

ELLORA'S CAVE VOYAGER



Embroidered
Tapestries *Fantasies*

N.J. WALTERS

Embroidered Fantasies

N.J. Walters

Fifth in the Tapestries series.

Roxanne Sykes is a divorced waitress, trying to carve a life for herself after escaping an abusive marriage. Her quiet life is shattered when her ex-husband finds her. Before he can harm her, a magical tapestry whisks her away. She finds herself in a strange land, in the presence of a man straight from her erotic dreams.

Radnor Craddock's life has been one of violence and brutality. He never expected the tapestry of Javara lore would bring a woman to him and his brother, Sednar. They only have three days to try to convince Roxanne to stay, and both use their considerable seductive skills to do so.

The erotic encounters are like nothing Roxanne has ever experienced. Yet she cannot trust her judgment. After all, she married a man who abused her. Then there are the dark hints and innuendoes of the Craddocks' violent pasts. But when her ex-husband threatens her, Radnor and Sednar risk their lives to save her. Will she leave them? Or stay and claim these wounded warriors as her own?

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Embroidered Fantasies

ISBN 9781419924569

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Embroidered Fantasies Copyright © 2010 N.J. Walters

Edited by Shannon Combs

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication March 2010

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the authors' imagination and used fictitiously.

EMBROIDERED FANTASIES

N.J. Walters

Dedication

Thank you to all the fans of the *Tapestries* series. You all keep asking for more and I can't seem to stop writing them.

As always, my thanks to my husband, who inspires me daily with his love and support.

Trademarks Acknowledgment

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Dorothy: Turner Entertainment Co.

The Wizard of Oz: Turner Entertainment Co.

Chapter One

Roxanne Sykes stood in the middle of the crowded field and smiled. Such a small feat for most people but such a huge one in her world. There was a time when she'd thought she might never feel happy again.

Her smile faltered. She would not think about him. Not now. She summoned all her mental strength and pushed all thoughts of her ex-husband and her life with him into the dark recesses of her mind. He was in prison and couldn't hurt her. Not any longer. She now lived life on her own terms, doing what she wanted, when she wanted. And right now her plan was to enjoy the gigantic flea market spread in front of her like an exotic feast for the senses.

Michael would never have allowed her to go to such an event. Buying other people's garbage, he called it. Not that her ex-husband had either taste or style. He'd figured a large-screen television and a leather sofa held together with duct tape was the height of decorating.

"Stop it," she muttered. She didn't want to think about her ex. The day was warm but not too hot. There was a breeze off the ocean that kept it cool enough to be enjoyable.

She checked her purse for the tenth time. She had one hundred dollars she'd saved in tip money from her waitress job at Joe's Diner to spend on anything she wanted. It was all for her. Hugging her purse closer to her body, she merged with the crowd.

Artwork was on her list of things to look for today. Over the past year, she'd managed to furnish her small efficiency apartment with flea market and thrift store finds. She'd sanded and painted a bistro table and two chairs, and refinished a bookshelf, coffee table and an end table. She'd also refurbished a davenport, which doubled as both a couch and a bed. She'd collected a variety of dishes and cookware. Every item she'd chosen had suited one criteria – she liked it.

She took a deep breath and her nose caught several delicious aromas – sugar and deep-fried food. Shopping first, food after, she reminded herself. That was something else that had changed over the past year – she ate whatever she wanted. No more worrying about what Michael was going to say if he saw her eating something he didn't approve of, which was just about everything. He liked his women model thin.

She'd always been naturally skinny, but for the first time in her life her hips actually had some curve to them. Her chest had never been a problem. She'd always had more than enough in that area.

Squaring her shoulders, she hitched her purse higher and waded into the fray, wandering up and down the long lines of vendors, searching for just the right pieces for her apartment.

Two hours later, she had a purple glass vase and a pink Depression glass bowl tucked safely in the cloth shopping bag she'd brought along to carry her treasures. Still nothing for her walls.

Her stomach growled, reminding her of her earlier promise to feed it. What did she want? There was so much to choose from. She contemplated a hot dog and French fries but she finally settled on a warm, soft cinnamon pretzel and an ice-cold lemonade. She juggled her purchases and food as she continued to roam through the long lines of sellers.

The pretzel filled the empty hole in her belly quite nicely and the lemonade quenched her thirst. When she was done, she located a garbage can and deposited the remains of her snack. It was time to get back to serious shopping.

Some people might find it lonely to shop by themselves. Roxanne loved it. There was a sense of freedom that came from having to please no one but herself. She could come and go as she pleased, spend as much time as she desired looking at an item. Maybe someday down the road she'd want someone with her, either a friend or, heaven forbid, a boyfriend, but for now, she was more than content with her own company.

She reached the end of a long row of vendors and turned to head back up the other side. An elderly lady was situated on the corner with a smattering of items spread across a rickety table. It was impossible to tell her age. Her hair was snow white but her face was smooth and unlined. There was a timeless beauty about her, which was even more apparent when she smiled. "Morning."

Roxanne was startled to realize it still was morning, just after eleven. She always lost track of time at the flea market. "Good morning," she returned.

"What are you looking for today?"

Not wanting to be rude, Roxanne stopped and perused the woman's items for sale. "Nothing in particular. I'm searching for something to brighten up my apartment."

The older lady indicated a pile of dusty rugs in the corner behind her. "Maybe you'll find something here."

Roxanne didn't think so but she decided she'd have a quick look to be polite and then move on. "Thanks." She walked back to the stack of rugs and crouched down. Her purse bounced off her hip as she set the bag with her purchases on the ground. The rugs on top were dusty and old, but as she dug deeper, she found some that had true potential. She could attach hooks to it and hang it on a rod on her wall if she found something she liked. Instant art.

It took her a few minutes to work her way to the bottom of the stack. She had to move a dozen or so to one side to lighten the pile. Dust smudged her jeans and her T-shirt, but she didn't mind. She'd dressed for comfort, not style. Flea marketing could be dirty business.

At the very bottom of the mound she hit the jackpot. A small tapestry, not bigger than about two by three, came into view. It was medieval in style. She pulled it closer and bent to examine it. A small castle sat in the middle of the piece, surrounded by

craggy mountains and a thick forest. It appeared dark and forbidding, yet she couldn't look away.

It was the two men in front of the stone structure that caught her attention. They weren't dressed in armor as she'd half expected them to be, but were naked from the waist up. No, that wasn't quite true. They were wearing thick armbands and wristbands, which emphasized the massive muscles that corded their arms and chest.

Roxanne shivered as a cloud moved over the sun, momentarily obscuring it. She glanced over her shoulder, feeling as though someone was watching her. The elderly lady was serving another customer and everyone else was minding their own business. It was only her imagination.

Her gaze was drawn back to the tapestry, or rather the men in the center of the piece. They each wore leather boots that came to just below their knees and tight leather pants that molded to their thighs. They were impressive, to say the least.

Each man had an enormous sword strapped to his waist. That was more like it. In a medieval-style tapestry, you expected to see a castle and men with swords. The colors were a bit faded but she liked the piece.

She picked it up and started to cough when a cloud of dust poofed up. Okay, maybe it wasn't faded but dirty. She could work with that. Clutching it in her hands, she turned to the lady selling the items. "How much?"

The woman squinted at the tapestry and shook her head. "You sure you want that old thing? There are nicer tapestries in the pile."

Roxanne's hands tightened around the cloth. Now that she'd decided on it, she wanted it badly. "No!" Appalled at herself for yelling, she softened her voice and offered a smile. "I like this one."

The woman smiled. "If you're sure. There are no refunds."

"Positive." Roxanne picked up her shopping bag and headed toward the woman. "How much?"

The elderly lady chewed on her bottom lip for a moment and Roxanne prayed she had enough money left in her purse. "Ten dollars."

Roxanne felt like celebrating, but a year of bargaining at flea markets and tag sales had taught her not to show her emotions. The price went up whenever a seller knew how badly you wanted something. Usually, she haggled. Today, she dug into her purse and drew out a rumpled ten-dollar bill. "Here you go." She handed the money to the woman and stuffed the tapestry into her bag. "Thanks."

"You're welcome." Concern was etched on the woman's face. "Are you certain you want that particular one?"

Roxanne nodded and hurried away before the woman changed her mind. As she flowed back into the crowd, she thought she heard the woman whisper "good luck".

Clouds continued to roll in, obscuring the sun. Roxanne shivered and decided to call it a day. She'd gotten a few items for her apartment. She'd come back again next week and try again.

That was part of the fun. The search for buried treasure. The never knowing when you'd find something you absolutely loved.

She walked to the edge of the grounds and was lucky enough to catch a bus almost immediately. She had to transfer once, but in record time she was exiting the second bus and starting the ten-minute walk to her apartment. Butterflies fluttered in her stomach and she didn't think it was due to the pretzel she'd eaten. She couldn't wait to get home and examine her newest finds, especially the tapestry.

The first raindrops hit her face just as she reached her destination. The four-story building was faded pink stucco with white trim. It had probably been beautiful once. Today, it just looked worn and more than a little tired. But it was home.

She hurried up the short set of stairs and opened the door to the lobby, ignoring the chipped tiles and the peeling paint. The elevator was out of order—again—so she took the stairs. Thankfully, she only lived on the second floor. She pitied the folks who lived on the fourth.

Unlocking the door to her apartment, she pushed her way inside. It always gave her a small rush of pleasure no matter how many times she entered. She could see the entire place at a glance. A small table was situated to the left just inside the door and it was there she dumped her keys and purse. To the right sat the davenport, which was facing a bookshelf that was pushed up against the wall. A coffee table sat in front of the davenport and a small chair sat on the far end of what she called her living room.

Barely five feet from the end of her davenport, her bistro table and two chairs sat beneath the only window in the place. The kitchenette was off to the left. It was tiny, but she'd painted the entire room a cheerful yellow that made it seem brighter.

The only other room in the place was the bathroom. It was big enough for a bathtub, sink and toilet, with barely enough room to turn around. It was snuggled between the kitchen and the front door.

Roxanne kicked off her shoes and went straight to the kitchen table, carefully setting down her shopping bag. She drew out the newspaper-wrapped glassware first, unwrapping the purple vase and the Depression glass bowl, admiring the way the light caught the colors.

"Gorgeous." She set the glassware next to the sink. She'd wash them later. Taking a deep breath, she pulled out the tapestry, almost afraid to look at it. She'd been so drawn to it at the flea market. She hoped it was as good as she remembered and she didn't end up with buyer's remorse.

She unrolled the fabric slowly and the picture came into view. The warriors were still there, standing stoically in front of their castle. The colors were muted and she nibbled her bottom lip as she examined the tapestry. The edges were strong. The threads weren't frayed or unraveling. Should she take the risk and try to clean it?

She really didn't have a choice. There was no way she could hang it on her wall like it was. Decided, she ran some water into the sink and added a dash of laundry detergent. It was mild and she prayed it wouldn't damage the fabric. She dipped the bottom corner into the soapy water and rubbed the cloth lightly.

"Yes!" Pleasure filled her as the dirt flowed away, leaving several shades of green in its place instead of muddy brown.

Excited, she continued to clean the tapestry, taking her time so as not to damage it. There was no telling how fragile it was and the last thing she wanted to do was ruin it. She changed the water several times, letting the dirt and grime flow down the drain.

Her thumbs rubbed over the design. She paused when she realized her thumbs were caressing the chests of the two warriors. Her cheeks got hot and she released the tapestry. It fell into the water with a heavy plop, sending a splash of soapy water over her shirt. "Damn." She ignored the spatters down her front and plucked the fabric out of the sink. She squeezed out most of the water before holding it up to the light.

The colors were vivid, the scene almost alive. Birds and several animals were visibly cavorting in the forest where previously they'd been hidden by dirt and grime. The stones of the castle were still gray, but a shade lighter than she'd originally thought. The mountains were still tall and forbidding.

An icy shiver raced down her spine as a sense of foreboding swamped her. A second later, the phone rang. Roxanne gave a small shriek, slapping her wet hand against her chest. Her heart jumped and began to beat faster. She took a deep, calming breath as the phone rang again.

She set the tapestry on the counter and rubbed her right hand over her jeans to dry it before reaching for the ringing phone. It was probably just her boss wondering if she could come in early. She told herself that even as a sense of dread washed over her. She picked up the phone and tentatively spoke. "Hello."

"Roxanne, it's Stacy Emerson. I was hoping you were home. I didn't want to leave a message."

Her heart stopped. When it resumed beating it was a heavy throbbing in her chest. She hadn't heard this voice in almost six months. Stacy had been the prosecuting attorney in the trial that had landed her ex-husband behind bars. They'd kept in touch for a few months after the trial ended, their calls dwindling as they both went on with their busy lives. Roxanne's fingers tightened around the receiver and her throat got tight, making it almost impossible to talk.

"Are you there, Roxanne?"

"Yes." The word came out as a whisper. She cleared her throat and tried again. "I'm here, Stacy." Maybe it wasn't bad news. Maybe it had nothing to do with her ex. Yeah, and maybe she'd win the lottery tomorrow too.

Stacy sighed. "I just got some news and I thought you should know." She paused and Roxanne's stomach tightened, the pretzel she'd eaten earlier threatening to come back up. "Michael Talbot was released from prison today. Overcrowding in the facility

and good behavior on his part. This was his first offense and that went in his favor as well."

Bitterness swamped Roxanne. His first *convicted* offense, but not the first offense. Michael Talbot was used to getting his own way and didn't mind using his fists to get it. It had taken her two long years to get the courage to leave him. It had taken him half killing her to finally get her to press charges. In spite of all her pain and suffering, here he was, a free man after only a year behind bars.

"Roxanne?"

She realized she hadn't said anything to Stacy. "Umm, thanks for letting me know."

"I'm really sorry, Roxanne." She could hear the other woman's frustration. "I pushed for a longer sentence, but there were no previous charges or convictions."

"I understand. It's okay, Stacy. Really. You did everything you could and I'll always be grateful for that."

"You don't live in Nevada anymore. You're in California. He doesn't know where you are."

But he would find out. Roxanne knew that. She'd seen the promise in his eyes when he was led away from the courtroom that last time. She knew that look and knew what it meant. Michael wouldn't be happy until she was dead. Maybe a year in prison had made him rethink things. After all, if she died, he'd be the prime suspect and he'd get a lot more than a year in prison.

"Listen, I have to run. I have to be in a meeting in five minutes. You take care and call the cops if you see him. You still have a restraining order against him."

For all the good that would do. Roxanne knew firsthand just how useless a piece of paper was. She'd had the restraining order against him when he found her and beat her that final time, landing her in hospital for more than a week. The irony of the situation was that she was still his wife at the time and his health insurance had paid for her hospital stay.

"Thanks, Stacy."

She hung up the phone and stared out her tiny window. Rain slashed against the glass. A tear rolled down her cheek and dropped onto the tapestry. She'd been so happy only moments ago. Now her life was a nightmare once again. What would Michael do? Would he come after her? Or would he decide she wasn't worth the effort?

Only he knew, but she had a sinking feeling in her stomach.

"Why?" she cried, burying her face in her hands.

She'd asked that question many times over the past three and a half years. She'd had a normal life once. Had parents who loved her and a fiancé she adored. They'd all been in the car together when they'd been hit head-on by a drunk driver. The other three had died and she'd walked away with a broken arm and a shattered life.

It was less than a year later she'd met Michael Talbot. Charming in a rough sort of way, he was the exact opposite of her slender-built, soft-spoken fiancé, Dan. Michael

was six-foot-three, all of it muscle. With his dirty blond hair, blue eyes, tattoos and bad-boy charm, he'd swept her off her feet. He was a mechanic who liked fast cars and motorcycles. He'd breathed life back into her. When he'd asked her to marry him, she'd said yes.

He'd hit her for the first time while they were on their honeymoon. All because she'd spoken to their waiter. Michael had accused her of flirting. She'd been dazed and hurt. Michael had apologized with roses and she'd forgiven him. Life had settled down for a few months after that, but then he'd hit her again, the frequency growing as one year turned into two.

Isolated and alone, it had taken Roxanne a long time to realize it wasn't her fault that he hit her. It was Michael's. Furthermore, she didn't have to put up with it any longer. He'd stripped her of her self-confidence, her sense of self-worth until she was little more than a shade of her former self. The laughing, smiling girl who'd been engaged one moment and left alone the next had turned into a quiet, frightened woman.

She'd looked in the mirror one morning and knew she had two choices. She could leave Michael or she could let him kill her, because that's what would happen if she stayed long enough. She'd tossed a few belongings into a battered duffle bag and left. But he'd come after her, finding her in the cheap motel where she'd taken refuge. Thankfully, the people in the room next to her had called the cops about the noise. Otherwise, she'd have died that night.

A soft sound, much like a sigh, startled her. She jerked her head up and whirled around. She was alone. "Now you're hearing things," she muttered, swiping at her eyes with the backs of her hands.

She looked down at the tapestry. All her early pleasure in the item gone. She traced her finger over one of the warriors and then the other. "Too bad I didn't have someone like you to protect me." But that was nothing more than a fantasy. These warriors were nothing more than the figments of someone's imagination, nothing more than embroidered threads.

Roxanne didn't hate men. She knew not all men were like her ex. Her father had been a good man. So had her fiancé who'd died at such a young age. But she no longer found it easy to trust men. Who knew what kind of monster hid behind a charming smile? In the year since her divorce she hadn't dated. She'd been asked several times, mostly by guys she'd met while working at Joe's. But she wasn't ready to date again. Might never be.

There was nothing she could do but continue to live her life on her own terms. If he wanted to find her, he would. No matter where she ran. She would be cautious, but she wouldn't allow Michael to control her life. Not any more.

Picking up the tapestry, she draped it over the back of one of the kitchen chairs to dry. Then she reached for the purple vase. It was time to clean her other treasures and get them put away before she had to get ready for work. She was filling in a half-shift

today for one of the other girls. She didn't mind and it was extra money. It would also help take her mind off her problems.

Roxanne glanced at the clock and groaned. She had barely enough time to grab a shower and get changed before she had to catch the bus back downtown to work. Setting the vase aside, she hurried into the bathroom.

The sun peeked out from behind a cloud, the light streaming through the window and catching the colors of the tapestry. It seemed to glow for a split second. By the time Roxanne came back out of the bathroom with her hair wet and a towel wrapped around her, the strange light was gone.

She didn't give the tapestry a second thought. She quickly tugged on her pink polyester uniform, grabbed her purse and hurried out the door.

Chapter Two

The razor-sharp edge of the blade slashed downward, slicing straight toward his head. At the last possible second, Radnor Craddock brought up his sword and blocked the deadly blow. The two blades skated against each other, the metallic shriek firing his blood. He would not be defeated.

Muscles bunched in his shoulders and forearms. His biceps bulged. Dust kicked up from the dry ground beneath his boots. The sound of heavy breathing and low grunts filled his ears as he slowly pushed his opponent back. They were equally matched in all ways but one—sheer willpower. Radnor was the more determined of the two. He would never give up. Never stop fighting.

Giving a battle cry, he thrust forward, throwing all his weight behind the move. His opponent stumbled, almost losing his footing. Radnor attacked. Mercilessly, he pounded the other man, driving him back, looking for an opening, some weakness in his defense.

But his opponent wasn't defeated. Not by a long shot. He renewed his effort, swinging his heavy sword with the ease of long practice. The two men fought as the sun rose higher in the sky.

Sweat rolled down Radnor's forehead and stung his eyes. He blinked to clear his vision, but didn't dare try to swipe it away. To do so would give his opponent the opening he was waiting for, watching for. He could see the gleam in the other man's eyes and knew it matched his own. They'd both been born to fight.

"Enough." His opponent suddenly stepped back and lowered his blade. "I don't know about you, but I'm starving."

Radnor slowly let his blade fall back to his side. "That's your problem, Sednar, you're always worried about your stomach." He sheathed his sword and reached his arm outward. His older brother grasped it readily. They clasped, hands around biceps, shoulders bumping before they released their grip.

Sednar's face was flushed from exertion but he smiled and patted his flat stomach. "What can I say? I don't want to pine away to nothing."

Radnor snorted. At six-foot-four, of solid muscle, there was little chance of that happening to his brother. Sednar threw his arm around Radnor's shoulders and the two of them left the training field and headed for the keep.

Craddock Keep wasn't as large as many castles in the area, but it was strong and well fortified. The tower was built out of thick gray stones and it rose like a beacon in the sky. It was his home and he loved it. And unlike six years ago when his older brothers were still alive, it was in good repair.

Radnor rubbed the back of his neck, wondering if memories of those bleak times would ever truly fade. If there had ever been a more brutal man born than his eldest brother Leon, Radnor had never met him. Vicious and cruel, Leon had ruled with an iron fist, warring with surrounding families and stealing whatever he wanted.

Once there had been six Craddock brothers. Now the only ones left were he and Sednar. Bren and Lednar had been killed in a raid, trying to steal a woman. Leon and then Hamid had been slain on the field of combat, after displaying a true lack of honor. All four of them had met their end at the hands of the Bakra brothers. Once considered the mortal enemies of the Craddocks, they were now related to the Bakra family by his sister's marriage. The world was indeed a strange place.

Radnor couldn't say he was sorry that his older brothers were dead. His early years had been hell. As the youngest boy, he'd borne the brunt of much of their brutal ways. He'd learned not to trust anyone or anything. An act of kindness was usually a trap that led to disappointment at best, to a brutal beating at worst.

He still found it strange that he and Sednar had formed such a deep bond of friendship and brotherhood over the past six years. With their older brothers out of the picture, it had fallen to them to bring the castle and the land surrounding it back from the brink of poverty and destruction. In doing so, they'd learned they were more alike than they'd realized.

"What ails you, brother?" Sednar's arm dropped away and he paused at the bottom of the stone staircase that led to the entrance of the keep.

"Memories," he replied, knowing his brother would understand.

Dark shadows crossed Sednar's face and he nodded. "Some days are worse than others."

That was true. Days went by when Radnor gave no thought to his dead brothers. It was ironic that the two youngest boys were now the lords of the keep.

"Come. Get cleaned up and have something to eat. You'll feel better."

Radnor snorted. "You think food is the answer to every ill."

The corners of Sednar's mouth tipped upward into a half grin. "Maybe not the answer, but it certainly doesn't hurt." After many lean years, they both appreciated a full belly.

The two of them walked up the stairs side by side. The massive door opened just as they reached it and Johhan, their steward, greeted them. "Good morning, my lords." He gave them both a short bow before turning his attention to Sednar. "I need a moment of your time if you can spare it. There is a minor structural change the builder would like to make to the training area behind the new stable."

"Give me time to get cleaned up and I'll be right down." Sednar turned to Radnor. "You want in on this?"

That was another change in how things were now. Leon would never have asked for any of their opinions. In fact, he'd beat any of them if they dared question his decisions, his authority, taking it as an affront to his leadership.

As the eldest brother, it was Sednar's right to do whatever he chose, but from the moment they began to rebuild their home and their lives, the two of them had functioned as a team.

He gave his brother a nod. "I won't be long." His long legs ate up the stairs as he climbed to his room. Now that there were only two of them, they each had their own room, complete with private bath. It was a luxury he appreciated, especially on days like today.

Radnor entered his personal domain and unbuckled his sword, setting it carefully on the trunk at the end of his bed. His muscles flexed as he rubbed his left biceps. He'd pushed himself too hard today, trying to beat back the demons of the past.

Sighing, he pushed the dark thoughts away. The past was what it was. No amount of thinking or wishing could change it. The here and now was good. That was what mattered.

A servant had left water, which was still warm, in the bathing chamber. Radnor poured some into a basin and dunked his head forward, rinsing off the worst of the sweat and grime before grabbing a washcloth and running it over his arms and chest. He immediately felt better.

He grabbed a drying cloth and was rubbing it over his torso when he suddenly paused. The back of his neck tingled and he spun around, dropping the towel and reaching for the knife in his boot, while cursing the fact that he'd left his sword in the other room. That wasn't like him. He usually took his sword everywhere. Years under his brothers' rule taught him never to be unarmed. They'd often attacked with no provocation, simply for the sport of trying to hurt him. He was getting careless and lazy.

But he was alone. He cocked his head to one side and listened intently. There it was again. It sounded like a woman crying. His gut tightened. He hated the sound of a woman's tears, had heard it often as a child. His mother's life had been a hard one and so had his baby sister's.

It had eaten at him that he couldn't do anything to help them. He'd learned as a child that any show of kindness on his part made things worse for them. Radnor had learned to ignore the women in his life and deflect his brothers' attention onto himself. It was painful at times, but he counted it well worth it if it saved either of them a beating.

His brothers had been an abomination. In Javara, women were scarce and, as such, were treated as the treasures they were. Because there were more males than females, it had long ago been decreed that two brothers would share a woman, but only one of them could marry her and claim her children. The other brother would get one night a week in her bed and would be there to take care of her if her husband died. No more

than three brothers to a woman. That meant that the Craddock brothers might have had three brides between them all, two at the very least. They'd had none. No family would give their precious daughters into the brutal hands of their family. Radnor didn't blame them.

They'd treated their sister with blatant disregard. Radnor was glad that Genita had found happiness in the arms of the two younger Bakra brothers. They were good to her, treating her with the honor and respect she deserved.

He prowled to the bedroom, knife in hand, and looked around. He was alone. The sound came again, a low sob that tugged at his heart. "Where are you?" he called. He turned in a circle, unable to locate where the sound was coming from. "Don't be afraid."

Even as he said the words, he knew she might not believe them. There were many, even those who lived and worked at the keep, who still didn't quite trust him or his brother, even after six long years.

Sometimes Radnor thought they were right not to. The violence of his childhood had left deep emotional scars inside him. Thankfully, Sednar didn't seem to be quite as damaged by their upbringing. His brother had always been more affable, avoiding the worst of their older brothers' scorn and anger, deflecting it with humor. As a result, Sednar was a good leader, firm but fair in all his dealings.

Radnor hadn't been quite as lucky. He'd borne the brunt of his older brothers' brutality. Been beaten down time after time. But he always got up again, unable to keep his tongue when he felt strongly about something. He'd always feared he was more like them than he wanted to admit. He could sense the smoldering cauldron of rage bubbling deep in his soul.

He trusted Sednar more than he'd ever trusted another soul, but there was still a part of him that was waiting for his brother to turn on him, to betray him. It left him feeling tainted, unworthy of the trust his brother gave him.

There was a soft sigh and a light breeze caressed his cheek. Then the air in the room stilled and he knew he was alone. The short hairs on the back of his neck rose. "There's nothing there," he told himself. He grabbed up his sword and strapped it on. He pulled a brown leather vest from out of the trunk at the end of the bed and tugged it on. His leather pants and boots were dusty, but acceptable. His brother and the steward were waiting.

Roxanne was exhausted by the time she arrived home later that evening. It had only been a partial shift, but the diner had been extremely busy. The rain had cleared off and the nice weather had brought people out to eat.

Coupled with her early excursion to the flea market and her shocking news about Michael, it was no wonder she was dog-tired. Her limbs quivered with fatigue as she stripped off her uniform and dumped it into the hamper. She had to do laundry tomorrow. She'd planned on doing it this evening before she'd agreed to the extra shift at work.

Tomorrow, she promised herself, as she padded to the bathroom. She looked longingly at the tub, but knew she would probably fall asleep within minutes if she tried to take a bath. She was that tired. Instead, she opted for a quick shower. Five minutes later, she was clean and dressed in a pair of yellow cotton pants sprinkled with orange and green flowers and a matching tank top.

Yawning, she turned off the bathroom light. She double-checked the five locks on her front door, making certain each one was secured. She was uneasy even though she knew it was too soon for Michael to have found her. Still, she took the phone and set it on the coffee table next to the davenport.

She made quick work of opening up her bed and spreading out the bedclothes. It was only then she remembered her earlier finds of the day. Her feet made no sound on the tiled floor as she walked to the kitchen chair. The tapestry looked incredible now that the accumulated layers of grime and dirt were gone. She picked it up, pleased to find it was dry.

Forcing herself to be brave, she turned off the kitchen light, leaving on the lamp next to her bed. She couldn't afford to leave all her lights burning, but she couldn't quite bring herself to turn them all out. Not yet.

She scooted beneath the covers and laid the tapestry out beside her. The castle was still imposing, even though it seemed more functional than grand. It looked solid and secure. She liked that. The forest seemed alive with animals and birds, surrounded by the forbidding mountains not too far in the distance.

But it was the two men that pulled at her, drew her gaze time and time again. Both had long, dark brown hair. She couldn't quite tell how long it was, but it looked to go to their waists. One of the men had a pair of thin braids framing his face. The other man's hair fluttered in the breeze.

She wished she could see their features better. They both looked hard and tough. Their shoulders were broad, their chests wide. She smiled and wondered about the person who'd created the tapestry. She'd bet it was a woman. The men were obviously fantasies. No men looked that good.

Not that she'd want anything to do with men like that. A shiver skated down her spine. She'd had more than enough of her share of tough, strong men. Michael had proven to her that men like that often used their strength to get what they wanted. She couldn't imagine being at the mercy of two such men.

Now where the heck had that thought come from? "You're tired." She scrubbed her eyes. They felt gritty and heavy. "You'll never have to worry about dealing with two men, or even one. Not if you don't want to. You're in charge." That had been her mantra for the past year. She was in charge of her own life now. And nothing and nobody was going to change that.

She settled onto her side and sighed. Her fingers traced the patterns of the tapestry. She knew she needed to switch off the lamp before she fell asleep. She couldn't afford to

waste electricity. She barely made enough to cover her bills as it was. Two minutes, she promised herself as she snuggled into her pillow.

Two minutes.

~~~~~

A noise startled her, jolting her into a seated position. The room was pitch black. She couldn't see a hand in front of her face. But that was impossible. The streetlamp just outside her kitchen window usually gave her more than enough light to see by at night. Plus, she'd left a light on. Her heart pounded and sweat popped out all over her body as she listened.

There it was again. A slight brush of fabric that sounded like it was coming from just inside her front door. She scrambled off the davenport, shoving aside the sheet and light blanket. The beat of her heart pounded in her ears, blocking out all other sound. She held her breath, trying to hear where the intruder was. She had five locks on the door. Why hadn't she heard someone trying to break in?

"Who's there?" She'd meant for her voice to be strong. Instead, it had come out as a pitiful whisper.

A low chuckle reached her ears and froze the blood in her veins. "You didn't really think you could get away from me that easily, did you, Roxy?" Only Michael called her Roxy and she hated it.

How had he found her so quickly? How had he gotten into her apartment? She couldn't see him or hear him now. Didn't know where he was. He was playing with her like a cat taunts a mouse before striking.

Her hand fumbled for the phone, but in the dark she couldn't find it. Her heart skipped a beat when the side of her hand struck it and sent it crashing. She fell to her knees, hands out, frantically patting the floor in search of the phone, her lifeline to help and the outside world.

"You wouldn't call the cops, now would you, Roxy? I just spent a year in prison because of you and I don't plan to repeat the experience." His voice was calm and matter-of-fact. It chilled her soul. He was going to kill her. But god only knew what he'd do to her first.

"You'd better leave." She needed to get to the kitchen. There were knives in one of the drawers. If nothing else, she could defend herself.

Standing slowly, she inched her way to the kitchen, still not able to see a thing. Not that it mattered. The room was small and she knew the layout. The tile floor was cold against the soles of her feet as she moved quickly and quietly. Only two more steps and she'd be in the kitchen.

She hit a solid wall and bounced back. Strong hands shot out and caught her, pulling her forward.

"No!" she screamed, raising her hands to beat at his chest.

"Shh," a male voice crooned. "There is no need to be afraid. You are safe."

Several things registered at once in her muddled brain. The chest she was beating was warm and hard and very naked. It also wasn't Michael. She glanced over her shoulder, unable to see her apartment in the shrouded darkness. "He's going to kill me," she whispered.

At once the man's demeanor changed. He thrust her behind him and a metallic whoosh filled the air. The stranger walked backward, forcing her to move. She didn't know where he expected her to go with the kitchen counter only a few steps behind her. Except the counter wasn't there. She kept waiting to hit it, but the expanse behind her seemed to open up into nothingness.

Her stomach churned and her knees went weak. She lifted a shaky hand to her mouth to keep from screaming. Terror filled her. A flicker of light off to her right caught her attention. She turned toward it, needing to get her bearings. Around her the room began to take shape.

She blinked, not quite believing what she was seeing. A fire crackled in a large stone hearth, illuminating gray stone walls. The texture of the floor beneath her feet changed. It was no longer tile, but harder and cooler. She suspected the floor was much like the walls.

The stranger walked into her line of sight and she caught her breath. He was very, very tall. Even bigger than Michael. His shoulders were as wide as a doorway and his biceps were huge. Heavy bands of bronze wrapped around his upper arms and wrists. They flashed in the firelight as he sheathed his sword in the scabbard at his side.

"You are safe." His low voice reached deep inside her, comforting her in a way she hadn't thought possible. She almost believed him.

He unbuckled his sword belt and set it on top of a wooden table just off to the right. His feet were bare and he was wearing a pair of snug leather pants. He looked incredible.

She raised her eyes to see the face of the man who had saved her. Before she could get a good look at him, a rustling sound came from behind her. She whirled around and came face-to-face with a huge four-poster bed. There were no curtains to soften the austere lines of the bed. It was huge. And there was a man, a naked man, rising from its depths.

"What have you brought us, Brother?"

When he spoke, she took an involuntary step back toward the man standing next to her. She didn't know him, but she trusted him not to hurt her.

"I heard a woman cry out and found her wandering in the hall."

The hall? That wasn't right. "No, I was home." A thought occurred to her. "Where am I?"

She peered around the room, studying the man beside her and the one propped up on one arm, staring at her from the depths of the gigantic bed. It was all so familiar even though she knew she'd never been here before.

*The tapestry.*

Relief hit her and her knees went weak. She swayed and was quickly lifted into a pair of strong arms and carried to the bed. She'd be screaming her head off if she hadn't suddenly realized she was dreaming.

The nightmare about her husband finding her had been brought on by the phone call from Stacy. That was only normal. Instead of the nightmare coming to its terrifying conclusion, it had morphed into a dream about the two men from the tapestry. She'd earlier wished for someone to save her from her ex-husband. Who better than two fantasy men?

She sighed and caught the scent of hot male, mixed with leather and something else. Something earthy and clean. She liked it.

Her back hit the mattress and she stared up at her dream hero. His jaw was square, his features strong. She wished she could see him better, but there simply wasn't enough light. His eyes were dark and intense. No golden boy like her ex. If she'd met this man in a dark alleyway, she'd have been terrified of him. But this was just a dream and here he represented safety.

"Thank you for saving me." She didn't know why she was thanking him. It was a dream, after all. But for some reason it seemed important.

He grunted and before she could blink, he'd shucked his pants and climbed onto the bed beside her. She caught a glimpse of rock-hard thighs and a huge erection.

Roxanne swallowed hard. She wasn't ready for this, not even in her dreams. The shifting of bedcovers behind her reminded her that there was another man in the bed. He snuggled closer and she felt his arousal, long and thick, press against her hip.

She scrambled to the top of the bed, pulled her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. It was a protective posture. A defensive move. With them surrounding her, there was nowhere else for her to go. "Please." She thrust out a hand in front of her, as if that would stop them.

The scowl deepened on the stranger's face.

"That's what we want to do, my sweet." She glanced at the man's brother. They had to be brothers. The resemblance was too close for them to be otherwise. Plus, in the way of dreams, she just knew it was his brother. He offered her a soft smile. "Let us pleasure you." His large hand settled on her thigh. Her breath caught in her throat.

"We don't want to take from you." Her hero cupped her face in his hands. Leaning forward, he brushed his lips across hers. The caress was featherlight, so soft she barely felt it.

Arousal zinged through her, awakening parts of her body she'd feared would never be alive again. Her breasts ached and she felt a heavy pulse low in her belly. Cream slid from her core, dampening the crotch of her pajama pants. She licked her lips. His eyes darkened as he watched her. "I don't understand."

The brother shifted his hand, sliding it beneath the hem of her shirt until it rested just below her left breast. Her heart raced. "Let us touch your breasts, lick your skin, taste the sweetness from between your spread thighs."

A shiver rushed down her spine, but this time it wasn't from fear. She was aroused. Totally and completely aroused. And why not? This was a dream. Her dream. She was safe here. She was in charge.

Her dark warrior brushed his thumb over her bottom lip. Her tongue darted out to taste it. His skin was salty and hot. A low rumble came from deep in his chest. Staring up at him, she nodded.

Pure male satisfaction covered his rugged face. Not hesitating, he caught the waistband of her pants and pulled, whipping them away. His brother did the same with her top. In seconds, she was naked.

A sense of vulnerability swept over her. It was just a dream, but she couldn't stop herself from curling her legs upward to shield her body from them.

"No." Her hero was having none of it. He knelt on the bed in front of her and wrapped his hands around her ankles. His grip was gentle, but firm. Slowly, inexorably, he eased her legs away from her body, tugging them open as he did so. With his large body between her legs, she couldn't close them. The position left her open and exposed.

He leaned down and inhaled deep. "You smell hot and sweet, like a woman should." His tongue snaked out, licking up one side of her damp folds and down the other. "Your cunt is juicy and ripe."

His crude words startled her, but his gentle touch held her captive. The expression on his face was one of wonder.

The brother wasn't about to be forgotten. He leaned down and brushed a soft kiss across her lips. They were both being so gentle it brought tears to her eyes. She blinked them back. She wanted to enjoy this dream, this fantasy of being protected, cared for and wanted by two exceptional specimens of manhood. She'd have enough reality to deal with in the morning when she awakened.

He kissed the curve of her jaw and down her neck, licking her collarbone. Her breath caught in her throat as he continued lower, lapping at one of her swollen nipples. A low moan broke from her throat, startling her.

Her tormentor gave a low laugh and latched onto her breast with his mouth, sucking strongly.

Between her thighs, her dark warrior touched her with his tongue, slicking over her engorged folds. He found the nub at the apex of her thighs and flicked it. Her hips arched upward of their own accord. He blew softly on her heated flesh. She reached down and tangled her fingers in his hair, urging him closer.

"Is this what you want?" His breath was warm against the lips of her pussy.

"Yes," she whispered. And it was. She wanted to feel like a woman again, a whole woman, one who could find pleasure in the intimacy of sex, even if it was only in a dream.

Her warrior lowered his head again and caught her clit carefully between his lips and sucked. His brother cupped one breast with his hand, molding the firm flesh and caressing her nipple as he continued to tease the other with his tongue and mouth.

Roxanne floated in a haze of sensual pleasure, her body alive with sensations, each one more intense than the last. Her breath was coming faster with each passing second. Her skin was slick with perspiration, each nerve ending pulsing, reaching for the explosive culmination at the finish line.

Between her legs, her fantasy warrior touched her, rimming the opening to her channel with his finger before slowly sinking inside. The sensitive inner tissues were swollen and tight. He worked in and out until her body accepted his invasion, softening around his thick, long finger. She wondered what it would feel like to have his hard cock buried in her depths. He would fill her to overflowing.

Then there was no time to think of anything but the pleasure suffusing her. Her warrior began to thrust his finger in and out of her core, quickly adding a second one. Roxanne arched toward him, wanting more even as her inner muscles pulsed and tightened around him.

His brother lapped at her nipples, switching from one to the other, drawing her deep into his mouth, using his tongue to best advantage.

Pressure built low in her body. She was so close to coming. The fingers pumping in and out of her channel moved faster. He sucked her clit between his lips, drawing hard just as his brother did the same at her breast.

Roxanne screamed as every muscle in her body tightened and released. A flash of heat pulsed through her pussy, bathing her fantasy man's fingers with her essence. She shook and trembled, her body not her own as her orgasm overtook her.

When she came back to her senses, one brother lay with his head on her breast, lapping lazily at a distended nipple. The other sprawled between her legs, stroking her gently. Her fingers were still tangled in his long hair and she tried to free them without disturbing him. He raised his head from between her thighs and stared at her. His eyes glittered with undisguised lust.

She shivered, not with fear, but with a longing that surprised her. She'd just orgasmed but she wanted more. She wanted her dark warrior. And his brother. What would have shocked and appalled her in her normal life seemed normal in her dream.

Her warrior shifted onto his knees between her spread thighs. His cock jutted out in front of him, enormous and proud. The head was damp and she could see the veins pulsing down the thick shaft. Yet he made no move to impale himself in her.

She wanted to touch him, to feel all that power throbbing against her hands. Roxanne reached out, but he seemed to be getting farther away rather than closer. She frowned as a noise buzzed in her ears, distracting her. Her warrior lunged toward her,

his face fading before her very eyes. She tried to catch his outstretched hand, but met nothing but air.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Roxanne sat straight up in bed, a cry of dismay echoing through her small apartment. The alarm of her clock radio blared out at her from the shelf on the bookcase and she scowled at it as she rolled out of bed to shut it off.

She froze and stared down at herself. She was totally naked. Her pants and top were tangled in the sheets next to the tapestry. The light still glowed from her lamp, barely visible with the early morning sunlight streaming in through the window.

"That was some dream." She raked her fingers through her damp hair and took a deep, calming breath. *And that's all it was.*

She grabbed up her clothing and tugged it on before flicking off her alarm. Her body ached and throbbed, reminding her of just how real her dream had been. She'd actually orgasmed in her sleep. Incredible.

Determined to put the dream and the fantasy warrior and his brother out of her mind, she tossed the tapestry onto the back of the living room chair. Getting into her daily routine, she folded her blankets and pulled the davenport back into a sofa, stowing the bedclothes in the storage area beneath it.

That done, she headed to the bathroom. She needed a shower to wash away the effects of the night. It was morning. Time to face reality. There were no warriors to help protect her.

As always, she was on her own.



## **Chapter Three**

Roxanne was bone tired. They'd been extra busy at Joe's today. One of the other waitresses had called in sick and Roxanne had ended up working for twelve hours instead of her regular eight-hour shift. In spite of her sensible shoes, her feet ached. She was hot and sweaty after hustling heavy trays around all day and was ready for a long, relaxing bubble bath. All she had to do was make it through the bus ride and short walk home.

Thankfully, no one was seated next to her. She held her purse in her lap, her body swaying to the rhythm of the bus as it rolled down the city street. Resting her head against the window, she longed to close her eyes but didn't dare, fearing she'd drift off to sleep and miss her stop.

Raising a hand to her mouth, she stifled a yawn. Her mind drifted and she smiled as a picture of two tall, strong men invaded her thoughts. All day long, she'd been unable to get last night's dream out of her head. Memories of four strong calloused hands stroking her breasts and between her legs, arousing her to a fevered pitch, occurred at the strangest times during the day, making her flush. Pamela, one of the younger waitresses, had commented on it. Roxanne had passed it off as just the heat from the kitchen.

Her breasts swelled, nipples pushing against the cups of her plain cotton bra. Her pantyhose were confining and hot after all day. She couldn't wait to strip them off. Her entire body felt sensitized.

Her dark warrior had touched her between her thighs. She swallowed hard as she remembered his phantom touch. Cream coated the crotch of her panties and she squirmed, emitting a low moan that startled her. Heat crept up her cheeks as she straightened in her seat and glanced around. Thankfully, no one was paying her any attention. Everyone was concerned with their own lives.

A sense of loneliness assailed her. She was truly alone in a world of people. She liked the folks she worked with but wasn't close with any of them. The few friends she'd had, she'd lost touch with after the death of her parents and fiancé and her marriage to Michael.

Roxanne tugged her purse tighter to her body, saddened by what her life had become. It was as much her fault as it was the people she knew. After what had happened in her disastrous marriage, she'd kept people at arm's length.

No more.

It hit her suddenly that she'd been living in a prison of her own making, keeping herself from truly living as some sort of punishment for having the bad judgment of marrying a man who abused her.

She knew what the counselor she'd seen a few times immediately after she'd filed for divorce would say. Mrs. Dobson had told her over and over that it wasn't her fault. That men like Michael were master manipulators, hiding what they truly were until they had a woman isolated. In fact, he'd probably been attracted to her because he sensed her vulnerability.

A cold shiver skated down her spine. She didn't want to think about Michael. Just knowing he was out there somewhere was enough to give her nightmares. Unconsciously, she'd been watching for him all day, her eyes flying to the front door of the diner every time the bell had rung.

No wonder she was exhausted. The strain of knowing her ex was out of prison coupled with the sensual dream and the long work shift had drained her totally. She planned to make it an early night to catch up on her sleep.

Glancing out the window, she was surprised to find her stop was next. She rang the bell, climbing off when the bus rumbled to a stop.

As it pulled away from the curb with a bellow of exhaust fumes, she glanced around. Everything looked normal. The man at the grocery store was sweeping the sidewalk in front of his shop. A woman pushed a baby stroller and two young men sauntered along on the other side of the road.

Gathering what little remained of her strength, Roxanne began the final leg of her trip. Putting one foot in front of the other, she started home. Maybe she'd get a cat, she mused. A warm, furry bundle that would greet her at the door when she opened it each evening, demanding supper with an insistent meow.

The thought made her smile. It was an expense, but if she was careful, she could afford it. She could go to the local animal shelter and get a kitten. No, maybe a full-grown cat would be better, one that was used to being on its own during the day.

She'd also take Pamela up on her offer to go out for coffee next time the other woman asked. She'd always cited excuses before, hurrying home after each work shift, unconsciously afraid to make friends. That was all about to change. Maybe she'd even ask Pamela herself after work tomorrow.

Her heart felt lighter than it had in a long time, but her body was still bone tired. Her building came into sight but she couldn't work up any energy to hurry her step. Finally, after what seemed like hours instead of minutes, she trudged up the stairs to her apartment.

Unlocking her door, she shoved it open and walked inside. Her gaze swept the room. Satisfied, she stepped inside, shut the door and engaged all the locks. Her feet throbbed, reminding her she no longer needed to wear shoes. Dumping her sweater and purse on the floor, she went to work removing them. It wasn't easy getting her body to bend over. Her back ached and she groaned, but that turned into a moan of pleasure as each shoe was pulled off. She wiggled her tired toes and flexed her feet.

The pantyhose had to go. Roxanne reached up under her bubblegum pink polyester uniform and grabbed the waistband. As she peeled them down her legs, she silently

cursed Joe for wanting a retro feel for his diner. He wasn't the one who had to wear bubblegum pink polyester every day. The diner was always full and the heat from the kitchen made the entire place sweltering hot, in spite of the tiny air conditioner that worked overtime to cool the dining area.

Pantyhose gone, she gave a sigh of relief and kicked them aside. Normally, she was very tidy with her things, but tonight she was too tired to care. "Tomorrow," she muttered. She was working a later shift tomorrow so she could actually sleep in.

Her stomach growled. She needed to eat something even though she didn't feel like it. A can of soup would be the quickest thing. It wouldn't take long to heat. She padded toward the kitchen, pausing when she neared the davenport. She stopped and peered around the room. Something was different.

Adrenaline pumped through her body, heightening her senses. A voice inside her head screamed at her to run. Not hesitating, she raced for the door, her hands clawing at the locks. Four off and one to go.

She didn't dare look over her shoulder, fearing what she'd see if she did. She couldn't hear a thing above the pounding of her heart. Her breath was choppy, her hands shaking.

A light scent lingered in the air in front of the bathroom door. An expensive men's cologne. One she hadn't smelled in more than a year. Michael's cologne.

"Not leaving so soon, are you?" He hadn't made a sound or, if he did, she hadn't heard. Suddenly he was behind her, his heavy body shoving hers against the door.

She cried out as he slammed her head against the door before grabbing her by the hair and pulling her backward. He thrust her to the side. Her hip smashed against the side of the davenport and she grabbed it for support. Her nightmare stood before her, except he was all too real.

Michael was even larger than when he went to prison, which was saying something. His blond hair was longer and tied at the nape of his neck with a leather thong. He was wearing a sleeveless shirt, which showed off broad shoulders, large biceps and the tattoos that ran the length of both arms.

His eyes were just as she remembered—cold, unforgiving blue ice. When he spoke, his voice was the same, calm and unemotional.

"Now that's no way for the wife to greet her husband." He took a step toward her and she scrambled backward.

"You're not my husband," she whispered. She wanted to scream, but fear had tightened her throat, making it impossible. She moved slowly away from him. A weapon. She needed something to defend herself.

"Of course I'm your husband. No piece of paper or judge is going to change that." He took another step closer. Reaching between his legs, he cupped the large bulge there. "I've been in prison a long time. I've spent a lot of hours thinking about this reunion, about what I wanted to do to you when I got out."

He smiled, flashing a perfect set of pearly white teeth. "Nice place. I know you meant to send me a forwarding address, but that's okay. A buddy of mine from prison is really good at finding people. He's pure magic with a computer."

Her blood ran cold. All the time she'd thought she was safe he'd known exactly where to find her. "If you kill me, you'll be the prime suspect."

He shook his head and sighed. "You never were really smart, Roxy. But that's okay, I'll take care of you just like I used to. You've put on a few pounds and cut your hair, but we can take care of that."

Roxanne could feel herself shrinking beneath his gaze. Memories of being told she was stupid, again and again, threatened to destroy the year's worth of work she'd done to rebuild her self-confidence. She reached deep inside to the core of strength she'd slowly and painstakingly built. "No. I don't want you to take care of me. I'm fine by myself."

"Now, Roxy. That's your opinion, which doesn't really matter squat." He moved fast as a snake, grabbing the front of her uniform and tugging her toward him. He leaned down and she could smell peppermint on his breath. He'd always liked mint candies and the scent of them turned her stomach.

He yanked her upward until she was standing on her tiptoes. "You're going to call work and quit your job. Then you're going to pack your clothes. I've got a place back in Nevada. It will be just like old times."

She shook her head. She couldn't go back. Wouldn't go back. "You're crazy. I won't do it. I won't go with you."

His gaze narrowed. "Now, Roxy. That's not a nice thing to say to me after I've come all this way to get you." He shoved her back, hard and fast. She toppled over the back of the davenport and tumbled onto the floor, hitting her head on the edge of the coffee table.

Her vision dimmed as she tried to clear her head. She could feel the stickiness on the side of her temple and knew she was bleeding. The sound of boot heels on the tile startled her into action. She grabbed the edge of the chair and pulled herself upright. It was then she noticed the tapestry lying on the davenport.

That's what she'd unconsciously noticed, what had made her stop before she'd actually smelled his cologne. She'd put the tapestry on the back of the chair this morning but it had been on the davenport when she'd gotten home. Too bad her brain hadn't made the connection before she'd locked herself into her apartment with a madman.

He followed her gaze and shook his head. "Still buying other people's garbage, Roxy? This whole place stinks of it. A few mismatched dishes, some ragtag furniture and a moth-eaten rug. Not a lot to be proud of."

Michael's hands went to his belt buckle and he slowly began to release it. The leather swooshed through the loops of his jeans as he removed it. He held it easily in his

hands. Roxanne was paralyzed with fear. She'd felt the heavy leather and the hard metal buckle against her flesh too many times not to know what was coming next.

Anger, hard and swift, broke through her fear. She wasn't a victim. Not any longer. He might kill her, but she wasn't going anywhere with him. Lunging toward the bookshelf, she grabbed a chunk of rock she'd picked up on the beach and threw it at him.

Disbelief flared in his face as he ducked the projectile. She sent a vase flying after it. "Get out!" She screamed it as loud as she could. "Fire!" She figured that would get the attention of her neighbors faster than anything else. Maybe someone would call the cops.

Michael lunged for her. She darted to the right toward the kitchen. She needed a knife. She could feel him behind her. Getting closer. She stretched out her fingers. Reached.

He tackled her from behind, taking her down hard on the floor, his full weight landing on her. The air went out of her lungs with a large whoosh. She clutched her throat, unable to breathe.

He rolled her over and grabbed her by her hair, dragging her back toward the living room. The pain in her scalp was horrendous as he yanked her up onto the davenport. She struggled to take in a mouthful of air.

He loomed over her, straddling her thighs as his hands went to the opening of his jeans. "I'm going to fuck you first. Hard and long so you remember who you belong to. I've dreamed of that for months. Every time I jerked off in my cell, I could picture you down on your knees with my cock rammed down your throat. We'll get to that in a bit after I've taken the edge off. I might even fuck that tight ass of yours. We've never done that. I did a guy in prison and it wasn't too bad. It would be a hell of a sight better with your smooth, tight ass." He paused and reached down and caught her jaw between his fingers and squeezed tight. "When I've had my fill of you, then I'll punish you. After that, you'll make that call and pack your things."

Roxanne desperately tried to pull air into her body. The horror of his words washed over her, making her stomach roil. He was going to rape her and beat her, maybe even kill her. There was no telling with Michael.

She squirmed beneath him, but he was heavy and strong and her head was still spinning from the heavy knock she'd taken and being dragged by her hair. She brought her hand up, raking her nails down his cheek. He reared back and swore.

"You'll pay for that, bitch." His pulled his arm back, making a fist. As it descended toward her, she felt something warm against her back. The room started to spin and a bright light flashed.

Roxanne cried out as she felt the davenport disintegrate beneath her. The world seemed to open up around her and she was thrown into an abyss. Her stomach dropped and the breath was sucked out of her body. It felt as if she were in an elevator that was freefalling.

She stuck out her hands, desperately trying to find something to grasp. There was nothing. She heard Michael swearing and yelling. Then she heard nothing at all. It was as though she were sucked into a void that had no beginning or end.

The light flashed again and the world went black.

Radnor finished brushing Xander, his warhorse, and led the enormous black beast back to his stall. "Only a few days and you'll be in your new home," he promised the horse.

Xander shook his head and released a puff of air, letting his owner know his displeasure. Radnor slapped the beast lightly on the shoulder. "None of that. You'll be the king in the new stable and you'll have many pretty mares to service."

The horse seemed to like that idea. He raised his massive black head and shook his mane as he trotted into his stall. Radnor chuckled. Sometimes he truly believed his horse understood every word he uttered. "There you go, my friend." He made sure Xander had enough feed and water before closing the stall door. The animal bared its teeth and whinnied, sticking his head over the gate for a final rub.

Radnor patted the horse fondly. Xander was responsible for the biggest change at Craddock Keep. Six years ago, he'd started a breeding program, using Xander as a stud. The stallion had produced several fine offspring, each worth a tidy sum. Radnor had sold them all in order to help repair the keep and reclaim their lands.

He and Sednar had worked tirelessly for years. This was Radnor's reward for his hard work and patience. The new stable was almost finished. Built to his specifications, it would allow him to expand his breeding practice and raise more horses, which, in turn, meant more wealth and security for everyone who lived here.

"Stay out of trouble," he told the horse. He gave Xander one final rub and left the old stable. He squinted against the strong morning sun. All around him people went about their daily work. Some of them nodded as they passed. Others kept their heads down and hurried past, not daring to look his way.

Radnor sighed and raked his hand through his hair. Even now, there were still people who didn't trust either him or Sednar. Not that he blamed them, but it was still hard to watch, to deal with.

Putting it out of his mind, he strode across the yard toward the new stable. It was a thing of beauty. Long and spacious, it was more than twice the size of the old one. The outside was built entirely of stone. A peaked roof with slate tiles topped it off. Radnor had wanted to build something that would withstand fire. The horses were the main wealth of the keep and had to be protected at all costs. It had been a long and expensive process to quarry the stone from the mountain behind them, but well worth it now that it was done.

He strode inside to inspect the structure. The stonemasons had promised to be finished by today. By the looks of things, they had fulfilled their promise. Heavy wooden gates were hung across each large stall. A wide aisle ran down the center with

stalls on either side. There was a larger open area at the end for grooming or examining sick horses. A heavy wooden gate opened up onto a fenced corral that would be used for training and exercising the animals.

There was a room for all the tack and saddles, as well as a sleeping area above for the head groom and his helpers. All in all, Radnor was pleased with the addition to Craddock Keep.

The building was empty now. If all went according to plan, he was going to relocate the horses tomorrow. The old stable, which was constructed entirely of wood, would be taken down, the wood reused in repairs to the many cottages occupied by his people. Many were in dire need of repair. The wood was being made available free for anyone who needed it.

He inhaled deeply, the scent of fresh hay filling his nostrils. Someone had already begun bringing hay and feed into the new stable. It was probably Quince, the head groom. The man loved the horses as much as Radnor did. His boots hit the stone floor in a comforting rhythm as he walked to the far end of the building, inspecting each stall, checking each gate.

A sense of peace surrounded him, pushing away the restlessness that had filled him all morning. He'd dreamed last night. His sleep was filled with the sight and sounds of a woman. Not unusual for a man who longed for one of his own. But this had felt different. Very real. So real, he'd woken to find himself hard and aching. He'd taken himself in hand and relieved the pressure, keeping the image of the woman in his mind all the while he'd pumped his cock and pleased himself.

The woman was unlike any he'd ever known. Her hair was unusually short and dark. He wished he'd been able to see the color of her eyes. All he'd known was that she was afraid and he had to protect her, no matter the cost.

He leaned against one of the gates, his gaze going inward. His biceps flexed as his fingers tightened around the heavy wood. The dream had seemed so real. His fingers itched with the remembrance of her soft flesh. He'd taken her away from what had frightened her and brought her to bed. Sednar had been there as well, welcoming his dream lady.

Radnor's cock swelled as he remembered the way she'd allowed them to remove her clothing. Trusted them with her delicate body. He could still smell the sweet scent of her skin and feel the slick folds of her pussy. Her low moans of pleasure had been music to his ears. She'd looked at him as though he were special.

His heart pounded and his breathing increased even as he scoffed at the idea. Women didn't trust him or his brother. In spite of the passing years, the Craddock family history loomed large. Their history with women was less than desirable.

He shook himself free of the daydream, swearing under his breath. "Don't be a fool," he muttered. The woman wasn't real. She was only a dream brought on by loneliness and memories. It was enough that he had a peaceful home, the respect and regard of his brother and his horses. It had to be enough. It was all he had.

A sound caught his ears and he cocked his head to one side, listening intently. He heard it again. A low groan followed by the sound of fabric shuffling. Someone was in here.

Radnor strode silently down the aisle, hand on the pommel of his sword, checking each stall as he went. It was probably one of the stable boys, but he wanted to be certain. Most of the stalls were empty, but a few had bales of hay stacked inside, ready to be spread as bedding for the horses. In the last stall on the left, he found his intruder.

He froze, unable to believe his eyes. Lying on a stack of hay bales was a woman wearing a garment of the most striking color he'd ever seen. It was almost blinding in its intensity. Her slender legs were bare. The bottom of her unusual dress was pushed above her knees. Most of her arms were exposed, as was a wide swath just above her breasts. Something metal glinted down the center of her garment when she shifted.

Her lips parted on a low groan, freeing Radnor from his stupor. He opened the gate and stepped into the stall. Her hair barely touched her nape and was as black as the night. Her lips were rosy and full, begging to be kissed. Her cheekbones were high, her nose straight.

He frowned, his eyes narrowing as he noted the pallor of her skin. He moved closer and the faintest scent of flowers wafted before him. Recognition hit him full force. He knew this woman. Knew the feel of her skin beneath his palms, the scent of body when it was aroused, the full shape of her ample breasts and the strength of her supple limbs. She was the woman from his dream.

Her eyelids fluttered open and she stared up at him. Her eyes were gray, the same color as a morning mist over the lake. She blinked once, opened her mouth and screamed.



## Chapter Four

The shape of a huge man loomed over her. Roxanne scrambled away even as she opened her mouth and screamed. Michael had found her and he was trying to kill her.

She blinked as she scuttled away. She was lying on a hard, scratchy surface. Something was wrong. She didn't recognize her surroundings. Had Michael knocked her out and taken her somewhere?

Her body broke out in a cold sweat and her heart pounded so hard it hurt her chest. Roxanne couldn't breathe. She tried to scream again but couldn't get enough air into her lungs. Terror filled her even as her fingers closed into fists. She would fight back. She was a victim no longer.

He moved into a shaft of light coming from a high window. Roxanne frowned. It wasn't Michael. Her heart skipped a beat. He was huge, maybe even bigger than her ex-husband. His expression was fierce. His golden-brown eyes reminded her of those of an eagle, sharp and predatory. His jaw was square, his lips firm. He had a bump in the center of his rather large nose and a wicked scar on his right cheekbone just below his eye.

His dark brown hair fell all the way to his waist. She swallowed hard when she realized he wasn't wearing a shirt. His massive chest was bare, covered only in a light sheen of sweat. *Oh god.* Was he one of Michael's friends? The one from prison Michael had mentioned. He didn't have any tattoos. But that didn't mean anything. It was naïve to think everyone who went to prison had them.

He held out his hand. "There is no need to be afraid. You are safe."

She frowned. She'd heard those words before. His voice was familiar too. The fog cleared from her mind and she tried to remember what had happened. She'd hit her head on the edge of the table. Michael had caught her when she'd made a run for the kitchen, dragging her back to the living room and tossing her onto the davenport. She'd landed on top of the tapestry.

She stilled, staring at the stranger who'd made no move toward her. She noted a few things she hadn't before. He was wearing thick bronze bands around his biceps and his wrists. Leather pants molded the heavy muscles in his thighs. Brown leather boots covered his feet, rising almost all the way to his knees. But it was the huge sword strapped to his waist that caught her attention. How she'd missed it before now, she had no idea. The thing had to be at least four feet long.

"You're the mystery man from my dream," she blurted.

He frowned, his dark brows drawing together. He took a step toward her and she shifted back until her back struck something hard. She was in a stone room of some kind, sitting on several bales of straw or hay. *Impossible.*

"Dream?" He lowered himself slowly until he was sitting next to her. She was effectively caged in with nowhere to go. He lifted his hand toward her and she flinched in spite of her resolve to be brave. He hesitated but didn't stop until his fingers cupped her jaw. "What dream?"

His voice was deep and compelling. Before she knew what she was doing, she was spilling the details. "You saved me from my ex-husband and then took me to a castle, and then..." She could feel the heat creeping up her cheeks and knew she was blushing at the memory of what had happened, even though it had only been a dream. "This must be a dream too. Maybe I'm unconscious somewhere." She grabbed a piece of skin on her arm and pinched. Hard. "Ouch."

He sat back and his fingers drifted away from her face. "Why did you do that?" He seemed genuinely perplexed.

"Because I'm dreaming," she explained. "Michael was attacking me and I fell." She frowned. "Maybe I have a concussion or something," she muttered. She sensed her dream man's growing impatience and hurried on. "You saved me from him the first time, so I guess my subconscious conjured you again. I blame it on the tapestry."

She sensed the change in him immediately. His entire body tensed, every muscle coiled and ready to react. Expectation filled the air around them. "What tapestry?"

She heard the urgency in his voice and responded. "The one I bought from the white-haired lady at the flea market. It was pretty dirty, but it cleaned up nice. It had a picture of two warriors standing in front of a castle so it's no wonder I conjured you out of my imagination."

And why she was babbling about an old tapestry when she was probably in grave danger, she had no idea. Had to be nerves. But if she was dreaming, why was she nervous? Roxanne was confused and her head was pounding. She raised her hand to her left temple and touched it gingerly, moaning when it increased the throbbing in her brain.

"You're hurt?" He leaned forward and tilted her face toward the light.

"It's nothing," she lied. "It's just where I hit my head when Michael tossed me over the side of the davenport."

A low growl came from her dream man, yet she was no longer afraid. She sensed he was angry on her behalf. He'd protected her before in her dream, so it was natural for her to trust him. And she couldn't keep calling him dream man. "Who are you?"

His brown eyes captured her with their piercing gaze. "I am Radnor of the House of Craddock. You are at Craddock Keep."

The name was strong and suited him. Unlike her ex who was a golden boy, this man looked dark and dangerous. Not the sort you wanted to meet in a back alley. He exuded danger.

He gently fingered a lock of her hair. "Who are you?"

She swallowed hard, ignoring the way her heart tripped when he touched her. It wasn't from fear, but arousal, which wasn't at all appropriate given the circumstances. He was waiting patiently for her to respond to his question, so she answered. "Roxanne Sykes."

"Roxanne." He said her name slowly, letting it roll off his tongue in a way that made her skin go hot, then cold.

She shivered and nodded.

"And you say the tapestry brought you here?" he continued.

She frowned. That wasn't what she'd said. "No. I said you reminded me of the tapestry I bought at the flea market. I'm here because I'm unconscious." Her frown deepened. "Or maybe I'm dead and this is heaven. But if it was heaven, would my head still hurt?" She shrugged away her question. "Anyway, I was fighting my ex-husband off and then there was a flash of light. I think the tapestry was underneath me."

"Ex-husband?" Roxanne could hear the menacing threat in his voice.

She didn't want to talk about Michael. "He found me after he got out of prison. We're divorced, but he still came after me." She wrapped her arms around herself, suddenly chilled.

Radnor's scowl deepened. "I do not understand the word divorce. He is not your husband?"

"No. He hurt me and I left him." She hated talking about that. It brought back all the old feelings of inadequacy. Made her feel somehow less because she'd stayed with Michael for so long before getting the courage to leave. A man like Radnor couldn't understand what it felt like to be under someone else's cruel rule, unable to defend oneself, unable to leave. He was strong. A warrior. She was a woman. A woman very alone in the world.

But, she reminded herself, she'd gotten the courage to leave even though it had cost her dearly. She was brave. She had remade her life and no one was going to make her feel ashamed again. She tilted her chin upward, daring him to make some comment about her staying with a man who abused her.

Radnor growled. "He hurt you."

Roxanne nodded, buffeted by the waves of fury rolling off the man seated beside her. Yet she wasn't afraid of him, didn't feel threatened. Of course, this wasn't real.

"Where is he?"

She shrugged. "I have no idea. Not that it matters. This is just a dream anyway, brought on by the tapestry I purchased. Obviously, I got more than I bargained for when I spent my ten bucks. I didn't know it came complete with erotic fantasies."

Radnor's demeanor changed in a heartbeat. Masculine satisfaction emanated from every pore of his body. He straightened his shoulders and stared down at her. "The tapestry brought you to Craddock Keep. You belong to us now."

Roxanne's eyes widened at his audacious statement. She didn't belong to anyone but herself. Before she could tell him so, he leaned down and pressed his lips against hers. Her eyelids drifted shut.

Radnor couldn't believe his eyes. The woman from his dreams was here. She'd appeared out of nowhere, brought by the magical tapestry of Javara lore. It should have been impossible. The tapestry usually only came once a generation. On the rare occasion it came twice. It had already been here three times in his lifetime, bringing tapestry brides to a world starved for women.

But the last time had been different. The woman it had brought had been an ancestor to the sorceress who'd created the tapestry. His sister, Genita, had told him all about the happenings at Castle Garen a year ago. The woman, Kathryn Piedmont, had been able to summon the tapestry at will. Perhaps the rules had changed.

Whatever the reason, Radnor wasn't about to question his good fortune. Leaning down, he pressed his lips against Roxanne's. Her name suited her. It sounded strong and exotic, much like the woman herself.

She made a small sound in the back of her throat as he kissed her but she didn't pull away. He kept the kiss light, when what he really wanted to do was strip her naked and claim her as his own. His cock throbbed in agreement, but his brain reminded him that he was not an animal like his older brothers had been.

Roxanne had been hurt. She was frightened, although she tried to hide it. He wanted her to feel safe with him.

He traced the full curve of her bottom lip with his tongue. She tasted sweet. She sucked in a breath, parting her lips, and he dipped inside. A brief touch. Light. Undemanding.

It was the hardest thing he'd ever done. The muscles in his arms ached he was clenching them so tight to keep from tugging her into his arms. She made another small sound of desire and the pressure of her mouth increased as she shifted closer to him.

Radnor wanted to roar in triumph. He parted his lips, inviting her to explore his mouth. Like a skittish foal, she hesitated before dipping her tongue inside. He touched his tongue to hers and she withdrew. Radnor kept the kiss gentle and seconds later, she was back, this time going deeper.

Unable to resist, he raised one hand and cupped the back of her head. Again, he kept the pressure light. Simply touching her. Demanding nothing. Her hair was soft. He longed to bury his fingers in it and deepen the kiss.

He felt the lightest pressure on his chest. He caught his breath but didn't move. Her fingertips played over the hard muscles of his chest before trailing over his biceps. Roxanne examined his armbands briefly before drifting upward to stroke his neck.

His cock was as hard as stone. His balls were heavy, aching for release. There was no way to hide the bulge pressing at the front placket of his pants and he didn't even try. She needed to know he wanted her, needed to become accustomed to his body, his touch.

He leaned back and their lips parted. She opened her eyes and blinked, looking as shocked as he felt. The sexual connection between them was undeniable. Radnor wanted Roxanne with a depth of need that shook him to his core. Never in his life had he allowed himself to want something as much as he wanted her.

It was disconcerting. But there was no denying it. The tapestry had brought her here and it was up to him, and Sednar, to find a way to keep her here. That meant convincing her to stay. From all he'd learned about the tapestry, the woman had the final choice if she stayed or went back to wherever she came from. The man could do nothing to stop her. That was the magic of the tapestry.

She cleared her throat. "That was..." She raised her fingers to her mouth and touched her lips. "That shouldn't have happened."

"You liked it." He would not let her deny her pleasure or the connection that existed between them.

She frowned at him, creating little lines on her brow. "That's beside the point."

Radnor touched the spot between her eyes and smoothed away the creases. He shook his head at her stubborn refusal to admit to the sexual spark that flared between them. "That is the point. You are here now and I will protect you."

"Don't you understand?" She spoke slowly, as if to a child. "This isn't real."

He grinned in spite of the seriousness of the situation. "If it's only a dream, you won't mind if I do this." Taking advantage of the moment, he leaned forward and captured her mouth, kissing her the way he longed to. His tongue surged between her lips, exploring the moist cavern of her mouth. He used his hand on the back of her head, tilting it so he had a better angle of penetration.

Roxanne moaned, her tongue tangling with his. Pleasure shot through him as she returned his caress. She was so sweet, like nothing he'd ever tasted in his life. Better than the finest wine, sweeter than the juiciest fruit.

Her unique scent surrounded him, a combination of flowers and warm, willing woman. She smelled like a dream long buried, like hope. Her pussy would taste even sweeter, with a hint of spice. He'd sampled her cream in his dream and knew the reality of it would be even better.

He placed his hand on her ankle. Her leg jerked slightly but she didn't object. Radnor kept kissing her as he ran his hand over her calf and knee. He slipped his hand beneath the strange-colored tunic she wore. Her skin was smooth and inviting. She shifted restlessly beside him.

He paused, not going any higher. She froze beneath his hand, quivering with indecision. He could almost hear her thoughts as she debated letting him go further or pushing him away.

She tore her lips from his. "I don't understand any of this." The confusion in her voice went straight to his soul and he sought to reassure her.

"All you have to do is enjoy the pleasure I want to give you." He rubbed her leg, moving no more than an inch upward before moving back down, settling her like he would a skittish mare. He didn't want to spook her any more than she already was.

"I want to touch every inch of your body. I want to uncover your breasts and tease your nipples into hard buds. I want to bury my face between your thighs and feast on your sweet flesh until you scream with pleasure."

Radnor stared into her smoky gray eyes, willing her to agree. "All you have to do is say yes." He wanted to stake his claim now before Sednar met her. He knew without a doubt that Sednar would put up a fierce fight for her affections. How could he not?

By rights, he should scoop Roxanne into his arms and take her into the keep. She had a bump and a slight gash on her temple. Not life-threatening, but it needed tending. If he were a decent man, he'd be more concerned with making her comfortable and seeing to her needs instead of wanting to fuck her.

But he'd never claimed to be a decent man. He was a hard man with rough ways. He'd learned to fight for what he wanted and he wanted Roxanne with a fierce longing that threatened to choke him.

His pulse pounded in his temple as he watched her. She was a miracle and his first inclination was to snatch her away and lock her in the tower room, pleasuring her until she couldn't even think of leaving him.

He dragged a hand through his hair and huffed out a deep breath. If he did that, he'd be no better than his older brothers had been. He'd be an animal. Old hurts rose to the fore as he remembered his sister and his mother. He'd been unable to protect them as much as he'd wanted. But he could protect Roxanne from anyone who dared to try to hurt her. He could also protect her from himself.

Slowly, he removed his hand from her leg and sat back to give her some space. Roxanne's mouth was open and he could see the shock in her eyes. And no wonder. He'd barely met her and he'd told her in very graphic details what he wanted to do to her. What woman wouldn't be afraid? Especially one who was already on the run from a man.

He almost growled at the thought of her ex-husband hurting her. Radnor wanted to meet the man who would do such a thing and make him pay for his crimes. Roxanne didn't know him, didn't understand that he'd never hurt her. The problem was he had only three days to make her understand, to get her to want to stay.

He stood abruptly and held out his hand. "Come. I will take you inside. You can bathe and have your head injury tended to. Then you will eat and rest before you meet my brother."

"Brother." Her word was little more than a whisper. Her eyes grew larger as her face got paler. "Is he about your size with brown hair and two skinny braids framing either side of his face?"

Radnor nodded.

"I really am dreaming." She sounded more bemused than afraid, for which he was grateful. He hated to do anything to make her fearful, but he couldn't allow her to go on lying to herself.

"No. You're not dreaming, Roxanne. The tapestry is magic. It has brought you to the land of Javara. You are not the first woman it has brought to our world. It has been going on for generations. Here, women are scarce and are treasured. Brothers compete to win the right to marry a woman. Only one brother can marry her and claim her children as his own. The other brothers get one night a week in her bed and vow to take care of her if her husband dies. There are no more than three brothers to a woman. There is only Sednar and myself. And he will want you as much as I do."

## Chapter Five

Roxanne's head was spinning. One minute Radnor was kissing her senseless. The next he'd pulled away and was looking more fierce than ever as he told a crazy tale of a magic tapestry, a strange world and brothers who competed for a woman's affection.

Did she believe any of this? For a dream, it was damn real. Her head throbbed from her fall. Her breasts and her pussy ached with sexual need. Her leg still tingled from where he'd touched her and her lips felt swollen and damp from his kisses. She'd gone from fighting for her life to being immersed in sexual pleasure.

In some ways it wasn't so far-fetched. One intense emotion had been swapped for another. Fleeing from death made her want to celebrate life in the most elemental way. That was a very human and natural reaction. And since it was her dream, she'd much rather be kissing a hunk like Radnor than fighting with her ex for her life.

But the things he'd said to her. She lifted her hand and fanned her face, feeling the heat climbing over it. He'd been quite explicit about what he wanted to do to her. Radnor's words still echoed in her mind. *Bury his face between her thighs and feast on her sweet flesh until she screamed with pleasure.* Just like her dream from last night.

A thought occurred to her. *Compete.* Did she really want to know? "Umm, what do you mean, compete?"

Radnor's gaze was fierce as he watched her. A sense of determination surrounded him. "Sexually."

Her mouth dropped open and she shook her head in denial. Surely he couldn't mean what she thought he did.

He plowed forward, ignoring her denial. "We will take you to bed, separately and together, and pleasure you. That way you will be able to choose which brother you like better."

"That's..." she struggled to find the right words, "that's crazy." At least that's what her brain was saying. Her body was thrumming with sexual arousal, as though it had decided to embrace this dream to the fullest and take advantage of what was being offered.

Radnor's lips pulled into a thin line. He propped his hands on his hips. He looked huge standing over her. She realized she was still reclining on the bales of hay, her dress riding up, exposing a large amount of bare thigh. She scrambled to her feet and shoved the pink polyester down to cover herself. It wasn't a soft bed anyway and the stiff blades of grass were sticking into her bare legs and scratching her arms.

"Not crazy," he said, his voice low and controlled. "It is simply the way things are here."



This was the strangest dream she'd ever had. It was very real. If the situation in her real life wasn't so dire, she might like to stick around and see where things went. But she didn't have that luxury.

She tried to reason with him. "Okay, let's just say for the sake of argument, I believe this is real. I didn't ask for this. What if I want to go home?"

Roxanne backed up a step as Radnor stirred restlessly in front of her. He seemed to become even bigger, every muscle in his arms rippling as he crossed his arms over his chest. "The tapestry will appear again on the third day. You will then have to make your choice. Go or stay."

She shook her head, making it throb. This was crazy. Totally unbelievable. Three days. She didn't have three days. Not even in a dream. She had to wake up this very moment. Now.

She scrunched her eyes together and concentrated fiercely on waking. She opened her eyes to find herself still in her dream world. Try as she might, nothing happened. She was still standing in a large, stone structure, her bare feet on the smooth ground and several strands of hay stuck to her uniform.

The sweet smell of the hay and the darker, lusher scent of hot male wafted around her. The sound of her breathing got louder with each passing second. There was still an incredibly handsome and extremely large man standing in front of her. It all seemed so real even though she knew it wasn't. It couldn't be.

She was probably lying unconscious in her apartment. Or worse, maybe even now she was stuffed in the front seat of Michael's vehicle as he drove her back to Nevada. Maybe even the trunk, depending on what he was driving and his mood. She had to wake up.

Closing her eyes, she concentrated with all her strength. She tightened her fists by her sides and hunched her shoulders. "Wake up. Wake up," she commanded herself. She opened her eyes and Radnor was still standing there watching her. There was an aura of sadness about him she hadn't seen there before and, somehow, she knew she was responsible for it.

"I'm sorry," she began, willing him to understand. "But this isn't real." She darted around him, searching for an exit. "I have to wake up. I have to get back home."

He didn't stop her as she ran through the opening behind him. Roxanne glanced around. The building was obviously a barn even though it seemed to be empty. Where were the horses? There was no time to ask questions. She had to wake up. There was an entrance at the far end and she hurried toward it. She could see the light. Maybe when she got there, she'd be back to reality.

Not that she really wanted to go back there, but she had no choice. She couldn't live in a dream. She had to fight for her life. Michael was going to kill her. If not now, then at some point down the road. She had to wake up, had to get her wits about her. There was no white knight in shining armor to save her. Not even a warrior with a naked chest and a very large sword. There was only herself.

She ignored the pang in her heart. If only Radnor were real. If only men like him truly existed, she might not have to fight alone. But it was only a dream.

She was very aware of Radnor keeping pace with her as she made her way toward the door. For such a big man, he moved with uncommon grace and speed, making little noise. But it made an odd kind of sense considering this was all just a figment of her imagination.

The floor was cool and rough beneath her feet. She was still dressed exactly as she'd been when Michael had found her. She'd much rather be wearing jeans and sneakers than a pink polyester uniform and no shoes. You'd think since it was her dream she could change that. Maybe she could do something about that if she thought hard enough.

Before she could even attempt to change her clothing she reached the door. She came to a dead stop, swaying where she stood. Radnor's arm snaked around her from behind, keeping her upright. She was glad for his strength and support. Without it, she might have ended up flat on her bottom.

An entire world existed in front of her. One she'd never seen before. It looked like a scene from a movie or possibly a book. A castle loomed large before her, the gray stones reaching high into the sky. It was a fortress, meant to defend and protect. Chickens squawked, dogs barked, children yelled and people talked as they worked inside the large courtyard. There were men everywhere and the occasional woman. Everyone seemed to be busy at some task.

Roxanne brought her hand to her eyes, shielding them from the sun blazing in the bright blue sky. Mountains rose majestically in the distance and a large, dense forest rose up behind the castle. She wasn't in California anymore. She felt more like Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz*, except there was no tornado. Only a light breeze that tickled her skin and made the ends of her dress flutter.

More precisely, it looked like the scene from the tapestry, not her apartment. "I don't understand." Bitter tears came to her eyes but she blinked them away.

Radnor rested his chin on the top of her head and sighed. "It is all real, Roxanne. No matter how much you wish it was nothing more than a dream."

She spun around to face him, pulling away from his embrace. "This can't be real. Don't you understand? This is a dream." The only other explanation was that she was losing her mind. Maybe she was going crazy. Maybe that last hit to the head had pushed her past some point of no return.

No. She refused to believe that.

"You can deny it all you want, but it won't change a thing. You are here until the tapestry comes back for you."

"On the third day." That's what he'd told her before.

"Yes." He looked so real standing there. All of it looked authentic.

She suddenly became aware of a growing silence behind her. She looked over her shoulder and found herself the center of attention. Everyone had stopped what they were doing and were staring at her. Some of the men were ogling her legs. Everyone was watching her intently, a growing sense of disbelief on their faces. She shifted uncomfortably, taking a step closer to Radnor.

He wrapped his arm around her, holding her close, just as a masculine voice boomed through the quiet. "What's going on?"

She blinked as the sea of people parted and the other man from her dream came into view. His hair was long and brown, but there were skinny braids on either side of his face. His features were finer than Radnor's, not quite as harsh. But there was no denying the resemblance between the two men. They were definitely brothers. This then, had to be Sednar.

His gaze ran over her, slowing as it hit her breasts and continued a leisurely path to her bare feet. She curled her toes in the sun-warmed dirt even as she inched closer to Radnor. The heat from his large body gave her a sense of safety, which didn't make much sense. There was nothing to be afraid of. As she kept reminding herself, this was just a dream.

He turned his attention to Radnor. "What do we have here?"

Radnor's arm tightened around her and he pulled her closer. Her back was pressed against his chest, his hips against her lower back. She froze as a large, thick bulge nudged against her. Radnor was definitely aroused. Her nipples tightened and she bit her bottom lip to keep from moaning. This was so not the time or the place to get turned on. Problem was, her body wasn't listening to reason.

"This is Roxanne Sykes. The tapestry brought her." Radnor's deep voice rumbled against her back.

A low murmur of surprise and shock rippled through the crowd. Bewilderment and then wonder etched Sednar's face. The corners of his mouth slowly tipped upward in a smile. "Welcome to Craddock Keep. I am Sednar of the House of Craddock."

Roxanne's stomach lurched and she broke out into a cold sweat even though the sun was warm and bright in the sky. All her senses were telling her this was indeed reality. Somehow, someway, she'd gone from her apartment to this strange new world.

This couldn't be happening. Yet it was. Her body swayed and the world suddenly closed in around her. Her vision dimmed, the edges going dark until all she could see was a pinprick of light. That winked out and she felt her body go limp. Her last thought was, *What if this isn't a dream?*

Radnor caught Roxanne as her body went limp, scooping her into his arms. Sednar rushed to his side, concern etched on his face. "What happened? Is she hurt?"

Ignoring his brother's questions, he started toward the keep. "We need hot water and the healer."

Sednar grabbed Radnor's arm, stopping his progress. "She is hurt."

Radnor scowled, not liking the implication in his brother's words. "I didn't do it," he growled. "She was injured when she arrived. She said her ex-husband attacked her."

"She is married?"

"No. She left him because he hit her," Radnor explained as he carried Roxanne toward the keep. Just saying the words aloud had a hurricane of fury swirling deep inside him. He despised any man who would hurt a woman. Doubly so if the woman was Roxanne.

He glanced down at her pale face, reassured by the slow, steady rise and fall of her chest. She was light in his arms. Her head rested in the crook of his shoulder, her breath warmed his skin. She felt right, as though she belonged there.

"She is brave." Sednar fell into step beside him. "To leave the man who hurt her."

"Yes." She was brave and stubborn and the most precious creature he'd ever laid eyes on. He would stop at nothing to protect her and would thank the gods for the rest of his days if she chose to stay. He barely knew her and already she was a song in his blood, in his soul. What would it be like in three days if she left?

He tightened his hold on her as he went through the massive oak and metal door and into the keep. Not pausing, he started up the stairs, carrying her to his room. Thankfully, Sednar didn't object. His brother paused long enough to bellow a few orders before pounding up the stairs behind him. Sednar was only two steps behind by the time Radnor shouldered the door open and carried Roxanne into his room. He set her gently on the bed and had to force himself to release her.

"The tapestry brought her?" Radnor could hear the disbelief in his brother's voice.

"That's what she said." He could see the bump on her temple and the beginnings of bruises on her arms. Was she injured elsewhere? He hesitated briefly before reaching for the fastener on her tunic. It was a strange metal contraption, but it only took him a moment to figure out how to work it.

"Incredible," Sednar whispered as the metal teeth in the front of her garment parted to expose the woman beneath.

Radnor's fingers shook as a swatch of white, smooth skin was exposed. Lust was riding him hard. He wanted to bury his face in the curve of her neck and simply breathe in her essence. He wanted to lie on his back and pull her on top of him, feeling every soft curve conform to the hard planes of his body.

His cock pulsed, molding its hard length against the front of his pants. He yearned to bury his shaft in the welcoming moist heat of her pussy, to feel her close around him in the most intimate of caresses.

He made a low rumbling noise in his chest as he pushed the colorful material aside, revealing plump, firm breasts encased in a few skimpy pieces of cloth. Radnor ran his finger down the edge of the unusual garment, following the curve of her breasts.

His heart raced, like the pounding of Xander's hooves on the hard-packed ground when he was allowed to run free. Roxanne moaned, releasing him from the erotic spell that had ensnared him. She was hurt and he had to take care of her. That came before all else.

Gently pushing his arm behind her back, he lifted her into a sitting position and tugged at the short sleeves of her tunic or dress or whatever it was she was wearing. Sednar helped and, between the two of them, they quickly had it removed. Sednar brought the garment to his nose and inhaled. Radnor couldn't blame him. Roxanne's scent was intoxicating.

With her still in a seated position, Radnor examined the contraption binding her breasts. A sense of satisfaction filled him when he discovered two hooks at the back. He quickly released them and the cloth eased away from her body. He carefully laid her back on the bed and pulled the fragile piece of clothing over her arms and away from her body.

Beside him, Sednar inhaled deeply. Radnor knew exactly what his brother was feeling. It was like being kicked in the teeth by a fractious horse. He shook his head to try to clear it while he stared at the bounty laid out before him.

Her breasts were magnificent. Plump and firm and tipped with rosy nipples puckered into tight buds. His fingers itched to touch them, to shape them with his palms before leaning down and capturing one with his mouth.

Another scrap of fabric wrapped around her hips and covered her sex. It was almost transparent, barely a barrier at all. He could snap the thin band with his hands, tug away the remains and she would be totally naked. Or he could slide his fingers beneath the covering and find the soft, slick folds beneath. His cock flexed in agreement. His fingers curled into fists to keep from reaching out to touch her. It wouldn't be right to do that. But it would be oh so easy.

Goosebumps rose on her arms and legs. Radnor swore and grabbed the covers, tossing them over her almost naked form. Here he was ogling her, imagining stroking her intimately, when she was injured and cold.

Maybe he was a monster. No decent man would do that.

"Where is the healer?" he barked.

Sednar raised his eyebrow in question. Radnor knew his tone was argumentative and brusque. He didn't care. Roxanne had all his emotions in an uproar. Not to mention his body.

A timid knock sounded on the door. Not waiting for his brother to answer it, Radnor strode over and yanked open the portal. An elderly woman stood there, head down. Waiting.

He tried to remember her name but couldn't. "On the bed." He motioned forward and the woman scuttled past. Radnor bit back a scathing comment. He was tired of everyone who lived in the keep fearing him when he'd personally never hurt any of them. He was sick to death of paying for the crimes of his older brothers.

Locking his jaw against the pain, he returned to the side of the bed. Darrina. That was the woman's name. "Can you help her, Darrina?"

The elderly woman jumped when he said her name, her gaze dropping to the floor, as if to avoid his angry glare. "I'm not a healer proper, my lord. But I can try."

"Do the best you can," Sednar told her.

Darrina nodded and both brothers stood back and watched as she examined the wound on Roxanne's head. Another knock came on the door. Radnor went to open it. A boy came into the room carrying a bowl of hot water. After that, there was a steady stream of servants carrying clothes and food and herbs.

Sednar eventually sat at the table and helped himself to some ale and a bowl of thick stew. Radnor couldn't eat, couldn't rest. Not until he knew the extent of Roxanne's injuries. He watched as the elderly woman examined Roxanne's limbs. She muttered under her breath as she worked and it took every ounce of Radnor's patience not to demand answers.

Finally, after what seemed like days rather than minutes, Darrina tugged the covers back up around Roxanne's shoulders. Her limbs had been washed and a healing salve had been applied to her bruises. Roxanne seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

"Well?" Radnor demanded.

Darrina shrugged. "The bump on her head is the worst of it. Not serious enough for stitches, but it was still quite a crack. Let her rest for now. Wake her every hour or so to make certain she doesn't fall into a sleep from which she never wakes."

"Is that possible?" Sednar demanded as he jumped up from the table and strode to the side of the bed.

Again the elderly woman shrugged. "Who knows? It happens. If she awakes each time then she should be fine. If not, it is up to the gods." Gathering her healing salves, Darrina shuffled off. "I'll send someone back to clear away the mess." With that, she was gone.

Radnor and Sednar were alone in the room with Roxanne. Her face was still pale, but she seemed to be breathing with no problem. Radnor couldn't even contemplate the idea that she might not wake up.

Unable to wait, he bent down and laid his hand on her shoulder, lightly shaking it. "Roxanne?"

"What are you doing?" Sednar asked. "Darrina just got her settled."

Radnor ignored his brother, raising his voice slightly. "Wake up, Roxanne."

She mumbled and her eyelids fluttered open and then closed again. "Go away. I'm sleeping." She turned over onto her side and snuggled beneath the covers.

He started to shake her again. Sednar placed his hand on Radnor's arm stopping him. "She woke and talked. That's enough for now. Sleep will help her heal. When she wakes, we will sort all this out." Sednar's features hardened. "Tell me everything."

Knowing he owed his brother that much, Radnor motioned toward the table. He turned his chair so he could keep an eye on Roxanne as she slept. Sednar sat and poured two goblets of ale, handing one of them to Radnor.

"It all started when I decided to examine the progress of the new stable."

Michael Talbot's head was throbbing. He opened his eyes and then closed them again. It was too bright. He felt like he had a hell of a hangover, but he hadn't been drinking. The last thing he remembered was going after that faithless bitch of a wife. He didn't care what the courts said. Roxanne was still his wife. Until he decided he didn't want her anymore.

He forced his eyes open and looked around. "What the fuck?" He pushed himself into a seated position. He certainly wasn't in Roxanne's apartment any longer. He was in the middle of some godforsaken forest. What had that bitch done to him?

He struggled to remember. He'd dragged her back to her small sofa, planning to avail himself of his husbandly rights. There'd been a flash of light so bright it had momentarily blinded him. Then he'd been thrown back and felt himself fall. Then...nothing.

Standing, he surveyed his surroundings. He couldn't stay here. He had no idea how far he was from civilization. Roxanne must have done something to him. Had she somehow managed to drug him? That had to be it. Nothing else made sense. She'd pay for that.

A heavy pounding came from off to his left. He turned just in time to see two large horses break into the meadow. Each horse was carrying a man dressed in nothing but leather—pants, boots and vest. They circled him, their eyes narrowed.

Michael's heart thudded, but he showed no fear. He'd met this kind in prison and recognized kindred spirits. The corner of his mouth turned up in a sneer. "Where the hell am I?"

They brought their horses to a stop and stared down at him. They both had long hair to their waist, but one had thin braids on either side of his face. The one with the braids drew a long sword from a scabbard at his waist. He extended the weapon until the tip touched Michael's face, breaking the skin. A bead of blood rolled down Michael's cheek. He didn't move. Didn't flinch.

"Who are you?" the stranger asked. "And why are you on our land?"

"Name's Michael Talbot. I don't know how the hell I got here, but I'm looking for my wife."

The man eased his weapon back. "You have a woman?"

Michael sensed the stranger's interest and nodded. "I need to find her."

The stranger sat back in his saddle. "Why should we help you? What will you give us if we help you?"

"What do you want?" Michael had a feeling he knew what they wanted. He'd seen the gleam in the stranger's eye when he'd mentioned a woman.

The second stranger nudged his horse forward. "Is the woman pretty?"

"I wouldn't bother with her if she wasn't," Michael retorted.

"We want her." The first stranger sheathed his weapon but that in no way made him any less dangerous.

Michael shrugged. He was almost finished with her anyway. Serve her right if he left her with these two. She'd be begging to come back to him in no time. Only he wouldn't take her. Not after these two had their dicks in her. "When I'm done with her, she's all yours."

The stranger smiled. Michael could see the cruelty in it. Roxanne was going to get what was coming to her one way or another. Maybe leaving her with these bastards would show her just how good she'd had it with him.

The stranger glanced at the other man with him. They were obviously related in some way. Probably brothers.

"I told you my name. Who the fuck are you?"

The man with the thin braids smiled his cruel smile again. "I am Agmar of the House of Luther. This is my brother Ivan."

Strange names, but then again, these weren't exactly normal-looking guys. If they weren't riding horses, Michael would have pegged them as part of a biker gang. Maybe they were. Maybe they had a place to crash near here and kept horses.

"Where am I?" He hated not knowing, not being in full control of the situation. But that was about to change. Michael knew what these men wanted now and he was a master at manipulating people to get what he wanted. It was only a matter of dangling what they desired before them. And right now, they desired Roxanne.

"You are in Javara." It was the second man who answered him. He turned his horse around and offered Michael his hand. It was either swing up on the horse or walk. Riding was better than walking any day.

"Never heard of it. How close is that to Los Angeles?"



## Chapter Six

Roxanne felt warm and cozy. She snuggled beneath the covers and sighed. She'd had the strangest dreams last night. Everything from a nightmare that Michael had found her to another one featuring her warriors from the tapestry.

*Her warriors.*

When had she started thinking of them in that way? Not that it mattered. It was perfectly normal for her to want them in her dreams. They made her feel safe and very desirable.

The covers shifted beside her. She jerked and tried to move, only to find herself trapped by a large, muscled arm thrown across her waist. A low rumble came from behind her. "You're safe, Roxanne. Sleep."

Her eyelids popped open. Impossible. She was wide-awake now. Or was she? She blinked as a large man came into view. His eyes were closed and his lips were parted slightly. She recognized him. Sednar. Radnor's brother. He lay on his back, one arm thrown above his head, naked from the waist up. She had no idea if he was naked below that because a blanket covered him.

As if sensing her gaze, his eyes opened and a sleepy smile covered his face. "Good morning, little one. How are you feeling?" His voice was deep and slightly raspy. Seductive. It sent a shiver down her spine.

Behind her, Radnor shifted. There was no mistaking the fact that he was naked. She could feel his cock hard and hot against her lower back. Against her lower back! She was naked. Almost naked. She was still wearing her underwear, but she might as well be wearing nothing. How the heck had that happened? And what had they done to her?

She bolted upright in bed. The covers fell to her waist. She grabbed them and yanked them to her chin. "I'm still dreaming."

A rumble, much like a growl, came from her left. She swiveled around and watched Radnor as he sat up and shoved his long hair away from his face. The scowl on his face and the scar under his right cheekbone made him look deadly and dangerous and incredibly sexy.

She had to stop thinking about sex all the time. For a woman who'd been celibate for a long time with no problem, she was suddenly thinking about sex constantly. It had to be their fault. Maybe it was pheromones. Whatever it was, it was disconcerting to say the least.

"You are not dreaming, Roxanne." Radnor reached out and pried one of her hands away from her death grip on the covers. He brought it to his face and pressed it against

his hard square jaw. The stubble on his face was rough against her palm. The warmth of his skin soaked into her hand.

Not to be left out, Sednar cupped her chin in his large hand. "We are very real, Roxanne." He brushed his thumb lazily over her bottom lip.

"I don't understand." This couldn't be real. Could it? She couldn't explain away what was happening by saying it was a dream any longer. That logic didn't hold up. She'd slept. Yet when she awakened, she was still here, not in her apartment.

Radnor sighed, his fingers tightening around hers before he turned her hand and pressed a kiss in the center of her palm. "It's as I told you, Roxanne. You are in Javara. The tapestry brought you here as a prospective bride for Sednar and myself."

Everything he'd told her from the day before came back in a rush. Competition. They wanted to compete, sexually, for her favor. Her nipples tightened, brushing against the cover she had clutched to her chest.

"I..." She just didn't know what to say. She should be horrified by the mere thought of sharing a bed and her body with two men. Yet with Radnor and Sednar it didn't seem appalling at it. It seemed...appealing. Desirable.

Roxanne brought her knees to her chest and buried her face against them. She was totally confused. The mattress shifted and large, steady hands lifted her, depositing her in a strong lap. She brought her head up so fast, she hit Sednar's chin. She was shocked, and slightly dismayed, at having him reach for her instead of Radnor.

Sednar swore beneath his breath and then chuckled. "I didn't mean to frighten you." He stroked his large hand over her spine, reminding her that she was all but naked.

"What happened to my clothes?" She glared at Radnor, vaguely hurt by his withdrawal. His expression was remote, totally unreadable.

He shrugged. "You fainted. We removed your clothing so your injuries could be tended."

That made sense, she supposed. At least they'd left her underwear in place. "Thank you." She owed them that much for taking care of her. It was strange to think of them touching her, removing her clothing, seeing her naked when she wasn't aware. It made her feel vulnerable.

"Your well-being is our first concern." Sednar's low voice rumbled in her ear. "Your pleasure is our second." He slid one hand around to her stomach, coming to rest just beneath the curve of her breast. "Let us pleasure you."

Her gaze shot to him and then to Radnor. He was watching her carefully. Waiting for her decision. It came to her then in a blinding flash that it was entirely up to her. Both men would withdraw immediately if she protested.

A sense of wonder filled her. They spoke the truth. They only wanted her pleasure. Michael would never have asked. He would have taken what he wanted whether she

objected or not. Her feelings had always been irrelevant. But not here. Not with these men.

"I don't know." God, she sounded stupid. The crotch of her panties was damp. Her brain might not have figured things out yet, but her body certainly had. It was making its demands known in the most obvious ways.

"It is your choice, Roxanne." She loved the way Radnor said her name. It made it sound exotic. "But why wouldn't you let us pleasure you?"

She sensed his question was genuine. "It's not done where I come from," she blurted out. She could feel the heat on her cheeks and knew she was blushing. "I mean, women don't sleep with two men at once. I suppose some do, but I never have."

Sednar rested his chin on the top of her head and began to gently rub it back and forth. "It is not only done here, it is the norm. We would be remiss if we did not please you sexually. How can you decide whether or not you want to stay here with us or return to your own world if we don't show you just how happy we can make you?"

When they put it like that, it sounded so reasonable. So normal. "Other women from my world have done this?"

"Yes." Radnor brushed a lock of hair away from her cheek and tucked it behind her ear. That tiny caress made her heart beat faster and her inner muscles clench with anticipation. "If there was more time, we could take you to meet them. Christina and Kathryn of the House of Garen and Jane from the House of Bakra were all brought here by the tapestry. All chose to stay."

"Wow." She couldn't believe it was as easy as all that. "They had no doubts, no hesitation?"

"I did not say that, Roxanne," Radnor continued. "It is a difficult decision to take a leap of faith and leave behind all you know. But the tapestry only brings women who have the strength to start a new life here. It is not always easy, but the benefits are many."

"Regardless," Sednar added. "Go or stay. Let us touch you, taste you." He lowered his head and his lips caressed the side of her neck. Her toes tingled and curled. It felt strange to be so aroused by two men. Did that make her fickle?

"Do not overthink this." Radnor trailed his fingers down her jaw and over her throat. He stopped when he reached the top of the blanket still tucked around her. "You can stop us at any time." He tugged at the covering and she let her fingers relax. The blanket slithered downward, catching on her nipples for a brief second before falling to her waist.

Roxanne sucked in a deep breath as Radnor stared at her breasts. "Beautiful," he assured her as he circled one puckered nipple with his forefinger. "So pink. So perfect. Let me taste it."

She could no longer delude herself. This wasn't a dream. This was reality. If she did this, she'd be changed forever. She had a feeling Radnor and Sednar would imprint themselves on her body, her mind and her soul in a way no one else ever had. She

should be frightened of them. They were both huge men, strong men. But she could stop them with one small word. *No*. That was all it would take. That knowledge made her relax. Made her feel safe.

They weren't like Michael. Not in the slightest. All he'd ever cared about was his own pleasure. She'd always figured it was a good night when he didn't hurt her overly much. The bottom line was she wanted them. The thought of having four hands on her body, stroking her, of having two tongues licking and sucking her breasts and between her thighs, made her hot.

Whether she went home or stayed, she'd always regret it if she didn't take this opportunity to explore her sexuality. With Radnor and Sednar she felt as though she could throw off the horrors of the past and embrace every aspect of herself. Sexually, she'd buried herself for the past year. Longer if she included her time with Michael. It was time to release that part of her, to bring it back to life.

It all came down to trust.

Sednar's cock was throbbing against her side, yet he did nothing more than place tender kisses on the nape of her neck. Every muscle in Radnor's chest was delineated as he sat there waiting. Tension rolled off him in waves, yet all he did was circle her nipple with his finger.

Did she trust them?

Yes. They'd had every opportunity to do as they pleased with her. She was in a strange world, totally at their mercy, yet they'd shown her nothing but respect and kindness.

Roxanne shifted off Sednar's lap. Radnor's hand fell back to his side as she knelt on the bed in front of them. Naked except for her underwear, she looked from one brother to the other. Both their expressions were filled with lust and longing. Sednar's eyes narrowed, but he made no move to touch her. Radnor watched, looking stoic and proud.

She reached for the waistband of her panties, took a deep breath and shoved them down her thighs. It was awkward, but she managed to get them past her knees and off. She tossed them over the side of the bed.

The only sound in the room came from their heavy breathing and the light whistling of the wind through the window. Her breasts seemed to swell beneath their regard. She felt wanton and sexy. A sense of feminine power rose from deep within her. She wanted these men. Wanted whatever they wanted to give her. Wanted to take and give in return.

She smiled at them and gave her answer.

"Yes."

Radnor was surprised he hadn't already spilled his seed on the covers. His balls were tight and heavy and his cock was swollen so hard it would only take a stroke or two until he exploded. And it might not even take that.

Roxanne knelt on the bed before them, looking shy and determined. Pride surged through him. He could only imagine the courage it took to accept two men in her bed after being abused by her ex-husband. He was determined to make certain she didn't regret her choice.

He glanced at his brother to give him a warning look, but Sednar was too busy staring at Roxanne to pay him any attention. "Whatever *you* want," he told her again, making sure his brother heard the command beneath it. This wasn't about them. It was about Roxanne and earning her trust.

"Touch me," Sednar encouraged. "Touch us." He kicked the covers away, leaving both men naked for her perusal.

Her eyes widened and her lips parted on a small gasp. Radnor swallowed a groan when Roxanne licked her bottom lip before pulling it between her teeth. He wanted that tongue on various parts of his body. He curled his hands into fists to keep from reaching out to her.

It seemed forever before she finally stretched out her hand and placed it on his leg. His cock jolted and liquid seeped from the tip. He held his breath, hoping, praying she'd continue.

She glanced at him from under thick, dark lashes. Her gray eyes were soft and sensual, like the morning mist. She slowly moved her hand up his leg, over his knee and across his thigh.

When she lifted her hand away, he almost howled with displeasure. She reached out and touched Sednar, letting her hand trail over his leg. The skin on Radnor's leg tingled and he swore he could still feel her touch against his flesh.

"Higher," Sednar whispered.

She hesitated but did as he asked. Sednar's eyes closed, his expression was one of pure bliss as Roxanne skimmed her fingers over his swollen cock.

Radnor's shaft pulsed and pounded, more liquid seeping from the tip. If she kept this up, he'd come before she had a chance to stroke him, before he had a chance to learn what pleased her.

"Roxanne." She jerked her hand away from Sednar and turned to him, her expression filled with uncertainty. He hated seeing that look on her face. "May we touch you?" Gods, but he wanted her to say yes.

She nodded, her lips turning upward in a shy smile.

He patted the mattress between them. She glanced back at Sednar before stretching out on the mattress. Unable to keep his hands off her any longer, Radnor stroked his finger down the curve of her jaw. "There will be plenty of time for you to explore our bodies as much as you'd like."

"But I thought you wanted me to? I thought you liked it." He could tell he was confusing her with his mixed messages.

"Too much," he conceded. "I'm too close to the edge. If you touch me, I'll come."

She swallowed hard and stared at his erection. She licked her lips again and Radnor had to close his eyes to keep from seeing the hunger in her gaze. His eyes shot open when he felt her small hands wrap around his cock and squeeze tight.

He groaned her name.

She smiled at him and slowly pumped her hand up and down his swollen length. He wanted to stop her, to tell her it was too much, but the feminine satisfaction on her face stopped him. This was what she wanted.

Her fingers caressed the full length of his cock as she stroked him. Up. Down. Up. Down. His shaft swelled. Every muscle in his body tightened. Fireworks exploded behind his eyes and his pelvis jerked in her direction.

Roxanne leaned over and flicked one flat nipple with her tongue. His blood began to boil and he began to sweat. He wanted that tongue lower.

As if she heard him, she began to kiss a path down his chest. Her hand kept up the pumping motion on his cock. Radnor gritted his teeth and brought up every unpleasant memory he could think of. Anything to keep from coming before he felt Roxanne's mouth on him.

She slithered down the mattress until her face was level with his straining erection. Her hand was pale against the swollen flesh and thick veins. She shifted so close he could feel her moist breath and swore. "Roxanne," he groaned. Her name a plea. A prayer. He couldn't hold out much longer.

Her tongue snaked out and she licked the head of his cock. "Yesss," he hissed. He reached up and tangled his fingers in her short hair, dragging her closer before he realized what he was doing.

She made a soft humming noise in her throat as she opened her mouth and closed around him, encasing him in moist heat. The vibration went through him, almost shattering his control. His lungs were working like a bellows now as he sucked in huge mouthfuls of air.

In spite of his resolve to let Roxanne control their lovemaking, his hips pushed upward. He swore as she took more of him into her mouth. "So fucking good," he told her.

Keeping her hand locked around the base of his cock, she pumped harder even as she continued to suck him off. It was better than anything he'd ever dreamed. He knew he couldn't last.

"Roxanne." He desperately whispered her name. "I'm going to come." He wanted her to stop and he wanted her to never stop.

She redoubled her efforts.

The top of his head seemed to explode as the blast came from deep in his balls and shot up his shaft and out the tip. He came hard and fast, spilling himself into her sweet mouth. She didn't pull away but kept sucking, swallowing as she did so.

When his orgasm finally ended, he was spent. His fingers were still locked in Roxanne's hair and he forced himself to carefully release her. She lifted her head and smiled at him.

In that moment, he lost himself to her. No one had ever given so freely to him, expecting nothing in return. No one had ever made him feel this damn good, as though he was special. It was more than physical. It went all the way to what tiny bit remained of his shattered soul.

Nothing or no one was as important as Roxanne. He would do whatever it took to make her happy. *And if that meant her returning home*, a voice in the back of his head prompted. He ignored the pain spearing through him and strengthened his resolve. Whatever it took.

Sednar shifted behind her. Her eyes widened as she became aware of his brother waiting patiently. He nodded at her. She swallowed hard and rolled over to face Sednar.

Watching Roxanne suck his brother's cock had been one of the hardest experiences of Sednar's life, and one of the most erotic. She'd pleased Radnor without hesitation, taking his thick length into her mouth.

Sednar's cock was throbbing unceasingly now. He needed some relief. Would she touch him the same way she had his brother?

Roxanne shifted closer and slowly reached out her hand. He groaned as she wrapped her fingers around his cock and stroked. With her short black hair and her unusual colored eyes, she was like some exotic creature from a fantasy. Sednar didn't quite trust that this wasn't a dream. The tapestry had brought her, he reminded himself. That meant she was free to leave in a matter of days.

It also meant she might choose to stay. What would that be like? He couldn't imagine having a woman as sweet as Roxanne in his bed every night. Or one night a week if she chose Radnor as her husband. But he was jumping too far ahead. The sun was almost ready to rise and that meant that this was day two. Time was running out.

He lifted a hand and cupped one of her magnificent breasts. She was full and firm and her nipples were large and pink. She gasped as he caught the puckered nub between his forefinger and thumb and gently pinched. Her breasts swayed as she took several deep breaths. Her skin was damp, giving it a pearly sheen. He wanted to lick her from head to toe.

"I want to fuck you," he stated baldly. He knew he'd made a mistake when she jerked back, her gaze darting toward Radnor.

His brother said nothing. He gave no indication how he felt about Sednar's request. Although he didn't have to say anything for Sednar to know he wasn't happy.

He wasn't pleased with himself at the moment. He'd acted like a boy, concerned with only his own wants, instead of a man, worried about what his woman needed.

As he watched, Roxanne bit her bottom lip, the earlier arousal seeping from her face.

Sednar cursed himself beneath his breath and forced a smile. "But only if you want. Whatever *you* want," he reiterated, trying to recapture the earlier mood. He picked up her hand and brought it back to his cock. "Touch me."

She smiled hesitantly, wrapped her fingers around him and began to pump his shaft. Sednar closed his eyes and concentrated on how good it felt to have her hand on him, willing to take whatever she wanted to give him.

She'd been hurt and was skittish. He'd do well to remember that. He could feel Radnor's eyes on him, sense his brother's displeasure and knew he'd hear about it later.

But that was later. Right now, Roxanne's hands were working their magic on his cock. Learning his body. He felt a light breath against his shaft and opened his eyes just in time to see her close her mouth around him.

Surely she was sent from the gods. Her generosity was overwhelming. He didn't deserve it after acting like a callous youth, but he certainly wasn't about to stop her. Enough of the Craddock blood ran through his veins that he wouldn't turn away from what he wanted. The trick was to keep his sex drive under control and not get too grasping and ask for too much too fast.

Giving himself up to her tender touch, he relaxed and absorbed every wonderful sensation shooting through them. His balls pulled up tight, letting him know he wouldn't last much longer. His entire body was on fire for this woman. He tried to hang on, but it was no use. It had been so long since he'd felt a woman's hand on his shaft, her mouth and tongue wrapped around his cock head.

He came on a yell, pumping himself into her mouth. He came hard and fast, every muscle tightening and flexing. She sucked until he'd emptied himself and then fell back onto the mattress beside him. Her eyes were closed, her skin pale. Her lips parted and her tongue darted out to lick them. Sednar's cock jerked, growing hard again instead of soft.

Through half-open eyes, he caught his brother's gaze and nodded. Now that the edge was off their desire and she was more comfortable with them, it was time to pleasure her.



## **Chapter Seven**

Roxanne couldn't believe what she'd just done. She'd sucked both men's cocks, bringing them both to orgasm with her mouth and hands. She couldn't stop the small smile that played over her lips. A sense of feminine power surged through her. She'd brought them to their knees, figuratively speaking.

Their bodies radiated heat and power. Their thighs were thick and covered in a dusting of dark hair. Their chests were broad and heavily muscled. They had shoulders a yard wide and huge biceps. Her fingertips tingled. It had been amazing to touch them, knowing she was in total control.

She licked her lips, tasting their essence. They both had impressive cocks, long and thick. She'd found the contrast between the soft velvet covering and their hard shafts fascinating. Tasting them, touching them, was an enjoyable experience, one she wouldn't mind repeating.

It felt good to give, to be able to embrace her sexuality without being afraid. Neither man demanded anything of her. Well, that wasn't quite true. Sednar had baldly stated he wanted to fuck her, but when she'd hesitated, he'd backed off immediately.

Her ex would have tossed her down on the bed and done whatever he'd pleased. She'd never enjoyed oral sex with him either. He'd always shoved his penis too far down her throat, choking her. Everything was an act of dominance with him.

Radnor brought all thoughts of Michael to an end when he leaned down and kissed her. The caress was gentle. Undemanding. A touching. A melding of lips and tongue. Calloused fingers stroked her jawline, her neck and lower.

She could watch Radnor all day. He was so strong and dark and dangerous, yet so gentle with her. The contrast was enthralling.

Not to be forgotten, Sednar nuzzled her neck and trailed hot, openmouthed kisses down her neck and over her collarbone. "Let us touch you now, sweet Roxanne. Let us pleasure you."

In spite of her resolve to relax and enjoy herself, Roxanne felt her muscles stiffening. Radnor raised his head, understanding in his gaze. "We only want to touch you. It won't go any further than that until you're ready."

Tears pricked her eyes at his understanding. She wanted to have sex with them but it was hard for her to just toss away her past. Radnor understood. She glanced at Sednar and he gifted her with a smile, his gaze thoughtful. They both understood.

Taking her silence as acquiescence, both men resumed touching her. Sednar shifted lower in the bed, his hand and mouth working steadily toward her breasts. Radnor kissed her one final time before he too moved. Two hands cupped her breasts, both

large and calloused. Their skin was dark against her paler flesh. It made an incredibly erotic picture.

Roxanne was sprawled in the center of the large four-poster bed with a man on either side of her. They were huge men, all heavy bone, sinew and muscle from head to toe. It was easy to picture them swinging a sword like the one they had in the tapestry. They were made for war. Yet each of them cupped one of her breasts with great care.

She gasped when Sednar trailed his thumb over her distended nipple. It quickly turned into a moan when Radnor leaned down and captured a puckered nub between his lips and flicked it with his tongue. Fireworks went off in her brain. Her legs shifted restlessly on the cool sheets beneath her. A faint breeze wafted in through the window making her shiver. Yet she wasn't cold. She was flushed and hot and aching for their touch.

Sednar skimmed his hand over her side, tracing the indent of her waist before flaring over her hip. He followed his hand, licking and sucking at her skin as he worked his way down to the apex of her thighs. A low moan escaped her as his fingers grazed the inside of her thigh. "Open your legs for me. Your pretty pink folds are hot and wet. I know they are."

His voice was low. Mesmerizing. It should have shocked her that she wanted to spread her legs wide and let him touch her. And not just him but Radnor as well. She wanted both men to touch her with their hands, taste her with their mouths and tongues. What would have been impossible only two days ago was now something she craved. Whether it was the magic of the tapestry or that of the two men flanking her she didn't know. All she did know was she wanted it.

It was easy to convince herself this was safe. It was a time out of time. Real but not real. This wasn't her life. It was the equivalent of a weekend fling. She could enjoy it and go back to her normal life, stronger and more self-assured than before.

"Roxanne?" Radnor raised his head from her breast, his lips damp and sensual. He stroked a hand over her belly, his fingers combing through the curls covering her mound.

She made her choice. Slowly, she spread her legs. The cool air hit her moist core, making her very aware of her nakedness. It was a sensual caress that had her arching her hips. She hungered for their touch.

Radnor smiled, openly and warmly. Roxanne couldn't believe how much younger it made him appear. He leaned down and lapped at her swollen nipple one final time before shifting lower in the bed. He parted the slick folds with his fingers and blew gently.

Roxanne gasped. She wanted to close her eyes and savor the sensations, but was unable to look away. Both men were gazing at her pussy, enthralled by what they saw. It made her feel powerful and wanton at the same time. She wanted them to do more than look. "Touch me," she demanded.

Sednar shot her a seductive grin. "As you command." He crawled between her thighs and his massive shoulders pushed her legs farther apart. With Radnor holding her labia wide, Sednar licked up one side and down the other.

A low keening sound erupted from her throat. Sweat broke out on her brow. Every nerve ending in her body was charged and tingling. Reaching down, she tugged on Sednar's hair, pulling him closer. He laughed, the vibration humming along her slick folds. He settled his lips over her swollen clit and flicked his tongue over the nub of nerves.

Roxanne cried out as the sensation shot through her body. Her breasts seemed to swell and her nipples tightened. She panted hard, unable to draw a deep breath. Radnor outlined the opening of her sheath with one thick finger before slipping it inside. Her inner muscles clasped around it and she arched her hips, wanting him deeper.

He obliged.

As Sednar used his tongue and lips on her clit, teasing and tormenting her with his skilled mouth, Radnor worked a second finger into her core. His fingers were broad and blunt and two of them stretched her. He patiently worked them all the way in before dragging them back to her entrance.

It felt amazing. It was too much. It wasn't enough. Roxanne had no frame of reference for what she was feeling right now. She'd had good sex, bad sex and painful sex, but she'd never experienced anything like this.

Keeping his fingers pumping in and out of her, Radnor surged upward and claimed her mouth in a torrid kiss. She grabbed his head, holding him tight.

Fear surged up from deep within her, a protective mechanism. If these men could make her feel this way, then she was already in too deep. The fact that she trusted them in bed should have been her first warning that she was already emotionally involved with them. They could hurt her. Not physically. She didn't think, no, she knew, they'd never hurt her in that way. But emotionally, they could devastate her.

Radnor tore his mouth from hers. "Don't think about it. Let yourself go. Feel my fingers in your hot cunt. Your juices are flowing all around them, coating them with your pleasure." In and out his fingers went in a faster rhythm.

Roxanne panted harder, her breasts swaying with each gulped breath. Sednar sucked on her clit and her hips jerked toward his mouth. She needed more, needed to come. She was balanced on the edge, on the verge of tears.

"Come for me, Roxanne," Radnor whispered in her ear. He caught the sensitive lobe between his teeth and nipped carefully. Goosebumps broke out on her arms. She was hot and aching. Ripe. Ready to burst.

Radnor introduced a third finger into her tight sheath. She felt stretched to the max, on the verge of pain, but not quite. Sednar sucked hard, flicking his tongue over her clit.

A flash of hot, white light filled her, overwhelming her. She heard herself cry out as she came. Hard and fast, her orgasm swept over her, making her lose all sense of time

and place. It was so intense it was frightening. She tangled one hand in Sednar's hair and tightened her grip on Radnor, needing them to anchor her in the sensual storm engulfing her.

When it finally subsided, she felt herself sink into the mattress. She jerked and moaned when Radnor carefully removed his thick fingers from her pussy. A low sob broke from her as Sednar gave one final lap at her clit and sat up, his face filled with male satisfaction.

A tear seeped from the corner of her eye, rolling down her temple to disappear in her hair. She closed her eyes, overwhelmed by what had just happened. She hadn't had intercourse with either man, yet she felt more spent than if they'd fucked for hours. They'd reached past all her defenses and touched the core of the woman she'd buried inside. Worse, she'd let them.

She was marked, permanently, by their touch, their caress. She was forever spoiled for other men, instinctively knowing that no other would ever measure up to these men. When she returned home, she'd miss them forever.

A second tear escaped. She took a deep breath and tried to calm her wayward emotions. No wonder she was on the verge of tears. She'd been attacked by her ex-husband and snatched out of her own world and thrust into another. Beyond that, she had two handsome warriors who wanted to claim her as was the custom of their world and had just had the most amazing sexual experience of her life, even if she hadn't had intercourse.

It was all so confusing.

Strong arms wrapped around her. Her eyes flew open as Radnor lifted her into his arms. Sednar rolled out of bed and padded ahead of them as they entered a smaller room off the bedroom. A bathroom. A huge wooden tub, filled with steaming water, sat against the far wall.

She didn't want to think of someone actually filling that tub while she was in the bedroom engaged in sexual activities with Sednar and Radnor. It was embarrassing. She supposed she should be grateful there seemed to be a separate entrance to this room so they didn't have to troop through the bedroom. And wouldn't that have been fun? Not.

Radnor lowered her into the tub. The hot water surrounded her, seeping into her sore muscles, soothing her tattered nerves. Now that hormones and adrenaline were no longer pumping through her, she was feeling some of her bruises and the stiffness left from the fight with Michael.

"Bathe." Sednar set a towel and a cloth on a low wooden table that sat next to the tub. "When you are done, you will eat." He cocked an eyebrow. "Unless you want help washing your back."

Roxanne wanted time alone. Needed it to regain what little of her wits remained. She shook her head. He looked disappointed, but inclined his head. "As you wish."

Radnor leaned down and placed a chaste kiss on her forehead, another one on her nose, before dropping a quick one on her lips. "Everything will be fine, Roxanne. We will take care of you."

He straightened and stared down at her. He was totally naked, his cock fully erect again. Her gaze flew from his shaft to his face. She could feel her cheeks getting hot.

He shook his head. "I would love to fuck you. To bury my cock in your moist heat. To feel the welcome of your soft body as it took mine within it." He wrapped his hand around his shaft and pumped. His cock head was damp and dark. "But it's your choice. It's up to you to say yes or no."

The longer she was around these men, the less she wanted to say no. She swallowed hard and said nothing. Radnor sighed and released his cock. He motioned to a small bench just beside the door. "There are clean clothes when you're done."

"Thank you," she whispered. He was halfway to the door and turned toward her when she spoke. "For everything."

One corner of his mouth turned up. "It's my pleasure." Then he was gone and she was alone with her thoughts.

Picking up a cloth, she dipped it in the water and slapped it over her face. Oh god, what had she done? *Had the best sex of your life*, a voice in the back of her head insisted. That was the problem. Radnor and Sednar had somehow found a way to slip past her defenses. No, that wasn't true. She'd lowered her defenses and invited them in.

Roxanne pulled the cloth away from her face, picked up the bar of soap from the ledge next to the tub and began to wash. As she carefully scrubbed every inch of her skin, she put her thoughts in order.

She'd had sex, kind of. Not intercourse, but there was no denying she'd had an orgasm. There was also no denying she'd sucked both men's cocks and loved every second of it. She'd discovered a part of herself she hadn't realized existed—a woman who enjoyed sex, the giving and receiving that came with it.

Maybe it was this place, but she didn't feel like herself. She stilled and the cloth she was holding slipped away and sank into the water. Michael wasn't here. She was safe. That's what had made her feel so free, so alive.

She shivered and grabbed the cloth and finished washing. "You can't stay," she whispered aloud.

*Why not?*

She wished the voice in the back of her head would stop saying things like that. "Because," she muttered. Not exactly a stellar reason. This world wasn't hers. She had no place here.

What place did she have back home?

It was all so confusing. She had no idea about this place beyond a quick glimpse of the courtyard before she fainted, or rather, passed out due to everything she'd been through. That sounded better than saying she fainted.

Clean from head to toe, she stood and let the water cascade down her body. She shivered as her nipples peaked. Her skin felt oversensitized and she ached between her thighs. No doubt about it, she might have had the mother of all orgasms, but she still wasn't satisfied. She had a sneaking suspicion she wouldn't feel satisfied until she'd had both men, felt their thick cocks buried in her slick, heated passage.

Roxanne stepped out of the tub and dragged the towel over her tender flesh. Ignoring the throbbing between her thighs, she padded to the bench and picked up the clothing that had been left for her. She shook out the first piece. A skirt. She shrugged, dropped the towel and tugged it on. There was a drawstring at the waist, which she tightened. The next item of clothing was a tunic that fell to her hips. Both were made from a soft, supple fabric. She couldn't tell if it was cotton, linen or wool. Or maybe a combination of several of them. Whatever it was, it was comfortable and loose, which was nice considering she was feeling sore and slightly bruised.

She pulled up the skirt and examined her legs. A few dark marks marred her skin. It was the same with her arms. Overall, she felt better than she expected. She gingerly touched her forehead. Even her head felt pretty good.

It felt strange not to be wearing any underwear, but she had no idea where her panties and bra were. And she wasn't about to go looking for them. Not with Radnor and Sednar sitting in the next room. She'd search for them when the men were no longer around. Until then, she'd have to get used to walking around without underwear. She took a few practice steps and almost groaned. The fabric brushed lightly against her breasts, her bottom and her thighs, a teasing, torturous caress.

"Nothing you can do about it now," she told herself as she smoothed the fabric over her legs.

She spied a comb on the bench. Grabbing it, she combed her hair, grateful it wasn't long any more. The shorter style was much easier to deal with. There was no mirror and she was just as glad there wasn't. She had no desire to see what she looked like at the moment. She was clean and safe. That was all that mattered.

Roxanne thought about her job and her stomach dropped. Would she even have one by the time she got back? She chewed on her bottom lip. She was supposed to be off—she stopped and thought—tomorrow. She'd miss today's shift. If what Radnor had said was true, she'd be able to go home late tomorrow. She'd call Joe and plead with him if she had to, telling him she was ill. She'd never missed a shift before. Hopefully that would count for something. Her apartment would be fine. Unless Michael had trashed it.

Would the tapestry return her to the exact moment she left or would time have passed back home as well? It was all too confusing.

She couldn't think about that. Not now. There was nothing she could do about it. Her stomach growled, reminding her that she hadn't eaten in quite some time. Life went on no matter what. Dropping the comb back onto the bench, she picked up the

damp towel and hung it on a wooden peg. She returned to the tub long enough to pull out the wooden plug at the bottom. The water slowly began to drain.

There was nothing else to keep her in here, nothing except nerves. She took a deep breath, drew her courage around her, opened the door and strode back into the bedroom.

Both men were waiting for her and stood when she entered. They were dressed, thankfully. She didn't think she could eat with two naked men sitting next to her. Not that the vests they wore covered much of their chests, but it was better than nothing. Their skin and the ends of their hair were damp. They looked as though they'd washed while she was lolling in the tub.

"Hi." She didn't know what else to say. Felt slightly awkward now that they weren't in bed, which was silly.

"Come and eat." Sednar held out a chair. It was a command, but he punctuated it with a smile. She was quickly learning that was his way. But his tone left no doubt that he expected to be obeyed.

She arched a brow at him and padded over, her bare feet making a slapping sound against the cool stone. She shivered as the cold seeped through the soles of her feet and into her body.

Without saying a word, Radnor scowled, turned on his heel and strode to the door. He yanked it open and disappeared. Roxanne swallowed her disappointment and offered Sednar a half-hearted smile as he seated her.

"There is bread, cheese, fruit, meat and stew. We weren't sure what you'd like."

Her gaze went to the table in front of her and her eyes widened. It was filled with platters and bowls of food. They'd obviously gone to a lot of trouble.

"Thank you." Even though her stomach was protesting, she wasn't really hungry. But she knew she had to eat to keep up her strength. She took a piece of the bread, some cheese and something that resembled an apple and began to eat. Sednar poured something from a wooden jug into a cup and handed it to her. She sniffed it.

"It's cider." He poured a cup for himself and drank. "There is water if the cider is not to your liking."

She sipped and then drank a bit more. The drink was tart, with a hint of sweetness, yet refreshing. "It's good. Thank you."

Radnor stalked back into the room, something held in his hands. He came around the side of the table and abruptly went down on one knee beside her, dropping the bundle he carried onto the floor beside him. Her hand was shaking so she set her cup back on the table.

He reached beneath the table and drew her left foot onto his thigh. He brushed off the bottom and then reached for whatever it was he'd brought with him. Shoes. He'd brought her shoes. Or rather, soft, supple leather boots that went to just below her knee and were tied in place with leather straps.

His hands were gentle, yet sure, as he tied the straps and then reached for her other foot. He'd seen her shiver and had immediately gone to find her something to wear on her bare feet. They'd taken care of her, fed her and clothed her. Her heart ached at their generosity.

When Radnor was done, he grunted and stood. Giving her a nod, he went to his seat, grabbed a piece of bread and some cheese and began to eat. Roxanne picked up her cup and took a sip of cider, knowing in that one gesture, she'd surely lost a piece of her heart to the massive, taciturn man seated beside her.



## Chapter Eight

Roxanne ate a little of the bread and cheese. Her stomach was in knots and she knew it was impossible for her to eat any more. She pushed her plate away. It had been hard to eat with both men watching her every move. Oh, they weren't overt about it, but she could see them watching her out of the corners of their eyes.

Sednar frowned. "You did not eat much."

It sounded like an accusation, but it made her smile. "I'm not really hungry."

He persisted. "If the food is not to your liking, I can get you something else."

For all his commanding airs, Sednar was a good man. He didn't get angry with her for not eating what he offered. His only concern was for her. "The food is wonderful. Truly," she added when his frown deepened. "My stomach is just upset from everything that's happened." That was nothing less than the truth.

Sednar sighed. "As you wish. If you get hungry, you have only to let one of us know and we will find you something to eat."

"Thank you." She was touched by his genuine concern.

Radnor shoved back from the table, his chair scraping against the stone floor. "If you are finished, we would like to show you our home."

Roxanne found she was very curious about both men and the stone fortress they called home. Her glimpse of the outside had only whetted her appetite for more knowledge. "I'd like that." She pushed her chair away and stood, shaking out the skirt. It fell halfway between her knees and ankles, but her legs were totally covered because of the boots Radnor had procured for her. It felt very strange and oddly erotic to be completely dressed, yet to feel half naked due to her lack of underwear.

She glanced at the bed. The covers had been pulled up, showing no signs of their earlier sexual activities. She sighed, not seeing her clothing anywhere. She'd have to leave it for now and look later.

Radnor stood beside her, waiting patiently. "Lead on," she told him.

He reached down and took her hand in his, thick fingers twining with her smaller ones. Their palms touched as he guided her out of the room and down a short hallway to a set of stairs. It was a very intimate sensation to be walking hand in hand with him. Sednar followed close behind them.

Radnor's voice was deep as he began to tell her about his home. "Craddocks have been on this land for generations. The original tower itself was built about twelve generations ago, as far as we can tell, and has been added to since."

She couldn't imagine having a family history that went back that far. She placed her free hand on the cool stone, trying to imagine all the people before her who must have touched the exact same spot.

"It is not as large as some family lands," Sednar continued, "but it is prime land."

Roxanne could hear the pride in his voice, but she could also hear an underlying defensiveness as well and wondered about it.

They led her through the great hall, which was surprisingly sunny in spite of the thick stone walls. Windows were cut high on the walls, allowing light while maintaining security. It seemed her first impression of the building was correct. It was a fortress, built to protect those who lived within.

Men and a few women scurried about doing everyday chores. None of them spoke to the brothers. Indeed, they seemed to be doing their best to avoid their gazes. Roxanne frowned as a man darted furtive glances over his shoulder as he stoked the fire in the hearth of the great hall.

The room was huge, but sparse. A heavy wooden table sat on a dais at the head of the room with two large chairs placed so whoever sat there would have a perfect view of the entire room. Like the table, the chairs were simply constructed. Sturdy and functional. Four smaller tables sat perpendicular to the larger one with long benches on either side. All were empty at the moment.

"This way." Sednar strode in front of her and Radnor, leading them toward a stone archway and a set of stairs. They went down the narrow, winding steps. She had to release Radnor's hand and walk in front of him. The stairwell here was too narrow for the two of them to easily walk side by side. The smells emanating from below told her they were headed for the kitchen.

As they stepped into the room, all activity ceased. An older woman was busy, bent over a table, kneading dough. A man turned a spit over a cookfire. Several younger men and one young woman were peeling and cleaning vegetables and fruit, some of which appeared familiar and some that did not.

The older woman straightened and hurriedly wiped her hands on her apron before giving a small curtsy. "My lords." Her gaze flitted to Roxanne and then back down to the floor. "I hope the food was to your liking."

Roxanne could hear the underlying tremor in the woman's voice and hurried to reassure her. "It was wonderful. Thank you."

The woman offered her a quick smile of gratitude. She clutched her apron in her hands and waited.

"This is Tamma. She is in charge of the kitchens." Radnor made the introduction.

Roxanne stuck out her hand on impulse. "Pleased to meet you, Tamma."

The other woman stared at Roxanne's hand as if she wasn't quite certain what to do with it. Her gaze jerked to Sednar. He gave a small incline of his head. Tamma reached out and took Roxanne's hand, giving it a small shake before releasing it.

Not quite sure what to think, Roxanne settled on giving the rest of them a smile as Sednar introduced them. The atmosphere in the kitchen was tense and she was glad when they moved on.

The men took her on a tour of the rest of the castle, pointing out things of interest as they went. It was fascinating to see how it all worked. There were storage rooms, weapons rooms and barracks for the men who were part of the guards of the keep. The sight of all those weapons of war—swords, crossbows, knives and others she wasn't quite sure what they were—was a stark reminder that she wasn't in her own world.

The family living quarters were on the top floor of the keep. The great hall was below it. Then came the kitchens and storage rooms and finally the barracks and arsenal. The layout was functional. Yet the place had an air of oppression about it. Roxanne blinked and reached up a hand to shade her eyes as they stepped through the huge metal and oak main door. The sun was bright and inviting as they went down the wide stone stairs and into the courtyard.

"The fields are off to the west. The grazing lands to the east." Sednar pointed as he spoke. "We grow and raise what we need to survive. We fish in the river and lake beyond."

From their higher vantage point, Roxanne could see the lake off to the west and estimated it at about a twenty- to thirty-minute walk. Not too far, especially on a beautiful day.

The courtyard was abuzz with noise and activity as everyone went about their daily work. A man pulled a cart filled with vegetables toward the back of the keep. Another man seemed to be building something out of wood. In the distance, she could hear the bang of metal on metal. As her gaze wandered, Radnor followed it and explained what she was seeing.

"Hamish is taking the yield of one of the fields to the storage bins in the keep. The land he farms is ours so he must give up a portion of his crop to us. Arron is a master builder. He is currently working on a chair."

Unlike the chairs she'd seen in the keep, this one seemed to be ornate. The builder was currently carving the back of the seat. She couldn't make out the design, but it seemed to be vines and flowers. Roxanne smiled to herself. Perhaps it was for Arron's wife or sweetheart.

She stopped to watch him. "Your work is beautiful." And it was. Close up, she could see just how intricate the carving was. Back home, he'd get a small fortune for a handcrafted piece like this.

The man nodded. "Thank you." He glanced at Radnor and Sednar but said no more, going back to his work.

Roxanne sighed. They certainly weren't a friendly bunch. Maybe it was something about her that put them off. The thought was rather depressing. It was probably as simple as the fact she was a stranger. At least that's what she told herself.

Radnor led her toward a building, which was the source of the crashing metallic sound. She walked just inside the large barn-like structure and stilled. A giant of a man, naked from the waist up, stood with a huge hammer raised over his head. He brought it crashing down on a piece of metal sitting on an anvil in front of him. The red-hot piece was held in place by a pair of heavy metal tongs. The man's arm muscles bulged as he worked. A blacksmith, she realized, watching with open fascination. He pounded the metal several more times before lowering it into a bucket of cool water. It sizzled and steamed. He set everything aside before turning to greet them.

"Good morning, my lords. Lady." He nodded. "You've seen the stable." He turned his attention to Radnor.

"Aye. The metal work on the doors is perfect. But I expected no less from you, Emon."

The blacksmith smiled and the men chatted a few minutes. Roxanne observed them. There was a difference in how this man spoke to the brothers. He was more at ease, less guarded.

While they talked, she wandered out to the doorway to take in all the comings and goings in the courtyard. It was like taking a step back through time. She imagined that a castle in medieval times would have looked very similar.

It was quite amazing to watch. There were no power lines, no cell phones, no cars or buses, no hordes of people who were complete strangers. Here everyone knew everyone else. They all went about their business, calling out greetings to one another. Well, to everyone except Sednar and Radnor. There was definitely a distance there. She wondered why. Maybe it was because they were the lords of the keep, but it felt like more than that.

She rubbed her hands up and down her arms, feeling very alone and out of place. There were no takeouts, no convenience stores, or movie theaters. No chocolate or tampons either. She chewed on her bottom lip as she wondered what it would be like to live here. Not that she was contemplating staying. Not really. But it was fascinating to think about.

The man she'd seen a few minutes ago—Hamish, Radnor had called him—sidled up to her, glancing behind her in a furtive manner. "You don't want to stay here, lady," he whispered. "The Craddock brothers are evil. Killers. Four of them dead and only two left."

Her heart began to pound as his words sank in. Before she could ask him any questions, his eyes widened and his face paled. He spun on his heel and scurried away. Roxanne could feel someone watching her. She turned slowly to find Radnor staring at her. His face was totally without expression. She couldn't tell how much he'd heard, if anything.

He strode toward her and placed his hand on the small of her back. "If you're ready, I'd like to show you something else."

He didn't look like a killer. But then again, her ex-husband didn't look like a wife beater either. Not that Radnor wasn't capable of defending himself against an enemy. His size and strength was more than evident. The scar beneath his eye whitened and the muscles in his jaw worked, reminding her there were depths to this man. She sensed a darkness within him. Strangely enough, it intrigued her more than it frightened her.

Her throat went dry and she had to clear her throat before she could speak. "What about Sednar?"

"He's delayed with business."

"Of course." She hadn't even stopped to consider how her presence here must be affecting everyone. They all had work to do. "You don't have to babysit me. Keep me company," she added when he looked at her with a blank stare.

"You do not wish my company?"

The inflection in his voice didn't change, but she was already very attuned to his moods and could sense the hurt beneath it. He'd definitely heard what Hamish had said to her. She was certain of it. Yet he hadn't offered any denial or explanation.

It was silly to be nervous around Radnor after everything that had happened between them. She trusted him enough to go to bed with him. A few malicious words spoken by someone she didn't even know couldn't change that.

"I'm enjoying your company," she told him. And it was true. There was a quiet strength about Radnor that she liked.

He nodded and grunted. She realized that was as much as she was going to get out of him at the moment. As they walked a bit farther, her mind whirled with the implications of what Hamish had said. How much of it was true and how much was some sort of grudge or personality conflict? Maybe he just wanted her to leave and figured that was the best way to get her to go. She could have told him she wasn't planning on staying. This wasn't her world.

Radnor's hand was warm and firm against the small of her back as he guided her to the far end of the courtyard. Roxanne began to recognize the massive building they were headed toward. "This is a stable, isn't it?"

"Brand new and ready for occupancy." She could hear the pride in his voice. "The stone is much better than wood, which burns too easily. The horses are too valuable to risk." He opened the large door and ushered her inside, pulling it almost shut behind him.

The room was dim and cooler than the courtyard. It took her eyes a moment to adjust. The building was just as she remembered it. A long, wide corridor ran down the center with stalls on either side. At the far end, she could see a much larger area, perhaps a training area. "It's amazing."

The workmanship was astounding considering there was no heavy equipment, only men and sweat to construct it. It gave her a whole new respect for those who'd built the strong, sturdy keep. The walls of that place were about five feet thick. Here they were only about two, which was still incredible.

"Sednar and I have been slowly building the wealth of the family for the past six years. He has taken on the lands and I have taken on the horses."

"You breed them?" What had happened six years ago? She was dying to ask, but bided her time for now.

He nodded, running his hand over the top bar of one of the stalls. "The Craddocks are gaining a reputation for good horse flesh." He motioned her to walk ahead of him and they strolled down the shadowy corridor.

She paused in front of an open stall. There were several bales of hay inside. It was very familiar. "This is where you found me, isn't it?"

"Yes." He crossed his arms over his massive chest. Roxanne tried not to notice how his biceps rippled or how the muscles on his abdomen tightened.

"Why are we here?" There was obviously some significance. Suddenly she realized just how isolated and alone they were. She glanced at the bales of hay and remembered what had happened here the first time they'd met.

She licked her lips and a muscle jerked beneath his right eye. She lowered her gaze and noted the very large bulge at the front of his pants. Her scalp tingled and cream trickled out of her core. She shifted her weight from one leg to the other. The motion set her tunic brushing against her breasts. Her nipples puckered. She didn't look down, knowing the tight buds were outlined against the fabric.

"I told you the last time we were here what I wanted to do to you."

His words seeped into her brain, but it didn't matter if she remembered them or not. He was repeating them in a low, sexy voice.

"I want to touch every inch of your body. I want to uncover your breasts and tease your nipples into hard buds. I want to bury my face between your thighs and feast on your sweet flesh until you scream with pleasure. I want to fuck you." He uncrossed his arms and let them fall to his sides. He was all male, fully aroused and more than ready to make good on his promise. "The choice is yours."

Fury lashed Radnor's insides. Beneath that, buried so deep he barely acknowledged it, was a mountain of hurt. He'd heard what Hamish had told her. *Killers*. That's what his brothers had been. What many thought he and Sednar were. Roxanne hadn't asked him about it even though he knew she had to have questions.

So why had he brought her here, back where he'd first found her and propositioned her? He'd made his words purposely crude, offering none of the softness she deserved. Why?

It came to him in a flash. He wanted her to accept him for what he was, no questions asked. It was a lot to expect of anyone, but especially of a woman who'd been abused by a man, a man much like his brothers had been.

Her eyes were wide gray pools, her skin pale as cream. She licked her full pink lips, tugging lightly on the bottom one with her straight, white teeth. His cock jerked, pressing against the front of his pants. He knew what those lips felt like against his

shaft, knew what that soft, wet mouth felt like as it took his cock head inside. It wasn't enough. He wanted, no needed to bury his cock so far inside her cunt she'd never forget him.

He feared she would leave, wouldn't even consider staying. Especially not with men like Hamish poisoning her mind against them. His conscience reminded him it was no less than the truth. His brothers had been killers, evil men. What did that make him? He sprang from the same seed.

He raked his hand through his hair and heaved a sigh. He shouldn't have brought Roxanne here. The fact that he had done so only proved he didn't deserve her. "We should go." He stepped back, not daring to reach out to touch her. If he did, he was afraid he wouldn't be able to stop from taking her.

"I thought you said it was my choice." Her soft voice skimmed over his skin like a caress. Then her words locked in his brain. He swallowed hard and nodded.

She stepped toward him and held out her hand. "I find I like it here."

Radnor felt as though someone had rammed him in the stomach. He couldn't have heard her correctly. He swallowed hard. "Are you certain that's what you want?" His voice was rougher than usual, thick with longing.

She nodded and a lock of her hair fell over her forehead.

Blood surged through his veins, pooling low in his groin. His cock, already full and thick, seemed to swell even larger, making his pants very uncomfortable. He couldn't believe his luck. Roxanne was choosing to stay here in the stable, to be with him.

He stepped forward, herding her into the stall. Reaching behind, he grabbed the gate and pulled it shut. His hands went to his belt. He unbuckled it slowly, giving her time to object, to change her mind. When she said nothing, he removed his sword and propped it against the wall within easy reach.

"You're always armed." Roxanne stared at his sword.

"Always."

She raised her misty gray eyes to him and he could see the worry, the concern in their depths. "Is it so dangerous here?"

He wanted to lie, to tell her it was perfectly safe, but he could not. "It is. Especially for my brother and me. We have enemies who would do anything to destroy us or those we care for."

She swallowed hard, the slender column of her throat rippling. "I see."

He was sure she did understand. She'd had experience with violence. Radnor wanted to roar and rant to the heavens about how unfair it was to find the woman he'd always longed for only to be faced with such obstacles. But no one said life was fair. It wasn't. He'd never flinched from a challenge before and he had no intentions of starting now. Roxanne was much too important to give up without a fight.

He cupped her face in his hands, marveling at her delicate features. Her lips were lush and made for kissing. Her skin was as smooth and pale as fresh cream. Bending down, he brushed his mouth against hers. Gently at first and then with firmer pressure.

She tasted sweet, like honey tinged with the cider she'd sipped earlier. Her fingers crept up his chest. He felt the heat brand him as her hands slipped beneath his vest to find his bare skin.

He lifted his head. "Go or stay." His hands fisted at his sides. He couldn't touch her. Not yet. If he did, he wasn't certain he'd be able to let her go. His words had a much deeper meaning. He wanted her to stay here in Javara and marry him. Or if not him, then Sednar. His brother was much more easygoing than he was, not as brooding. Roxanne would probably be better off with him. He could be gentler with her, which she deserved after what she'd been through in her life.

A part of him roared his denial. He wanted Roxanne with a desperation that went to the depths of his soul. He needed her in a way he couldn't explain.

His outward appearance showed none of his inner turmoil. He stood as still as stone, waiting for her reply.

She didn't answer him in words, but that didn't matter. Her reply was as clear as if she'd shouted it from the battlements. Her hands slipped up around his neck, linking at his nape. Her breasts pressed against his chest, the soft, full mounds impressing themselves on his skin. He could feel the heat of her pussy even through the layers of their clothing as she arched into him.

Lust crashed through him like a lightning bolt. He grabbed her ass with both hands and lifted her, rubbing his cock against the notch of her thighs. She moaned and tightened her grip on his neck.

Radnor couldn't think, could only feel. He slammed his mouth down on hers, capturing her lips. He ate at the top and the bottom one, sucking and licking, before plunging his tongue into her mouth. She made a low moan of pleasure. He swallowed it, savoring the sweet sound.

Without breaking their kiss, he walked them across the room and pressed her back to the wall. He wanted to lay her down on the bales of hay and fuck her, but some still-functioning part of his brain warned him that it was too rough. The last thing he wanted to do was scratch her tender flesh.

He shoved his pelvis against hers, groaning as her heat enveloped his cock. He had to touch her bare skin. Rearing back, he held her easily with one arm and grabbed the front of her tunic, shoving it up.

Roxanne raised her arms and he yanked it over her head and tossed it aside. Her torso seemed almost too slender for her ample breasts. He frowned. She was so fragile and he was so large and rough.

"Touch me." She grabbed his hand in hers and brought it to her breast. He groaned and kneaded the soft, firm flesh between his fingers. She gasped as he flicked his thumb over her nipple. It puckered tight.



Radnor lifted her high in his arms, bringing his mouth in line with her breasts. He buried his face in her cleavage and breathed deep. He could smell the alluring scent of her arousal, tinged with the soap she'd used to wash. He sucked and licked at her breast, getting ever closer to her turgid nipple.

He laughed when Roxanne dug her fingers into his hair and tugged him to the tip. Opening his mouth, he sampled her sweet nipple, teasing it with his tongue. She moaned and arched her back, pushing herself more fully into his mouth. He sucked hard, wanting to please her.

Her lower body moved restlessly against him. Radnor wanted to take his time, wanted to taste her honey. His cock protested. His balls were close to bursting. There was no more time.

"I can't wait." He could hear the desperation in his voice, the rough, aching need.

"Then don't," she moaned.

He knew he should go slower, knew she deserved to be gently aroused in a soft bed, not fucked against the hard wall of a stable. He also knew he wasn't going to stop. He couldn't. Not with her moaning so sweetly and offering herself to him. He wasn't strong enough to turn aside such a gift.

He shoved her skirt up and found her firm, slender thighs. Her breathing was rapid, her chest rising and falling with every breath she took. He wasn't much better. He felt as though he'd run for miles without stopping. His back and chest were slick with perspiration. He'd never wanted anything the way he wanted Roxanne.

Her eyes were closed and she had her head tilted back. Her lips parted on a sigh of pleasure as he stroked his fingers over her hot, damp heat. "Your cunt is so wet." He marveled at her readiness as he dipped one long finger into her molten depths.

She made a strangled sound in her throat, which turned to a cry as he inserted a second finger. Her inner muscles grabbed at his fingers, trying to hold them in as he withdrew almost all the way out before shoving them deep once again.

Roxanne bucked against his hand, making small noises of pleasure. His hand was getting wetter as she covered him in her slick cream. Every muscle in his body was screaming for release.

He withdrew his fingers and tore at the opening of his pants. His cock sprang free. He hissed in a breath as the cool air hit his dick. He was within a hairsbreadth of coming.

She was moaning and clutching at his shoulders as she rubbed her mound against his body, trying to get the contact she needed. Radnor fitted his cock against her opening and inserted the head. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth as her warmth surrounded him. He needed to find control.

"That feels so good," she managed to get out between gasps.

"Your cunt is so soft. So hot." His lungs were working hard.

“Radnor,” she moaned his name, digging her nails into his bare shoulders. They would leave marks, branding him.

She wiggled, driving his cock deeper. His control shattered. He drove himself all the way to the hilt. Then he began to fuck her.

## **Chapter Nine**

Roxanne's body was alive with sensation. Her breasts ached, her nipples almost hurt they were so tight. But it was between her thighs where she felt it most.

Radnor buried his thick shaft in her slick channel, stretching her to the point of pain. Yet it felt so incredibly good, she never wanted him to stop. She held onto him for support, digging her fingers into his wide shoulders and wrapping her legs around his thick waist.

Muscles rippled beneath her palms as he withdrew to the entrance of her heated passage only to drive back in. He went even deeper this time. She tightened her thighs around him as he hammered his cock into her cunt, getting faster and harder with each stroke.

He was the most elemental male she'd ever met. He was earthy when he spoke of what he wanted to do to her, with her. She'd creamed herself just listening to him.

She cried out as he shifted her slightly, his thick penis brushing her clit with each stroke. The wall was hard and cool against her back, a contrast to the heat radiating from between her thighs. Her skin felt hot, like she had a fever. And maybe she did.

Release hovered just beyond her reach. She tightened her thighs around Radnor's hips, moving in counterpoint to his thrusts. She drove down as he shoved up and in. She heard a whimpering noise and realized it was her. She was mindless, needing to come.

His chest brushed against her breasts, making them ache even more. The hard points of her nipples demanded more attention. She arched against him, crying out as the contact deepened.

Radnor buried his face in the curve of her neck, his breath hot against her skin. She felt his sharp teeth as he bit down gently. That small pain sent her over the edge. Her world exploded. Lights flashed behind her eyes as she came.

She heard Radnor yell. Felt the hot rush of semen as he filled her. His hips pumped furiously, slapping against her damp, hot flesh. She hung on and rode out the waves of pleasure.

Radnor slumped forward, keeping one hand under her bottom and resting the other one against the wall of the stable. Roxanne could feel something warm and sticky rolling down her inner thigh. She groaned and shifted. Radnor's cock jerked and flexed within her. He swore and carefully began to withdraw.

She lowered her legs and bit her lip to keep from groaning as her feet touched the floor. She was stiff and sweaty, but she felt content too. Radnor raised his head and peered down at her.

"That shouldn't have happened."

Her heart stopped. When it began beating again it was a hard, heavy beat. Her spirits plummeted at his words. Hurt replaced the pleasant languor of moments before. She stiffened and shoved at her skirts, feeling suddenly exposed in more ways than one. Her tunic was on the floor so she settled for crossing her arms over her chest. "No one forced you to do anything." Her words were wooden and stiff.

Radnor frowned, his expression growing darker with each passing second. "Did I hurt you?"

What did the jerk think? Of course he'd hurt her. After having a beautiful sexual experience, at least on her part, he'd announced it shouldn't have happened. "I'm fine." She'd get over it. She'd survived a hell of a lot worse.

He raked his fingers through his hair and bent down to retrieve her tunic. Shaking it out, he started to dress her. She gave a small shriek when he tugged it over her head and then threaded her arms through the holes.

Cupping her face in his hands, he studied her. "You deserve a soft bed and a gentle lover, not a brute who fucks you against the stable wall."

Realization came slowly and with it a sense of relief all out of proportion to the situation. Radnor was angry with himself with the fact that they'd made love. *Had sex*, she corrected herself. She frowned. "I didn't say no. In fact, I distinctly remember urging you to go harder and faster."

Radnor tucked his softened penis back into his pants and laced them before reaching for his sword belt and strapping it on. He looked big and imposing. She also sensed an air of uncertainty around him as he shifted closer, lowered his head and kissed her. "I didn't keep my promise. I told you I was going to bury my face between your thighs and feast on your sweet flesh until you scream with pleasure."

"Maybe later," she told him.

His eyes widened and he began to smile. She placed her hand over his heart, feeling the steady thud beneath her palm.

"As my lady wishes." His tone left no doubt that he was more than up for the task. His golden brown eyes smoldered with sexual promise.

"Right now, this lady wants to get cleaned up. I feel sticky." Roxanne ran a hand through her hair. Without a mirror she couldn't tell what she looked like, but she was almost certain she looked as though she'd been tumbled in the stable. Not that it mattered. She was leaving soon and wouldn't have to face any of the people in the courtyard who would easily guess what happened between her and Radnor.

Why that thought left her feeling empty and sad she didn't want to speculate. Radnor rested his hand against the small of her back. Such a little gesture, but one he did often, unconsciously. He was always watching out for her, always concerned about her well-being. It was a strange sensation. A pleasurable one.

She glanced at him and felt her heart stutter. He was watching her intently. The corners of his mouth turned up slowly in a boyish grin. She blinked, unable to believe how much younger that smile made him look. She had a feeling he didn't smile often and was absurdly pleased that she'd drawn it from him. A wall crumbled deep within her and she lost yet another small part of her heart to him.

He held out his free hand. "After you, my lady."

Hours later, Roxanne was pleasantly exhausted. After she and Radnor had returned from the stable, she'd retired to her room for a quick wash. Then she'd had a bite to eat with both men. It had been interesting to watch them interact with the people around them during the midday meal. The brothers were cordial, if slightly distant, with others. But she sensed the underlying distrust, and even fear, of everyone they spoke with.

It gave her something to ponder beyond the intense sensual interlude in the stable with Radnor. Just thinking about that raised her body temperature and had her pussy throbbing.

Lunch was a pleasant affair, if slightly strained. She'd managed to actually eat something substantial. When the meal was done, the men had retired to the practice field for an hour, giving her a display of their prowess with their swords. They'd taken her breath away and given her more than a few moments of anxiety. The blades were sharp and deadly, yet they'd wielded them with abandon.

When they were done, Radnor had disappeared, leaving her alone with Sednar. He'd taken her on a walk, giving her an in-depth tour of the fields, explaining what crops they grew. Then he'd shown her all the animals they raised. The amount of labor necessary to keep everything working was mind-boggling. The workers responded to Sednar's greeting and questions, but the conversation wasn't exactly what she'd call easy.

Still, it was nice to enjoy the fresh air and sunshine and to take her mind off her worries for a few hours. The dark cloud of her return to her home still hung over her. She had no idea what she'd find when she got there. A small part of her still wondered if this wasn't all a coma-induced dream brought on by a beating from Michael. Maybe she was really lying in a hospital bed hooked up to tubes and machines.

She took a deep breath and slowly released it. She had to believe this was real. The only other explanations weren't acceptable. She really didn't think a coma would produce such erotic and realistic dreams. And she certainly didn't want to believe she was crazy.

Roxanne gazed around her, marveling at the clean, fresh air. Life here was much simpler in many respects, but the underlying problems of human relationships still existed.

As Sednar showed her the land and introduced her to some of the people who called Craddock Keep home, she found herself growing more interested in the marriages and interactions of the inhabitants. It seemed to work for them, although she

still had a hard time wrapping her head around the idea of a permanent relationship between a woman and two or three brothers.

Still, everyone she met seemed to be happy in that respect. She'd sensed no underlying currents of discontent when she was introduced to the blacksmith's wife and his brother, who also lived with them. It was the same with the master builder's wife and his two brothers.

Conversation lagged between her and Sednar and they climbed the stairs to the keep in silence. But it was a comfortable silence. Sednar was easy to be around. He was smart and entertaining and a very good teacher, patient as he'd explained the outer workings of the keep. He also was clever and had a sense of humor. It wasn't always obvious, but it was there.

Roxanne paused at the top of the stairs and turned to gaze out over the land. The concept that this belonged to Sednar and Radnor was incredible. If they lived in California, they'd be multimillionaires, maybe even billionaires, with this kind of property. Not that they'd fit in with the lifestyle of many of the rich and famous. From what she'd been able to glean, both men worked tirelessly and had for many years to make this land as prosperous as it was.

"Tired?" Sednar pulled open the door and held it for her.

"Mmm." She was tired, but strangely energized as well. Her skin felt sensitive to the touch. She started up the stairs, pausing at the entrance to the great room, but he put his hand on her lower back and indicated she should go up.

Shrugging, she climbed. Maybe she'd take a nap before dinner. She wasn't wearing a watch, but it had to be getting close to that time. They'd been outside for hours. All that fresh air and exercise had made her sleepy. The stairwell was cool and quiet. Roxanne reached the final turn and glanced up. Only about a half dozen steps to go. If she lived here long she wouldn't need to worry about getting enough exercise.

That thought stopped her cold. When had she started even considering staying?

"Everything all right?" Sednar leaned closer, his lips skimming the curve of her ear, his breath tickling her skin.

She sucked in a breath as her breasts began to tingle. "Fine."

Sednar smoothed one large hand down her back, curving it over her hip and around to lie on her stomach. She sucked in a breath and the fabric of her tunic abraded her nipples. She chewed on her bottom lip to keep from whimpering.

What was wrong with her? She'd had sex with Radnor only this morning. Now she was attracted to Sednar. It was crazy. It made her feel uneasy. As though her body wasn't under her control. She'd always been a one-man woman. For the last year or more, she hadn't even wanted anything to do with a man. Now she wanted two of them.

He placed hot, open-mouthed kisses on her neck as his hand rubbed circles on her stomach. With each rotation, he got closer to her breasts and mound as he made the circles larger. "I want to touch you." His fingers grazed the undersides of her breasts.

Roxanne's breasts were heavy, aching to be touched. She captured her lower lip between her teeth as his hand curved lower, brushing her mound. Even though they were both fully dressed, the caress went through her like a wildfire through a summer forest, burning everything in its path.

"This is crazy," she muttered. Her body undulated of its own accord as Sednar's hand made an upward turn.

"Not crazy," he whispered in her ear. "Necessary." This time, he covered her breast with his hand. Her puckered nipple stabbed the center of his palm as he closed his fingers around the full, aching mound.

"It's not wrong to want me, Roxanne. It's acceptable. Expected. Let me pleasure you." He punctuated his words with tiny nips at her earlobe, which sent shivers down her spine.

She couldn't think. A sexual lethargy settled over her. She made a half-hearted attempt at cool reason. "We're..." She licked her lips and tried again. "We're in a hallway."

He chuckled. "So we are." He squeezed her breast as he rubbed his thumb over the hardened tip. "No one will bother us."

Sednar gathered the fabric of her skirt in his free hand, slowly inching it up and exposing her calves and thighs. He slid his hand beneath and continued until he found her hot, pulsing sex.

He made a thick sound of pleasure in his throat as he fingered her pussy. "Soft and wet. Let me taste you, Roxanne."

She could hear the excitement in his voice, feel the hard length of his cock pressed against her back. Could she do this? It seemed wrong, yet somehow right. She was hot and horny and totally confused.

Sednar turned her until her back was against the wall. He loomed large in the narrow stairwell. Twin braids framed his face. He looked so much like Radnor, yet there were slight differences. Sednar's eyes were the color of bittersweet chocolate, dark and rich. His features were finer, not quite as harsh as his brother's. His lips were fuller.

The way he looked at her was similar. There was lust and longing in his gaze as he let his eyes roam over her. He smiled easily, a roguish grin that made her smile.

"Just a taste," he cajoled. "I'll stop whenever you say the word. Please."

What was it with these men? They acted like she was doing them some great favor by letting them pleasure her. This was a time out of time, not real life. She'd be a fool to turn him down. She nodded.

Sednar went down on one knee in front of her and lifted her skirt to her waist. "Hold this."

Cool air hit her skin as she hiked her skirt over her arms and held it out of the way. She was naked from the waist down, which seemed more provocative than if she was totally naked. Sednar picked up the end of one of the thin braids and trailed the end

over her thigh. His hair was soft and tickled, even as it aroused. She didn't know whether to laugh or moan, so she did both.

Sednar gazed up at her and grinned. "Only the eldest brother has the braids. There's an advantage to that." He went back to caressing her inner thigh, getting closer to her pussy with each stroke.

Roxanne filed that bit of information away in her brain along with everything else she'd discovered about this strange world. She'd ponder it all later. Right now, she was more concerned with Sednar's teasing touch.

He flicked the end of the braid over her slick lips. The silky slide of hair over her clit made her moan.

"Spread your thighs for me," Sednar coaxed.

Roxanne spread her thighs as wide as she could and still remain on the stair, reminding her that their position was precarious at best.

"Hmm." Sednar leaned forward and placed a soft kiss on her mound. "Hold your pussy lips open for me so I can see you better." He stroked his finger over her thickened labia.

Roxanne gulped. Could she do this? She glanced down the stairs, but couldn't see beyond the curve. They were alone, but that didn't mean someone couldn't come along at any second and see them. She'd never been an exhibitionist, but the added tension of possibly being caught sent her arousal soaring through the roof.

She licked her lips and did as he asked. Keeping the fabric of her skirt tucked behind her, she reached between her legs and spread the lips of her pussy apart, giving Sednar a perfect view of her.

Heat climbed up her cheeks even as she felt cream trickle out of her sheath.

"Beautiful," he breathed. He leaned forward and licked her from anus to clit. He licked his lips. "Sweet and spicy."

Roxanne watched, enthralled as Sednar bent his dark head and began to lap at her pussy. Tongue sliding, lips sucking, teeth nipping, he took her from hot to about to come in less than sixty seconds. He thrust two thick fingers into her sheath. Her hips jerked forward, wanting him deeper.

Her breasts swelled and she wished she could touch them. She could feel the tension welling within her and knew she was close. Her skin was damp, her breathing erratic. He captured her clit and sucked hard as he drove his fingers deep.

She cried out, body shaking as she came. The wall at her back and Sednar in front of her were the only things keeping her from falling. Her inner muscles spasmed. Sednar removed his fingers and she cried out. It was too soon. She felt empty, still needing more.

"Let me fuck you." Sednar surged to his feet in front of her. He swooped down and captured her lips in a torrid kiss, employing tongue and lips in a way that sent heat soaring through her. He tore his mouth from hers. "Let me fuck you."



She felt empty inside. Her orgasm hadn't alleviated the tension thrumming within her. She couldn't talk, couldn't answer. She nodded.

Sednar wasted no time. He spun her around so she was facing the wall. She slapped her hands on the stone for balance. Her skirts were flipped above her waist, baring her ass and her pussy. He pulled her back slightly so she was bent forward, hands still flat on the wall.

She heard the swish of cloth and knew he was undoing his pants. Then she felt the brush of his cock head against her cleft. The heat of his shaft seared her flesh as he worked the head into her swollen sheath. Her legs were quivering, her entire body vibrating. He paused for a brief second. She heard him take a deep breath. His hands were hard on her sides, his fingers gripping her hips as he slammed forward.

Roxanne cried out, her inner muscles clutching at his cock as he withdrew and drove in again, this time going deeper. He fucked her in short, hard stabs that filled her to the edge of pain but never pushed her over.

He slid his hand under her tunic and found her breasts. He captured them, squeezing and molding them, flicking his thumbs over the sensitive tips. Roxanne could feel another orgasm about to explode.

The taste of Roxanne lingered on his lips and mouth. The scent of her arousal surrounded him. He'd never be able to forget it. Didn't want to forget it.

Sednar buried his cock over and over in her hot, wet cunt, loving the way her inner muscles sucked him deeper, surrounding him in her damp heat. Her sheath rippled around him, gripping his hard length. Her breasts filled his hands, the soft, full mounds growing larger as he caressed them.

She moaned, the sound like a prayer, a promise in his brain. She'd come once. He'd tasted her essence as she'd found release with the touch of his fingers and mouth. He wanted her to come with his cock ramming into her.

He knew Radnor had taken her in the barn. Had seen the satisfied expression on his brother's face and Roxanne's flushed skin. She'd looked like a woman who'd been tumbled in the stable and enjoyed it. Jealousy had speared through him. He wanted what his brother had – a woman who belonged to him. Not any woman. Roxanne.

He'd learned so much about her in the hours they'd spent together. It only made him want her more. Now Sednar had all the warmth and generosity that was Roxanne in his arms. Like Radnor, he'd purposely chosen a public place to have her for the first time. He wanted her to risk being discovered. It not only heightened arousal, but proved to him just how much she wanted him.

Her soft whimpers were driving him mad. He pumped his cock into her cunt. She was tight and each time he squeezed into her hot channel was like entering her for the first time.

Time was running out. This was day two. The tapestry would appear in little more than a day. He desperately wanted Roxanne to stay. The thought of losing her was untenable. She belonged here, where he and Radnor could protect and care for her.

She didn't belong in a world where a man wanted to hurt her. Sednar had seen too much of that in his lifetime and refused to allow Roxanne to be hurt further. But he might not have a choice. He almost roared at the obscene thought. She could choose to leave them. It was her right and he couldn't stop her.

His job was to get her to want to stay.

His cock spasmed, jerking his attention back to Roxanne. He released one plump breast and let his hand slide down between her thighs. He found her clit and began to stroke.

Roxanne gave a sharp cry. Her cunt began to tighten around him as she came. Sednar gave a muffled yell, driving his cock into her one more time. He came hard, filling her with his hot seed. Her tight channel milked him dry.

He slapped one hand against the wall to keep his balance. He was totally spent. A tiny sound made him jerk his head up. Radnor stood at the top of the stairs watching them, obviously aroused by what he'd just witnessed.

Sednar swallowed a low growl of displeasure and jerked his head, indicating that Radnor should leave. The last thing he wanted was for Roxanne to be embarrassed or upset.

Radnor inclined his head and faded back down the hall. Satisfied, he carefully withdrew from Roxanne, pulling her skirt down to cover her. She gave a low moan and shivered. He turned her and lifted her in his arms. She gave him a sleepy smile and closed her eyes.

Content in a way he'd never been before, he carried her the rest of the way up the stairs and into Radnor's room, where she'd been staying. He wanted to take her to his room but knew she'd be more comfortable in familiar surroundings.

Radnor was standing in the shadows, staring into the empty hearth. His brother raised his head as he entered with his precious cargo. Sednar went straight to the bed and placed Roxanne in the center, tugging off her boots, before pulling a heavy fur over her. She snuggled down, not even opening her eyes.

Sednar went to the door and waited. Radnor walked silently to the bed and stared down at Roxanne. He turned on his heel and strode out of the room. Sednar closed the door carefully behind him.

## Chapter Ten

Roxanne came awake slowly. She was warm and fully dressed. She frowned. She slept in her pajamas, not in her clothing. Her eyes flickered open and she stared at her surroundings. It all came back to her in a rush.

She was in Javara at Craddock Keep. She'd toured the castle and grounds today with Sednar and Radnor, making love with both of them. *No*, she corrected herself, *she'd had sex with them*. They didn't love her and she didn't love them. She ignored the pang in the region of her heart. They couldn't love her. They barely knew her. And the same went for her. Didn't it?

The problem was neither man felt like a stranger. Maybe that was her way of justifying having sex with both of them. But it went deeper than that. Roxanne *knew* them in a way she'd never known her ex-husband. Fundamentally, at their very core, they were good, hardworking men who would do whatever it took to protect everyone under their care. And, for the moment, that included her.

They treated her with a care that wasn't false. There was no fanfare, no "look what I've done". She wasn't even certain they were aware of what they were doing. It was an ingrained part of them. They always walked between her and what they perceived as any potential danger. They were constantly trying to feed her. They never lost patience with the questions she'd asked.

There was also no denying the physical attraction that smoldered between her and the two brothers. Roxanne thought she'd known what sexual attraction was until she'd met Radnor and Sednar. What she'd known was only a pale imitation of what they'd brought out in her. For the first time in her life, she felt like a sexual, powerful woman. It was an odd, yet liberating sensation.

She sat up and winced. All the unusual activity had left parts of her slightly sore. She was also sticky and sweaty. A bath was the first thing on the agenda. Throwing back the cover, she slid off the bed and stretched.

The door open and Radnor walked in carrying a tray. Sednar was right behind him, a second tray in his hands. Roxanne felt her cheeks get warm. It was harder than she thought to face both men at once. She'd had sex with both of them, for heaven's sake. She barely resisted crawling back in bed and pulling the covers over her head.

"You're awake." Radnor set the tray on the table and studied her. "You're looking rested."

"I am." Her voice sounded slightly hoarse from sleep. It certainly wasn't due to embarrassment, at least that's what she tried to convince herself. It worked. Sort of. Sighing, she padded toward the table. There was no point in her hiding now that they'd seen her.

Sednar smiled as he straightened from the table. She studied the tray he'd brought in. It was filled with food, as was Radnor's tray. A smile flitted at the corners of her mouth. "You're always trying to feed me." It touched her that they cared enough to bother.

Radnor frowned. "You don't eat enough." He studied her in a way that made her want to squirm. It was as though he could see what she was thinking. She was almost convinced of it a moment later when he added. "Do you want a bath first or food?"

"A bath," she all but moaned. Soaking in a tub was more of a priority than food at this point.

Sednar strode to the door to the bathing chamber and opened it. "Your bath awaits."

Roxanne was very aware of both men as she entered the smaller room. Her skin was hypersensitive. Her breasts and between her thighs throbbed with awareness. Shaking off the sensual sensations, she walked toward the tub. Sure enough, it was filled with steaming water. She turned to the men, who were standing just inside the bathing chamber. Their mere presence made it shrink in size. "Thank you."

She waited for them to leave but neither of them made a motion to do so. "Umm, you can go now."

One corner of Radnor's mouth turned up in a wicked grin. "No, we can't. We're here to help you."

She knew her jaw dropped. It took her a moment to gather her wits and close her mouth. "You can't be serious," she sputtered.

"Very serious," Sednar told her as he went around the room gathering a washcloth and towel.

"It's as we told you when you first arrived. We must take you separately and together so you might learn which of us fulfills your needs better. You've had both of us separately." Radnor's gaze heated as he continued. "Now we will tend to your needs and both pleasure you at once."

Roxanne's knees went weak and she slowly lowered herself onto a wooden stool. Radnor frowned and started toward her. She held up her hand, stopping him in his tracks. "This is crazy." She'd already pushed way past her comfort zone today. She wasn't certain she could handle more.

Sednar strode to her side and went down on one knee beside her. It reminded her too much of earlier today and brought a flush to her cheeks. "It is up to you. All we want to do is bathe you and pleasure you. Then we will feed you. What happens after that..." He shrugged.

"It is always your choice, Roxanne." Radnor crossed his arms over his chest, emphasizing the breadth of his chest and the massive size of his biceps. As always, both men looked as sexy as all get out, dressed in leather pants, vests and wide wrist and armbands.

"Don't you ever get cold?" she blurted out.

Radnor frowned and Sednar laughed. It was Sednar who answered her question. "We wear shirts or tunics and heavier clothing in the cold season, but it is still warm." He shrugged. "There is no need for anything more."

"Enough." Radnor dropped his arms back by his side. "Your bath is getting cold and I do not want you to take a chill." He walked over until he was standing in front of her. He reached down, gently pulled her to her feet and began to tug off her tunic. Seeing no help for it, Roxanne raised her arms over her head. The back of Radnor's hand brushed her nipple as he helped her undress. She didn't think it was an accident. But accident or not, her nipple responded by puckering into a tight nub.

Sednar went to work on her skirt and, before she could blink, she was naked. She quickly climbed into the wooden tub, letting the hot water surround her. It was a good-sized tub, but it wasn't large enough for her to stretch out all the way. Her legs were slightly bent as she leaned against the rim.

Sednar sat near her feet, Radnor near her head. Sednar reached for a bar of soap, lathering it in his hands before passing it off to his brother. Radnor worked the soap until his fingers were covered in a froth of white.

Roxanne watched, entranced by the contrast of their strong hands covered in fragile bubbles. Mostly, she couldn't begin to think about what was going to happen next. She didn't need to worry about her bath getting cold. She was giving off more than enough heat to start the water boiling.

Her breasts bobbed just above the waterline, which lapped at her tight nipples. Radnor and Sednar moved as one, leaning over the tub. Then they began to bathe her.

Radnor licked his lips as one tight pink nipple dipped beneath the water before bobbing up again. He wanted to protest as Roxanne bent her legs slightly to shield her mound from view. After everything they'd done, she was still as shy and skittish as a woodland creature.

His cock was at full attention, straining against his pants, but he ignored the discomfort. This moment was about Roxanne. Like a fractious mare, he planned to gentle her with his hands, get her used to his touch. He hid a grin. He didn't think she'd appreciate being compared to one of his horses.

Whether she realized it or not, today had been about saturating her senses with them, with their home. They wanted her to feel a part of Craddock Keep. His gut tightened as he remembered all the dark looks and comments that had been sent her way as she'd toured their home. He'd wanted to shake more than one person today. It was as if they wanted Roxanne—a tapestry bride—to leave. Perhaps he should be proud of his people instead. They braved his and Sednar's displeasure to protect her from what they considered a fate worse than death—being with him or Sednar, the despised Craddock brothers.

That thought left a bad taste in his mouth. All these years of working and struggling and the people of the keep thought no better of them, treated them like they

were their older brothers. What they'd failed to stop and realize was that if any of them had dared to voice a disagreement today, Leon would have slain them where they stood.

Radnor pushed aside his dour thoughts. Roxanne was wet and naked and waiting for him to bathe her. Sednar had already reached for one slender ankle and was working his way up to her knee, leaving a trail of soap behind him.

He decided to begin at her shoulders. Laying his hands on the curve of her neck, he slid them up and down before following the slope of her shoulders. Roxanne closed her eyes and moaned as his fingers worked the stiffness out of her muscles. He was very careful to control the pressure, not wanting to do anything to cause her discomfort.

Her lips parted on a sigh as he soaped her upper arms. Her arms were slender, yet muscled. She was no stranger to hard work. He rubbed and kneaded all the way down one arm to her hand. He held it between his larger one, stroking and gently pulling on her fingers.

"That feels wonderful," she breathed.

Radnor stroked between her fingers in a sensual caress. Roxanne shifted restlessly in the tub and the water sloshed gently to the rim. He caught his brother's eye and nodded.

Moving to the top of the tub, Radnor leaned over and cupped her breasts with his soapy hands. He rubbed until they were covered in a froth of white. Sednar was busy between Roxanne's thighs, coaxing them apart and slipping his wet, soapy fingers into her molten core.

Roxanne moaned and arched her hips out of the water. Her skin was gleaming wet, trails of soap streaming over her stomach. Radnor captured her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers, tugging and pulling gently.

This time when she parted her lips on a whimper, he leaned down and captured her mouth with his. She opened for him as easily as if she'd been doing it forever, offering him whatever he wanted.

All the blood rushed to his cock, leaving him lightheaded as he kissed her. She reached behind her and grabbed a hunk of his hair, tugging him closer to her. He savored the slight sting of his scalp and the knowledge that she wanted his kiss, wanted him.

Radnor kept kissing Roxanne as he glanced down at Sednar. His brother was busy, thrusting his fingers in and out of her slick pussy. Thick fingers disappeared into her tight channel over and over.

A cry was ripped from her throat and she pulled away from his kiss. She cried again, her body jerking as she came. Water sloshed over the edges of the tub, splashing his pants, but doing little to cool his ardor.

He anchored her with his hands on her breasts, kneading and stroking until her orgasm was done. He changed his touch then, making it more soothing and relaxing.

Her eyelids fluttered open and she smiled at him, then at Sednar. "That was amazing."

"Now you will eat." Radnor scooped her up and set her on her feet in the tub, supporting her when she swayed.

Sednar lifted a bucket of warm water and rinsed the soap from her skin. When she was clean, he set the bucket aside and grabbed the towel he'd set out earlier. Wrapping it around her, he lifted her out of the tub.

Radnor turned and left the room to check on the food. It would also give Sednar time alone with Roxanne. His heart clenched and his gut burned as he entered his bedroom. He wanted to be with her, wanted to spend every second he could with her, but he also wanted her to stay for good.

That most likely meant her marrying Sednar. He'd have to get used to it. His brother might share leadership with him, but there was no denying Sednar was lord here. His line in the birth order preordained it. His braids and the ceremonial torque he wore on special occasions proclaimed it to the world. Sednar was also a much easier man to understand and live with, not burdened by as many demons as Radnor. Why wouldn't she choose him?

He glanced at the bed and rubbed a hand over his chest. He'd never be able to see his bed again without picturing Roxanne curled up in it, sleeping soundly. Then there were the more erotic pictures of Roxanne naked and sucking his cock with great enthusiasm.

He turned away from the bed and focused his attention to the food on the table, choosing the best of it for Roxanne.

Sednar briskly ran the drying cloth over Roxanne's body, frowning at the slight bruises on her arms and legs. He wasn't sure if she'd had them when she'd arrived or if they were new from the vigorous activity of today.

"What are you frowning over?" she asked.

He traced an older bruise, the edges of which were yellow and fading. "You have too many bruises."

Roxanne tugged the cloth from his hands and wrapped it around herself. "It's nothing."

She made to move away from him, but he stopped her. His hands rested lightly on her shoulders. He didn't want to make her feel trapped or afraid. "It is not nothing, Roxanne. It matters that you are hurt. I hope I did not add to your collection of bruises today in the stairwell."

A delectable shade of pink flowed up her chest and bloomed on her cheeks. She stared at a point beyond his shoulder. "Umm, I don't think so." She shrugged, tightening her grip on the towel when it slipped. "Even if you did, I didn't feel them at the time." She shot him a cheeky grin. "I was otherwise occupied."

Sednar smiled. He couldn't help himself. Something about Roxanne lightened the burdens on his soul. "Stay," he blurted. "Don't go when the tapestry comes for you. Stay here and marry one of us."

She took a step away from him. He let his hands fall down to his sides. His fingers curled into fists as he forced himself not to reach for her. Her gaze flicked down to his hands and she took another step away. Her face paled.

She was afraid of him.

Darkness descended on Sednar. Was he no better than his dead brothers, forcing a woman to his bidding? He bowed his head and relaxed his hands until they were no longer fisted. "Forgive me."

Roxanne blinked and gave him a nervous smile. "That's okay. It's just that I don't belong here. I have a life."

His heart sank and despair threatened to swamp him. "I understand. But think about this. There is no one back where you come from who will care for you and protect you like we will. Our world may seem strange to you, but you can make a place for yourself here. Other women have done it. The tapestry would not have brought you here if you couldn't do the same thing."

She offered her hand to him, her gaze beseeching him to understand. "I need to go home. I have too much unfinished business there."

She lowered her hand self-consciously to her side when he didn't take it. He couldn't. If he did, he'd drag her into his arms and make love to her until she was too dazed to even consider leaving.

"You and Radnor are both so strong and self-assured. You have a place here. You don't need me."

Sednar stalked to the outer door of the bathing chamber, unable to remain in the room another moment. His control was precarious at best. He yanked open the door and turned to face Roxanne. "You're wrong. We need you more than you know."

With that, he closed the door behind him and strode down the hallway, a black mood enclosing him. Radnor would see that she ate. Would see to her comfort. He paused and almost turned around and went back to Roxanne. If she was set on leaving, her time here was limited. He didn't want to miss a moment of it.

Then again, he never wanted to see fear on her face again, especially not when he was the one who put it there. Best to get control of himself and his mood before he returned.

He continued to his room, closing the door solidly behind him. His sword was resting against the hearth. He'd placed it there before going to Roxanne. He lifted it with his right hand, feeling the familiar weight. He twisted his wrist, sending the blade into a series of complex arcs and swirls.

Sword practice had always centered him. He only prayed it would work this time.



## Chapter Eleven

Roxanne stared at the closed door in dismay. She'd driven Sednar away. One minute he'd been toweling her off from her bath—and how strange was that—and the next he was angry, and if she wasn't mistaken, hurt.

Sednar was wrong. They didn't need her. Not really. She was a novelty, nothing more. Women were scarce here. They needed one and she just happened to fit the bill. Which made her wonder if there was anything special about her or if any woman would do.

She couldn't give up the only life she'd ever known on three days' notice. Of course she couldn't. She noticed with some surprise the idea wasn't as unappealing as it had been when she first arrived.

What did she really have back home in California? An ex-husband who wanted to kill her, a job as a waitress at a diner and no real friends. What would she have if she stayed? Two men who made her feel special. What would she do here? She had no idea and that was part of the problem. Everything ran like clockwork in the keep. She supposed she could find something to do in the kitchen.

Her temples throbbed and she shivered. Now that the heat of the bath had dissipated, her skin was chilled. She looked around, not wanting to put on the skirt and tunic again. She spied a robe hung on a peg by the door. She padded over to it and lifted it down. It was much too large for her, but she didn't care.

She dropped the towel and slid the garment on. It was huge and it smelled of Radnor—musky and slightly spicy. She wrapped the robe around herself and belted it tight. Shoving back the sleeves, she lifted the hem and headed to the bedroom.

Radnor rose from his seat at the table when she entered. "Where is Sednar?" His sharp gaze went to the door behind her.

"He left. Took the other exit." She gestured back to the bathing chamber.

Radnor's eyes narrowed. "What happened?" His muscles flexed and his hand went to the hilt of his sword, which was propped next to the table beside him.

Roxanne shrugged, not wanting to get into the whole thing. She didn't know how she felt about what had happened. She'd been frightened when Sednar's hands had fisted at his sides. She'd lived with an angry man for too long to mistake the signs. Sednar had been angry. But he'd noticed her fear immediately and his entire demeanor had changed. He'd distanced himself from her, leaving her feeling slightly bereft, which didn't make any sense at all. She was so confused. "We had a slight disagreement about something."

That was another reason she didn't dare stay. She'd had sex with both these men, but did she truly *know* them? She'd thought she'd known Michael before she married him, but he'd been putting on an act. If she stayed here and her opportunity to return home was lost, there was no way she could save herself. Here in this world, their word was law.

And she couldn't discount the warning and the mutterings she'd heard today from the people who lived here. As much as she wanted to, they played on her mind and her fears.

*But you slept with them*, a voice in the back of her head reminded her. She trusted them on some deep level to have done that. There was no denying the connection she felt to both men. That in itself was confusing enough.

Radnor tugged out the chair next to him, pulling her from her musings. "No matter. He will be back. Sit and eat."

Keeping a grip on the hem of the robe, she sat. "I hope you don't mind I borrowed your robe."

He took his seat and shook his head. His golden eyes twinkled as they grazed the deep vee where the sides of the robe had parted slightly, showing a glimpse of cleavage. "It looks much better on you than it ever did on me. Feel free to borrow it anytime."

*Anytime*. The word seemed to imply that she would be here to borrow it. But she was going home. Late tomorrow night if they were to be believed.

Her stomach growled, pulling her back to the here and now. Her plate was piled high with succulent fruit, thick wheat bread and slabs of delicate cheese. Radnor had been busy. "Thank you." She motioned to the plate and began to eat.

"My pleasure," he rumbled. He touched her arm gently before turning to his own plate.

Roxanne tried not to think about Sednar, about what he'd said, but it was impossible to put it out of her mind. Radnor was silent as they both ate their fill. When she couldn't eat another bite, she shoved back her plate. "I'm done."

He sat back and nodded. "You did better than I'd hoped."

She laughed. "I'm glad you didn't expect me to eat all of it."

"I expect nothing of you, Roxanne, other than what you wish to give me." His tone was serious and her smile faded. He was talking about much more than just food and they both knew it.

He stood and held out his hand. "Come. It is time for bed."

Radnor had no idea where Sednar had gone. He assumed their disagreement was over her staying or going. His brother lacked patience sometimes but in this case, Radnor understood. This was too important to them, to their future, not to try to advance their cause.

Talking obviously hadn't worked and he wasn't much of a diplomat in any case. He left that chore to his brother. He was a man of action. It was time to pull the ties between them even tighter. He'd do that in the only way he knew how – in bed.

Women might be scarce in Javara but all young men were taught the best ways to pleasure one. It was something every father took pride on teaching his sons. Even his own father, as cruel and violent as he'd been, had taught all of them. After all, the goal was to get a wife in order to get heirs for the land. That might have been his father's goal. All Radnor wanted was Roxanne.

Roxanne took his hand, the sleeve of his robe bunching around their fingers. She was so much smaller than he, but there was a strength in her that drew him. She might not see herself that way, but he knew that in order to not only survive the abuse she had, but also to escape, she had to be strong.

He wanted to sweep her into his arms and carry her down onto the mattress. He didn't. He walked slowly, allowing her to set the pace. It wasn't easy. His body, indeed his soul, was crying out for him to claim her in the most basic way possible. To put his mark on her so that she would never forget him.

He closed his eyes and sucked in a breath. The thought of never seeing her again was almost too much to bear. How would he survive being cast back into the darkness after tasting such heaven?

Her fingers slid along his palm. She might as well have stroked them over his cock. He was hard as steel and more than ready. But she wasn't. She deserved to be wooed. He wasn't a gentle lover but, for her, he would try.

They stopped by the edge of the bed. The shutters on the windows were closed against the cool night breeze. The only illumination came from the fire crackling in the hearth and the two tapers on the table. Still, it was more than enough for Radnor to see her by.

The ends of her black hair were damp from her bath. Her skin was rosy and smelled fresh and clean. Roxanne's gray eyes were smoky and soft. Her lips parted on a sigh as he slid his hands inside the opening of the robe. The fabric parted and he slipped it over her shoulders. It pooled at her waist, caught by the belt.

Her breasts were high and firm, beckoning him to touch them. He lifted his hands and cupped them, stroking his thumbs gently over her nipples. They puckered and she sucked in a breath.

"You're so beautiful," he told her. Radnor glanced at her face. There was a hunger in her eyes that spoke to him, lured him closer to her.

He reached for the belt and tugged the ends free. The robe slithered to the floor. Forgotten. Radnor lost his breath. He'd seen her naked before, but she never failed to make his heart pound and his cock throb.

He reached between his legs and adjusted himself. It didn't help. There just wasn't enough room in his pants for him to be comfortable. She looked down at the large bulge and her lips curved up in a seductive smile.

"That doesn't look comfortable."

He shook his head. "It's not."

Roxanne sidled closer, her fingers plucking at the ties to his pants. It was ecstasy. It was torture. Her fingers brushed his hard length as she struggled to free him. His balls ached for release. He could have completed the task much more quickly himself. Yet, he didn't move, allowing Roxanne to do with him as she would.

He watched her, etching every second into his memory. He still had no idea if she would stay or go when the tapestry came for her. He hoped she would stay, but he was realistic enough to admit that she would probably leave. She'd shown no signs she planned to do otherwise.

Resolve hardened deep within him. He would pleasure her so much tonight, she would have to consider staying. He grunted when the laces came apart and his cock sprang free from his pants. She captured his shaft in her soft hands, stroking from root to tip and back again.

His hips jerked toward her, encouraging her to touch him as she would. For several long minutes, he gave himself over to the sensual torture. Her fingers alternated between skating lightly over his cock to squeezing it tight. When she cupped his balls and rolled them gently, he thought he'd spill himself in her hands.

Radnor pulled away, scooped Roxanne into his arms and laid her in the center of his large bed. She looked so right lying there, as though she belonged. Her hair looked even darker, her eyes more mysterious and her skin glowed in the faint firelight. Her legs were slightly parted, allowing him a glimpse of her slick, pink folds.

He stripped his pants and boots off, tossing them aside. Then he removed his wrist and armbands, setting them onto the table beside the bed. He wanted nothing between them.

"Tell me you want this," he commanded.

Roxanne swallowed, the muscles in her throat rippling. He waited, hard and hurting, by the bed. This had to be her choice. She nodded and her lips parted on the words he longed to hear. "I want this."

Roxanne found it difficult to breathe as Radnor placed one knee on the bed and climbed in beside her. He was so large he blocked most of the light. She closed her eyes as the mattress depressed slightly, remembering the feel of his hard cock in her hands. Like velvet over steel, his erection pulsed with life. Thick veins laced his shaft, pumping blood there to keep him erect. It was both frightening and beautiful to behold.

Not that she thought he'd hurt her. Even fully aroused, he'd waited until she'd agreed. *But what if she hadn't agreed*, that pesky voice tormented. Would he have taken her anyway?

*No.* Deep in her heart, she didn't think he would. All she'd have to do is say the word and he'd stop. Michael would never have given her wants or needs a second thought. He'd always taken what he wanted, never caring about her.

Strong hands cupped her face. "Roxanne? What worries you so?"

She opened her eyes to see Radnor peering down on her, his expression one of concern. For her. "Nothing. Everything." She was so confused about all the events of the past few days. Confused about her growing feelings for both Radnor and Sednar. How was that even possible? Yet, she'd seen examples of this kind of arrangement at work here at Craddock Keep and everyone involved seemed satisfied with it.

Radnor rolled on top of her, resting his weight on his knees and forearms. His cock brushed against her stomach like a hot brand. Lowering his head, he brushed his nose against hers. His long hair fell around them, a curtain closing out the rest of the world.

He placed soft kisses on her forehead, her cheek, her nose and chin. There was no rush, no sense of urgency about him. He made her feel...cherished. That's the only word she could think of.

He kissed his way down the line of her jaw and over to her ear. "Let me touch you." The seductive whisper pushed the last of her doubts away.

She lifted her head, capturing his lips with hers, kissing him with every ounce of the volatile emotions churning within her. His tongue surged into her mouth, tasting and stroking every part of it until Roxanne could barely breathe. When he pulled away, they were both panting.

Then he smiled at her. It was a smile of promise, of passion.

Radnor kissed her again, this time more slowly, making a thorough job of it. He made it seem as though he'd be content to simply kiss her all night long, in spite of the hard press of his cock. She'd never been kissed like this before. He teased and tasted and savored her for long minutes.

She broke first, no longer satisfied with mere kisses. Her pussy ached and throbbed a primal rhythm, demanding to be filled. Her breasts felt swollen, the tips brushing against the hard planes of his chest with each breath she took.

Roxanne wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer. She arched her hips upward, rubbing her swollen pussy against his shaft. Her moan and his groan entwined as he pulled away and stared at her.

His eyes were a blaze of golden fire as he leaned down to lick her collarbone. She writhed beneath him, wanting him closer. He was kneeling over her like some great beast ready to devour her whole. She couldn't wait.

He growled low in his chest as he captured one puckered nipple between his lips and sucked. Heat washed over her. Through her. Her pussy pulsed harder.

Radnor shifted his attention to her other breast, licking and sucking before teasing the tip with his teeth. Her lungs heaved. She tried to catch her breath. Her body was damp with perspiration. He kissed a trail down her torso, pausing at her bellybutton to dip his tongue inside the small indentation. He nipped at her hipbones. She cried out his name.

The sound seemed to enflame him as he shoved her legs apart and settled between them, her thighs resting on his shoulders. She felt his hot breath on her swollen lips a moment before he stroked his tongue over her labia. Up one side and down the other. Her hips jerked up to meet his mouth. A low whimper escaped her.

She licked her lips and gasped. "More."

Radnor inserted two thick fingers into the opening of her channel. "Your cunt is so hot and tight."

She twisted her hips, trying to make his fingers go deeper. She couldn't talk. Could only feel.

He worked his fingers into her tight sheath, stretching her, touching all the sensitive spots inside her. His lips captured her clit and he lapped at the swollen bud with his tongue.

The world spun away from her. Roxanne felt her orgasm swamp her. She cried out, her hips pumping. Radnor kept working his fingers in and out of her channel, sucking and lapping at her clit. Cream coated his fingers. When the hot shivers coasting through her body finally subsided, Roxanne sank deep into the mattress, her heart pounding like a drum.

Radnor propped himself up between her thighs and smiled at her. His lips were damp with her cream. As she watched, he stuck his fingers in his mouth and licked her essence from them.

A sound off to the right startled her. Her gaze flew to a dark corner just inside the door. A shadow detached from the wall and Sednar walked toward them. She had no idea when he'd arrived, had been too caught up with what Radnor was doing to her to even notice.

Sednar was naked and fully aroused. Radnor watched her, a combination of lust and need blazing in his eyes. She knew what they wanted. She wanted it too. She patted the mattress next to her. Sednar sauntered over to the bed, his eyes never leaving her as he knelt next to her. She had no idea exactly what was coming next. But whatever it was, she wanted it.

Sednar thought his balls might burst as he'd watched Roxanne come. Hidden in the shadows, he'd stroked his swollen cock, letting her every moan and sigh seep into his skin. He'd felt a twinge of jealousy that it was Radnor who'd brought her to orgasm, who'd tasted her sweet cream.

He must have made a sound because Roxanne's eyes had flown to him. He'd stepped from the darkness and wanted to howl with pleasure when she'd patted the mattress, inviting him to join them.

He knelt on the bed, glancing at his brother as he settled next to Roxanne. Radnor nodded and Sednar relaxed. They both wanted the same thing—for Roxanne to stay with them. Right now, their only goal was to bring her as much erotic pleasure as possible.

Roxanne circled his cock with her hand and stroked his hard length. He gritted his teeth. He was so primed and ready it wouldn't take much for him to come. Not that he'd stop her. Never that. He wanted to feel every stroke of her soft hand.

What he really wanted was to bury his cock into her sweet cunt while Radnor took her from behind. But it was too soon to even suggest something like that. Roxanne was still new to the idea of sleeping with two men. Better to go slow and easy, to get her used to the idea. He shoved aside the thought that she might not be here long enough for that.

She was here now. That was all that mattered.

Sednar cupped the back of her head, threading his fingers through her silky locks. "I want to feel your mouth on me." He inched closer to her, being careful not to crowd her.

She licked her lips and Sednar swallowed a groan as his balls tightened. She had such a sweet mouth and tongue. He longed to watch his cock disappear into her mouth, to feel her tongue stroking him.

Radnor covered her breasts with his hands, kneading the perfect white mounds. Roxanne moaned, her hips rotating slightly. "I want to fuck you," he growled.

Her eyes widened as she looked at Radnor. He continued to tease her nipples, tugging gently on them with his thumbs and forefingers.

"I want to fuck you while you suck Sednar's cock." Radnor released her breasts and slid his hands down her torso and between her legs, spreading them wide.

Both men waited. This very special woman held their fate in her hands.

Roxanne's brain was whirling with the erotic images the brothers' words evoked. She could easily imagine taking Sednar's hard length into her mouth while Radnor buried his cock in her heated passage.

Every inch of her skin was sensitive. She felt alive and daring. She could do this. Why not? It was acceptable in this world. They were all adults. Roxanne wanted to store up every memory, every moment of her time with these men. She feared she'd never feel the same way about any man back on her own world. She frowned at the thought.

Radnor stroked her pussy with the tip of his cock, probing softly at her entrance. Thought fled, replaced by need. Right or wrong, she wanted this. Had to have it. These brothers had healed her wounded soul and she longed to give back to them in some way.

She opened her legs wider to encourage Radnor as she tugged gently on Sednar's cock to get him to move closer.

Sednar supported her head and neck as he guided his shaft toward her mouth. She licked a pearly bead of fluid from the tip, letting her tongue trace the slit. Sednar groaned, his fingers tightening in her hair.

Feeling totally in control, she twirled her tongue around his cock head as if it were a lollipop. She sucked it into her mouth and then slowly released it, making a wet, slurping sound as she did.

Sednar gave a strangled laugh. "Tease." The way he said the word and the way he looked at her told her he didn't mind in the least.

Smiling, she opened her mouth and took him as deep as she could, running her tongue over the prominent veins on his shaft.

She moaned as Radnor stroked his fingers over her clit. A second later, he slid into her snug channel, stretching her with the width of his cock. She squirmed as he held himself still inside her, allowing her inner muscles to relax around him.

The vibration of her moan caused Sednar to groan as the sensation shot through his shaft. She realized then that they were all connected when they were like this, one feeding off the pleasure of the other. It felt amazing and somehow right.

Radnor began to move between her thighs, pulling his cock almost all the way out before driving deep again. He lifted her hips, wrapping his fingers around her waist as he fucked her, alternating long, deep strokes with short, hard ones.

Sednar thrust his hips forward. She wrapped her hand around the base of his cock to keep control over how far he went. She loved the salty, musky taste of him as she sucked his shaft into her mouth. She lapped at the underside with her tongue. Occasionally, she teased the bulbous tip before taking him deep again.

The scent of sex permeated the air around them. The bed frame shifted, the headboard hitting the wall as Radnor's thrusts became hard and fast. Short strokes that pushed her to the edge and then over it when he caressed her clit with his thumb.

Her pussy tightened around Radnor's cock as she came. He continued to pump his hips as he came too, filling her with his seed.

The sounds of her cries vibrated around Sednar's cock. She felt the ripple of his shaft as he came in her mouth. She swallowed, trying not to choke. Sednar eased back before she panicked, making it easier for her. She lapped at his cock, giving it one final caress before releasing him. He lowered her head back to the bed.

She groaned when Radnor eased from between her thighs. Although he'd come, he didn't feel any smaller as he withdrew. She felt totally wasted, utterly complete and surprisingly content.

Radnor rolled out of bed and padded toward the bathing chamber. Roxanne admired the flex of his buttocks as he moved. He could make a fortune as a model in her world. His back muscles were perfectly sculpted, narrowing as they ran from his shoulders to his waist.

The more time she spent here, the less strange it seemed to have both brothers in bed with her. A trickle of fluid ran down her thigh and she stopped breathing. They hadn't used protection. Her entire body stiffened. What if she got pregnant? This wasn't a dream. This was reality. She'd had unprotected sex several times. If she did get pregnant, she wouldn't even know whose baby it was.



"Are you all right?" Sednar leaned over her, concern on his face.

Was she all right? She wasn't sure. Radnor returned at that moment, washcloth in hand. With no warning, he dipped it between her legs, cleaning away the remnants of both their orgasms. She was too stunned to be embarrassed. After all, they'd seen every part of her several times now. It seemed stupid to feel shy now. He tossed the cloth aside and then lifted her, tucking her under the covers before climbing in beside her.

Sednar slipped under the covers to join them. He hadn't forgotten his question and prompted her again. "Roxanne?"

"I'm fine." She kept her gaze averted. Both men were much too observant for her liking. What would she do if she were pregnant? The thought of holding a brown-haired, brown-eyed baby in her arms filled her with longing. She wouldn't mind a child at all. Maybe a boy who'd grow up to be as big and strong as his father. Maybe a girl with golden brown eyes.

How could she deprive the child of its father? Maybe she wasn't pregnant. Her thoughts were a whirlwind, each one more confusing than the last. What should she do? Should she mention her concerns?

No, there was no point. Both brothers had made it abundantly clear that they wanted her to stay. Whatever choice she made was up to her.

Exhaustion made her yawn. Radnor threw his arm around her and leaned close. "Don't worry so much. Everything will be fine."

That was easy for him to say. He wasn't the one faced with the almost impossible choice. What had been a clear-cut decision only yesterday morning was now a dilemma. Go or stay? She fell asleep to the argument raging in her mind.

\* \* \* \* \*

Michael sat in the corner of the great room and observed the drunken melee taking place in the center. Shouts and curses rang out as flesh met flesh. The Luther brothers were lethal bastards. He was lucky he had something they wanted – Roxanne.

He lifted the tankard of sour ale to his mouth and sipped the bitter brew. He wondered what the faithless bitch was doing at this very moment. Was she spreading her legs for some other man?

His fingers tightened around the cup in his hand. His knuckles turned white and he forced himself to relax his grip. It didn't matter what she did. She was his. He'd simply punish her for any infractions when he got her back.

The Luther brothers were a font of information. They had spies everywhere. One had returned earlier this evening with word that a woman fitting Roxanne's description was at Craddock Keep. The Luthers seemed to have an ax to grind with these Craddocks, which was good for Michael. He hoped they all killed one another. As long as he got his hands around his sweet wife's neck, he didn't care.

The biggest problem facing him was how he was going to get back to his own time. He still couldn't quite believe he was in another time and place, but there was no

denying the obvious. Roxanne had been responsible for bringing him here. She'd damn well get him home too.

Satisfied, he leaned against the wall and closed his eyes, shutting out the brutal sounds of the fight beyond. With a smile on his face, he daydreamed about the reunion with his faithless wife. He couldn't wait.

## Chapter Twelve

The next morning, Roxanne was no further ahead in making her decision than she'd been the night before. She'd awakened alone, which surprised her. Both men had held her wrapped in their embrace all night. The strange thing was that she hadn't felt smothered by it, but rather protected and cherished.

The sun streaming through the window told her that the morning was well underway. It was strange not to be watching a clock all the time or worried about a schedule. The days here followed a natural rhythm that was quite soothing.

A low knock sounded on the door. Roxanne tugged the covers tight beneath her arms before answering. She didn't think either Sednar or Radnor would knock. "Come in."

An older woman bustled in, carrying a tray in her hands. Darrina. This was the woman who'd tended her when she first arrived.

"Morning, my lady." The older woman gave her a slight curtsy before placing the tray on the table.

"Good morning, Darrina. Is it very late?" Roxanne noticed the robe placed at the end of the bed and silently thanked whichever brother put it there. Grabbing it, she slipped it on before sliding out of bed. When she had the robe belted tight, she headed to the table.

"The morning is almost gone." Darrina hesitated as if she were about to say something. She firmed her lips and held her tongue.

Roxanne was curious as she glanced at the tray of food the woman had brought. Her stomach growled, reminding her she hadn't eaten much yesterday. "Was there something you wanted to say to me?" Roxanne was getting tired of the innuendoes and dark glances.

Darrina squared her shoulders and spoke in a low whisper. "You should leave here, my lady. The Craddock brothers are a cruel lot. Four of them, all older, are dead, rot their souls."

Roxanne was taken aback by the venom in her tone. "Sednar and Radnor have been cruel to you?"

The older woman began to reply, then stopped. "Their brother, Leon, was a demon. He took what he wanted, not caring who he hurt. They raided and murdered. Planned to give their sister to the Luther brothers." Darrina shivered and wrung her hands together. "They're the vilest creatures ever born. Hamid, Bren and Lednar were no different than Leon."

Roxanne was worried about the older woman, she was so pale. She pulled out a chair. "Sit, please."

Darrina appeared startled. She glanced at the partially open door before perching on the edge of the chair, ready to bolt at a moment's notice.

"What happened to their sister?" She couldn't imagine Sednar or Radnor being cruel to their sister. But, then again, she couldn't have imagined Michael beating her either. Not at first.

"She ran away."

"By herself?" That seemed dangerous in this wild world.

Darrina's lips firmed. "Radnor helped her."

Roxanne nodded encouragingly and the older woman continued. "She's married now to one of the younger Bakra brothers. They're good to her. Not like it was here. Leon worked her like a slave, he did."

Her earlier hunger fled. "What about Sednar and Radnor?" She needed to know.

The older woman shrugged. "They mostly ignored her."

"I see." But she didn't. Not really. Why hadn't they helped their sister?

"It wasn't safe to gainsay Leon about anything," Darrina continued. "He'd beat anyone, even his own brothers."

Roxanne swallowed hard. The brothers had grown up in an atmosphere of violence. That kind of situation bred even further violence more often than not. "What about now? What about since the older brothers died?"

Darrina frowned. "They built the land and the keep back up. It was in poor shape before, I can tell you. Things are more prosperous now."

Roxanne felt her ire rising as she continued her questions. "Then why do all of you seem to fear them so much?"

"Because they're Craddocks. The evil is in them somewhere just waiting to come out."

She crossed her arms over her chest, getting angrier by the second. "So, they haven't done anything in the past six years but build up the keep and tend to the lands."

Darrina hesitated briefly before nodding. "Aye."

"Then what you're saying makes no sense. Truly evil people could not contain themselves for that long. You'd have seen evidence of cruelty by now."

The older lady pushed back from the table. "I'm just warning you is all. It's your choice. I only know what I've seen. I've lived here my entire life. It's not safe for any woman in this family. They say that their father killed their mother. Of course, no one can prove anything." On that note, Darrina left the room, obviously still agitated, closing the door softly behind her.

Roxanne sank down into the chair Darrina had abandoned, her mind sorting through everything she'd learned. She had to ask them about it. She bit her lower lip. What if it made them angry?

No, she had to trust them to tell her everything. Before the tapestry came back late tonight or early tomorrow morning, she had to know the truth.

Roxanne had just finished washing and dressing when a sharp rap came on the door and Sednar walked in before she could answer. "Would you like to go for a ride?"

"Yes, I would." It would do them all good to have the upcoming discussion in private. "Is Radnor coming?"

Sednar inclined his head. "He's saddling the horses." He held the door wide as she swept past him.

"You should know that I've never ridden before."

"Never?" She could hear the incredulity in his voice.

He sounded so appalled, she laughed. "It's not quite that easy where I come from. I take the bus." She glanced over her shoulder and saw him frowning. "Do you know what a bus is?"

"I do. I've heard stories from the other tapestry brides." His palm was warm on her spine as he guided her down the stairs and out of the keep. "I can't say I like much of what I hear about your world."

"It has its good points, just like any place does." His frown deepened. She wondered what he was thinking but there was no time to ask. Radnor waited in the courtyard seated on a huge horse, the reins of another held in his strong, capable hands.

"Come, Roxanne. It's a beautiful day and the world awaits." Radnor held out his hand. She went to him, eyeing the large black beast he was seated upon. The creature seemed well behaved. For now. She'd never realized just how large horses were before, had never had the opportunity to get so close to them before coming here. And this one was bigger than most.

She chewed on her bottom lip. "I've never ridden before."

He reached down and lifted her, settling her in front of him. Once again, she was shocked by his casual show of strength. It took no effort at all to lift her off the ground. His chest was bare, as he wore his usual leather vest wide open, and his muscles rippled. The heat of his skin warmed her as she leaned into him. His brawny arms came around her, enclosing her in his protective embrace.

Sednar swung up onto the other horse and they were off. She gasped when the horse began to move.

"Relax and move with the animal," Radnor instructed.

She released the breath she was holding and did as he said. It was incredible to feel such muscle and power beneath her. She almost giggled. She could say the same thing about Radnor.

They passed through the courtyard and the outer area. She wasn't quite certain what it was called but it was surrounded by a low stone wall. People stared at them as they went. Some nodded in greeting. Others frowned.

She breathed a sigh of relief when they reached the open fields beyond. Tension slid away from her as the rocking of the horse soothed her.

Radnor caught her chin in his hand and tipped her face up. He lowered his head slowly. "Good morning, Roxanne." He kissed her then. A leisurely caress that was an end unto itself. There was no pressure, just sheer enjoyment. When he finally lifted his head, she blinked up at him, her mind nothing but mush.

She gathered her wits and glanced around. "Where are we going?"

"There's a lake not far from here. It's a beautiful place."

She'd seen the lake in the distance and had longed to see it up close. "Sounds wonderful."

"It is." Sednar continued to expound on the virtues of the land. Roxanne knew it was part of his ploy to try to convince her to stay.

Meanwhile, Radnor was quiet, keeping her safe in his arms as the horses and riders passed the fields and entered the woods, following an obviously well-traveled trail. It was darker here, the sun barely able to penetrate the canopy of trees. The air was tinged with the smell of earth and pine. Birds chirped and flew overhead. Small animals scurried beneath the brush.

She was nervous at first. She was a city girl and had never been exposed to this much nature before. But when neither man showed any sign of concern, she relaxed and began to enjoy it.

It really was another world here. It was amazing how crisp everything looked, how sound carried through the air. She could hear the babble of a brook off to the left. Looking up, she stared up through the green canopy to the blue sky above. Puffy white clouds dotted the skyline. No smog here.

She wanted to ask them about their family, but this wasn't the time to do so. There was something almost sacred, spiritual about the woods that made her want to keep silent. A sense of peace, of total calm enveloped her. Had she ever felt this way before?

She didn't think so.

"Almost there." Radnor's voice was low as he guided the horse through an opening in the trees and into an open field. Tall grasses swayed in the breeze. A bevy of wildflowers released their perfume. And beyond was a lake, its dark surface rippling slightly.

"It's incredible." She didn't try to hide the wonder she was feeling.

The horses walked across the field, stopping at the water's edge. Radnor tightened his arms around her. "Craddock land ends just on the other side of the lake." He pointed off to the left. "Bakra land is that way."

"What's off to the right?"

His grip tightened almost imperceptibly. "That's Luther land. You don't want to go there." Radnor's voice was hard, his words clipped.

Roxanne remembered what Darrina had told her about the Luther brothers and shivered. Radnor slid from his horse. "Easy, Xander," he crooned as the horse shied slightly. She gasped and clutched the pommel of the saddle but there was no need. Radnor quickly swept her from the horse and set her safely on the ground.

Sednar came up behind them, a blanket and a satchel in hand. "I thought you might like to sit by the water and have something to eat."

She eyed him suspiciously. "Were you talking to Darrina?"

"Of course." He didn't even try to hide the fact that he was checking up on her. "She said you didn't eat much when you woke."

She couldn't really be mad at Sednar. He was simply concerned about her well-being. She took the blanket from him and shook it out, spreading it near the edge of the water. Sitting cross-legged, she took in the beauty around her.

Both men removed their swords, keeping them at hand as they sat, one on either side of her. It was only then she noticed the weapons. How she missed two four-foot swords was beyond her. It was probably because she'd gotten so used to seeing both men with them constantly. They strapped them on the moment they woke in the morning and laid them by the side of the bed each night. Their weapons were such a part of them, she didn't think they even noticed them.

"Why are you always armed?"

Sednar plucked a long piece of grass and chewed on the end. "There are wild animals and enemies to worry about."

"Even in your own home?" She noticed they were never unarmed, not even in their own keep.

"Especially there." There was a contemptuous edge to Radnor's words that made her turn toward him.

"Why?" It was now or never. "Tell me about your older brothers."

Neither man seemed surprised by her question. "What have you been told?" Sednar asked.

"Nothing good, I'd wager. We Craddocks are not exactly the most popular family." The mocking tone in Radnor's voice made her heart ache.

She pulled her knees to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. "I've heard dark warnings and mutterings about your eldest brother especially. And your sister," she added.

Radnor snorted. "I'm not surprised. Leon Craddock was the vilest creature ever born. If you don't count our sire."

Sednar gave a bark of laughter but there wasn't an ounce of humor in it. She could feel the brothers' pain. It was a living and palpable thing. "Craddocks take what they

want. They steal and fight and cheat to get it. Isn't that right?" Sednar turned his gaze to Radnor who picked up the tale.

"If you don't, you're seen as weak. And the weak are beaten, ridiculed and abused. Might was right in Leon's world. Two of my brothers tried to steal a woman from another family. They were killed. That only made Leon worse. He hated the Bakra brothers with a passion."

Now she was totally confused. "But isn't your sister married to one of them?"

Sednar nodded. "Leon had promised her to the Luther brothers and went to get her back from the Bakras. He failed." There was obviously a lot more to the story than that, but Sednar had already moved on. "There are four Bakra brothers so they have two brides."

Roxanne nodded as she sorted through the facts they'd told her. "Okay, I follow that. What happened then?"

Radnor sighed. "It doesn't matter. Our family has a history of such things. That wasn't the first time one of our older siblings tried to steal a woman from another family."

She knew this wasn't a pleasant or easy thing for them to talk about, but she had to have answers to her questions. "What about your sister?"

"Genita grew up to be a fine woman in spite of the rest of us. Leon treated her no better than a slave. When he threatened to give her to the Luther brothers as a bride, she objected. He beat her." The lack of emotion in Radnor's voice was chilling.

"What happened?" Roxanne kept her voice low and soothing.

"We could never help her." Roxanne could sense Sednar's pain. "If we showed her any attention or tried to intervene, Leon would only beat her worse. I'd try to deflect his attention with humor."

"What about you?" she asked Radnor, knowing in her heart he wouldn't stand there and do nothing while his sister was being beaten. It wasn't in him.

Radnor rubbed his hand over his face. His eyes were bleak. "If I was lucky, I could deflect Leon's attention my way."

Roxanne stilled as the implication of his words sank in. "You mean you took the beating for her."

"Not often enough." There was disdain in his tone. She knew he remembered every time that he hadn't been able to prevent his sister from being harmed. Radnor shook his head. "I helped her escape. Gave her some provisions and got her out of the keep." He turned to Roxanne. "I sent my only sister off by herself with no protection. What kind of a man does that make me?"

"One who had to make a difficult choice." Unable to hold back any longer, Roxanne reached out and placed her hand on Radnor's arm. The muscle beneath was like iron. "You were the youngest brother. If what I've learned over the past few days is true,



then Leon's word was law. He would have killed you if he'd discovered what you'd done."

"It wasn't enough." Radnor shook off her hold and walked a few feet away, staring out over the water.

"What happened to Leon?" she asked Sednar.

"Leon was killed during a challenge fight. Hamid was wounded when he tried to interfere. It was just another dishonorable act in a long line of them."

"You and Radnor chose not to continue in your brothers' footsteps. The keep is prosperous, the people well cared for."

"For all the good it does." Radnor turned on his heel and stalked back to the edge of the blanket. He practically threw himself to the ground and stared out at the water, brooding. "They have long memories. But I really can't blame them. Not one family living here hasn't suffered because of a Craddock."

"But not you," she informed him. "Or you." She gestured to Sednar.

"It doesn't matter." The resignation in Sednar's voice hurt her to the depths of her soul. "They may never accept that we're different from our brothers. In this world, sometimes your family name is all you have. And there are times you'd be better off without it."

The fact that they hadn't taken up where their brothers left off was astounding. Roxanne had done some research and plenty of reading on domestic violence after escaping Michael. It was often passed down through families. Sons learned from their fathers. It took strength of character and conviction to break that cycle. That was what Sednar and Radnor had done.

*Or at least, that was their story,* the voice in the back of her head warned. She shoved aside her misgivings. Radnor and Sednar were good men. She'd never have allowed them to touch her so intimately if she didn't trust them on a deep level.

She started to speak but was cut off when Sednar placed his hand over her mouth and pulled her close. "Shh," he whispered in her ear. Radnor grabbed his sword and rolled to his feet. The blade cut through the air with a whistle as he held it in front of him. Sednar unsheathed his sword, slowly getting to his feet.

"Stand between the horses, Roxanne." She immediately responded to the command in Radnor's voice. Something was obviously wrong. She looked around but saw nothing out of the ordinary as she hurried to stand between the two horses. Suddenly, she was very glad they were both massive beasts. Their bulk protected her.

"Is it an animal?" she asked, envisioning bears and dragons and other wild beasts. She truly had no idea what kind of creature might be lurking in the forest. Her knees were shaking and she wrapped her arms around her waist to comfort herself. Neither man even glanced her way, their gazes locked on the woods beyond. She heard it then, the sound of crashing in the brush.

Three horses burst from between the trees. Two of them bore large brutal-looking men with bushy black beards and long hair. The men wielded long, sharp swords as they approached in a threatening manner.

But it was the man on the third horse that made every ounce of blood drain from her face. Her body trembled. "No," she whispered. "This can't be happening." She blinked but the man didn't change. She'd recognized those cold blue eyes and that nasty smirk anywhere.

"Roxanne?" Sednar's voice reached her as though from far away. She wanted to answer him but couldn't find her voice. Nor could she tear her gaze away from the specter from her nightmares.

The strangers were bearing down on them. Radnor stepped in front of her, blocking her view. She reached out and grabbed the side of Xander's saddle as her knees almost gave away beneath her. Sweat beaded on her forehead and she wiped it away with the back of her hand.

"Halt!" Radnor's authoritative voice rang out across the clearing.

"You're not welcome on Craddock land, Luthers," Sednar added, his tone hard and cold. "What do you want?"

Roxanne shifted so she could see around Radnor, needing to confirm her worst fears. Sure enough, the man tipped his blond head down and smiled at her. A shiver of fear raced down her spine.

"Hello, Roxanne." Her ex-husband sat back and calmly faced Sednar and Radnor. "You have something that belongs to me. I've come for my wife."

## **Chapter Thirteen**

Fear left a bitter taste in Radnor's mouth. Not fear for himself, but for Roxanne. He stared at the large man seated calmly on the horse next to the Luther brothers. There was an arrogance, a cruelty about him that reminded Radnor of Leon. This was the man who'd abused Roxanne.

He studied his opponent, noting the cocky look in his eye. This was not a man used to losing. There was a sly tilt to his mouth as he smiled at Roxanne. He was enjoying terrifying her.

The man was dead. He just didn't know it yet. No matter what else happened, Radnor promised himself he'd kill this man. How he was in Javara was a mystery. Perhaps the tapestry had brought him here to face Radnor so he could free Roxanne from her ex-husband's tyranny.

It didn't matter if Roxanne stayed in Javara or went home, he wanted her safe. He loved her enough to set her free if that was her choice. Resolved, he stepped forward. "Roxanne is no longer yours."

Sednar stepped up next to him. "Get off our land."

Shoulder to shoulder they faced their enemies. The Luthers needed to die for all the crimes they perpetrated on a daily basis. They were too much like Leon, killing and stealing, beating down those weaker than themselves, rarely facing men as equals.

Agmar Luther, the elder of the two, leaned back in his saddle and grinned. "As soon as we get what we came for, boy." He spat on the ground in Sednar's direction. "In Javara, a woman belongs with her husband and his brothers." His smile grew wider. "And we've just adopted Michael Talbot as our brother."

Roxanne moaned behind him. Radnor didn't dare turn to comfort her. He needed to keep his eyes and his attention focused on the men in front of them. He felt her presence, smelled the perfume of her skin as she stepped up beside him. Radnor swept out his arm to keep her from standing in front of him.

She reached down and gripped his forearm. He could feel her hands quivering. Still, there was no sound of fear in her voice when she spoke. "We're divorced, Michael. You no longer have any claim on me, legally or otherwise."

"Now, babe. You know that's not true. You're mine until I say you're not mine. No judge or piece of paper is gonna change that. I told you that back in California." He spread his arms wide. "I came all this way to get you. That should tell you something."

"Yes, that you're an obsessive maniac."

The corners of Michael's mouth tightened. "You'll pay for that." Radnor could tell the man was struggling for control. Good. That was a weakness that could be exploited. "After our reunion, I plan to let my *brothers* take a turn with you."

Agmar laughed. "We lost one woman promised to us by the Craddocks. It's only fitting they should provide us with another."

"I'm not going anywhere with you, Michael." She scowled at the Luther brothers. "And you two are pigs."

"I like a woman with spirit," the younger Luther brother quipped. "More satisfying when you finally break her."

"Surely you don't expect those two to save you." Michael sneered as he pointed at Radnor and Sednar. "They're Craddocks. They'll save themselves first."

Roxanne's trembling deepened and Radnor pushed her behind him. "Enough. Fight or leave."

Radnor gave a sharp whistle and Xander charged forward with Sednar's mount beside him. Not pausing, Radnor gripped the pommel with his free hand and swung himself in the saddle. "Run, Roxanne," he yelled as he pounded toward Agmar Luther. Sednar would take the younger brother.

Agmar roared as he charged forward. Both horses reared. Xander's heavily shod hooves came down hard. He had size and weight on the other horse. Plus, he was like his master. Losing was not an option. Keeping control of his horse with his thighs, Radnor brought his sword down in a sweeping arc. Agmar ducked at the last moment and avoided getting decapitated.

His opponent's sword shot out and Radnor threw himself to one side to avoid getting gutted. He pulled himself back up on top of Xander and wheeled around to face Agmar. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Roxanne running across the field with Michael in pursuit. He wanted to break and run but couldn't with Agmar pounding at him with his sword. Radnor prayed that Michael wouldn't kill Roxanne before he could save her.

Roxanne's heart was hammering so hard it was an actual physical pain in her chest. When Radnor had told her to run, she'd run. There was nothing she could do to help them there. In fact, she was probably a liability, taking their attention away from the men they had to fight.

*The Luthers.* She shivered, sweat coating her body and seeping into her eyes as her feet flew across the grass. Seemed that, even here, Michael could find other men as vicious as himself.

The tranquil scene of moments before rang with the sound of whinnying horses, cursing men and the crash of deadly steel. Those swords weren't just for decoration. She risked a glance over her shoulder and was momentarily dazzled by the display of physical prowess between horses and men as Sednar and Radnor attacked.

She blinked and would have screamed if she'd had the breath. Michael was heading toward her, his horse getting closer and closer with each passing second. The woods. They were her only hope. Maybe she could hide. There was no doubt in her mind that Radnor and Sednar would come for her.

She couldn't even contemplate the possibility that they wouldn't win the battle. A vision of the two of them lying in the dirt, their bodies cut open and bleeding, their eyes lifeless took her breath away. She shoved aside her panic and forced herself to keep moving. They would be fine. They had to be.

She loved them.

Fine time to admit that to herself. What a fool she'd been, ready to toss aside true love because she was afraid of what the future might hold. Who knew what was in the future? Bitterness filled her. She might not even live long enough to have a future. Not if Michael had his way.

And what did she have to go back to anyway? A job that really didn't fulfill her. No real friends. A small apartment and some things.

A new sense of determination filled her. She would survive this. She'd survived her marriage with Michael and he would not destroy her now. She wouldn't let him. And when this was over, she was going to have her say to the two brothers. If they still wanted her to stay, she'd make her choice.

But first, she had to stay alive.

Sednar blinked the sweat out of his eyes as he battled with the younger Luther. Ivan was a master fighter, but like his brother, he had a quick temper and no patience. That made him careless. Sednar thrust his sword downward. Ivan caught it with the edge of his. Sparks flew as the blades skated against one another. Sednar drew back and attacked again.

He'd had years of practice with his older brothers. And unlike most, many of his so-called training sessions had been a matter of life or death. Leon or any one of the rest of them would have killed him, or at least maimed him, if given half the chance. Only Radnor had been different.

The three youngest—him, Radnor and Genita—had somehow escaped the curse of the Craddock family. Maybe their older siblings had taken all the meanness. The gods only knew that they'd had more than their share. The Luthers were no different.

Sednar saw a flash of color and watched helplessly as Roxanne fled across the field with Michael in pursuit. In fact, the bastard was taunting her. Giving a roar, Sednar doubled his efforts, driving hard. The horse moved with him, an extension of his body. He silently thanked Radnor. The man knew how to train horses and there were none better on Javara than the ones they were on.

Dust flew, mingling in the air with the sharp crash of steel and the mutter of curses. Finally, Ivan made a mistake. Losing patience, the younger Luther struck out,

committing himself totally to a killing strike, giving himself no room to pull back or maneuver.

Sednar twisted aside and ducked to avoid the blow. He brought his right arm up, slamming it as hard as he could toward Ivan. His blade found flesh and bone. Steel slashed through the younger Luther's body, coming out the other side. The other man's eyes widened in surprise and he gasped, not quite able to believe what was happening. Only the strength of Sednar's arm and the strong steel of his sword were holding Ivan upright.

Sednar yanked his sword out and watched, dispassionately, as his opponent slumped to one side and slid from his horse. Using his knees, Sednar whirled his horse around in time to see Xander leaping at Agmar. Like an avenging god, Radnor held his sword with both hands and plunged it into his opponent's neck. Blood flew, spattering horse and rider.

Radnor didn't even wait to see Agmar fall. He wheeled his horse around and headed after Roxanne. Sednar shivered at the bloodlust in his brother's eye. Michael Talbot had better run if he wanted to live.

Falling in beside each other, the two brothers guided their mounts across the field. Hooves pounding, stirring up dirt and grass with every step, they plunged into the forest.

Roxanne weaved in and out of the trees, jumping over downed logs and thick roots. Behind her Michael swore. As far as she knew, he hadn't ridden a horse before arriving in Javara. She used that to her advantage. She paused by a large boulder, leaning against it as she sucked air into her starving lungs. Her arms were covered in shallow cuts and dotted with blood from the slaps of the branches of the trees she'd shoved her way through. The undergrowth was getting thicker, but that was in her favor.

"Don't make me have to come get you, bitch. Come here and it will go easier for you." Michael was working himself into a rage. She recognized all the signs.

A loud crash came from the left. Michael swore. The huge horse he was riding plunged over a four-foot bush. Michael was hanging on for dear life, his face bloody from the slashes of branches.

Good. He might be on horseback, but he wasn't having any easier a time of it than she was. Roxanne studied the area around her and went right. A shout rose behind her and she knew he'd seen her. She needed a place to hide. She couldn't keep running forever.

Roxanne lost all sense of time and direction as she ran. Her only thought was to stay ahead of Michael and remain alive. She didn't dare think about Radnor and Sednar. She could only pray they were safe. They were both deadly with a sword. She'd watched them practice briefly. Even when they were only sparring, there was a sense of lethal intent about them that had made her shiver. Now it reassured her.

The woods thinned and she stumbled into a small glade. She glanced both ways before racing forward. She needed to find shelter and that way led to the base of the mountain. Maybe she could find a cave or someplace she could hide until Michael either gave up or got lost.

She ignored the fact that she was totally lost as well. Radnor and Sednar would come for her. The pounding of hooves got stronger as she tripped on a rock and fell. She put out her hands to catch herself but didn't quite make it. Palms skidding, she landed facedown on the ground.

She dug her fingers into the ground and pushed herself up.

"I've got you now."

Roxanne jerked her head around, appalled to see Michael only a few yards away. She dug her toes into the ground and scrambled up. Like a drunk, she staggered but kept going. The edge of the woods was only a few yards away. If she could make it, she could lose him again.

The horse bumped her shoulder, spinning her around and sending her crashing to the ground. Her muscles were like jelly. She didn't have enough strength left to keep herself upright. The dirt rushed up to meet her.

A jolting pain shot down her arm and leg. Her hip ached. Ignoring it, she pushed herself into a sitting position. She needed to get up. She needed to run.

Michael dismounted from his horse and strode toward her, an expression of triumph on his face. "You didn't really think you could get away from me, did you?" His tone was the one he used just before he beat her. He talked to her in that condescending voice she hated, as if she were a wayward child who'd done something wrong and needed to be punished.

"Stay away from me." She tried to stand, but her legs would no longer cooperate. Not to be defeated, she started to crawl. Her hand closed around a rock. She gripped it tight. It was a weapon. She'd use it to bash his head in if she had to.

It had come down to this. Him or her. Only one of them was leaving this clearing alive.

Michael was reaching for the buckle on his belt. "You know you brought this on yourself. You have no one else to blame."

She'd heard that excuse, that justification a hundred times before. She tightened her hold on the rock and glared at him as she rolled up onto her knees. Her muscles quivered, but held. "I blame you, you weak sonofabitch."

His icy blue eyes narrowed. "I see you've forgotten how to speak to me." His tone grew softer, almost caressing. "I can remedy that. If not me, then certainly the Luther brothers can. Once they kill your lovers, they'll find us and take us back to their castle. Once I'm done with you, they can have you." He pulled the leather of his belt through the loops of his jeans. It made a heavy swishing sound that she often heard in her nightmares.

Her stomach roiled and threatened to revolt. She swallowed hard, barely managing to keep down the meager amount she'd eaten earlier today. "What then? You're stuck here." She pushed herself to her knees and then to her feet. She swayed but didn't fall.

Michael shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. If what I've heard is true, that godforsaken tapestry has to appear. Since it brought me here, it can take me back."

She shook her head, not truly surprised. Her ex was nothing if not single-minded. Everything had to go his way, in his worldview. He moved closer. Taking his time now. Almost taunting her with his nearness.

"I've been waiting to do this for a long time, Roxy. I barely got started in L.A. but I'm going to finish it now. I can do what I want to you here with no consequences." He doubled the leather in his hand. "You'll simply end up another missing person on the back of a milk carton. And there'll be not one shred of evidence to connect me."

She tightened her grip on the rock and waited. She locked the muscles in her legs to keep from crumpling to the ground. Dirt and perspiration covered her body and clothing. Exhaustion swamped her, but she wouldn't give up.

She had too much to live for.

He raised his belt.

A battle cry ripped through the air. Two huge black horses crashed through the woods and into the clearing. Sednar and Radnor rode like demons. One with their horses, they were like two of the horsemen of the apocalypse as they closed the distance between themselves and Michael. Each held a sword high above his head. They were no longer gleaming but stained with the blood of their enemies.

Michael swore and made a grab for her. She'd been expecting it. She threw the rock at him, clipping him in the temple. He reeled back, blood dripping down his face. She experienced a brief moment of triumph, but he recovered quickly and lunged in her direction. She dropped to the ground, rolling as fast as she could away from him.

As if in slow motion, she could see the heavily shod hooves of the horses tearing up the ground. Their flanks covered in sweat, the muscles rippling beneath their silky black coats, their manes flying in the breeze.

Sednar and Radnor both wore masks of death and destruction. Both were peppered with blood. Theirs or their enemies, she didn't know. As a unit, they split, one going to the left of Michael, the other to the right.

Michael suddenly seemed to realize just how much peril he was in. These weren't men he could bargain with or manipulate. They were warriors and they were out for blood. His.

It unfolded like something from an action movie. Only it was terrifyingly real. Michael turned and ran. Neither Radnor nor Sednar slowed their horses. They both leaned inward, Michael in their sights.

Roxanne couldn't speak, couldn't breathe. Two heavy swords swung at the same time, one going high, the other low. Thick blades cut through skin and bone. Blood flew



like water droplets in a rainstorm. Michael cried out, but the scream was short-lived as his head separated from his body and dropped to the ground. It rolled, landing a few yards from her. Sightless blue eyes stared up from the dirt.

She rolled away from the gruesome sight and vomited.

A male voice swore and a heavy hand dropped on her shoulder. Roxanne cringed, not wanting them to see her like this. The hand fell away. She used her palm to wipe her mouth. Taking a deep breath, she turned around, being careful to keep her gaze away from the bloody remains of her dead ex-husband.

As cruel as he was, she still felt sorry for him, even though he'd brought this on himself. He'd had a new start after getting out of prison but had chosen the path of destruction instead.

Radnor stood several feet away, his sword lowered by his side. His clothing, chest, arms and face were spattered with blood. His eyes were blank and emotionless. This was her fault. They'd been forced to kill for her.

She swallowed hard, unable to look away. Sednar crouched down in front of her, blocking her view of Radnor. He was covered in blood as well. His eyes weren't blank, but bleak. She could see the pain in them and shivered. This wouldn't have happened if she'd never come here.

They'd killed to keep her, to protect her. Their dark fate as Craddocks had been fulfilled because of her. She feared that's how everyone would see it.

Her visions of having a life here crumbled before her very eyes. They wouldn't want her now. Not after this. Everything Radnor and Sednar had struggled to build these past six years was now tainted by the blood of the three men they'd been forced to kill.

"Roxanne." Sednar's tone was low and even as he cupped her chin in his hand. "Can you stand?"

She licked her lips, hating the sour taste in her mouth. "I'm not sure."

Radnor swore. Her gaze flew to his as he sheathed his sword in one smooth motion and strode toward her. Shouldering Sednar aside, he leaned down and scooped her off the ground.

Tears pricked her eyes as a sense of safety enveloped her. But it wasn't real. She couldn't count on it. Not any longer. Not after what had just happened. What would the people of their keep think? She'd brought death and destruction to their door once again.

A thought occurred to her. "You won't get in trouble over this, will you?" She had visions of some kind of court proceedings. Maybe they'd lose their land. She huddled closer to Radnor as he swung up on the back of Xander.

"It is not your concern." Radnor's clipped words were like a slap in the face. It wasn't her business because she wasn't going to be here. The message was loud and clear.

Feeling more miserable than she had in her entire life, Roxanne endured the long, silent ride back to Craddock Keep.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

Hours later, Radnor paced the hall outside his room, a killing rage still upon him. The Luther brothers and Michael Talbot had ruined everything. If they were still alive, he'd kill them again on that premise alone. The look of horror in Roxanne's eyes, the way she'd cringed away from his touch and thrown up in the field, haunted him.

He wasn't sorry he'd killed the bastard. If any man had needed killing, it was Talbot. He only wished Roxanne hadn't had to witness it. He and Sednar had fought side-by-side so many times, they hadn't even had to think about what to do, had simply reacted. When they'd seen Roxanne's ex-husband about to hit her, there had been no hesitation. That the other man had run instead of fighting was his choice. He'd died as he lived – as a coward.

Radnor wouldn't lose a moment's sleep over it. He'd done what needed to be done. What any warrior worthy of the name would have. He'd protected his woman.

Only she wasn't his. Not any longer. Maybe she'd never been his. Maybe they'd never had a chance at her staying. His tainted Craddock blood ran too thick in his veins. Even she, who was from another world, could see it, feel it.

He looked down at his hands. They were clean now, as was the rest of him. But the stains of battle remained, hidden deep, a permanent marker on his soul.

He glanced toward the door. Roxanne was sleeping, had been for several hours. He curled his hands into fists at his sides. She'd been exhausted to the point of sickness. Michael had run her into the ground. Still, she hadn't given up. She'd faced him with nothing more than a rock in her hand.

Radnor unclenched his fist and rubbed his palm across his sternum. His head jerked up as Darrina left the room. She left the door partially open. He moved close enough to peer in. Roxanne was covered in thick furs, sound asleep, her chest rising and falling slowly. Sleep was the best healer.

"She is well, all things considered." Darrina hefted a bucket with medical supplies in her arms. "I cleaned her up and tended to all her cuts and bruises."

"Thank you, Darrina." Radnor didn't spare the older woman a glance, his gaze locked on the woman sleeping in his bed.

He sensed the older woman's hesitation and reluctantly pulled his eyes from Roxanne. "Was there something else?"

She shook her head and started to leave, but stopped. "Will she stay?"

There was no longer any doubt in Radnor's mind as to the answer to that question. "No. Not after this afternoon. She'd been through too much, seen too much bloodshed. This place holds nothing but bad memories for her."

The older woman frowned. "It holds much the same for you and Lord Sednar, yet you've managed to make a life here."

Radnor straightened, giving Darrina his full attention. This was the first time anyone here had ever acknowledged that he and his brother were trying to overcome their past and make a fresh start.

Darrina's hands tightened around the bucket she was holding. "Maybe it's not my place to say anything, but the lady got me to thinking about things." She shifted the weight in her arms to her other side. "Anyway, perhaps she'd be able to make a new beginning too. If you'd ask her."

Having said her piece, Darrina hurried down the hall, her footsteps ringing on the stairs.

"Do you think she's right?"

Radnor turned to his brother who came up behind him. "You heard everything?"

Sednar nodded.

"What do you think?"

Sednar hesitated and his shoulders slumped. He walked to the door and eased it open. "I think there are too many memories for her here. Too many of them bad. She can go back to her world with no fear and start again."

Walking to his brother's side, Radnor stared at the woman who'd stolen his heart. He pushed the door open. His feet made no sound as he went to the bedside and stared down at her. She was so precious to him. She was everything he'd ever wanted, ever dreamed of having. He'd had her, if only for a few short days.

"We have to give her up. We have to let her go."

Sednar came up beside him, his voice a frantic whisper. "We can't. We love her. At least, I do."

Radnor knew in his heart that his brother was wrong. "It's because we love her that we have to." He knew the pain his brother felt. It was a tearing at his gut that would never go away. "We had her for a short time. She showed us how good life could be. What happiness is. How can we ask her to stay here with our hands stained in so much blood? She's already been through so much violence. You saw how she cringed from my touch at first. It was only when she couldn't stand, she let me touch her. There was no other way for her to get home."

"There has to be something we can do." Desperation tinged Sednar's words.

Shaking his head, Radnor turned his back on Roxanne. "Can you ask her to stay here in a strange, violent land, in a keep where the people fear the lords and violence is everywhere? I can't." He stiffened his resolve. "I won't. Not when she can go back to her own world and be safe. She can begin a new life and this will fade to nothing but a bad dream." He strode from the room, unable to stay any longer.

Sednar watched his brother leave, his heart heavy. He leaned down and gently caressed Roxanne's pale cheek. "I love you. Radnor does too." Sighing, he straightened.

"He's right. It would be selfish of us to ask you to stay after everything. I'm glad we killed those bastards though. You will have nothing to fear when you return home. That will at least give me some comfort."

He turned on his heel and strode from the room, oblivious to the lone tear that rolled down Roxanne's cheek.

The moment the door closed behind Sednar, a sob broke from Roxanne's chest. She ached from head to toe, her body battered and bruised from her desperate race through the forest. But the pain in her heart was the worst.

These men loved her. They'd pleased her, protected her, killed for her. And they were ready to let her go. Not because they didn't want her, but because they did. Had she ever even thought a love could be so selfless? No. She hadn't thought it possible. Thought it to be nothing more than a fairytale perpetrated by romance books and movies.

But it was real. These men were real. Her love for them was real.

The question was, what was she going to do about it?

She rolled over in bed, whimpering as every muscle in her body protested. Her legs were stiff and sore. Her arms were no better. Both had scratches and bruises, but they would heal with time. Would she ever recover if she left here? Would her heart eventually heal?

The shutters were closed in the window, blocking out all light. A fire crackled in the fireplace and soft furs covered her. The scent of Radnor and Sednar rose up from the sheets when she moved, surrounding her in their essence.

Exhaustion took her under before she could make any decisions. She was vaguely aware when two large male bodies climbed into bed beside her. She didn't fully wake but snuggled closer to their warmth. Relaxed and secure, she drifted back to sleep.

Hours later, she woke. Her eyes popped open and she sat up in bed, moving slowly so she didn't jostle either Sednar or Radnor. She was sandwiched between them. Both of them were still wearing their pants and lying on top of the covers. Neither of them was touching her.

There was a low hum in the air, almost electric. Roxanne squirmed out from between the covers, careful not to disturb either one of them, and inched her way to the end of the bed before climbing off. She cocked her ear to one side. It was coming from outside. She felt compelled to follow it. Only problem was, she was totally naked.

Her bubblegum pink uniform lay across the back of one of the chairs. Her underwear was there too, but she ignored it. There was no way she could manage to pull a bra and panties on. Not with how stiff and sore she was.

She scooped up the dress and tugged it on, biting her bottom lip to keep from moaning as every muscle protested. It was amazing how strange the synthetic fabric felt

against her skin after only a few days. She zipped the front of the dress shut and headed for the door.

Opening it a crack, she peered into the hallway. All was quiet. She eased out of the room, closing the door behind her. The chill from the stone floor seeped into the bottoms of her feet. She wished she'd pulled on the leather boots Radnor had given her but that would have meant bending over. There was no way she could accomplish that without a lot of pain. She didn't bother to go back, but kept on walking.

The compulsion grew as she mounted a narrow set of stairs to the upper tower. At the top was a lone door. Placing both hands on the wood, she pushed. It creaked as it opened. She stepped inside. The room was barren, the window uncovered. The breeze was cool as it raced through the room, stirring dust.

Roxanne padded to the window and stared out. The land was so vast and dark. There were no streetlights, cars or electrical lines. A low moo of a cow reached her ears, followed quickly by the yip of a dog. She definitely wasn't in Los Angeles anymore.

She liked it here. The pace of life was slower. People really knew their neighbors. They took pride in their work. They could see how what they did made a difference to the whole. And, of course, Sednar and Radnor were here.

A light blazed behind her. She swiveled around and her breath caught. The tapestry hovered about five feet in the air, a bright light surrounding it. The colors shimmered like a chest full of jewels touched by the sun. "You really are magic."

The image on the tapestry was the one she remembered—the vibrant green forest, where she'd run for her life, the clear, blue lake where she, Radnor and Sednar had talked, the fertile land she'd walked with both men. But more importantly, were the two men standing tall and proud in front of the familiar stone castle. They seemed almost alive as they watched her, as if trying desperately to influence her decision.

As she watched, the image on the tapestry began to fade and another one began to take its place. As though the tapestry couldn't quite decide, it morphed through people and places, never settling on one.

*Decide.*

The word shimmered in her brain. Not spoken aloud, but understood.

Roxanne knew without a doubt that when she made up her mind, the image on the tapestry would change for good. She would never see it again after tonight.

*Go or stay.*

Primitive world versus modern conveniences. There was no chocolate or television. No tampons. There was violence and hardship here.

*There was also love.*

*Go or stay.*

A sense of urgency filled her. If she didn't make a choice the tapestry would make it for her.

She stared at the magical piece of fabric that had changed her life, entranced by the vivid colors swirling through it. "You know my decision."

The wind swept around her like a soft sigh. The light around the tapestry grew brighter and brighter, blinding her. Roxanne threw the back of her arm over her eyes. It didn't help. The light grew, enveloping her.

There was a huge whoosh.

As quickly as the light appeared, it was gone.

Radnor jerked up in bed, already rolling to the side and grabbing his sword from the floor. Across from him, Sednar did the same. They both looked back to the bed at the same moment. Roxanne was gone.

"Nooo," Sednar moaned. He dropped his sword to the floor and fell to his knees, grabbing his head in his hands.

Radnor's legs shook, his head screaming a denial. Roxanne was gone. He sat on the edge of the bed and placed his hand in the center of the mattress. It was still warm. A lone tear rolled down his cheek and landed on the sheet where she'd lain. He propped his sword next to him and raked his hands through his hair, tugging until his scalp ached.

"We should have asked her, begged her to stay." Sednar dug his palms into his eyes and took a deep breath.

"We couldn't." Even to his own ears, Radnor thought his voice sounded hollow. Empty. Just like the rest of him.

His brother stared at him, anguish in his gaze. "We should have given her a reason to stay."

Radnor's gut twisted. Maybe his brother was right, but it was too late now. "She made her decision." He swiped at his eyes with the back of his hand as he pushed himself off the bed and walked to the table. Picking up the jug of ale that sat there, he poured some into two mugs, ignoring the fact that his hand trembled, sending a good amount of it spattering across the table.

Too late.

The words echoed in his brain, tormenting him.

Too late.

What if they'd talked with Roxanne, pleaded with her to stay? Would she have taken pity on them and done so?

Too late.

Halfway across the room, he stopped in his tracks and flung the two mugs of ale into the fire. The flame in the hearth burst high into the air and the wood mugs bounced off the stone hearth, shattering into several pieces. Radnor fell to his knees and let out a roar of anguish that rattled the shutters.

His heart was breaking.

He felt Sednar's arms come around him and grabbed his brother, holding him tight. They would get through this like they had every other tragedy and hardship in their life – together.

They clung to one another as they had when they were children. But they were men now. They would survive, but they would never be the same again. How was it possible to function without a heart, Radnor wondered?

The door to his room pushed open. Anger flared like a wildfire out of control. It was bad enough to lose Roxanne. Who would dare to intrude during a time of such grief?

He opened his mouth to roar at whoever had defiled the sanctity of his chamber and almost swallowed his tongue when a flash of pink slipped into the room. He blinked, certain he was hallucinating. Roxanne stood there, her hands clasped at her waist, looking uncertain. She was wearing that unusual dress she had arrived in. It hit her mid-thigh, leaving the rest of her legs bare.

He scowled when he saw she wasn't wearing any boots. Her feet were probably cold and the rest of her chilled. He wanted to speak but was afraid to. Was she leaving now? Was that why she was here?

Sednar shoved away from him and staggered to his feet. "Roxanne?" He held out his hand. She closed the door behind her but made no motion to come any closer.

Radnor pushed off the floor and rose to stand next to his brother. He tried not to notice the soft curve of her cheek, or the way her hair framed her beautiful face. He desperately tried to ignore the way her breasts pushed against the fabric of her ridiculously short dress, outlining her nipples. She wasn't wearing a bra. Did that mean she wasn't wearing any underwear?

Where he'd felt dead only moments before, he now felt totally alive. His body sprang to life, reminding him he was a man and she was a delectable woman.

He held out his hand to her. "Come here."

Roxanne shivered with more than just cold as she stared at Radnor's outstretched hand. Both he and Sednar were pale, as though they'd seen a ghost. They'd awakened to find her gone. They'd thought she'd left.

She hadn't. She'd stayed and now there was no going back. She was suddenly very nervous. Sednar took a step closer to her. The look of hope crossing his face was almost too painful to watch.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "The tapestry came."

Both men stilled. She could feel it. The tension in the room grew as she opened her eyes. Radnor slowly lowered his hand back to his side.

"Then why are you here?" She almost smiled at Radnor's clipped words. She was starting to know him much better. The more worried he was about something, the shorter his temper got. She no longer feared his anger. It would never be directed at her,



not in a physical manner. They might disagree about things, but she would never have to worry about him hitting her.

"Because I couldn't leave."

Sednar frowned and his expression grew bleak. "That's not the way it works. The tapestry is supposed to take you if you want to go home."

Radnor swore and raked his fingers through his hair. "I don't understand."

She realized they'd totally misunderstood what she meant. She took a deep breath and plunged onward. There was no turning back now. She'd sent her only ride home on its way. "It didn't take me home because I am home."

Both men stared at her as if they couldn't believe what she was telling them. She licked her dry lips as nerves made her stomach flutter. "It was my choice to stay."

Instead of coming to her and taking her into their arms, they both turned from her and strode to either side of the bed and picked up their swords. She took a step back, her spine hitting the wooden door behind her. They both wore identical expressions of determination as they paused in front of her.

They both went down on one knee before her. Hefting their swords in their hands, they laid them across their palms, bowed their heads and offered them to her. It was a ritual of sorts. Intrigued now, she waited.

Sednar raised his eyes to her. "You are the heart that beats in this chest and in this home and if you would take me for husband I will give you my love, loyalty and devotion for as long as I live. With me, you gain the love, loyalty and devotion of my brother as well, who will be lover to you, and would also be your husband should I die before you. In return, I ask for your love, loyalty and devotion and any children that the gods see fit to gift us with."

Before she could answer, Radnor laid his sword on the floor at her feet and placed his palm against his heart. "You are the heart that beats in this chest and in this home and if you would take me for husband I will give you my love, loyalty and devotion for as long as I live. With me, you gain the love, loyalty and devotion of my brother as well, who will be lover to you, and would also be your husband should I die before you. In return, I ask for your love, loyalty and devotion and any children that the gods see fit to gift us with."

Roxanne was overwhelmed by the solemnity of the moment. Her eyes filled with tears and she desperately tried to blink them back. One escaped and rolled down her cheek.

Radnor reached out his hand and caught her tear on his thumb. He brought it to his mouth and licked it off. "Don't cry, Roxanne."

She was torn. "How can I choose between the two of you? I don't want either of you to feel left out or unwanted."

Sednar rose and cupped her chin in his free hand. "There will be no change with us. We will all share one bed if that is your wish." He glanced at his brother.

Radnor rose and nodded. "Whatever makes you happy, Roxanne."

"But," Sednar continued, "you must pick one of us. That is the law. The children must be formally recognized by a father and you must have the protection of a husband. It is a legal arrangement but it means nothing behind closed doors."

Her love for both men grew. She had enough love to share. It was strange that she loved both of them, yet her feelings for each of them were slightly different. One of them needed her more than the other. Needed that binding, that joining together in a formal ceremony, to feel complete. And so, she realized, did she.

She smiled at Sednar and turned her face into his palm, kissing it. Radnor started to back away but she reached out and caught his hand in hers, tugging him closer. When he was standing in front of her, she smiled up at him. "Yes."

"Yes." His expression was dazed.

Sednar slapped his brother on the back and began to laugh. He grabbed Roxanne into his arms and kissed her. She barely had time to acknowledge the kiss when she was torn from Sednar's arms.

Radnor pulled her into his embrace and held her so tight she could barely breathe. She hugged him back just as tight. He raised his head and studied her face. "Yes."

She nodded. "Yes."

A slow smile crossed his face as he swept her into his arms and over to the bed. "Now we celebrate."

## Chapter Fifteen

Radnor held tight to the treasure in his arms, savoring the feel of her weight against his body, her hand pressed against his chest. He didn't want to release Roxanne. It wasn't easy, but he forced himself to set her gently on the bed. She hadn't left. Hadn't returned to her world. She'd chosen to stay here, with them. With him.

He was to be her husband. He glanced at Sednar to see how he was taking the news. His brother smiled at him, looking pleased and happy. That would never change. Radnor pledged then and there. He would make certain his brother never felt left out of their union. Roxanne had more than enough love to give them both.

Sednar's love was real, but his needs were simpler than Radnor's were. His brother would be happy to have Roxanne with them, in their bed. Radnor knew he needed her bound to him by law in order to subdue the demons that sometimes swirled deep within him. Roxanne quieted them, soothed them in a way he couldn't truly explain.

He'd gone from the deepest depths of despair to absolute happiness in such a short span of time his emotions were all over the place. The one thing he did know was that Roxanne would never regret her choice. He'd make it his life's work to ensure that never happened.

"Let's get this off you." He reached down and pulled at the fastener of her dress. It parted, revealing pale, bare skin. "I was right," he growled. "You aren't wearing any underwear." He combed his fingers through the thatch of dark curls that covered her mound. They were soft and springy.

Her gasp turned to a moan as he used his finger to part her slick folds. He found her clit and teased the hard nub. Roxanne moved her hips against his hand. Radnor smiled. She was really here.

Sednar slid one arm beneath her shoulders. "Sit up for a second," he urged. Roxanne struggled to help Sednar slip the dress down her arms. Radnor removed his hand long enough to grab the garment and pull it the rest of the way off. He would have torn it from her body, but she might want to keep it. She hadn't arrived here with much. It was part of her past and he wanted to honor it.

Naked, she lay on the bed, legs parted, arms out. "I want both of you this time." There was no mistaking her meaning.

Sednar jumped out of bed and hurried toward the bathing chamber.

"What's wrong?" Radnor could hear the concern in her voice and hastened to reassure her.

"He's going to get something to help make things easier and more pleasurable when we both claim you."

"Oh." Her eyes widened and she swallowed hard.

He leaned down and kissed her. "Only pleasure. I promise."

The corners of her mouth turned up. "I trust you."

Radnor closed his eyes, savoring that trust. She hadn't told them she loved them, but she had to feel something for them, something deep. Even after seeing the more brutal sides of their nature, after seeing them with blood on their hands, she'd given up her home for them. Love would come in time.

He heard Sednar returning and rolled off the bed long enough to undo his pants and pull them off. His cock bobbed forward, heavy and full. He glanced toward his brother. Totally naked now, Sednar must have stripped while he was in the bathing chamber.

Roxanne gave a low hum of pleasure as they both approached her. She licked her lips. He wanted that tongue on his body. He knelt beside her and covered her mouth with his. Her fingers tunneled through his hair, holding there. He could have told her there was no need. There was nowhere else he'd rather be.

He made slow forays into her sweet mouth, teasing her tongue, tasting her essence. Sweet. She always tasted sweet. She gasped and jerked beneath him. He swallowed the sound and knew that Sednar had gone to work pleasuring her. Not to be outdone, he ended the kiss.

Sure enough, Sednar was currently feasting on her sweet breasts, his tongue flicking one delectable nipple while his fingers teased the other.

Radnor kissed the curve of her neck simply because it was there and he had to. He tugged on her earlobe with his teeth and traced the delicate whorl of her ear with this tongue.

A low moan was his reward.

His cock was throbbing relentlessly now. Every inch of it ached to sink into her hot depths. And he would. But first he had to make certain she was ready to take them both.

He worked his way down her body, licking and tasting—the plump curve of her breast, the dip of her waist, the indentation of her bellybutton. Then he was between her thighs. They were long and lean and slightly bruised from her fall.

He raised his head. "Are you sure, Roxanne? You're bruised and injured." It would probably kill him to stop, but he'd do it.

Sednar raised his head, eyes filled with concern. "I didn't think."

"I'm not that bruised." She glared at both of them. "Don't even think about stopping."

Radnor couldn't help smiling. "My lady's wish is my command."

She snorted, which made him laugh. She had no idea just how much power she wielded, but he figured she'd eventually learn. She had years to discover it.

He shouldered her legs farther apart and used his thumbs to part the slick folds of her pussy. She was always wet and ready for him. It was such a gift. He leaned down and blew on her damp flesh. Then he licked her.

Roxanne's hips came off the mattress when Radnor licked a path from her anus to her clit. Her breasts heaved as she took a breath. Sednar sucked one rosy nipple into his mouth. His nimble fingers tugged on her other nipple, leaving it a hard, aching nub.

She was burning up as if she had a fever. And maybe she did. These men had stolen her heart and marked her as theirs. Forever.

"More," she gasped. She'd never felt this free before. Free to ask for what she wanted.

"My pleasure." Radnor licked his lips before lapping at the swollen bud of nerves at the apex of her pussy. He leisurely pushed two thick fingers into her sheath and opened them, preparing her for his thick cock.

Her eyes almost rolled back in her head at the thought of the pleasure to come. Radnor pulled his fingers back to the edge of her opening and then completely away. She frowned and undulated her hips, wanting more of his touch.

He moved his hand lower and stroked over the puckered opening of her bottom. His finger was slick with her cream. He rimmed her before carefully pushing past the thick muscles. She shrieked as the tip of his finger entered her. She couldn't help it. No one had ever touched her there before.

His gaze flew to hers and he removed his finger. "Stop?"

She shook her head. It didn't hurt. Not yet. It just felt oddly embarrassing.

"Use this." Sednar tossed a container of something to his brother.

As Radnor opened it, she could smell the herbs. He dipped two fingers inside. When he pulled them away they were covered in a thick jelly-like substance. "What is it?"

He pressed his finger back against her ass and pushed, this time sliding deeper. The muscles in her bottom clenched and she forced herself to relax. This wouldn't work if she stayed so tense.

"It's something to ease our passage into you. The herbs in the mixture will also relax you." He grinned at you. "Put you more in the mood."

"Make me hornier you mean."

Sednar laughed, leaned down and kissed her. His kiss was much different from Radnor's. More playful, but just as skilled.

As Sednar kissed her, Radnor continued to work his finger into her tight channel. It was difficult, but he persisted until the thick digit was buried as far as it could go. It felt so strange to have one man kissing her, his hand toying with her breasts and nipples, while the other one had his finger up her behind.

Her breathing got harder, faster, when she felt Radnor start to insert a second finger. It was too much. She tilted her head back, huffing out a breath from between her clenched teeth.

Sednar sat beside her and plumped both her breasts in his hands, thumbing her nipples. "Just relax. You can take him," he encouraged.

It hurt, but not enough for her to ask him to stop. A few minutes later, she noticed it didn't feel quite that bad. In fact, it was starting to feel pretty good. Maybe the herbs had finally kicked in. Whatever it was, Roxanne was grateful for it. Her ass got hot and she had the overwhelming urge to move. She pushed her butt toward Radnor.

"That's it, Roxanne." Radnor eased his fingers in and out of her tight chamber. "Almost there."

Sednar left her breasts and kissed his way down her torso, lingering on some of her bruises. She cupped the back of his head, wanting to soothe his worry. It was crazy. She was aroused, cream sliding from her core, and all she wanted was to make Sednar feel better. It had to be love.

He made a growling noise and nipped at her hipbones. His playfulness surprised a laugh from her. He shot her a wicked grin before dipping his head between her legs and licking her clit. He raised his head. "Tasty."

She felt her cheeks grow warm. There was an honest, earthy air about both these men that made this feel natural, even if it was still slightly embarrassing. She might get used to it. Say in twenty years' time. In the meantime, she'd have a heck of a lot of fun.

Radnor worked his fingers out of her ass, leaving her feeling empty. "It's time."

Sednar thought it was a miracle his balls hadn't burst or he hadn't spilled his seed. Roxanne was so naturally sexy. Every breath, every moan, every quiver of her body was as good as a stroke over his cock.

When she'd cupped the back of his head, her fingers sliding through his hair, he'd had to fight back tears, which was why he'd done something playful to make them both laugh. The feel of her lips as she'd kissed him, the taste of her cream as he'd licked her. There was no way to describe how she made him feel.

Roxanne was everything. She was hope for the future. He could easily imagine her belly swollen with child. His cock jerked in agreement, fluid seeping from the slit. He was more than ready to claim her.

He eased down beside her on the mattress and pressed a quick kiss against her lips. "Straddle me." He took no offense when she glanced at Radnor first, waiting for his nod before sitting up.

Radnor helped her turn around and swing her leg over him. The slick folds of her pussy brushed against his shaft. Sednar couldn't hold back the groan of pleasure. "So wet and soft," he muttered. "Put me inside you."

She wrapped her fingers around his cock and he almost came on the spot. He gritted his teeth and thought about the tally for the harvest yields as she rose up on her

knees and guided his cock head to her opening. When the tip sank into her heat he felt a bead of sweat roll down his temple. If he didn't get inside her, it would soon be too late.

He wanted her too badly.

She bit her bottom lip, her face a study in concentration as she eased over his shaft. She looked sexy and utterly adorable. He wanted to smother her in kisses. All he could do was grip the sheets. If he grabbed her hips, he'd yank her down on top of him and she had to do it. It had to be at her pace, not his.

The fabric beneath his fingers ripped as she took the last inch of him into her. "Yesss," he hissed, feeling as though he'd finally come home. He'd had her before, but this was different. This was for forever.

Sednar's cock filled her to bursting. She'd forgotten just how big he was. She squirmed on his chest, trying to get comfortable. The sound of fabric ripping startled her. Then his hands were around her waist, holding her in place. He reared up and buried his face between her breasts. His breathing was choppy and she sensed he was near the end of his control.

She waited, not daring to move. A few deep breaths later, he eased his head back and slowly lowered himself back down on the mattress.

Roxanne could sense Radnor behind her, patiently waiting. His cock was pressed against the base of her spine, pulsing as blood pumped to the area, keeping him hard. "Ready," he whispered in her ear.

She nodded. She wanted this more than anything. Wanted to be able to take them both at once, to prove to them that she wanted them equally.

"I've put some of the salve on my cock. It will help ease my way. Just breathe and try to relax."

Easier said than done.

"Lean forward," Sednar urged. She planted her hands on either side of his shoulders and lowered herself.

She heard Radnor shift behind her, felt the cool breeze on her ass as he parted the globes and probed against the opening with his cock. The tip slid in easily. She took a deep breath, held it for a moment and then released it.

Sednar's cock pulsed deep inside her, filling her sheath to overflowing. Her inner muscles contracted, pulling him deeper.

"Your cunt is so tight and hot." His raw words made her shiver.

"Her ass is even tighter." Radnor's hands wrapped around her hips as he eased himself deeper. "I've never felt anything this fucking good."

She'd never felt anything like this either. Both men were filling her until she was certain there was no more room. Still, Radnor carefully pushed a bit deeper. She gritted her teeth to keep from crying out. It hurt, but in a good way.

Radnor shifted his hands from her hips to her breasts, molding them in his large hands. She could feel the heat of his chest against her back. The two brothers

surrounded her, front and back. They were so strong, so powerful. Yet she had power too.

It was a heady feeling. She purposely squeezed the muscles of her pussy and ass tight. Sednar groaned. Radnor swore.

"I can't wait." Radnor sounded as though he was in pain. He leaned down and nipped at her nape as he began to slowly work his cock in and out of her ass. Only an inch or so, but it was incredible. The combination of the heat from him and the herbal mixture seeped into her flesh, exciting her even further.

Using his hold on her waist, Sednar rocked her over his cock, moving in time with Radnor. Both of them were careful with her. Heat flooded her core. Her skin was covered in a sheen of sweat. Her breasts ached. She shoved them deeper into Radnor's hands and he caught her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers and squeezed.

She was so close.

They rocked a little harder now. Sednar shoved one of his hands between them and found her clit, stroking it with his index finger. They filled her one more time. It was enough. Roxanne splintered into a thousand pieces.

She cried out. Her body quivered, her inner muscles squeezing their cocks. Sednar gave a cry and she felt the flood of his release inside her. Radnor thrust twice more. Then he yelled her name, his fingers closing tight around her breasts as he came.

Unbelievably, she felt another wave of ecstasy wash over her. She came a second time. She couldn't catch her breath. The room dimmed around her and she slumped onto Sednar's chest. He said her name but she couldn't answer. Her body shook and shivered.

Radnor carefully withdrew from her and she couldn't hold back a moan, part pleasure, part pain. She was lifted and Sednar slid from her channel, leaving her empty. But not alone. Strong arms held her. She sighed and allowed them to take care of her.

A damp cloth appeared from out of nowhere. She knew one of them must have gone for it. Radnor. She knew it even as she knew it was Sednar holding her. Even with her eyes closed, she had no problem telling them apart.

The cloth was cool and damp on her swollen pussy and on her behind. Radnor murmured to her as he cleaned her. Soft noises that meant nothing and yet everything. The mattress depressed and she was passed from one set of massive arms into another. She snuggled against Radnor's chest and sighed. It was difficult but she forced herself to open her eyes. There was something important she had to tell them. Something she'd promised herself she would do when she thought she was going to die.

She raised her head and blinked. Radnor's hair was mussed, his face flushed, but he looked completely and utterly relaxed. She'd done that. Roxanne smiled at him before turning to Sednar. The two thin braids he wore kept his hair a little less tangled, but it still looked like he'd spent some time rolling around in bed. She didn't want to contemplate what she looked like.



Not that it mattered. Not with both men looking at her like she was the best thing since sliced bread. Her nipples tingled.

"I love you." She looked from one to the other. "Both of you."

Radnor sucked in a breath. Sednar sat up in bed and cupped her face between his hands. "That is the greatest gift I have ever received. Thank you."

She felt her heart dip slightly when he didn't say the words back. Her smile wobbled but held.

Radnor tugged at her hand until she looked at him. His eyes were golden in the firelight, his gaze fierce. "There has never been another man born who will ever love you as much as I do."

Her heart soared. Beside her, Sednar stirred, using his grip on her to turn her back toward him. "Yes, there has," he protested. "Me." He stroked her damp hair away from her face. "I love you, Roxanne."

The tears came then. Tears of joy, of happiness, of a brighter future. Radnor tugged her back down and cuddled her close to his heart. The heavy thud was reassuring against her ear. Sednar moved in behind her, his arm wrapping around her waist.

She was finally home. Sighing, she relaxed and felt sleep claim her. Tomorrow was the beginning of a brand new life.

## Epilogue

The great room was decorated with colorful banners. Garlands of wildflowers and fragrant herbs hung all around. A huge fire roared in the hearth that was big enough for her to stand upright in when it was cold. The smell of savory meats and spices filled the air along with the voices of the large group gathered there.

Roxanne sat at the large table perched on the dais at the head of the room. The chair she was seated in was the one Arron had been working on the day after she'd first arrived, the one she'd admired. Sednar and Radnor had presented it to her as a wedding gift.

To her right sat her husband. Radnor looked large and impossibly handsome in a heavily embroidered vest, which showed off his chest to perfection. His wrist and armbands glinted in the light as he inclined his head to hear what his sister was saying to him.

Her husband. Just saying it to herself made her want to laugh. It also made several interesting parts of her body tingle.

To her left sat the second husband of her heart. Sednar was just as good-looking in a similarly embroidered vest. As always, he wore his hair with the two thin braids in the front. Today, he also wore a heavy silver torque around his neck, the symbol of his position as elder brother.

He threw back his head and laughed at something Emon, the blacksmith, said to him. It made her feel good to see him so happy. Life had changed her these past weeks. Slowly, but surely, the people of the keep were beginning to treat both brothers differently. The fact that she'd stayed with them and was incredibly happy had been noticed by one and all.

No woman had ever been taken care of the way the Craddock brothers had cared for her while she'd been recovering from her ordeal. She'd done her best to get around the keep, talking to people, asking them about their jobs and families. It surprised her sometimes just how interested she was. In her old life, all she'd wanted was to be alone. But here, she felt a part of something. It was a wonderful feeling.

She still couldn't believe how many people had come to celebrate their wedding. The past few weeks had been a whirlwind of preparation. Genita, who preferred to be called Genny, had arrived several days ago from Bakra castle with her two very large, very fierce warriors in tow. There was no doubting how much Jarmon and his brother Garrik loved her.

And just yesterday the two older Bakra brothers, Zaren and Bador, had arrived with their wife, Jane. Roxanne had immediately liked her. They had much in common, both being tapestry brides. She'd spent several long hours talking to Jane, asking her

myriad questions about life here. She knew both Radnor and Sednar worried from time to time, but she was happy with her choice.

The only thing she'd left behind in her old life was a tiny apartment's worth of used furniture and a handful of clothing. Nothing to truly mourn or regret. Not when she'd gained so much.

As if sensing her attention, Sednar leaned toward her. "Having fun, my sweet?"

Her smile grew bigger. "I am. I can hardly believe this."

"Believe it," came the voice on her right. Radnor caught her hand in his and raised it to his lips. He turned her hand over and pressed his lips against her palm.

"When I brought that dusty tapestry home, I thought it was nothing but a piece of embroidered cloth. Instead, it made my wildest fantasies come true."

"I'll make more of them come true later," Radnor promised before nipping at her fingers. She laughed and tugged her fingers away and turned coyly to Sednar.

"And what about you?"

He grinned. "I've got a few fantasies of my own..."

He let his words trail off, but she could hear the promise in them, the pledge. She leaned over and kissed him before turning to Radnor and doing the same to him. Around them, people cheered.

"I think later just became sooner." With that, Radnor rose from the table and bowed to the crowd. "If you'll excuse us, I think my bride is fatigued from the festivities." His lascivious grin left no doubt what he was planning to do to *help* her rest.

Roxanne laughed as she rose beside him, giving him an elbow in the ribs. He didn't even grunt or move. The man was built out of stone.

Radnor scooped her into his arms and headed toward the stairs. Behind him, she heard solemnly Sednar address the crowd. "I must go check on them. My brother might need some help."

The crowd roared with laughter and began to chant. "Craddock bride! Craddock bride!"

Tears pricked her eyes as Sednar caught up to them on the stairs. "Are you all right, love?" Radnor asked.

"I'm better than fine," she assured them. "I love you both. You've made me so happy."

"It's only just begun," Sednar promised her as he held open the door to their room. They all entered and he shut the door, closing out the rest of the world and leaving them alone together.

## About the Author

N.J. Walters worked at a bookstore for several years and one day had the idea that she would like to quit her job, sell everything she owned, leave her hometown and write romance novels in a place where no one knew her. And she did. Two years later, she went back to the same bookstore and settled in for another seven years.

Although she was still fairly young, that was when the mid-life crisis set in. Happily married to the love of her life, with his encouragement (more like, "For God's sake, quit the job and just write!") she gave notice at her job on a Friday morning. On Sunday afternoon, she received a tentative acceptance for her first erotic romance novel, *Annabelle Lee*, and life would never be the same.

N.J. has always been a voracious reader of romance novels, and now she spends her days writing novels of her own. Vampires, dragons, time-travelers, seductive handymen and next-door neighbors with smoldering good looks all vie for her attention. And she doesn't mind a bit. It's a tough life, but someone's got to live it.

N.J. welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

### *Tell Us What You Think*

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at [Comments@EllorasCave.com](mailto:Comments@EllorasCave.com).

**Also by N.J. Walters**

Amethyst Dreams

Amethyst Moon

Anastasia's Style

Awakening Desires: Capturing Carly

Awakening Desires: Craving Candy

Awakening Desires: Erin's Fancy

Awakening Desires: Jackson's Jewel

Awakening Desires: Katie's Art of Seduction

Beyond Shadows

Dalakis Passion 1: Harker's Journey

Dalakis Passion 2: Lucian's Delight

Dalakis Passion 3: Stefan's Salvation

Dalakis Passion 4: Eternal Brothers

Dalakis Passion 5: Endless Chase

Drakon's Treasure

Ellora's Cavemen: Dreams of the Oasis IV *anthology*

Ellora's Cavemen: Jewels of the Nile IV *anthology*

Ellora's Cavemen: Legendary Tails IV *anthology*

Ellora's Cavemen: Seasons of Seduction III *anthology*

Jessamyn's Christmas Gift

Project Alpha 1: Embracing Silence

Project Alpha 2: Have Mercy

Project Alpha 3: Sweet Charity

Summersville Secrets 1: Annabelle Lee

Summersville Secrets 2: Heat Wave

Summersville Secrets 3: Lily Blossoms

Tapestries 1: Christina's Tapestry

Tapestries 2: Bakra Bride

Tapestries 3: Woven Dreams

Tapestries 4: Threads of Destiny

Tempting Tori

Three Swords, One Heart  
Unmasking Kelly



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com) for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

[www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com)