



CAPTIVE  
*of* LOVE

*Wendy Stone*

Captive of Love  
by Wendy Stone

**Phaze**

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## **Captive of Love**

a novel of erotic romance by

WENDY STONE

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## Chapter One

His head rolled against his shoulders, a loud moan coming from his lips as consciousness beckoned him with bright lights and noises whose meaning he didn't want to know. Opening his eyes, Ryder squinted, lifting his head to take his bearings.

His body hurt all over, a fact that he ignored for the moment as he took stock of his situation. And it wasn't good. He was naked. The chilly breeze blowing across his chest and loins discerned that fact quicker than his eyes did. His arms were pulled above his head, held securely so that his body was almost hanging by his wrists. His feet barely touched the ground, leaving him stretched in one long line.

Glancing around through the thick tangled locks of dark hair that fell in his face, he saw the rest of the men from the hunting party he'd headed. They were in similar or worse predicaments. Across from him, his older brother was strung up in the same manner, his chest crisscrossed with wide welts that bespoke of a beating from a belt.

"Trace?" he whispered huskily, his throat raw from thirst and disuse.

There was no movement, but Ryder took comfort in the rise and fall of his brother's chest.

"He's awake," said a decidedly feminine voice.

"Katrina will be pleased. She's been anxious over this one, though I told her his wounds were superficial. She's worried about him recovering from the drug."



Ryder turned, his eyes seeking the owners of the voices. Standing near the door, he found them and stared with shock. Two women, dressed as warriors with chain mail specially fitted to their trim and supple forms, stood staring back at him. Their eyes of gold seemed to almost gleam in the light. Helmets rested upon dark heads and their hands rested upon swords, sheathed for the moment.

"He finds us amazing, sister," one said, doffing her helmet and exposing intricately braided hair that hugged her head.

"As do most men, sister," the other woman answered, laughing and stroking a hand down the fitted mail of her armor.

"Too true. I should let Katrina know her new slave has awakened and is ready to begin his training. She'll wish to be present for the initiation." She started to push from the wall she leaned against when her sister stopped her.

"Katrina plans on doing all this one's training. She's taken a special interest. I think she means to keep him to herself."

Ryder had heard enough. His head hurt and for the life of him, he couldn't think of how they had gotten here. The last thing he remembered was leaving the hall, passing through the massive gates of his father's kingdom with Hunter, his favored hawk, on his arm.

"Release me!" he commanded in his most royal tone. His mother, Raven was a healer of her people, a Chee of the West, and royalty in that aspect. His father was Damien, Lord of Daring Castle and the surrounding areas. He was used to giving orders and being obeyed without question. He would take control now.

"Ah," the woman sat her helm down and strode forward to stand before Ryder, a smile upon her face. "The mighty one speaks."

Ryder became outraged at the laughter in her voice. No one but family was allowed to laugh at a son of the Lord. "Let me loose and you'll see just how mighty I am. Release me now and I might allow you to live when my father takes this place apart stone by stone."

"Your father has no idea where you are or how to find you, Ryder of Daring Castle." The other woman stepped forward, her voice less amused and more formal. "Nor will he know how to find you until Princess Katrina is ready for him to."

"How do you know who I am? Where in the hell am I?" He twisted against the heavy leather thongs that bound his wrists to the post above his head.

"I have known who you were for months, Ryder," another feminine voice said. He turned his head to watch the new woman walk towards him. She was dressed differently than the other two, in a gown of pale gold. Her body was curved and lush with breasts that strained against the fabric holding them bound. Her hair was loose, fiery red with deep highlights that drew his eyes like an insect to flame.

"Who are you?" he asked, more curious than anything else.

"She is your mistress, man," the last word spit as if it were the worst of curses. "Show some respect!"

Ryder jerked against his bindings as a blow slashed across his chest, leaving a bright red welt on his tanned skin. He glared at the woman holding the wide leather belt in her

hands, not noting how the woman in the golden gown glared also, reacting as if she felt his pain.

"Hold!" she commanded. "He is mine to punish. You are not to touch him unless I order it so, Dahlia. Is that understood?"

The woman nodded, bowing before her. "Yes, Princess," she said.

"Good. Now release his bonds and take him to my chamber. I wish to get to know this pet of mine a bit better." Her green eyes, large and cat shaped, gazed at him, taking in every bit of his muscled form. From his mussed dark hair, which showed tiny highlights of red as the sun hit it, to the tips of his elegant feet. He was magnificent.

Katrina reached up, tracing a thin white scar that bisected his abdomen. It wasn't an old wound but it had healed nicely, the scar adding a touch of ruggedness to his masculine beauty. His eyes were amazing against his tawny tanned skin, a blue the color of the sea where it meets pale sand. A hint of green turned them turquoise, a color not found amongst her people. They flashed in anger now as she ran her hands across his body with a seeming familiarity he scarcely felt.

"You shall get used to my hands, pet. Before we are through, you shall even come to beg for my touch." She said it with a false bravado that had him narrowing his gaze at her. As if to prove her words, she let her palm lie flat against his hard lower stomach, stroking the line of hair that ran down from his navel to where it widens at his groin, brushing over the soft flesh of his cock.

It stirred against his will, twitching as if coming awake. Ryder jerked, trying to dislodge her hand from his body.

"I am no woman's pet," he hissed. That this woman could make him feel desire while tied naked to a post in the most humiliating of ways added anger and a surge of hatred to his tone.

"You doubt me now, Ryder of Daring Castle. But once you are trained, you shall become Ryder, favored pet of Princess Katrina, a high rank that many men would give one of these for." She reached out and cupped his balls, squeezing gently even as he tried once more to jerk away.

"Never. I will become no woman's slave." Ryder stopped moving as he felt her long, sharp nails against the sensitive skin of his scrotum. Even the threat of those nails couldn't prevent the heated look of disdain that he gave her. All thoughts of her beauty were obliterated by her overbearing and high handed manner.

Katrina laughed, though inside she felt a twinge of worry. He was big, larger than the men of her country. It would take every power and trick she knew to over power the will she saw shining in his eyes. It was that will that had first attracted her to him, watching him in her mother's Mirror of Seeing. He'd been another handsome man amid many handsome men in the courtyard outside the huge castle that was his home. Until she'd looked closer at those beautiful eyes watching him fight one after another of the men. He disarmed them all, until the last remaining opponent. The opponent was the one now tied across from him.

He was bigger, stronger than Ryder. He held his sword with a confidence that had seemed almost cocky. Ryder had smiled, despite the sweat that streaked his face and dripped to sting in his eyes. And fought him, refusing to back down despite his fatigue, until finally his brother's sword had knocked his away and he'd been forced to admit defeat.

He'd intrigued her that day. In the days that followed she watched him with his family, learning more and more. He'd become almost an obsession, albeit a secret one, for her family wouldn't have understood. She slowly released him, staring into his eyes with a small smile on her face.

"We shall see who shall win, Ryder." She turned away, feeling the tingle of his gaze against her back. "Take him carefully, for if he gets away, your men will take his place," she warned the two women, her voice almost purring. "And not in my bed, Dahlia. Your beloved Jarvis will find his way into the games if I find any damage upon his person. I expect him ready when I return."

Katrina turned and strode from the room, knowing that they, too, stared at her with dislike. She had enough of her mother in her to hold her shoulders back and her head proudly, allowing none of the fear and uncertainty she felt to show.

She passed through the wide expanse of hallways, the breezes cool as they rushed through the open windows that surrounded the rooms she walked by. It was growing warmer, but hadn't yet reached the debilitating heat of mid-afternoon. That was the time when all that could took shelter from the heat of the sun, which burnt with devastating effect upon the

unwary. She wanted her duties done, her inspection of castle guard over and any lingering meetings finished well before that time. She wanted time with her new pet. Her first pet, and one that had her younger sisters drooling.

Just weeks before, her older sister had ruled the kingdom, leaving Katrina with no more responsibility than to decide upon what she would wear and what distraction would occupy her day. Then Kalina had fallen ill, a strange malady which had come upon her suddenly and with no discernable cure. She'd lain in her bed for days, tossing and turning feverishly while the castle healers had done everything they could.

Her body had withered as she had been unable to eat; her mind had shattered under the heat of the fever that had taken her. Ice and snow had been carted from the nearby mountains to try and cool the raging fire inside of her. Tinctures and potions had been brewed and given, teas and broths fed ruthlessly to the struggling woman. But all had been for naught. Kalina had died and left Katrina in control of a people who believed in power and strength in their women and submissive obedience in their men.

"I hope you're enjoying this," she whispered. "And I hope in whatever hell you've found yourself, Kalina, you're buried to your neck in nectar and have two Rangorian kittens licking at your feet for eternity for leaving me here as Princess."

"Princess Katrina?" A quizzical voice responded to her murmurings.

Katrina glanced down and noted the man who took brave glances at her out of the corner of his eye. He was in the proper position of respect that all men were trained at an

early age to take, on his knees, his body curved in a pleasing arch, his face against the floor, hands held straight out in front of him. It was a position men took when confronted by the Princess or by their owner. If confronted by someone who was not either of those, the man was allowed to stay on his feet but must bow his head and never look at the woman directly.

Katrina hated it. She hated having these men throw themselves to the hard floor, hated watching them prostrate themselves at her feet. She sighed. It had been this way from the time of her mother's mother's mother's reign and would be that way after she'd died and left this plane of existence.

"Princess?" the man spoke again. His voice was low and a tremor of fear had entered it. Princess Kalina had been demanding and ruthless, hateful to some of the men, using them for her own perverted pleasures despite their belonging to others. She'd liked the belt, using it to degrade, not to discipline. Katrina hadn't been princess long enough for anyone to know what to expect of her.

"Yes," she said finally, waving a hand for him to rise.

He stood. He was dressed in a plain tunic of gold and silver stripes, devoid of any sign of a brand. It denoted his rank as castle slave and therefore belonging to the Princess. He was taller than she by a good head, his shoulders wide and strong. Dark blonde hair touched the neck of his tunic, hiding the thin leather collar. He kept his dark gold eyes averted, his head bowed. "May I do something for you, Princess?"

"No," Katrina said, distractedly, waving her hand at the man. He turned and was heading down the hallway the way she had come when she suddenly stopped him.

"Wait," she said, her eyes narrowing as he stopped immediately, bowing again.

"Yes, Princess?"

"What is your name?"

"My name, Princess?" he asked, confusion in the swift glance he sent her way.

"Yes, you have one, do you not?"

"Yes, Princess. It is Lynar."

"Lynar? I've seen you here before, have I not?"

"Yes, Princess, I have served since your mother's reign. She took me herself from my home when I was but a boy." He glanced up at her again, his eyes flitting from her face to the floor.

"Do you like serving in the castle, Lynar?"

"W ... What, Princess?" His voice trembled in fear, for these questions were strange and not what he would expect.

Katrina sighed, hearing his fear and hating it as much as she hated the new role she was expected to play. She reached out, touching Lynar's chest with a gentle hand, trying to reassure him and herself at the same time with simple human contact.

"It is of no matter, Lynar. I expect I already know the answer to the question. Go ahead, be on your way." She dropped her hand as she felt the tiny tremor that shook his sturdy form.



"Thank you, Princess." He bowed his respect of her and turned once more, now hurrying as if expecting her to stop him again and ask more questions that he did not understand.

Katrina shook her dismal thoughts away, determined to do the best she could at what she'd been given. She hurried to her duties, finding her retinue of advisors waiting for her in the huge throne room. Ten women, the youngest of whom was just beginning to turn gray haired, these women were considered the most intelligent and respected of all that lived in her lands. They were her mentors. Katrina consulted them in all matters that dealt with the welfare of her people.

"Princess, we've been concerned as to your whereabouts. Is all well?"

"All is fine." Katrina walked to her chair at the head of the huge table, seating herself with a grace befitting her position. She stared at them as they stood, nodding towards their seats with a slight tip of her head. "Shall we begin? Or do you wish to gossip amongst yourselves like old men for a while longer?"

They gathered around the long table and it began.

By the hour she reached her chambers, much time had passed. The heat of the afternoon was beginning to beat down upon the white stones of the castle, creating a haze that gave the scenery a dreamy bent. Her head pounded with a combination of the heat and hunger; for she'd been given no time to eat. Her approval was necessary upon many matters that dealt with the castle and her lands, matters that she'd had little understanding of a few weeks ago but was

hurriedly mastering. And all these matters had to be addressed before the heat of afternoon put a halt to work, as the castle closed in upon itself, darkening rooms and closing out the burning rays of the sun.

It was one of the worst punishments to be tied to a post in the center of the courtyard during the afternoon's sun. It was a punishment given to only those slaves too stubborn to bend their will or too insolent in manner to be forgiven any other way.

She could only hope that her servants had left a meal waiting for her in her chambers. She sighed tiredly, the heat making her indolent and leaving a sheen of moisture to glisten upon her skin, slicking the golden gown that had felt so wonderfully light this morning until the fabric felt heavy and wet, sticking to her. As she approached her chambers, two skimpily dressed men bowed low before her, rising to open her door. She shoed them away, sending them to rest while she closed the doors herself.

She hadn't taken her sister's chamber upon her death as was her right to do as the new Princess. Instead, she'd taken these rooms, further from the throne room than her sister's. They granted her more privacy and were shaded by the huge trees that surrounded her courtyard. They were opulent, as were most of the rooms of the castle, largely made from the white stone so prized for its coolness.

Windows, their drapes now pulled to block the sun, made up most of the walls, opening into her private courtyard. Silky fabrics lined the walls and covered the low couches and the pillows that were thrown upon the floor for seating. Across

the way, a small table had been brought in, filled with tempting treats, made specifically by her personal cook. The scents that wafted her way were tantalizing, causing her stomach to lurch and grumble with hunger.

A heavy wardrobe took up most of one wall beside a door that led into a dressing chamber where her shoes and armor were kept. And tied to a wall, close to the table where her food was laid, was Ryder.

His arms were spread wide, wrists bound tightly so that he was unable to move. Ryder watched her as she walked into the room, noting with pleasure the strained look upon her face. If he had to be miserable, he wanted the cause of his misery to feel the same pain he did.

"Will you release me and my men so that we may return home?" He ignored the instructions that he'd been given by the women who'd brought him here. Don't speak unless spoken to, keep your eyes lowered and your attitude subservient to the Princess were only a few of the things he'd been told, all of which he planned to ignore.

"Do you find this routine worthwhile, pet? For you must know, my answer is the same now as it was this morning and will be the same until you tire of that ridiculous question. Your brother and the rest of the captives have already been sold to new mistresses. They will receive their training and grow to enjoy their lives here, just as you will." She walked towards him, reaching under the heavy locks of her hair for the ties that held her gown closed.

With a tug she pulled them free, the loose material sliding from her body, leaving her bare to his eyes. Ryder tried to be

unaffected by the beauty she displayed, tried to ignore the way her breasts bounced softly as she continued toward him, the lovely curve of her waist that broadened into lush hips. A fiery triangle of hair covered the soft mound of her sex, attracting his gaze to that sleek prize.

"I knew you would find me attractive, Ryder," Katrina said, running her hands down her sides and over her hips. "I've seen the women that draw your eye, especially that blonde wretch, Praia."

"How do you know of her, or of any of us? How have you spied upon my family, wench?" He struggled against his bonds and against himself as he felt that tingle of awareness deep inside of him.

"Perhaps one day I will show you, pet. If you behave yourself and earn the treat, I shall let you watch your family yourself and see how they fare. I can tell you that your father has sent out parties searching for you and your brother. Your mother worries and has asked for help from her people and the seers of the clans of the North. I'm very intrigued by the magical qualities they possess, and the ones that you do also."

"My father shall find us, and when he does, he will bring down your kingdom around your pretty ears. And then you shall find yourself tied to this wall under my command," he hissed before clamping his mouth shut. He turned his head from her, refusing to look at her even when she chuckled.

"You are lucky I am tired and hot, pet. I'd hate to have to take you to task for your rudeness to me." She moved toward a spot in the corner of the room where a crudely rigged spout

emerged from the wall. Pulling on a cord, she stood under the spout and let the fountain of fresh water stream over her sticky body. It was cooling and refreshed her flagging spirits more than anything else possibly could have in that moment.

Ryder couldn't help but glance at the rudely-built waterfall, hearing her sighs and murmurs of pleasure as she doused her head under the water. Letting loose the cord shut the water off and she reached out for a crystal bottle, pouring a goodly amount of the liquid into the palm of her hand before using it on her body and hair. He watched as she rinsed, her hand running over her wet skin, drawing his eyes to her lush form.

She stepped from the corner, slicking her hands through her hair and squeezing the water from the length of it. Grabbing a thick towel off a pile set on a small bench, she bent her head and wrapped her hair into the material, letting the water on her body dry in the heat of the air. Walking with a nonchalance she didn't feel in front of him, she went to her wardrobe and removed a thin short shift made of fabric too flimsy to conceal her curves from his eyes.

"Maybe tomorrow you can join me in the water. It feels wonderful when the air gets hot and heavy in the afternoon." She slid into the shift before pulling the towel off of her hair and taking a comb from her dresser, walking over to stand in front of him.

The white fabric had soaked up the moisture on her skin, turning the material transparent. It clung to her, sticking to the heavy globes of her breasts, emphasizing the soft bumps of her nipples. He could plainly see the fiery triangle of soft hair that covered her sex. With a mental groan at the picture

of decadence t, he turned his head away, staring at the heavy draperies that covered the window on the other side of the room.

Katrina chuckled softly, knowing that he was attracted to her, knowing that he fought that attraction. The women of her people were experts on breaking men to their will; the secrets used were passed through the generations. Her mother had taught her what she needed to know at a young age.

And Katrina knew she could turn Ryder, that she could make him want her and bend to her will. It would take time and patience but she could do it. She sighed, sinking down on one of the soft pillows scattered on the floor. Her only problem was that she didn't want him to be like the rest of them, the men in her kingdom. She didn't want blind obedience or to watch him throw himself down upon the floor in front of her, anxious to please her every whim.

She'd liked what she'd saw upon his planet, the strength of the men and their caring way with their ladies. She'd watched Ryder's parents, anxious to see how they behaved together. Lord Damien had been loving and playful, aggressively amorous with the beautiful healer. Even after giving birth to two boys and one girl, Raven was still slender of build with a strength about her that had amazed Katrina.

Raven ran her home with a grace and caring that rivaled even the most powerful of Princesses. She bent her husband to her will, though at times she had to yell and put herself in his way to be heard. Her sons showered her with love, showing her deference. Katrina had laughed until she'd cried

watching Raven chastise Ryder while Trace made fun of him behind Raven's back. At least until the grand lady turned quickly and grabbed the much taller man by the ear, twisting until he fell to his knees in front of her, apologizing.

That is what she wanted, not a lifetime of bowing and scraping. She didn't want her man to agree with her every word. She wanted fights and yelling. She wanted fire and passion and making up. She wanted a man who could stand with her, fight with her, be a partner not a pet. If Kalina had not died, then she would have been free to have gone to Ryder as she had once planned. But she was Princess now.

Katrina shifted upon the pillow, her soft mouth turned down into a scowl. She had no choice. It was her duty to her people and to the generations who had come before her. She would serve her people, train Ryder as a pet who would bow to her will and be obedient to all her commands. She would ... die of boredom before she reached her next birthday.

A heavy sigh caught Ryder's attention and he turned his head, staring at the picture of dejection his beautiful captor portrayed. Her lush mouth was turned into a pout, her eyes downcast and sad. Her hair laid heavily on her shoulders, dripping down her back, the comb in her hand forgotten. She was lost in thoughts that weren't happy ones, Ryder decided, hating the twinge of sympathy he felt for her. He couldn't allow her to make him feel anything for her. Nothing but hatred and disgust for the lifestyle he'd seen as he'd been forced to come here, a noose placed around his neck and held tightly by a long pole in the hand of one of the strongest women he'd ever seen.

Men were dressed in fussy tunics, some embroidered with forms of animals or birds on the fronts. They bowed before the women who'd moved him, some throwing themselves to their knees on the hard stone floors and prostrating themselves. Not a single man wore a weapon, not even a knife, upon his person.

If this is what life would hold for him here, he didn't want it.

"Have you been fed, pet?" Katrina had moved while his mind was wandering and now stood before him, a tidbit of meat held between two of her long slender fingers. She was offering it to him, holding it just beyond the reach of his mouth. "I know I hunger and you have been unconscious for three days. You must be famished."

His stomach rumbled in answer, making her smile. The smile faded when he turned his head, staring defiantly off into space, ignoring her and the food. She sighed, lifting the morsel to her own lips and chewing it slowly. "Being obstinate is only going to cause you pain, Ryder. It will not further your cause for you to become weak through your own stubbornness. Will you not eat willingly, to give yourself the strength to fight me on more important battles?"

Her logic irritated him. Mostly because she was right. It served no purpose to let himself grow weak from lack of food. What if he were too weak to fight or to run if given the chance to escape? What purpose would his stubbornness do him then?

But still, his contrary nature wanted to fight her on this. He settled the matter by glaring at her with hatred while he bent



his head, his lips brushing the softness of her long fingers as she fed him a tender bit of meat. He chewed slowly, feeling the rush of saliva that came to his mouth from the superb taste of the food. Closing his eyes, he savored it, obediently opening his mouth when she pressed another bit to his lips.

Katrina felt a surge of heat in her loins. The look on his face was one of sublime rapture. He took the act of a simple feeding and made it into a sensual foray of the senses with the touch of his tongue against her finger, lapping quickly at the sauces left upon them. The way his mouth suckled hungry upon her skin as she fed him each small piece was exquisite torture, causing her to imagine how it would feel elsewhere upon her body.

His lips were soft as he took the food, his teeth sharp as he nipped her fingers. He stared down at her with eyes that seemed to flame, making her breath catch in her throat. Sensuous heat traversed the length of her arm and arrowed into her groin and belly, causing a maelstrom of feelings intense and confusing to her innocence. Her lips parted softly, her tongue coming out to moisten their dryness.

Ryder watched the confusion upon her face; saw the way her breasts moved as she panted for breath. He felt a surge of pleasing power course through him, knowing that though she thought she was the master, he was in control at this moment, despite his bonds. He licked his own lips, tasting the succulent sauce that had been ladled upon the meat and just a hint of her taste, the sweetness of her skin, its clean flavor a pleasure to his palate.

Katrina watched his lips, saw them curve in triumph and felt a flare of anger that she couldn't control. He thought he was winning, thought he could control her with just his mouth. No Princess would let a man think he was in control, not if she wanted to keep him. Her mother's teachings came to mind and a smile of her own, wily and cunning, came to her lips.

"You are finished then? I thought you to eat more but find my own hunger must be satisfied now." She didn't allow him to speak, instead pressing her fingers against his mouth, feeling his lips part. His tongue flicked out, laving her palm and tracing the line between her fingers before sucking one into his mouth. She allowed him his play, knowing he thought to control her. But after only a few moments she pulled away from him, going to the table once more and seeing what else had been left. Her eyes sparkled as she took in the small bowl of pudding made from the day old breads that had grown stale. It was a favorite of hers and the cook made sure to always include a small bowl with her meals.

Lifting the gold dish, she studied Ryder, noting that he didn't seem so sure of himself anymore. "I think it is only fair that I be fed by you as you were by me, do you not think so?"

Ryder felt his heartbeat quicken. She would free him so that he could feed her as he was fed. Now could be his chance at escape. He would plan the moment and then overpower her, using her as captive to get his men back. Then they would escape this place and go home. Maybe he'd take Katrina with him, make her his slave though his father had

released all slaves years before. It might be good for the uppity bitch to learn her place.

He watched as she sauntered forward, ignoring the prickle of desire she caused. She might as well be nude for all that the tiny wet shift covered of her, clinging as it did. He watched as she moved to his side, her small hand coming to the thick leather cuffs that bound him to this accursed wall. But instead of releasing him, she smeared a trail of the stuff in the bowl onto his skin, moving it up his arm and over his shoulder, leaving a dollop in the hollow of his collarbone before trailing more of it down his chest.

"What do you do wench?" he shouted, startled by the way her hands felt against his skin.

"I'm preparing you to feed me, Ryder. And for all heaven's sake, please call me Princess or Katrina. Calling me wench in front of my people would force me to have to have you punished. This I would find distasteful." She smiled up at him, licking the remainder of the pudding off of her fingers with tiny flicks of her tongue.

Her tongue. Ryder felt heat rise inside of him. She was going to use that soft pink tongue on him, licking up the sticky pudding that was slathered on his body. Panic was only one of many emotions that hit him at that moment, but it was the biggest. He started to struggle, feeling her eyes upon him as he threw his weight against his bonds, grunts of pain and anger coming from between his lips.

"Ryder, pet, it is no use to struggle. Those bindings are made by my finest craftsman and will not be broken by you. All you do is deny yourself the pleasure you might feel if you

were to let yourself." She smiled serenely, though inside her stomach was a tight mass of nerves. "This will happen," she said quietly, moving forward to bring her mouth to his wrist.

She felt his twistings and his movements even as she took her first taste. The pudding was sweet and spicy from the roots that were used to flavor it. His arm was warm, his flesh salty, adding his taste to the mix. *An invigorating and heady combination*, she thought as her tongue lapped along the underside of his bicep, investigating the slight line where his elbow would bend if he had the room.

She heard his breathing, harsh rasps that were unbelievably erotic as her tongue slipped up to his shoulder, her mouth suckling along the muscle of his neck even though she hadn't used any pudding there. His taste was more satisfying than any feast.

Ryder stopped dead. He could smell her scent, he could feel her body pressing against his, the shift dragging in the pudding and sticking them together. His heart raced and a flood of heat engulfed his loins, his cock growing hard and pushing against the soft skin of her stomach. His eyes closed as he bit his lip to hold back a moan of despair and need. He hated her in that moment, hated her for making him want her despite the situation. But he had no control of his desire. He could only stand there and feel.

Katrina wanted his mouth on hers, wanted to know the dark flavor, the heat of his tongue against her own. She was innocent, but she'd known a man's kiss, having practiced upon one of the slaves of her mother's court. She'd watched as the women her mother's reign had entertained had

pleasured themselves upon the slaves, taking them as they wished and in public with no thought to modesty or decency for themselves. She knew what happened between a man and a woman; she'd just never experienced it. But she wanted to, now. With him. With Ryder of Daring Castle, her new pet.

She tangled her hand in his matted hair, pulling his face down, feeling the bristles of whisker on his cheeks as they rubbed against hers. Her mouth found his, their tongues meeting, moaning as he kissed her with a finesse and demand unknown for a slave. Her heart thudded against his chest, beating in desperate measure as she sought more, her hands roaming down his chest and over his stomach.

"Let me loose, Katrina," he whispered huskily against her mouth. "Let me love you like you were meant to be loved."

She tore her mouth from him, staring up and into his eyes. She saw lust, and hunger. But was the hunger for her or for freedom? She didn't know.

With a groan, she took a deep breath, forcing her body back a step from the wonderful pressure of his. Staring up at him, she pulled at the ties that had held the shift around her, letting the sticky wet garment fall to the floor. Her eyes traveled from his flushed face, over his body to his groin, seeing the length of his cock, hard and throbbing, standing erect with its purple tip pointed up toward her.

"It is beautiful, Ryder," she said, biting her lip as she let her hand rest against the satiny soft skin of his shaft. "So hot and hard, but soft at the same time. It is a mighty weapon you wield here," she whispered, dropping to her knees before him, her face only inches from his cock.

She stroked him, her fingers barely closing around the large shaft. A shiny drop of liquid grew from the tip, and she leaned forward, lapping at it with her tongue. It was bitter and salty, but tasted of him.

Ryder watched her tongue against his cock, unable to look away. He saw the uncertain expression upon her face as she tasted his juices for the first time. Her eyes glanced up, those green cat eyes that blinked once before she smiled slyly and licked her lips. The sound that came from him was wrung from deep inside, a groan of torturous pleasure unlike anything he'd felt before.

Then she leaned forward again, her soft, pink lips opening slowly, the tip of her tongue peaking out before her mouth stretched around the head of his cock, enveloping it in a satiny wet heat. His head fell back against the wall, his hips jerking as he felt her take more of him inside, until half of his length pulsed upon her tongue.

Her mouth moved with amazingly soft friction against his shaft, her hand stroking what she couldn't take. She felt his hips moving under her mouth and felt a wash of heat in her loins, knowing that he was enjoying what she was doing through instinct and remembered nights of peeping at her mother and her friends. She could hear his gasps and moans, his whispered urgings to release him, to let him do to her what he wished so badly to do. It aroused her, those noises and his words. Aroused her to the point where her own body was tight with need.

Her hand slid from his thigh, dropping to her own. It slid with a mind of its own, parting her sleek red curls and the

thick, swollen lips of her sex that were almost dripping with her own desperate need. Her fingers pressed against the hardened bud of her clit, growing wet with her own moisture as she tormented herself with flicking movements and soft circular strokes.

Ryder stared down at her, seeing her hand buried between her thighs in a display of wanton lust. He groaned as he watched her move her fingers, stroking into the heat that he knew was there. He wanted it to be his hand, his fingers stroking over her delicate pink flesh, tormenting her clit until she came, spewing wet juices onto his hand in her pleasure. But his demands for release were unheeded, her mouth moving over his cock with a desperation that was quickly doing him in. He could feel the prickling heat that heralded the approach of his own pleasure and tried to deny it.

She moaned around his cock, the vibrations traveling through her mouth to his flesh. Ryder ground his teeth trying to hold back the inevitable. Unable to do so.

Katrina jumped with surprise when she felt the first burst of hot liquid from the tip of his cock, buried snugly within her mouth. She swallowed hurriedly, feeling his body jerk and his cock twitch with each spurt of salty liquid. She heard his shout and knew she'd brought him off, though her own loins still burned with need and desire, unquenched by her own untaught fingers.

She sucked and licked at his cock until she felt him grow limp, finally letting him loose of her soft lips. Looking up, she saw him staring down at her, his eyes half closed with an

expression she couldn't quite decipher. His blue eyes glittered, looking hard and angry.

"Are you through with me now?"

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## Chapter Two

Trace's eyes opened slowly. He blinked, letting his eyes adjust to the dimness of the light so he could look around. His arms hurt, his chest stung where the belt had been lashed over him. His head ached from whatever was in the herbs they had given him. He shifted uneasily, feeling the softness of the bed that was under him, the sleek bedding against his naked skin.

The room was lavishly ornate. Gold-toned scroll work traveled across the ceiling and along the three pillars that ran the length of the middle of the room. The walls were white stone, the floors carpeted in woven rugs that were jewel-toned in brilliant red, blue and green. The bed he was lying upon was immense, sitting just off the middle of the room. Wispy white curtains draped around it, as if he were lying in the middle of a cloud.

Moving his arms, he found he had a little slack in his bonds but not enough to grant him freedom. Trace closed his eyes, evening his breathing and tried to concentrate. He let his mind free itself of distraction, timed his breathing for concentration and then pushed with his thoughts, searching through the dozens of rooms, touching the people he found, looking for his brother.

This was his gift, seeing that which was beyond normal sight, even through walls. It took focus and a lot of energy, but he persevered. What he saw when he finally found his brother almost broke his hold. Tied to a wall, his head tipped

back, eyes closed, his face tight with pained ecstasy, Ryder was being pleased by a red-headed wench who was on her knees in front of him. As he watched, Ryder stiffened and Trace saw the girl jerk and then her throat work convulsively as she swallowed his brother's spendings.

"I know you are awake."

The voice startled him enough that he lost control of his gift, his thoughts returning to his body suddenly and violently. His eyes shot open, staring around the room before resting with a slightly shocked look on the bed next to him.

"Who are you?"

"I am your new mistress. You may call me Rayne when we are in private. In public, you may address me by Mistress or Mistress Rayne." The woman rose up on her elbow, looking down at the man who was tied to the bed next to her.

"I call no woman mistress," Trace said, his voice husky. This woman, this Rayne, was naked, her body exposed to his sight. She was golden; hair, eyes, skin tone, she looked as if she'd been dipped in the precious metal. Her eyes were almond shaped with thick lashes that flirted along a cheekbone that flushed with heat; from his eyes or his words, he didn't know.

"You will, Trace, if you know what is safest for you and your brother. You will cooperate, and not cause trouble." Rayne settled the tip of her finger against his chin, tracing the slight cleft she found there. Her fingers slid through the growth of whiskers on his cheek, grimacing as the three day beard prickled her sensitive skin.

"Where is my brother? And the rest of my men, what have you done with them?"

"Ever the leader," she said with a smile, her lush lips curving sweetly. "I would expect no less from one of our leaders if they ever found themselves in similar circumstances."

"Then answer me. Where are my men?"

"Your brother has become the property of Princess Katrina, ruler of the Kingdom of Looma. It is a great honor that she has chosen him. I was given second choice of the captives, my pet. How could I resist a man such as you? You are very pretty." She smiled at the look of resentment in his eyes.

"We are free men from Daring Castle. My father is Lord Damien. Do you know what that means?" Trace tried to ignore the surge of outrage he felt at being called pretty. Women were pretty, not men.

"I have heard of your father, Trace. He holds no power here, nor does he know where you and your brother are. Princess Katrina was swift and secretive. We came to your world, took you and left before anyone knew we were there." Rayne let her hand rest upon his stomach, her fingers moving in light circles on his hard muscled flesh. None of the males upon her world were built this way, with bulging delineated muscles that felt so incredibly hard beneath her hands. The castle slaves were soft and pampered, used to doing little more than the work needed to please their mistresses.

"He will find us." Trace's voice was full of certainty. His father would find them. "You would be wiser to let us go now. We will find our way home and forget this happened."

He glared into her eyes, trying to get her to back down. She stared back, a slight smile upon her face.

"You are enjoyable, pet." She leaned down, letting her soft breasts rest against his side, feeling the heat of his skin against hers. Scooting even closer, she let her leg slide up his, feeling the prickle of the hair on his legs against the smoothness of her flesh. There was something about this man, something that appealed to her in all ways. She even enjoyed his royal air, as if he could be a dominant. Even just the thought was enough to make her smile.

"Stop that," he hissed, trying to ignore the sleek feel of her, the roundness of her breasts pressing into him, the way her hand was slipping over his skin with wanton intent. "I am not some toy or slave for you to use me this way."

Rayne chuckled. "You sound so outraged, love. It's nice to know that you have these soft emotions. I was afraid you were going to prove too stubborn to tame."

Trace was shocked, by her words, by her actions, by the blatant way her hand was now stroking his cock, which was coming to life beneath her soft palm. His heart raced and his blood pumped hot through his veins. Rage filled him, rage and desire. His eyes narrowed even as his nostrils flared. His lips thinned and he strained against his bonds, feeling the skin of his wrists abrade under the rough leather and the wet heat of the trails of blood that dripped onto the pristine linens beneath him.

Her lips brushed his before he could turn his head, still fighting what she was making him feel. He couldn't lose control. He couldn't give in to desire, though his body argued

with him. "I don't want you," he said, his voice low and hoarse.

"You keep thinking that, pet. But this," she squeezed softly around the hard shaft of his cock, "is telling a far different story. I think you want me. I think you find me beautiful and desirable." She slid up until she was on her knees beside him, turning his face so that he was forced to look at her. "There is no wrong in finding your mistress a desirable being, pet. Nor is there any shame in it."

Trace tried to turn his eyes away but she held his gaze captive with her own. Tawny gold eyes met blue ones filled with anger. They clashed and held, despite his ire. He watched as she sat back upon her haunches on the bed, her hands coming up to lift her burnished curls off her shoulders, letting them cascade through her hands to caress her skin in a satiny waterfall. She slid her hand from her hair down and over her breasts, stopping to caress one pale golden globe with a knowing touch.

"I am your mistress, Trace," she said in a soft voice, speaking as if she were trying to soothe a spooked beast. "I have only your best interests at heart, that and thoughts of pleasure for the both of us. If you will but submit to me, I know that what is between us could grow and take root. It would be a strong bond. You have only to submit." She lifted onto her knees, letting her hand slip over her narrow waist and down over the smooth flesh of her own hairless sex.

Trace stared, for no woman in his father's kingdom removed the hair from their groins. He could see the plump, swollen lips of her sex, the sleek pink flesh between, even the

glint of moisture that bespoke of the desire she felt. The bud of her clit pushed from behind its protective hood, growing hard and taut before his avid gaze.

He watched as she slid her finger over that delicate pink softness, seeing her shiver as the tip nudged her hard clit. And then his eyes shot back to her own. Her lips were parted, the tip of her tongue coming from between to moisten them. Her eyes watched him, the lids partially lowered, heavy with desire. Her skin was rosy, from the heat of the room or from what she was doing, he didn't know. He only knew he'd never seen a more desirable woman. And he hated her for it.

With a strength he didn't know he possessed, he forced his eyes down, his head swiveling to the side so that he could no longer see her. He closed his eyes, determined to ignore the spell she was weaving.

Her soft chuckle came to his ears. Her hands rested upon his chest as she lifted herself above him, her thighs opening to straddle his legs. "Fight it all you wish, Trace, for I will have you. And one day you will ask me to take you, you will beg for my love and want it with every fiber of your being. But for now, you can pretend you do not hunger for the touch of my body. This," she slipped her hand over his cock again, still erect and throbbing with passionate desire, "does not lie."

Trace wanted to groan with frustration as his body responded to her words and her touch. He kept his face averted, though it only made each soft glide of her hand on his cock all that more devastating to his will. She teased and tempted him, running her fingers across the clear fluid that flowed from the head of his cock, using it as lubrication to

stroke him, squeezing with ravaging finesse until his hips jerked under her ministrations.

And then he felt the soft heat of her cunt, the wetness of her delicate opening as she fed his cock into her body with tauntingly slow intent until they were firmly pressed together.

"Oh," she hissed as he filled her, "pet, if you would but give me your word, I could release you so that we both might enjoy this more."

Her words surprised him, as did the pleasure he felt being buried to the hilt inside her tight wetness. He barely bit back the groan she brought to his lips as he felt her thighs flex, lifting her with intimate friction along the length of his cock, until only the tip was still inside. She stayed there, tormenting him with tiny squeezes of her vaginal muscles along the heavy ridge that ran around the head of his cock.

"Will you?" she asked him, her breathing ragged.

"Will I what?" he gritted out between teeth clenched to hold back need.

He felt her settle against him a little, then the wonderful soft weight of her breasts lying with sweet pressure against his chest as she leaned down over him, her fingers going to his chin to turn his head. He allowed it, opening his eyes to see her looking down at him.

"Will you give me your word to not try and escape? For to do such would be madness, Trace. You would be found, and I would be forced to punish you. Relent, pet, let me show you what true pleasure can be between us. Let me take you in my arms and love you the way that I wish to." Her lips found his before he could answer, her soft mouth avidly plying wet

hungry kisses upon his. He felt her tongue, felt her push it between his teeth, tasting of his mouth and tangling with his own tongue, coaxing him into returning the kiss.

When she finally drew back, her mouth was wet and shiny, swollen from their kisses. She was moving up and down atop of him, sliding tight wet muscles against the shaft of his cock. "Will you?" she whispered, arching against him.

The heat of her cunt surrounding him, her taut body undulating with fervent desire above him; Trace was caught in the spell she'd woven with such intricacy. He felt her hands sliding up his arms, her breasts brushing against his face, one nipple sliding across his cheek until he turned his head, his mouth latching onto the firm tip. He suckled upon it, nibbling and nipping, hearing her soft pants and whimpering cries of pleasure from above him.

Her hands trembled against the fastenings of the leather cuffs that held him bound, fumbled with the lock as he continued to feast upon the tender morsel of her nipple, the drawing motions of his mouth creating contractions in her womb that heightened her desire to a fevered pitch. With a sigh of delight, she felt the leather slip free and his arms move, surrounding her, lifting her until she rode astride his loins.

His hands were free. He could over power her, leave her tied and gagged upon the bed and go. But her cunt was hot and wet, and so tight he thought he'd lose his mind. He wanted to turn her, to press her to her back, thrust open her thighs and pound into her until she wailed her delirious



pleasure for the world to hear. And then he would start over, and go on and on until neither had the strength to move.

He sat up, his strong, calloused hands going to the soft cheeks of her ass, squeezing as he moved her over him with deliberate demands. Her mouth was on his neck, her lips a sweet distraction that he tipped his head to take advantage of, using his tongue to mimic in her mouth the movement of his cock in her cunt. He could feel her nails digging into his shoulders as he plundered her depths, not allowing her a movement that wasn't controlled by his hands.

If she thought to make him a slave, he would show her who controlled who, grinding into her with devastating precision and hearing her gasping cries that were muffled against his mouth. He took her to the brink of heaven before dragging her back, holding her tightly against him so that she couldn't move and leaving her stretched on that sharp knife's edge of pleasure.

"Release my ankles, Rayne. I want to fuck you properly," he hissed into her ear.

"W ... what?" she asked looking up at him dazed with the power of what he was making her feel.

"My ankles," he repeated, groaning at the hazy look in her amber colored gaze. "Release me, Rayne. Release me and beg me to fuck you," he whispered, running his fingers against one taut nipple, smiling darkly as it contracted into a tight point, making her shiver.

He leaned back, not helping her as she twisted and reached for the bindings around his ankles. She finally turned all the way around, her back to him, the succulent globes of

her ass riding his cock. Even as she fumbled with the bindings, he was grasping her hips, thrusting up to tease her further. "Hurry, Rayne," he whispered. "Hurry and release me."

Trace felt as if his body was one big throb, the desperate need to empty himself into her, to lose himself in the wet softness of her hot cunt becoming harder to resist with every thrust. Her hair fell from across her shoulders, coming to brush with satiny rhythm against his legs. Her golden skin grew rosy from exertion and passion, her body rising and falling in a frantic rush for the fiery spasms of her climax that he kept just teasingly out of reach.

Finally, he felt the bindings fall from his ankles and he lifted her slim weight easily, twisting her so that she fell to her back on the bed, following her down. He spread her slender thighs, holding the soft lips of her sex apart with his fingers. He could see the red swelling from his thrusts, the moisture that was dripping from her to pool on the sheet beneath them. The scent of her arousal rose, his nostrils flaring at the sensual aroma of her need. It wrapped around his senses, holding him there, just a breath from the pink flesh of her cunt.

A small part of him cheered that he was free and urged with frenzied voice for him to tie her down in his place. To leave her here, find his brother and his men and run from this place before he could be captured or she could raise the alarm. Another part of him, a much larger part, demanded that he finish what was started between them. That he prove to her who was the dominant species in this or any world. It

wasn't just a matter of passion and pleasure, but one of might and right.

His right to be free, his ability to think and do for himself were being challenged. He could pick up a sword and fight her, but this battle of wills right here and now would be much more satisfying. She would mewl his name and beg him to end her torment. With a hard look at the soft golden body that trembled and writhed under him, he moved forward, his mouth finding her clit, his tongue tasting of her woman's dew, holding her down with hard hands when she tried to struggle away from him.

"W ... What do you...? Oh, stop, Trace. You must stop."

He heard her through a rushing fog of desire, the taste of her a heady draught of delight that befuddled his senses. The soft breathlessness of her voice tangled into the mix, leaving him lost in the sight and taste and sound of her.

Rayne felt his tongue swipe over delicate flesh that felt so empty now that he wasn't inside of her. She could feel the roughness of his whiskers against her sensitive inner thighs, the heat of his breath brushing over the smooth skin of her sex. His lips and teeth nibbled with erotic glee over her bare lips, his tongue dipping between to torment and taunt her clit with devastating effect. Her body bowed into an arch of desire, tight and torturously pleasurable, the coil in her belly drawing into itself as if to make it even more powerful.

"Trace," she growled with seductive huskiness. "End this torment. Fuck me," she ordered him, her voice catching and trailing off on a moan as he suckled the taut bud of her clit into his hot mouth.

Her hands pulled upon his head, trying to drag him up her body, her fingers catching in his dark hair that shone with hints of red a little brighter than that of his brother's. In response, he grabbed her wrists, holding them down to her sides, his calloused skin easily containing her slender wrists.

"R ... Release me, Trace," Rayne ordered, a slight flicker of unease distracting her from what his talented mouth was doing.

Trace lifted his head, her juices glistening on his cheeks and mouth. He smiled at her, dark and dangerous. "No," he said simply before returning to his feast of her flesh.

"What do you mean no?" She wiggled under him, pulling on her arms, kicking her long legs in an attempt to dislodge him.

He chuckled at her movements, slipping up her body and retaining hold of her wrists to take them in one hand above her head, staring down at her ineffective squirming with amusement. "I meant what I said, Rayne. No, I will not release you." His hand moved between their bodies and she once more felt him pushing inside of her. "How does it feel to be on the bottom, Rayne? Do you enjoy being helpless?" His voice was an insidious whisper in her ear as he thrust his body into hers with measured movements.

His cock felt huge inside of her, rubbing and pressing upon parts of her that responded with sharp bursts of pleasure. She struggled anyway, biting her lip to hold back groans, feeling his mouth settle around the taut peak of her breast, his teeth nipping at the hard brown nipple.

"Do you want to come before I tie you to the bed, Rayne? Or should I take my own pleasure and leave you here, naked, tied down, your body throbbing with need? It's such a hard choice to make," he hissed, grunting as he started pounding against her, feeling the beginning of his own orgasm. His free hand moved between her thighs, his finger finding her clit and slipping around the hard nodule until she cried out and he felt her body contract around him, her vaginal walls milking his cock as she climaxed.

The heat of him was overwhelming, the things he was doing to her body dragging any sense of reality from her passion fogged mind. She could feel his hand, his fingers stimulating her until it felt as if a huge knot of tension popped inside of her, hot waves of pleasure boiling out to flood her until her eyes fluttered shut. She screamed, twisting against him, her legs wrapped around his waist, her heels digging into the small of his back.

He felt as if he would explode, his seed boiling out of him, spurting into the heat of her cunt with spasms of joy almost too intense to be believed. His body jerked, his hand tightened around her wrists, holding her to the bed as he slammed into her one last time. And then he collapsed, his breathing ragged, his body heavy on top of her.

\* \* \* \*

A soft feminine giggle echoed through the loft of the huge barn that held the horses of Brindle Castle. The man who just entered through the big open doors of the barn crept stealthily along the hay strewn passage between the stalls,

ignoring the sleek heads of the huge horses that peeked out over the half doors, watching him with huge brown eyes. One nickered softly, blowing a greeting to him, and he ran a distracted hand over his soft nose, whispering quietly to the huge steed.

"Shh, don't let her know I'm here. She thinks she has me stumped this time," he said before continuing on his way. The huge ladder at the end of the aisle beckoned and he quietly climbed the sturdy wood, pulling himself through the narrow doorway at the top that led into the loft and peeking around to see if he could spot his prey.

She stood at one of the huge open windows in the loft, peeking around the corner of the frame as if to spot him outside. Her hair was down, flowing in thick black waves across her back to her hips still slender even after birthing five sons. Her waist was still as trim as it was that first night, when she had seduced him in his tub, until he forgot his vows to himself and took her to his bed.

He slipped quietly up behind her, his feet making barely any sound on the hay covered loft floor, reaching out and grabbing her around the waist, hauling her away from the open window and onto the huge pile of hay that lay against one corner. "I have you now, wench. Time to pay your due."

"Oh, no, good sir, please. My husband will find us and then he shall kill you and beat me to within an inch of my life. Please, sir, let me go with my honor intact." But even as she spoke words of mercy, her hands attacked the fastening of his clothing, eager to strip him bare.

"What think you, then, wench? That you would rip my clothes from my poor ungainly body?" Castor laughed, feeling her small hand finagle its way through the layers of his clothing and find the hard shaft of his cock. "He would find you ill mannered and whorish in means, lady if he could see what you do to me at this moment."

"And what of you, sir? What do you think your wife would say if she could see the ungentlemanly way you've been chasing me all afternoon?"

"Ah, that unkempt hag would probably thank you for distracting my amorous attentions from her beastly form." Castor ducked the hand that flew up at him, grabbing her wrist quickly to stop her from her flailing.

"Unkempt hag? Beastly form?" Jetta sputtered the words, struggling under him to try and buck him from her body. "Release me lout. Then you won't have to deal with my ugliness." A sullen pout emerged on her full lips, her blue eyes shooting daggers at him.

"Jetta, my love, you are the most beautiful of women. You shame any and all, even those half your age." He nuzzled her neck, breathing in the familiar scent that still had the ability to stir him even after all their years together. "I am in awe of your loveliness, my wife."

"You are a lucky man, my love. I'll forgive you, but only because I understand that, as a man, your intelligence lacks somewhat." She shouted with laughter as he rose and picked her up, twirling her around, continuing until she begged him to stop.

Only then did he drop back to the hay, coming to lie on top of her slender form, his lips finding hers and clinging.

Jetta wrapped his solid form in her arms, feeling that wonderful thrill of desire and passion that he roused in her so effortlessly. Her hands tugged on the shirt laces that crossed his chest, pulling them open until she could sneak her fingers in, loving the feel of his warm hard chest against her skin. She moved under him, her thighs spreading as his hands pushed at the length of her skirts, baring her long slender legs.

His fingers were warm. Their calloused strength sliding over her flesh had Jetta panting and begging for him. Her hands pulled at his clothing, yanking his shirt free of his breeches and letting her hands stroke under the fabric, over the heat of his hard stomach. He hadn't changed much in the many years since they had married and become Lord and Lady of Brindle Castle, the castle that Damien had taken from Lord Bryant. His body was just as hard, his cock still rising with the least provocation from her. And she thanked the Spirits for her blessings.

She felt his hand slip over the soft curve of her breast, pulling on her gown to bare her pebbled nipple to his hand and mouth. Her head tipped back as his lips left a trail of fiery warmth, slipping from her lips to the curve of her cheek and the line of her jaw. Down her neck and over her collarbone, he nibbled his way, listening to her moans and soft whispers of encouragement. Just as he was about to capture her nipple with his mouth, he stilled.



Lifting his head, he gently covered her with his dress, turning his head towards the open window where Jetta had been standing moments before. "Hello brother," he said quietly, pulling Jetta up with him.

Damien stepped from the window frame, golden trails of dust still sparkling around his somber form. "I need to speak with you, Castor."

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### Chapter Three

Castor stepped forward, worry upon his face. His brother had not looked like this since the day of Tia's death, that horrible day so many years before. Something was wrong, something serious.

"Is it Raven?"

Damien shook his head, thanking the blessing of the Spirits that it wasn't. "Ryder and Trace are missing. They went hunting four days past and disappeared. Brother, there is no sign of them, or their hunting party." He reached out his hand to his brother, sighing deeply when it was grasped and held tightly.

It had been up to him to be strong, to show no worry to Raven. She worried far too much. To add his to that would have made it unbearable. It hadn't been easy. Any touch between the two of them allowed her to see into him, to sense his feelings. But he'd managed to hold himself together for her. He didn't have to be as strong before his brother.

"So we will search for them. Knowing those two, they've probably gotten drunk and ended up in bed with a couple of wenches. Damien," he said, grasping his brother's shoulder with his other hand, "we will find them."

Jetta came and wrapped her arm around her brother-in-law's waist. "Don't worry, Damien. Those two of yours have always gotten in more trouble than my five combined." She grimaced as she felt his arm come around her, squeezing her slender waist tightly against him.

"Thank you, Jetta, Castor. Since Ryder's hawk came back to the castle without him, well, it's been a terrible strain on Raven."

Castor turned his head, knowledge showing in his brown eyes. It wasn't that it was a strain on Raven; Damien's pride and joy were those two boys. He remembered the day Trace was born, the light that had shone in Damien's eyes as he stared down at the small dark head, at the tiny bundle he held so easily in his arms. Damien was worried, this Castor knew, and he wouldn't rest until he found his sons.

Jetta took Damien's hand, pulling him forward. He let her lead him to the small hole that led to the main part of the barn, climbing down the ladder and then following her into the castle.

\* \* \* \*

Ryder glared at Katrina as she stood before him, her body clothed in a regal gown of light green that fluttered about her in the light breeze from the windows. Her fiery hair was coiled and pinned, a jeweled crown of light green gems glittering in the midst. More of the gems dangled from her ears and graced her slender throat, emphasizing the beauty of her neck and shoulders.

She was exquisite, and it made him furious.

"If you would but promise to behave, Ryder, I would leash you and take you with me tonight. You would make a regal consort," she said, her bare fingers brushing across his chest. The last thing in the world she wanted to do this evening was to go to the throne room, to be on display, in public so that

her people would know that she was performing her duties. Lost in thought, she continued to stroke Ryder's chest and stomach, her fingers finding the silky light hair that trailed below his navel.

Ryder squirmed, trying to pull away from her caressing hand. He hadn't forgiven himself or her for what she had done to him earlier; nor he had forgotten the pleasure he'd felt at her hands and mouth, bliss more profound than any he'd felt before. He hated her for it.

His eyes were icy with anger when Katrina finally seemed to shake off her distraction, her attention drawn to where she was finger combing the hair at his groin, brushing against his cock with the side of her fingers. It stirred to life, slowly growing harder, prompting a curse from between his lips.

Katrina glanced up, smiling at the cold look in his eyes, purposefully letting her hand close around the width of his cock. "Some parts of you aren't as reticent as others, my pet," she cooed, her tone just slightly patronizing. "I've had my seamstress make you garments, pet, showing my banner and brand. I've had the horse master sew his finest collar, fitted for your neck. You would look very fine with your leash in my hand, Ryder. Almost as fine as you will look seated upon the pillow at my feet."

"That will never happen, wench. I will never willingly consent to be your pet, to wear a collar and leash like some animal. I will never give myself to you without it being rape." His voice was filled with loathing, though some was directed at his own unruly lusts which had him hard and throbbing in her soft palm. "You might as well kill me now or let me and

my men go, for we will never quit trying to escape no matter what we have to do or who we have to kill to do it."

Katrina felt a secret thrill at his words. Ryder was strong willed, he was intelligent and handsome, and he was willful and disobedient. He was everything she'd always secretly wished. And he was everything she couldn't have now, not in her position of power. Her role as Princess demanded that she set examples.

With a small derisive smirk, she wondered what her retinue of advisors would think if they knew she yearned to let Ryder free from his bonds and to slip to her knees and beg him to take her with him, to take her to his world and make her his woman. She could see the shocked and disapproving looks upon their faces even in her mind's eye.

Ryder saw that smirk and his frown grew. He growled low in his throat wishing he could wrap his hands around her slender neck. His cock grew harder under her stroking fingers, despite everything he did to keep it flaccid and limp.

Katrina bent, her light green wisp of a gown gaping and giving him a wonderful view of the inner curve of her breasts. Her lips played over the head of his cock, sighing as she enjoyed the heady, masculine taste of his flesh. She'd cleaned him after their little foray into passion earlier, wiping away the sticky pudding and the sweat of the day. Now she tasted the flavor of his sex, letting her tongue swirl around him teasingly. With a tiny kiss to the tip of his cock, she pulled away, smiling up at him.

"I wish I could stay with you. Perhaps we might even manage to come to an understanding. But, alas, my duty to

my people must come before my own selfish pleasures." She sighed, realizing just how true her words were. "I shall return before too long, pet. While I am gone, you will be taken from the wall and given a proper bath and then readied for my return. Please try not to give the slaves too many problems, my pet. It would be just too bad of you and they would be forced to control you. That would not please me, not at all."

Ryder stared down at her, ignoring the attraction he felt and the amazing power her hand had held over his cock. Her mouth had been warm and wet and he'd almost protested when she'd pulled away. Now she was leaving, and for some reason that he couldn't understand he felt an urge to have her stay.

She sighed again, turning away from him to walk towards the door, feeling his dark eyes on her as she opened the heavy portal. She turned, giving him a last look. "If I see your brother there, I shall ask his mistress, my Commander of the Guards, if he has any messages for you."

Ryder opened his mouth, but she'd left already. He ground his teeth in frustration, both from his state of arousal and from knowing that his brother could be so close but still unreachable by him. He twisted against his bindings, opening wounds that had crusted closed, feeling the blood that flowed down his arm. The pain gave him a sort of savage release against the throbbing of his cock.

Struggling, he felt his right arm loosening and redoubled his efforts, cursing loudly at the stiff bindings. And then, success! His arm slipped free, the binding falling into pieces on the floor and he reached over, hurrying. He couldn't afford

to be caught by the slaves she was sending. He had to find clothing and weapons.

His other wrist was loosened and free in only seconds. Ryder took a moment to stretch out the kinks after having been tied for the past few days. His arms were stiff and his legs felt rubbery. His stomach grumbled and he couldn't help but wonder when the last time he'd actually eaten was. But none of that mattered now. He had to find his brother and escape from these women and their deluded and unnatural ways.

Staring around the room, he searched quickly for something he could use as a weapon, finding the clothing that Katrina had mentioned. He grudgingly put it on, knowing it would be necessary to travel through the palace. It was a large place with many rooms and he had no doubt that a naked man would be considered an oddity.

The tunic fit well, tight across his chest, the white material soft and comfortable. It was sleeveless; most likely due in part to the weather and the intense heat that he'd lived through that day. The breeches were strange, sliding up his legs in stretchy material that had no flap or bindings. Instead, it fit snugly, emphasizing every line of his body. It would have been embarrassing to wear except for the tunic overlapping it, coming just to the top of his thighs. He also found the collar she'd told him about. Walking to the window, he took pleasure in throwing it into a small pond he saw outside, knowing the water would rust the metal and ruin the leather.

Then he went to the door, peering out carefully. Seeing no one, he hurried out. Picking a direction, he took off at a fast pace.

\* \* \* \*

Raven stared as the glistening shimmers of gold coalesced into her husband and his brother. Jetta, Castor's wife, hung tightly to Castor's arm, her eyes closed against the tickling feeling of traveling the way Damien did. Raven sighed in pleasure as Damien came forward, taking her in his arms and holding her close, her head against his broad chest.

"Has there been any news?" he asked her, his voice grave.

"No, nothing yet, my husband. The patrols have come back but naught was found of their party. They have just disappeared." As she spoke, Raven let her senses free, chanting the rhythms of her people silently in her mind. She searched out his fears and his exhaustion, knowing she could do little for the first, but as for the latter...

"Raven," he started, his voice warning as he felt her mental fingers tickling at his tired muscles and exhausted morale. "You are too tired to be taking on my woes and cares."

"Hush," she said quietly, still chanting in her mind. She felt him tense against her and then relax, felt his sigh of relief as the strain lessened, leaving him able to think easier once more.

"My wife, I do not know what I would do without you." He leaned down to kiss her, then let her go and greet Castor and Jetta.



"Have you checked the portals, Damien? Perhaps they went exploring. You know those two boys are always fascinated by the goings on of other cultures and civilizations." Jetta hugged Raven, giving her a gentle smile. "If they went through one of the portals, wouldn't there be a way to tell?"

"Yes, the balance would be off if that many changed dimensions all at one time. It would cause a shift that would affect the portals ability. If one of the portals has been breached in such a way, we would be able to tell which one. But as for trying to get to them," he shrugged his broad shoulders. "It would be almost impossible to take a rescue party to find them."

"But you could try?" Raven asked, her hand upon his arm.

"Yes. Tomorrow we shall leave for the portals. Let us pray to the spirit's great blessing that those boys did not go through one."

\* \* \* \*

Ryder saw the woman coming toward him and cursed under his breath. She was golden and lovely, her eyes staring at him strangely as he stepped off to one side of the hallway to await her passing.

"You," she said, stopping to look at him. "Have you not been taught the proper way to greet your betters?"

Ryder glanced down, shaking his head slowly. She wore a golden girdle around her hips, a sword housed in a jeweled sheathed tucked in between the links. The sword would be

short for him, but it was better than what he had now, which was nothing.

"Answer me, man. You belong to the Princess. Why are you not leashed?"

He moved quickly, reaching for her with one hand, wrapping the other around the hilt of the sword and tugging it free of its sheath. It was razor sharp and shined in the brightness of the corridor as he held it to her throat.

"You dare much man, you must be the Princess's newest toy," she said calmly, even with the blade pressing against her skin.

"I am no one's toy. I am looking for my brother. Do you know where the chamber of the Master of the guard is?"  
Ryder, gripped her tighter, amazed at her calm.

"Of course, and you wish me to take you there so that you may release your brother so the two of you may flee our planet and go home, am I right?"

"Do you not know that I will use this sword that is begging to taste of your blood? Take me to my brother, wench. Now!"  
Her calm was unnerving. Being in the corridor, where any might see him, was also starting to strain his already fractured nerves. "Which way?" he asked.

"To the right," she answered calmly, moving in front of him as he held her at the point of her sword.

"If you lie to me or walk me into a trap, I shall skewer you, woman or no."

"I have no doubt of that," she said, a small smile twisting her lips. "It is down this corridor. The third set of doors will be Rayne's."

"Take me to them," he ordered, emphasizing the words with a small jab of the sword that drew just a tiny drop of blood.

She walked to the door, standing next to it and looking at him. "Do you wish for me to open them?" she asked, smiling up at him.

"Yes," he said, then stopped her when she went to fling them open. "But do it slowly. I want no surprises."

She pushed open the doors, walking between to take the sheer curtains draped across the entry and pull them back. Then she stood aside and let him walk into the room.

\* \* \* \*

Trace stared down at the beautiful woman who had just pleased him more than any he could remember. He held her wrists in one of his hands, his body weighing her down as he lay, still deeply embedded between her thighs. She'd been amazing, responsive, demanding, and so incredibly hot he felt scorched by the fire between them.

"Who are you?" he whispered, pushing aside a lock of her golden hair with his free hand.

"You know who I am, Trace. You've been chosen by me. You belong to me," she said simply.

"I belong to no one but myself, Rayne. I come from a world ruled by men, where women are treated as equals as long as they are deserving. I could not live in this world and be dominated by women."

She chuckled and he felt her move under him, her hips moving against him, drawing his still hard cock deeper inside

of her. "You will not be dominated by women, Trace. Just by me. I am your mistress, no other. Even the Princess Katrina would have to get my permission to use you if that was her wish."

Trace felt the fire leap to life in his loins once more, even though he'd just emptied himself into her. "Would you allow it?" he asked, and then regretted the words, for he wouldn't allow it. Nor would he be staying long enough to find out.

"I could make a great enemy of the Princess if it was her wish to use you for her own pleasure, my pet. But I do not think it will become an issue. She seems most taken with your brother." Even as she spoke, she moved slowly under him, pushing her feet flat against the bed to tilt her hips higher, undulating under him in ways that were slowly making him forget his wish to leave.

He dropped his head, his mouth finding hers, kissing her with a zeal that made her laugh wickedly. He captured that laugh with his lips, tasting of her passion, kissing her deeply as her tongue came to duel with his own.

"Let me loose," she whispered, pressing her breasts into his chest. "Let me give you pleasure, Trace."

She slipped her hand free of his grip, tangling it in his hair, feeling the silky strands slide like satin between her fingers. Her eyes locked upon his, amber gold to deep blue, feeling his will to leave her slip like sand through his fingers. She chuckled again as his mouth found her neck. She tipped her head back to allow him better access, enjoying the heat of his lips, the sharp bite of his teeth as they nipped the muscle at the joining of her throat and shoulder.

She pushed upon him and he rolled to his back, letting her astride him, his hands coming to her hips, grinding her against him with a growl of pleasure. She took his hands, moved them from her to his side, slipping free of his grip to torment him with her own pace.

His eyes closed as he savored the feel of her tight cunt wrapped around his cock, the wet friction sending shivers of incredible pleasure to gather and boil in his loins.

He was close already, this she knew. She leaned a little further over him, taking the heavy chain that she'd had made earlier in the day. He would go mad when he felt it on him. But there was no other choice. She would not allow him to go free. He would not leave her.

With as little noise as she could, covering what sounds couldn't be helped with her own moans of pleasure, she drew the chain to the small hasp in the collar that was around his neck. "Come for me," she murmured, feeling his hands once more on her hips. She fought back her own pleasure. She had to get the chain on him.

"Come for me, Trace," she whispered in his ear. "Fill my tiny cunt with your seed. Fill me until I can't take any more."

He groaned, his body thrashing against hers, holding her hips still as he thrust up into her. He was so close, so treacherously close to coming. And then he was there, jerking into her, his moans loud, his grunts covering the sound of the chain as his seed pulsed into her, as deep as possible, filling her with his come.

Rayne clicked closed the tiny lock that kept the chain tight to the collar, locking him to the head of the bed. A chain made of the strongest steel, embedded into the wall.

"What...?" Trace asked, his voice husky and bewildered.

Rayne pulled herself off him, feeling his seed drip down her thigh in heated trails. "I had no choice, Trace," she said, her hand touching his cheek for a single moment. "You gave me no choice."

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## Chapter Four

Trace bellowed with rage, his hands grasping the thin chain and yanking furiously. He felt betrayed, not only by Rayne but even more by his own body. "Loose this thing!" he shouted at her, bracing his feet against the wall to give himself even more leverage. "Free me, now!"

"Pet, calm yourself," Rayne soothed, watching in amazement as his body went rigid, his muscles bulging as he fought the trappings of her capture. "You do nothing but harm yourself with your struggles."

He ignored her, rattling the chain, yanking against it, throwing his whole body into freeing himself. He felt the leather cutting into his neck but his rage was total and enflaming. He didn't care if he had to tear this place apart. He would be free of this chain.

"You leave me no choice," Rayne said slowly, sadly, slipping in behind him with the needle held tightly in her hand. With a quick, deft move, she pricked him with the dipped barb, backing away before he could think to grab her.

The medicine would work quickly, or at least it did with the men of the castle. It would calm him, soothe his frayed nerves. It also had the side effect of enhancing his libido, enflaming his need for sex. She just had to wait for it to work. Standing back, she watched her new pet as the drug started to make its way into his body, saw as his muscles relaxed and his hands dropped off the chain. He turned toward her, his blue eyes softening. Then he smiled.

Rayne felt her knees weaken under that smile, those lush lips framed by a few days worth of whiskers parting, white even teeth gleaming in the half light of the room. His eyes roamed over her naked form, flitting from her face to her breasts, down to the naked mound of her sex, taking in the glistening mixture of their spendings that was drying on her thighs.

He held his hand out to her. "Come to me, Rayne," he said so softly, his voice a husky rumble. "Come to me and let me love you."

She eyed that hand as she would a snake, untrusting of it not to attack. Turning her back, she slid the needle back into its protective pouch. She heard the chain rattle as he got off the bed, though it didn't allow him to go far.

"Please Rayne," he begged, softly, sweetly, his cock standing proudly from his body, stained with the same mixture of their fluids. "Please, I want to touch you."

"I hated to do this, pet," she sighed, disgusted. "I hope you understand that when the drug leaves your body."

"It matters not," he said, shrugging, his hand sliding around his cock, slowly stroking it. "Please, little one, come to me now, and let me make love to you."

"Lie on the bed."

He instantly did as he was told, his mind fuzzy, the urge to escape from her all but gone. He had one thought now, one desperate need that filled his mind beyond all else. He had to have her. "Please, Rayne," he pleaded. "I love you, come to me."



"You may not touch me," she ordered, slowly slipping onto the mattress next to him, her hands sliding up over his chest to his arms, carefully slipping each wrist back inside the leather binding and tightening them down.

"Anything," he hissed, feeling the warmth and wetness of her cunt as she straddled him. His cock had never felt so hard, he had never known such need as he did now, for her. It had to be love. "Fuck me, little one. Take my cock into your wet cunt and fuck me now," he commanded, the husky edge to his voice sending a thrill of heat through her.

"Trace," she said softly, holding his face between her hands, forcing his eyes to look into her own. "You are a warrior and a warrior stands by his word, does he not?"

"Yes," he hissed, his hips arching in desperate need to find the sweetness of her cunt.

"Then you must give me your word that you will not leave me when the potion's effects wear off. Promise me this, on your word as a warrior of your people and I will show you pleasure unlike any you've seen before." Her golden eyes stared deeply into his blue, stroking her hand over the whiskered roughness of his chin.

Trace groaned, for even in his passion befuddled state, he knew he should not make such a vow. "I ... cannot," he hissed, his cock aching with need. He felt as if his balls would explode, for his seed boiled deeply there. His hips jerked, they moved as if he had her around his hard cock even now.

"You can, love." Rayne slipped down his body, her wetness tracing over his cock for just a single moment before sliding further down, trapping that hard member between their

bodies. She could feel him rubbing against her, pressing into the flesh of her stomach as he writhed with the effects of the drug. "It takes but two words," she sighed, looking up at him through the veil of her lashes, her amber eyes glowing, coaxing him to say the words.

His legs moved, trying to snare her body between the muscled columns of thighs honed by years of riding and his father's demanding training. She easily slid free, coming to kneel next to his loins, her eyes on the turgid stiffness of his lusty cock.

"Two words," she said again, the heat of her breath blowing like a gentle breeze against the head of his cock. "Say them, my pet, and I will prove to you that your time here will be more than rewarding."

His hips jerked as he fought the drug, fought the allure that she cast and the dangerous seduction she practiced. Trace strained against the temptation of her golden form, the sleekness of her skin, the lush ripeness of her lips. He turned his head, his teeth gnawing into his lip, blood flowing as he tried to resist her charms.

"I must not," he groaned. "My brother, he depends upon me. My parents will grow ill from worry, my father will never give up looking for us. There is nothing that can keep me here," he growled, feeling her breath once more as a gentle caress across his glans, circling the ridge with a warm touch. "Spirits help me. What you wish is beyond what is mine to give."

"I will get my way, Trace," she purred, moving a little closer, her face almost rubbing against the long length of his

shaft. "I will have your promise." Her hand slid to his stomach, resting just above the thick mat of hair at his groin. She traced tiny circles against that sensitive skin, once more blowing a soft stream of air across his cock.

Trace moaned. He tried to shift away, but his restraints held him immobile. His eyes closed, unable to bear the sight of that luscious golden body that was crouched so close to his throbbing form. He wanted her hand on his cock; he wanted her lush lips surrounding it, sucking him into the delicious sin of her mouth. He needed to come. It was a blazing pain in his body, an ache that grew steadily worse until he wanted to curl up from the defiant throbbing in his groin.

"Please," he heard himself say, his voice begging for relief. "Ask of me anything but that, for it is the one thing I must not do."

"But it is the one thing that I must have, pet," she moaned, using the tip of her tongue to trace the long length of his shaft. "I must know that you will stay by my side no matter what."

His back arched, his feet flattened against the bed, pushing his hips up, desperate for the friction that would bring him peace. He heard a soft keening sound and realized with shock that it was coming from him, for his body was in flames, and only she could put it out.

"You are a daemon!" he cried, his thighs flexing as if he could somehow bring himself to pleasure. His hands twisted in the tight leather that bound him to the bed, fresh blood pouring from the wounds that he reopened.

"I am a woman, and your master," she answered, sliding her hand around his cock, but keeping her fingers open, denying him what he begged for. "It is an easy thing, Trace."

"I will be giving away my freedom, giving away my right of choice, giving away my life to become nothing more than your sex slave," he snarled, his eyes turning to her, flames of blue ice flickering in their depths. "I shall hate you, Rayne. Is that what you wish?"

"You will not hate me, pet. It is a simple thing for a man to do, and one that he must to survive on this planet. An unclaimed male has no one to protect him. Any woman might do as she wishes with him. Not all on this planet are as civilized as we'd like them to be." She closed her hand, squeezing gently, hearing his curse when she opened it again.

She let her lips purse, kissing the tip of his glans. She laughed when his hips moved, causing his cock to bump into her lips. Slowly she slid him inside, sliding her head down until she could feel him against the back of her throat, her tongue slipping around his shaft and tasting the musty flavor of herself on his skin. She suckled lovingly, but only for a moment, refusing him the release she knew he needed.

"You but hurt yourself, love, and deny me that which is mine by right of capture. Two words, pet. Say them and I will end your agony." Her voice was soft; it was sultry, wrapping around him like a silken touch.

He heard himself speak then, heard the words that came from his mouth. In recognition he let loose a bellow of rage. "NO!"

"It is done," Rayne whispered, her hand clasping his shaft as she looked up at him. "You have given your word as a warrior that you will stay by my side until I release you of your obligation." She smiled ruefully up at him. "It won't be so bad, pet. You shall be pampered and spoiled. I shall have to be cautious though. I do not wish the others to become jealous of my infatuation for you."

Trace heard not a word she said, lost in the pleasure of her sweet hand on his cock. Even his misery, the feeling of betrayal and hatred came second to the sweet relief of finally feeling her against him. His body moved with a will of its own, his hips jerking against that stroking hand, using her to sate the insane arousal in his body.

Rayne watched, feeling his cock swell under her hand, knowing he was in beyond her words for the moment. She hated what she'd just done, but it had been necessary. No mortal man could survive the dangers upon her world without a woman to protect them. If Trace had made good his escape, he would have lived only long enough to become one more casualty.

He grunted with every long stroke of her hand. He growled, his head thrown back, his mouth opening as the pleasure built in his loins, the ache for release growing until it was all he could imagine. "Faster," he begged, his voice a jumble of emotions.

She complied, her own breathing quickening from watching him like this, so wild and untamed under her hands. It was arousing her own lusts, ones she'd thought sated.

"Yes, pet," she murmured, leaning over his straining body, her mouth sliding down upon his member.

Trace roared as the wet, hot suction of her mouth took him over that knife edge of passion. His body clenched, his muscles locking as his balls emptied, spewing his hot seed into her mouth. She took it all, slurping and slathering his still hard cock with her tongue, seeking out every last bit of his passion. He couldn't breathe, for the ecstasy held him in thrall, his body rigid until that last spurt of semen left his cock.

Then he collapsed, his chest heaving, his body covered in sweat. He hissed as her tongue continued to stroke over his still hard cock, pressing against the sensitive glans. He closed his eyes, unable to look at her, knowing her eyes would be triumphant.

He'd betrayed his people, his parents, and his brother. He'd done the one thing unthinkable in his world. He'd willingly made himself a slave to a woman. Hatred built inside of him, for she had tricked him; but even so, he had given his word and it was binding.

"Is it so bad to be mine?" he heard her ask, her hand sliding up his stomach and over his chest to his chin.

He turned his head, his eyes blazing with the loathing he felt both for her and himself. "I have bound myself to you, woman. Never expect that I will make it easy for you, though. I might be forced to stay on this Spirit-forsaken rock you call home but never will I willingly come to you of my own volition. You shall have to rape me, each and every time you take me."

He watched as her face grew hard under his words, as the gold of her eyes, once soft with passion and desire turned brittle and glittered with anger. "Do not make promises that you might not be able to keep, pet," she growled, seeing his eyes suddenly shift as the drug once more heated his body. "Soon you will be begging me again. Would you rather I leave you here to suffer the results of your body's desire?" She trailed her fingers over his chest, her nails scraping across his nipples, tormenting him.

"You bitch," he growled, struggling against the restraints that held him captive. "Loose me from these straps and I shall attend to myself." The thought of masturbation was abhorrent to him, to any warrior worthy of the word. Spilling his seed onto the ground or onto himself was thought of as a sin, done by men too weak to tame a wench to hand.

"Now where would be my fun in that?" Rayne whispered, crawling up his body, letting hers rest provocatively against his, her breasts flattened to his chest, hard nipples burrowing their heat and texture against his skin. He growled again, his eyes fierce and wild, his body bucking under her light weight. "That's it, my mighty warrior, prove your mettle, but know that I am your master."

Trace felt her body against his and felt his cock spring to life once more, blood rushing to engorge that traitorous piece of flesh and sending it to an aching hardness that had him writhing in seconds. "Fuck," he snarled, feeling the flames of the drug ensnaring his senses once more, until all he could do was think of the woman's body that lay so temptingly atop of him.

"Do you want me?" she asked him, her lips against his throat.

"I want a cunt on my cock, wench," he growled, the crudeness of his words uttered purposefully. "Yours will do."

She bit down on the heavy muscle of his throat, hearing his rumbling anger as she suckled upon his flesh. "You'll regret saying that," she snarled. "One day, my life will be more important to you than your own."

"It will never happen." His voice was defiant but there was a tremor of need in it that made her lift her head.

A thin film of sweat lay over his face, his skin pale under the tan that he sported. His eyes were fiery, his need already fierce enough to have him shaking. A twinge of guilt sent her sliding down his tensed body, her sex finding the head of his cock and engulfing him in her heat.

His groan of pleasure dropped his head back against the softness of the pillows under him, the tightness of her cunt around his turgid flesh stroking the fires of his desire. He felt her shift over him, riding him, taking him deep inside the sweetness of her body.

"Look at me," she cried out, eager to see his eyes, to see that he knew his master. "See who rides you like the fine stallion that you are. Know you are mine, Trace, that you belong to General Rayne, first General to Princess Katrina."

Trace thrust himself inside of her, unable to stop the movements of his body. His head was shaking, his hair tossing against the pillow as he silently denied her claim. He was almost beyond thought, the drug in his system forcing his heart to race, his skin to prickle with heat. "I belong to no



woman," he growled. "My oath binds me to your side but you shall not be my master."

She stilled her movements, her eyes staring down at him. She could see the truth of his words there, the loathing he felt for her and for himself. Annoyance at his stubbornness flooded her being even as he still thrust against her.

Trace felt her still and bared his teeth like an animal, for he needed her now, needed the comfort of her cunt, the heat and sweet friction of her body to take away the cursed affects of the blasted drug. His body clenched beneath her, his muscles burning with the strain of his movements as he sought to force her to give him what he needed. "No, damn you wench. Fuck me," he demanded his voice hoarse.

There was a commotion, a sound of a door being thrown open and Rayne pulled herself off her new slave, turning to greet the woman who pushed aside the draperies. "What is the meaning of this?" she demanded, ever mindful of the twisting body of the man behind her.

"I am sorry, General Rayne, but Princess Katrina's new consort has requested a meeting with his brother," Glenna said, her hand indicating the man that appeared behind her, the sword in his hand resting against her back.

"Trace!" Ryder called, his joy at finding his brother alive swiftly replaced by concern. "What is wrong with him? What have you done to him, wench?" His eyes, so like his brother's, were drawn to the bed where his brother lay, naked but for the cuffs and collar that bound him to it. He writhed as if stretched upon the fires of hell, his moans and groans of pain loud in the room.

"He is fine," Rayne said, waving away his concern. "You, on the other hand, are committing a crime punishable by an afternoon spread eagle in the gardens. Give up the sword, slave, and save yourself any more punishment."

"No. Let my brother loose and we shall leave this place," Ryder ordered her, pushing the point of the sword so that it pricked the woman's skin. He felt a moment's admiration as she never moved, even as the tip bit into her body.

Somewhere, deep inside the wide castle, the deep tones of a bell rang out. Ryder glanced behind him, quickly returning his eyes to the naked woman who had been rutting atop of his brother. "Let him go!" he ordered again.

"It is too late, Ryder, son of Damien of Daring Castle. Your escape has been noticed, the alarms have been sounded. There is no way you will escape from here." Rayne held her hands out in front of her, speaking with a soothing calm, as if talking to a spooked horse. "There is no way out now, even if your brother was free of his oath and could accompany you."

"What oath? What nonsense do you speak, woman? My brother would make no oath to remain on a world as depraved as this." Ryder pushed the other woman forward, walking sideways behind her, finally coming to stand between the two women and the bed where Trace lay. He laid his hand upon his brother's shoulder, jerking it back quickly as he felt the scorching heat of his skin. "He is ill. What poison have you given him that caused this fever?"

"No poison, a simple soothing draught," Rayne answered, her eyes narrowing as she heard the rapid approach of footsteps outside in the corridor. "They come, Ryder. I know

of Princess Katrina's infatuation with you, it will hurt her terribly if she is forced to sentence you to a punishment that will cause you harm. For her sake, if not for your brother's, return Glenna her sword and prostrate yourself before us."

Trace opened his eyes, his body on fire, his need a huge terrible gnawing in his gut. He saw the man standing over him, his eyes narrowing in his lust induced fever, finally recognizing his brother in the strange garments. "Ryder?" he moaned, his voice a hoarse rumble.

"Yes, Trace, I am here. We are leaving this place." He touched his brother's arm again, trying to calm him as he sought to reach his bindings.

"I ... I cannot," Trace groaned. "I ... gave my oath. You must go," he said hurriedly, feeling the power of the potion flowing through his body. "Go home. Run, now!"

"I did not lie, by his own words he has spoken of the oath he gave. Now quickly, before they come in here, give Glenna her sword!" Rayne took a step forward, her eyes on Trace's writhing form. He needed relief quickly or he would go mad with lust.

Ryder glanced at the door, the footsteps coming ever closer. Indecision stayed his hand even as he longed to reach for his brother once more. If Trace was telling the truth, he would be betraying the oath of warrior if he forced him to leave. Could he do that to his own kin?

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## Chapter Five

Ryder stared at his brother, seeing the pain and humiliation upon his face. "I ... I cannot leave you this way, brother." He reached for Trace's bindings again, hearing his brother's curse.

"For the sake of the Spirit's, little brother, you must go. Leave me!" Trace ordered, but there was a note of begging in his voice under the pain of the potion.

Rayne slipped the needle into her hand once more, slowly creeping up on the distracted Ryder. She was almost close enough to strike when he turned quickly, the blade of the sword he carried pointing to her throat.

"I do not think I wish to share his fate if what you have in your hand is the cause of his illness." Ryder pushed Rayne back, using the tip of the blade to urge her away.

"No! Ryder, do not hurt her," Trace yelled before he could stop himself.

The suddenness of his shout, the words that he spoke, shocked the drugged man. Why he should care what happened to the wench was beyond him, but he did. He did and he cursed himself for it. "Just go, Ryder, before you are found."

"I cannot let him go, pet," Rayne interjected, her hands held up in front of her. "My Princess has gone to a great deal of trouble to attain him. If I just let him leave this way, she will not be pleased."

Ryder stared at the slender naked woman, her air of bravado amazing him. "What do you plan to do to stop me, wench?" he asked her, forcing her back a little further with the end of his sword.

"Whatever is necessary," she answered, shrugging her shoulders and causing her firm breasts to jiggle on her slender frame. "It would go easier if you would surrender to me, give Glenna back her sword and make your apologies to your mistress."

"Are you crazed?" Ryder stared at her. He couldn't help but admire the gumption she showed, or the lovely female attributes her lack of attire displayed. He could almost understand Trace's attitude and his desire not to see the exquisite General hurt.

Rayne stepped forward, the prick of the sword on her skin not even generating a flinch. With the side of her hand, she knocked the sword to the side, stepping under the blade as he brought it back around. Her hand slipped forward, the needle sinking into the muscle of his thigh.

Ryder cursed, his voice growing quickly fuzzy as he stepped out of her way. The sword dropped from his suddenly lax fingers, his blood growing hot, his cock stiffening in the too tight breeches. "What have you done to me, wench?" he growled.

"Get the pole and take him back to the Princess's quarters. I will find Katrina and let her know what has occurred." She gave Glenna a studied glance. "You will not expect retribution for this man's incorrigible behavior?"

"Princess Katrina has my complete support," Glenna said, taking up her sword and grabbing Ryder's arms in her hands. "I wish no retribution, nor reward for returning her property to her."

Rayne bowed her head slightly, accepting the loyalty of the guard with grace. "Go then. Make sure he is well secured, for the drug will have him wild and these men are stronger than we give them credit." She went to a small desk set into one of the thick white walls, pulling open a small drawer. Withdrawing a fine tipped quill, she dipped it into a small pot of ink and began writing on a sheet of paper.

When she finished, she blew carefully on the drying ink, then rolled the paper into a scroll, tying it closed with a small black ribbon engraved with her colors of gold and red. She called one of the castle men, sending him to the Royal court with the note.

Turning from the door, she watched her new pet for a moment, knowing that he was reaching the point where touch would be painful. "Why, Trace? Why did you stop your brother from hurting me?"

He groaned, his eyes glazed with painful need. His hands opened and closed, writhing against the bonds that held him to the bed. "Please," he begged, his face turning red as his need grew to the point of desperation.

Coming to him, she settled next to him on the low bed, careful to not touch him in anyway that would cause him more pain. Leaning over him, she took the head of his cock in her mouth, suckling on the incredibly sensitive glans.

Trace thrust into her mouth, his lust turned into a raging pain that wouldn't stop. Rayne allowed the movements, drawing him deeper, letting him feel just a hint of the sharp edge of her teeth along the length of his shaft.

Within minutes, he was spewing his hot seed into her mouth, his body jerking under the painful pleasure, his ass clenched as he tried to go deeper into her throat. He roared, the sound echoing from the walls in the large room, his climax leaving him breathless and half dazed.

When he settled, jerking away from her mouth, Rayne sat back, her golden eyes glowing with pleasure. She wiped the corners of her mouth with a delicate movement of her fingers, trailing her other hand across his sweat slicked chest.

"Better?" she asked softly, knowing from experience that this drug would cause his body to be sensitive to all stimuli.

"Y ... yes," he managed to say. "Is it over?"

"I am afraid not, pet, but I won't let you get to that level of desperation again." She smiled, leaning over him and licking up the salty taste of his sweat. "Why did you stop him?" she asked again, crossing her hands over his chest and resting her chin in them.

"I did not want to see him punished any further," Trace said hurriedly, the lie coming easily to his lips. For in truth, he didn't know why he'd stopped Ryder, only that he didn't want to see her hurt.

"If you'd let him kill me, then you would have been freed of your oath," she said slowly. "There must be more to it than that."

Trace stared at her, his eyes inscrutable. He was already feeling the renewed effects of the potion she'd injected him with and he could only wonder how his brother was handling the same drugs. His blood felt as if it were surging inside his veins, his heart pumping hard and painfully inside his chest. His cock rose again, pressing insistently against Rayne's thigh.

She looked down as she felt it nudging against her, throbbing already. Looking back into his eyes, she slowly licked her lips, making him groan. Then she settled astride his loins, holding his long hard cock in her palm, slowly sitting on him, feeling it stretch the delicate flesh of her cunt.

"Hmm," she moaned, beginning to move over him, keeping her strokes long and slow. "You feel so much better than any of my other pets."

Trace, despite the haze of lust that was beginning to cloud his mind, heard her words. They sent a sudden jolt of rage and jealousy through him. "How many?" he growled, his blue eyes shining like ice.

"What?" Rayne ground her body against him, feeling the wiry curls at his groin rubbing with such wonderful delicacy against the hard flesh of her clit.

"How many pets do you have?" he snarled, thrusting against her.

Rayne frowned, hearing the jealousy in his voice. Men should not be so territorial when it came to their mistresses, nor so angry about having to share their attention. She leaned down, nuzzling his neck with her nose and breathing in



his earthy scent. "It matters not, pet," she moaned into his ear, biting delicately on his lobe.

"I don't share," he growled. "If you wish to fuck me, you will not be fucking anyone else. Otherwise, I will do everything in my power to make sure that you will get no reaction at all from my body."

Rayne's eyebrows raised, a smile gracing her lovely face. "It is not for you to decide who I favor with my attentions, pet."

His hands fought the leather manacles wrapped so tightly around them, his blood staining the leather and the sheets under them. "Unbind me," he growled.

Rayne stared into his eyes before reaching above his head, her breasts pressing against his face as she undid the leather ties that held him still. She gasped as his lips captured one proud nipple, suckling it into the heat of his mouth, nursing upon her with an intensity that sent tugs of pleased spasms to her clit. It distracted her, causing her hips to surge with renewed vigor against his writhing loins.

"Yes, pet, pleasure me," she moaned, her husky voice triggering a response deep inside of Trace. He felt a warmth shift over him, a tingling that brought to mind his father's powers. It startled him and he stared down at his chest, seeing a sheen of sparkling gold, like that which accompanied his father's transportations. Was his power growing?

Her lusty growl distracted him, the wild, sensual sway of her body as she fucked him causing his eyes to linger upon her, forgetting for the moment everything else. "Release me,

Rayne. I want to touch you," he urged, his voice rumbling with desire.

Thoughts of how his hands felt upon her sent her over the edge and she climaxed on his straining cock, clenching down, muscles fluttering with the spasms of joy. Her head fell back, her hair swirling around her lovely form as she cried out her pleasure.

Then he felt her fall to his chest, her fingers trailing up his arms once more, reaching the bindings and once more releasing him. He grabbed her waist, throwing her off him, only to follow her quickly, bringing her to her hands and knees on the low bed. Sliding in behind her, he grasped her hips, thrusting with long hard strokes into her wet cunt.

In no longer than a breath's span he was loosing his seed within her once more, his body clenched in agonizing pleasure. With a heavy sigh, he fell to his side upon the bed, his sensitive cock leaving the warm depths of her body, his chest heaving as he tried desperately to catch his breath.

Rayne snuggled against him, her eyes closing. She knew what he was feeling for she'd seen it before, though none of the men of her planet had ever handled the drug this well. Most would be crying and begging for release from the unbearable desire, petulant and whining between bouts of need. But not her new pet. His body was honed and tight as any of the warrior women she had in her service, his cock well up to the task of pleasing her completely.

She was very happy with her reward and she would keep him, no matter who tried to take him from her. When she heard the change in his breathing, heard his pained groan,

she turned to him once more, eager for more of her barbarian.

\* \* \* \*

Katrina stared at the scroll in her hands, feeling an itch of worry. Rayne was to have been at the dinner tonight. Her absence and this scroll meant that something untoward was happening. Slitting the small ribbon with her dagger, she quickly unrolled the paper and read the words penned there.

She read them twice, silently cursing, though outwardly she showed no sign of her emotions. Holding the scroll to one of the candles upon the low slung table set before her, she waited for it to catch, then placed it on the empty plate in front of her, watching it burn.

Rising caused all present in the huge room to rise with her, the men prostrating themselves next to their mistresses. One man moved too slow for his tawny haired mistress and was slapped down harshly. Katrina's eyes narrowed at the woman, for she hated these small and petty punishments given at the least little infraction.

"Princess?"

With barely a sign of a pause, Katrina turned and faced one of the oldest of her advisors. "Yes Miriam, what is it?"

"Is there trouble?" the advisor asked, glancing down at the ash that had been Rayne's note.

"None that concerns the council or my court," Katrina said. "I must retire early this evening. Please continue the feast. Any who wished to speak to me on matters of import may

join me tomorrow in the late morning. Otherwise, I wish to not be disturbed this evening."

Miriam nodded her head, though her eyes showed her displeasure at her young Princess's determination to leave the event. "I shall arrange a late morning meal for all who wish it, Princess. Good evening to you."

Katrina nodded her head, turning away from the assembled court, feeling their eyes on her back. She knew that not all those eyes were supportive and true to her. Those who'd followed her sister and the ways she employed were unhappy about Katrina's reign. Some considered her weak, too weak to rule her people the way that they needed. Some thought her too young, though she was the same age as her sister had been when her mother died.

She nodded at the man who held open the door for her, quickly slipping through and striding with a purposeful gate towards her own apartments.

Ryder must be going through hell by now. The potion would have him beyond thought with only one driving desire, to spill his seed by whatever means necessary. A thrill of fearful desire curled in her belly. Tonight she would lose the veil of her innocence to the one man she'd decided was worthy of that great honor. She only hoped he wouldn't be too far gone in the drug to understand what she was bestowing upon him.

She'd kept her virginity past the age when most women would be owners of at least one pet if not more. But she'd hated the idea of owning another human, even if it was for their own safety. But Ryder, just the thought of how he'd

looked against her wall, his muscles bunching and straining with power as he'd tried to pull free, to get away from her. Oh, he was more than what she could have possibly hoped.

Now that he was feeling the full effects of the draught, she could just imagine what he would be like. She hurried her step, reaching her door and nodding at the two women who stood guard. "You may go," she said, dropping her hand on each one's shoulder for a second. "My thanks to both of you for your loyalty."

In her room, Ryder lay upon the wide bed, his body twisting in an unholy, unbelievable sea of sexual agony, his cock so hard he thought it would burst. He writhed, barely recognizing the bands of leather that held his arms to the bed, his body searching for anything that would give him relief. He didn't hear her enter the room, his agony too extreme.

But she saw him, his dark hair damp and curling around his face and shoulders, his body shining with a layer of sweat caused by his painful arousal. His muscles were standing out in etched detail, glowing golden in the light of the candles. He moaned, his pain palpable to the woman standing in the door watching him.

"Ryder," she sighed, her heart heavy. She hadn't wanted to see him like this, hadn't wanted it to come down to this at all. But he'd left Rayne no choice, or at least that is what she penned in her note. Katrina would ask questions later. Right now, all she could think of was to give him some respite.

She tugged at the laces of her soft green gown, pulling it loose and letting it float to the floor, where it lay in a puddle

of silky fabric. Her jewels were carelessly tossed onto the table, left to glitter in the light of the candle. Pulling the pins from her hair, she dropped them to the floor, her thick tresses spilling around her, fiery red against her tawny skin. She crouched on the bed, careful not to touch him.

"Ryder," she said softly, waiting until his eyes met hers. "I am sorry this came to be. I will try to make it easy on you, but you must be punished for trying to leave me that way."

"Fuck me," he growled, not giving any hint that he'd understood her words. "Ride my cock, wench."

"Oh no, no, no," she whispered. "I won't even try that yet, not until you have more control." She reached out, wrapping her tiny hand around his cock, squeezing the throbbing flesh and stroking it hard.

Ryder threw his head back and roared at her touch, his seed pouring from the head of his cock, spurting into the air to hit his chest and stomach, coating her hand in its thick, creamy juice.

\* \* \* \*

Jetta stared at her husband's back as he rode ahead of their party, silently admiring his handsome form upon the horse. This was their second day upon the road that led to the portals, a trip that had to be made on horses. Not even Damien was strong enough to transport them all magically.

Lord Damien had tried to make Raven and Jetta stay behind in Daring Castle to wait upon their return, but neither woman would hear of it, both demanding to be taken along. Jetta was actually excited, for this was her first trip to those

magical portals and she was anxious to see if the stories she'd heard were true.

The terrain they rode across had changed from the lush and fertile lands surrounding the castle to thick forests and then to desolate areas of dirt and rock where nothing would grow. The temperature changed as well, from the coolness of the northern lands to the heat and arid baking winds of the lands near the portals. It caused everyone's temper to grow foul. She'd even heard Raven snarl at Damien, something that never happened.

"We shall be there soon, my love," Castor said, reining his horse in to ride next to her. "It is good, for tempers become worse the closer we get to those magical doorways. Damien says it has something to do with the magicks that are in this place. To stay too long could drive one mad."

"I've noticed," Jetta said, showing him her long slender arm, crawling with goose flesh. "I feel chilled even in this heat," she said, shivering.

"You didn't need to come, my love," Castor reminded her, reaching out his big strong hand to run over her skin, warming her with his touch.

"I wanted to see the doorways. I've been told what strange things may be viewed just watching from the outside." She smiled up at her husband, looking a little wistful. "I've always wondered what happened with Adrianna and Kaden and want to see the land where they now live."

"That might be possible, my love. We must wait and see what we can find out about Ryder and Trace first. If we find out where they've been taken, we will send you and Raven

back to the castle with a guard and then Damien and I shall go after them." Castor smiled down at his slender wife, reaching out to brush a strand of thick black hair from her face.

"We shall see, my love. I make no promises." She smiled, leaning her head against the hand that cupped her cheek.

"Damien," Raven said softly, for only her husband to hear. "Do you think we shall find that they have crossed the portals into another world?"

Damien leaned across the small space separating them, squeezing his wife's hand. "If we do, then we go after them. It is that simple, love."

"But they know better than to disturb the fragile energy of the portals. It could cause devastating effects upon both worlds." Raven turned worried eyes to her husband. He'd always seemed larger than life to her, more powerful than any god or spirit to whom she'd ever prayed. Now he seemed like a normal father, trying to ease her mind despite his being fraught with worry.

"They might have had little choice, love. But worry not, we shall find them and set all to right." Damien didn't tell her that he could feel the flux in the magic that surrounded him. He could tell that a party had come through here, a party of people not of their kind. He could feel that they had taken his sons back with them. He just didn't know who.

\* \* \* \*

Katrina slowly released Ryder's throbbing prick, her eyes on the mess of pearlescent come that was on her hand and



on his chest and stomach. Her fingers touched the warm goo, slid through its somewhat slimy texture, raising her wet fingers to her lips.

Ryder's eyes opened and he watched as Katrina, her body bare to his avid and lustful gaze, let her tongue peep from between her lush lips, tasting his seed from the tips of her fingers. He moaned at the sight, feeling his cock harden again almost immediately. "What is this drug your bitch general gave me?" he growled, startling Katrina.

"It is a soother," she said calmly, trying to still the racing of her heart. She could feel her wetness between her thighs and knew that the sight of him ejaculating had turned her on more than she thought possible. "It won't hurt you physically, though the side effects can be tiring. It wouldn't have been necessary for General Rayne to do such to you if you hadn't tried to escape, my pet."

"You should have known that I would try. You say you know me, that you know my parents and what our life is like at home. Then you know that neither Trace nor I will ever stand to wear a collar or to be some woman's sex slave." He moaned, his body slowly catching fire, his cock standing smartly even as he sought to force it back down.

"Will you let me help you through this night?" she asked him, ignoring his words. They weren't what she wanted to hear from him. "Will you let me use my hands and my mouth, my b ... body to take away the pain?"

Ryder heard her stumble over the word, his keen blue eyes, hazy with the dregs of desire, staring at her. "How long?" he growled.

"How long will it take before the potion is no longer in your system?"

He nodded.

"It could be an hour or it could be all night, no one can predict. The drug strikes every man differently. You feel it again, do you not?"

He nodded again, feeling the urge to move, to roll and find something to rub against.

"I wish to help you, Ryder, though I should leave you to this punishment for trying to escape. But I find I cannot, not now. I will help you if you will help me."

"Help you how?" he groaned, his hips arching helplessly.

She bit her lip, tempted to just reach for him, to drive him over the edge and into release with her hand once more, to put off this conversation that she didn't wish to have. If it were found out that the Princess was still a virgin, she would lose the respect of her people. "I ... I wish you to take my virginity," she blurted. "What say you?"

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## Chapter Six

Ryder fought the insane urges of his body, the fire that felt as if it would burn his soul to a charred ember. He cringed against the feel of the sheet under him, his skin too sensitive to handle even the softest of touches. All he could think about was the fire in his loins, the burning pressure that demanded to be assuaged. Without realizing it, he pulled at his bonds, the muscles in his arms and shoulders straining and standing out in slick relief.

Katrina watched the turquoise of his eyes darken to almost black, the pain of his arousal all the more apparent in them. His breathing was harsh, his chest heaving with the effort to fill his lungs. His cock was huge, swollen and weeping large clear drops as his hips strained upward and off the bed, humping at the air.

She pressed down on his heavily muscled stomach, her lips parting, her mouth moving over the thick head of his cock. She wasn't prepared for his response as he rose up against her hand, his hips pumping as he tried to thrust deeper inside of her wetness and the relief that it would bring.

He slid through her hand, slick with the spendings of his last pleasure, his shaft turgid and thick between her lips. Her tongue slid over him, slurped around him as he thrust into her mouth, his salty, slightly bitter taste filling her senses. She gagged as he thrust harder, his moans growing louder as she brought him closer to release.

"Ah, fuck!" he shouted, filling her mouth with his seed after only a few moments of her ministrations. He settled back on the bed, sweat pouring from him to dampen the sheets under him, his heart thumping madly in his chest. "Release me," he ordered her hoarsely. "Release me and I will take your virginity as you have asked."

"I must have your word that you will not run from me, Ryder." Katrina swallowed heavily, the thoughts of losing her virgin's veil to Ryder heating her loins.

"You want me to give you my word to stay here and become a slave, a toy for you to play with when you wish? What will you do with me when you no longer wish to play with me, Katrina? Will you toss me away? Leave me to languish under the lack of my freedom? I think I'd rather die from this drug that your foul general forced upon me." He turned his face away from the sight of her loveliness, but could not deny the hand that still caressed his hard cock.

"The drug is harsh but I had thought you to stand up under it with more aplomb than the men of my country. I see I am wrong. Men are men wherever they might be. A woman threatens his masculinity and he whines foul and wronged." She sighed dramatically, slowly pulling her hand off his cock. "Fine then, resist the drug and what help I might be able to give you. I shall leave you to it." She turned, slowly picking up her gown from where she'd let it drop, giving him a long look at the beauty of her body.

"Wait," he growled, his body tensing as the stimulation on his cock seized and the tremors from the drug started once

more. "I ... I will give you my word that, for this night, I shall not try to flee from you."

Ryder wanted to curse and call back the words and the promise that lie in them. But it was too late; she was already turning to him, triumph shining in the green of her gaze. She tossed her head, flipping her hair away from her face and behind her slender shoulders, the red satiny sheen of her locks highlighting the soft creamy color of her skin.

"Agreed," she said quickly. "By morrow you shall put yourself back into those restraints and we shall go on from there, but for tonight..." she hesitated a moment, thinking of what tonight would bring. "Tonight, you shall take my veil."

He felt the heat building in his loins at just the thought of being between her slender thighs. "Agreed," he said, his body eager if not his mind. "Release me."

"Not yet," she said, coming back to the bed. "Your body is too needy; you would hurt me in your zeal."

"What makes you think I shan't hurt you anyway?" he asked, groaning as she let her hand travel down the hard muscled planes of his stomach.

"You do not enjoy giving pain, Ryder."

"How do you know so much of me? Of my family? Have we met before?" He shook his head, answering his own question. "No, for I would remember a woman of your beauty had I met her."

"We have not met," she agreed, lying down beside him and pressing her soft body against his hard one. His groan was heartfelt and started a throbbing between her thighs even as she leaned over him. "Will you kiss me?" she asked.

"Yes," he growled, wishing his hands free that he might roll her under him, taking her mouth and her woman's flesh in the same moment. Instead, he waited with growing impatience as she slowly bent her head, her lips finally brushing against his.

They were soft, lush and full, moistly clinging to his. They parted under the thrust of his tongue, allowing it to slip between and tease her own. He heard her moan, felt her slide more fully on top of him so that her soft breasts teased his chest, her nipples like twin peaks of flame against his sensitive skin.

His hands twisted in the restraints, wanting to bury his fingers in the thickness of her richly colored hair, hold her to him while he plumbed the depths of her passions. It was torturous, having her so close, so near to that part of him that desired only to plunge into her, taking her with strong strokes. He wanted to hear her sighs, her whimpers of pleasure as he sought his own in the delicate beauty of her soft sex.

Worst of all, he wanted to hear her voice, shrill with ecstasy, crying out his name as she came. "More," he growled when she lifted her head, her green eyes hazy with desire, and her lips swollen from his. "The Sacred Spirits help me. Wench, fuck me," he ordered, his hips thrusting against the empty air.

"Not yet," she sighed, her tongue trailing over the rugged shape of his jaw. She scraped her teeth against the rough texture of his whiskers and then moved lower, straddling his legs and letting him feel the warmth and wetness of her sex

against his knee. He thought his heart would stop, or would beat a hole in his chest as he moved his leg under her, rubbing against her silky softness, feeling her grind down on him.

"You're going to kill me," he gasped, barely able to breathe through the thickness of the desire that settled over him. "Fuck me, wench," he ordered again. "I want to fill you with my seed."

She shivered against him and he felt her hand wrapping gently around his cock, stroking the soft skin over the steely hardness of it. Her mouth moved further over him, her tongue slipping over his flesh, tasting him. Her teeth scraped across his skin, tracing the hard muscles of his stomach, nipping with an eagerness that sent his senses spinning.

Ryder shuddered as her mouth closed over him once more, his cock twitching against the soft wet tongue that played upon it. Her lips stretched tautly around his girth, her eyes closed as he lifted his head to watch her pleasure him once more. The last time, he'd been too desperate, too lost in the fog of the drug to know what was done to him. This time was different. This time he saw her cheeks hollow as she suckled upon his unruly flesh. He saw the flesh of his cock as she pulled back, glistening with her saliva.

He watched the pleasure upon her face as she brought him to his, heard as well as felt the moan that escaped her tightly stretched lips. When her eyes opened and she looked up at him, the glint of lust he could see buried deeply in the emerald gaze was the final push he needed. He came,

spurting into her throat as his head dropped back and a roar of pleasure escaped his lips.

The room was quiet but for his heavy panting breaths. She lay with her head pillowed against his thigh, her finger drawing patterns in the soft hair at his groin. "Stop, wench," he gasped, feeling her hand brush over his too sensitive flesh.

"My name is Katrina," she said, her eyes narrowing as she looked up at him. "After such intimacies and those yet to come, do you not think you can use it?"

"Fine," he grumbled. "Katrina," he added when she glanced up at him expectantly. "Now do you think you could release me?"

"You have your control back?"

"Aye, for now. Best we get this done before that damnable drug has me in its talon-like clutches again."

She crawled up his body, seeming to enjoy rubbing against him, her nipples feeling like hard kernels against his chest. He groaned as she released his wrists, shaking out his heavily muscled arms and relishing the freedom to move once more.

Katrina sat on the side of the bed, her eyes on him. He could see the question in that emerald gaze as well as the nervous way she seemed to inch away from him. "Where are you going, Katrina? The deal is not met. For you still retain the veil you once seemed in such a hurry to rid yourself of."

"What would you have me do?" she asked nervously. Now that the time was nigh, she was having second thoughts.

"Come to me," he said, his turquoise eyes studying her soft body and lush curves. "I wish to touch you."



Ryder reached out, grasping her wrist in his hand, feeling her pulse racing under the softness of her skin. He grinned, enjoying her nerves and the way her eyes were watching him, leery of the madness of the drug. Now that the time was here, he felt his own control strengthen, though the lust for her was as fresh as it had been the moment she'd walked into the room.

He pulled her to him, sliding his hands down the softness of her body, cupping the ripeness of her breast, tugging gently at the pale pink tip until it hardened. He enjoyed the difference in the crinkled flesh that surrounded the rubbery nub, loving the stark contrast of sensation in his hand.

Katrina gasped, her eyes shooting to his face even as her back arched, pressing demandingly against his palm. She moaned softly, her tongue peeping out to moisten the dryness of her lips, drawing the attention of his eyes.

"You are beautiful, Katrina," he growled. She was, with her eyes heavy lidded with pleasure, her lips swollen and reddened from her play. Her skin was flushed, the green of her eyes even more vibrant as she moved beneath his caresses. He couldn't help the attraction he felt. Even in his rage at being captured and held the way they had been, he couldn't help the way she drew his eyes when she entered the room, or the heat she inspired in him.

He'd wanted her from the first and now that he knew the touch of her hand, the heat of her mouth, he wanted more. She was like the finest of brandies that his father had imported from the Eastern edge of his lands; smooth, sweet, with an addictive taste that surprised and pleased him.

His lips found hers, a startling tasting that had his eyes wide for just an instant before he closed them, savoring the feel of her lips, the delicate pressure of her tongue playing against his. A moan echoed in his head, the taste of her sending his passions soaring even as he sought to tamp them down. He kissed her with a lusty longing, pulling her naked body against his, saturating himself in her scent and the feel of her skin.

"You go to my head," he groaned, pulling back and hearing her breath catch upon a husky moan of her own.

"More," she whimpered, reaching up with eager hands to pull his head back down to hers, finding his lips with an enthusiasm that had him rolling her beneath him.

He settled against the cradle of her hips, nudging her thighs apart, his resurrected cock pressing against her stomach. The heat of her skin caused his pulse to race; her scent intoxicated him. He forgot promises and vows, forgot who was who, and where he was. His only thought was her.

His hands roamed endlessly over her curves, smoothing over her skin, infatuated with the way she felt. He cupped her breast once more, his head dropping, his mouth latching onto her nipple, drawing it deep into his mouth, rolling it against his teeth.

Katrina grasped his head, hers thrown back against the pillow, soft moans and ecstatic whimpers of need coming from her parted lips. She arched into his hand, her hips undulating under him, drawing his fingers into the heat between her thighs.

"Ah, Katrina," he growled, letting her nipple loose as he reveled in the feel of her sex. "You're so wet for me."

She wanted to blush, but the heat that scorched her cheeks came more from passion than embarrassment. His touch was pure fire, his mouth filling her with a hunger to know more. She felt his fingers against her soft lower lips, felt him part them and then one long finger slip between. It sent a cauldron of embers to her belly, a burning that twisted deep inside of her, demanding relief.

"Please," she whimpered, moving against his fingers, demanding more. "I feel so strange."

"Strange?" he asked, finding the small bump of flesh that denoted her sexual need, the flesh as hard as that of his cock. Coating his finger in her secretions, he rolled that bump of flesh, pinching it gently as she stiffened under him. "In what way?" he asked.

Her hands grasped his arms, hanging onto him as the only stable hold in a land gone mad with sensation. Every touch of his hand, every lick or kiss had her dizzy with need that she didn't understand. She only knew she wanted and he had what she needed. "I ... I ... Gods you must," she ground out, pushing her hips up and against him.

Lifting himself up, he lowered his head so that his lips were at her ear. "This is what I have felt since given that drug, Katrina. This is what happens to your men when you use it on them. Would you like me to leave now, leave you to feel this heat and desire, this unfulfilled lust?"

Katrina's eyes flashed to his face, her head swiveling to look at him. She saw lust and anger in his eyes, and

something else, a small flare deep in the turquoise depths. It was victory, however small, however insignificant in the scheme of what was to be. He'd proven his point.

She looked away, unable to stand the thought that he was right, a thought she'd had many times prior when watching a man suffer through the unbelievable heat of the drug. By looking away, she'd allowed him another victory, this one entirely between the two, a domination of a sort, of the master becoming the slave.

If he only knew that she craved his mastery, that she longed for him to be the man he was and as such, allowing her to be the woman she wanted to be. His woman and only his, an equal in all ways as he would be hers and only hers.

"Ryder ... I wish the relationship between our men and women were different," she said slowly, fighting the heat that he kept alive between her thighs with the casual stroking of her sex, as if it were an afterthought for him. It was driving her to distraction, making her unable to think clearly. Words she hadn't meant to say tumbled from her lips.

"I watched you with your family and I ... I so longed to be part of what you have. I saw you with Iiana, with Tilapia and wished to take their place in your bed. In your life," she whispered, glancing back into his eyes and seeing the shock upon his face.

"Then ... Then why capture us, why not come to me or to my father? Contracts of marriage could have been made, Katrina. We could have met, we could have seen if we would suit. Why all of this?" he asked, indicating the wall and the torn leather bindings.

"It is the way of my people, Ryder." Her hips thrust against his stilled hand, begging for more. He pulled away, sitting on the side of the bed, his back to her.

"This is not the way of mine," he said finally, looking back at her. "If you watched us as you say, then you know these things. How could you expect us to live as slaves when we are free men?"

Katrina sat up on her knees, her green eyes still hazy with passion though regret now colored the verdant gaze as well. "I did not wish for you to be a slave. I planned on coming to you, Ryder. I planned to meet you, to see if we could have that which I see in your mother's eyes when she looks upon your father. I was readying to leave this place," she glanced around at the sumptuous chamber with a dismissing gaze.

"Why didn't you?"

"My sister, Kalina, died. I was next in line for succession. As Princess, I have a responsibility to my people as well as to my country. How could I think only of myself?" She shrugged her slender shoulders, her breasts swaying with the movement.

"So, we are at an impasse," he said finally, glancing down at the hands that lay fisted in his lap, not wanting her to see the fine trembling of his fingers. The drug still held a tight reign on him, but he was mastering its effects slowly. If she knew how aroused he was now, she wouldn't be sitting there so calmly. He could smell the scent of her musk upon his fingers; still feel the heat and softness of her most intimate flesh against his hand.

It was driving him mad. So much so that he had to forcibly stop himself from reaching for her again and make himself listen to her words.

"Was there no one else?" he asked, his voice quavering for the first word before he regained control.

"To rule in my stead?" she asked slowly. "No, my sisters are all too young. My mother bore two boys after me. Karina is the next oldest but she won't be allowed to leave her teachers for another three seasons." She scooted forward, her body feeling cold without his heat against her. "I am all my people have."

"What happened to your brothers?"

"My mother kept them until they reached their seventh season, giving them to the slave master to train in the required deportment. When they were presentable, my mother had them delivered to Princess Patrice; she is ruler of the kingdom to the north of my lands. The gift was part of a peace treaty that has kept our peoples from war for the past ten seasons." Katrina's voice showed no emotion as she spoke of her flesh and blood. Nothing like Ryder's would have if he'd been speaking of his brother or sister.

It shocked him that she could think so callously of the men who bore the same bloodline as she. His head turned and he stared down at her in shock. She looked up at him, her eyes wide and not understanding his confusion or his questions.

"You have no feelings for them, do you?" he asked slowly.

"I never knew them," she said simply. "My mother gave birth to them, when they were found to be boys, they were taken away. It is the way of my people."

"And your sisters? Do you have feelings for them?"

"Kalina and I were in competition since we were old enough to walk. Mother believed that if we cared too much for each other we couldn't do our duties. It is a harsh reality, being ruler to a race of women who will question every decision. Mother thought that for us to strive to be the best would make us more competent as rulers." She sighed, her hand rising to touch his shoulder, marveling at the curve of muscle that stood out hard and delineated even now.

"What of ... Karina, was it? Do you care for her?" He let her touch him, her hand warm and smooth against his skin, pushing his hair back behind his shoulders so that she could stroke him.

"Why are we talking of this, Ryder? You want me, I can see it in your eyes and even more so in the hardness of your shaft. I want you to touch me as you were." She moved even closer, her breasts pressing against the long line of his back, her legs spreading so that he was between them.

"I wish to understand you," he said, shrugging and feeling her nipples rubbing against his back. He felt her shiver at the sensation and smiled, though darkly.

"That is the difference in our peoples, Ryder. You wish to understand me. Any woman on my planet would take you for what pleasure she might get from you and then send you away."

He turned his head, gazing down at her. She was beautiful, her features fine and delicate. There was a hidden strength in the toned length of her body and in the steel of her spine that he found decidedly attractive. But the softness that he saw,

the need in her eyes, the desire for him ... that had him bending toward her, finding her lips with his.

"Is that what you will do?" he whispered against the lush moistness of her kiss. "Will you take me for what I can give you and then throw me away?"

"No," she moaned softly. "I couldn't if I wanted to."

He lifted his head, his eyes darkening from the lightness of turquoise to a stormy blue. "Why?" he asked, turning further and grabbing her arms, pulling her across his lap so that she lay cradled in his arms.

"No more talking," she hissed, desperately craving his lips on hers again. "Kiss me."

He did, though he kept it brief, not giving into the desire that was pumping through his veins. He could feel the drug leaving his system slowly, even as his need for her grew. It surprised him. He wanted her more than he'd thought he could. The taste of her mouth, the feel of her beneath him was like the drug. "Why?" he asked again, letting his tongue trace the corners of her lips.

Katrina groaned, unwilling to give him the power of knowing her feelings. He was too dangerous to her as it was, making her want things that she shouldn't, making her feel things she shouldn't. "I went to too much trouble to bring you here. My people were torn in two by the decisions I made over you. If I were to send you away, it would cause an uproar among the women of my consul."

She was lying, but he wouldn't know that. Her hands moved over his chest, pressing her breasts against him. She



moved languorously, arching and moaning, finally linking her hands behind his neck, drawing him down to her.

Ryder knew her lie but knew also that she wouldn't open up to him more. Not tonight. Pulling her off the bed so that he cradled her entire body across his lap, he kissed her fiercely, his tongue hot against hers, his hands roaming and molding her against him. Her moans were the sweetest of music to his ears. Her scent rose, musky and sweet, a spicy scent that drove his passions higher.

She moved against him and he lifted her, easily laying her on the bed and following her down. His lips traced over her jaw, slid down her throat and then back to her ear, his tongue slipping around the soft whorl. She shivered. He chuckled softly, enjoying her helplessness in his arms after being held her prisoner.

His mouth moved over her skin, tasting her flesh, enjoying the salty sweetness of her. Sliding further down her body, he licked over her collarbone, dipping into the tiny hollows of her throat. Her breasts lay firm against her chest, round and slightly flattened, the nipples pale pink, puffy and hard. He heard her gasp as he cupped one, his thumb stroking slowly over the rubbery tip.

"You are beautiful, Katrina," he growled. "I do not understand how you retained your veil this long. The men of your world must be truly weak of will and mind." He dipped lower, his mouth taking her nipple, chewing on it softly, flicking it with his tongue. He released it slowly, nuzzling his nose against the underside of the round globe.

"I ... I didn't want them," she admitted on a groan. His mouth moved down the taut line of her stomach, admiring the firm muscled flesh that flared into slender hips topped with red curls.

"But you do want me," he added, unnecessarily, smoothing his fingers through the soft curls.

"Yes," she hissed, opening her thighs even more as she felt his fingers upon the flesh of her sex.

He smiled against her lower belly, finding the crease where the top of her thigh met her hips. His tongue slid over it and he felt her squirm, her gasp turning into a giggle that he found enchanting despite the roles they played.

Breathing deeply, Ryder let her scent flow through him. Her musky aroma betrayed the state of her arousal as much as the wetness he found in the sleek flesh of her cunt. He looked up at her, seeing her gazing back down at him between her legs. With his eyes locked on hers, he dipped his head and took his first long taste of her femininity.

Heat flooded her as his tongue swiped through her wetness. Her head fell back against the soft pillows, her hands grasping the silky sheets under her. A low moan was ripped from her lips as her hips thrust against his mouth. She was barely able to control her excited movements.

He concentrated upon the hard little button of flesh, sucking it into his mouth, nibbling on it, flicking his tongue over it as he had her nipple. His fingers slid lower, finding the veil of her innocence still intact, moving his fingers over it.

Katrina's head moved against the pillow, her hair tangling around her. Her body seemed to tighten, her muscles

clenching as pleasure she hadn't really understood began to flood her being. She reached between her thighs, grabbing his head and holding him to her as her body convulsed, heated prickles exploding from her center.

"Gods!" she cried, spasms shaking her system.

Ryder smiled against her thigh, feeling her shake as she came for him. He rose, her wrists now in his hands as he moved over her, his cock a hard throbbing ache that longed for the warm depths of her body. Holding her hands over her head, he settled himself between her thighs, resting on his other elbow to stroke the tip of his cock through her wetness before placing it at the opening of her channel.

"Katrina," he growled near her ear. "I'm going to take you now."

Before she could turn her head to look at him, he pushed against her, feeling the thin membrane as it stretched, keeping him at bay. He pushed harder, breaking through, seating the rounded head of his cock just inside her opening as she cried out again, this time in pain.

Tears gathered at the sharpness of the pain. She tried to blink them back. Weaknesses such as pain were not allowed in a royal princess.

Ryder saw them, the glint of the candle catching in one stubborn droplet. He kissed her gently, forcing his body to stillness even though he desperately wanted to push himself into her, the last of the drug still playing havoc on his control. "Are you all right?" he whispered against her lips, before kissing the salty wetness from her cheek.

She nodded, the pain fading as her body began to grow accustomed to the feel of him. She moved experimentally, taking a little more of his hard cock into her delicate flesh, marveling at the way she seemed to stretch around him.

He let her move, his lips growing thin as he fought the urge to push all of him inside of her. Holding himself above her, he stared at her face, seeing her bite her lip as she moved under him.

"Ryder?" she whimpered.

"Hold still," he growled, loosing her wrist and grabbing her hips in an iron grip. With slow strokes of his hips, he slowly filled her with his cock, hearing her gasp. He moved over and in her, creating a sweet friction that had the warmth building inside once more.

He wrapped his arms around her, rolling suddenly with her until she straddled his loins, his cock still buried deeply inside her body. "Ride me Katrina," he urged, his hands going to her lush hips, seeing the long muscles in her thighs as they flexed, moving her over him.

Katrina threw her head back, her hair bouncing around her shoulders as she rode him, rising above him until he was barely inside of her before sliding back down, her clit rubbing against him, mashed between them. Her movements became jerkier, less sure as that same incredible pleasure began to build again and she dropped her hands to his chest, steadying herself.

Ryder thrust up inside of her, digging his heels into the bed. His hands roamed her body, sliding up and over her breasts, caressing and squeezing the beautiful globes before

pulling on her nipples. He twisted them sharply, hearing her cry of pleasure. He let her control their pace, taking it as long as he could before wrapping his arms around her and rolling once more.

She found herself on her back, her legs held up by his arms, bending her almost in half. Every thrust seemed to go deeper, find parts of her body she didn't know she'd be able to feel. Her hands rose, grasping onto his arms, holding tightly as he started to fuck her hard, pushing her until she felt the pressure inside of her burst, the same exquisite pleasure pulsing through her.

Ryder felt her clenching muscles, the flutters of her spasms of pleasure around his cock. He groaned and thrust harder, losing the last of his control as his cock seemed to swell. His climax had him roaring in pleasure, his seed spurting deep inside of her.

When it was over, he collapsed, letting her legs slip from his arms, feeling them slide down his hips. He held himself up with his elbows, managing to open his blurry pleasure hazed eyes with an effort. She was luminous beneath him, a small smile gracing her lush swollen lips. Even as he watched, she blinked her eyes open, blushing as she saw him staring at her.

"Your veil is gone, Katrina," he said huskily.

"Perhaps we should do that again," she said slowly. "Just to be certain," she added, seeing him smile.

\* \* \* \*

Jetta stared with disbelief at the portals that lay deep within the cavernous, desolate cave. It glowed with the ancient stones that gave their power to the portals, letting her see everything at a glance, from the sandy floor to the brown of the cave walls that graduated to darker gray at the ceiling. Each portal was a different size, some no more than four hand's widths, other large enough to allow a man and his horse to pass through.

The wonders contained in each portal had Jetta enthralled. She watched as strange beings, covered in silky gray fur, whipped huge ponderous beasts into motion, pulling crudely made wagons. In another portal, metallic machines moved over a field filled with orange colored fruits, plucking each and sending it down some kind of chute towards other machines that rolled away with it. A man, at least she thought it was a man, for these people were much smaller and frailer looking than any she'd seen before, stood in the center, a box in his hand as he directed the work.

A war was being waged in the next she watched, blood spurting and bodies exploding in grisly display. She turned quickly from that one, unwilling to watch such horror.

"This one," Castor whispered in her ear, turning her toward a most wondrous sight. "This is where we left Adrianna after Damien sent Kaden through the portal to heal."

Tall buildings greeted her vision, looming over ground that seemed made of some strange gray earth. More strange machines moved, seeming almost to fly quickly on wide trails. People were everywhere. Moving in huge crowds, they

seemed almost choreographed as they stopped and started to some kind of signal.

"This is what Adrianna was so anxious to go back to?" she asked Castor, her voice betraying her doubt.

"I do not understand it either, my love. How you could want to leave the beauty and lushness of Daring Castle to return to a land such as this is beyond me. But they did. Perhaps, once we find out what happened to Ryder and Trace, we might find them."

"Truly?" Jetta asked excitedly. The idea of traveling to another world was exciting to her, even though she knew the risks.

"Castor!" Damien called, standing before another portal, his hand was on the side of the opening. He could feel the wrongness of the balance in his hands, his powers sensing the surge of energy that had happened when a party of men and women had entered the portal. "This one. My sons were taken through here."

"Do we know aught about this world?" Castor asked, coming to stand beside his brother.

"No. Though I would say that it is much like the world that we came from," Damien said softly, glancing down at his brother with a worried frown. "You know what that means."

"Yes," Castor sighed, though he did not like the idea. "You wish to take Raven and Jetta with us."

"It is the only way."

"Do you think you can be submissive to your mate?" Castor teased his older brother, knowing of his arrogance.

"I will do whatever I need to if it means retrieving our people." Damien stared at the lush grasses and the mountains he could see in the distance. With a wave of his hand, he changed the view of the portal, showing a huge village enclosed by a white wall, built high. Women walked the top, women wearing swords and wearing breastplates made of gold. The gates of the wall were open, allowing them to see inside.

It was a bustling city, full of women going about their business, men following at a discrete distance behind, some wearing collars and leashes held by the women. None of the men were armed.

Damien held back a shudder of distaste. It reminded him of the planet of their birth, a planet to which he'd vowed long ago to never return. But now, he would have to pretend to be that which he'd once been, that from which he'd escaped. "We will have to send back the men, for it wouldn't do for a heavily armed party to arrive."

"We can do this, brother," Castor said softly.

"No, Castor. We have to do this."

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## Chapter Seven

Ryder stretched, his long lean body more than a match for the bed. His arms pressed against the cool stone and his toes dangled slightly off the end. He felt good; better than good, actually. He was about to spring up and welcome the day when a warm, feminine body rolled against him. Soft rounded breasts pressed into his chest, her head coming to rest upon his shoulder.

She sighed in her sleep, her leg coming over his, soft skin rubbing against his thighs, holding his legs down. Her hand trailed to his hip, slipping over the thin scar on his stomach. She murmured quietly in her dreams.

"Ryder," she breathed.

He felt a stirring in his groin, his cock hardening against her leg. His eyes lowered, his hand pushing the thick mass of her hair away from her face. He smiled slowly as she blinked up at him, looking for all the world like a sleepy feline with her big green eyes. "Good morn," he said softly.

She smiled back, stretching with little provocative movements that had him moaning. "Good morn, Ryder. I trust you slept well."

"When a certain passionate princess would allow," he whispered, pulling her up so she lay upon his chest.

"Passionate princess?" Her brow quirking even as she tried not to chuckle at his playfulness.

"It is my curse. A woman has one small taste of me and then she cannot keep her hands to herself." He laughed as she rolled her eyes before she leaned down, kissing his lips.

"Hmm, perhaps I can understand the draw. You do taste and smell sinfully delicious," she whispered. She squealed as he brought his hand down upon her bottom, squeezing the reddened skin before sliding his fingers between her thighs.

"Are you sore?" he asked, seeing her flinch and then bite into the succulent morsel of her lower lip.

"A bit," she answered slowly. "Go slowly."

"Perhaps we should wait?"

He felt her fingers wrapping his rampant cock, sliding her closed fist up and down his long hard shaft. "But then, what would we do with this? My mother always said waste not, want not."

He groaned as she sped up her hand, his secretions easing her way. His heartbeat grew rapid, his breathing quickened. "Wicked woman," he growled, rolling so that she was under him. He spread her thighs, his fingers slowly stroking against her glistening lips, listening to the sound of her gasps and moans. He found the tiny piece of flesh that grew under his caressing fingers, becoming engorged.

Her hips moved, her arms coming up to wrap around his neck, pulling his lips to hers. "Kiss me," she breathed, lifting to meet his lips.

So much heat, so much desire, it drew her in. She held him to her, her body undulating against his, her hands sliding over his back, his hips, digging into his hair. "More," she moaned when he lifted his head.

"Insatiable wench," Ryder chuckled, loving the way she moved against him. He lifted his body from her, pulling her up with one massively strong arm. Flipping her to her belly, he watched as she looked over her shoulder at him, her eyes wide and unsure.

"What do you here?" she asked him cautiously.

He slapped her on one firm cheek. "On your knees," he ordered, his husky voice full of desire.

When she moved to turn around, he stopped her, holding her back to his chest, his hands full with her breasts. "The first time I saw you in this room, I wanted to touch these," he whispered in her ear. "They are beautiful, Katrina." He heard her moan as he pulled upon her hard nipples, twisting them between his fingers, tweaking them softly. His hand slid down to her slender waist, his fingers easily spanning her abdomen.

The calluses slid over her skin like a rough caress, causing shivers of pleasure to tease her senses. He stroked the smooth skin of her thighs, amazed at the strength he could feel. The women of his home weren't built like this. Katrina was a warrior in her own right; her arms toned and defined, her legs gorgeously muscled and strong. Between those thighs, dense red curls shielded her core, drawing his hand to their silkiness.

"I've never felt anything so soft," he breathed in her ear, his tongue sliding over the curled shell. His breath blew over her, making her shiver, goose flesh rising over her skin. She slid her head back, letting it rest against his wide shoulder, giving herself over to his hands and the intense pleasure he made her feel.

"Princess!"

The call and the knocking upon her door brought a snarl to her lips. She stopped Ryder from moving away, cupping his hands over her flesh.

"I am not to be disturbed!" she called out.

"It is important, Princess. You wished to be told if the portals had been used."

Katrina turned, pushing Ryder back. "Stay here," she ordered, his brow furrowing at the harshness of her words.

He watched her rise gracefully from the bed, lifting a dressing gown from the edge of the soft mattress and pulling it over her nakedness. The gown hid nothing. The sheer green material moved around her like a thin iridescent fog, only emphasizing her beauty.

But he put her beauty from his mind, though he did watch her walk away, her shapely bottom twitching attractively. No, he seized upon what had been said. The portals ... the woman on the other side of the door must have meant the portals to the different worlds. Had his father figured out that they'd been taken off world? Hope sprang to life; tempered by a strange emotion he had trouble naming. Uncertain of its origin, he pushed it aside.

Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath, slowly releasing it. He became perfectly still, his hands resting upon his bent knees, only his chest rising as he breathed. With his mind, he reached out, searching through the miasma of consciousnesses so closely spaced around him until he found the one he wanted.

"Trace," he whispered...

\* \* \* \*

Trace brushed his hand across his face, as if swatting at a persistent gnat. "Go away," he muttered, growling.

He heard it again, that buzzing, but this time it grew until he could almost see his brother's shape forming behind his closed eyes. "Ryder?" he breathed.

*Finally! You always were a stone in bed,* Ryder projected, merging his mind with his brother's. *By the Spirits, Trace, did you fuck the woman to death last night?*

"Did you come here to ridicule or do you have a reason for this trespassing into my mind?" Trace whispered, quieting his voice when he felt Rayne stir at his side.

*Ridicule always comes first, brother, this you well know. But no, Katrina was just given the message that the portals were in use. Do you think it is father?*

"Can you reach out to him?" Trace asked.

*No. If it is him, he is too far away.*

"Keep trying. You must warn them, brother. They would be walking into a..." the words were cut off and his eyes flew open, banishing the presence of his brother as he felt cold steel against his throat.

"None of your tricks, my pet," Rayne whispered, lying close to him, her dagger pressed with studied care to the skin of his neck. "Who were you talking to?"

"Talking to?" he asked, amused. "There is no one here but you and me, little one. How could I be talking to anyone?"

"The princess warned us about the magic that is so prevalent in your country. Do not try this act of innocence

with me. Now answer, who were you speaking to?" She rose over him, her golden loveliness even more pronounced in the light of morning. She was flushed from sleep, her long hair strewn about her shoulders, her lips swollen from their play of the night before.

"I was dreaming of my brother," he said, shrugging his massive shoulders. His hands slid up her thighs, ignoring the presence of the dagger she held as they came to rest with his thumbs pressing against the heat of her center. "But this reality is much better than any dream," he said huskily, parting her smooth lips and slipping his thumb inside.

"Why do I think you lie?" she moaned softly, trying to keep her thoughts tuned to the conversation she'd heard only his part of and not what his seductive hands were doing to her. It was difficult, for he was determined to seduce her, to keep her from asking more questions.

"Lie? Rayne, you wound me with your suspicious nature," he said huskily, his blue eyes completely guileless as they gazed up at her.

"Ha!" she snorted. "Innocence does not suit you, my pet. You are more suited for power and passion than you are this timid approach."

Before she could blink, Trace reached up, knocking the blade from his throat. Twisting the hilt from her grip, he flipped her to her back. He went with her, easily parting her thighs with his strong legs and pushing his hard cock into her wet depths. "Do you mean like this?"

He tossed the dagger in the air, catching it by the tip and throwing it so that it embedded itself in the wall close to the

doors. Then he was fucking her, hard and fast, listening to her breathless pants and feeling her body close in around him; her arms around his back, her legs around his waist. "Is this better?" he panted in her ear.

She moaned, grabbing his ass and squeezing, her fingers slipping between the hard cheeks to run over the puckered bud. She felt him jerk at the unfamiliar touch. "Treachery," she groaned, "and deceit will get you punished, pet."

"What treachery?" he growled, pulling from her suddenly and flipping her to her stomach. He grabbed her hips, yanked her to her knees and pushed his cock back into the heat of her, groaning as her body clamped down on him. "I have been in your bed, your toy for the taking since last eve. How could you accuse me of treachery?"

She stared back at him over her shoulder, unsure of herself in this position. He seemed so in command, so controlled. So unlike the other men she'd been with it sent a shiver of something she hadn't felt in ages through her. Fear.

It mixed with what he was doing to her body and she shivered, moaning his name as he began to rut into her, slamming his body against hers with bruising might. She found herself grinding against him, as helpless as he against the passion that was driving them.

His hand slid from her back to her nape, grabbing a handful of hair, pulling her head back. "You like this, do you not? You are enjoying your lack of control." It was a statement, not a question. Her moans and movements would belie any negative she could give. It was getting to him, also.

Taking Rayne this way, forcing her to submit to what he wanted when it went so against what she was.

Rayne cried out, his name coming from between her lips, the sound hoarse and lost. Scorching heat poured through her body from where he battered at her. Pleasure in its most base and raw form filled her body, forming white sparks of light from behind her lids. Her body shook, and she felt him fall against her, one arm wrapped around her slender waist, the other jammed to the bed, holding them both up. She felt his cock swell, felt his seed as it jetted from the thick tip, sending another wave of heat until she could not see for the pleasure he provoked.

Trace rolled to his side, forcing her to go with him, his arms wrapped around her slim shape. He groaned, not wanting to let her go even after the night they just had. "Do you still consider me deceitful?" he whispered against her golden hair, smoothing the mass out of his face.

"And treacherous," she panted, her eyes still closed, smiling as she felt him kiss the back of her head.

"I can live with that," he said agreeably, flexing his hips and making her moan.

\* \* \* \*

Damien walked a few paces behind his wife, his anger over being forced back into the position of submissive long since gone. He enjoyed watching her walk, the almost stubborn twitch of her hip, the swing of her sword against her thigh, the way her long thin skirt cupped her bottom cheeks. It was more than just a pleasant view and one that would have had



her tossed over his shoulder, her skirts in the air, if not for the presence of his brother and wife.

Jetta was similarly dressed, a long skirt of lightweight cotton, slit on both sides to allow for ease of movement, short brown leather boots, a knife stuck inside one. Her breasts were confined by a short half shirt, held up with leather thongs at the shoulder, tight enough to move as a second skin if she needed to fight.

Her sword was at her side, though she didn't seem as comfortable with its weight as Raven was with hers. Raven was a swordswoman, learning at a young age at the hand of her Chee, preparing her to become a Chee herself. Only her marriage to Damien had put a stop to that part of her destiny, changing it so that her life was bound with his. Her healing skills remained sharp, for they were as much a part of her as her arm or leg.

Her sword skills required practice, though her only opponent was Damien. Her sons loved to watch, calling out instructions and giving their opinions until she would stalk up to them, grabbing their ears and twisting until they bent down. Then she'd give each a quick kiss, whispering in their ears what horrors she would do to them if they didn't leave.

They always did, pretending to be horrified of her and her powers, when in truth, their own powers were stronger than hers.

Trace also had the power of healing, his gift from his mother. His gift from his father was more difficult to pinpoint, for it seemed to grow and change every day. Ryder, though not a healer, was able to send and receive thoughts. He also

had a way with animals, for even the wildest of predators would come to him if he called, acting as if tame while he stroked them.

That was why, when his hawk had returned to the castle, the worst was thought. Ryder's hawk, Masiah, would stay at his side day and night if he were allowed. It would take a dire force to separate the two.

His sons weren't dead. Damien held that thought determinedly in his mind. They couldn't be dead. Why would a party of hunters risk crossing the portals, only to walk away with Ryder and Trace and a handful of others? It would have required a huge force to take them, for they were all well-trained warriors. There should have been signs of battle; blood, bodies, something.

But nothing was found.

"Damien?" Raven called softly, seeing the look of frustration upon his handsome face. "What is it?"

"I don't understand how a force small enough to go through the portals would be able to take a group of men as well trained as these were. Worse, to do it with no sign of battle. It seems impossible to me."

"We will have the answer soon, love. There is a city ahead. We should reach it before nightfall."

\* \* \* \*

Night came, but they were still many miles from the thick city walls, visible in the distance. They made their camp away from the trail they were following, finding a thin stream in a

clearing. Jetta made a fire while the men hunted and Raven looked for wood.

The night air was cool, much better than the afternoon. The hot sun had seemed to scour into their flesh, the heat unbearable. Jetta was suffering, her skin red and in some places covered with tiny blisters that popped and ran when touched. She was burning hot to the touch, but she refused to complain.

Raven came to her, dropping her third load of firewood in the small pile. She put her hand on Jetta's forehead. "Just be still," she told her, closing her eyes and beginning the ancient chant.

Jetta closed her own eyes, feeling relief almost immediately. Raven had healed her before, at the birthing of her babies and once when she'd grown ill from eating meat that was prepared incorrectly. She never got over the strangeness of it.

First there was a tingling awareness, as if Raven stimulated nerve endings, tickling them awake. The sensation was pleasant, a warm and safe feeling that always made her smile. Today, the feeling was bigger, fuller; covering her skin like a soft blanket. She could hear Raven's voice in her mind, the words and notes that seemed to climb and then descend the scale sung in a soft contralto voice. She didn't understand the language, but she responded to the voice, her breathing growing shallow.

Raven went through the healing chant twice, feeling her own skin tighten, the small blisters forming and then bursting on her skin, new pink flesh growing quickly underneath. When

the pain disappeared, she released the chant, brushing her hand over Jetta's face and squeezing her shoulder. "Feel better?"

"Yes," Jetta breathed, relaxing for the first time since they began this trip.

"Thank you," Castor said, coming up behind them and dropping a pair of soft furred creatures next to the fire. "I was going to ask. Her skin is so fair."

"She is fine now," Raven said, smiling at Castor even though she felt a trifle light-headed. It happened every time she healed someone, but with a few minutes off her feet and a drink of water, she would be just fine. She felt an arm come around her waist, her eyes brightening as she knew without looking who was guiding her to sit down. "My husband should be back anytime," she said softly. "If he sees another with his hand upon me, it will not go well for you."

"I'll chance it," Damien said dryly. He handed her a small bladder of water, helping her bring it to her lips. "You should have waited until I could be with you," he accused, though there was very little heat to his tone.

"Yes, my love. I'm sorry," she smirked, her eyes meeting his. "I'm just a weak-willed woman with no strength and stamina. I should always wait for you before I try anything, even bringing food to my lips. It would be terrible if I spilled upon my clothing."

"Wench, do not take this too far," he warned, though there was a smile on his lips.

"Yes, my lord," she said regally, bowing her dark head.

He shook his head, rolling his eyes at her before tying the top of the bladder closed and putting it with the rest. "Are you better?"

"I'm fine," she said, reaching over and kissing him gently. "Thank you, Damien."

Jetta skinned the meat, preparing it on a spit over the fire. The four of them sat around, talking while they waited for it to cook.

"Do you have a plan for getting us in to the castle?" Raven asked, her eyes on her husband's.

"No, not really," he said, reaching over to turn the spit. "To borrow a phrase from Adrianna, I thought we'd 'wing it'."

"Wing it?" Jetta looked from her husband to Damien.

"We will figure things out as it happens," Castor explained with a smile upon his face.

"Just remember brother, keep your head down, your eyes on the floor. If these women are anything like the planet of our birth, they will not hesitate to force punishment for any infraction."

"I well remember those punishments, brother. I bear the scars still." He broke the stick he'd been playing with, tossing the pieces in the fire. "This does not sit well, not at all."

"I know," Damien growled.

"It is for Trace and Ryder," Raven interjected before the two could work themselves into a fury. "We will do what we must do to get our people, our sons back."

A swish caught Damien's attention, his head turning toward the sound. He stood, his hand reaching for the sword that wasn't at his side.

"What is it?" Castor asked.

\* \* \* \*

Katrina felt Ryder's eyes upon her as she hurried back into the room. He kneeled upon the bed where she'd left him.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"No, Ryder. It is naught for you to concern yourself with. I must attend a meeting." She looked at him before she opened the door to her wardrobe to grab an appropriate gown. "But what am I to do with you?"

"Let me go?" He smiled in response to the frown that crossed her face.

"It is not a laughing matter, Ryder. I must attend to my country and I need to know you will be here when I return." She walked toward him, the glistening green gown shimmering across her skin, parting to expose her long shapely thighs.

"You wish me to promise to not escape? I cannot do that, Katrina."

She stopped short, her fiery hair tumbling around her shoulders as she cocked her head to look at him. "Would you not miss me if you left me now?"

His blue eyes twinkled. "Yes, definitely. But not even for you could I give up my freedom. I am not a slave, Katrina. I am a warrior with a warrior's needs and desires. I was raised free, my brother was raised free. How could you expect me to live otherwise?"

"I do not want to have to call my women in to chain you, Ryder." She shook her head sadly. "I was hoping we would come to some kind of understanding."

He got up from the bed, a tawny predator, muscled and toned, beautiful to watch. "There could be no understanding, Katrina, not if you want to put me in chains."

"But I don't, Ryder. I want you at my side. But it isn't the way of my people. They would look down upon me if I were to take a man as a companion. It is not done amongst the higher classes of my people." She put her hand on his chest, her fingers stretching out, caressing him gently. "I could no longer rule my people. There would be chaos until another ruling Princess was chosen. There would be killings, murders as people fought for the position of leadership. My country could fall to one of our enemies. I can not let that happen."

She looked up at him, her heart in her eyes, pleading with him to understand.

"Would I have to wear those clothes?" he asked, looking in disgust at the tunic and leggings that he'd been forced to wear when he'd tried to escape.

She smiled. "I still have the clothing you were wearing when we took you. I could give you the breeches, Ryder. But you would have to wear the collar of my ownership with it. Without that, any woman who took a fancy to you would have the right to demand that you pleasure her." She eyed him, noting the sleek muscles, the handsome face. "You wouldn't be able to walk before the day was done."

He chuckled, his hand closing over hers, which was rubbing his chest. "You sound jealous."

"Perhaps I am," she said coyly. "Come, if we are going to go, you need to be bathed."

He stopped her, reaching to untie her robe, slipping the shimmering fabric down her arms until she was as naked as he. He took her hand, putting it back on his chest, pushing it downward until she clasped his growing cock in his hand.

"Ryder, we don't have much time," she said, stroking the soft-skinned steel that made up his sex. Her eyes were locked upon that throbbing piece of flesh. She licked her lush lips, making him moan.

"Then, Princess," he said, reaching out to lift her in his arms, pulling her legs up so that they wrapped around his muscular hips. "We'd better get started."

Her giggles turned to gasps as he lowered her down on his cock, splitting her wet flesh and surging inside. He carried her like that to the shower she'd used before, bracing her easily against the wall. His body moved against hers, thrusting slowly.

Katrina reached up, pulling the cord that would send the water sluicing over them. It spilled down upon their bodies, clear and cool, washing away the sweat and evidence of their night before. Ryder's hands slid over her, watching the way the rivulets of water ran over her body, dripping from her breasts.

It was sensual eroticism, feeling her against him as the water flowed over him and her. The water was cool, but she was liquid heat around his cock. His hands stroked over her, kneading her hips, moving her on him.



Katrina braced her hands on his shoulders, helping her balance. Her body glistened, the light spilling over the drips of water, shining like crystal gems. Her hair was wet and dark, clinging to her skin. The sleek style emphasized the slash of her cheekbones, the darkness of it making her eyes seem greener.

He felt her motion, felt her sex clamp down upon his cock, the muscles inside clinging over it until he joined her in pleasure, his head thrown back, his teeth grinding as he came. She collapsed against him, even as her legs loosened their hold, dropping to the floor of the shower. Her eyes closed, she breathed in his scent.

She didn't see the look of triumph on his face, the glint that came to the turquoise of his eyes. She missed the speculative gleam in them as he congratulated himself. He was one step closer to being free.

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## Chapter Eight

Katrina stood at the head of a long table, her eyes drawn to the maps and the brightly colored stone that sat next to them. The stone, taken from one of the portals long ago by one of her ancestors, glowed with a strange power, sending shimmering pulses of light across the room. It bathed the maps in brilliant colors, changing every few moments until she grew almost dizzy with its power.

"The portal has indeed been used. The powers in it are terribly unbalanced," she mused to herself, not noticing how Ryder's body grew taut at her words.

"What is this?" he asked, leaving his place at the wall and coming forward to stare over her shoulder.

The swishing sound was the only warning before he felt the first bite of the whip landing across his bare back. It startled him more than it hurt. Turning his head, his eyes finding the wielder of the long whip.

"Your place is upon the wall slave, unless you are bid to come near," the woman, one of Katrina's Counsel of Advisors, growled. She cocked the whip back to her side, preparing for another stroke.

Before it could be unleashed, he felt the push of a small hand upon his chest and looked down, finding Katrina in front of him, her angry green eyes blazing at the woman.

"Miriam, I have given orders that he is not to be touched by anyone but myself. Were you not informed of such?"

"Yes, Princess." Miriam coiled the whip, returning it to its normal place of rest at her waist. "But he needs taking in hand. His actions are rebellious and his manners are revolting, Princess."

Katrina pulled herself up, her eyes growing cold. "Miriam, I think you need to excuse yourself. You are treading very closely to the edge."

"I was Head Counsel to your mother and a counsel member to her mother before that. I have been helping to rule these lands since before your birth and you speak to me as such, taking the wishes of a man into accordance before the laws of slavery?"

"Is it not one of those very same laws which states that mercy must be given when the offense is caused by helpless emotion or a lack of common knowledge? Ryder's offense was to me, he is mine to punish, not yours. If you wish to remain Head Counsel, you'd best remember such." Katrina reached over her shoulder, grabbing the short leash that was clipped to the collar around Ryder's throat, yanking a little harder than necessary in her ire.

"Stay here," she said softly to him. "Do not cause trouble here, for if you do, even my position might not be enough to save you from the whip. When they leave, I will explain what we do. If you wish." Her eyes stared up into his, almost pleading with him to do as she asked. She lifted the leash from his chest, taking the end she held in her hand and attaching it to the wall behind him.

How he wanted to roar, to pull upon the leash, to take the whip from that woman and show her he was no slave. He was

Ryder of Daring Castle. He was a Lord's son. His word was law. He'd made grown men shake in their boots. But he looked down into the pleading eyes of the woman whose virginity he'd taken the night before and found himself acquiescing.

"Very well, Princess," he managed to growl, bowing his head in a manner more befitting of royalty than a slave. He stood as bid, arms crossed over his wide chest, legs shoulder width apart. His eyes remained fixed upon Katrina.

They gathered around the map, Katrina lifting the pulsing stone and holding it upon the flat of her palm. "The power is unbalanced but not dangerous as of yet. It could become this way if the balance is not restored soon."

"Then we shall send the new slaves back to their world," Miriam said with a shrug. She hadn't taken any of the men for her own, preferring the less aggressive men of their world for her own play. Perhaps if she'd been younger, she might have found one of them more to her liking. She glanced back at the Princess's new pet, her eyes narrowing as she saw the look upon his face.

He stared at her mistress in a manner most disrespectful, making her fingers itch to release her whip once more. Such haughty creatures, these otherworldly men. They were magnificent to look upon with their muscled forms, but they knew nothing of respect or humility.

"Has General Rayne been called yet?"

"Yes, Princess, she should be here soon."

"Good, I don't think we will be able to clear this up until we have her input upon the situation." Katrina turned from the

women, pacing across the floor, coming to stand before Ryder. She ran her hand over his chest and then down his stomach, stopping just above the snug black leather of his pants.

His reaction was quick, his body tightening against the pleasure she was giving him, his cock coming to life even in front of these women. "What do you do, Katrina?" he hissed, uncomfortable with this public display.

"I'm sorry, Ryder. This wouldn't have been necessary except for Miriam. She needs to know I control you." Her fingers toyed with the button at the waist of his pants, slipping it open and letting her fingers brush against the soft skin of his stomach. "Moan and I will stop," she whispered.

"You wish me to moan?" he asked, aghast.

"You must, if I am to stop." She flipped open another button and then another until his pants gaped at the top, his hard cock easily seen but for Katrina's body blocking the view of the women behind her. "You do not find my touch pleasurable, slave?" she asked loudly, her eyes locking upon his.

He understood the ploy and fought the sounds that wanted to slip from his mouth. Even as she grasped him in her cool palm, her fingers sliding over him and sending fissures of pleasure to battle their war of wills, he managed to keep silent.

"If I must," she whispered softly, "I will go to my knees and take you in my mouth."

"You wouldn't," he gasped, both appalled and aroused by the thought of her bringing him to climax in front of all these women.

"Yes, Ryder of Daring Castle, I would." She licked her lips, adding a gleam to their pink hue that had him remembering exactly how wet and lush they felt, stroking over the hardness of his cock.

An involuntary moan erupted from deep inside of him, cut off as soon as he heard it, but it was enough. He felt his face flame as he heard the women chuckle, his eyes hardening as he looked back down at Katrina. "That was not necessary," he growled.

She closed her eyes, hating herself and the ire she saw in his eyes. "Yes it was. You do not know how necessary, Ryder." With a sigh, she tucked him back in his pants, carefully buttoning them, seeing his hands fisted at his side. "I wish I could explain to you, I really do. I will be seen as weak if I show you any consideration or respect. I have to be dominant. I have no choice."

He held himself back, even though he saw the misery in her eyes. He could not afford to feel for her. If he had his own way, he, Trace, and any of the other men they could find would be on their way home in the next day or so. Instead, he hid the anger and the tug of compassion he felt, shuttering his emotions as his father had taught. Bowing his head slightly, he relaxed his hands, uncurling them.

"I understand, Mistress. Forgive me."

Katrina's eyes narrowed in confusion. What game was he playing? Before she could open her mouth to find out, the

doors to the counsel's chamber were thrown wide and General Rayne appeared. She was clad in white, from the short skirt that barely grazed the top of her thighs to the tight leather vest that cupped her breasts, pressing them together to fill the deep neckline. Her sword was at her waist, her long golden hair braided intricately. She carried a leash, tugging on it gently.

Ryder's eyes lit up at the sight of his brother. He was dressed similarly to Ryder, his own leather pants riding low upon his hips. He wore his leather vest though, tiny chains of gold crisscrossing the opening and holding it together. A wide braided collar was at his throat, a long white leash leading to Rayne's hands.

Ryder closed his eyes, sending his senses out, finding Trace instantly. *You lasted the night better than I'd expected, brother.*

Trace rolled his eyes. He kept his mouth shut until Rayne went to her place at the table, after securing him to another clip at the wall across from Ryder. "You seemed to have survived your ordeal well, also."

The words were barely whispered but Ryder heard them. *Ha, never has a night in a wench's bed been anything more than a pleasurable excursion. But I know of your ... limitations, shall we say?*

"Hush," Trace breathed. "What have you learned?"

*Nothing. They have a crystal from the portals. It tells them when the powers there have been disrupted. Tis all they've discussed, they've been waiting for your warrior.*

"Watch out," he hissed, just seconds before Katrina jerked on Ryder's leash, drawing his head down to hers.

"My pet," she said softly. "I know of your powers, I've seen you use them before. I cannot allow you to communicate with your family."

"And I will not be told what I can or cannot do. If my family is truly on their way here, then I will not let them walk into a trap of your making, Katrina." Ryder's eyes were hard, no trace of the sweet emotions and feelings of earlier left in them. "You hurt my family, Katrina and it will sign your death warrant."

"Speaking to me thusly will have you whipped until the flesh falls from your back, Ryder. Be cautious of what you say." Katrina's own eyes were emerald gems, cold and hard, not letting him see the misery she felt, for she had bonded with him in their night of shared passion. She cared more than she should for the broad-shouldered other-worlder.

She turned from him, unable to carry on the front of anger when deep inside, she could understand his fears. She looked back once. "Keep your eyes on me, and open. If I look back and they are closed, you will be punished."

The counsel bent over the maps. The trail was plainly marked, for there was only one direct path from the portals to their lands.

"There are many places along the route for a small party to hide," Rayne mused, leaning against the table as she studied the map. She could feel Trace's eyes upon her. When he'd seen her dress for counsel this morn, she'd been hard pressed to keep his hands off of her. It was a boon to a



woman's ego to have her pet so eager to please her. She just wished he were a little easier for her to resist.

"I would choose here, or here," she said, using the dagger from her waist sheath to point out the spots on the map. "The river shoots off into a small stream here, easiest to reach and just deep enough to bath in. If our intruders were to walk in the heat of the afternoon, their skin will be badly burned. They will need the ease of the water."

"If it is who I think it is, they have a healer of great power amongst them," Katrina said, though her eyes remained upon the plainly marked area near the stream. "But no matter, they will camp here. Tis the only accessible water source." She stood, gazing at her counsel. "I want them captured, brought to me with no harm done. You will need darts for the men, for they are as well-trained as these two are. The largest male is a magic wielder. He will need to be darted first."

"Yes, my women will be prepared," Rayne shifted, feeling Trace's gaze grow hostile. "I shall personally go, to make sure your orders are carried out exactly, Princess."

Katrina nodded, hiding her smile. She knew Rayne was feeling the same as she at this moment, split in decision. She had to do her duty, but she didn't want to upset her pet. "Thank you, General. Keep me informed."

\* \* \* \*

Castor stood, his eyes scanning the blackness of the forest, his hands on his sword. He heard Damien grunt and

turned, seeing the barbed dart that stuck out from his brother's chest. "What the..."

A quick searing pain struck his shoulder. He grunted, feeling the darkness washing over him even as he saw Damien stumble. He heard a scream, turned and saw Jetta's horrified face, then knew no more.

Raven stood, going to Damien even as he fell, his eyes rolling in his head before finally closing. She reached into his consciousness, feeling the depths of the darkness that covered him. "They've been drugged," she said, turning to look at Jetta.

The rustle in the trees alerted her and she stood, pulling her sword with an ease that would give even the most adept pause. "Come out of there," she shouted, standing in front of Damien.

Six women stepped through the forest, surrounding the four of them. They were tall, well built, the leader striding forward confidently. "You are trespassing on the lands of Princess Katrina."

"We are traveling with our men. We had no idea whose lands we were on," Raven growled. "What did you do to them?"

Rayne gave the two men a quick curious glance, noticing the resemblance to her Trace in the big one lying on the ground. "They've been darted. It is strictly for their welfare. Men can do the stupidest things when a battle rages."

"A battle? You expect there to be a battle when there is six of you and two of us?" She motioned for Jetta to leave Castor's side.

She did, drawing her own sword and holding it with both hands gingerly out in front of her. "W ... We'll fight you if you don't leave," she stuttered.

One of the women guard walked up to Castor, moving his leg and stooping to get a good look at his face. "He's quite pretty, he should fetch a good price if Princess Katrina decides to sell them. I might bid upon him myself."

Jetta turned, hurrying over to stand in front of her husband, pushing the woman back with a well aimed kick. "He's not for sale," she growled, actually managing to sound threatening.

"We will see," Rayne said. "Now, you can drop your swords and we shall take you to Princess Katrina, where you can argue your plight. Or we can kill you now and take your men. It is your choice."

Raven stared at the younger woman, quickly coming to a decision. She sheathed her sword but did not offer to give it up. Calling to Jetta, she waved at her to do the same. "We shall go see your Princess, but we will not give up our swords. You have my word that as long as you do no harm to us and ours, we will come peacefully."

"Good enough," Rayne said, holding her hand out to Raven. She clasped it solemnly.

Rayne whistled loudly. Two other women brought forth huge beasts. Not exactly horses but close enough to be in the same family. They had broad backs, short necks and huge heads like horses, but had six legs. One was a roan color, moving forward with a scuttling walk. The other was a high-

spirited black who pranced about, refusing to settle until a set of blinders were put upon his face.

Damien was hauled up, his body draped over the black beast, hands and ankles tied together under the animal's belly to keep him on board. Castor was similarly settled on the roan-colored animal. Then they were led out of the clearing. One of the women stayed behind, putting out the fire and gathering their possessions to bring along.

"Your men are unlike ours. How do you control them?" Rayne walked next to Raven, staring at the mother of her new pet.

"It's not simple," Raven hedged. She felt the woman's eyes continually come back to her face, staring at her as if she knew her.

"With as big as they are, I would say not. What kind of training do you put them through?"

Raven's lips quirked as she tried not to smile. "It is a long, drawn out process," she said finally.

"Perhaps while you are a guest of Princess Katrina, you might give us a demonstration of your training rituals."

"Perhaps."

They walked in silence, the cool night air alive around them. Insects whirred and chirped; night birds called, flashing down to feed. Predators howled their triumph as prey screamed in defeat. The stars twinkled overhead, the light of two moons shining upon the women, making the trail quite easy to follow. Jetta followed close behind Raven, her eyes constantly looking back to Castor, as if to make sure he was still there.

"Raven, the men still haven't come around," she hissed.

"They won't. We had to use quite a bit of the drug to knock them out. They should sleep at least to day break, if not longer. Once we have them bound in the male quarters in the castle, then we will make sure they awaken." Rayne smiled as she heard the gasps of both women. "Yes, I am sorry, they are just too big to leave free to wander, no matter how well trained. They must be bound while they are within the city walls."

"Then we won't stay within the city. No woman has a right to bind my pet unless given my leave. I do not give it." Raven's voice was angry but she kept her tone even.

"You are not in the position to give orders. We will leave the matter up to Princess Katrina." Rayne nodded, her tone civil but final. She picked up her pace, walking away from the two women even as two of her guard came up beside them, keeping a respectful distance.

Jetta moved a little closer to Raven, though neither woman said a word.

\* \* \* \*

"Ryder, sulking does not become you," Katrina said, lying upon her side in bed and watching her pet as he paced the floor.

"I am not sulking, wench. I am angry." He turned and glared at her, trying to ignore the way she looked, stretched out, sleek and naked upon the soft sheets.

"That little becomes you also, my pet. Come to bed, I am sure that I can take your mind off of your peevishness." She patted the space beside her, smiling lazily up at him.

"You've just sent an armed guard after what is most probably my parents and you expect me to fuck you?" He turned, slamming his fist against the white stone walls. "You know too little of real men if you think that to work."

Katrina sighed, rolling slowly off the low mattress and coming to her feet. She walked toward him, holding her hand out, her green eyes shining. "Come, you must know I have no choice pet. Won't you be glad to see them? Then they may leave here and go back to their own world, knowing that you are safe."

"They will not leave without us."

Katrina closed her eyes as frustration began to eat at her. "They will have no choice."

"Then you leave me no choice," he growled, turning to glare down at her.

"What does that mean?"

He walked to the wall where she'd had him tied before, the leather bindings still there, ripped in two. Sinking down onto the floor, he leaned against the wall. "This is where I will stay. I will not touch you again, Katrina, not of my own will."

"What would you have me do?" she said angrily, losing her teasing tone. "I can't let them take you from me."

"Why? Katrina, you are Princess. You could have any man in your kingdom. Why choose to make me your slave?"

"I want you."

Ryder wanted to curse at the stubbornness of her tone. His position was one where he couldn't win either way he chose to go. He would be a slave if he stayed, left to the whim of a woman's lust. Yes, she was a beautiful woman, one any man would thrill to have wanting him. She was strong and controlled, a natural leader and lovely to behold. She was his match in bed, willing to please and be pleased.

But if he left...

...He would have to leave her. Trace growled, striding across the empty bedchamber only to stop at the unlocked doors that blocked him from the wide corridor. He couldn't leave; he'd given his word to stay. She knew that, which was why Rayne left him free to roam at will while she went to ambush the party of strangers from a different planet.

Strangers ... ha! He knew they were his parents. If he knew his father, which he did, Castor would be there also.

He went to the bed, sitting upon the side of it and closing his eyes. Breathing deeply, he sent out his vision, easily finding Ryder. He sat upon the floor of Katrina's room, arguing with the beautiful princess. He couldn't help but smile at the stubborn battle that was going on.

He took another breath, stretching his vision, pushing outward. There was a village outside the castle, within the huge white walls that he could catch glimpses of as he made his silent and invisible way between people and buildings.

The further he went, the more blurry his vision, as well as becoming harder to push himself onward. He reached the huge closed gates, his breathing getting rougher, his head starting to spin. A thin trickle of blood came from his nose,

the warmth of it running over his lips and down his chin, to drip onto his chest.

"By the spirits," he groaned, giving up and letting his vision return. He wiped his hand under his nose, smearing the blood as he got off the bed.

Trace went to the basin of water, pouring some onto his hands to splash across his face, scrubbing away the blood. Looking into the mirror, he could see his eyes were now bloodshot; the effort that he'd expended weakening him. "Damn me," he growled. "Ryder, I need you."

\* \* \* \*

Katrina stared down at her pet, sitting against the wall. The look in his eyes told her that the only way she would get him to move would be to do it physically. She wanted to throw her hands in the air and curse the stubbornness of men and their petty little ways of getting even for even the smallest infraction.

"Ryder, pet, be reasonable. You cannot expect me to let you just walk away, not after all I went through to bring you here?"

"Yes, I can. You should never have come to me, Katrina. Not when you expect me to be something I am not. I could no more be your sex slave than you could give up your throne." He watched as she walked over to the wall, sliding down the cool stone to sit next to him.

"I cannot. By all that is holy, I cannot let you leave." She dropped her head into her hands, struggling to contain the



emotions that ran so violently through her, emotions that she shouldn't be having for any man.

"You still haven't answered my question," he said, though his words were in a kinder tone as he saw how upset she was.

"Why you?"

"Yes. Why me?"

Looking up at him, she gave in. "I love you."

"You what?" he asked, staring at her as if she were speaking a different language.

"I love you."

"You cannot," he managed to say when he finally was able to speak again. "I am naught to you but slave, a cock for you to fuck."

"Tis what I wished you to be, but..." she rose, going to her wardrobe and opening a lower drawer, pulling out a large round mirror. Holding it in both hands, she brought the gold framed piece to him. "Hold this," she said.

"What is this?" He took it from her, amazed at its weight. Even though it wasn't much bigger around than a dinner platter, it was very heavy.

"It was my mother's, a prized possession and one that she kept hidden away. I found it one day after her death when Kalina was on one of her screaming fits. It is a mirror of seeing, something we use to view other places, other peoples."

"This is how you knew of me and my family? This mirror showed you our lives?"

"Yes, I became quite addicted to watching you, Ryder, even when you were with those women." She spat the word as if it were foul tasting, making him smile.

"Jealousy does not become you, Princess." He lifted the piece, looking under it, staring into it. "How does it work?"

"Tis a simple thing." She cleared her throat. "Mirror, I wish to see."

The frame grew warm in his hands, the once clear reflective surface growing wavy. Then, almost like looking into the portals, scenes of different places suddenly rushed over it. There were strange looking beings and buildings made of glass, vehicles such as the ones he'd glimpsed when looking through the portal into the world where Kaden and Adrianna lived. Scenes of homey dinners and couples entwined in lust and love, scenes of war and screaming, scenes of killing and scenes of babies being born, all rushed by within a matter of seconds.

"How can you stop to watch? It all goes so fast," he said, mesmerized.

Katrina sighed, taking it away and muttering the words that would change it into a mirror once more. "I did not show you this for your entertainment. I only wished you to know how I came to love you."

"Because you watched me in the mirror, you think you love me?"

"I do not just think it, Ryder. I do love you. Tis why I went to such extremes to bring you to me."

He got up off the floor, pacing once more. "I do not know what to say."

"You could say that you love me," she said quietly.

He turned to look at her. "You would want me to lie?" He shook his head. "I can not tell you that I do not feel. I know I find you beautiful. But how could I love a woman who wishes to make me a slave? I can't."

Her eyes grew cold, her lips thinned as she listened. She wanted to throw something, to scream and yell her frustrations. Instead she just went to her bed. "Fine. I no longer wish to speak upon this matter. Blow out the candles, Ryder. I wish to sleep until General Rayne returns."

She turned on her side, facing away from him, pulling the sheet up and over her shoulders.

Ryder sighed heavily, going to the candles around the room and blowing out all but one. He stared at her back for a few moments before pulling off his leather pants and sliding into bed next to her. His hand reached out to her, grasping her shoulder, wanting to pull her into his arms but she resisted.

"No, pet. I am tired," she said, scooting further away from him in the huge bed.

It was a long time before sleep took either of them.

\* \* \* \*

Rayne made good time bringing back their prisoners to the castle. She had the men brought in and laid upon two of the low couches in the throne room. Raven and Jetta were left to tend to them while a servant was sent to fetch the Princess.

Rayne left guards to watch the doors, almost running to her own chamber. She'd been insane to leave Trace alone, to

trust him to stay within the walls of her chambers while she went on this detail for the Princess. Now that his parents were inside the castle walls, she was even more worried about what he would do.

Throwing open the door of her chambers, she almost sighed her relief upon seeing his muscled form in her bed, his chest bare, the sheet riding down around his narrow hips. He stirred as she drew near, opening his eyes as she leaned down, kissing him with a passion that was as fraught with need as if she hadn't spent the night before making love to him.

"Mmm," he moaned softly, his hand coming to grasp her braids. "I think you missed me, Rayne."

"I think I just wanted to remind you that you are mine," she said softly, her hand stroking his cheek.

"Were you successful?"

"Yes. They are waiting for the Princess in the throne room. I would take you to them, but that is up to the Princess and not to me, pet."

"I don't know if I wish to see them, or more to the point, have them see me this way." He waved at the collar that was still around his neck, the only thing that he wore. "My father would be ashamed that his son has thrown away his freedom to become slave to a warrior woman."

"There is no shame in it, pet." She stroked her hand across his chest, teasing his flat nipples with her nails. "You hold a position that is highly sought after by the men of our kingdom. I am thought to be quite the catch," she said with a laugh.

"You do not understand. My father was raised on a planet filled with women who believed men held no worth. He was beaten, sold as a child, forced to service any woman who had the coin to cover his price. He escaped but had to leave his brother behind. My Uncle was beaten continuously, tied up, raped over and over until a friend of my father's was able to rescue him. They think little of female-dominated worlds, holding them all in the same esteem as the one from which they came."

"But this is not that planet. He will adjust to you being here."

A loud gonging sound came from the corridor and Rayne glanced up. "I must go, pet. I will return as soon as I am able." She bent, letting her lips caress his for a moment before turning and walking out of the room.

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## Chapter Nine

Princess Katrina entered the throne room, her head high, red hair coiled into a coronet of curls around her face. Her green eyes were sharp, her gaze resting on the other-worlders one by one, finally coming to rest upon Ryder's mother.

"You were trespassing upon my property, poaching off my lands and traveling with unsecured males," she said by way of greeting.

Raven placed her hands on her hips, her eyes traveling over the richness of the Princess's gown, the shapely figure that was revealed by the clinging fabric, the loveliness of her face. But Katrina's eyes finally told her the tale; they spoke of power, shrewdness and cunning. She would have to tread carefully with this Princess. "We meant no disrespect. We were coming here to ask about a party of men who were taken from us."

"Men? You travel all this way for men?"

"They are my sons, Princess. I would travel farther if necessary to find them." Raven surmised that this woman knew who she was. She could see the recognition in her eyes. "You have my sons here." It wasn't a question; it was a statement of fact.

"Yes," Katrina admitted. "Your sons were taken fairly. The men they were with have been sold as is the right of the forfeited." She shrugged, her gown swirling around her feet as she walked further into the room.

"And my sons?" Raven asked.

"They are safe and well taken care of. Now that you know this, you will be escorted back to the portals where you shall be sent back to your world. If we find you trespassing again, it will not go well for you or your men."

"Do you realize who we are? Do you know what you've done?" Raven's voice grew husky as fear and anger grew inside of her. "My husband does not take lightly to threats, especially not against his family."

"Of course I know who you are. I have known since you passed through the portal and into my lands. Your husband is of no threat to me or my kingdom, Lady Daring." Katrina walked across the room, the swish of her skirts loud in the near silence. She went to the small dais where a table and chair were placed, sitting with nonchalance she little felt. Inside, she was a mass of knotted fears, her stomach turning and making her feel nauseous as she watched these people who'd come for her Ryder. "I've dealt with more powerful and far more intimidating than you."

"You've not dealt with me," Damien growled, having heard their words as the drug wore off. He rolled, sitting up on the bench, glaring at the woman who'd caused this mess. "Have faith in one thing, wench. I am not one to be trifled with no matter what your ploys or trickery. Now, bring us our sons and the men of the hunting party or..."

"...Or what?" Katrina broke in, waving her hand dismissively. "As I've told Lady Daring, Ryder and Trace are well looked after and are in no danger here. They will have good lives here and are no longer any of your concern."

Rayne stepped forward, reaching for Damien as she saw the look upon his face. Raven spun, her hand on her sword. "Do not touch him," she growled, though she left her blade sheathed.

"He has threatened my Princess," Rayne said hotly, her anger more pronounced for the fear she felt. "That is a crime punishable by death or castration."

"Hold, General," Katrina said. "These people know not our customs or our laws. We must forgive trespass of this kind, for now." She rose once more, passing by the infuriated Raven to stand in front of Damien. "I know of your magicks, Lord Daring, and of how you rose in power. I know of your past and of that of your brother, Castor, Lord Brindle. You, Lady Brindle, were once slave to the man you call husband now." She turned her head, smiling over at Raven. "Lady Daring, you are a healer, a very powerful position in my world, I will grant you ease and not punish your Lord's infractions."

"How do you know...? Did Ryder tell you these things?"

"No, Lord Daring. Ryder has been loath to tell me of his family and of his life before he became mine. Tis true," she said when she heard Damien snort. "I have taken your second son as my own."

"What of Trace?" Raven asked, her eyes showing her anxiety for her children.

"He is mine," Rayne spoke up. "By his own vow, he has bound himself to my side."

"You lie!"



"You dare call me foul? You, a man, call me a liar?" Rayne growled, coming up to Damien once more, her arm rose as if to strike him.

"General Rayne!" Katrina's order was implicit in the sound of her voice.

She needn't have spoken; Rayne had already lowered her arm, not willing to strike the father of her pet anymore than she wanted to fight his mother. "Princess, my apologies," she said, bowing her head. "Perhaps I might bring my pet to these people and let them hear with his own words that what I say is true?"

Katrina nodded, turning to send a servant to fetch her General's pet. "Release their bonds," she told Rayne.

"As you wish," Rayne said, drawing her dagger and slicing quickly through the ropes that had bound Damien. She repeated the maneuver with Castor, watching as Jetta quickly sank down next to him, her hand on his chest. "Do not worry, Lady Brindle. The drug will wear off and he will be fine."

Jetta glanced up, nodded and then turned her face back to her husband.

There was a commotion in the corridor outside the wide double doors leading into the room. Four women, each carrying long poles with nooses on the end, those nooses wrapped around Trace's throat, pulled him into the room.

"What is this?" Rayne shouted. "Remove those poles, this treatment is unnecessary."

"He refused to budge, General. We had no choice."

Trace glanced over at Rayne, ready to tell her what he thought of her orders when he noted the other people in the

room. Raven hurried over to him, throwing her arms around his wide chest.

"Trace," she cried. "We thought the worst."

"Mother!" He held her close, ignoring those around him as he breathed in the familiar scent she wore, the scent that always reminded him of home. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, we are fine. Princess Katrina has been a gracious host," she managed to keep the biting sarcasm out of her answer, not wanting her son to worry. "Where is Ryder?"

"He is the Princess's personal guest, mother. But fear not, I've seen him this day and he's fine. Perhaps a little more indolent after his vacation from training," he teased, wanting to see her smile.

"We've come to take you home," she said, running her hands over the dear face of her oldest. "But this woman believes that you've made some vow that will keep you here."

"Tell her she is mistaken, son," Damien ordered, rising to his feet despite the presence of the guards who crowded round him.

"I did, father." Trace's head dropped between his shoulders, unable to look at his parents. "I vowed to stay at her side."

"Why would you do such a foolish thing?" Raven exclaimed. "You've given your vow to stay as a slave in this land?"

Trace felt his face growing red and he dropped his arms to his side, stepping back away from his mother. "It doesn't matter the circumstances, Mother. The vow has been made

and now I am under obligation to stand by it. My wishes and wants are of no concern now."

"Ryder didn't make the same idiotic vow, did he?" Damien growled, moving away from the bench and coming to his son, who stood almost of a height to him. He grasped Trace's wide shoulders in his big hands, wanting to shake him and force him to say he lied.

"Not that I am aware of, father."

Damien closed his eyes. "What is the wording of this vow?"

"That also matters not," Rayne said quickly. "What is of import is that you have been apprised as to the welfare of your sons, you know they are well and being fairly treated. Now it is time for you to leave."

"The wording, son," Damien hissed again, ignoring Rayne completely.

"Do not," she shouted, grabbing the leash that was hooked to her pet's collar and yanking him backwards.

Damien stooped quickly, grabbing the dagger hidden in the top of his boot, quickly slicing through the leather of the leash so that his son stood free once more. "Men are not animals to be collared and leashed, to be owned and taken advantage of no matter what their wishes," he snarled. "You'd do well to remember such."

"Oh and you never had female slaves? You never took advantage of a slave under your care, treated her foully or bruised and beat her?" Rayne asked. "Do not act so pious, Lord Daring. We know much of you and your world. We've seen what you've done and had done in your name."

"I may have acted as such once, but it was long ago. I no longer own slaves, either men or women. My servants are paid fairly and treated well. You will not find one who has complaint amongst my retainers or serfs." Damien turned to face the beautiful General, his eyes blazing with anger. "I lived the life that you want to give my sons. You will stand over my dead body before I let them be collared and chained like some cur."

Rayne stepped forward, her sword swishing loudly from its sheath, a ringing sound filling the air. "You dare much, man. But I dare more. I will fight for what is mine before I let you take him from me." She turned toward Raven, ignoring the look on Damien's face. "I will not fight a man, for it is not a fight worthy of a real soldier. You," she said, pointing towards Raven. "I will fight you. If you win, I will forswear his vow to me and you may take him home with you."

"No!" Damien growled, lunging towards Rayne, only to be forced back when three of the armed guards pushed him away with the tips of their swords. "Raven, do not."

Raven stared into Rayne's angry golden eyes and saw the truth. "It is the only way, Damien. If we are going to get our sons back, I will have to accept her challenge."

\* \* \* \*

Ryder paced the room, furious with Katrina for what she'd done, for the way she'd made him feel. Damn her! He hadn't chosen to come here, to be made into some sort of toy for her physical pleasure. He hadn't wanted to feel these tender and inexplicable feelings deep inside.

He growled, stalking to the wide windows and staring down into beautiful gardens lit only by torches, the flames flickering and making the exotically scented flowers dance in their light. He didn't see the loveliness in front of him; all he could see was the look in her eyes when she told him she loved him.

"How could she?"

He had no answer, only a hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach that had nothing to do with hunger. It ached, causing him to rub his hand across his abdomen. So what if she was beautiful? He'd had more than his share of exquisite women willing to share a young Lord's bed. So what was so different about her that she tempted him so?

He turned away from the window, his eyes gazing about blindly before finally coming to rest upon the wall where she'd held him that first day. He stopped in his tracks, the memory of her mouth, the way she'd felt against him, the sweetness of her scent.

"No," he whispered, shaking his head slowly. "No!"

He couldn't love her. He couldn't. It would make for an impossible situation and one he would not allow.

\* \* \* \*

"The contest will be held in the courtyard just after dusk," Katrina said loudly.

"I do not agree to this," Damien growled, pacing back and forth in front of the swords that were pointing at him. He looked like a sleek predator in a too small cage.

"You do not need to agree, Lord Daring. Here, you do not give orders or have a say in matters of politics and war. Your

Lady does." Katrina hated this. It seemed her life was crashing down around her head. "For now, you will be taken to rooms where you might bathe and rest. Food shall be brought to you."

"So we are guests?" Jetta asked, finally opening her mouth.

"In a fashion," Katrina agreed. "I hope, as guests, you won't feel the need to wander. I shall have a woman posted at your door in case you are in need of anything. Just ask her and she shall be sure to procure it."

"I want to see my other son," Raven demanded. "I want to see Ryder."

Katrina took a single instant to close her eyes, letting out a long heavy breath. "Perhaps tonight," she said, trying to placate the woman. "My pet isn't yet as well-trained as General Rayne's seems to be."

"They are not pets, wench. They are my sons." Damien's words were uttered in a voice gone deadly quiet. The rage in him was impossible to miss. His muscles bulged, jaw moving as his teeth ground together. He seemed to be holding on to his emotions by a tenuous thread.

Rayne glared at him. "Lady Daring, I would respectfully suggest that you take your mate into hand and quiet him. He is treading upon a fine line between rudeness and aggressiveness that could be construed in the wrong manner."

"He is responsible for himself," Raven said slowly. "We do not dominate our men on our world. My husband and I are partners, we aren't master and slave."

Katrina clapped her hands loudly for she could feel the storm that was brewing between the two women. "You shall be escorted to your rooms now," she said loudly. "General Rayne, you and your pet are excused. Please ready yourself for battle."

"Thank you, Princess." She bowed and walked up to Trace, who was staring at his parents. Grabbing a hold of his collar, she pulled him away.

Katrina gave her a few minutes to leave the main corridor and then wished the others a good night.

As soon as they left the throne room empty, she dropped down into her chair, her hands going to her face. "By the gods, what have I done?"

\* \* \* \*

"You will not fight my mother."

Rayne barely spared him a glance as she slowly took the whetting stone over the edge of her sword. "It is not a matter for you to worry about, Trace. What must be done, will be done." She didn't let him see the regret and worry that was gnawing at her stomach. It wouldn't do for her pet to know that she regretted what had happened.

Her damnable anger always made her speak before thinking. She had been berating herself since returning to her quarters with Trace in tow, his stride angry and fierce. Now he paced before her, his hand going to the cut end of the leash that was still clipped to his collar.

"No, Rayne, I am not asking nor worrying. I am telling you. You will not fight her." He stopped in front of her,

grabbing the whetting stone from her hand and heaving it at the wall.

Instinct had her blade up between them to hold him off, for the look in his eyes was one of violence.

He glanced at the blade but once before plucking it from her hand as easily as he would a flower from a field and sending it skittering across the floor.

"Trace," she growled, coming to her feet. "I do not want to have to punish you. Remember your plac ... mmff."

His lips came down upon hers, hard, bruising, cutting off her words. He kissed her, punishing her; hating her for what she was doing to him. He didn't understand himself what he was feeling, torn in two by this battle that was to come.

But for now...

He slid her dagger from the sheath at her waist, slicing through the laces holding the short white vest closed over her straining breasts. They spilled out of the opening, round and ripe, the tips already hard and aching for his touch, his kiss. Dropping the dagger on the floor, he buried a hand in her hair, the other reaching for the silken skin he'd uncovered, cupping and kneading.

Her gasp was lost in his mouth as his tongue slid between her lips, taking the kiss deeper, until she could scarcely breathe. She heard him growl what sounded like rage, felt him lift her in his arms, carrying her to the bed. He dropped her on the soft spread, following her down before she could even think to try and get away from him.

Heat scorched her skin as his lips made a sultry trek over her chin and down her throat, stopping to nip at her shoulder.



His hands stroked down her arms, twining his fingers with hers to drag them over her head, holding them there with one of his, leaving her to strain and twist under him.

"Trace," she moaned. "No, we cannot. S ... stop, pet," she pleaded as his mouth encompassed her erect nipple, suckling that tempting tip deep into heat and wetness. She writhed under him and he toyed with her, allowing her no recourse but to submit to his will this time.

Confusion raced with passion as she surrendered. There was such a danger to him, such wildness. It scared her even as it enflamed her. No man would ever dare treat a woman, especially not one of her rank, with the disdain that Trace was showing by ignoring her commands.

"I am not a pet," he growled, his teeth nipping at her skin. He laved the mark he made with his tongue. "I am a man, not some lackey to serve your needs then be tossed aside." He buried his face in the cleavage of her breasts, his tongue lapping at the underside, sending shivers of pleasure through her body. "Do you understand, Rayne?" His voice was husky with need, hard with ire at the position he found himself in.

"No," she snapped, trying to twist free of him, bucking her body under his in ways that just drove his lusts higher. "Let me go!"

"Now you sound like a woman," he smirked, making no move to free her. He glanced into her golden eyes, admiring the rage he saw, finding the passion he desired. His free hand moved to her hip, finding the low slung fabric of her skirt and yanking hard. It dug into her flesh, stubbornly refusing to rip

for an instant before finally pulling free, leaving her clad in the tiniest undergarments that he'd ever seen.

A small triangle of white sheer fabric covered the beauty of her hairless mound, a thin strap sliding between her thighs, buried in the dampness of her slit. It met a thin ribbon at the small of her back, holding it to her body, leaving the rounded cheeks of her bottom bare.

"What is this?" His hand reached down, smoothing over the fabric, watching as it hugged her skin. His finger slid between her thighs, pulling at the tiny strap so that it tugged free of her slit, feeling the dew of her passion that clung to it. "I think I like this garment," he mused as his finger slid beneath the strap, finding her sex and thrusting inside.

"Trace," she groaned, her body arching under his, trying to get closer. "You have to stop this."

"No, I don't," he pulled his hand out, grasping the fragile material of the last of her clothing and ripping it off of her easily. Pushing her legs apart, he fumbled with the ties of his breeches, pulling them loose and shoving them down far enough to free his hard cock.

One shove and he was buried into her halfway, the secretions of her arousal easing his path. He moaned as he felt her around him, the heat and the wetness that greeted his cock. "Tell me you don't want me, Rayne," he ordered, daring her. "Tell me your body doesn't weep for mine."

"I ... I..."

He pulled back, shoving in further before she could speak. His body came down on top of her, his free hand stroking her. "Lie to me, Rayne. Say you don't want this as much as I do,

tell me I am nothing more to you than another member of your stable of pets. Say it, Rayne, for I will not believe it."

His body moved on top of hers, his hips flexing as he pumped into her. "Lie to me," he ordered her again, his mouth by her ear, his warm breath creating shivers of pleasure on her skin. "You cannot do it."

"I ... I don't want y ... you," she panted, opening her eyes to glare at him, though the moan of pleasure she gave ruined the effect of her anger.

"Liar," he laughed, bending his head to find the tip of her breast and suckling it deep. He watched her, seeing her golden hair, the braids having been released upon her return to their chamber, tossing against the silky soft pillow. Her throat was exposed; the long column sleekly muscled, sensually graceful in her passions. She strained under his hold, her hips rising to meet his with every thrust.

Small whimpers came from her, tiny cries escaping as he pushed her onward, pleasure coiling in her loins, tightening until she wanted to scream from the exquisite pressure. Her breasts felt swollen, rubbing against his chest, her nipples hard as gems. He moved with a fluid elegance between her thighs, his movements sure as he brought her closer to climax.

Then he stopped.

He closed his eyes tightly, praying to the Spirits for strength and released her hands, holding himself above her until they touched only where they were so intimately joined. "If you do not want me, do not need me as a real man and not one of those tiny puppets out there that jump to do your

bidding, then tell me now, Rayne. I refuse to be demeaned as something I am not."

Rayne opened her eyes, staring at him in confusion. She'd been so close, within reach of her pleasure; then he just stopped. Her befuddled mind fought to make meaning of his words even as she wanted to order him to continue.

"Y ... you want me to free you?" she asked breathlessly, her eyes narrowing, brow furrowing as she looked up at him.

A part of him wanted to shout yes to the world. But a wiser part stopped that cry. "I want to be your equal, Rayne. I do not want to wear this collar or be thought of as a pet. I could stand at your side, fight there, love there. On equal footing."

Rayne tried to ignore the throbbing need that was pulsing in her belly but it was difficult. Her hips moved of their own volition even as she tried to focus upon his words. "You would stay with me if I freed you?"

A slow smile spread across his handsome face and he flexed his hips once, sweet heated friction causing them both to gasp. "Where else would I find a woman this eager for my body?" he chuckled.

"I ... I don't know." Her hand came up, palm pressing gently against his cheek. "There are ramifications that must be thought of and I could not do so without the permission of Princess Katrina."

He moved inside of her again, his own willpower quickly diminishing. "Will you think about it?" he asked, bending down to slide his tongue over her throat, relishing her taste.

"Yes," she moaned, grabbing his ass with her hands. "Now, finish what you started against my will, pe ... Trace."

He grinned, a shiver of pleasure coursing through his body. "See how easy that was," he whispered. Before she could answer, he moved again, thrusting quickly, as eager as she for the pleasure he knew was to come. She ran her hands up his back, using her nails against him and making him jerk. Sitting back, he pulled her up, pulling her thighs over his hips. "Ride me, General, grind against me."

Her hands were on his shoulders, supporting her as he grabbed her hips, pulling her against him. Soft cries and torrid whimpers fell from her lips. She moved against him almost blindly, guided by instinct. She felt his hands on her thighs, moving over her bottom, sliding up to her waist.

"You feel so good," he growled.

She rode him hard and fast, her pleased gasps mixing with his groans. When her release came, it was intense; brilliant waves of heat that crashed over her, leaving her spent and limp, barely able to move. She heard his roar, felt his body jump beneath her and the sudden heat of his ejaculate as he spent himself inside of her, holding her tight.

Rayne let her head fall to his shoulder, letting him carry her weight as she came down from the ecstatic sensations he had brought her so easily. It had been a long day, fighting with him, then having to lead the guard to go and round up his parents. A yawn caught her by surprise. She was exhausted.

"You need to sleep," Trace whispered against her hair. He laid her back on the bed, starting to back away when she wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Don't go," she said. Her tone asked, it did not order.

"I won't," he whispered. He rolled to her side, drawing her slender form over to him and tucking her against his side.

"Sleep. We will talk more when you wake."

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## Chapter Ten

"You're insane!"

Trace paced the floor, glaring at his golden lover as she calmly finished preparing for the trial ahead. "You really cannot mean to fight my mother on the field of battle. It is insanity."

"Trace," she began, her voice infinitely patient. "A challenge was given, a challenge was accepted. If I were to go back on that challenge, my word would mean nothing here anymore."

"She's my mother," he growled, reaching over to pull her off the bed where she was lacing on white leather boots that came just above her bare knees.

"I know this." She sighed, her hands coming up to his face. "If I do not win this challenge, you'll be going home with them. I will have given up my rights to you." She leaned up, pulling his head down to her and kissing his lips.

Trace wrapped his arms around her, hugging her tightly to him. "If anything happens to either of you..."

"Now you're just being insulting," she chided, pulling away from him to finish her preparations. "I am General of Princess Katrina's guards. I did not get to this position by letting things happen. It will be fine, pet, you'll see. I shall fulfill the challenge, let your mother give up her rights to you and then all will be as it should."

"Give up her rights? What do you mean by that?" He followed her over to her chest, watching as she took up her

sword, sliding it from its sheath to check the sharpness of the blade.

"For a winner to be determined, the loser must admit defeat and be willing to make a sacrifice to the winner. Your mother's sacrifice will be any and all claims to you and your brother." She looked over her shoulder at him. "The sooner she does it, the less blood will be spilled."

"You cannot," he almost shouted. "She will never willingly give up those rights, no matter what, Rayne. You are talking about killing my mother!"

"Don't be ridiculous. No woman would give up her life for that of a man. She shook her head, chuckling. "Really, Trace, be calm. Naught will happen to your mother."

He paced the floor in front of her. "You don't understand. Spirits damn me! We are not like your people. My mother would give her life for her husband and sons. She will not yield to you!"

A loud gong sounded somewhere deep in the building. Rayne glanced up at Trace, seeing the look of anguished truth in his eyes. A small feeling of doubt grew in the pit of her stomach but she quickly banished it, knowing she dared not let anything distract her now.

"I will have to collar you again," she said softly, picking up the white braided collar and leash she had pulled from a drawer. "It's for your own protection, Trace. Not because I believe you would try to run from me."

He growled, closing his eyes as his anger threatened the restraints he'd put upon himself. "Fine," he snapped.



She slid it around his neck, leaving it looser than a normal male would be collared. She didn't take the leash in her hand, instead looping it over his shoulders, a sign of trust between a mistress and her pet, though Trace didn't know it. Then she once more lifted her sword, settling the golden girdle that her sheath was attached to around her slender waist and securing it tightly. "It is time," she said simply, meeting his gaze. "It will be all right, pet."

"I hope for all of our sakes you are right," he sighed.

\* \* \* \*

Katrina stared down at Ryder's lean muscular body, feeling an insane urge to run her hands over him. He looked like some perfect statue, an idol to the gods made of the sleekest of tawny stones. But she knew if she touched him he would be warm, breathing, his flesh made for tactile exploration. A small moan of frustration emerged as she turned away, her red hair swinging around her, her hands fisting to keep from waking him with her mouth on his.

"Are you all right?" he mumbled sleepily, gazing up at her with a soft expression in his beautiful turquoise eyes.

"Yes, no ... I'm not sure," she mumbled softly, walking away from him and the bed as if she couldn't stand to be near him. In truth, she couldn't; for all she wished was to reach for him, to have him love her once more, hold her. She wanted to draw strength from him, for the coming events would have serious effects upon their future.

"Princess?" Ryder called, sitting up in the bed, the sheet pooling at his waist. He tossed aside the covers, rising easily

to his feet to follow her, his hands sliding down her arms to pull her back against him. "Despite our differences and the fact that you're holding me here against my wishes, I do not like seeing you like this."

"I'd have thought you to gloat," she smirked ruefully, glancing up at him. "See the mighty Princess as she falls flat upon her face." She chuckled, pulling away from his arms. It took more strength than she knew she possessed to leave the warmth of his body.

Before he could speak, she spun, putting her fingers against his lips. "It is time," she said softly. "We must dress."

"Time?" Ryder asked as she spun away once more. He watched her move around the room, pulling open drawers, opening her huge chest, gathering clothing. "For what?"

"To find out our fates," she answered, though it really wasn't much of one. "Here, I had these made for you."

Ryder stared down at the black leather breeches she handed him, three bars of emerald green embroidered upon each leg.

"They will fit, and they aren't the tunic and leggings you found so reprehensible. But come, hurry and dress. We haven't much time."

She gave him no chance to question her further, just urged him to finish as she made her own preparations. A knock sounded upon the door and she called for entry, her voice sounding fretful.

Ryder stared at the small man who entered. His head barely reached Ryder's shoulders. His body, clad in the traditional tunic and leggings of the male servants of her

court, seemed almost delicate, his skin pale. His hands drew Ryder's attention, for they were graceful, with long nails that were perfectly manicured.

He bowed to Katrina, glancing nervously over his shoulder as he stared at Ryder. "Princess, you wished to see me?"

"My hair, Bran, you must fix it for me."

"It is my pleasure, Princess," the small man said, picking up her brush and beginning the process of smoothing out her beautiful fiery locks. Soon they were curled and pinned, feathered and framed until Bran stepped back to admire his handiwork. "You look beautiful, Princess."

She rose, pulling at the ties of her dressing gown and dropping the sheer fabric to the ground, surprising Ryder.

"What are you doing?" he growled, reaching for her to yank her behind him.

"I was getting dressed," she snapped back at him. "What are you doing?"

"You aren't getting dressed while he's here," Ryder ordered, turning to glare at the much smaller man. "Get out!"

Bran hesitated, his eyes huge as he stared at the Princess's new slave. "Princess?" he yelped, unsure of which way to go.

"It's fine, Bran. Thank you," she said, unable to hide the grin that came to her face. Bran was forgotten as she stepped around Ryder, her hand resting lightly on the smooth muscled plane of his chest. "Are you sure you don't care about me?" she asked.

His eyes narrowed and he grabbed her arms, yanking her up against him. "While I am in your bed, I am the only one

who sees you like this, the only one who can touch you, do you understand?"

"Perhaps," she purred, her earlier bad mood evaporating as if it had never been. "You dare much, Ryder."

"I'd dare more," he growled, his eyes roaming over her face. His head lowered and he watched her close her eyes, her soft lips parting in anticipation. His warm breath sifted across her face and she moaned softly.

"Get dressed."

Katrina stared at him as he moved away from her, crossing his strong arms across his wide chest. She felt like screaming, slamming her heel into the ground and throwing a huge fit. Instead, she smiled. She walked away to the bed, where her gown for the day lay. It was short, mimicking the style of the guards, leaving much of her leg bare as well as her arms, lacing tightly across her breasts. Knee high boots went with the green outfit, lacing to the top.

Her jeweled dagger slid into a hidden sheath in the right boot. A golden girdle ringed her waist, her own sword settling firmly into its sheath. Clasp on golden arm bands, she was done, turning to Ryder to gauge his reaction.

"Do you know how to use that?" he asked, pointing at her sword.

"Of course," she said, ignoring the barbed slur of his words. She walked toward him, his collar in her hands.

"Come, we must get to the arena."

He eyed the collar as he did the tunic and leggings. This one was green, studded with gemstones, a short leather leash clipped to it. But he didn't move when she fastened it, or

when she ran the palm of her hand over his body, finally patting his ass.

"Let's go," she said, smiling.

He went to follow her, catching a glimpse of himself in her mirror and sneering. "Will my parents be there?"

\* \* \* \*

She hadn't told him. She hadn't been able to find the words. She sat in her chair on the side of the huge ring, the arena mostly empty save for the women of her counsel. They would be the final judge of winner. Ryder stood next to her, his eyes fixed upon the center of the ring where a wooden pole stood.

"I do not understand," he said to her.

"This is a private contest, Ryder. A battle of rights between General Rayne and ... and your mother."

"My mother!" he snapped, turning to face her, his hands coming out to grasp her arms and drag her from the seat.

Katrina lifted her hand, stopping the women of her counsel from intervening. "Yes," she said quietly. "Your mother has accepted a challenge from Rayne for the right to leave with you and Trace. If she wins, you are free."

His hands dropped from her arms and he stumbled backwards a few paces. "You've given up your right to me?" he asked slowly.

"No. My General will win, Ryder. She is unbeatable in the ring. I've seen your mother fight. It will be a strong contest, but in the end, Rayne will win."

"You don't know my mother, Katrina. You don't know what her family means to her. She will fight to the death for us." He shook his head, coming toward her again. "What of my father, does he know?"

"Yes," she said, just as a loud gong reverberated through the arena. Across the way, a woman stepped out, two men following her.

Ryder's eyes lit up as he saw his father and his uncle and aunt. "My mother?" he asked Katrina, never taking his eyes off of his family.

"She will come from that doorway," Katrina answered, pointing toward a wall at the far end of the ring.

He stood close to the short rail that separated them from the arena. His arms were tense at his side. Ryder waited, knowing that he would never let his mother come close to being in danger, not for him. If he had to, he would deal with this General himself.

\* \* \* \*

Rayne stood at ease, waiting for her signal to enter the arena. Trace was at her side, his eyes scanning the arena, finding his brother standing at the side of his Princess. For once, he wished he had the power of his brother, able to communicate with his mind. From the look on Ryder's face, he could tell he planned something, probably the same something that Trace himself planned. He wouldn't let his mother be hurt.

"You will follow me out but stand to the side of the arena, out of the way, Trace. Do you understand?"

He nodded absent mindedly, his gaze locked on his brother.

"Trace!" she yelled, finally getting him to look at her. "If you move during the fight, someone could get hurt. You must stay still, for your mother's sake if not mine."

"I understand, Rayne. I am not one of your soft men here that do not know what battle is like. I do not let a woman fight for me."

Rayne glared at him, angered by his tone of voice. "You are letting a woman fight for you now, Trace," she said as another gonging sound blared across the arena. "Come."

She stepped out, feeling Trace's eyes on her as he followed her out, taking up his position on the wall. He saw shackles built into the wooden walls, only guessing what they were used for. Close by, another door slid open and his mother stepped out, dressed similarly to Rayne, her clothing a brilliant blue down to the boots that encased her feet.

She strode out onto the sand that made up the arena floor as if it were second nature to her, her dark hair braided to her head, sword swinging at her side. Trace couldn't help but feel a burst of pride. This was his mother and she was a spectacular sight to behold.

There were differences in the two contestants. Age was a major one, for Rayne was at her prime while Raven had two grown sons. They were of a height, though Rayne had the more defined musculature. One was blonde, the other with hair as dark as the wings of the bird that was her namesake.

Raven met his eyes, giving him a smile that made him want to chuckle. She looked prepared for anything as her

eyes slid to her opponent, sizing her up. Then they turned, both striding forward to where the Princess sat, Ryder standing beside her.

Both women knelt, their hands upon their swords.

"Rise," Katrina said, her voice carrying throughout the mostly empty arena. "A challenge has been made, has it not?" she asked Rayne.

"It has, Princess."

"And it has been accepted, has it not?" she asked Raven.

"Yes," Raven's answer was curt and to the point, refusing to add the proper title, not to the woman who had collared her sons.

"You will fight until one yields the day. The winner will decide what is to become of the two slave men, Trace and Ryder, both once sons of Daring Castle. Is that the agreed upon prize?"

Both women agreed, Raven's eyes moving from the Princess to the tall, imposing figure of her son. He looked well, as though his captivity hadn't taken much out of him.

"Very well," Katrina said. "The contest is set, the contestants ready. It has begun."

Rayne turned quickly, the swish of her blade loud in the eerie silence. She brought it up, using both hands as she began her first attack. She swung at Raven, watching in begrudging admiration when the woman rolled under the slash, coming up and loosing her own weapon.

"This might be more worthwhile than I had hoped," Rayne said, smiling smugly.



"I do not plan to lose," Raven threw back at her, bringing her sword up so that the hilt almost touched her face, a salute to Rayne, showing her the respect she deserved as a worthy opponent.

They circled, feinting with short slashes, thrusting in an almost teasing manner. Raven waited for an opening in Rayne's defense, knowing there had to be one; everyone had one. Seeing an opportunity, she attacked, swinging her sword with both hands. Only to feel a jolt of tingling pain in her hands and arms as her blade was met by Rayne's, the ringing sound filling the courtyard.

They swung and thrust, parried and ducked, their swords clanging together hard enough to draw sparks from the two blades. Long pauses were punctuated with flurries of blows as the two women sought to discover each others style, then backed away to again circle and recover. Their heavy breathing was loud in the silent tension of the arena. Each woman's sword point dipped slightly as arms grew tired and blades grew heavier with the fatigue. Taking a daring chance, Raven spun, slicing low with her blade, watching as Rayne jumped it easily. She continued in the spin, rising and aiming a cut at the General's head as she completed her revolution, hoping to catch her still in the air and unable to avoid the attack.

Rayne parried the powerful blow, sending Raven's sword glancing up and over her head. The resulting momentum left the dark-haired swordswoman open to a riposte, but the force of the attack and uncertain footing of her landing sent the

younger woman back across the loose sand, unable to take advantage.

Trace felt his heart leap to his throat as Rayne's foot struck a depression from an earlier exchange, a place where one of the combatants had braced themselves against a furious assault. Her boot heel caught in the divot, sending her off balance. She landed on her back in the sand, her sword flying from her fingers to land a few feet away.

Raven strode forward, her sword at the ready. "Do you yield?" she panted.

Rayne stared up at the woman, the mother of her pet, the man she was beginning to fear meant too much to her. "No," she growled, rolling to her sword, snatching it up as she sprang to her feet. "I do not yield."

She rushed forward, sending Raven back in a quick skip. Raven spun, knocking Rayne's sword to the side. Stepping in while her opponent was unprotected, Raven slashed with her sword, slicing into the younger woman's body. Her blade caught in the General's ribs, leaving her vulnerable to a counterattack. Rayne's sword flicked back towards Raven's exposed neck.

But the blow never landed. Rayne's face contorted with the pain and shock of her wounding and her sword flew from suddenly strengthless fingers, her grip lost. It spun end over end into the sand.

Katrina stood, her eyes wide with horror and disbelief as she watched her General fall to the sand, blood welling from the gash just below her ribs. The wound was deep and clearly

ended the fight. And perhaps Rayne's life. "She's never lost," she whispered in shock.

"Neither has my mother," Ryder said, a hint of pride mixed with sadness in his voice.

Trace sprang forward, his eyes on the golden woman who lay upon the sand. "No," he groaned, dropping to his knees at her side.

"You were right," Rayne whispered, staring up into Trace's beautiful eyes. "I knew you were right, that she wouldn't yield because of her love for you. It made me reckless."

"Hush," he said softly, laying his open palm on her forehead. "Be still." His eyes closed, his other hand dropping to cover the wound, hearing her moan as he pressed upon it. He took a deep breath, trying to ignore the warm pulse of blood welling over his hand even as he sent a prayer to the Spirits for the strength he needed. For an instant, panic blotted out the words to the chant and he opened his eyes, looking around wildly. His mother stepped forward, seeing the pain on his face.

"Slowly, son," Raven said. "Tu ma Chee," she whispered, giving him the first words of the healing refrain.

"Tu ma Chee, coska de freya," he chanted, closing his eyes once more and feeling his mother's hands come to rest against his shoulders, adding her power to the deep well of magicks he carried within.

He chanted the words out loud, his skills still rudimentary compared to other healers. A tingling warmth grew from his hands, heat flowing out of him, leaving him cold. Heat pulsed at his shoulders where his mother's hands rested, flowing to

Rayne's body through his own hands. He spoke the words, letting them reverberate through him, drawing the magic into healing. Behind his closed eyelids, he could see Rayne as she'd looked this morning, her body twisting under his as both of them cried out their pleasure, gazing into each other's eyes.

He heard his mother gasp; knew that she saw what he did and knew what it meant. But she didn't remove her hands. She added her voice to the chant, determined now to save her son's mate.

\* \* \* \*

Katrina bit back the words she wanted to say, reaching up as she stood in front of Ryder and removed his collar. "A challenge was made and met. The prize goes to the victor. You are f ... free, Ryder of Daring Castle. You may go and join your parents." She stepped back, her head bowed, unwilling to look up at him.

"Katrina," he began, his hand rising to touch her only to drop back to his side as she refused to look at him. "I..." He sighed, unable to find the words to tell her what he was feeling. "Thank you," he said finally. She nodded her head once.

He jumped over the railing, easily dropping the eight feet to the sandy floor, striding quickly to where his brother and mother stood over the fallen body of General Rayne. "Is she...?"

"Healed," Trace finished, smiling up at his brother before turning back to the golden woman of his heart. "Open your eyes, Rayne," he urged softly.

She did, though confusion swirled in their amber depths. "Am I dead?" she asked, her hand coming up to explore the bloodied tear in her vest. The skin beneath was smooth and unblemished.

"No, my love, you are healed. Come, sit up."

"W ... what did you call me?" Rayne stared up at him, her eyes huge.

"My love," he repeated, laughing at the surprise on her face. "Any woman who would take a sword wound instead of hurting the mother of the man she loves, deserves to have his love, don't you agree?"

"You knew?" she asked him, letting him lift her to her feet.

"That you would rather bleed than cause me pain? Yes, I knew. You told me so yourself, earlier." He wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her close.

"What is this?" Ryder asked, his eyes narrowed as he tried to understand.

"Little brother, you would not understand. Go greet father and leave grown up things to the adults," Trace chided, chuckling at the glare of retribution leveled at him. "We have much to discuss," he said to Rayne.

"But ... but you are free. Your champion won and I lost. I have yielded all rights to you." Her hands rose, going to his collar and pulling it off of him. Dropping it in the sand, she tried to pull from his arms, but he refused to let her go.

"Is that what you wish?" he asked her softly, ignoring all around them as Ryder was engulfed in the arms of their parents.

"Do I wish to let you go? No," she said, angrily blinking back the tears that wanted to fall. "But I lost all right to you, Trace. You are free to go home."

"There wouldn't be much of a life for me there, not now that my heart is here," he said, bending his head and finding her lips.

Rayne melted under the sweetness of his kiss, her hands rising to wrap around his neck, uncaring of the eyes that were upon them. All she knew was that he was still here, still in her arms where he so definitely belonged. When he lifted his head, she could barely think, much less form coherent words, but she had to ask.

"Does this mean you will stay?"

"I will. But not as a pet," he warned, holding up his hand when she opened her mouth to speak. "I will stay as your equal, as your mate and I will not wear another collar. Can you live with that?"

His tone had Rayne's head lifting, her eyes finding his. "It looks as if I have no choice," she said, smiling. "If it is true that I hold your heart, than it is as true that you have mine." She smiled, and then sighed tiredly. "Oh but the complaints from my male servants will be deafening. Are you certain you do not wish me to keep one or two?"

His eyes narrowed and his hand came down hard upon her bottom cheek, making her laugh. "Do not tempt me to do more, Rayne. You would not like what would happen to you.

Now come, meet my parents and my aunt and uncle the right way."

\* \* \* \*

Katrina stayed only long enough to send away the counsel, leaving word with a servant that the other worlders were to be treated well, given whatever they needed and to be allowed to leave whenever they were ready. She was not to be disturbed, not for a while; not until she could accept Ryder's loss.

She didn't run from the arena, though she wanted badly to do just that. Instead, she kept her demeanor calm, walking sedately back to her chambers. Only when she'd managed to close the door behind her did she allow the tears to flow. The sobs built inside of her until she slipped to the floor, curling into a ball.

Time had no meaning to her while misery ate at her heart and soul. A knock came to her door, a summons to the throne room where a feast was being held to celebrate the winner. How she wanted to ignore it, to send the servant away with the excuse of illness. But she could not. She would have to face them once more.

Rising, she shed her clothes, stepping under the cold shower of water. Desperately she tried to forget how it had felt when Ryder had made love to her under its flow. She readied herself quickly, drying and putting on a simple gown of white, a slim sheath that hugged her curves. She left her hair down, the curls cascading down her back like a wave of

fiery red gold flames. A thick gold band held it from her face, matching the gold armbands she still wore.

The throne room was full. Everyone in the palace wanted to see the other worlders. She entered, hearing the familiar gong that heralded her arrival and feeling all eyes upon her as she made her way to the head of the large table.

Katrina managed to smile, nodding to those who greeted her, stopping to speak to one or two of her people while keeping a serene smile upon her face. Only those that knew her best would know she was hurting inside, or guess that she'd spent most of the afternoon crying.

She reached her chair, thanking the servant who'd held it for her and sitting, gesturing for the meal to continue with a graceful hand.

Food was placed before her, a goblet of dark wine by her hand; she ignored them. She could feel his eyes upon her from where he was seated at the table with his family and General Rayne. She refused to look up, afraid of what his gaze might cost her emotionally. She had but to make an appearance, perhaps give a small speech; than she would be free to leave, to hide away behind her duties as princess until they left.

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## Chapter Eleven

Ryder glanced behind him once again, catching a bare glimpse of the Palace walls as he and his family made their way home. Two days had passed since the contest between his mother and the General, the contest that had freed him. He should feel relieved, happy; excited to go home and be away from this backwards world.

Instead, he felt as if he were leaving a piece of himself behind.

"Missing your brother?" Raven asked, dropping back to walk with him.

"Yes," he said quickly. It was true. Trace had opted to stay behind with Rayne. Nothing anyone had said could sway him from his decision. His father had even offered for General Rayne to come back with them, to become one of his guards, an offer that could have caused him untold derision amongst his own men.

But the beautiful General remained true in her loyalty to Princess Katrina. Rayne knew that keeping Trace as an equal to herself would cause an upheaval with the slaves and their owners. Princess Katrina had backed her decision to take Trace as a mate, going so far as to address her people about her decision.

"I wish we could have brought more of the hunting party back with us," he said, trying to hide the real reason for him upset.

"They were given the option, Ryder, you know this. Hopefully our leaving this world will cure any problem of balance with the portals for those that have decided to stay with their mistresses."

"Let us hope they don't live to regret their decision," Damien said. "It will be good to have you home again, son." He slapped his boy on the back.

"It will be good to be home, father. I've had enough of collars and orders to last a lifetime." Yet even as he spoke, he glanced behind him once more, feeling a keen disappointment that the palace was now completely out of sight.

\* \* \* \*

Rayne handed Trace his sword and belt, smiling at her handsome lover. "Shall we?" she asked, cocking one golden brow.

Trace grinned, his moodiness at his family's departure dissipating as he held the familiar weight of his sword in his hand. He pulled it from its sheath and checked the finely honed edge. "Are you sure you feel up to it?" His eyes dropped to the smooth skin of her stomach, where just days before she'd been mortally wounded.

If not for his mother, he thought, feeling that same gut wrenching panic as he had at the time, she would have died. Even now, that thought had the ability to make him nauseous.

"I am fine. Don't you trust your own healing skills?" She grinned, walking up to him and sliding her arms around his

neck. "Or are you just afraid that I shall be more skillful than you and you might find yourself tied to my bed once more?"

"That will be the day I hang up my sword, you saucy wench," Trace laughed, wrapping his free hand around her and lifting her so he could reach her mouth. He kissed her thoroughly, using teeth, lips and tongue to befuddle her senses until she moaned under his onslaught, her hands turning into claws and raking down the fine lawn of his shirt.

With a chuckle, he dropped her back to her feet, steadying her with his hand while he watched the dazed look slowly leave her eyes.

"Oh, not fair, not fair at all," she growled at him. "If you think I'm going to let you win just because your kisses make me melt..."

"Really, they make you melt?" he asked, the arrogance on his face making the question rhetorical.

"I refuse to answer that. Now come, before the afternoon sun makes the heat too unbearable to train." She took his hand, dragging him out of her chambers and into the morning light.

They faced off, each at the ready, waiting for the other to make the first move. It was a contest of wills, who would break first as they circled each other. Trace grinned, his handsome lips turning up with cocky self-assurance. "Any time you are ready, General."

"After you." Rayne waved her hand with languid grace.

Trace lunged, his sword thrusting quickly before being knocked aside by Rayne's. He was impressed with her

quickness. "Somehow I think you weren't really trying that hard when you fought my mother."

"Actually, I wasn't." She smirked, raising her sword easily to block his next blow. The power behind it sent a tingle of awareness up her arm. He was massively strong; his reach much longer, his body honed by years of training. She had agility and speed on her side. In her eyes, that made this contest more than equal. "Is this the best you can do?"

"Actually, no," he said, playing upon her words. His sword spun, wrist flexing, drawing forth power from deep within his core. He lunged forward again, forcing Rayne to back up and use two hands to block off the blows of his sword.

With a quick spin, she let him move right past her, twirling to come up upon his back.

But he'd spun as well, and she once more faced his sword. Smiling, she nodded approval of his quick moves. Blow after blow, they fought, each admiring the other's form and grace until sweat beaded their bodies, causing Rayne's golden hair to curl and Trace's shirt to grow transparent.

He grew impressed by her movements and the strength of her arms and legs as they almost danced across the courtyard, neither willing to give quarter. Finally, a lucky blow decided their fate and Trace smiled as he watched his sword fly from his hand to land on the intricate flagstones that made up the courtyard.

"Nicely done, General," he said, bowing his head to her.

She bent at the waist, catching her breath. "It was plain luck," she panted. "You've got a firm grip and the style to lead any army into battle."

He nodded his thanks, stooping to pick up his sword when they heard the applause of the woman who stood watching them.

"Princess," Rayne said, going to one knee. "I didn't see you."

Katrina waved for her to rise, going instead to Trace and walking around him, looking him up and down as if inspecting a cut of meat. "I had always wondered how you would fair with one of my guard. It's nice to know of your prowess with the sword. Do you plan to let him keep it, General?"

"It is his, Princess. I would not wish to be the one to try to take it from him."

"True. I envy you, Rayne." She turned to look at Trace without giving Rayne time to find an answer. "You are loyal to my General?"

Trace smiled, glancing at Rayne before answering. "Fiercely so," he said.

"Good, then perhaps we can find a place in the guards for you. Once all my subjects are used to the idea of free men, I think perhaps we will have more like you." Katrina smiled wryly. "I bid you good afternoon."

Trace bowed his head, before smiling at Rayne. "I believe you won."

"I believe you are right."

"So now, what act must I perform to pay for my loss?" He smiled, knowing that what she wanted would be no hardship to him.

She sheathed her sword, stalking toward him with the grace of a feline. Her hands came up, pulling loose the laces

that held his shirt together. She ran her fingers over the smooth flesh of his chest, admiring his hard, toned body.

"What do you think I want?"

Trace gathered her to him, fitting the curve of her ass in his palms. Lifting her, he felt her long slender legs wrap around his waist. His head bent, his mouth sliding over the warm skin of her throat to find her ear, twirling his tongue around the soft whorl. He chuckled as she shivered, enjoying their play.

"I could take you right here," he whispered, reaching between her legs with one hand and pressing against her soft, feminine lips. "I think you'd beg me for it."

"Is this another wager?" she moaned, letting her head drop back as his mouth roamed over her flesh.

"If it is, it is one that I would win." He dropped her to her feet, his hand coming up to cup her face. The kiss started off as a gentle merging of lips and tongues, growing heated until he bent her over his arm, desperate for more of her.

When he lifted his head, her eyes told him all he ever needed to know. They were soft, lambent with desire and love, almost too beautiful as they gazed up at him. He carefully brushed the hair from her face, his hand shaking slightly, betraying the need that coursed through his body. "I love you, Rayne," he said softly.

Her smile was brilliant, outshining the sun. She took a step back, leaving his arms and took up his hand, dragging him out of the courtyard.

\* \* \* \*

Katrina heard them laughing behind her as she made her way through the courtyard and into the gardens. It struck a chord deep inside, making her realize how alone she really was. She lived in a palace filled with people; men, women, children. She couldn't remember ever feeling this alone. With a sigh, she glanced back, seeing Rayne and Trace locked in an embrace.

They looked so happy, her golden hair pressed against his chest, her head cradled in his hands as he kissed her sweetly and then with more fire until Katrina thought she could feel the heat from where she was standing. Her hands roamed his back, pulling at the thin lawn shirt until she could reach under it to find his hot skin.

For a moment, she stood watching them. Trace kissed a long path over her throat, bending her back in his arms until he could bury his face in the deep cleavage between her breasts. A soft moan escaped Katrina's lips as she remembered Ryder's lips on her skin, the feel of his tongue against her. She could still feel the heat of his mouth as he suckled her taut nipples; feel the hair roughened skin of his legs against her smooth thighs.

With a cry that never reached the lovers entwined in the courtyard, she turned and ran, not stopping until she reached her chamber.

She stood in the center of the room, her eyes darting from one wall to the other, every piece of furniture reminding her of him. She could almost see him, glaring hostilely from the wall where he'd been tied. She could taste his flesh; feel the

heat of his skin. She gazed helplessly about, feeling as if the walls were closing in.

"Stop it!" she shouted. "Just stop thinking about him."

But that was easier said than done. Even her subconscious played her false; dreams of him making love to her, kissing her, walking away from her, had her tossing and turning from the moment she laid her head on the pillow. He seemed everywhere, haunting her, haranguing her until she felt she would go insane.

She hurried to her wardrobe, pulling out the mirror, holding it carefully. It was precious to her, her only link to the man she loved beyond all else. Climbing onto her bed, she set it down in front of her. "Show me," she whispered softly. "Show me Ryder."

The images spun, twirled like a liquid vortex, colors spiraling into a whirlpool of chaos. Katrina kept her eyes fixed, waiting for it to slow and stop, the image clearing. A pain sliced through her heart as she saw him, finally.

His hair shone in the light that slid through the branches of the trees around them. He was talking to his uncle, saying something that made the man throw back his head and laugh. Ryder looked happy. For a moment, her heart lurched and she nearly turned away, but then she saw him look over his shoulder. Emotion flitted quickly across his handsome features.

She recognized the area. They were close to the portals and to the end of her lands. They had made good time. Katrina bent over the mirror, wishing she could touch him one more time.



Her eyes narrowed when a group of women suddenly appeared around the group, the six men clutching different parts of their bodies where feathered tips of darts protruded. Each fell over, succumbing quickly to the sedative. Jetta and Raven stood next to their men, swords drawn, but they were no match for the warriors around them.

All eight were tied and then the circle of women parted, letting in a woman that Katrina recognized instantly.

"Bettina," she hissed. "You thieving whore." She glared at the golden haired woman, wishing she could reach through the mirror and ring the bloody bitch's neck.

Bettina smiled, her painted lips parting to show white teeth. She spoke. Katrina could not hear a word, but she had an idea as to the gist of the conversation. She was claiming the men for her own. Katrina was more certain of the fact when she saw the faces of Raven and Jetta.

Anger flooded her body. She rose from the bed, going to the bell pull and giving the satiny cord a heavy yank. By the time a servant appeared at her door, she had her thoughts organized and had pushed aside her worry.

"I need you to bring General Rayne to my quarters, along with her mate. Also, have her send a party of her finest warriors along the trail taken by the other worlders. I wish to know what they find right away. Hurry!" she urged the slender man. He bowed, running from the room to do her bidding.

\* \* \* \*

Trace thrust against Rayne, his body desperate with the need to feel her come around his plunging cock. She was voracious, her hands grasping, her body undulating under his with need and demand. He leaned down, taking her mouth in a kiss of pure lust, his teeth sinking with strategic accuracy into the softness of her bottom lip, hearing her moan.

Rayne's hands were on his ass, cupping the smooth, thrusting muscles, teasingly dipping between his legs to glide her short nails across the taut sac of his balls.

"Wench," he growled against her mouth, his hands grabbing hers and holding them out to their sides, his fingers twining with hers. "I love you," he gasped, feeling her body jerk and then quiver under his, the muscles of her sheath hugging him like a clenched fist as she came.

"Trace," she cried, grunting softly as pleasure poured through her. It was exquisite, sending her nerve endings on a dance of pure sensual current. Waves of heat, of ecstasy swamped her so much so that she missed the telltale roar of his own spendings, only feeling the warmth and weight of his body as he relaxed against her.

His body glistened with sweat, rubbing against hers as he rolled, pulling her on top of him while his hands roamed over her back, his palm rubbing tenderly. "Mmm," he moaned in appreciation. "You unman me, Rayne."

She lifted her head, looking down at him with a speculative gleam in her eyes. "You look very manly to me," she purred, moving her hips against his. "You feel very manly as well, my love."

He narrowed his eyes, his lips parting to retort when an urgent pounding came upon the door of their chambers.

"What?"

"Princess Katrina wishes to see you both, sir," the man's voice came through the wooden portal. "It is a matter of importance."

"It had better be," he snapped, groaning when Rayne pulled herself free of him, sliding off the edge of the bed.

"Come. The Princess is not one to send for me unnecessarily, Trace." She went to the corner where her shower stood, allowing herself a few moments to sluice off the sweat and dirt of the day's play. Trace joined her, though she quickly moved out of reach of his caressing hands, knowing if he had his way, the Princess would wait.

She dressed quickly, watching with amusement as he struggled to pull his leather breeches up over his still damp body, handing him his sword when he was through and watching with pride as he buckled it on. "I never thought to arm one of my men," she mused.

"I'm *one* of your men?" he asked, stressing the word as he gazed at her.

"You are my one and only man," she smirked, making him chuckle. "Come, we must not keep the Princess waiting."

\* \* \* \*

Princess Katrina paced the confines of her chamber, going back to the mirror every few moments to see how far Bettina had managed to drag the men. She cared little for the three

men that had wanted to return to their home world, but Ryder was in danger and she had to find a way to help him.

The knock on the door of her chamber startled her. She twirled, her hand going to her breast before she called for admittance.

"Rayne, Trace, the party of other worlders has been attacked," she announced with no preamble. "Bettina. She dares much, attacking guests of my land upon my own property. She has taken them captive."

"How do you know this?" Trace asked, staring around the room. "Did you have a spy following them?"

"No," Katrina said quickly, only to hesitate. "I should not show you this."

Overruling her caution, she beckoned them forward and toward her bed, waving a hand at the mirror showing the men being loaded upon the backs of beasts.

"What magic is this?" Trace's brow furrowed as he stared at the moving pictures in the mirror.

"My mother's. Stolen, I am sure, from some other world. We must go to their aid. Bettina isn't honorable. She will kill the women and keep the men. They will be abused terribly. Rayne, this you know."

"I do," Rayne said. "We must roust an army."

"Yes, and quickly." Katrina glanced down once more, seeing Ryder's slack face as he hung from the back of the beast. As she watched, Bettina moved toward him, her hands stroking over his wide back, down to his trim waist, and over the taut curve of his buttocks.

\* \* \* \*

Ryder woke, his head hanging between his upraised arms. Pain shot through his temples, pain echoed in his back as he slowly swung upon the rope that bound him. He tried to open his eyes, only to moan quietly as even that tiny movement brought shards of bright agony to pierce his skull.

"Tis about time, son."

Ryder pried open his eyes, looking up and into his father's face. "Where are we?"

"I don't know," Damien said, glancing around at their surroundings. "If I were to hazard a guess, I'd say a dungeon or a stable."

"Can you not get free, father?"

"No," Damien growled, angered by the sudden lack of magic. "I have no powers here."

Ryder's curse was coarse and to the point.

"Would your Princess pull such a foul trick?" Castor asked.

"No," Ryder said at once. "She is honorable, father."

"She is a fool," a woman's voice chimed in. "She's always been a fool. She freed you, and to what purpose? Honor is for the weak, those needing a reason to give up. You are mine now, all of you." The owner of the voice stepped forward, golden hair loose and curling around a gown made of two short pieces of fabric held at the sides by thin gold chains. It showed off rich, luscious curves, the material thin enough to leave little to the imagination.

She was lovely, with almond shaped eyes of gray green, but there was a vicious cruelty to the twist of her lips that Ryder recognized instantly. "Who are you?" he asked.

He barely saw the thin leather whip in her hand but he felt it against the welts already left upon his back. "I did not give you leave to speak, man," she sneered.

Ryder jerked, his body twitching upon the rope. "I never needed permission," he growled, only to feel a fury of rage-filled blows.

He clenched his teeth, never allowing their captor to see his pain. A trail of wet heat fell upon his naked flanks, blood from the welts that opened under the brutal blows. It dripped to the straw-filled floor beneath him.

"Bitch!" Castor growled, watching the woman turn from his nephew and come towards him. Her hand caressed his thigh, moving up and over his ass, touching the scarred leather of his back. The skin there was so badly whipped from his life on his home world that he wouldn't feel her blows.

"I see you have been punished before. Your punisher did nice work with her whip."

"My punisher is dead." Castor said, "As you will be if you do not release us now."

She laughed. "I am Princess Bettina, great granddaughter to Queen Bertana who once ruled every province of our world. I do not fear anything as insignificant as a man." She roamed her hand across his lower stomach, finding his cock. "Are you too old to fill this lusty piece?"

Castor ground his teeth against the feel of her hand stroking his cock. He willed himself to feel nothing, a trick he'd used on his own world those many years before. He needed it in years, but by concentrating upon the pain in his

hands, he was able to stop his cock from responding to her touch.

"Bah, you are old," she said in disgust, turning to one of the other men who had come with them. "I know one of you was favored by Katrina, but which one?"

Ryder started to open his mouth only to be stopped by his father who shook his head. He narrowed his eyes, unwilling to let any of the others take his place, whatever torment this madwoman had planned.

She wandered amongst them, touching, caressing, stroking as she tried to decide which male her rival had favored. When she stood in front of Damien, she drew her dagger. "If you will not tell me, I suppose I shall have to geld you all, at least until one of you talks to save yourself."

"I am Ryder. I was the one Katrina favored," Ryder said, despite the glare from his father. "Leave them alone. They are innocent."

Bettina's eyes sparkled, her mouth pursed in a moue of disappointment. "You ruined a fine day of torture, slave. Perhaps you can make it up to me later." She nodded to two of the women who stood near the door. "Take him to my chamber and then bring the women in. I think they might find it interesting to see how we treat men in our world."

"Yes, Princess," they said in unison, moving forward.

Bettina sheathed her dagger, smirking as she left the dank room.

"Damn the Spirits, son..." Damien began, only to be silenced by one of the women.

"Do not risk more of her wrath," one of her guard said, glancing over her shoulder. "She has become quite mad."

"Then it is our duty to put her out of her misery," Ryder growled.

"Treason," the guard hissed. "Do not listen. She will have our heads to decorate her hall."

"Your magic, father. Can you not use it to free us?"

Damien shook his head. "I've not enough left this far from the portal," he repeated. "Do you not think I haven't tried?"

Ryder felt the familiar nooses being looped over his neck as they cut him down. He fell to the hay strewn floor, his back aching from the beating, his arms numb from being tied above his head. The nooses tightened, the poles forcing him to his feet. He gave his father one more glance before he let himself be led from the room.

He would not allow this torture to happen, not to his family. He would kill this Princess Bettina if she were actually as insane as she seemed to be. Ryder looked around as he was walked towards the Princess's chambers. The halls were dirty, litter and refuse in every corner and crevice he could see. It was nothing like Katrina's palace, with its open, airy feel. This place was dark, smelly and dank, the people they passed afraid to even raise their eyes from the ground.

They passed a male servant who prostrated himself upon the floor, his back a horror of crisscrossed stripes, his arms shaking as he tried to lift himself up. Ryder's disgust was evident upon his handsome face and as he was dragged through huge double doors, once white, now stained red with



blood, he couldn't help the shudder that over took his tall frame.

"How can you let her do this?" he hissed at the two women.

"They have no choice, Ryder of Daring Castle. I am the ultimate power here."

"I'd say you were the ultimate evil here," he growled, seeing his mother and aunt tied to the wall of the Princess's bedchamber. "Let them go."

"A man who gives orders," Bettina mused. "And by all that is holy, expects them to be followed. This is truly a wonderful find."

\* \* \* \*

Bettina rose from where she'd been reclining upon the bed. She wandered around him, her eyes widening as she finally became aware of his size, the power of his body. "You are a mighty one, aren't you? But even the mighty fall, Ryder. Did not your father tell you that?"

Her hand rested upon the small of his back, pushing him forward. "Alanna, Edina, go to the women. If Ryder refuses any order that I give him, cut off a pound of their flesh."

Ryder's eyes flew to his mother's, seeing Raven's pain.

"Don't worry about us, son," she said slowly.

"Mother..."

"Enough!" Bettina pushed him once more towards the bed. "I wish to find out what Katrina saw in you that made her foolish enough to go to another world to drag you here." She watched as the impact of her words caused horror and

disgust to cross his expressive face. "You will please me as well as you did her, or else..."

"Or else what?" Ryder ground out between gritted teeth.

"Or else your family will be put to death," she said lightly, playfully slapping his ass with the palm of her hand.

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## Chapter Twelve

Katrina turned back to the mirror as she made her final preparations, readying to go with Rayne and fight the battle ahead. It was a battle long overdue and one she'd been hoping to avoid.

"Show me Ryder," she said softly, watching the familiar spin of the images, the chaotic bleeding of colors until it finally stopped. Her eyes widened as she saw him, tethered hand and foot to a bed, his face turned away from her. Bettina moved into view, her hands slowly roaming over his chest, pulling on his tiny male nipples, stroking over his flanks.

Jealousy roared through her, a rage that made her tremble as she watched that foul witch touch the man she loved. Now that she knew his touch, the pleasure he could bring, the joy she felt when with him, she couldn't bear to see this, and especially not with her. She had to save him, no matter the cost.

"Princess, we are prepared," came the awaited call through her door.

"We ride." She shoved her dagger into her right boot top. Through the palace she hurried, reaching the front door and running down the steps that led to her mount. He was broad of back with a short neck and an ornery temper, snorting rudely as she push her foot into the stirrup and grabbed his reins to pull her other leg over him. "Shut up, you unruly

brute," she hissed, kicking him in the sides and starting him through the village.

It was an amazing sight. Thirty armed and mounted women, each well built and in complete control of the huge beasts they rode. Armor plating curved to the shape of their breasts and waists, glinting in the morning sun. Helmets covered their heads, all but the Princess, who rode with her hair flying behind her in a long red tail. Behind them, more of the guard followed on foot, running with near perfect synchronicity. These foot soldiers were capable of swift long distance travel, priding themselves on their strength and stamina.

General Rayne kicked her beast until he ran neck to neck with the Princess's. "What are your orders?" she shouted above the sounds of hooves and the heavy breathing of the animals.

"Free the other worlders and kill whomever you have to, but Bettina is mine," Katrina growled. "She's pushed me too far this time."

"She will not fight fairly, Princess."

"Than neither shall I," Katrina spat, her green eyes hard and glittery, like emeralds in her pale skin.

"Princess..." Rayne began, ready to remind her of her duty.

"No, Rayne," Katrina said, shaking her head. "I know of what you are going to speak. My duties as Princess also call for me to protect my people and those that travel cross my lands. Bettina has stepped far outside the boundaries of the

laws. She's taken something because it was mine, I will not let Ryder or his family be harmed because of me."

"But I could..." Rayne stopped speaking, seeing the determination in Katrina's eyes. "She will have her spies out, Princess."

"She will not expect us to know of their abduction this soon. It gives us the advantage." She sighed heavily. "I must speak with you about another matter, General. I've already spoken to Councilwoman Miriam of my plans and while she doesn't agree, she is willing to abide by my wishes."

"What wishes?"

"If I fall to Bettina's sword, you are to assume command. Not just of this guard, but of my kingdom. Perhaps, with Trace at your side, you might be able to bring about the changes that I wasn't." Katrina glanced over, wanting to gauge her General's reaction.

"What of your sister?" Rayne asked, surprise coloring her voice.

"She will not be ready to reign for many seasons, Rayne. My ... our people will need a strong leader, someone not afraid to fight for what is right. You are that person, Rayne. Your loyalty has never been in question, to me or to the people. You must do this, Rayne. You are the only one who can."

"I ... I do not know what to say, Princess. Let us just hope it will not become an issue."

Katrina nodded grimly then kicked her beast hard, surging ahead to meet the guard she'd sent out to scout the area.

\* \* \* \*

Bettina stared down at the hard, tanned body of the man who lay supine upon her bed. Even in his relaxed state, his muscles bulged with strength, sending a flutter of warmth down to her groin. No man in her kingdom had ever looked such, so strong, so sensual, so utterly male. It made her long for the days she'd read about in her ancestor's writings, when men had ruled and women had fought to be equals.

If not for the wars and the famine, men would still be in charge. But one strong queen had taken her king in hand, forcing him to bow to her will by using drugs, torture; whatever methods necessary to control him. She had been the first, saving a generation by ending wars and binding with others so that all could share in the riches of their world.

The men had paid for it. However, with them no longer training and fighting, leaving the protecting to the women of their kind, they had lost everything that made this man in front of her so desirable.

His skin was warm under the caress of her palm, and though he jerked at her touch, he made no other movement. His head was turned from her, denying her the pleasure of seeing the pain and disgust in his eyes, the torment of being degraded in front of these two women. That would not do, not at all.

"Look at me!" she growled, her voice rough with her desire. She grabbed the long length of his sable colored hair, pulling until he turned, hatred in his eyes. "If you do not wish to see my two soldiers carve flesh from the bones of these

women you love, you'd better do my bidding. I can see why Katrina found you so irresistible. Did she fuck you?"

Ryder glared at his captor, his turquoise eyes hard and brittle. He kept his mouth shut, unwilling to speak to her about what he'd shared with Katrina, for it had been unlike anything he'd felt before.

"Stubborn to a fault. The scrolls spoke of how the men of our past showed such fire and determination. It should displease me, but I find such defiance somehow appealing." Her hand slid down his rippled stomach, sliding with pleasure over the hard muscles until her fingers brushed against the wiry curls at his loins.

He fought the unwanted pleasure that stirred as her stroking fingers finally grasped the root of his cock, holding it in her hand. He struggled more as he saw her bend down, her mouth opening around the purple head, sucking him in.

A strangled moan escaped his clenched teeth, for her mouth was hot and wet, and she sucked upon him as if he were the most delicious of treats. "Bitch. Leave off and let me be!"

His demands were met with a garbled chuckle, vibrations causing his cock to harden even more. Her beautiful eyes met his, her lush lips turning up in a smile of pure evil delight over having caused such a reaction.

Pulling her mouth away, she licked her lips. "Men are such silly creatures. You are all controlled by this," she said, stroking her hand up and down his saliva-coated cock. "You can scream and fight all you wish, but once your cock is nested in a warm, wet place, you all turn into moaning dogs."

I could make you scream with pleasure. Or, I could just make you scream." Her teeth snapped closed harshly, a mere breath from the tip of his glans. "Which would you like?"

"I would like you to roast in the fiery depths of hell," he growled, struggling against the bonds. He could feel his hand, wet with blood, slipping through the leather of the cuffs. If he could but fight more, he would be free.

"Is that anyway to speak to someone who only has your best interests in heart, Ryder of Daring Castle?" She frowned, seeming displeased, though her hand kept up its constant stroking. "You will hurt my feelings if you keep speaking to me this way."

"I will do more than hurt your feelings, wench." He couldn't help the groan that rose from his depths for what she was doing to him, while unwanted, still held him spellbound with desire.

"Oh yes, you will," Bettina agreed, pulling her hand away from him and grabbing the ties that held her clothing together. One tug and she was naked, her slender body golden and curved, beautiful to see. "I look forward to telling Katrina how well you loved me when we meet upon the field of battle. That green-eyed wench has needed bringing down a peg or so for years. What do you think she will do when she knows that you have serviced her worst enemy?" Bettina laughed, the sound high and shrill, the sound of madness.

"She will not care," Ryder growled, narrowing his eyes as she slid off the thin leather boots she wore. "She has given up all claim to me."



"Oh, she will care, and care deeply. You will be damaged goods, worth little to anyone but me when I am through with you." She slipped onto the bed, one hand going to the mattress on either side of him. Her breasts pressed against his chest and she looked up at the wall where her other two prisoners resided. "Perhaps when I am through riding him, you two ladies would like a turn?"

Ryder's curse was low and succinct, causing Bettina more laughter. She threw her leg over his hip, straddling his loins. The tip of his cock nestled into the thin slit of her femininity, which was wet with her desire. She started to lower herself down upon him, her hand between her thighs, guiding him into her.

"No!" he roared, trying to buck her off, but only succeeding in pushing himself inside her further.

"Princess Bettina!" The cry came from the doorway, panic and terror in the voice of the man who was interrupting Bettina in her play.

"What is it?!" she screamed.

"An army is at the gates, Princess. Katrina comes for the hostages."

"Impossible," Bettina shrieked, pulling herself from the fullness of his cock. She ran to her windows. "She could not know so soon, she could not."

What she saw turned her blood cold. Her kingdom was nowhere near the size of Katrina's and had far fewer trained, mounted guard. Katrina hadn't brought all of hers, but she had enough. Her foot soldiers stood in rank behind the mounted guard, ready for battle. A ram was being used,

battering at the city gates below. "Close and block the gates to the castle itself. Get the guard prepared for battle. Bring my mount to the castle steps."

"She thinks to take you back," Bettina growled, glancing over her shoulder at her bound prisoners. "I'll kill you before she gets her hands upon you."

Edina stepped from the wall, her eyes going past her Princess to the mighty show of force outside. A thrill of terror shivered through her. Many would die today because of Bettina's madness, a madness that had most of the once loyal guard sneaking away at night, offering their services to other Princesses. They had perhaps ten mounted guard and maybe twice that in foot soldiers. "We will not survive this battle, Bettina," she whispered.

"Nonsense," Bettina scoffed. "But if you fear so, then stay here. If it looks as if I am to fall in battle, run your sword through these three. There will be no one left to save. Poor Princess Katrina will blame herself for the loss of her man and those he holds dear. It is not what I wished, but still a sound plan. Alanna, go to the stable and do the same for the men of his world. They are to die if I do not win."

Ryder struggled against the leather cuffs, the blood on his wrist making the leather slick. He watched as Bettina readied herself for battle, hearing the booming of the battering ram grow louder.

"They are at the castle gates now," Edina called from her place at the window.

"Do you see Katrina?"

"She rides at the front, and there is a man with them, a man who is wearing a sword," she said, turning to glance at her Princess. "Who is this man?"

"He must be one of the other worlders." She waved her hand in front of her. "It matters not, no man can fight with the same deftness as a woman. He will be a stain on the tip of my sword soon."

Ryder laughed. "He is my brother and wields that sword with more proficiency than any I've seen. You are as good as dead, Bettina."

"Then so are you, Ryder of Daring Castle." She reached over, grabbing a handful of his hair and pulling his face up. "Best you pray for my safety this day, for if not..." she dropped his head, leaving the sentence unfinished as she grabbed her helm and her sword. "Lock this door. If anyone besides me tries to enter, kill them."

"Yes, Princess," Edina said, though her voice lacked conviction.

She hurried after her mistress, locking the door behind her before going back to the window. A loud crashing rose from the gates of the castle. The sound of battle cries filled the air. "Tis begun," Edina whispered, her hands at her breast.

Ryder pulled against the leather, grinding his teeth as the pain in his wrist became worse. Just as he was about to give it up as a lost cause, the leather gave, freeing his hand. He wanted to shout his triumph. Instead, he went to work on the rest of his bindings, quietly swinging his ankles over the side of the bed when they were free. He went to his mother first,

freeing her hands, then to Jetta while his mother freed her ankles from the wall.

"If you will take me from this place, I will ignore my Princess's orders," Edina said from behind him.

Ryder twirled, noting that while the woman's hand was on her sword hilt, she had not drawn the weapon and stood confidently before them. "I can trust you?" he asked, his eyes narrowing.

"Princess Bettina is mad. Today's events confirmed this to me." A tear of sadness fell from her eyes. "She will get us all killed. I do not wish for a death that has no meaning. So, yes, you can trust me to do you no ill."

"I need clothing and a sword," Ryder said.

Edina dug into a small trunk, pulling out leggings and a tunic such as he'd worn once before. She handed them to him, ignoring the rolling of his eyes as he struggled into the too tight, unfamiliar clothing. "Your swords are there." She indicated a wardrobe that stood upon one wall. "But we cannot leave this room. We will be killed."

Ryder grabbed his sword, handing his mother and Jetta two of the smaller ones. "Take the rest of them. We will have to arm Father and the rest of the men."

"Did you not hear me?" Edina hissed.

"I heard you, but it matters not. I will not let my father be killed like some animal. Will Alanna follow Bettina's orders or is she as eager as you to leave this terrible place?"

"Let me talk to her. She is as eager to leave Bettina's rule. Bettina used her man foully, hurting him so horribly. He is

now crippled and can no longer service a woman in bed. She hates the Princess for that."

"Then come along. Take us to the stables. Then you and Alanna can leave or stay, it is up to you." Ryder buckled his sword belt around his waist, hearing the sound of battle in the courtyard below. "We must hurry."

He opened the door, standing off to the side to check the hallway for sign of either friend or foe. When he saw no one, he waved his mother forward. "Off to the right. Do not cross through the courtyard. I will be right behind you."

Raven let her hand rest against his cheek for one moment. "Be careful my son. This is making me old beyond my years," she said, sighing and making him chuckle.

"Doubtful, mother. You are still as young and beautiful as the day you met father. Now go, quickly and quietly." He held the door open, watching as Edina led the way to the stable and then hurrying after them. He would make sure they made it inside safely. Then he had to find Katrina. If anything happened to her, he would be unable to forgive himself.

Alanna opened to Edina almost instantly. She stared wide-eyed at Ryder. A man wearing a sword was an oddity to her. Ryder spotted his leather breeches and changed quickly, breathing a huge sigh of relief to be out of the strange and too tight clothing. He cut down the rest of the men.

"Father, I have to go. Katrina is out there somewhere. I have to warn her about Bettina. The woman is not right in the head."

Damien dropped his hand down on his son's shoulder. "I would go with you." He glanced over at his wife and the other

men, too weak to pick up a sword to defend themselves. "But my place is here until the others recover." He sighed heavily. "Take care, son. With as weak as our magic is this far from the portals, things are more dangerous. If you were injured, I doubt even your mother could save you."

Ryder nodded. "Blockade the entrances. I will be back as soon as I am able."

"No. We should be off," Castor warned, his arm around Jetta.

"The castle is overrun with warrior women, Uncle. Until this battle is fought and won, the safest place for you is here." Ryder clasped his uncle's hand. "I'll be back soon."

He turned to leave, hearing the door bolted behind him and hearing his uncle's voice. "Now why does he remind me of you, brother?" Castor joked, making Ryder smile.

\* \* \* \*

Katrina could smell the fear. It lived in the muck that lined the streets and in the eyes of the people who peeped at them from inside their huts. It dwelled in the too thin animals that roamed freely throughout the village and the sickly looking garden plots that grew more rocks than produce.

This palace had once been a showplace, Queen Bertana's home and the birth place of the first Princesses of this world. Now it spoke more of poverty and despair than riches and hope.

Just the scent made Katrina feel ill. "Why has this place fallen to such disrepair? Bettina is one of the richest of us.

What has she been doing to let these people live in such squalor?"

Rayne flinched at the sight of a small boy, his leg cruelly twisted, his foot turned in. He had been left to fend for himself among the animals. He was filthy and half wild, growling at the riders as they passed. "Bettina has much to answer for."

"Never have I seen such poverty," Trace growled. "This is how the royals of your world let their people live?"

"No," Katrina answered, her eyes hardening. "She will be made to atone for these evils." They reached the edge of the city, coming to the closed castle gates. "Bring up the ram, batter the doors in."

She watched as the women brought forth the huge ram, a large log hung from heavy chains attached to a small wagon. The wheels were locked, then blocked from behind by chunks of rock. The log was then swung, slamming with building force against the gates.

It took very little time, for the gates had been left to rot, the timbers used to make them never replaced. The once-formidable barrier splintered quickly, falling apart in just a few blows. The ram was pushed away and the mounted riders galloped inside, only to be greeted by an empty courtyard.

"Have they all fled?" Rayne growled, her sword out, eager to begin the battle.

Katrina dismounted, handing her beast's reins to one of the foot soldiers and striding out into the midst of the courtyard. "Bettina!" she shouted, the name echoing eerily. "Come and face me if you dare!"

The sound of hooves seemed loud in the silence. Katrina turned toward it, the song of her sword singing out as she pulled it from its sheath. Bettina, her hair mussed, her armor dull and dinged, galloped into the courtyard, her own sword swinging in her hand. "I dare, Katrina. You have broken treaty, attacking me in this way."

"You've broken treaty first, by coming onto my land and abducting visitors given safe passage to the portals. I want those people back, Bettina. Now." Katrina stood tall as Bettina galloped around her, the size of the beast an unfair advantage, against all codes of honor even in time of war.

"Pshaw, Katrina. It is not those visitors you want back, but that warrior man. Did his cock fill you as well as it did me? Did it bring you to climax as quickly and as many times as it did me? His chest is wide and so well-suited to pillow my head, Katrina."

"You bray like an ass, Bettina. Face me as a woman and let us meet our fates."

"I hear jealousy," Bettina laughed, slipping off the back of her beast. "It is such a bitter pill to know that you were second best, is it not? He cried out my name when I let him finally spend his seed inside of me. He thanked me for rescuing him from you."

Katrina's eyes gleamed, her emotions firmly held in check. She would not let the taunts touch her. Bettina was not known for her fairness. She stood her ground, raising her hand and waving Bettina closer. "Come, let us finish this."

"Yes, Ryder is waiting in my bed. He is eager for more of me, Katrina."



"Behind you!" the shout came from the back of Katrina's guard. The sound of fighting erupted, momentarily drawing Rayne's eyes from her Princess. The clang of swords brought her eyes back. Bettina had attacked, swinging her sword with both hands in a show of strength meant to demean and overwhelm Katrina.

Katrina held her own, latching on to Bettina's wrist to finally push her back, swinging her sword to clear space in front of her and backing to the center of the courtyard.

"Find them," she shouted to Rayne and Trace, taking a strong stance and moving slowly around Bettina.

"But..."

"Do not argue with me," Katrina growled. "Do as I said and remember my instructions, Rayne." She moved forward, bringing her sword down and thrusting at Bettina.

She heard Trace and Rayne move off but could not take the moment to spare them a glance. Her arms tingled from the sword blows and for the first time she felt as if she might not come out of this alive. Bettina was mad, insanity granting her unnatural strength. She giggled irrationally, the sound sending goose flesh over Katrina's body.

*How do you face a devil and win?* Katrina thought to herself, for Bettina was certainly some kind of demon. She found herself backing away, rushing to parry blows that came with a speed and dexterity she hadn't expected.

"You have no hope of winning, Katrina. When I have killed you, I will take over your lands and your men. I will rule your lands with the same laws I rule my own." She laughed

harshly, spinning and blocking a thrust of Katrina's to sneak under her guard, her sword sinking into Katrina's side.

Pain was instantaneous and harsh, like a hot fiery brand shoved into her. She stared down at the blade embedded in her flesh then up to the triumph in Bettina's eyes. Her mouth opened, but no sound came out. She fell backward, her body dropping from the sword and lying still against the cobbled stones of the courtyard.

\* \* \* \*

Trace saw Ryder first, running to him and embracing him quickly. "You aren't hurt?"

"No, we are all well. Father and the rest are up there," Ryder nodded towards the small building used to "stable" the new men. "Is Katrina with you?"

"She's back there," Rayne said, her eyes worried. "She's fighting Bettina, Ryder."

"Tell me you're joking," Ryder growled, staring down at the General. "She cannot, the woman is insane."

Before Rayne could say anything else, Ryder was gone, running down the small pathway towards the sound of clanging swords.

"Let's go get my parents," Trace said, pulling on her arm. "Ryder will take care of his Princess."

Rayne nodded, feeling a relief she hadn't expected from seeing a man rush towards battle.

\* \* \* \*

Bettina stood over Katrina's body, watching as her foe bled her life's fluids onto the stones. "I shall rule your lands with pleasure, Princess."

Ryder stood at the edge of the courtyard, his body frozen in disbelief as he saw Katrina lying on the stones. "No," he whispered, his heart beating so hard he thought it would burst. Pain engulfed him and he threw himself forward, screaming her name. "Katrina, No!"

Bettina raised her sword, wrapping both hands firmly around the hilt, smiling up at Ryder as she made ready to deliver the final blow. "It is for the best, my love," she said softly, the sword poised above her head.

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## Chapter Thirteen

Ryder tried to reach Katrina but knew he was too far away. He watched in horror as the sword came down towards the woman he loved, his throat closing up in agony.

Bettina smiled as she brought the sword down. An intense pain stopped her and she looked down, surprised to see the jewel-covered hilt of a dagger emerging from just under her breast plate.

"Wha..." she groaned, before the blood spurted from her mouth and dripped down her chin. The sword fell from her suddenly nerveless fingers, clanging harmlessly to the cobbled stones as she stumbled back.

Her hands in claws, she ripped at the dagger, shrieking as she pulled it from her chest. It rang against the stones, a clear counterpoint to the dull clang of the heavier blade. She staggered, her eyes shocked, shaking her head helplessly as she fell to her knees. Her mouth opened and closed, opening once more as a huge gout of blood welled from between her lips and she fell, her body arching in one final spasm as death took her.

Katrina closed her eyes, helplessly letting her body fall back from its perch on her elbow, her strength gone. The arm that had delivered the dagger remained raised for a moment, then fell bonelessly beside her. She felt someone kneel at her side and forced her eyes open. "R ... Ryder?"

"Shh, don't talk," he said, helplessly staring at the wound in her side. "We'll get my mother and she can heal you."

"I ... It's too late for t ... that," she sighed, feeling him gather her in his arms. "I ... Is she...?"

"Dead?" He turned, seeing Bettina lying on the ground not far from them, her eyes open and sightless, an expression of stunned surprise still upon her face. "Yes. You won, Katrina."

"I ... I guess that m ... makes you mine," she said, a coughing fit making her moan in pain.

Rayne ran into the courtyard, her eyes taking in the sight before her. "Princess?"

"She's hurt! Get my mother, and Trace. Maybe the two of them..." He couldn't finish the sentence.

"Ryder?" Katrina whispered, her green eyes staring blindly up at his face.

"Don't speak, Katrina. Save your strength. Tell me after my mother's healed you."

She shook her head, her beautiful red curls hanging down and over his knee as he held her against his chest. "N-no time," she whispered, her green gaze going distant. "I'm losing too m-much blood."

Instinct made him press his hand against the wound, feeling the heat of her blood as it oozed between his fingers. He heard her gasp and the low moan of pain she gave, but he didn't give up. He had to keep her alive until his mother arrived. He must.

"I love you," she said, the last clear words to come from between her lush lips. The words tore at his heart like a physical pain.

"I love you," he whispered, bending his head down to hers. He heard her sigh, felt the heat of her breath against his skin and then nothing more. "Katrina?"

He shook her, unable to believe she was dead. "Katrina! No, I won't let you die!"

A hand fell to his shoulder and he shook it off, stubborn in his grief. "No, she's not dead."

"Son," Raven said softly. "Let me see to her."

Ryder looked up, seeing his mother, Trace and his father not far behind. He laid her carefully on the ground, his eyes pleading with his mother. "Please," he whispered hoarsely.

Raven gave him a quick hug before dropping to her knees next to Katrina. She pulled aside the soft leather, inspecting the gaping hole of her wound with a clinical eye. Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes, slowly letting her hands rest against Katrina's skin. Her lips moved silently as she repeated the chant, going through it once and then again before inspecting the wound another time.

"My magic is too weak. Trace, take my hand," Raven said, holding her blood stained palm out to her son.

"Use mine too," Ryder begged, feeling for that spark of magic he'd never been without and finding it dim and weak.

"And mine," Damien ordered, going to his wife and laying his hand upon her slender shoulder. She looked up at him, grateful for his presence. She could feel Katrina's spirit, her essence connected by a mere thread to her corporeal form.

Closing her eyes, she gathered the magical warmth sent to her by the men of her family, felt build inside of her. She rocked slowly, her hand once more pressed against Katrina's

side. Heat slid down her shoulder, not the blaring heat she usually felt, but a healing warmth none the less.

"Changa tu, keysa par tu," she chanted out loud, hearing Trace's voice join hers.

\* \* \* \*

The foot soldier didn't know what had drawn her towards the courtyard, but she stood, staring at the group congregated around the still body of her Princess. She lay upon the cobbled stones of the spacious area, her life's blood spilled across the dirty ground. No movement could be seen.

"The Princess is dead," she whispered. "Princess Katrina is dead!" She turned, screaming the words to the women resting after a battle that had been hardly worth fighting. Most of the women of this castle had given up without raising a sword, sick and tired of Bettina's cruelty. They sat in a circle now, waiting for Princess Katrina's orders.

But if she were dead...

\* \* \* \*

Rayne saw the woman flee the courtyard and began to follow her. She opened her mouth to tell of the wonders of the other worlders, of their powers and magical healings. But a sudden thought stopped her. Her smile grew wide, lighting up her beautiful face.

Turning, she let the woman go to spread her words. Things just might work out after all.

\* \* \* \*

Katrina felt as if she were floating. She opened her eyes, staring around her in wonder. White light, brighter than the afternoon sun shone around her, though she didn't feel the need to squint against it. There was a strange sound, like music played on unfamiliar instruments. But it was a beautiful harmony, pleasurable to the ears.

She walked forward through mists that swirled around her. Warm air bathed her face and body. She felt no pain or ills. She was content.

"Katrina?"

The voice was female and close by. Katrina lifted her head, staring ahead of her as the mists parted. "M-mother?"

"Yes, Katrina. And no," A small smile appeared on her pretty lips.

"What do you mean?"

"I am the woman that you called mother, Katrina, but that is not actually who I am. Haven't you ever wondered why you were the only woman in the castle with hair like this?" She reached forward, running the fiery strands through her fingers.

"You told me I took after my great grandmother."

"I lied. I did not want you to find out, Katrina. I am sorry about that now. You should have been given the right to choose your own destiny. Not simply accept the one that was forced upon you. I wish to give you that choice now."

"But ... but I thought ... aren't I dead?"

Her mother chuckled, a softer sound than the harsh laughter she'd always heard from her when she was alive.



"You don't belong here, not just yet. You have a chance at a happy life, if you're willing to reach out and take it."

"What must I do?"

"When I was younger, I loved the woods close to the portals. I spent hours exploring them. I knew every inch, every trail, and every animal path. One day, I was close to the entrance of the cave of the portals when a woman ran out. She was wild eyed and very frightened, begging me to hide her. She held you in her arms." She reached out, touching Katrina's cheek with her hand. "She looked very much like you do now."

"Who was she?"

"I never found out. I hid her and then I watched from a safe venue as huge men came from the cave's mouth. One knelt, finding the woman's prints and following them. I watched as they found her, dragging her back with them, though you were no where to be seen. As soon as they were out of sight, I went to the place I'd left her and found you, tucked snugly in some leaves. I had no idea who the woman was or even what portal she'd come through. So I took you home and raised you as one of my own."

"I am not a Princess?" Katrina whispered, her eyes huge with shock.

"No, you are not." She stepped backwards, the mist slowly covering her form again. "Stay with him, Katrina. Perhaps together you can learn of your destiny."

"Mother?" Katrina tried to walk forward, only to be stopped. She was being tugged back, away from the warmth and the light. "No, mother, I need to know more!" she cried.

Pain, intense and heated, made her gasp; choking on the first breath she'd taken in a span of minutes. Her body ached, her head throbbed but her side hurt the worst. She could hear people around her; hear chanting even as she struggled away from the hands that were touching her.

"Katrina. Lay still, love."

Ryder! She forced her eyes open, seeing him crouched next to her, his face unusually pale. His turquoise eyes lit up when he saw her awake, despite the dark shadows that were under them. "R ... Ryder?"

"Yes, love, I'm here."

"Am I-I dead?"

He chuckled huskily, his hand coming out to stroke her cheek. "No, love. I think my mother just performed a miracle."

"She's not healed, Ryder. She will need rest and constant care until we can get her close enough to the portals to regenerate our magicks. It would be better if we brought her with us." Raven brushed Katrina's golden-red hair off her forehead. "That was too close," she said to the girl.

"Princess?"

Katrina's eyes moved until she met Rayne's amber gaze. "Yes," she whispered.

"Your warriors think you're dead." The words were said simply, but with a wealth of meaning that passed quickly between the two women.

"Perhaps that is for the best," Katrina whispered, thinking of her mother's words. "You will rule?"

"Until Karina is old enough and has the necessary wisdom," Rayne said, smiling down at the Princess who had become her friend.

"I shall miss you, Rayne. You are truly the finest General and friend any Princess could have."

"What is this?" Damien said. "Your Princess is not dead. She will be completely healed when we move closer to our own world."

"Princess Katrina will be coming with us, father," Ryder said, his eyes meeting his father's gaze. "She will be my wife."

\* \* \* \*

Katrina rode upon a stretcher. Her wound was healing at an amazing rate as they drew nigh the portals. As she felt better, the boredom of being alone in the small wagon grew unbearable. Her mind buzzed with all that had happened in such a short time.

Could she believe what had happened in that bright misty light? Or was that just some strange hallucination, brought on by pain and loss of blood? It sure felt real. She could even remember the way her mother's hand had felt as she'd touched her cheek, playing over her hair.

But if she wasn't a Princess, then who was she? In what land did she belong? Was the woman who'd run from the portal her mother? If she was, then why had she, Katrina, been left behind? There were too many questions and no answers, making her thoughts spin and her head ache.

Rayne climbed into the small wagon, crouching next to Katrina. "Are you sure this is what you wish?"

"Yes. I ... I never fit in there, Rayne. I could never do or be the type of woman that my mother expected me to become. I would have grown bitter and disillusioned if I had tried." She handed her the small scroll, signed by her and with her seal pressed into the wax holding it closed. "This gives you command of my lands and by forfeiture, Bettina's. When Karina is ready, you will be allowed to keep Bettina's palace for your own, if that is what you and Trace wish."

"You are being very generous, Princess."

Katrina reached out her hand, putting it over Rayne's. "No longer do I hold that title, Rayne. Now I am just a woman, and hopefully, your friend."

"I shall miss you, my friend," Rayne said softly, bending to press her lips against Katrina's cool cheek. "I wish for you a happy life and much love."

Katrina nodded, smiling through the tears that gathered in her eyes. "To you also, though I don't think you need worry about love. Your Trace shows that every time he looks at you." She laughed as Rayne's golden complexion grew rosy and flushed.

She bowed once more, turning away to climb gracefully down from the wagon. "We are at the portals, Katrina. Our path together ends here."

"Do not forget the mirror," Katrina said. "It can show you dangers before they strike and other worlds and lands that are amazing beyond belief."

"I will remember, and perhaps I shall peek in upon you and Ryder once in a while. If you ever need anything..."

"I will send word. I expect the same." She pushed herself up until she was seated upon the small pallet, throwing off the blanket and scooting closer to the opening.

"You cannot be seen, Pr ... Katrina. Wait until we have left the clearing." She reached out and took Katrina's hand once more, squeezing it quickly. Then she was gone.

Katrina heard the rustle of many feet and the sound of impatient hooves as the beasts were held in check. They were close enough to home to scent the fresh hay that was waiting for them and were eager to be back in their stalls. She could hear good-byes being said and well wishes given, then the sound of her people leaving the clearing. The wagon she rode in would be picked up tomorrow, after they'd crossed through the portal into Ryder's world.

Even the thought of him sent a shiver down her spine. She would no longer be in command, no longer able to order him to do her bidding. Would he still want her or was his talk of marriage a way for him to even the score between them? Not knowing was killing her, but since her injury, he'd stayed away. Even when they'd been forced to seek shelter during a stormy afternoon, he'd preferred to stay with his family rather than seek reprieve from the rain inside the wagon with her.

So lost in thought was she that she didn't hear Raven's approach, or feel her come into the wagon.

"Princess?"

Katrina looked up quickly, gasping in surprise.

"I'm sorry," Raven laughed. "Deep thoughts?"

"Dreary ones," Katrina answered. "And I am no longer a princess, Lady Daring. Please, call me Katrina."

"Only if you'll call me Raven."

Katrina nodded her agreement. "They have all left?"

"Yes, I thought you might like to stretch your legs a bit before going back on the stretcher."

"I am not going back on the stretcher, Raven. I am healed enough to handle walking and I'm tired of the enforced solitary. I believed I'd go insane with only my own thoughts for company." She scooted to the end of the wagon, letting her legs hang over the edge before dropping to the ground. For a single moment, dizziness made the world swim around her. She caught her balance, steadying herself with the edge of the wagon and taking a deep breath. "See, I'm fine."

A shriek of surprise escaped her lips as she was scooped up in a pair of strong, very familiar arms. Her world lurched and she wrapped her arms around his neck, blinking rapidly to dispel the dizziness.

"What do you think you are doing up? You almost died, Katrina. You should still be in bed." Ryder's voice was stern with disapproval as he spun and started to climb back into the wagon.

"I think this is where I wish you good luck," Raven snorted, chuckling as she went to find her husband.

"Ryder, put me down!" Katrina ordered. It was as if she spoke to a wall for all the response she received. "By all that's holy, Ryder, I am not an invalid."

"Yes, you are," he said hotly, laying her carefully upon the pallet only to reach out and grab her arm when she bounced back up again. "Where do you think you're going?"

"Out of here. I'm fine, I'm healed and I'm going insane inside this wagon!" She turned as he grabbed her again, her hands coming up to hold him off. "Let me go," she ordered softly, anger sending her pulse racing.

"No," he said just as softly. "I almost lost you. I'm not going to let you go, ever. You might as well get used to the idea and accept it."

Katrina snarled even though his words made her feel warm and gooey inside. "You are not going to order me around," she growled.

Ryder pushed her down to her back, his body coming over hers to hold her to the wagon. "Who's going to stop me? You?" He chuckled. "I think you're out powered and out maneuvered."

She could feel his body pressing against hers, the heat and desire he inspired making it hard for her to think. She arched against him, pressing her breasts against his bare chest, hearing him moan even as he pulled away from her.

"Stop it," he growled, letting his hand rest against her shoulders. "Just lie still and when it's time to cross the portal, we will talk with my mother about whether you should be carried or not."

"Do I disgust you?"

Ryder stared down at her, stunned by the question. "You? Disgust?" He shook his head in confusion. "The last thing I feel around you is disgust, Princess."

"Then why did you pull away from me?"

"You think I pulled away from you out of disgust?" He laughed, bending over her once more. "You died, Katrina. I will take no more chances with your life, I can't. If I were to lose you..." he closed his eyes, letting his forehead rest against hers.

Katrina sighed, reaching out for his hand. "Touch me, Ryder," she said, pulling away the bandage that Raven had applied to her skin. "Look at it. It's healed and so am I."

Her skin was warm, smooth but for a thin scar that was pink with healing. His fingers probed the scar, caressed her slowly as her fingers went to his chin, turning him to face her. "I am fine."

"You are beautiful."

Whether she moved the short distance that separated them or he did, neither was sure. Only that his lips were on hers. It started as a tasting, a temptation of soft lips and seeking tongues that soon grew into a fiery exchange, leaving both gasping and wanting more.

"You are truly healed?" he groaned, his fingers playing with the laces on the front of her vest.

"Yes, there is only this ache now."

"Ache? Where?" he asked, his brows furrowing. "I will get my mother to care for you."

"No!" she said quickly, stopping him before he could move away. She took his hand, placing it palm side down on her stomach. Watching his eyes, she slid it down, over the leather of her short skirt until it rested on the throbbing mound of her sex. "She cannot fix this ache, Ryder. Only you can."



She watched his face, the slow smile that turned up the corners of his lips in a roguish manner, the twinkle that came to his turquoise eyes as he realized what she wanted. He moved closer, his fingers pulling at the supple leather of her skirt, drawing it over her thighs.

Her arms raised, her fingers sliding through his hair, weaving her hands in the thick strands. She tugged at them, drawing him back to her lips as he moved over her, intent upon showing her how he felt.

He kissed her with sensual intent, drawing moan after groan from deep inside her, feeling his cock harden more with each sexy sound she made. His hands explored her soft flesh, parting her smooth thighs, sliding over the soft fabric that hid her sex from him. "What is this?" he breathed heavily, his eyes going to the soft triangle of fabric that covered the bright red fleece at the apex of her thighs.

"What does it look like?" Her voice was husky, her fingers pulling at him, wanting more of his lips.

He evaded her easily, intent upon that sexy little scrap of material, pulling it gently up until it pushed between the puffy lips of her sex and into her wet slit. "I like this," he groaned. "I think we should have my mother's seamstress make more, many, many more of these."

"Ryder..." she breathed, closing her eyes as she felt the first brush of his fingers against those same swollen lips, stroking over the damp flesh before pressing between. He found the hardening bud of her clit, caressing it through the soft, wet fabric, making her gasp as sensations of pleasure so acute as to be pain throbbed through her.

"Katrina," he murmured, slipping lower until he knelt between her knees, holding her thighs apart with his body, his eyes exploring her softness in the bright light of day. "You are so beautiful, even here."

She pressed her hips up, trying to force his soft caresses to an even sweeter pressure, undulating under his gaze as the wagon filled with the scent of her arousal. Her nipples were hard, diamond-like points that pushed against the leather of her vest, her breasts swelling with her need, her cries becoming louder despite her best intentions. "You will drive me mad," she whimpered.

"We wouldn't want that," he growled, leaning over her and pulling the fabric away from her wetness. Then his tongue was there, soft and nimble, stroking her with such talented ease that she stiffened under him, feeling the beginning onrush of her first orgasm. It hit her like a felled tree, thundering through her as she eagerly grasped at his hair, pushing his face into her sex.

Ryder could feel her contractions beneath his mouth and smiled grimly. Her taste coated his tongue, her scent all he could smell. The feel of her beneath him, rising and falling in time to his tongue, sent blood rushing to his groin. He'd never been harder.

"Unbutton me," he growled. "Take out my cock, Katrina."

She smiled at his tone of voice, knowing that she would enjoy following this order. She waited until he rose above her, straddling her waist before her hands went to the button fly of his leather pants, parting them with shaking fingers. She reached inside, finding him hard and throbbing and guided

him out. Lifting her head, she opened her mouth and took him inside.

Ryder's head fell back against his shoulders, his eyes closed and his mouth opening as the pleasure of her actions sent his emotions into a spin. He could no more stop her than he could stop the day from becoming night. Her lips moved over his cock, sucking upon it; her hands on his hips, pulling him closer, taking him deeper until he thrust against the back of her throat.

His moans filled the air in the wagon, spurring her on to even greater acts of intimacy. Her hands cupped his buttocks, squeezing and rubbing the leather-encased muscles. She tried to take him even deeper, fighting her urge to gag as he began to fill her throat with the thick end of his cock.

"You will make me come," he warned, feeling the familiar tingle, the tightening of his balls in their sac, the need that boiled deep inside.

She moaned, the thought of bringing him pleasure making her ache to be filled with his passion. But that was for later. For now, she wanted him to feel the same pleasure he'd just given her with his mouth. Katrina could hear his breathing growing labored, the harsh moans that came from him as he tried to hold back. She swallowed, the movement drawing him deeper and heard his gasp, felt his cock jump and swell.

The first spurt of his seed drained into her throat and she swallowed automatically, pulling back slightly. The second filled her mouth with his salty, bitter semen and she swallowed that too, eager to show him how much she cared for him. He seemed to come forever, but then all too soon it

was over and he was falling to his side, lying next to her on the small pallet.

"You unman me," he growled, his beloved voice sending a thrill of pleasure to tingle down her spine.

She rolled to her side, her hand stroking over his wide chest, hearing his harsh breathing and the quickly inhaled gasp as her small fingers wrapped around his sticky cock. "You seem pretty manly still to me, pet," she purred, stroking him slowly.

"Pet?" he growled, letting her fingers explore at will. "You know we will be on equal standing in my father's kingdom?"

"Does that mean I need to come up with another endearment?" Her tongue slipped out to moisten her full lips, tasting him upon them.

"Definitely," he groaned, his eyes fastening on the sweetness of her mouth.

She bent over him, letting her lips peck at his. "How about stallion?" she teased. "Or stud?"

He chuckled, enjoying her play. "How about husband?" he asked, his hand coming up to wrap in the thickness of her hair.

"You truly wish to marry me in the ways of your people?"

"Yes," he growled. "I think it is the only way I'll be sure of your place at my side." He narrowed his eyes at her. "Just be warned, marriage to me will be a daunting task, for I will be demanding of your attentions."

She kissed his cheek, sliding her lips across the rough whiskered expanse of his jaw before twirling her tongue against his ear. "I think I'm up for the task. And by the feel of

this, you are also," she giggled, feeling him harden against her fingers.

"Tis difficult to be otherwise when an insatiable minx has her hands upon my poor body." His smile grew as he watched the blush that suffused her face. "I love you, Katrina."

Her heart sang, then fell as she remembered her mother's words. She closed her eyes, indecision plainly written upon her face.

"What is it?" he asked, cupping her face in his hands, his thumbs stroking along her cheeks. "Tell me, Katrina. Together we can overcome any obstacle. Do you not love me still?" His voice betrayed his fear as he uttered the question and Katrina's eyes popped open, her head shaking the negative quickly.

"Oh no, Ryder, it is not that at all. Perhaps I love you too much. It is just..." her voice trailed off, worried that he would view her differently if he knew the truth of her past.

"It is just..." he urged, feeling her pull away from his hands, sitting up so that her back was to him. "Katrina, you are scaring me."

She turned, smiling wryly at him. "It is I who has much to fear, Ryder." With a sigh, she took a deep breath, deciding upon the only course left open to her. "When Bettina's sword pierced my side and I died, I went to this place. It was full of the most brilliant, beautiful white light. Mists swirled around my feet as I walked. I felt so at peace there, Ryder."

"You walked with the spirits?" he asked, his hand reaching out to stroke her back, as if he couldn't bear not touching her.

"If that is what your people call it, then yes, I did. I was met there by the woman I had always thought of as my mother. She was different. Softer, more easily approachable than she had been when alive." She paused for a moment, trying to think of how to tell him the rest.

"What do you mean, you always thought of her as your mother?"

"She always liked to play in these woods. She said the powers of the portals drew her here. One day, while she was exploring by the cave opening, a woman with red hair came rushing out. She was hysterical, demanding that my mother hide her before they could catch her and her baby. Me, I was the baby she carried." She paused again, turning to see his expression, only continuing when she saw he didn't think her crazed.

"She hid us, my mother ... oh this is confusing! But men came pouring out of the cave, spotted her tracks and followed them to where they found the red haired stranger. They took her with them, but they left me behind. My mother, who'd already had one child, decided to take me in also. I am a fake. I never was a princess."

"And you think that because of this, I will not want you anymore?"

"I ... I don't know. I ... I could be anyone, Ryder. I could be the daughter of your most hated rival or a bastard. I could be the lowliest servant." A sob built inside of her and she turned away, unwilling to let him see how badly this hurt her.

"Or you could just be Katrina, wife of Ryder of Daring Castle, beloved of her husband. Is that not a better way to

think of yourself?" he asked softly, sitting up to pull her into his arms. "This does not shock me nor does it change the way that I feel about you. I loved you when I thought you were a bloody tyrant with your belts and whips and prissy male servants. How could I love you less now?"

"Y ... you are serious?"

"Yes. Now smile for me. If you wish, once you are completely healed and our time of bonding has passed, we might try to find your world and your parents." He felt her arms come around his neck and lifted her onto his lap.

"I love you, Ryder of Daring Castle."

His lips moved over hers, tenderly, openly showering her with the love he felt. He grew more heated, his hands sliding over her body, searching out all those spots that he knew would cause her the greatest pleasure. He was about to pull her down, anxious to feel her around his hard cock when a male throat being cleared interrupted their play.

"I know you two have lost time together to make up for, but do you think you can control yourselves long enough for us to get home? The portals await, son." Damien grinned, his eyes roaming over Katrina's long legs with an appreciative male eye.

"Behave father, or I shall tell mother," Ryder smirked, enjoying the sound of his father's laughter.

"We could leave you here, son." Damien chuckled.

"Yes, I can surely see that happening."

Damien grinned again, unrepentant, and turned to leave.

"So, shall we stay here?" Ryder asked his blushing bride to be.

She answered with a grin of her own. "Let's go home."

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### **About the Author**

A small town girl with a master's degree from the School of Hard Knocks, Wendy started writing as a way to combat boredom and keep from gaining dress sizes after an injury to her back kept her from working. No one was more surprised than she when people actually enjoyed what she wrote.

Writing as Daniellekitten, Wendy has won many awards for her writing, including Most Influential Writer in 2005 at Literotica.com, as well as Most Literary—Genre Transcending. She's been nominated for many of the Reader's Choice awards, as well as the monthly awards at the same website.

Wendy Stone resides in a small Michigan town, spending most of her time writing and enjoying time with her animals and the company of her family.

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