing he couldn't leave her behind. Not before he knew she'd be safe. He knelt down beside her, brushing her hair back from her face with a gentle finger. It was long and curly, the golden colour shimmering in the waning light. Her skin was pale and smooth, and he felt a strange stirring inside his leathers. He gazed down her body, taking in the gentle swell of her breasts and the lush curve of her hips. Everything about her spoke of warmth and tenderness, and he couldn't help but wonder what kind of lover she'd be? Was the innocence only on the outside?

The sound of voices broke the spell, and he snapped from his thoughts with a strong shake to her shoulder. Night was dawning, and he needed to leave with the setting sun. She sighed, and her lids fluttered. What breath he had hissed out through his teeth as he watched her deep green eyes stare back at him. A primal growl sounded in his head, and in that instant, he knew he was lost. She blinked once, and darted her tongue out to moisten her lips. He watched the slow progression and had the sudden image of her luscious lips wrapped around his cock, the pink colour stretched around his darker flesh. Somehow he knew she'd take him gently at first, just teasing the first few inches with her velvet warmth. Testing his smooth skin as if she'd never tasted a man before. She'd move slowly, licking and kissing until her need matched his, and she'd sink lower, swallowing as much of his length as possible, drawing on him with such sweet suction he'd have no other choice but to fill her pretty mouth with his seed.

Yes, she'd be a very sweet mouth fuck indeed. And he knew she'd love the taste of him, always begging for just one more drop of his cum.

"Oh. You're awake."

Her voice was like a silky caress to his shaft, and it thickened in his pants, straining against the tight leather, begging to be released. The tip flared as she gave his body a long, slow sweep and he couldn't stop the smile from spreading across his lips.

"How are you feeling?" she asked, using the bed to push to her feet. "Are you sore?"

Again he heard the words, but felt the reaction in his cock, this time beading a drop of liquid from the tip. He closed his eyes and tried to remember why he'd woken her in the first

place, but his head was filled with images of them fucking on the bed behind her. It was all part of his damn curse. It wasn't often his cock responded to a woman, but when it did...

By the Gods, it reacted, robbing him of every other coherent thought. But it wasn't just his shaft. Every sense was heightened. His sight. His hearing. His sense of smell. Even his skin became overly responsive, twitching with the slightest contact. He jumped when her hair brushed over his shoulders as she turned to follow his gaze. When she looked back at him, her brow was etched into a tight vee, as if she were questioning his state of mind. She shifted her weight, her foot tapping against the floor, the hushed sound matched by the thudding of his heart. He wondered what it'd feel like to have that dainty foot perched on his shoulder as he spread her wide, watching her smooth skin part around his swollen flesh. A rumble echoed in his head and it took him a moment to realise he'd growled.

"Sir?"

He met her gaze. Her eyes were wide and glassy, and her lips were pursed together forming the most delectable little pout he'd ever seen. He smiled down at her, knowing he'd have to taste those perfect lips before he could do anything else.

Keegan stepped forward, corralling her towards the wall until her back pressed against the cold stone. He fought to keep his touch light as he cupped his hands around her waist, drawing her close. She stared up at him, her hands timidly reaching for his shoulders as he pressed his cock against the soft mound of her sex. She gasped, but didn't struggle, widening her stance just enough so she could cradle his shaft between the lips of her sheath.

The groan he'd been holding back broke from his chest as her sensuous flesh parted for him. Even through both their clothes, there was no mistaking the slide of her juices as he moved along her slit, scraping the rough fabric against her clit. Her mouth opened slightly and the softest of moans caressed his skin.

He bent over her, licking the fullness of her lips. "Tell me your name, sweetness." His voice was low and gravelly, and he knew she heard the lust in it. He wasn't just asking for her name. He was asking what to shout when he came inside her.

"Mira."

Her reply was whispered on a gasp as he brushed his thumb across her breast, flicking her nipple as he dipped inside the bodice of her dress. It wasn't a flattering frock by any

means, but he didn't care. She'd look far better naked and spread out before him, her glistening sex bared to his gaze.

Mira inhaled as he pinched the tight peak, exposing it to the cool air, before bending down and laving it with his tongue. She tasted like warm honey and he pulled at the other side, needing to taste that nipple as well.

"You haven't told me your name yet," she said, pushing her breast into his mouth. "What shall I call you?"

Keegan pulled back, loving how her eyes had darkened. He was finding it hard to concentrate with the smell of her sweet sex tantalising his senses. He'd caught her scent the moment he'd pushed her against the wall, and he knew if he slipped his hand beneath her dress, she'd be dripping her juice down her thighs. He cocked half his mouth into a smile at the thought.

"Well, my sweet Mira..."

His voice faded as her name triggered a memory.

... you will be Mira's tutor. You'll spend the next few days bringing her to orgasm with your hand and your mouth, allowing her magic to use chemicals from your skin and saliva to thin her virginal barrier. Once you've prepared her properly, you'll take her maidenhood as a sign of your submission to the Queen of Corand...

Keegan braced his hand on the wall as more images materialised. His naked body chained to the wall, ripe for their pleasure. They'd tried to coax his cock to attention, but he'd been unable to perform. They'd laughed and beaten him, leaving him alone to die.

"Sir? Are you well?"

Keegan broke free from the dream and took a staggering step back. He looked down at the woman standing before him. It was *her*. The woman he'd been *ordered* to fuck. And Heavens help him, but he wanted to. Wanted to pound into her day and night, over and over until she accepted his claim. Wanted to watch her swallow his seed, loving the sight of her lips wrapped around his shaft. Wanted to drink the sweet juice he smelt swirling in the air around him. Hells, he even felt the need to claim her in other ways.

"You!" The word came out harsh and cruel, and she jerked back at the sound of it. He took another step back. "You're one of them. One of Queen Vestna's warriors."

Mira shook her head, but didn't try to speak. How could she explain she'd never been part of their world, and never would? She looked away, unable to watch the anger and disgust flicker in his eyes.

"I demand you release me."

She forced her gaze upwards until she was staring into his dark brown eyes. They were hard, unrelenting. "I'm sorry, but I can't."

She shivered as he took a step towards her, his large size diminishing hers. The muscles in his chest flexed as he crossed his arms and measured her with a long, slow sweep of his eyes. The heat in his gaze ignited a fire in her groin, and she had to fight to keep from doubling over.

She cursed and bit down on her bottom lip, hoping the hurt would ease the ache. Her body didn't care its suitor no longer wished to continual his sexual game, all it knew was the need. The desire to feel his hard shaft sliding between her silky lips, plunging deep inside her. Filling her where no man had ever touched. She'd felt the hard evidence of his desire move along her slit, and wanted nothing more than to slip it inside.

"Can't. Or won't!"

Mira shook the sexual thoughts from her head, hoping the pain would clear her mind. "I can't." She held up her hand when he growled and took another step forward. "Queen Vestna has imbedded a small crystal in your neck, very similar to the one I have in my naval. It's guarded by her power. It prevents you from inflicting harm to her, or from leaving the palace. I'm afraid I can't break her magic...at least not yet." The warrior glared at her and she rushed to explain. "Since you're not native to Corand, and Vestna lied in order to justify her use of magic, I might be able to break the spell once the crystal has been accepted by your body."

The man snarled again and her body warmed. Damn, she should be afraid of him, but the thought he'd lose control and come at her had her more aroused than ever. Hells, she was lost.

"How. Long?" He accentuated each word with a huff as his fingers probed the small stone.

"About three more days. If I try before that, I'll only hurt you."

He snorted and crossed his arms again on his massive chest. "It's a little late for that, don't you think?"

"I wasn't the one who tortured you. I..." Her voice faded as he turned around and stalked over to the fire. Nothing she said would make a difference. She was the enemy, period.

Mira straightened and took a step forward, trying to ignore how the firelight danced across his body, illuminating the bronze in his skin. He was simply the most handsome man she'd ever seen. "If you're hungry..." She stopped when he turned and glared at her, his hatred so blatant she missed a step and tripped against the bed. His chuckle didn't help.

"Do you really take me for a fool, Mira? I can go more than three days without food. I'll not be trickled so easily, just so you can get your way."

"And what way is that?" she snapped.

He kicked his mouth into a smile that was both sexy and smug. "I remember what your sisters demanded of me while they were beating me. You want me to fuck you."

Mira's heart clenched at the disgust in his voice, as if touching her would be the worst fate he could imagine. While her body tried to propel her forward so he could do just that, she pushed herself back, retreating to the door. "I want nothing from you."

"Oh, you want me, sweetness. I can smell your need from here, and from what your *sisters* told me, you need it real bad. Something to do with a ritual." He sauntered towards her, caressing the bulge in his pants. "I tell you what. Maybe, if you're real nice to me, I'll fuck you before I leave. After you've broken the spell." His gaze swept down her body. "It's obvious you're a willing wench. Already given me a taste of those pretty nipples." He nodded and licked his lips. "Yeah, I'll fuck you in exchange for my freedom seeing as there's no one else in this Kingdom *up* for the challenge." He cocked his head to one side. "Now I wonder why none of the other *tutors* want to fuck you?"

Mira felt the bitter sting of tears, but pushed them back. She'd endured this type of taunting all her life, and wouldn't show him how much it hurt. He was nothing to her, so why did his words hurt so badly?

She reached for the door and turned the handle. "I'll break the spell, but if you try to touch me, I swear I'll kill you. I don't need your help to survive the Ritual, so I suggest you

go to the bathing area and take care of..." She waved her hand at his groin, "your condition yourself." She walked through the door and slammed it shut behind her.

Keegan watched her leave, tears glistening in her eyes as she fought to hold them back. Guilt threatened, but he tamped it down. He hadn't meant to be so cruel, but, Hells, he'd just been beaten and tortured for two days, and now he was expected to fuck her so she could complete some kind of mystical ritual. Nothing made sense. Especially how hard his cock got just looking at her. It'd been over two years since the damn thing had stirred to life, but he'd never felt the desire to finish a bonding. Never imagined needing to have a woman submit to him in every way possible, as his father had claimed would happen. Yet just thinking about her...

"Hells. Why am I reacting to *her*?" What good was the damn curse if it didn't work? If it allowed him to bond with a woman concealing such...such coldness in her heart? Didn't the damn thing realise where he was? Despite her subtle beauty, he just didn't see how a woman from this realm measured up, especially one of Queen Vestna's soldiers.

He glanced once more at the closed door, his cock still rigid beneath his pants. There'd been something in her eyes that made him feel worse. Shame, or was it despair. Either way, he couldn't stop the nagging feeling he was wrong about her.

He sighed and sank down on the bed, resting his chin on steepled fingers. There was obviously more to Mira's story than what he'd been told, but be damned if he knew what it was. The Queen couldn't have known he'd react to her, so why did she want to give Mira a tutor who couldn't perform his duties?

"Dark Hells," he cursed as he rolled off the bed and stalked into the bathing area. He needed to get some measure of relief if he was ever going to be able to think clearly. Who knew how long Vestna would wait before unleashing her ranks on his Kingdom, and he couldn't chance that either Gareth or Roland would be killed. He fisted his cock, hoping his hand would be enough to ease the ache, as he glanced back towards the other room. Mira had seemed genuinely hurt by his reaction and he couldn't help but wonder what she was hiding. Why none of the men in her kingdom desired her?

He sighed and started the rhythmic motion. Whatever the reason, based on the way he'd treated her, he doubted she'd be a willing partner, ritual or not.

Chapter Two

Mira tiptoed into the room, closing the door quietly behind her. She'd spent the night in the stables, healing the horses and staring into the dark. She'd even stood out in the rain, hoping the water would wash the scent of his body off hers. But it hadn't helped. She'd been surrounded by his scent all night. Hells, it even wound through the curls of her hair.

She closed her eyes, willing him to somehow be gone, but felt the weight of his stare the moment she stepped forward. He leant against the wall, his dark eyes watching her. His long brown hair was wet, the ends still dripping down his shoulders. Her breath stalled as one drop rolled along his chest, clinging to his nipple. The bead distorted the shape, magnifying the tight round bud before falling to the floor.

Another contraction rippled through her sex and she whimpered in need before she had the strength to crush the soft sound. The warrior's smile faltered for a moment, before he tilted his lips again.

"Back so soon, sweetness?" he teased, heading over to stoke the fire. She watched him move, the firm muscles in his buttocks flexing with every stride. Her stomach fluttered, her hands desperate to feel those very muscles bunch as he thrust into her, burying his body within hers.

"What's wrong, sweetness? Still not talking to me?"

Mira glared at him as she stumbled over to the other chamber, desperate to soothe her raw nerves in a cool bath. The heat was getting worse, her need for release so strong she could smell her own scent mixing in the air. She headed for the large tub, stripping her clothes off as she walked.

"Mira!"

The woman's voice was accompanied by a loud banging, making the small hairs on Mira's arms stand up. She cursed and headed back to the door, ignoring the way her warrior's eyes bulged as she rounded the doorway and stalked across the room. She knew her shift was transparent, leaving nothing to his imagination, but she didn't have time to care. No one was supposed to disturb her during the Rite of Passage.

"What?" she snapped, flinging the door open.

The woman gazed down her body, a knowing smile tilting her lips. "Oh come now, Mira. Don't try to pretend. I can see the red tinge to your crystal from here." She waved towards Mira's navel. "So don't try to convince me I've interrupted something." She pushed past Mira, her hips swaying as she walked.

"Whether you're interrupting something, or not, isn't the point, Tiana. Corand law clearly states..."

"Corand law..." Tiana waved her hand in the air. "Really. Besides, I didn't come here to challenge you, though your tutor must be begging to be released from his duties by now." She shot the man a suggestive glance. "I have another use for you."

Tiana clapped her hands. Two more warriors entered the room carrying a man between them. He whimpered as they dumped him on the floor, his body contracting in pain. Mira moved to his side, staring at the angry welts covering his legs. "What have you done to him?"

Tiana shrugged, scraping some dirt out from beneath her nails as she glanced at the man writhing on the floor. "I caught him pleasuring one of the servants without permission, so I decided to teach him a lesson." She snarled at the man. "I'm starting to think he enjoys men more than women."

"Perhaps he sees you for what you really are?" taunted her warrior, still leaning against the wall.

Tiana glared at him and took a step forward, a red fireball sizzling to life in her hand. "Silence, servant, or I'll finish what I started the other day."

Her warrior snarled and matched Tiana's step, his eyes fixed on the red flame. Mira realised he was now just grasping the truth. They really were witches...the rumours were true.

"Stop it," hissed Mira, stepping between them. "I have enough work without having to deal with the two of you." She turned on Tiana. "Now stay back or some of my power may touch you as well, and I wouldn't want you to get burned, *sister*."

Tiana glared at her, but the flame in her hand vanished as she stepped back and waved at her servant. "Now, Mira. I don't have all day."

Mira sighed and knelt down beside the man. "These burns are extensive. It'll take time."

"It's not like you're busy with something else. Just fix him so I can leave."

Mira scowled, but turned away, her fingers finding some hidden marks on the man's body. Then she closed her eyes.

"Sweet Heavens," rasped Keegan, watching a pale blue hue surround Mira's body and float over the man on the floor, gaining strength as it travelled along his body. Her hair bellowed and flowed backwards, waving in the still air. Keegan took a step forward, unable to look away, as the servant's skin began to shift, flowing from one form into another until only a layer of pale pink remained.

"Was she born with this...this...gift?"

"I suppose," sneered Tiana. "Unfortunately, we discovered her *talent* a little too late."

"You don't approve of her being a healer?"

Tiana glared at him and raised her hand, a new ball of red flame flickering on her palm. Keegan scowled but turned away, ignoring the woman's glare, as he watched Mira work her magic. By the Gods, she was beautiful. The way her pale skin shimmered beneath the blue light. Her muscles contracted as she moved her hands, weaving the man's body back together with her mind. And beneath her shift, sweet Heavens, nothing hid her silhouette as she swayed from side to side, as if listening to the rhythm of a distant song. Her breasts were firm, the nipples pressed tightly against the material, the pink hue just detectable beneath the thin fabric. But between her legs. He stifled a moan, unable to tear his gaze from the soft curls of her sex peeking out at him from between her thighs.

Keegan licked his lips, willing his cock to stand down. He didn't want Tiana to see his arousal, sensing the knowledge would only anger the woman further. Instead, he concentrated on Mira. Watching as her fingers swept along the man's skin, leaving pale, pink swirls where the burns had once scarred the surface. She worked slowly, tediously, never stopping to rest, as the minutes drifted into an hour. It wasn't until every mark had been erased that she leant back, exhaustion hunching her shoulders. She was still watching the last wisps of blue fade from the servant's skin when the man bolted awake, turning on her with a

savage snarl. She tried to move, but the servant howled and struck her, scrabbling to his feet as she fell backwards.

Keegan moved before the man gained his balance, throwing him back against the wall, trapping his throat beneath one chiselled forearm.

"The lady just saved your life, knave. I suggest you show her the respect she deserves."

The servant spat on Keegan's chest, fighting to free himself. "I'd rather die than have that vile witch touch me."

Keegan pressed harder, watching the man's eyes bulge wide. "That can be arranged, friend."

The servant whimpered just as a harsh hiss echoed behind Keegan's back. He didn't need to turn around to know Tiana was behind him, another ball of flames dancing in her hand.

"Release him, Garinthian, or I won't leave anything alive for Mira to heal this time."

Keegan looked back at her over his shoulder. He snarled and pushed harder when Mira's voice broke the tension.

"Touch him, Tiana, and you'll be my next target."

She was standing beside the bed, her body trembling. Dark circles rimmed her pretty eyes, and beads of sweat creased her forehead. She looked ready to collapse, but held her ground, her blue aura shimmering back to life when the fire in Tiana's hand swelled.

Tiana cursed and stepped forward, launching the ball at her sister. Keegan tensed as the fire flew towards Mira's head, only to burst into thousands of splintered sparks, as Mira countered her sister's attack, sending a single blue stream of light out from her hands. Tiana gasped when the light sliced across her arm, leaving a small, red welt in its wake. She turned back to Mira, sizing her sister up, before stepping back as the flames flickered and died, a small hiss whispering across the room.

Tiana laughed as she crossed her arms on her breasts. "Have it your way. But he's hardly worth saving...again. Especially since he won't be able to return the favour." She laughed again. "Guess I'm going to have to find someone else to heal my pets."

Keegan released the man, shoving him towards the waiting warriors. The women grabbed him and pushed him out, mumbling something about a punishment. Keegan

glanced over at Mira. She looked ready to faint. He took a step towards her, but stopped when she held up her hand.

"Don't," she snapped. "I don't want your help...or your pity." She extinguished the blue light and fell on the bed, crawling over to the far side.

"I wasn't going to give you my pity," he replied, stalking to the bed. "I merely wanted to get you a cloth. Your face is bleeding."

Mira just shrugged and closed her eyes. "Doesn't matter."

"Does the red in your crystal matter?" he challenged.

"It means I'm still a virgin," she rasped, not opening her eyes. "I can't leave the palace or take my place as a warrior until it's blue. That's what the Rite of Passage and Ritual are all about."

"And if it's still red when the Ritual begins?"

"Then instead of a celebration the Queen will have one of her servants fuck me in a public display to prove my allegiance to the Kingdom...and give me my freedom."

Keegan stepped back, remembering the instructions Vestna's soldiers had beaten into him. "But they said taking you without preparing you first will kill you."

Mira opened one eye long enough to meet his gaze. "That's what they're counting on," she said, and then she was out.

Keegan shook his head and watched her sleep, her tears joining the blood on her cheek. It was then he realised how wrong he'd been. How harshly he'd judged her. He'd never stopped to wonder why his wounds had healed so fast. But now he understood the truth. She'd healed him. That's why she'd been huddled on the floor. She hadn't gone to sleep beside him, hoping to fuck him the moment he woke. She'd fainted after saving his life.

He sighed and palmed his head in his hands. He'd have to find a way to make it up to her. One that would save them both.

* * * *

A cool cloth dabbed Mira's face, trailing along her cheek. She sighed and leaned into the gentle caress, revelling in the sensual touch until a sudden heat covered her forehead. She opened her eyes to find her warrior hovering over her, his lips brushing her skin.

She gasped and jerked away, moaning at the firm contraction in her sex. Her body was humming again, and just the slightest touch of his skin was enough to set off a reaction.

"What are you doing?" she demanded, though her voice sounded husky and raw, like a woman on the verge of release. Her tutor smiled and relaxed back, watching her through lowered lids. He centred his gaze on her chest, and her nipples tightened in response. She glanced down, a red flush lacing her skin when she realised she was still wearing the sheer shift, and nothing else.

"Just tending to your wound," he mused, nodding towards her cheek. "I suppose this means you can't heal yourself...or, I suspect, your sisters."

Mira grabbed at the sheet, pulling it across her body as she rose from the bed. She knew he'd already witnessed her arousal, but she'd be damned if she'd flaunt it. Ritual or not, she refused to beg him to fuck her.

A trickle of liquid eased from her channel as she clung to the image of Keegan above her, his hips pumping as he held her legs wide. Somehow she knew he'd want to see every reaction she made. The way her breasts bounced as he rode her, her nipples pointing straight up. Or the quick pulsing of her clit as she climaxed, spilling more of her precious juice along her sex.

She groaned, and stepped forward. "You saw what happened. My power heals anyone else in the Kingdom, but if I touch the Queen or one of her soldiers, I burn them. What good is a warrior that can't fight or heal her sisters?" she snipped, heading for the bathing chamber. He followed.

"So why won't you let me help you then?"

She whirled around, not caring when the blanket slipped from her fingers and pooled at her feet. "I told you before. I don't want anything from you...whatever your name is! Now if you don't mind?" She motioned towards the sleeping chamber, but he didn't leave. Instead, he took a step closer, grazing his fingers along her thigh. She tensed, but when she tried to step back, he pushed her against the wall.

"Keegan."

She blinked, unable to look away from the curve of his mouth. His lips were so close she could see the soft play of skin across them. "What?" she managed to murmur as his hand moved across her hip.

"My name. It's Keegan."

"Oh," she began, but felt the rest of her breath rush out as he grazed the tip of his finger across her mound, as if testing its softness. Another clench punched through her womb and it took every ounce of strength not to arch into his caress. She could feel her juices spilling out along her inner thighs, and longed to have him slide his finger through them, swirling them around her nub. "Keegan, I..."

His finger slipped lower and her voice faded into a sharp hiss as he gently probed her slit. "I like the way you say my name," he whispered, his breath caressing her neck. "I only wish I'd told you sooner." She tried to turn away, but he blocked her, holding her firmly against the wall. "Easy, sweetness. I won't hurt you. I only want to help."

He dropped his hand and she nearly screamed at the loss of heat. She closed her eyes, wondering why she'd been so foolish as to believe he'd wanted to touch her, when his finger returned...beneath her shift.

Mira snapped her eyes open, her breath coming in hard pants. He was only inches away, his eyes gleaming in the pale light. He lowered his face, kissing the top of her shoulder. Shivers raced down her spine, making her tremble as the heat from his touch tore straight to her sheath, rippling it with pleasure. A small whimper escaped her lips before she had the good sense to crush it.

Keegan smiled against her skin, raising his finger until it brushed the edge of her sex. He groaned as he raked it through her spilled juices, licking at her shoulder as if desperate for a taste. "So wet and warm. Do you have any idea how delicious you smell?"

She could only shake her head, every other thought locked on the slow progression of his hand along her inner thighs. He was tracing the path of her juice, easing it back towards her sex. She held her breath, not sure she could stand the wait when he slipped it through her slit and gently rubbed her clit.

"Keegan."

His name was a hushed plea and he groaned at the sound of it. But he kept his touch light, just teasing the soft skin. "Believe me, sweetness. There's nothing I want more than to spread you wide and fuck you against this wall." His tongue speared her earlobe and her cry echoed in her head. He nipped at her skin, pressing slightly harder. "But we need to go slowly. You're not ready for me to claim you...yet. Just my touch for now, but I promise.

Before the sun sets again, I'll be deep inside you, touching you where no other has dared try."

Mira whispered her agreement, all the while trying to gather her control. He'd mocked her, insulted her, and she'd sworn she'd kill him if he tried to touch her. Yet as his finger circled her clit, swirling her moisture around the tight nub, she was powerless to resist. She wanted him, and while she knew a large part was her body's need, there was more. A connection she'd felt since she'd first laid eyes on him. Maybe it was the way he looked at her, with heat in his eyes so strong she felt her skin warm beneath his hooded stare. He wasn't faking his attraction. She could feel the hard press of his cock against her stomach. He wanted her, too. She bit down on her lip, trying to kill the scream building in her chest.

"You can try and fight me, but I know you're close."

She forced herself to meet his gaze, but there wasn't the smugness in it she'd expected to find. "You don't have to..."

He silenced her with a raise of his eyebrow. "Do you think I'm touching you because I've been *ordered* to?" he rasped, biting the hollow of her shoulder. "Tell me, do you think your mighty Queen ordered this as well?"

Mira gasped as he pushed his hips against hers, his shaft lodging between her lips. He was harder, longer, and just the thought of taking him inside her made the room spin. She clutched at his shoulders, anchoring herself, as he moved against her, rubbing his length up and down along her slit. Her head fell back against the wall, fanning her hair across her shoulders. Somehow he'd managed to lift her shift, leaving her exposed to him. There was nothing between her lips and his cock but the tight bind of leather. She looked down, wondering what he'd do if she ripped the damn thing off him, when he rolled his hips back and cupped her mound with his hand.

"Mine to pleasure," he said, squeezing her mound. "This sheath belongs to me, and once I've prepared you, I'll take it."

Mira could only nod as he returned his finger to her clit, rubbing it in small circles as another finger probed the hole of her sex. She cried out at the slight penetration, so tight, but so delicious, she wanted to wrap her legs around his waist and thrust him inside. But he was right. She wasn't ready to take him. She needed to be brought to orgasm a few times before

her shield of virginity thinned enough he could penetrate her without fear of her bleeding to death. And it appeared he was planning on doing just that.

"Hells, you're tight," he said, probing her sex again. "I can't wait to feel your sheath surround me." He moved his lips up her neck tasting the curve of her jaw. "Do you want me inside you?"

"Yes," she rasped, feeling his breath wash over her skin. It was hot and spicy and she wanted to drown in the scent of it. "Please."

His chuckle was warm and sincere, igniting a hotter fire inside her. He wasn't teasing her. He was playing with her. "Don't worry, sweetness, you'll have all of me. But first, I want to watch you come." He drew back, his eyes boring into hers. "Come for me."

Mira cried out as the finger circling her nub moved faster, building the pressure growing in her womb. It flamed outwards, igniting each nerve as it raced along her skin, finally exploding in her stomach. Flashes of coloured light mixed with the grey of the room, making her feel lightheaded. She called his name as the orgasm sparked through her, tingling a place deep inside her channel. It was as if she could feel the shield thinning, preparing her for his shaft.

"You're so pretty when you come, sweetness. And the way you scream my name," he rubbed his lips along her neck. "It makes me want to do it all over again."

She nodded, resting her head in the crook of his shoulder. Her legs felt weak as the butterflies in her stomach finally started to settle. She smiled, giving in to the urge that pulled her towards a comforting darkness.

"Keegan." His name was a whisper on her lips and he kissed her on the forehead as he scooped her up in his arms. She knew he was carrying her somewhere, but she was too tired to care.

"Easy, Mira. With all your healing, your body must be exhausted." He placed her on the bed, a soft blanket easing across her body. "Rest. I promise you, you'll need your strength."

Chapter Three

Mira shifted on the bed, trying to find the strength to open her eyes, when a low moan drifted through the air. She forced one eye open, squinting to see through the shadows when her breath left her lungs in one long rush.

Keegan.

He was beside her on the bed, his body taking up half the width. His bare chest gleamed in the pale light of the fire, accentuating the dips and curves of his muscles. She'd never seen a body comparable to his. Most of the servants were strong, but lean, lacking the density and bulk of Keegan's muscles. The way they rippled as he moved intrigued her.

She leant towards him, inhaling the spicy male musk she'd come to recognise as his scent. It wrapped around her, drawing her into the familiar red haze she'd felt since he'd first been dragged into her chambers. But it was different now. He'd touched her. Brought her to orgasm with his hand as he licked her skin, humming his approval. It was as if he'd enjoyed the act as much as she had.

Mira chewed at her bottom lip, confused at the turn of events. While her heart still warned her to be wary, her head was too busy conjuring up ways to please him. It was a new concept. Women in her Kingdom rarely considered the pleasures of others, especially men. But she wasn't like them. Every instinct encouraged her to return his gift, and as his cock tented against the sheet covering his waist, she knew exactly how to achieve it.

She inched closer, feeling his skin brush against hers. A tendril of heat raced through her, culminating in her groin. Her juices pooled, tingling the lips of her sex. She smiled at the thought of Keegan licking the moisture away, his tongue exploring every fold of skin. She raised the sheet off his body, smiling when she realised he was naked beneath the thin cloth. She glanced up at his face, afraid he might catch her staring, but his eyes were closed, his chest rising rhythmically in his sleep. A playful smile touched her lips. She'd never gotten a good look at a man's shaft, always shunned from the public displays that ran rampant in the palace. But now was her chance.

She pushed up, needing to be higher to get a better look. He mumbled and twitched, making her heart race, as she waited for him to jerk away. But his body settled with nothing more than a soft sigh. She smiled and leant in, cupping one hand on his thigh. A small flicker of blue eased from her fingers as she allowed just a hint of power to flow between them. The healing had a calming effect, and she prayed to the Gods it'd help keep him asleep while she explored his body.

First she examined his thighs, noting how the taut muscles clenched whenever his cock twitched. The movement continued along the ripples of his stomach, and she felt the urge to lick each tiny flicker. She traced her lip with her tongue, holding back her desire long enough to sweep her gaze down to his shaft. It was long and hard, stretching proudly towards his navel. His skin was darker here, shading into a deep purple as it stretched taut across the head. She tilted her head over, searching the underside. A long, thick vein pulsed just below the surface, pumping more blood to his swollen shaft. She chanced another glance at his face, sighing at the sight of his contented smile. She upped the power just a bit as she reached out and stroked his flesh. It was silky soft and warm, like a river stone bathing in the sun. She ran her fingers down the length, watching how his skin moved with her, further exposing the large, plum shaped head.

She smiled, breathing in the heady aroma as she wrapped her fingers around his shaft. It pulsed in her hand, coiling heat through her. She wondered how it would feel to hold his cock as it purged his seed from the tip, covering her hands with his thick fluid.

Images flashed in her head and she couldn't resist pumping the thick rod, loving the way it flared beneath her fingers. A low groan whispered across the bed. Mira looked up. Keegan's mouth was pulled tight, but his eyes remained closed, trapped in the haze by her magic. She smiled and pumped again, watching in awe as a small bead of fluid eased from the thin slit on the head, glistening in the play of firelight. It moved across his skin, stopping at the edge of his hood.

Mira snagged her bottom lip as she stared at the precious drop. She'd seen other servants pleasure each other with their mouths, but never had she witnessed any of her *sisters* take a man's cock into their mouth. They'd made it out to be an arduous task that was far beneath them. But Mira had spent a lifetime being different from her family. She didn't see why she should start trying to fit in now.

She eased forward, distending her tongue just enough to lick the small drop off his cock, watching as it bobbed up at the gentle contact. She closed her eyes, savouring the unique flavour of him. He tasted like he smelled, and she knew she'd need another taste before she could release him.

She rolled her fingers down, pumping his shaft, only to be rewarded with another drop of pearly fluid. Her exulted cry hushed across the room as she dipped her head down, this time lapping at the crown. She hummed as his flavour filled her senses, making her feel dizzy. By the Gods, he tasted delicious. She licked again, loving the feel of his soft skin against her tongue as more of his spicy essence filled her mouth. It was such an intoxicating paradox—the hard strength of his cock mirrored with the incredibly soft skin—she knew she could spend hours touching him this way.

Mira looked once more at Keegan's face. He was still asleep, but the skin over his cheeks seemed more taut and his lips were pursed together as if he were holding back a growl. She glanced at where her hand gripped his thigh and decided the risk was worth the prize.

She moved slowly, pushing one massive thigh aside as she slid between his legs, careful to keep her skin from brushing against his. He muttered a hushed curse, but moved with her. She looked down at his cock, loving how it pulsed against his stomach, rising upwards as if seeking her touch. A seductive smile crept onto her lips as she dipped down, tracing the length of his shaft with her tongue.

Sweet Heavens.

Her body reacted, spilling juice along her thighs and tightening her nipples until she whimpered in need. She repeated the caress, sinking lower and flicking her tongue across his bollocks. They were heavy and round, and she loved the way they moved in her mouth as she drew each one into her warm heat. Keegan's body tensed as she moved back up his shaft, lingering at the crown. His cock was even thicker, and while she questioned if it'd fit inside her mouth, she knew she'd have to try.

She reached down with her free hand and cupped his shaft, angling it towards her face. More fluid eased from the slit and she purred in pleasure as she wrapped her lips around the head, and inched down, taking half his length into her mouth. Keegan gasped, but she didn't stop to consider the consequences. All her energy was focused on consuming the weeping

flesh in her mouth. She wanted to feel him move, feel him fucking her mouth like she longed for him to fuck her sheath. She wanted him to ache with his need to fill her, fighting the sensation until his eyes rolled back in his head and he came in her mouth, giving her all of his sweet seed.

“By the Gods, Mira!”

She chanced a look up, humming at the way his eyes bored into hers as she bobbed down his length again, swirling her tongue on the ribbed underside. Keegan hissed out his breath, his hands reaching for her hair. For a moment she feared he'd stop her, but her fear faded as he wove his fingers through her curls and guided her head lower.

Keegan stared at the diminutive woman poised between his thighs, one hand braced on his leg, the other wrapped around the base of his cock. Her eyes sparkled in the dim light as she looked up at him, her lips stretched around his shaft. She hesitated when he reached for her, until his fingers twirled in her hair, anchoring her to him. She hummed her contentment, sliding back down his shaft so damn slowly he felt every inch of his cock immerse in her velvet heat. A fire erupted in his spine and he tightened his hold to keep the feeling at bay.

Hells, she was good. If he didn't know she was inexperienced, he'd have sworn she'd spent time at a brothel. The way she laved him, sucking and nibbling, moaning as if tasting him was the sweetest of flavours. She was truly masterful. One of the few women he'd been able to court had performed this very act on him once, but it'd seemed forced, as if she'd felt obligated to pleasure him. But not Mira.

She savoured him. Rolled her tongue along his length, exploring every vein and ridge of skin. The way she hummed when a drop of his pre-cum slipped from the tip. It was enough to make his eyes roll and his heart pound. He'd thought he was dreaming when he'd felt her soft lips envelop him. He'd been adrift in a soothing haze until her warm, wet mouth surrounded his shaft and he'd felt his crown flare against the back of her throat. Now all he could do was watch as she moved over him, sucking him like she had all the time in the world.

“Take all of me, sweetness,” he urged as she released his cock and nibbled down the side.

She looked up at him, her eyes playful. "Soon," she promised, lapping at the head. "I want to take my time. I want to enjoy you."

He could only groan. How could he argue with that?

"You taste so delicious," she murmured, swirling her tongue around his hood. "I could do this for hours."

Keegan clenched his jaw as she nuzzled his sac, suckling each one before licking her way back up his shaft. "Take all the time you want. But don't be surprised when you find yourself on your back with my cock speared inside you."

Mira laughed, caressing his skin with her wispy breath. Keegan fisted her hair, trying to remember not to pull too hard. Seems his little witch was more temptress than he'd first thought.

"Is that what you want?" She lifted her face to meet his gaze. "Or would you like to come in my mouth...first?"

"Hells," he cried as she lowered her head and sucked him inside, taking as much of his length as she could. Her throat constricted around his crown and he fought the urge to spill his seed into her mouth. "That's it. Suck me harder, sweetness." She increased her suction and he felt the room start to spin. "Hells. I'm going to come."

Mira hummed and increased her rhythm, using her hand to apply pressure where her mouth couldn't reach. Keegan arched back, fighting the rush of pleasure down his spine until his teeth threatened to crack and he let go, thrusting into her mouth with a cry of her name. His cock erupted, flooding her mouth with jet after jet of his seed, as his body jerked on the bed, draining his strength as surely as she'd drained his shaft. The room dimmed, fading away into darkness before his breathing slowed, and his vision cleared. Mira was still perched between his thighs, a smug smile capturing the corners of her mouth.

"Did you enjoy yourself?" she asked, the touch of innocence in her voice bringing him back to his senses.

He fixed his gaze on her, smiling when hers faltered. She looked like a rabbit cornered by a wolf, and he had every intention of eating his prey.

Mira watched the fire rage in Keegan's eyes and had the sudden urge to flee. He looked so powerful, so strong, a part of her begged her to run. But another part, the sexual vixen just

waking inside her, welcomed his challenge. She'd brought this handsome warrior to his knees, and now she wanted him to do the same.

Keegan pushed himself up, the muscles in his arms and shoulders rippling under the strain. She watched them flex, wondering what it'd be like to feel that power over her...inside her. She tried not to tremble when he rose on his knees, reaching his hand out to stroke her face.

"Did your sisters teach you that?" he asked, his eyebrow arched in question.

Heat crept into her cheeks and down her chest as she shook her head. Keegan moved closer, his growl warning her to explain. "I've seen other servants touch each other like that. They always seemed to enjoy it."

"But your sisters don't please their servants that way?"

The heat seemed to intensify as he ran his tongue along her collarbone. "No. They believe it's the man's job to pleasure the woman."

His chuckle sent shivers racing across her skin. "Then I'm extremely lucky you don't share their feelings."

"I'm nothing like them," she stated, pulling back from his touch. "If that bothers you..."

He stopped her protest with a light nip to her shoulder. She gasped at the slight hurt, turning to look into his eyes. What she saw there frightened her even more.

"Do you really think I want one of your sisters?" he rasped, his lips pulled into a cruel smile. "After what they did?"

She looked away, afraid the disgust in his eyes was directed at her. "I'm sorry," was all she could say.

Keegan sighed, his breath washing over her skin like a warm breeze. "You've got nothing to be sorry for. It wasn't your doing." He drew her face back to his with a firm finger. "I wasn't implying that I desired them, or that I blame you for their sins. I'm just curious why you heal their misdoings when they clearly mock your gift?"

"Healing isn't a choice." She shook her head. "It's what I am."

He smiled, and her heart fluttered. What was it about him that made the world disappear, and had her longing to spend the rest of her life wrapped in his arms? She moaned as he traced his finger along the hollow of her shoulder and up the side of her jaw, tracing her bottom lip.

"You have beautiful lips. So pink and full. I've wanted to kiss you since I first saw you." He leant in, his mouth inches from hers. "I tried to yesterday, but you were unsure. Tell me. Do you still question my desire?"

"No," she said. "I trust you."

"Good," he breathed, brushing his lips across hers. "Because I have no intentions of stopping until my claim is made."

Mira moaned at his words, the soft sound captured by his mouth as it sealed to hers, his lips slanting over her. She tensed when his tongue traced her lips, wondering what he was doing until she realised he wanted inside. She gasped at the strange notion, and he took charge, plunging his tongue inside her mouth, daring her to deny him.

But how could she?

He tasted like rain on a hot summer's night, and she dipped her tongue into his mouth when he retreated. He seemed to enjoy her enthusiasm and pulled her close, pressing his body against hers. His cock hardened again, digging into the soft flesh of her hip.

Keegan pulled back, running his fingers along her skin as he stared into her eyes. He studied her as if he needed to commit every inch of her face to memory. She eased forward, wanting to taste his mouth again.

He smiled as her lips touched his, thrusting his tongue into her mouth. She tangled hers around his, loving the growl that rumbled through his chest. He was warning her he was in control. She'd had her time, now she would submit to him.

Mira relaxed against him, showing him she had every intention of following his lead. He smiled as he pulled back, nodding towards the bed. "Lie back," he rasped, pushing on her shoulders. "I want a chance to look at you."

She moved with him until her back pressed into the mattress and her head was nestled on the pillow. She didn't remember when he'd taken her shift off, but she was sure he'd already had plenty of time to look at her.

She felt exposed as he swept his gaze down her body, pausing at her breasts and groin. No one had ever wanted to look at her before, and the heat in his eyes made her heart race.

"You're so beautiful, Mira. I can't get enough of you." She jumped as he trailed his fingers down her body, grazing her skin. He frowned. "Did I hurt you?"

She shook her head, breathing out a hushed no as he stopped at the tip of her mound. "Nobody's ever touched me before...except you."

His lips curled up and his eyes sparkled. "That's just the way I like it. You're mine, sweetness. I thought I told you that before." He moved his finger lower, easing it through the slick folds of her slit. "My hands are the only ones that will ever touch you." He accentuated the point by swirling his finger around her clit. "My lips the only ones to ever taste you." He dipped down and swiped his tongue through her juices, making a cry of pleasure burst from her lips. "And here." He pushed his finger inside her, rubbing the walls of her sex. "My cock will be the only one to ever fill you."

She nodded in agreement, moaning again when he licked more juice from between her lips. His tongue was warm and soft, applying just enough pressure to make her pulse throb. She'd never felt such a sensual caress, and knew if he kept it up, she'd come.

"Please. By the Gods."

"Do you like that?" he mused, probing her channel as he swirled the juice around her nub. "Do you want me to keep tasting you?"

"Yes. Hells, yes."

"Then of course," he breathed. "But first..."

He moved up her body and she unclenched her eyes long enough to see him hovering over her, his lips once again brushing hers. She didn't wait for him to kiss her, but arched up, grabbing the back of his neck as she pulled him to her, plunging her tongue into his open mouth. He took her attack, deepening the kiss when she began to pull away. She gasped when he finally released her, watching as he moved down her body.

"Such pretty breasts," he hummed, suckling one nipple into his mouth. She pressed against him, whimpering when he reached up and plucked the other between his fingers.

"Keegan. Please. I'm so close."

He looked up at her, his mouth still sealed around her breast. His cocky smile had more juice spilling along her thighs and she knew if he didn't stop, she'd come without him.

"Don't worry, sweetness. I won't let you go over without me. I just want to taste all of you."

She groaned and pushed her head into the pillow, clenching her fingers around his shoulders. He didn't seem to notice her nails biting into his skin as the pressure in her groin increased until she was certain she'd die. "Please. I need you. I can't..."

Her plea hissed out with the rest of her breath when Keegan released her nipple and dove between her legs, lapping up the juice glistening along her sex. It was like nothing she'd felt before. Even the orgasm he'd given her earlier seemed to pale in comparison to the fire welling up inside her. It felt like a bubble growing in her stomach, stretching outwards, waiting for one final moment before bursting into a thousand pieces.

"Easy. Just feel what I can do for you, sweetness. Don't try to force it. I won't leave you. Just let yourself come."

Mira wanted to scream she had no choice but to let it take her, but there wasn't enough air left in her lungs to make a sound. She was perched on the edge of a chasm, with no way down but to jump.

"Yes!" The single word was torn from her chest as Keegan suckled her clit into his mouth at the same time he pushed two broad fingers inside her. The double stimulation overwhelmed her and she shattered, sending spirals of fire cascading through her body, igniting nerves she never knew existed. Her hushed scream filled her head, but nothing mattered except the feeling of Keegan's fingers buried within her. He was rubbing a small patch of skin, and the pressure was driving her release even higher.

"You're so pretty when you come. I can't wait to be above you when you do it again."

Mira forced her eyes open, her breath still panting in her chest. He was braced on one elbow, his body surrounding hers. She didn't know when she'd wrapped her legs around his back, but she felt his skin brush against hers as she arched into him, needing him to fill the emptiness raging inside her.

"Keegan."

Keegan smiled at his name, inching his fingers deeper. Then he felt it—a thin membrane of skin covering her channel. Something welled inside his chest but he pushed it away. There'd be time to analyse his feelings later. Right now, he needed to know if she was ready. After all they'd shared, he couldn't bear the thought of hurting her. Mira whispered

his name and pressed up, pushing him deeper. He clenched his teeth as the membrane stretched, thinning beneath his touch.

"Easy, Mira. I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't. I'm ready. Now. Please."

Keegan growled, but removed his fingers, placing the head of his shaft at her entrance. Her juices dripped down over him, covering his cock. He clenched his teeth, pushing the first inch inside her. Hells, she was tight. Her breath hissed across his shoulder and he forced himself to stop, grunting at the tight clasp of her channel.

"Am I hurting you?" he asked, trying not to think about how strongly she held him inside her.

She nipped at his shoulder, tearing another growl from his chest. "Fuck me."

Her words echoed in his head and he couldn't stop his body from reacting. He thrust his hips forward, pushing through the shield until his cock brushed the entrance to her womb. Pleasure unlike any he'd felt surged through him, blinding him with flashes of harsh light. Mira cried out beneath him, but it wasn't in pain. Even through the red haze covering his senses he could tell she'd felt the same rush. He paused, waiting just long enough to feel her bite him again before pulling back and filling her again.

"Mine, Mira. Mine!" He stopped as his bollocks pressed against her skin, savouring the vice like grip before slowly retreating, feeling the walls of her channel shudder in his wake. "No other shall feel your sheath surround him. No other shall hear your cries of release." He plunged back in, hissing out his breath as her tissues parted to accept him, welcome him. "Mine!"

Mira whimpered her agreement, her soft words mixing with pants and thrusts. He was moving steadily now, an easy rhythm he knew would only make the hunger worse. But he couldn't force his body to go faster, wanting to savour each pull of skin, every whisper of her breath across his shoulder. After a while she began moving with him, meeting his thrusts, angling her hips to take him deeper. Her sheath pulsed, and knew the end was near.

"So deep. By the Gods!" cried Mira.

Her nails dug into his skin as her voice keened into a wail. Her channel clenched around him, milking his release from deep within his body. He lowered his head and pounded into her, knowing he should go gently, but unable to stop. She met every thrust,

beating at his arms as she screamed his name. Keegan closed his eyes, plunging home one last time before his cock exploded, showering her with his seed until it seeped out between their bodies. He held himself still, unable to move through the rush of pleasure coursing through his body. Somewhere in the distance his world shifted into place and he knew his life would never be the same.

He rolled to his side, pulling her body into his with a possessive curl of his arm. She cried softly on his shoulder, her warm tears like knives to his soul. Hells, if he'd hurt her. She sighed, clutching at him as if her entire world was crumbling around her. He pulled back, needing to see her face, but scared of what he'd discover.

"Mira?"

She smiled at him, allowing him to brush the tears from her cheeks. "You didn't hurt me. I just feel..."

She looked away without finishing, but he knew what she was trying to say. He felt it too. "Hush, sweetness. We'll talk in the morning. Rest. I'll protect you."

Mira nodded and relaxed against him. She was gone before he could roll onto his back and cradle her on his chest. He stared up at the ceiling, the reality of the moment finally sinking in. After all these years, he'd found her. The woman destined to stand at his side. His father had promised him it'd happen suddenly one day. Had claimed that was the reason behind the damned curse put on their family so many centuries ago. But he'd never believed it...until now.

He sighed, a tight feeling settling in his chest. If she really was going to be his mate, he'd have to finish the bond, and he wasn't certain she'd let him. But already the need burned his blood, drawing him to the forbidden lust lurking inside him. Full submission. However archaic it sounded, it was deep-rooted, and as old as the curse, itself. Without it, he'd never feel complete.

Chapter Four

Mira sighed, feeling Keegan's arms wrapped around her waist. Her head rested on his chest, his male scent surrounding her. She smiled against his skin, licking the nipple closest to her, loving the husky growl that vibrated through his chest and into hers.

"Good morning, sweetness. Well rested, I see."

Mira laughed as he rolled her over, trapping her body between his arms. His cock hardened against her stomach, and she smiled at the thought of having him sheathed inside her again. "Very," she replied, tilting her hips up, bracketing his shaft between her velvety lips. "Well enough to relieve you of this," she teased, sliding his length along her clit, watching his face pull tight. "Unless you'd rather have me taste you again."

Keegan's head snapped down as she reached up and encircled his cock. He was thicker than any servant she'd seen and she couldn't stem the moan building in her chest from escaping her lips. She smiled when the soft brush of air made his groin clench, pulsing his flared head, and purging a small drop of fluid from the tip.

"Mmm. I can already taste you," she purred.

She leant forward, pushing him upright as she eased her lips down, kissing the crown. He grunted as she pushed her hips up, lowering her chest towards the bed. A smile lit her face and she couldn't resist wiggling her ass at him as she blew a heated breath across his cock, watching in awe as it bobbed towards his stomach before slowly descending. Keegan growled this time, and speared his hands through her hair, pulling her close.

"No teasing, Mira," he ordered. "Not this time."

Mira glanced up at him, her tongue distended along the hood, the tip just tickling the ridge beneath the head. She didn't like the dominant tone to his voice, but as her eyes met his, she felt a fire spark in her womb. He looked every inch the warrior, and it didn't look like mercy was on his mind. She hesitated just long enough to hear another growl resonate through the air before lowering her eyes and easing her lips around his shaft.

"That's it, sweetness. Take me all the way to the back."

He moved with her, easing another inch inside her velvet heat. Mira opened wider, relaxing her jaw as he surged inside, filling her mouth with his hard shaft. Blood pounded through the heavy vein lining the bottom of his cock, and she pressed her tongue flat against it as he slowly withdrew, leaving only the flared head inside her. A low rumble filled her head, purging her creamy juice from between her legs. She hummed in delight, feeling his bollocks tighten from the small vibration.

"So hot. Your mouth is so hot. Just like your sweet, tight sheath." He surged forward again, lingering with the head buried at the back of her throat before pulling back, moaning as she scraped her teeth along the ridge. "Damnation."

He moved, plunging hard, nearly making her gag as he buried over half his length in her mouth. Mira held the heavy prize in her hand, easing some of the pressure as he started up a rhythm, pushing forward, then slowly retreating. His sac pulled tight, the head of his shaft flaring against her throat, as she suckled his skin, swallowing every drop of fluid she coaxed from him.

Keegan moved faster, his hands now woven through her hair, his hips pumping like a man possessed. She took all he gave her, pressing her tongue along the bottom as he thrust forward, then hollowing her cheeks as he pulled back. Heavy panting filled the air, and she revelled in the husky sounds breaking from his chest. Power, stronger than the magic hidden within her, filled her senses, and she knew she'd never want to touch another man. She was his, completely.

Keegan growled above her, the muscles in his thighs clenching, as she pleased him towards his impending release. She tried moving faster, eager to taste the spicy flavour of his seed. But just before his crown pulsed in relief, he pulled back, slipping his shaft free of her mouth.

Mira cried a muted 'no'. She reached for him, but he reared up, pushing her to the bed with one large hand as the other found the sweet spot inside her channel. She arched into the intrusion, grinding her clit against his palm. Honey oozed from her sex, coating his fingers and her thighs with the creamy fluid. He groaned as more seemed to flow past his hand, and only paused long enough to catch her gaze before lowering his head between her legs and swiping a heated path through her slit.

"You taste delicious...all hot and sweet." He made another pass, dipping inside her. "I could spend all day devouring you."

Mira tried to reply, but only a strangled rasp escaped, as he pulled one cream coated finger free of her channel and circled it around her nether hole. She'd witnessed more than one of her sisters take a man that way, and she'd always wondered what it'd feel like. Was it as hot as when Keegan plunged inside her sheath, or would it be darker, more erotic?

Keegan made another pass, slipping one knuckle inside her this time. Her voice resonated through the room, more of a growl than a moan. She couldn't seem to stop her body from surging up, meeting his hot caress as he pushed deeper, finally sinking his finger completely inside her nether hole.

A low rumble filled the chamber, and it took her a moment to realise he'd risen over her. She opened her eyes to find him staring down at her, a haunted look in his eyes. Her heart stopped as she watched him shift his gaze from the table beside the bed back to her.

"What?" she asked, not able to hide the fear in her voice. Panic shimmered along her spine and she couldn't help but wonder if he'd changed his mind.

Keegan reached out and touched her face, following the soft curve of her jaw. "Mira." He took a rough breath, making the hair on the back of her neck stand up. "I need..."

His voice drifted off, and she couldn't stop her hand from reaching for his chest. His heart raced beneath her fingers, and she could hear it echo in her head. "What? What do you need, Keegan?"

He clenched his jaw, meeting her gaze with one so intense she had to fight not to look away. "The bond." He sucked in another hard breath. "I need to finish the bond."

She shook her head, trying to follow his words. "I don't understand. What do you need to finish?"

He sighed and moved his finger to her cheek. "When a Garinthian man courts a woman, there are certain...needs...acts if you will, he has to fulfil if the bond is going to be complete." He smiled at her. "What we started yesterday. I need to finish it. Now." He eased forward, wrapping his hands around her waist. "It's hard to explain, but I need you to submit to me. To allow me to perform the final step. I wasn't going to ask, but..."

Again his voice trailed off, and Mira could see the tension building along his shoulders. The way the muscles clenched as his cock strained ever tighter against her skin. He hinged

on the edge of control, her word the only force holding him back. Her heart clenched at the thought, knowing he'd deny his own needs if she dictated it.

Mira reached out and grazed his cheek, mimicking his touch. "You saved me when no one else could have. I'm yours for the taking."

The smile Keegan flashed her was nothing short of wicked, and her pulse raced as he followed her back down, his lips slanting over hers. His kiss was hot, demanding, and for one brief moment she questioned what she'd just given him permission to perform. Then his tongue lapped at hers, and she was lost.

He was still smiling when he pulled back, brushing a tender kiss across the tip of her nose. "Very well, sweetness. But first, I'm going to eat every drop of honey from your delicious flesh."

Mira's head fell back against the pillow as he roved down her body, nipping at her nipples. He paused just long enough to suckle each one into his mouth before splaying her thighs wide, and settling between her legs again. Heat fused her face as he stared at her sex, tilting his head as if he were looking at a beautiful painting. The gleam glittering behind his dark eyes held her captive as he drew a single finger through her slit, stopping to watch it disappear inside her.

"So beautiful, sweetness." He plunged in again, deeper.

"Keegan."

He chuckled at the husky drawl of his name, but didn't shift his eyes to look at her. Instead he moved his finger lower, once again probing the tight pucker of her anus.

"Relax, Mira, and let me taste your release while I touch this beautiful, perfect little hole."

She did as he asked, still watching as he drew her drenched lips apart, exposing her clit to the cool air. He moaned as she clenched it in response, making the vein in his jaw twitch.

"By the Gods, I love it when you do that," he said, circling the small nub with the tip of his tongue. He eased back. "Do it again."

A warm flush rose in her cheeks and wove down her chest as she squeezed her muscles, making her clit pulse. Keegan growled his appreciation, lowering his mouth to place a warm wet kiss across her mound.

"Mine," he echoed, drawing his tongue through her slick folds, all the while probing his finger into her ass. "Forever mine."

Heat punched through her womb as he lapped at her weeping sex, licking every drop of liquid as it eased from her body. She felt her release building. Tightening the muscles in her thighs and stomach. Igniting a ball of heat that plumed out from her groin in cresting waves, tingling her skin as it raced across her body. But it was different this time. The pressure of his finger inside her back hole intensified the sensations, layering heat and desire until the sound of her heart pounded in her head. He was building her up. Taking her to a realm of pleasure she didn't know existed.

"Now, sweetness. Let me taste your sweet cream before I die from the need."

She cried out, wondering how she'd survive the descent. He moved faster, licking her nub, tunnelling his finger back and forth until darkness edged her vision and her body shattered. Pleasure, unlike any she'd known, tore through her, purging the air from her lungs, leaving her hanging on the very edge of consciousness. Keegan lapped at her sex, the wet sounds of his tongue drinking her release echoing through her head. He still had his finger embedded in her hole, and she couldn't stop a primal moan from purging from her chest as he slowly pulled it free, tapping her ass as he rose between her legs. She met his heated gaze, blushing at the juice clinging to his mouth.

"I've never had a breakfast taste so delicious as you do, sweetness. I might have to have you again for lunch."

A shy smile graced her lips, but it faded as his expression changed. Once again he looked back at the small table beside the bed. She went to shift her gaze when he reached over and grabbed a small flask of oil.

"I found this in the bathing chamber," he said, holding it out in front of him. "Do you know what it's used for?"

A hotter flush laced across her chest as she nodded.

Keegan leant forward, shaking his head. "Oh, no. I want to hear you say it. So I know you're aware of what I need from you."

She swallowed hard, hoping to ease the parched feeling in her throat. "It's oil," she whispered, swiping her tongue across her lower lip as he dipped his finger inside the flask, coating it with the slick fluid.

"What kind of oil?" he prompted.

She watched as he pulled his finger free, swirling the oil around his thumb as if testing it. "Oil to ease the way when you..." she waved her hand at his shaft, "penetrate me."

He lifted one eyebrow in challenge. "Penetrate you where?"

"In my...other hole."

His chuckle caught her by surprise. "Now, sweetness, you aren't embarrassed to use the word, are you?" He shook his head in feigned amusement. "Are you not the same woman who just yesterday begged me to *fuck* her?"

Mira stared at him, finally realising this was more than just an acceptance of his need. It was a test to see if she was really ready to give him more than just her body. He wanted her trust. The sexual vixen he'd awoken in her smiled at the challenge and she arched her own eyebrow back at him. "The oil is meant for you," she began, her voice steady and strong. "To cover your cock so it doesn't cause me any pain when you fuck me up my ass."

The skin over Keegan's cheeks pulled taut, his eyes darkening until they looked like polished stone against his skin. A savage smile graced his lips as he bent down over her, his lips brushing hers. "So it is," he rasped, his voice more of a growl than words. "Now that we understand each other, I'm going to show you all the pleasure I can bring you. I'm going to finish the bond, sweetness. So make no mistake. From this point on, you're mine. Body and soul."

Mira framed his face in her hands, kissing his lips before allowing him to roll her onto her stomach. Any doubts she might have had vanished with the firm grip of his hands on her waist. She would be his, any way he needed.

Keegan clenched his jaw as he watched Mira roll beneath him, her skin feather soft against his. He hadn't planned on taking her this way, not so soon. But the moment she'd looked into his eyes, the soft gleam in hers sparkling with love, he'd been unable to deny the need. It burned inside him, slowly devouring him as he had her sex. He'd heard others speak of it that way. An uncontrollable urge that, when denied, could drive a man insane. And he had no doubts his sanity would go up in flames if he didn't feel her beneath him. Feel the hot, tight clasp of her nether channel wrapped around him, accepting him, welcoming him. He didn't know what the purpose of the claim was, only that he was bound to obey.

He drew a ragged breath as she sighed beneath him, her trust in him so evident he had to bite back the tears. Never had he imagined finding a woman like her. One whose compassion and love transcended any level he'd dreamt of. She'd been tormented, taunted and mocked, and yet found it in her heart to love. To give to those intent on seeing her fail. For that fact alone he knew his love wasn't misplaced. She was the heart he'd always hoped to find.

He reached up and traced the fine line of her back, her muscles quivering beneath his touch. A sly smile touched his lips as he remembered how she'd met his dark caress. Tilted her hips up to take him deeper when he'd slipped his finger inside her. She'd do the same to his cock.

"Just relax, sweetness. We'll take this nice and slow." He bit back a curse as she squeezed her buttocks, making the muscles across her ass contract. By the Gods he hoped he could keep his promise. But Heavens help him if she flexed them again.

He leant forward, drizzling some of the oil across her skin. He wanted to massage some of the tension from her body before preparing her for his invasion. A hushed groan washed through the room as the liquid splashed along her back, before she sighed and sank into the bed. Keegan reached forward and started rubbing her muscles working his way across her body. Her skin was warm and pliable and he couldn't stop his shaft from pulsing in need as every swirl of his hands brought him closer to his prize. It was hidden inside the pearly cheeks of her bottom, but he knew it was there, waiting for him to claim it.

"You have such soft skin. I love touching it." He scooted his hands down her legs, hooking the backs of her knees. "Tuck these underneath you, and let me see your beautiful ass."

She moved willingly, shuffling beneath him, raising her hips until her ass gleamed in the morning sun. Her skin was so pale, so perfect, he couldn't help but run his fingers along the cleft of her buttocks, lightly brushing her hole. "So pretty," he murmured, repeating the soft caress. "Now lay those beautiful breasts back down so I can see all of you."

Mira hesitated just long enough to look back at him across her shoulder. The smile she flashed him purged more fluid from his cock and it was all he could do not to pounce on top and drive into her. But he held back, watching in stunned fascination as she lowered her breasts to the bed, moaning out as the fabric brushed across her engorged nipples.

"I'll tend to those later," he promised, leaning back to gaze at her flesh. "But first, I want to see how excited I make you."

Mira groaned as he eased his finger between her silky lips, feeling her moisture soak his skin. She was hot and wet, and he couldn't resist bringing his finger to his mouth, tasting the cream he'd coaxed from her body. "So wet and sweet. I think you're ready for me to begin."

She hummed her reply, wiggling her ass at him. He smiled, giving it a playful tap as he drizzled more oil along her skin. He moved slowly, rubbing it across her cheeks, pausing to draw it down the valley and slowly slip it inside her hot channel. The moan that broke from her chest was dark and raw, and he knew she'd scream like that once he'd locked himself inside her.

"So tight, sweetness. I love how firmly your body holds me."

She moaned again as he slipped his finger all the way in, spreading the slick oil up and down her channel. Her muscles relaxed, taking his intrusion more easily. He smiled, and pushed in again, two fingers this time, both coated with a thick layer of fluid. "Damnation woman. You will surely be the death of me."

Mira mumbled a reply, but it got lost in the sound of his heartbeat. His blood pounded through his veins, threatening to end his explorations before they began. He groaned and removed his fingers, feeling her press back at the loss. He met her challenge with the head of his shaft. She stilled as he lodged it at the entrance to her ass, rubbing the tip around the edge. For a moment, he wondered if she'd pull away, but cursed when she pressed against him, sinking him slightly inside.

Keegan surged forward, slipping the bulbous head in her channel. Her tight ring of muscles clenched on him, as if deciding whether to pull him in or push him out. He paused, waiting to gage the outcome when she reared back again and sank another inch inside. His growl was followed by a firm thrust, his control no longer his. He pushed forward, burying himself in her ass until his sac cupped her sex. Mira cried out, but the sound was raw and hungry and he took it as his sign to move.

He eased back, feeling her snug channel grip his cock, pulling on the skin until he thought he'd lose his mind. But just when he was ready to bow his head in defeat, her muscles urged him back in, and he surged forward again, reclaiming the lost inches.

"So tight. Sweet Heavens but I feel as if I've crawled inside you."

"Please. Don't make me wait any longer."

He bent down over her, lightly biting at the corded muscle on her shoulder. "I'm trying to go easy. So I don't hurt you."

Mira huffed and clenched on him, locking his shaft deep inside her. "Stop worrying about hurting me, Keegan, and love me before *I* die of need."

He closed his eyes, the last shred of his control fading with the release of her muscles. He kissed her once, revelling in her raw cry of desire, as he dragged the heavy length of his cock back to the entrance of her nether hole, pausing one last time, before driving into her.

Mira wailed beneath him as he pounded into her, thrusting his cock so deep he felt her sheath clasp at his bollocks as they slapped against her, nearly filling that hole as well. He kept moving, claiming her fully before retreating to the edge, growling as the tight ring pinched his crown, never allowing it to leave her heated channel. Back and forth he forged, holding her hips in his hands, growling as the fire welled inside him, threatening to pull him into the darkness. Mira thrashed against the bed, her voice a rough mixture of his name and a word he couldn't quite make out. She'd angled her body, lining her nether hole up with his thrusting shaft, keeping it aligned so every stroke buried him deep within her. He fought the need, wanting to make this one joining last a lifetime.

The sound of his name brought him back. Mira threw her head back, her voice fading into a silent scream. Her walls clamped around him, trapping him inside, as her orgasm purged the air from her lungs and she went limp beneath him, his hands the only force holding her up. His cock swelled with male pride, his release burning down his spine. He called her name a moment before the fluid purged from his shaft, filling her anal walls with his hot seed. Over and over, jerking his body against hers until his strength finally waned, and he collapsed on the bed, pulling her with him, drawing her into the protective curve of his body. Shadows flitted across his vision, his breathing a series of sporadic gasps, until the last of his release purged from the tip.

"Dark Heavens."

The words were whispered with her name as he drew her closer, softly drawing her hair from her face. Her eyes were closed, her thick lashes brushed against the soft skin of her cheek. He reached forward, tracing a single finger along the curve of her face. "Mira. Sweetness, are you hurt?"

A soft sigh sounded from her lips as her mouth turned up into a contented smile. She didn't speak, but dropped a gentle kiss along the back of his hand before drifting back to sleep.

Keegan watched her fade, drawn to the simple beauty of her silhouette. So different from any woman he'd ever met, yet burned into his memory as if he was looking upon a face he'd known all his life, but only just found.

He sighed, easing his shaft free as he pulled her closer, feeling her heart beat with his. There'd be no turning back — Mira was his.

He smiled at the thought. A healer for a wife. Who hailed from Queen Vestna's Kingdom, no less. He certainly knew how to pick a mate. Now all he had to do was get them both safely back to Garinth, and the rest of their lives could begin.

Chapter Five

"No!"

Mira cringed as Keegan shouted the word back at her. She knew he wouldn't go along with her idea, but it was the only way. "Keegan..."

"I won't steal away in the night and leave you here to take the punishment Queen Vestna would otherwise bestow upon me." His eyes burned as he met her stare. "In my Kingdom, men don't leave *their* women to die."

His woman.

Mira's heart fluttered at the thought. He'd told her she was his, but under the circumstances, she just didn't see how they could stay together, though she would have gladly sold her soul to spend one more night with him. He was her every fantasy, and it touched her heart at the tenderness he'd displayed during their last few couplings. Ever since he'd completed the bond, he'd stayed at her side. Even when he wasn't loving her, he'd held her close, always touching her. She'd grown accustomed to having his hands cupped around her body, and the thought of losing that connection was killing her. But her love for him was stronger, and she knew if he stayed, he'd be killed.

She stood up and crossed over to him, touching him on the arm. A small amount of power flowed between them and she smiled at his hushed curse.

"That's not fair, Mira. I know what that does to me."

"I need you calm so I can reason with you." She held up her other hand when he tried to speak. "Vestna won't kill me. It goes against Corand law. She won't risk losing her magic for anything, even seeing me suffer." She lowered her fingers to his waist as she gazed down at her navel, smiling at the bright blue hue sparkling from the small crystal through her thin shift. She'd managed to break his stone hours ago, but he'd stubbornly refused to leave. She drew her gaze back to his face. "I'm expected to pass the Ritual. She'll just be angry I actually did." She glanced at his shaft, grinning at the bulge beneath his pants. "She didn't think you could do the job."

Keegan glared at her, but didn't speak. She smiled as his shaft pulsed, flaring the head against the fabric. He'd crossed his arms and turned his head away when she reached forward and ran her finger along his cock, loving how his head snapped back and his eyes narrowed.

"She might not kill you, herself," he said, slowly removing her hand. "But sending you on a mission with your sisters will accomplish the same result. We both know you're incapable of being a warrior. Killing people goes against your very nature as a healer."

"But at least I'll be free. Even for just awhile." She cut him off when he snarled. "You can't stop it. The mission is part of the Ritual, and we both know Vestna's not about to make any exceptions. If you stay, she'll have you executed for treason, real or not. You know I can't let that happen." She handed him a folded map. "An old servant gave this to me for healing his wounds when I was a child. I think he hoped I'd be able to use it one day. It'll take you to a secret route through the mountains. You'll be halfway to your Kingdom before they realise you're gone." She drew his face towards hers with a gentle finger. "Please. I can't bear the thought of Vestna hurting you. If I know her, she'll make me watch, knowing it'll kill me when I can't heal you."

Keegan scowled, but took the map. Something in his eyes had changed, but she couldn't tell what he was thinking. "Take this." He handed her a small amulet with a strange symbol inscribed on the front. "Wear it the day you leave and don't take it off. Ever. Do you understand?"

She nodded, knowing only death would separate her from his gift. "Go quickly. The warriors will be changing duties. You can slip out through the stables."

He looked back at her bed – their bed.

"Please, Keegan."

He nodded and took a step back, draping the cloak she'd given him over his body. "This isn't the end, Mira. I promise."

Mira forced a smile as he slipped through the door and down the corridor, disappearing around the corner. Tears welled, and once he was gone, she allowed them to flow unchecked. Tomorrow she'd have to face her mother, but tonight, she'd mourn the only love she'd ever know.

* * * *

Mira stopped at the door to the throne room, ignoring the sudden churning in her stomach. The sun was setting along the horizon, reflecting long shadows across the palace walls. A bitter scent permeated the air, and she recognised it as the incense burnt at previous Rituals. She nodded at the women guarding the entrance. They lifted their lips into smug smiles, opening the door, announcing her arrival with an air of humour not easily missed. Mira pushed past them, chin held high, the blue gleam of her crystal hidden beneath a simple cloak. She was dressed in only a translucent robe, her feet bare against the cold stone. A gathering of women filled the room, standing in concentric waves flowing out from the Queen. Vestna smiled as Mira stopped before her, a proper curtsy followed by a muted, "Your Majesty."

"Mira. How lovely to see you. I assume your Rite of Passage was enjoyable?"

Mira curtsied again. "Yes, mother."

Tiana poked her in the arm, but didn't allow her hand to linger as Mira's aura shimmered across the material in a gentle ripple. Mira simply smiled. She knew it was proper to address Vestna as, 'Your Majesty,' during the ceremony, but couldn't pass up the opportunity to use the old endearment. Keegan's love making had given her a confidence she hadn't felt since she'd been a child, and she was done cowering before her family.

Vestna sneered, motioning to the women standing beside Mira. "Very well. As you seem anxious to complete the Ritual, we won't waste any more time with pleasantries. Sisters!"

With the single word the women grabbed Mira's cloak, and tore it off her shoulders, tossing it aside in a crumpled heap. She didn't move as they removed her robe, baring her body to everyone's gaze. An audible gasp echoed through the room as the crystal sparkled in the harsh light, its blue hue casting small flecks across her skin. A contented smile touched the corners of her mouth as she watched her mother's jaw gape open.

"Impossible!" Vestna surged to her feet, covering the short distance in three strides. She pawed at the stone, as if trying to dig the damn thing out, before cursing and raising her hand. Her arm stopped in mid swing, her gaze following the flickering blue light on Mira's skin.

"It's a trick. You discovered a way to break the spell." Vestna crossed her arms on her chest, nodding at Mira. "You'll submit to your Queen and prove your validity by giving us a demonstration of your newfound womanhood. Tiana. Strap her to the table. Bram will prove her treachery when she bleeds to death on his first thrust."

Mira glanced at her sister, expecting fire to blaze from the woman's hand, only to stare in awe when indecision flashed in her Tiana's eyes.

"But her crystal is blue," began Tiana. "That's proof enough she's passed the Rite of Passage. Corand law clearly states she's to be given a celebration, not forced to fuck someone she doesn't find pleasing."

Vestna howled, fire erupting along her skin as she took a calculated step forward. "Don't lecture me on Corand law, daughter. I'm well aware of what the sacred scripts dictate. But it's obvious this little witch has found a way around our laws, thus justifying an altered approach." Vestna reached for Mira only to have Tiana step in front.

"I'm as puzzled as you, my Queen. But altering the ceremony will spell certain death to us all. And I, for one, have no desire to lose my magic for the likes of her."

Vestna scowled, but took a step back, the fire slowing bleeding into nothing more than a red glimmer. "Very well. If she enjoys fucking her Garinthian slave so much, she can give us all a show of her prowess. It seems obvious she welcomes him into her bed."

Tiana shot Mira a wary glance before nodding. "I'll return with the servant as ordered."

Tiana darted from the room, the soft swish of her battle leathers hanging in the air. It was only a matter of time before they discovered Keegan was gone, but Mira had hoped to give him more time. She chanced a look at her mother, wincing at the visible hatred that radiated off the woman's body. She'd always known her family despised her, but to see the emotion in its raw form was more than she'd expected.

"He's gone," said Tiana, dashing into the room, her words mingled amidst sharp pants.

Vestna's head snapped up, her lips pulled into a tight line. "What do you mean, 'he's gone'?"

"I checked Mira's room, but he's not there. I've sent some warriors to scour the palace, but I have a feeling he's not on the grounds."

"What!"

Vestna's voice rang across the room, vibrating the walls with its force. Mira winced, but held her ground as Vestna turned to her, rage burning behind her dark eyes.

"Where is he?"

Mira shrugged. "He was there when I left. I don't know where he is now."

"Liar!" screamed Vestna, pacing back to her throne. "You helped him escape."

"How could I, mother? He was protected under your magic. Are you suggesting a witch without any power could break your spell?" Mira shook her head. "I thought your spells were absolute."

Vestna cursed, but then lifted her lips into a cruel smile. "Of course, my dear. There's no way a simpleton like you could break one of my spells. Perhaps there was a fault in the crystal. But since it's clear you have feelings for this slave, I'll do you a favour and get him back." She waved at Tiana. "Tiana. Gather a small group. I want you to take Mira on her first mission and find the man who's given my dear daughter a second chance."

"What about the celebration? Corand law —"

"I know the law," snapped Vestna. "But it appears our feast will have to wait until our prisoner is returned. I wouldn't want Mira to be without the only man she desires." Vestna smiled. "You'll leave at once."

"But —"

"You have your orders, Tiana. Go."

"Yes, Your Majesty." Tiana shot Mira an unsettled glance before turning on her heels and marching out of the room.

"As for you, Mira. I suggest you go back to your room and gather a few of your meagre things. The next few days will be quite exhausting. Almost as much as the last few must have been." She laughed. "I suppose I underestimated your slave's potential. I'll have to find out first hand just how good this man can be. Perhaps, if you behave, I'll let you watch us fuck." She flicked her hand at Mira. "Leave."

Mira turned, picked up her clothes and left, praying to all the Gods Keegan had followed the map, and was well beyond the borders of Corand.

* * * *

Keegan stumbled along the rocky trail behind the palace, rain pelting his skin as he fought the numbing cold. Night was almost upon him and he needed to bridge the castle walls before they closed the gates. Hunger and thirst gnawed at his strength, but he kept moving, not willing to rest until he'd fulfilled his vow. He hadn't stopped since he'd snuck past Vestna's guards and found the hidden route through the mountains—a narrow, winding path that had tossed him against the rocks on more than one occasion. He'd managed to press on, only to be attacked by a pack of wild cur just as he'd crested the ridge. A small blade he'd found in Vestna's stables had been his only defence until he'd been able to climb a lone tree. It'd taken hours for the pack to scatter, but the damage had already been done. He'd taken several deep cuts to his chest, and had a series of puncture wounds to his right thigh.

But he'd kept going, the memory of Mira's face spurring him on. He could still see her...unshed tears shimmering behind her green eyes, her blonde hair like a halo around her face. She'd had only her shift on and he could still picture her luscious silhouette swaying beneath the sheer cloth. It gave her skin a hazy appearance, as if he was watching her through the mist, and he wanted nothing more than to wrap his hands around her smooth skin and drink in the sweet fragrance he'd come to know as her scent.

This isn't the end, Mira. I promise.

His words rang in his head, pushing him farther along the trail. He wouldn't fail her, even if he had to take Vestna's Kingdom apart piece by piece. She'd become his wife, and once she was safe, he'd spend his life showering her with all the love she'd given him for nothing more than a tarnished trinket and a passing promise in return.

He cursed, wincing when his foot caught on a stone, slamming him into the rock. The bitter taste of blood filled his mouth and he turned his head aside, spitting the red liquid across the path. "Damn you, Vestna. I swear you'll pay." He pushed up, trying to gain his balance, only to be shoved back down.

"On your knees, thief, before I take matters into my own hands and spare my father the trouble." The man moved in front. "Tell me your name and I might allow you to live."

"You're getting a bit cocky for such a young lad, aren't you, Roland?"

The man gasped and dropped to his knees, pushing Keegan's hood back. "By the Gods, Keegan!"

Keegan smiled as Roland pulled him into an embrace, all but smothering him. "Easy, little brother. I've had a busy week."

Roland eased back, sweeping his gaze down Keegan's tattered body. "What in all the Heavens happened to you? We expected you home days ago. Father even sent Captain Cutler out, but the man returned last night claiming you'd simply vanished."

"I'm afraid my adventure story will have to wait," he sighed, swaying to his feet. He leant into the shoulder his brother gave him. "Help me home. I've got to save her."

Roland opened his mouth, but only muttered a curse as Keegan draped his arm across the man's shoulder and urged them forward.

* * * *

"Your Majesty, come quick."

King Callun rose from his throne as two men stumbled into the room, heads hidden beneath hoods, their heavy pants ringing through the air. They collapsed on the floor, the smaller of the two removing his hood. Callun charged them, grabbing his youngest son by the arm. "Roland. What's the meaning of this?"

Roland sat back on his heels, pointing at the man huddled beside him. "I found him wandering on the trail behind the palace. He's been attacked and wouldn't stop mumbling something about having to save some woman."

Callun knelt at the man's side, brushing the hood away. "Keegan?"

Keegan lifted his head, a weak smile gracing his lips before he fell forward into his father's lap. "Mira!"

Callun shook his head, not sure he'd heard his son right. "By the Gods, it is you." He wrapped his arms around Keegan's shoulders. "Who's Mira?"

"I have to save her...Vestna...her warriors are on the move." He reached forward, pushing the crumpled map into his father's hand.

Callun's eyes narrowed as he stared at the tattered piece of paper. "Vestna did this to you?" he stormed. "The filthy witch." He waved at the soldier standing next to Roland. "Get Captain Cutler. At once!"

"Mira," whispered Keegan again. "My amulet."

Callun watched his son fade into unconsciousness, his hand gripped around Callun's vest. He reached out and searched Keegan's chest, wincing at the lacerations crisscrossing the man's skin. But their family symbol was gone. Callun cursed, motioning to his men. "Take him to his chambers and make sure the doctor takes a look at him. If he wakes, send for me."

The men nodded and heaved Keegan up, dragging him from the hall. Callun turned to Roland, his anger dimming his vision. "Who's this Mira? And why does she have Keegan's amulet?"

Roland shook his head. "I don't know. All he did was say her name over and over." He nodded in the direction Keegan had gone. "He's lost a lot of blood. I can't imagine how he managed to make it all that way on foot. I think he's delirious."

"Delirious or not, Vestna will pay for her treachery." Callun glanced back across his shoulder at his eldest son. Gareth sat stone straight in a chair by one of the windows, his eyes open, but dull. He sighed, turning back to Roland when another man entered the room.

"You sent for me, Your Majesty?"

Callun turned. Captain Cutler stood at his side, his fist crossed on his chest.

"Gather a troop together. It seems Vestna sent her warriors out on a mission, and I want them intercepted. Use whatever force you deem necessary, but bring me the one called Mira. She'll have Keegan's amulet. And Captain, be careful. We've all heard the rumours, and like our Kingdom, I'm sure there's merit behind them."

Cutler nodded and turned, but stopped when Roland shouldered up beside him.

"I'm going."

Roland's voice was strong and Callun could see the determination in his young son's eyes.

Callun huffed, skirting one more glance towards the man at the window. "I've already lost Gareth to the fickle feelings of a witch. I'll not lose you too," he snapped, pacing back to his throne. "Vestna's warriors are not easy prey, whether they possess magic or not. Until Keegan regains consciousness I think it'd be best if you stayed here, Roland."

"And do what? Watch Keegan sleep!" Roland stepped forward. "I'm not a boy, father." Roland nodded at the man by the window. "Nor am I Gareth. I realise the circumstances surrounding his illness is a constant strain on you, but I won't make the same mistake. Besides, Keegan has taught me well."

"Yet it looks as if Keegan barely escaped with his life."

"All the more reason to send his brother to even the score."

Callun sighed. Though he'd lost few arguments over the years, he knew when to back down. "Very well. Go with the Captain. But pay heed. Vestna's warriors aren't to be trifled with. And I have a nasty feeling Keegan did more than just visit."

* * * *

Mira sat by the fire, watching the flames dance along the wood. They'd travelled for two days without resting for more than a couple of hours at a time, and she knew she wasn't the only one who was tired and hungry.

"Here."

Tiana tossed some bread at her. Though her sister kept her usual mocking tone cloaked around her, Mira could tell it was more for show than a sincere hatred. Ever since Vestna had forgone the ceremony and sent the group on their quest, the warriors had been restless, as if they expected their magic to suddenly vanish. Tiana had gone so far as to light the way with her flames as if reassuring herself her power was still intact. Now they gathered around the dim light, searching the shadows for some hidden evil.

"How did you break the spell?"

Mira turned, startled by Tiana's voice beside her. "What?"

"The crystal on your slave's neck. How did you break it?"

Mira looked away. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Tiana laughed. "Please, Mira. Save your acting for mother. To be honest, I don't really care. I'm simply curious why you didn't just break your crystal years ago."

"It doesn't work that way," she said, meeting Tiana's gaze. "I can't break my crystal any more than I can yours."

"Yet your Garinthian servant is gone."

"Because he was just that, Garinthian. Besides, spells don't hold as much weight when they're cast against the scripts. Mother should have known that."

Tiana drew her brows together, glancing at the other warriors. "You mean because she lied about him invading our land you were able to break her spell?"

Mira shrugged. "Don't tell me you're surprised. Did you really think the laws were there just as warnings? I've always known they hold more power than mother ever could."

Tiana stood up, pulling Mira to her feet. "So by not following the rules for the ceremony..."

"Vestna has put you and the Kingdom in jeopardy." Mira sighed. "Irony how the gift of healing isn't part of the scripts. So in the end, Vestna's only hurting herself."

Tiana cursed and stomped away from the circle, only to return moments later. "I knew this was a bad idea. And I'll be damned if I lose my magic because of her hatred for you."

"You mean everyone's hatred."

Tiana looked at her, and for the first time since they were children, Mira saw her sister's eyes soften.

"I don't hate you. I...I just don't understand you."

Tiana turned, but not before Mira saw the pain flicker in her expression. Mira gasped and took a step forward.

"You're afraid of me, aren't you?" Mira looked around at the gathering of women huddled in the wavering light. "All of you. You think I'm evil."

"We don't think you're evil, it's just...our magic has no affect on you. Yet, with nothing more than a touch, you can wound us."

"But I'd never hurt you on purpose. It kills me every time I have to defend myself."

"Or your lover?" asked Tiana. "You were willing to do battle for him."

Tears gathered in Mira's eyes as the simple mention of Keegan tore through her heart. "That's different," she whispered, turning away, not wanting them to see her love for him. "Keegan's different."

"Keegan!"

Mira winced as Tiana spun her around, grabbing her shoulders with both hands. "His name's Keegan?"

Mira nodded, not sure how to reply.

"Dark Hells. Why didn't you tell us that before?" Tiana motioned to her sisters, nodding as they gathered their supplies.

"Why?"

Tiana cursed as she threw a bag over her shoulders. "Do you have any idea who he is?" She muttered under her breath, yelling at the others to hurry up. "Hells, if mother doesn't get us all killed I'm certain Callun will gladly see to it, himself."

"Callun?" She pulled on Tiana's arm when the women started walking. "What are you talking about? You're not making any sense."

"I'll explain later. But we need to get out of here before it's too late. We'll tell mother we searched and couldn't find your slave. Then we'll decide on how to deal with her rantings."

Tiana flashed out the fire just as a harsh wail echoed across the canyon. Loud voices battled against the thunder of hooves as the group of riders surged over the far hill, swords gleaming in the pale moonlight, teeth bared in disgust.

The women rallied, filling the night with their red flames. Mira watched as Tiana lined up her targets, knocking the warriors from their perch, before the woman grabbed her and dragged her towards the forest. A single arrow sliced through the air, cutting a line down Tiana's arm.

The woman cried out, tripping on a log as her attention faltered. Mira knelt down beside her sister, feeling her stomach roll at the first drop of blood. She hated the colour of it, dark and deep, like well-aged wine. She reached for Tiana, only to draw her hands back as the woman flinched.

Mira cursed. What good was her gift if she couldn't heal her own flesh and blood? Anger filled her and she turned, snatching a short sword from Tiana's belt before turning to face the approaching men. Tiana muttered something behind her, but Mira ignored it, concentrating on the young man dismounting his horse.

"Well, what do we have here?" taunted the man. "A warrior without any magic?"

He circled to her left, but she moved with him, keeping her body between him and her sister.

Mira shook the weapon at him. "Leave. I don't want to hurt you."

"The sword in your hand says differently," he snarled, brandishing his sword. "Surrender, and I'll try to remember you're a woman underneath the witch."

Mira shook her head, the small sword already heavy in her hands. Nausea crested her throat, but she pushed it away. Just holding the weapon drained her. She shuddered when the hiss of fire erupted behind her.

"Leave, boy, and I might let you live."

"Fiery words, witch. Can you live up to them?"

Mira stepped between them when Tiana tried to push past her, brushing Keegan's amulet aside when it swung out from beneath her dress. "No, Tiana. No more killing."

"You!"

Mira turned at the harsh sound.

"Come with us, and I'll allow your sisters to go free."

"No one threatens us, boy," hissed Tiana. "We—"

"Fine."

Tiana whirled on her. "Mira, no. You have no idea who they are."

"No more killing, Tiana. I can't bear it. Please. Just go. We both know I can't live under Vestna's rule any longer." She gave Tiana a shove. "Go!"

Tiana huffed, but ran off, her skin flickering red in the darkness. Mira turned back to the man and dropped the weapon. He sneered at her and grabbed her arms, binding them together in front of her body.

"Let's go, witch."

Mira stole one last glance back across her shoulder, before running behind the man as he mounted his horse and started into the night.

Chapter Six

Mira stumbled into the room, catching her weight on the wall. The young man grumbled behind her and pushed her forward, chuckling when she tripped on her dress. She fell to the floor, the rough stone scraping her cheek.

“Get up, witch, and keep your hands where we can see them.”

Mira glared at him, but did as he asked, pushing herself up and placing her bound hands in front of her. Another man paced the room, his fists tight at his side. He stopped and walked forward, one arm stretched in welcome.

“Roland. You’ve returned.”

The young man brushed past her, clasping the man’s hand with one of his. “Of course, my King.”

The King nodded towards her. “Is this the woman?”

“Yes. Though she doesn’t seem to possess the same power as the others we encountered.” Roland pulled the man closer. “They cast fire from their hands until their skin glowed red.”

The King’s eyes widened as he skirted a glare at her. Mira kept her chin high, hoping her fear didn’t show in her eyes.

“You’re Mira.”

His tone was curt and she nodded her reply.

“I’m King Callun.” He waved at her hands. “I’ll have my Captain release your ties, but know this. Use your wicked sorcery on me and it’ll be the last thing you do.”

Again she nodded, trying not to let her surprise show. Tiana had mentioned the man’s name just before the attack, and Mira couldn’t help but wonder what secrets her sister harboured. She held up her hands as the Captain moved over to her, flinching when his knife scratched her skin, leaving a thin pink line. She pulled her hands back, thumbing the wound, wishing for once, she could make these heathens pay. But even as the thought materialised, her soul ached to heal the men she’d seen injured in the battle.

Callun shifted on his feet, drawing her attention, as he took a heavy step towards her, pointing at her neck. "You wear the amulet of Garinth. Where did you get it?"

She fingered the necklace Keegan had given her. It'd been her only source of comfort since he'd left. "It was a gift." She lowered her eyes. "From a friend."

"Are you certain he *gave* it to you?" demanded Roland, stepping up beside Callun. "Or did you snatch it from his battered body?"

"Snatch it...battered?" She looked around, fear settling on her shoulders. By the Gods, if anything had happened to Keegan..."I'd never hurt him." She paused feeling her heart clench at the thought. "I love him."

"It certainly took you long enough to tell me."

Mira turned, drawn to the voice at the far side of the room. She heard the men gasp as a tall figure emerged from the shadows, his face pulled into a tight smile. He was dressed in silk and leathers, both bearing the mark of the flag hanging behind the throne. His long brown hair hung down past his shoulders, but it was his eyes that held her spellbound.

"Keegan?" His name came out on a whisper of air, so faint she wasn't even sure she'd spoken it.

His smile widened as he limped over to her. "There's just something about the way you say my name, sweetness," he mused, brushing her wild hair back from her face. "I hope it was me you were talking about."

Mira choked back a sob and fell into his arms grabbing his shirt with both hands. "I thought I'd never see you again."

He smiled against her hair as he stroked his hand down her back. "I promised you it wasn't over." He pulled back so she could gaze into his eyes. "I'm only sorry I couldn't get to you myself. I..."

His voice faded as he gazed at her hands, tracing the long line with his thumb. Anger flashed in his eyes before he dashed across the room, throwing the Captain back against the wall and barring his throat with his arm. "You malicious bastard, is that how we treat ambassadors from other realms?" He tightened his hold when the man tried to speak. "I swear if I find one bruise on her beautiful body I'll rip out your gizzards and feed them to you!"

Cutler's eyes bulged wide as he flicked a gaze at the King. Callun cleared his throat, but Keegan ignored it.

"I asked you a question, Captain."

"I was just following orders," Cutler finally spat out, his voice wavering from the strain. "From the throne."

Keegan whirled on his father, allowing the Captain to fall from his grasp. "You ordered her beaten?"

"She hasn't been beaten, Keegan," insisted Callun. "We merely wanted to question her...about your amulet. You didn't say why she had it."

"We?" He looked at Roland. "Dear Gods, don't tell me you were a part of this, Roland?"

Roland straightened his shoulders. "It was my duty to even the score."

Keegan growled, throwing his hands up, as he stared at the two men. "I distinctly remember telling both of you that I needed to save her," Keegan snarled. "Not have you drag her across the countryside." His breath hitched as he turned back towards Cutler. "Dark Hells, you didn't make her walk the entire way, did you?" He advanced on the man.

"Keegan!" Mira wrapped her hands around his arm, stepping between him and the Captain. "Please. I'm fine."

Keegan glared at the man behind her before cupping her hands between his. "These marks tell a different story, sweetness. I'll be damned if I allow any man to hurt my lady."

"They didn't hurt me, not really. And how could I expect more from your Kingdom when mine gave you much less." She smiled as he pulled her close. "Besides, if you hurt the Captain, I'll have to waste my energy healing him, and you know I'd much rather..." She stopped, feeling the welts beneath his shirt. "What?" She pulled back, tearing the edges apart, not caring when two of the buttons flung across the room. "You're hurt." She met his gaze, tracing the oozing cuts with the tips of her fingers. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Just a few scrapes," he insisted, but didn't resist when she pressed her hands on his chest. "Mira, honey. I'm okay. You don't have to do this."

"Hush," she scolded, sighing at the warm feel of his skin beneath her hands. "You know how it kills me to see you like this." She closed her eyes and let the power flow through her body, targeting each wound in turn until the marks vanished.

"By all the Heavens," gasped Roland. "She's a healer?"

"Yes," agreed Keegan, watching the last flickers of blue dance along his skin. "A healer, and my mate." He reached down and grabbed her hands, sandwiching them between his. "For me, the bond is already complete. But the final choice is yours. Will you have me?"

Mira grabbed his shirt to stop the spinning, but knew the feeling wasn't from the healing. "Have you? But I thought..." She looked back at the Captain, and then at Callun. "I was your prisoner."

Keegan laughed drawing her body against his. She felt the hard press of his cock against her stomach.

"If you'd like me to tie you to my bed, sweetness, I'll gladly do it. But you're not my prisoner." He took a deep breath. "I love you, Mira. And I want all the land to know. Marry me."

New tears threatened, and she didn't try to stop them from cascading down her face. "But what about the King? Surely he won't let me go that easily."

"On the contrary, my dear. I can only hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me. I suppose I allowed my love for my son to cloud my judgement as a King. I didn't want to lose another member of my family to the hands of a witch, never thinking you would be so much more. I should've trusted in him. There's only one reason we give our amulet to a woman."

Mira took a quick step back, shifting her gaze from Callun back to Keegan. "Your son..." she repeated. "You're a Prince?" She looked over at the young man standing beside Callun. "Roland is your brother?"

Keegan smiled, pulling her close. "One of my brothers," he said. "But I'm not the only one who kept secrets. Vestna's your mother, Princess Mira."

She looked away. "I didn't want you to hate me because of her. I've never known what it's like to be loved...until you."

"Then say you'll marry me, and I'll spend a lifetime showing you just how loved you are."

She nodded and took the hand he raised to her. "I'll always be a healer," she warned.

"I wouldn't have it any other way. Just promise me one thing. The next time you want to wake me in the middle of the night, don't use your magic to calm me. I want to enjoy every moment of your rosy lips wrapped around me."

Heat flushed her skin as she nodded her agreement. Then she stepped closer and lowered her hand, cupping his shaft through the tight cloth. "Take me to your chambers, my Prince, and I'll give you a chance to experience all of that...and more."

Keegan smiled and scooped her up, ignoring her muffled cry and the chuckles that followed him from the room. "That sounds like a very interesting proposal, sweetness. And I'll take you up on it...but I'm a little busy right now picturing you as my prisoner."

Mira laughed as Keegan marched down the corridor and carried her into his chambers, toeing the door closed as he pulled off her shoes and placed her gently on the floor. He stared at the woman before him. Her hair was blown around her face and her dress was smudged with dirt and blood. By all the Heavens, she was the most beautiful creature he'd ever laid eyes on.

"First things first," he mumbled, reaching for the bodice of her dress and ripping the offending garment from her body. Her eyes rounded in shock as she watched the torn scraps fall to the ground. "Don't worry. I'll get you more. But first..."

He stepped back. She was wonderfully naked, her pale skin glowing in the soft firelight. Her breasts were full and round, rising with each breath, pushing her turgid, little nipples out towards him. He growled when she flashed him a wicked smile and lifted her fingers, tweaking each perfect bud between her thumb and forefinger. She arched back, a breathy whimper of lust feathering from her lips as she rolled them this time, making his jaw twitch with desire.

"I see you're still intent on being a naughty little witch." He shook his head as he walked over to the table beside the bed, removing a set of velvet ties. He left three on the sheets, coveting the last in his hands. "I suppose I have no other choice but to keep those hands bound until you can learn to control yourself."

Mira shivered as he drew her arms behind her back, wrapping the soft length of fabric around her wrists. Keegan hesitated, uncertain if her reaction was one of anticipation, or fear, until he felt her small fingers encase his shaft through his tight leathers, firmly squeezing the crown.

His chuckle was followed by her soft moan, and he couldn't resist tapping her on the ass. "Dangerous move, sweetness. But since you seem so intent on having my cock, then by all means, I'll give it to you."

Her eyes gleamed back at him as he spun her around, loving the way her breasts pointed out at him, arched higher by the position of her arms. He drew a deep breath, catching her sweet scent in the air. Soon he'd eat his fill, but first, he wanted to play.

"Now we'll see just how badly you want your prize, sweetness." He nodded towards his groin. "Help yourself."

Mira glanced at the bulge in his leathers before arching her eyebrow at him. "Aren't you going to remove your pants?"

"If you want me that badly, use your teeth."

Her husky moan had him flaring again, and he could only pray she'd release his shaft before he came in his leathers. Mira gave him one last wicked smile before slowly kneeling at his feet, her mouth even with his groin.

"Keep your knees splayed wide. I want to see how much you need me to return the favour."

Mira lowered her gaze, but not before he saw the swirl of lust in her eyes. She shifted her weight, drawing her knees apart, exposing herself to his heated gaze. He growled at the sight of her velvety lips, her soft curls already wet with arousal. For a moment he considered reversing their positions, when he felt her tug at his pants.

Keegan looked down. Mira had one tie clenched between her teeth, having slipped it free of the knot. He watched, his eyes heavy, his breath tight in his chest as she moved to the other side, skilfully pulling it free. The laces hung down each thigh when she stopped and looked up. He smiled down at her, nodding his head, giving her permission to proceed. Mira eased forward, but instead of freeing his erection, she ran her tongue along the length of his shaft, caressing it through the fabric.

Keegan's teeth clamped shut around another growl as she lapped at his cock, making his thighs tremble in anticipation. Hells, if she didn't free him soon...

"Mira." His voice was strong and firm, and the way she purred against his shaft told him she understood the meaning behind it. Either she speed things along, or he'd take over.

Mira planted one last kiss on his shaft before taking the leather between her teeth and rearing back, tearing the front, smiling as his cock sprang free, bobbing down in front of her. She didn't wait for him to move, but surged forward, taking the head in her mouth and sinking it to the back of her throat. Keegan cried out, his hands reaching for her hair, needing to feel the soft mass twirled around his fingers. She was like fire on his skin, so hot he felt as if he'd dipped his shaft into burning flames. She devoured him, lapping up every drop of pre-cum, then sucking him hard into the depths of her mouth. Every muscle in his body tensed, every hair prickled on his skin as his impending release tore down his spine, threatening to pull him under. He thought he heard his voice begging for mercy, but she only moved faster, taking him deeper with every plunge.

Keegan groaned, wanting to pump his seed down her throat, hear he cry out in glory at his release, but he didn't want the moment to end. He closed his eyes, hoping the darkness would give him strength, only to have her scent surround him, the aroma so strong he could already taste her sweet juice on his tongue. He cursed, and surrendered.

Mira moaned in delight as he came in one hard spurt, her name echoing off the chamber walls as his seed purged from the tip, filling her mouth with his fluid. She swallowed every drop, plunging down his length again when his convulsions stopped. She wanted more.

"Sweet Heavens, Mira. I feel as if you've devoured my very soul." Keegan's body trembled beneath her lips, and she wasn't certain how he managed to stay on his feet. She pulled back, catching his gaze as she swept her tongue along her lips, drawing in the moisture still clinging to them. Keegan groaned then lowered his gaze, his attention now fixed on her sex. Honey eased from her cunt, a single drop trailing down her inner thigh. The muscle in his jaw twitched.

"Bed, sweetness. Now"

His eyes were dark, and Mira knew by the way he picked her up and threw her on the bed, his control was nothing more than a fleeting memory. She bounced once before he was over her. He reached for her hands, and she could only watch as he released them just long enough to tie them above her head. The smile that graced his face took what little breath she had.

“Oh, no. I’m not done yet. As a matter of fact, my turn’s just beginning.”

Keegan bent down, brushing his lips across hers, ignoring her attempt to dip her tongue into his mouth. He left her with a gentle nip to her bottom lip as he inched down her body, peppering kisses along her neck and shoulders. She arched into his mouth as he took one nipple between his teeth, nipping the tight bud. Her cry brought another smug smile to his face. He watched her this time, licking the other side, making it pucker against her skin before finally twirling it into his mouth.

“By the Gods, Keegan. Please.”

His soft chuckle warmed her skin as he kissed each tip before continuing down her body, tracing his tongue along the curve of her ribs. He paused to circle her bellybutton, dipping the tip inside, mimicking the way he’d lap at her sex. She tried to move, to bring her weeping cunt in line with his mouth, but with her hands bound all she could do was rub her lips against his chest, moaning as the simple sensation brushed her clit, pulsing desire through her groin.

Keegan groaned, and she knew he could feel her juice soaking his skin. He stopped to take one more deep breath before hooking his fingers behind her knees and spreading her legs wide.

“That’s how I want you. Nice and wide so I can see every inch of your pretty mound.” He trailed a single finger through her slit, making her jump. “Now keep them there or I’ll tie your legs as well.”

He looked up, and his expression spoke volumes. He wouldn’t just tie her up. He’d make her wait. Touch her in such a way she’d stay perched on the edge of her release, never going over. She nodded.

“That’s a good little witch,” he murmured. “Now stay very still and let me taste this sweet cream.”

The sound that broke the silence was so raw and hungry, she wasn’t sure it’d come from her. Keegan hummed his approval, lapping at her sex, dipping his fingers inside as he drew more liquid out for his pleasure. He didn’t stop. Didn’t try to make her climax by milking her clit, or increasing his thrusts. He consumed her, eating as if her taste alone would sustain him.

“Forever, sweetness. I could do this forever.”

She cried out, knowing if he didn't make her come soon, she'd simply die from the need. She tugged against the restraints, wanting to bury her fingers in his hair. Anchor him to her and demand he quench her desire.

Keegan smiled against her flesh, finally stopping to meet her gaze. His mouth was covered in her juice, and she felt a sharp contraction in her womb when he darted out his tongue and licked his lips clean. "I think I've eaten my fill...for now. So be a good girl and scream for me."

Her breath purged from her chest as he latched on to her clit, one finger sinking into her nether hole. He moved in small circles, rubbing the sides of her nub while pumping his finger through her tight, hot tissues. Back and forth, harder, deeper, until the fire exploded, shattering her from the inside out. Her orgasm burst from her sex, clenching her ass as it speared the pleasure straight to her womb. Light splintered across her vision, blinding her as she fell back to earth, Keegan's hands the only tangible connection to consciousness.

"Oh, how I love watching you come for me. It's as beautiful as when I watch you use your magic." He moved over her, wiping the tears staining her cheeks. "Praise the Gods for you, and your beautiful healing hands."

Her cry was captured in his mouth as he slanted his lips over her, kissing her with such tenderness, more liquid spilt from her eyes. Never had she dreamed of finding such love and acceptance. She moved willingly when he placed the head of his shaft at her sex, welcoming him into her wet heat. He moved slowly, rekindling the embers inside her, coaxing her nerves back to life. The orgasm built gradually this time, layering each sensation on the next, taking her higher than she'd ever been. His lips caressed her ear as he whispered his love, his devotion, binding her to him as surely as he'd bound her hands. She felt her power surge through her, burning the tie, freeing her hands as he shaft swelled inside her. He gave one last slow thrust before powering into her, sending them both into orgasm.

Mira gripped his back, locking him deep inside her, knowing she was finally home. His body stayed rigid, his muscles clenched until, at last, he collapsed, pressing her into the bed. She wanted to climb inside him, but settled for the comforting weight of his body on hers. Keegan sighed, lifting his face to hers.

"It's a good thing you're able to heal me, sweetness. 'Cause I swear you're going to kill me with your sweet body." He smiled at her laugh, before raising an eyebrow in question. "How did you free your hands?"

Mira merely smiled as he lifted the scorched velvet off the bed. Keegan shook his head, tossing the cloth to the floor.

"So is this where we live happily ever after?" she challenged, eyeing the other ties.

"Sweetness, with the way you love me, I'll be happy just to live."

"Good," she replied, using her magic to roll him onto his back, her thighs straddled around his. He watched her, his eyes heavy lidded, as she pulled one tie tight between her hands, snapping it. "Because this time, I'm the one in charge."

Keegan laughed, his hands already reaching for the spindles. "May the Gods have mercy," he prayed. "I love you, Mira."

"And I, you, Keegan," she whispered, tightening the strap. "But I'm still going to make you my prisoner."

About the Author

Kris sees herself as somewhat obsessive and feels she tends to push the limits sometimes. But her friends graciously see her as passionate and adventurous. After all, speed limits are only guidelines and shouting is just her way of rising above the chaos. Besides, she thinks the air is cleaner out there on the edge.

Kris started writing erotic stories a few years ago, but didn't try putting them out into the real world until recently. She loves penning independent leading ladies who aren't afraid to kick a bit of butt, especially when it only fuels the desires of their men. But of course, it wouldn't be any fun if the men didn't get to play... Most of her stories involve elements of suspense and quite often have a downright creepy villain lurking in the shadows. But all the better to get the hero's protective instincts going. After all, Kris still loves having a knight ride to the rescue...

Email: contactme@krisnorris.ca

Kris loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.total-e-bound.com>.

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