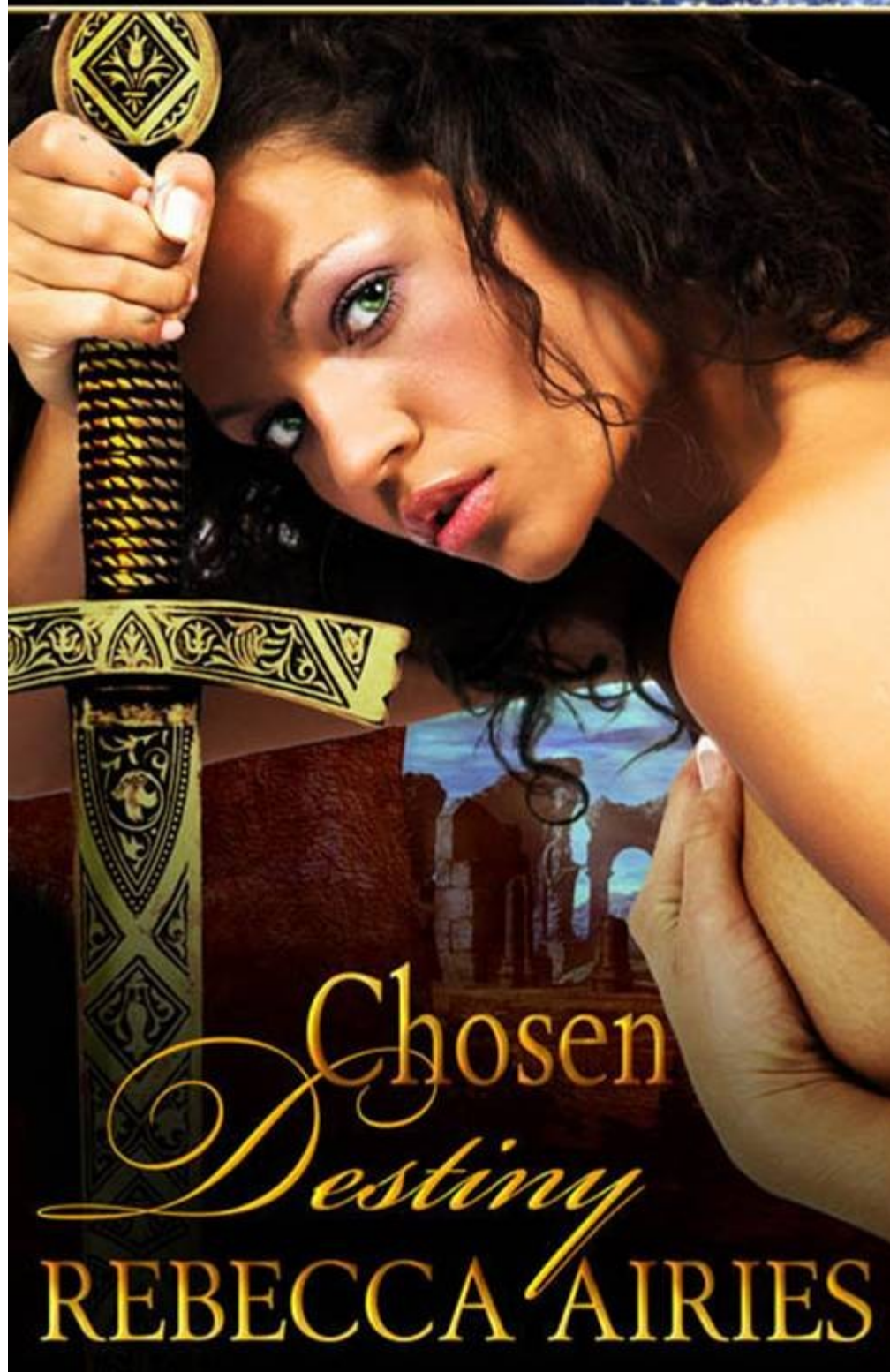


ELLORA'S CAVE XANADU



Chosen Destiny

Rebecca Airies

Meagan's village is under attack and she's been accused of being a spy. Refusing to let her home fall to the Dark Sorcerer, she has no choice but to take up the weapons of her ancestors. Dealing with the two gorgeous men who come to aid her in the fight is another matter.

Samiel and Jaeson came to fight, but finding the woman whose magic matches theirs surprises them, as does her reaction. She's so focused on the battle that she barely seems to notice the pair. With kisses and sensual caresses, they turn her attention to the desire building between all three of them.

Meagan's tempted by their seductive touch, but defining her place in their life is difficult and time's running out. The Dark Sorcerer has to be stopped before Meagan is free to discover if Samiel and Jaeson are offering forever...or a moment in time.

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Chosen Destiny

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CHOSEN DESTINY

Rebecca Airies

Dedication

For those who make the hard choices and push through in spite of the odds. Thank you.

Chapter One

Meagan Danae panted as she sprinted down the street. Her feet slipped on the stone paving as she rounded the corner and she skidded, nearly falling. Her heartbeat jumped up another notch and fear lurched through her. She couldn't fall. They'd kill her. She'd never thought she'd have to flee Apolin like this.

Her black hair whipped across her face. She didn't take time to brush the thick strand out of her way. She had to keep moving. Hurt, betrayal and confusion mixed inside her. She dashed down the street, dodging carts and people. The only good thing about an occupied street was that they wouldn't hurl any energy bolts here. Her shields wouldn't take too much more battering. She had to get out of here. She jumped forward creating a tunnel right in front of her.

Landing on her feet in a soft grassy meadow, Meagan turned and waited a few moments until she could be certain they hadn't followed her. She grimaced. She'd left the village because she knew they probably wouldn't follow. They'd been zealous and she really didn't want to have to start taking the offensive. They were her sect sisters. She didn't want to hurt any of them.

Her stomach felt heavy and her jaw ached. She couldn't understand how this had happened. After returning from a scouting mission, she'd been practically accused of being a spy or a Dark Sorceress by the elders of the Hanir sect. Before she'd even had a chance to defend herself a group of younger witches had burst into the room and started trying to kill her. Not wanting to hurt anyone, she'd run. Sadness and pain weighed heavily in her chest. She hadn't done anything to deserve that kind of suspicion.

Thrusting her hand through her hair, she looked around the area. Trees fronted two sides of the meadow giving it an air of security. A small stream cut across the grassy expanse. Drawing the sharp tang of sap and spring air into her lungs, she tried to calm down and push away the hurt. She had to think. No matter if they couldn't follow her here, she had to move. There were things she had to do.

Sometimes life makes the choices. Meagan could practically hear her older sister's voice. She just wished she could talk to her sister or her brothers right now, but she had no idea where exactly any of them were at the moment. She'd have to do this on her own and she couldn't waste time. More *merdanons* were coming. She had managed to tell them that, but since they doubted her loyalty they probably hadn't believed her. There was little hope that any of the dragons or vampires would show to help tonight. They hadn't answered any of the other calls for aid and there hadn't been any sightings of the dragons in the air.

Meagan licked her lips and raised her hand to the amulet at her neck. She didn't know if she was the one meant to take up the weapons, but she had to try. In spite of what had happened she couldn't just let the *merdanons* and Dark Sorcerers destroy the village. She had to try to help save the people from the attack.

She looked around the grassy meadow. This wasn't where she needed to be if she was going to try to take up the weapons of her ancestors. She took a deep breath and formed another tunnel. She stepped into it and felt the dizzying disorientation.

She was hurled into bright sunlight a moment later. As she exited the tunnel, she took a few steps trying to deal with the momentum. Her toe caught on a rock. She stumbled and fell to one knee on the rocky ground. Standing, she grimaced as her knee stung and she saw the torn gray cloth. She ignored it. She had more important things to worry about right now. Looking around, she chose the path that seemed to be heading upward. She had only ever read of the old temple and looked at old maps of this region. This wasn't a region where the Hanir sect held power.

Huge trees grew alongside the rough, rocky path. The leaves formed an almost solid canopy overhead, giving the path a shadowed, closed-in feel. She wished the cover wasn't quite so thick but at least she could still see. She just hoped she was on the right path. This could take some time and that was something she wasn't sure she had.

When the trail became steeper she was fairly sure she'd chosen the right direction. She kept climbing and kept her eye out for wild animals. A *volk* or a *necalot* could do a lot of damage before she managed a spell to stop them if she didn't see them first. She had no desire to be bitten or clawed. The chatter of *trimoks* in the trees was a little reassuring. She saw one of the small feathered animals swoop down and snatch an insect off the branches. They wouldn't be so noisy or relaxed if there was a predator in the area.

The air was heavy with the crisp scent of the *dicanan* trees and the moisture of a building storm. Her shirt clung to her skin, dampened by her sweat. She followed the curving path up until it finally stopped near the entrance to a cave. She smiled and relaxed a little as relief flowed through her. This was where she needed to be.

Two columns had been carved out of the stone and stood one each side of the opening. She created an orb of light and tossed it into the air. The light bobbed and then floated in front of her as she started into the dark opening. The dark gray rock tunnel narrowed a bit and then opened into a large cavern. It was obvious the temple was still used by the local sect of witches.

The rock walls had been carved into scenes and images from floor to ceiling. Some of the reliefs still bore the paint of a recent ceremony. The statues placed around the room were draped in the finest cloth. Bowls of flowers and fruit rested on a marbled rock altar in front of a huge stone warrior. She walked past the altar to the giant statue behind it. Placing her hands on the large pedestal beneath the great warrior's feet, she sent a surge of power into the stone. The stone moved beneath the statue's feet. She waited as the stone block moved backward.

The dark square opening in the floor loomed in front of her. Waiting only for the bobbing ball of light to float into the gap, she stepped down into the hole. The dark gray walls showed etched scenes of battle and everyday life in the age of the ancient kings. She continued down the long hallway to the door covered with painted scenes. She slipped her family seal off her necklace. She took a deep breath and placed the seal in the small depression in the center of the door. This was the test. Was she the one meant to take the weapons? If she wasn't, she wouldn't even be able to open the door.

The symbol slowly began to glow and the door swung open. She let out a slow breath. She didn't know what she would have done if it hadn't opened. Somehow, she'd have had to find a way to help the other witches defend the small town. She couldn't just walk away from the village.

She stepped forward and gazed in awe at the weapons covering the walls and the large stone table in the center of the room. There were so many of them. How was she ever supposed to know which one to pick? She walked around the room slowly. Her eyes ran over the weapons on the table, but she didn't see anything that caught her eye. She moved to the back wall and looked at the blades there. A sword caught her eye. The blade was straight and shone in the white light. It wasn't silver like many of the other weapons. The blade was golden with silver etching. She reached for it and the matching knife. Power pulsed from the sword leaving her hands tingling as it raced up her arm. The energy rolled through her straight to the core of her power. Her own magic swelled and responded. Energy surged through her to the sword. She stood there feeling the mingling of the two distinct powers. That had been strange but nothing had ever felt so right.

She kept the weapons in her hands, not wanting to lose the feel of their weight just yet. At the door, she awkwardly pulled her seal free of the door using the tips of two fingers to nudge it loose and stepped out into the hallway as the door swung slowly shut. There was a slight creaking noise, but the door moved smoothly. She began walking down the tunnel to the stairs. Her mind was already racing ahead to the battle. Going up the stairs, she sent a pulse into the stone base and stepped back as it slid over the opening to the vault.

Now she had to get back to the village. She really didn't expect to have to hide. Although the witches who'd chased her probably hadn't realized the truth yet, *merdanons* would probably be attacking the town before the sun fully set. The village was small and made the perfect target for the dark sorcerer and his *merdanons*. It was isolated from the large cities and the aid the people needed. There was another small village nearby, but it had also been trying to withstand the attacks of the Dark Sorcerer and couldn't offer any help. After the battle was finished, she knew she'd have some decisions to make. She didn't know if she'd be staying at the village, but part of her had to know why the elders had questioned her loyalty.

Meagan formed a tunnel and stepped into it. Beams of silver and white streaked through the blackness surrounding her. The ride felt dizzyingly fast and she had to take

two extra steps to catch herself. A scream rippled through the air, startling her. She stepped forward leaving the alley without hesitation. Time to face the *merdanons*.

Meagan didn't have to go far to find one of the Dark Sorcerer's minions. Pale gray skin gleamed in the dim light from the moon. She didn't need to see the vacant black eyes or the sharp blades at the huge beast's hands and feet to know what she was facing. It was impossible to mistake a *merdanon* for anything else. The Dark Sorcerer's creations were unique.

She saw the *merdanon* pressing forward, cornering a woman. From her position, she couldn't see the woman, but she did see the glow of a light orb. She wasn't quite sure what she was supposed to do, but knew she had to help. There hadn't been any instructions on how to tap into the power. She tried summoning an energy orb and directing it through the sword, but the orb just flared around the pommel of the sword and went into the walls of the building. She tapped the sword against her thigh.

How, by the Lady's robes, am I supposed to do this? Power stirred inside her. She froze. Experimentally she moved the sword from side to side. The energy built traveling through her to the sword. As she swung the sword, the energy coalesced near the tip and flew off. The mass of magic hit the *merdanon*. It howled and spun to face her. She exhaled, a little thankful for the Dark Sorcerer's lack of effort. It wasn't shielded. She whipped the sword back and forth, gathering power. A sizzling white orb flew down the street and hit the *merdanon*. It toppled to the ground.

Meagan's eyes met the wide, astonished gaze of Talia Sarash, elder of the sect. Dressed in a flowing white shirt and gray pants, the elder seemed comfortable in the casual clothes. The woman's gray-and-black hair hung wildly about her face. The elder looked relieved and astonished.

"I wondered where you'd gone. I knew you wouldn't just leave the village. Even after the way what should have been a few questions turned into a disaster." Talia slowly walked forward.

"My family has defended this village for generations. After it's safe, I'll decide what I'm going to do." Meagan dropped to a knee and following the pull of the blades, drove the dagger into the arm of the fallen *merdanon*. The large armor-skinned beast dissolved into a fine dust as power flowed into her. Her heart raced and she took a few breaths just trying to get used to the feeling. That was strange and she'd never expected anything like that.

"We just had some questions, Meagan. There were coincidences and some gossip." Talia edged forward. "No one but the elders and you were ever supposed to know about it."

"Rumors. I don't know how I was supposed to have time to contact others, much less opportunity. I was always scouting and seldom alone." Meagan shook her head and rose.

"Well that question is settled now. There's no way you could hold those weapons and be in any way evil," Talia offered with a conciliatory smile.

Meagan just raised an eyebrow. That was small comfort after being chased by that mob. She looked down the street, trying to decide which way to go. It probably didn't matter much. There'd be *merdanons* on the street no matter which way she went. It was early in the fight.

"Do you mind if I go with you? I don't want another incident like what happened earlier." Talia met her eyes.

Meagan took a deep breath. As angry as she was, she could still see the sense of the suggestion. The presence of the elder would stop another attack. Clearing the village would be hard enough. She didn't need the hassle of fighting other witches. She nodded.

"Has there been any sign of dragons or vampires coming to aid in the fight?" Meagan began to walk slowly down the street.

Talia fell into step beside her. "No, nothing. There hasn't been any message of any kind. You didn't expect there to be any help. You'd have never taken up the weapons if you had."

The elder was right. Meagan had held little hope that the vampires or dragons might make an appearance. She knew that the village was too small, too isolated and too far away from the dragon and vampire protection to warrant even yearly visits. It was their absence in the face of the repeated requests for help that concerned her. If nothing had gotten through the passes, then there should at least be a check by one of the larger Hanir sects in the city of Amaes.

"Are all the villagers safe?" Meagan asked.

"Yes they're safe." Talia's voice held relief. "When the *merdanons* were spotted, we began moving the villagers out."

Meagan felt a little relief, but she didn't have time to let the feeling settle. Rounding a corner, she saw two *merdanons* lumbering down the street. Behind them, gaping holes and crumbling walls marked the beasts' path.

She took a deep breath. The strange power inside her seemed to swirl inside her, not building, but staying the same. Her hands tightened around the hilts of her weapons. A bit of nervousness skimmed through her and her stomach lurched. She didn't know how she'd handle two of them. The weapons were so new to her and she had no idea exactly what she'd be able to do with them. Or how much power she'd be able to take. The details of her abilities as a *Tiria* were a mystery. She'd never thought she'd be called to take the weapons or that she'd be able to get to them. She'd always known that it took more than the right bloodlines to get into one of those chambers. Fate played a huge part in it.

The *merdanons* advanced closer. She shifted her stance a little wider and pushed more power into her shields. She didn't want to chance them coming down when the *merdanons* battered them. Licking her lips, she swung her sword. An orb of light flew off the tip of the sword. The glowing white-silver ball raced down the street. It flared as it hit the gray-skinned creation. Both beasts roared and moved toward her. She was just

glad that there wasn't a Dark Sorcerer behind them. They'd be much more difficult to defeat if there were.

If this attack followed the pattern of the other assaults on the small town, there would be plenty of *merdanons*, but the Dark Sorcerer wouldn't enter the village walls. Meagan wondered why the attacks kept happening. The Dark Sorcerer might not have a reason for one attack, but five meant that this wasn't random. He had to want something even if it was just to make them leave the area. The village didn't have great wealth and wasn't well-known as many cities and towns were. Some reason was behind all of this effort.

Meagan slashed the sword back and forth. The arc of energy hurtled down the street. It hit the second beast. The gray-skinned being roared. She winced as the loud noise reverberated in the tight space. Her ears rang. She swung the blade again. Another ball of magic flew off the tip of the weapon. The orb flared, but this *merdanon* didn't fall. She cursed under her breath but didn't feel discouraged. At least the beast wasn't shielded.

She slammed another bolt down the street followed by another quick orb. One *merdanon* fell, but the other took two long strides forward. She pushed him back, not wanting to let him get too close. Even with her shield up, it was dangerous. She'd had *merdanons* throw things at times. Her shield should deflect it but she didn't want to take any chances. The Dark Sorcerers were always coming up with new tricks, new ways to destroy and capture sorceresses. Throwing another bolt, she watched the second *merdanon* fall. She started forward, knowing that she had to go destroy the *merdanon*. The power still felt too high from the first beast. With these two, she knew the writhing mass of power would get even worse.

She knelt and drove the blade into the arm of the gray-skinned beast. Her head tipped back as the power pumped into her while the creature dissolved into a misty dust. Her hands shook as she moved the few steps closer to the next *merdanon*. She looked at the wizard's creation and bit her lip. How was she supposed to handle all this power? She'd never felt this much magic coursing through her body. That wasn't all that worried her. Arousal simmered inside her. The more power she took into her body, the higher it went, but she couldn't leave the creature for the Sorcerer. She dipped down and drove her blade into its arm. When she rose, it felt like every muscle in her body was quivering with the influx of magic.

"You know I won't mind if you help a little. We're going to run into more than a few of those beasts as we make our way through the village." Meagan cast the elder a significant glance.

"I was just enjoying watching the weapons at work. I never thought I'd see a *Tiria*." The older woman smiled. "You make it seem so easy to defeat them."

Meagan resisted the urge to roll her eyes. With the exception of being able to destroy the *merdanon* and prevent the Dark Sorcerer from using it again, there wasn't much difference in dealing with them. She was glad for the extra power, but she really didn't know what she was going to do with it. Without a Dark Sorcerer in the village,

she wouldn't have call to use it. Not that she was complaining about that. She really needed time to get used to the power and what the sword could do.

Striding down the street, she saw two people walking toward them. Meagan looked for a side street. She could still hear the *merdanons*. There was still work to be done. Chatting wasn't on her list of things to do until the village was safe. They met the two women, younger witches in the sect, just before they reached a side street. They looked from Meagan to the elder and back again.

"Elder, we... Isn't she a Dark Sorcerer or a spy?"

"No, she isn't a Dark Sorcerer or spy. Look at the weapons. A *Tiria* can't be a Dark Sorceress." Elder Sarash gestured to the sword and dagger.

Both women's eyes rounded.

"Spread the word to any witch you meet. Meagan is not a spy and no one is to attack her. After what happened, we're lucky she came back to help." Talia glanced significantly at the women.

Meagan and Talia took the street to the right and moved on to find other beasts. The moon was riding high in the sky when the last *merdanon* was killed and destroyed. Energy zipped inside her and Meagan could hardly stand still. The arousal boiling inside her had built to a point where she was almost desperate. She took a deep breath. She wasn't a slave to her desires. She could handle this arousal without attacking the first man she met. Even if it did sound like a great idea.

"We have problems, elder. There are holes in the stone wall. We're going to be vulnerable tonight if we don't find some way of sealing the gaps." Camilla Neshar met them as they neared the main sect house.

Meagan looked around the area. She could still see the red glow of fire above the rooftops. It was going to be hard enough just clearing the debris and trying to put the village back together. A gap in the wall would only add more worries. They didn't need to worry about *cortans* and mountain *graels* coming into town.

"I'll shield the village tonight." Meagan stepped forward. At least it would use up some of the extra energy and let her rest later.

"The whole village?" Camilla looked at her.

Meagan smiled at the woman's expression. It was a mix of disbelief and uncertainty. Meagan was certain the woman thought she'd lost her mind. Camilla couldn't know how much power was already coursing through Meagan and the effect it was having. Meagan would have probably done something similar just to use up a bit of energy. She hadn't given herself time to think about anything other than getting to the vault. There hadn't been time to think about even the basics of being a *Tiria*.

Walking through the village, she glanced around and the sight of destruction depressed her. There were complete streets where the highest standing wall was no taller than she was. Fires seemed to be burning everywhere. Smoke irritated her eyes. She knew the acrid smell permeated clothing and hair. Ash seemed to float in the air and landed on the sleeves of her maroon shirt and face. The gray stuff smeared into

dark streaks. By the time the last fire was put out, Meagan was exhausted. The effort of holding a shield around the village had taken some of the edge off the power, but she could still feel a bit of strange energy bubbling inside her. It had been a long night, though and she was more than ready to get some sleep.

Chapter Two

Jaeson Ro'Shan strode into the large main cavern of the lair he shared with his dragon. He walked around searching for Samiel. As much as the dragon irritated him at times, he'd missed him. The dragon wasn't in sight, but Jaeson knew Samiel was in the lair somewhere. He could feel his bond mate's energy within their home. He walked past the large golden and black bed to an opening in the red rock wall. Black and gold jewels embedded in the rock caught the light of the fire in the round hearth in the center of the room.

Looking into the large room, he saw a blue dragon rolling around in the large bathing pool. Jaeson smiled and leaned against the rounded opening. He'd love to go over there and jump into the water with the gorgeous dragon, but knew he'd ruin Samiel's enjoyment of his bath. Jaeson hadn't been able to discover why the dragon was so sure that he'd hurt anyone who got too close to him in dragon form. It had been a struggle just to get the dragon to bite anywhere other than at the wrist. Jaeson knew from a few remarks that there was some incident with a female in his past. Getting the tight-lipped dragon to talk about it had been impossible to this point. Jaeson was determined to get the full story and change the dragon's view, but it was going to take time.

He let his eyes linger on the glittering metal lamp stands around the pool. If the large dragon hadn't taken up so much of the deep pool, Jaeson knew the jewels embedded in the bottom and sides of it would sparkle in the light. Samiel did like the flash of bright metal and jewels. In that way, he was the typical dragon most people imagined. The dark blue dragon splashed and rolled in the water which flooded over the rim of the tub.

"How was the meeting with the other dragons?" Jaeson asked, deciding the dragon'd had more than enough time to play on his own.

The dragon flipped in the water. A dark, black cloud surrounded it as it moved beneath the water. The cloud tightened into a man-size oval before dissipating and Samiel's golden body glided through the water. His skin gleamed and muscles rippled as he stroked to the edge of the pool.

Jaeson pulled his shirt over his head and dropped the deep blue material to the floor. He let his eyes flick over the man swimming toward him. That hard body was too tempting to resist. Pulling off his boots, he watched Samiel fold his arms on the rock rim. His golden hair hung around his shoulders, the ends curling. Jaeson would like to see it a bit longer. The blue strips continued in an undisturbed arc along the sides of his head to the ends of his hair. The green crystal in Samiel's earlobe was almost hidden by the hair, but he saw the glint of it amid the wet strands.

Taking off his pants, he walked to the edge of the pool and dived into the clear water. He surfaced and turned to find Samiel's dark brown eyes locked on him. The dragon could look intimidating at times, but the smile on his firm lips promised pleasure.

Aside from the irritation over the dragon's refusal to show his strength during their sex, this side of their relationship had always been good. The heat had flared between them on sight and even after years still burned hot. Jaeson stroked forward in the water, eager to touch Samiel.

Putting a hand on Samiel's shoulder, Jaeson tugged his bond mate close. He brushed his lips over the dragon's lips firmly but didn't deepen it even when the other man's lips parted.

"So tell me about the meeting." Jaeson brushed his leg against Samiel's in a slow deliberate tease.

"For the most part, normal. A few villages requesting aid, but there was a request for us to check on two isolated covens of witches. Apparently they've been out of contact with the rest of the sect for months." Samiel nipped at Jaeson's earlobe.

"Any sign that the witches are in genuine danger?" Jaeson tensed. He didn't want to chance any witches being taken if it was possible to prevent it. If they were in danger, he and Samiel would need to leave soon.

"No word of any danger. The witches who sent the note don't know of any attacks, but they need to know what's preventing the others from contacting them," Samiel said and hooked an arm around Jaeson's waist, dragging him closer. "They don't have the extra witches or wizards in the area to do it themselves now. They're short because they've sent some of their people to help a sister coven in another region."

"Good, I've been waiting for this all day." Jaeson slanted his mouth over Samiel's in an aggressive claiming.

Samiel didn't remain passive for long. His tongue drove into Jaeson's mouth on a growl. Jaeson loved that harsh sound and wished Samiel would relax his control a little. He wanted to feel the strength of his lover, to push each other's control. With regret, he knew that wouldn't happen. Not tonight.

Jaeson arched his hips against Samiel's hips. He felt the hard length of the dragon's cock. He reached between them and circled his fingers around the thick shaft. He stroked the length with a sure grip. Tonight, he wanted to watch Samiel find his pleasure. The dragon tensed and his arms tightened just a bit. Jaeson met the brown eyes of his lover.

"Jaeson." Samiel's voice rumbled in a low warning growl.

Jaeson smiled loving the sound and the fact that the dragon felt such an intense reaction to the light touch. "I want to give you pleasure."

Samiel shook his head firmly. "It's been days since we've been together. I want you too much. I want us to come at the same time."

Jaeson nipped at Samiel's lips. That sounded so good. He had to admit that the idea had definite merit. Tonight, he didn't want to be fucked. As good as the dragon could make that feel, Jaeson wanted to fuck.

"All right, but tonight the choice is mine and I want you beneath me." Jaeson smirked ready to hear an argument from the large man in front of him.

A soft laugh rolled from Samiel's smiling lips. His eyes burned with heat and the heady musk of the dragon's arousal surrounded Jaeson, spurring his own desire higher. Samiel's hand slipped down Jaeson's back and his nails pricked against the skin of his buttocks. Jaeson drew in a sharp breath at the aggressive move. The dragon was using his claws. Samiel knew how much that excited him.

"If you're going to be on top tonight, you'd better get started or I'm going to be sinking my teeth into you as I ride you." Samiel's teeth parted, shining bright white against the brown gleam of his skin. Those four teeth looked and were sharp, more than capable of fulfilling Samiel's promise.

"You're not riding me tonight." Jaeson laughed.

Now that he had control and the dragon's attention, he wasn't giving it back. He licked his lips. He loved the feel of the water and fully intended to take advantage of the warm, sensuous flow. Using just a bit of magic he altered the pool, raising the floor in the small area so that their feet touched the bottom and the edge came to about waist high. While he was at it, he created a jar of lube. He wasn't taking the chance of hurting his lover.

"Bend forward a bit, Samiel." Jaeson drew his hand down the dragon's side firmly.

Samiel leaned forward. He braced his elbows on the stone surrounded the pool. Jaeson opened the lube, glad that it wouldn't dissolve. He didn't want to move anywhere right now. He smoothed the lube around the tight muscled ring. Pushing a finger into the clinging tissues, he spread the slick lubricant. Samiel's back arched and the muscles tightened as Jaeson pressed, finding the rounded gland. Jaeson grinned, but he was glad that the dragon couldn't see it. The expression would have pushed at Samiel's control. He was tempted to keep stroking his fingers over that sensitive spot until Samiel came, but his own needs pushed at him.

He reached around and gripped Samiel's cock. He stroked the length a few times before reaching lower and gently squeezing the heavy sacs. The move brought a growl to Samiel's throat. Samiel shoved back against him. Jaeson rubbed his cock against the entrance. Jaeson pressed forward, drawing in a hissing breath as the muscular passage tightened around his shaft. Samiel's hand touched Jaeson's thigh. Jaeson tensed as that large hand gripped, pulling him closer.

"Not slowly." The two words seemed to be ground between the dragon's teeth.

Definitely not slowly. Jaeson kept control only until his hips touched the taut muscles of Samiel's buttocks. He withdrew and rocked forward again. His hand stroked Samiel's cock as he pumped into him. Jaeson felt his balls pulling tighter and his blood pounding through his veins. He was going to come soon. His muscles tightened. He

stroked Samiel's cock faster. Samiel tensed. His body shuddered as he came. Jaeson kept pushing into the clenching grip. Sizzling sensation shot through him. His body jerked as streaks of white hot sensation exploded. His muscles felt heavy as he slowly pulled back. As soon as his cock slipped free, Samiel turned.

"Now, it's my turn and I want to take this to somewhere a little drier," Samiel said and swept his eyes down Jaeson's body.

Jaeson moved to the edge of the pool and levered himself out of the water. He could feel his body stirring to life. His mind easily supplied images of just what Samiel might do from restraining him to a slow, grinding fuck. The man might irritate him at times, but they had trust and friendship. He could work with that and solve the problems they had now and in the future.

* * * * *

Samiel looked at the wall being rebuilt by the men of the village. Even before they'd landed, he'd known staying at the lair last night had been a mistake. The destruction wrought on the small town weighed on him. He knew there had been a fierce battle here last night. He didn't need the frowns and angry stares to know that they had sent for help. Finding out why that message had never reached them would wait. He suspected they'd been targeted by at least one Dark Sorcerer. The situation was obviously bad, but he wasn't going to make any judgments until he had more information.

"With those big holes in the wall, I'm surprised we haven't seen *cortan* or mountain *grael* carcasses. The area is surrounded by mountains and thick forests." Jaeson was looking at the huge break in the dark-gray-and-black stone wall.

"Where did they put the *merdanon* bodies? I didn't see any as we flew over the area." Samiel frowned. Just from the destruction he'd seen, he knew there should be more than one.

The brisk mountain air felt good. This area was so different from the desert area where they lived. The beauty as well as the isolation drew him. Lush green trees reached for the skies and he'd seen more animals as he flew over than he'd seen in a week near his lair. He knew that no dragon had a lair in the area now, but he hadn't realized it last night. There had been one, but he'd been killed in a battle against a Dark Sorcerer almost a year ago. Samiel couldn't understand why no one had taken the area. It definitely needed someone in residence to protect it. The present attack was proof enough of that.

"That's a good question, but the Sorcerer could have called them back to him already." Jaeson shrugged.

Samiel knew that could be possible, but Dark Sorcerers usually left the carcasses as intimidation for a while. Especially when the village didn't have strong protection. Nothing was going to get explained until they found someone to talk to about the

attacks. They headed toward the center of the village. The coven house should be near it.

They made their way through the streets. The sounds of hammers and chisels filled the air. They saw the men of the village busily working. The bulk of the men were working on the wall. Those men not reinforcing the wall seemed to have been given demolition duty and were taking down the houses that were too damaged to be repaired.

Turning down a final street, they found the coven. The sect house loomed in front of them. Made of dark gray stone and standing two stories high, it easily dominated the other buildings around it. A large statue stood on either side of a set of stairs leading to the wide, metal-studded wooden doors. Looking at the statues he realized they were of the lady Goddess worshipped and honored by many of the witch covens. But these weren't just plain statues. The two images had been draped in bright red gowns. Flowers crowned the figures' heads and jewels and gold glittered at neck and wrist. Judging by the fact that the petals scattered near the stone feet still looked fresh, this had to have been done this morning.

Shaking his head, he went up to the doors and knocked. It took a few moments, but one of the doors eased open. A young witch in a red-trimmed tunic and pants stood in the opening. Her youth gave him a moment's pause, but then he realized she was probably still in training and had been given one of the more tedious chores. She didn't look surprised to see them. The elders had probably known of their presence even before they'd landed.

"We need to speak with some of the elders." Jaeson smiled easily at the young golden-haired witch.

The woman blinked at him, returning the smile. Samiel watched the witch nearly drool over Jaeson. Samiel couldn't fault her. Jaeson's silver-blond hair, light golden skin and muscled body were inspiring.

"They're expecting you. I'll take you to them," the woman said in a low, husky voice as she stepped back leaving the door open for them to enter.

Samiel stepped into the coven house behind Jaeson. He paused to close the door before he followed. The walls of the large hallway were the same dark stone as the outside walls but had accents of white and silver. Bright flowers were placed on small tables here and there. Jaeson's white shirt gleamed in the light from the magical lanterns hanging overhead. The woman led them down one hallway before turning onto another. She finally stopped before two pale-brown, wooden doors. She knocked first and then pushed them open.

A long, ornately carved wooden table faced the double-doored entrance. There were two smaller wooden tables to the left of the room. A black-haired woman stood near one of the small work areas, looking at something on the top of it. Two women with streaks of gray in their hair stood beside her. Samiel could hear them talking, but their voices were so low that he could only catch the occasional word. At the ornate

table, three other older women had been looking at a large book, but their eyes turned to the door the moment it opened.

The black-haired woman at the work desks was probably the youngest woman in the room aside from the witch who'd escorted them. The woman's cocoa-brown skin set her apart from the women next to her even more than her youth. Her light gray pants and smoky purple shirt also marked her as different. The elders wore long flowing skirts and dresses not suited for action.

The woman noticed them then. She spoke a few quiet words to the elders, nodded and stepped away from them. Samiel let his eyes linger on the curves of her breasts and hips as she turned. He'd love to get his hands on those.

"I'll see what I can find here first. I'll talk to you if I find anything of interest," the woman said. She nodded to the other elders and headed for the door with barely a glance at either him or Jaeson.

Determined to get at least the basic facts, Samiel focused on the elders. There'd be time later to discover if any of the local witches would complete their *tri'inal*, a mated triad of a witch, vampire and dragon. The last two elders took a seat behind the long, dark-brown wood table. He saw them looking Jaeson and him over as if assessing them and none of the women looked impressed or very welcoming.

"How long has your village been under attack?" Samiel watched the women's faces.

"There have been at least five major attacks over the last few months, many other testing probes. A single *merdanon* sent to cause panic the first time," one of the women at the far left of the table said. Her skin was wrinkled, her hair white, but her blue eyes sparkled with life and intelligence.

"We sent for aid. Why didn't you or any other dragon or vampire come before now?" A slim elder with gray-streaked hair, one of those who'd been talking to the younger witch eyed them warily as if she wasn't sure they could be trusted.

"We didn't get any requests. Not from you or from any other town in this area. We came because the main sect house asked us to check on the coven and village since there hadn't been any messages in months," Jaeson responded before Samiel could.

Every one of the elders gasped. "We sent message after message. Most of the messengers never returned but we thought they were too afraid of the *merdanons* to come back without aid. Those who did make it back were sent more recently and they never got through the pass out of the mountains. They were blocked by merdanons and the Sorcerer." A short, frail-looking elder with leathery skin and steel-gray hair shook her head. "Now that we know that absolutely none of our requests made it through we have to assume that at least some of the women sent have been captured."

Samiel studied the woman. She might have been one of the oldest witches in the coven but he'd bet she'd been out there fighting with the rest of them. He could see the spirit, the determination in her eyes. He couldn't help but admire their skill and

tenacity. There were cities and towns with many more witches and wizards that had fallen under such persistent attacks.

"We'll get them back, but first we have to discover who the Dark Sorcerer is and where he's hiding. How have you survived so long and what did you do with the *merdanon* bodies?" Jaeson cocked his head to the left.

"We were lucky, but we also have some very capable witches. Surrendering wasn't really a choice." The elder at the end of the table stood. "I'm Elder Talia Sarash. We thank you for coming to help us."

"There will be more dragons and vampires coming to help now that we know there is a problem. The Dark Sorcerer has to be stopped. He's not going to stop on his own." Samiel stepped forward to clasp her hand. He'd wondered for a while if their help would be welcomed or not. "We'll go see what we can do to help secure the village in the meantime."

Samiel started toward the door. He heard Jaeson's footsteps, but then they stopped. Samiel turned and found Jaeson looking back at the elders. Samiel knew that expression. Jaeson was curious about something.

"How did you keep the animals out all night long?" Jaeson asked.

"Oh, a few of our witches held shields on the worst spots until the sun rose. By the time the battle was over, it wasn't that long." One of the elders waved her hand. "They're resting right now."

Samiel nodded. That explained a few things. It also gave him more reason to admire the witches of this coven. They took care of themselves and those around them. He turned and headed for the door. He and Jaeson could go seal those holes and give the men a chance to repair the houses. As well, they'd be able to magically reinforce the wall and hopefully prevent another breach.

Chapter Three

The first of the other dragons and vampires began arriving just as Samiel and Jaeson finished strengthening the wall. Walking over to meet them at the double, black metal gates, Samiel recognized many of those who'd arrived and was happy to see that more than one set of dragon-vamp pairs were among them. He saw Danan and Grae near the front. Behind them, Maxim and Jadin strolled into town. Jaeson had told him Gaellon and Lassan would be staying to help the other village in these mountains. A few single dragons and vampires had arrived as well. In total, about eight dragons had come to help. That should be more than enough to deal with the Dark Sorcerer in the region, especially with the help of these witches.

Samiel strolled forward and clasped Danan's forearm. "It's good to see you. They don't know what's behind this but the Dark Sorcerer has been persistent."

Jadin looked around the area, his eyes running over the buildings and people. "I'm surprised to see this town as intact as it is. The other village didn't fare as well. How did they manage it?"

The vampire appeared as astounded as he had been. Samiel could understand that. This village and the witches here were unique. They'd held firm in a desperate situation that would have had many people running.

"Apparently cooperation, determination, and an inability to accept defeat," Jaeson explained.

"Well with an attitude like that, we'll have a step up on the Dark Sorcerer." Maxim nodded and smiled.

Samiel led the way into the small town. Groups of witches stood watching them. One of them, a tall, thin redhead separated from the group and stalked forward. Her lips were compressed into a tight line. She almost vibrated with anger. Samiel wondered whom it was directed toward. He didn't think it was the dragons and vampires although he would have understood if it was. They'd been waiting for help for a long time.

"You're here to destroy the Dark Sorcerer? What are you going to do about the minion the elders are protecting?" The woman put her hands on her hips.

Samiel blinked. That was the first he'd heard of anything like that. It sounded absurd. The elders wanted to save the village, not give it to the Sorcerer. Still it was the kind of accusation that couldn't be ignored. He wondered why the woman hadn't said anything before now.

"Why don't you take us to this minion they are protecting and we'll decide what needs to be done." Jaeson crossed his arms over his broad chest.

Samiel smiled as the woman drew in a sharp breath.

"What's to be decided? She needs to be killed." The woman shook her head.

"If she even is a minion. Only when we feel her magic will we act. There's a certain taint to the magic that's unmistakable." Jaeson took a step forward. "We're not going to chance killing a witch who isn't a minion. Witches who turn to the dark arts are rare."

"So lead the way." Danan gestured to the street ahead of them.

She frowned and turned heading down the street. Samiel followed. If there really was a minion, he doubted she was still in the town. She wouldn't want to face a group of vampires and dragons. There was also something strange about the redhead's attitude. She seemed to have thought that they'd go kill the woman only on her word. They wouldn't ever do that sort of thing. There were too many ways mistakes could be made.

He again mounted the steps to the sect house. The woman in front of them pushed open the doors. She looked left and right standing totally still for a moment. Apparently, she didn't know where the supposed minion was. She stalked down the hall, stopping the first person she saw. After a few quiet words she again led the way with confidence. They went deeper into the sect house, beyond the elders' council. She pushed open a large single door and entered. Stepping into the room, Samiel realized they were in a library. Floor to ceiling bookcases lined the room and even more bookcases stood in rows across the room. The minion was supposed to be here? The woman's story didn't fit even more now. Minions and Dark Sorcerers lived to cause trouble. Unless she decided to burn it down, there wasn't much trouble she could cause here.

The woman led them through a corridor of shelves to the back of the vast library. Three women stood around a table littered with stacks of books. They didn't even appear to notice when the group of dragons and vampires drew close.

The woman pointed to the black-haired woman who'd been in the elder's council room earlier. The sleeves of her violet shirt were rolled up to her elbows. She was slightly bent forward and the cloth of her gray pants molded to the full curve of her buttocks. The ends of her hair curled a bit as it hung near midback.

"That's her. Do it now before she flees," the woman demanded.

All three of the witches at the table turned to face them frowning at the group gathered at the end of the shelves. Samiel rolled his eyes. There went the element of surprise.

"We need you to do a bit of magic. She believes you're a minion or a Dark Sorceress." Jaeson stepped forward an encouraging smile on his face.

"Oh Lady, so she and her friends finally found someone gullible enough to believe them." She rolled her eyes. "I don't have time to keep proving myself. They won't believe in any case. They're the ones who will be giving me trouble."

Samiel watched in astonishment as she turned back to the books. She peered a bit closer at the one open in front of her before moving it to the side and opening another

thick volume. He couldn't ever remember being so thoroughly ignored. The witch obviously didn't consider them any kind of threat.

"We're not going away until you prove yourself to be what you claim you are." Danan stepped to the front of the group, his large form dwarfing that of the accuser as he stopped just in front of her.

"Then you can stand there and wait. I don't claim to be anything but a witch trying to get some work done. I'm too busy to cater to your whims and her delusions." She looked up at them only briefly before turning and walking over to the shelf on the wall. Her fingers ran over the thick tomes as she searched for something.

Samiel exhaled heavily. Stubborn woman. It would only take a moment. Either she was as irritated as she sounded or she had something to hide. He couldn't quite decide which, but he doubted that she was a minion or a Dark Sorceress. It was partly her reaction. She was more annoyed than anything else and even at first hearing why they were here she hadn't shown any fear.

"Why are you asking? Just make her use her magic." The redhead's fists balled and she turned a fierce glare on all of them. "Since you're too much of a coward..."

Before Samiel even guessed what she was going to do the redhead formed a sizzling orb of magic and hurled it at the black-haired witch who was just turning away from the shelves with a few books in her hands. She gasped and stopped abruptly. Samiel saw her eyes round. The books dropped from her grasp. She wouldn't have time to throw up a shield, probably was too shocked to even think about it. He knew she'd never expected to get attacked here, especially not with such a powerful orb. They wouldn't have done that even if she'd kept refusing. There were easier ways that wouldn't get someone hurt, to force the use of magic. The woman would have no time to think. He was sure she'd be hurt or worse.

Just before the orb hit, a sword and dagger appeared in her hands. The energy slammed into the blades and was absorbed by the weapons. Samiel gaped at the woman holding the blades a full moment before the truth hit him. *Tiria*, she was a *Tiria*. He took a long step forward sure she'd try to escape now that her secret was known.

"Are you happy now? Sure I'm not a Dark Sorcerer, minion, spy or whatever accusation she cares to hurl? They sent idiots to help us." The black-haired woman shook her head. With a sharp movement of her hands, she sent the weapons away. "We're going to need all of the Lady's grace."

She knelt and gathered the books she'd dropped. He could see the stiffness in her body. She was furious. Even though her movements were clipped and sharp, she took great care with the books. Her full lips were compressed in a tight line and her eyes narrowed angrily on the woman before she shook her head. She stood and walked over to the table. Tugging a chair over to the spot where she'd put the books, she sat and opened one of the books. Samiel stared at her. The woman was acting as if what had just happened was an everyday occurrence, not something momentous. How long had she been a *Tiria*?

A hand tapped his arm repeatedly. Samiel turned and cast quick glance over his shoulder, a little worried to take his eyes off her. She seemed unworried, but he couldn't believe that she was so unworried. If that was an act, it was one of the best he'd seen. Jaeson stood at his side, his mouth hanging open. When Jaeson caught Samiel's eyes, his mouth closed and he leaned close.

"Ours." Jaeson's voice held the stunned amazement that was so easily apparent on his face.

Ours. The word slammed into him. Their witch. He'd been so amazed at finding a *Tiria* that he hadn't even thought about who she'd match. He looked at her with new eyes. She was a striking witch. Her light brown skin gleamed in the golden light. And those light green eyes were so clear it was like looking into a cold mountain pool.

"Well, she's definitely not a Dark Sorceress or minion. I think your accusation has been effectively proven false." Danan's smug tone reached Samiel.

"But there are some questions about the accuser that haven't." Elder Sarash's voice came from behind them.

Samiel glanced back. The elder had her arms folded across her chest. She stared hard at the redheaded woman. Anger and frustration were easily apparent. He moved so he could keep an eye on the elder and the black-haired *Tiria*. Although she'd made it plain that she wasn't going anywhere, he didn't want to lose sight of her.

"Since you're so concerned about the witches who fought and protected this village, I can't help but wonder where you and your other friends were. I can't find one person who saw you during the battles." Elder Sarash's voice had gone cold.

The redhead's mouth opened and closed. "I was there."

"Then there's the fact that she and others were outside the shield waiting to be let in this morning. Kind of makes you wonder why they weren't inside when the shield went up if they did help," one of the blonde women at the table offered before she took a seat and opened one of the books.

The redhead looked stunned to find herself the focus of the questions now. "How can you all be so gullible? Can't you see that she's manipulating you? She's evil."

"She's a *Tiria*. It's not possible for her to be evil and hold those blades." Jaeson shook his head.

Samiel was astounded by the woman's continued blindness. He didn't know if it was some kind of grudge she held or if she'd been fed the information. It was something that bore looking into later. His first focus was on enlightening their *Tiria* about just what she was to them.

"She's not going to believe you. It's thanks to her and her friends that Meagan was practically chased from town before she claimed the blades." The blonde who'd spoken before looked up and her mouth twisted into a grimace.

"They are responsible for Meagan being run out of the village?" Elder Sarash asked.

"Chased through the streets?" Samiel's brows rose. If that had actually happened it said a lot that she was back here.

"If you want to talk about it, go somewhere else. Some of us actually have things to do." The black-haired woman, Meagan, cast an irritated glance around the assembled vampires, dragons and witches.

"Yes, some of us have things to do. Unfortunately, you're not going to get to finish what you've started. We're going to be talking to you. There are apparently a few things that you don't understand." Samiel took a step forward.

"Look, I know there's something about a dragon or a vampire being my mate. That can wait. There's too much to do. The village matters, the rest can be dealt with later." Meagan shook her head and looked back to the book in front of her.

Jaeson walked over and closed the book firmly. "That's just one of the things we need to talk about. We're going to need somewhere private to do it. We'll go to one of the inns. Neutral territory."

"Look, you're not listening...again. Whatever this *Tiria* thing means doesn't matter, saving this village is more important." She put her hands on the leather cover. Her head tilted and she looked frustrated.

"The town will be safe while we're talking to you. There are enough dragons and vampires here to ensure any attack will fail." Jaeson smiled and cupped Meagan's elbow, drawing her to her feet.

She opened her mouth, probably to argue. The woman didn't seem to want to hear anything they said. Samiel stepped forward. She didn't look at all intimidated or afraid of them. Of course, she didn't appear to know much about what taking up those swords had meant to her life. He'd enjoy telling her all about it. He expected her to be horrified, afraid or even panicked when she realized the full truth. Most witches tried to avoid the ties or run from them. He didn't know what she would do.

"We are going to talk privately about this," Samiel said before she could think of something to say. "We're not going to walk away and leave you alone."

They definitely wouldn't be leaving her alone. She might not want to run right now, but she might after she learned of the ties. She seemed absolutely focused on the attacks and on the town. He understood her urgency. She lived here. This was very personal to her.

She looked at the two of them. "Why are you two so eager to have this talk with me?"

"We'll talk about that when we're alone as well." Samiel stepped back giving her room to pass.

She rolled her eyes, but took a step forward. He had a feeling she was going to give them a few surprises. She slipped past him. She wasn't a tall woman. Her head came to about the middle of his chest. All in all, it was a very nice size and she had curves to please any man. The difference in her size and his made her seem even more feminine. A glint of gold at the top curve of the ear caught his eyes. He smiled as he saw two gold

studs as well as deep red and brilliant green gems there and two flashing blue gems at the lobe of her ear. He really liked that flashy jewelry. In fact, he wouldn't mind if all she wore was that, a few necklaces and bracelets and maybe a waist chain.

"Well I do have to get back to what I was doing. Can we get this over with?" She looked back over her shoulder at them.

He could see the tension in her jaw. She wasn't happy and, from her attitude, just wanted to get this finished. She was so focused that he didn't know if she'd seen them as anything other than an annoyance. He definitely wanted to change that. Some lust or just awareness that they were men who found her attractive would be a start.

Chapter Four

Meagan walked in front of the dragon and just behind what she suspected was a vampire, although she supposed he could be a wizard. Regardless they were persistent and a huge nuisance. And gorgeous, she'd definitely noticed that.

The dragon couldn't be missed even if she'd failed to spot the gem at his ear. Those dark blue streaks really stood out against his golden hair. His deep brown eyes hadn't seemed to blink while he was watching her. She couldn't mistake the tall, muscled man for anything other than what he was—a predator. Even though he'd never raised his voice or made an overtly threatening move, she knew he was dangerous. Maybe not violent or dangerous to her, but he did seem determined to cause chaos in her life. The choice of dressing in all black didn't help alleviate that dark aura. He couldn't have drawn more attention to himself if he'd tried, but she had a feeling that he didn't care what anyone thought of him.

The other man was a completely different matter. He might have been as muscled and nearly as tall as the dragon, but he looked more as if he should be on some ruling council somewhere even with his white shirt and black pants more suited to everyday wear. He had an aristocratic air and an aura of quiet power that was only emphasized by his high cheekbones and his golden eyes. She had an almost irresistible urge to reach out and touch his long silver-blond hair, just to see if it was real. She'd never seen anyone with hair like that. The light brown tan of his skin did make him seem a little more real, but he still didn't seem like he belonged in the middle of a battle.

They led her out of the sect house and to one of few inns in the village. She made no attempt to talk to them on the way there. They'd been the ones who insisted that this had to be done now. Their persistence didn't make any sense to her. The fact that she was a *Tiria* wasn't going to change in the next few days. They were in such a rush that they hadn't even introduced themselves. Of course, she hadn't exactly told them her name. They'd heard it, but she did didn't know if they'd realized it was her name.

The stone building of the inn looked better than it had earlier. It still had a small hole in one side of the wall, but that was being repaired now. She walked up the steps to the inn. The silver-haired man opened the door and waited for her to enter. She shook her head. They both acted as if she were going to run away if one of them didn't have her in his sight at all times. She just didn't understand it. There couldn't be anything that bad about being a *Tiria*. As long as it wasn't fatal, she wasn't going to worry about it.

The dragon went to the innkeeper to get a room while the silver-haired man waited with her. She looked at the man then around the empty large dining room.

"Why can't we talk here? There's no one here." She looked up at the man.

"The innkeeper's here and we're going to need the privacy of a room." The silver-haired man smiled. "I'm Jaeson Ro'Shan. He's Samiel. And you're called Meagan?"

"Meagan Danae." She nodded returning his smile. She'd bet he had women panting for him from just that smile. With a mental shake of her head, she told herself she was stronger than that even if she was drawn by it.

"I've secured a room for us. It will do for the short term." Samiel strolled over to them.

She raised a brow but shrugged. If they were lucky, it wouldn't take long to find and stop the Dark Sorcerer. She wasn't going to count on it. She'd be surprised if the dragons stayed more than a night in the town. They seldom did. They preferred to have their own quarters in an isolated area. Regardless of where they were, they'd be here when they were needed. She had no idea how they did that and was a bit curious, but the answer could wait.

She followed Samiel up the stairs, eager to get this finished so that she could get back to her research. There had to be some reason for the attacks. Maybe it could be found in one of the histories or on a map. Some kind of treasure or ancient knowledge the Dark Sorcerer hoped to use.

"You're suddenly very serious. Are you worrying now what being a *Tiria* means?" Samiel asked as he opened the door. He led the way into the room.

Meagan followed him. A large, sturdy bed with a polished black wood headboard dominated the room. A yellow and green blanket had been spread over it and plump pillows were ready for use. The bright color stood out against the dark stone of the walls. The way the room was decorated did surprise her. She hadn't thought that it would be this nice especially since visitors seldom came through the area.

"Are you thinking about what it means now?" Jaeson stepped up beside her.

She smiled, wondering why they thought she should be worried. "No, I was actually thinking about what I was doing before you decided talking was so important it outweighed searching for possible reasons the Dark Sorcerer might be focused on this area."

"You can get back to that later. Right now you need to learn just what it means to be a *Tiria*." Samiel's head tilted and his lips curved, revealing the points of four fangs.

"Being a *Tiria* isn't something that's going to change. As far as I'm concerned it could wait. This village really can't." She lifted a shoulder. "I was just going to learn what I needed as I went along."

"For most of the things, that would be a good way to approach it, but there's something that's not going to wait." Jaeson's hand rose to her cheek.

She stepped back just before he touched her. They had both been very touchy. Her arm and her cheek. They hadn't let her out of their sight. She could read the possessiveness in their gaze. She just couldn't understand it. She'd barely met them and knew nothing about them except their names.

"What is it that I need to know? Just get it over with so I can get back to what I was doing." She put her hands on her hips. She was getting a little tired of their theatrics. She wasn't going to run out of the room so they really didn't need to be watching her so intently.

"Get it over with." Jaeson looked over at Samiel, a smile on his lips. "No woman's ever said that to me."

She rolled her eyes. That comment probably hadn't even made a dent on his ego. It certainly hadn't prompted him to get to the point. She just didn't understand the need for privacy. Lady, even the talking wasn't necessary. As far as she was concerned, everything but the Dark Sorcerer could wait indefinitely. Their priorities were definitely out of order.

"Why don't you go sit down? As we said, there are things that we need to talk about, that are important enough to take you away from your search. In fact, it might just change the way you think about being a *Tiria*." Samiel waved a hand toward the bed.

She sighed. Deciding that it would be faster to do as he asked, she dropped onto the soft mattress. She shot them both a look from beneath her lashes and tapped her foot. She wished they'd just say whatever they thought was so important. The more they delayed, the more nervous she became. Even though she knew it couldn't be that bad, her tension was growing.

"Being a *Tiria* gives you the ability to draw power into you. A *Tiria* has special needs." Jaeson walked over to stand near her.

She tilted her head. At least he wasn't so close she had to crane her neck to see him. He looked a little nervous and watchful. Well, more watchful than he had been before and he looked ready to move. She had the impression he was ready to grab her. She wasn't going to make a run for the door. Not unless they didn't get to the point soon.

"She needs someone to take the power she draws into her, at least some of it." Samiel sat down on the end of the bed.

Meagan looked at the dragon and then at the hand's breadth of space between them. Close enough to touch and too tempting. She'd been so absorbed in finding some reason for the attacks that she'd ignored most of their body language. They were focused on her and their sexual intent seemed so obvious. She licked her lips.

"I did well enough last night. The level was high, but shielding the town took it down to a bearable level." She shrugged. She didn't see the big deal about the power that she could pull into her now. Maybe if there had been more *merdanons* it would have been a problem, but she was certain she could have handled it in some way without the assistance of those two men.

"It was probably a small battle. It won't be that easy in the future." Samiel frowned. "Especially when the Dark Sorcerer learns of you. He'll do everything he can to kill you."

"I already knew that, expected it." She shook her head. It was obvious that she'd be a target.

"Had you expected to have two mates?" Jaeson cupped her chin.

She tensed. She hadn't heard him move. His words slowly began to filter through her surprise. Two mates. She looked from Jaeson to Samiel hoping to see a teasing smile. They both stared at her expectantly.

She shook her head. "I'm not going to have two mates. A witch chooses her wizard. There might not have been many high wizards here, but you can bet when I'm ready, I'll find one."

Samiel laughed. "High witches might have chosen their mate in the past. There aren't that many men here. Aside from that, witches marrying two men isn't all that strange. In addition to the dragon and vampire pairs there are wizards who join in pairs."

She exhaled heavily. Something didn't seem right about their explanation to her. Her eyes narrowed. They had to be lying. Two mates just because she'd picked up the ancient weapons? How naïve did they think she was?

"Oh, so you two are my mates because I'm a *Tiria*? You're going to have to come up with a better story than that. What is it you're actually angling for? A few nights of sex? You're both sexy and probably more than aware of it. You don't have to pull that kind of trick." She felt anger rise as she thought of the game they were trying to play.

"Trick." Samiel's voice rumbled with a low growl.

Meagan tried to move back, but Samiel grasped her wrist. Even in that loose grip, she knew she couldn't pull free. She squared her shoulders. He wouldn't intimidate her so easily. The man might be large and strong, but she could take care of herself.

"This is no trick and it's not because you're a *Tiria*. All the *Tiria* will have two mates, but they would have two mates regardless of if they ever picked up the weapons. It's the woman's magic that matches. Your magic is a match with ours." Jaeson slid onto the bed on her other side. His voice sounded determined.

Meagan raised her brows. "My magic matches yours. And how do you know this?"

"I can feel it. If Samiel bit you, he could taste it." Jaeson cupped her chin.

"You can sense it. I don't believe you. I don't have time to waste with this." She stood and tried to tug free of Samiel's loose hold. She didn't know if they were playing some kind of game, but this was getting old fast.

Samiel's grip tightened and he tugged her back to the bed. "Sit down."

In spite of the growled order, she continued standing. This was outrageous. Did they actually expect her to accept what they said as fact? Anger rose. She reached up and grabbed Samiel's hand. Her nails sank into his skin as she pried at his fingers. She couldn't budge his grip and that only made her angrier. She glared at him.

"Sit down." Samiel spaced the two words precisely. His voice had hardened even more.

He reinforced the order by standing. She took a deep breath and gritted her teeth. The man had domineering down to an art. Dealing with him on a long-term basis would push anyone's control. She didn't plan on dealing with him for long. Definitely not permanently. She sat, hoping to get this talk finished. She had work to do and arguing with him wasn't helping.

"Well, get it over with. I told you I was busy." She jerked against Samiel's hold just to reinforce the fact that she wanted to be released.

"We're not lying to you. Tell me, is the attraction you feel for us just normal attraction or is it more intense?" Jaeson asked. His gold eyes flashed with annoyance.

The attraction was intense. She'd admit that. Was the intensity normal or more than that? She couldn't say if it was normal or more than that. They were both handsome and in spite of their arrogance there was something that did pull her to both of them. And it was the "both" that surprised her. She'd never been attracted to two men at the same time.

"Look just because I'm attracted to you doesn't mean you're my mates. It doesn't mean anything except that you're both very sexy." She put her free hand on the bed beside her.

"For now, forget about the long-term aspect. You can confirm we're telling the truth later when you're doing your research." Samiel ran his thumb up and down the inner skin of her wrist.

She'd never considered her inner wrist one of the more sensitive parts of her body, but that light touch sent tingles sizzling up her arm and straight to her core. She swallowed heavily and tried to ignore the sensation. He seemed determined to distract her. She wasn't going to let him do that.

"Just because I'm attracted to you, I'm not going to have sex with both of you." If she could have, she'd have crossed her arms and glared at them. She settled for frowning at him since he wasn't releasing her wrist.

"We don't expect you to have sex with us right now, Meagan. We wouldn't push you away if you were willing, but it's probably a little soon for you to be that accepting." Jaeson smiled wickedly and his body angled toward hers. "We only want to touch you, to get to know you a little and then you can return to your coven."

His eyes dropped to the curved rise of her breasts. The heat in his eyes sparked a response in her body. She could tell just from that look that he wanted more than just a little touching. She looked over at Samiel. His brown eyes glittered and his thumb rubbed in gentle circles on her wrist. She could smell their scents, each distinctive. They seemed to wrap around her, but one of them sent excitement pulsing through her. The dragon's musky sent had a spicy bite that she couldn't quite identify. She didn't have that problem with Jaeson. Just sitting next to him was like walking in a forest in the fall when the bark of the *cabar* tree was peeled. She loved the spicy, earthy smell before the bark was dried and ground.

"And touching me is supposed to help me get to know you. My guess is that once you touch there won't be much talking done at all." She shook her head. At least they'd stopped pressing the mate thing. She was grateful for that.

"I've been touching you for almost the entire time we've been in the room. We've been talking and I haven't hauled you into my lap. Can't say it's not a tempting idea though." Samiel's thumb swept down in a slow deliberate stroke.

"You were keeping me where you wanted me." She wasn't going to buy that argument. The man had wanted to make sure she didn't walk out on him, nothing more. "It's not the kind of touching I meant."

"You did have a tendency to want to get up and leave. Since you don't believe that we're mates, what questions do you have?" Samiel leaned close. His breath brushed over her cheek.

"It's just so improbable." She shook her head.

"It's the truth. Now give both of us a kiss and we'll let you get back to work." Jaeson whispered against her.

She tensed. Her entire focus had been on Samiel. She felt a hand at her lower back. The fingers pressed and rubbed at the tense muscles. She bit her lip. There shouldn't be any problem in a simple kiss, or rather two. She knew it wouldn't be that simple. The attraction was too strong.

"One kiss each. Then I leave and you don't stop me." She didn't want there to be any mistake about her intentions and she planned to hold them to their word if they gave it.

"One kiss now and later we'll find you. We're not going to just walk away from you now that we've found you." Jaeson's gold eyes burned with intensity.

"We'll talk about that later." She smiled. It felt good to use the words. They had to know that she was in no hurry to move the attraction between them to the next level. Even if they had been telling the truth, she didn't intend to jump into a relationship with the two of them.

"You can plan on it," Samiel growled.

His fingers threaded into her hair. She tipped her head back. She expected an aggressive kiss, a claiming. His lips brushed over hers softly. She blinked surprised at the gentle, almost questioning touch. Her mouth opened beneath his giving him access. His tongue traced her full lips, before sweeping into her mouth. She sighed and relaxed into the embrace. Her tongue stroked against his. She sucked at his tongue. His hand slid up her side and cupped her breast. When his thumb flicked across her nipple, she realized the kiss had grown into so much more. She pushed against his chest. Turning her head, she tore her lips away from his. She wanted to just let the kiss continue, to savor the feel and taste, but knew the delicious sensation would only be harder to deny later.

Samiel chuckled. The sound rolled from him. She felt the rumble against her fingertips. He leaned back and a satisfied smirk curved his lips. He winked. His fingers trailed over her cheek as they slipped from her hair.

"I said a kiss, not a full-on embrace. I still don't know you." She shrugged away from his lingering touch. Opportunistic dragon.

"You will. It's my turn now." Jaeson's hand on her shoulder turned her to face him.

She sighed and nodded. She'd keep her word. She couldn't hold them to the bargain if she didn't deliver on her promise. Leaning toward him, she lifted her hands to his broad shoulders. His mouth lowered and his teeth closed on her lip. The sharp edge of his teeth scraped over the full lower lip. She gasped. Hot tingles exploded from that light pressure. His tongue slid over the sensitive flesh just once before sweeping into her mouth. There was nothing tentative about his touch. His hand cupped the back of her head, holding her steady beneath the firm press of his lips. His tongue drove into her mouth. The aggressive move sparked an answering arousal. She moaned and slid one of her arms around his neck. Her tongue stroked against his and she sucked on it, trying to draw it deeper. Her action drew a groan from him.

Meagan didn't know what had come over her. Every breath she took seemed to increase her arousal. His hand slid down her body to her waist. He lifted her, settled her across his lap. She barely noticed the change in position. His hand slid underneath her shirt. It was the feel of his warm hand on her skin that jerked her out of the haze of hot pleasure. She pulled back.

A kiss wasn't supposed to cause an ache of hunger to pulse through her body. Except for a mere caress on her breast neither of the men had touched her intimately. Yet she could feel the slick juices gathering between her thighs and her breasts felt heavy. The hardened tips ached for a firm touch. She'd known kissing them wouldn't be simple, but she hadn't expected to nearly be shaking with desire after two kisses. Those men were dangerous.

She slipped off his lap and stood. Combing her fingers through her hair, she studied the two men through her lashes. What was she going to do with those two men? Well, other than try to avoid them. They weren't going away. Not only were they here to fight the Dark Sorcerer, they considered her their mate.

She shook her head and exhaled slowly. On top of the search for possible legends or old artifacts, she had to find information on dragons and vampires and *Tirias*. She didn't pretend to know much about it. It had just been her heritage. She'd never expected to have to take them.

"We'll see you later. Be sure to find the information about dragons and vampires." Samiel reached out and let his palm roam over the full curve of her buttocks.

She stepped out of reach. *What do I say to men who claim to be my mates?* Especially since she didn't believe them. She looked at them. There wasn't anything she could do to change their mind.

"Maybe I'll see you later. If I find anything solid, I'll be going to check on it." She shrugged.

"You'd better send for us before you go search for anything. You are and will be a target for the Dark Sorcerer." Samiel stood, his hand slashing through the air at waist level. His eyes were narrowed and he looked as if he was a breath away from doing that growling thing again.

Meagan raised an eyebrow. Who did he think he was to tell her what to do? Even if he was her mate, he wouldn't be telling her what to do in battle. She knew how to handle herself and didn't need guards or escorts. The man better realize that fact fast or they were going to have some trouble just getting along with each other when they met on the street.

Chapter Five

Meagan stared at the book in front of her. She could hardly believe what she'd read and she still felt a little numb. At least the shock had faded a little. Even though they'd told her, she hadn't really thought it was true. Two mates. What woman needed two men? One man was hard enough to understand and cope with. Two would be impossible. The two mates thing was going to take time. The reasons given in the book had been simple and straight forward. The men were to be the *Tiria's* protectors. They'd also help balance the power she'd gained with the weapons. The help part she could understand, but she couldn't understand why the men had to be her mates. She wasn't sure about any long-term relationship with them. Right now a future with them was the least of her worries. There were too many other things that were more important.

But it wasn't just what she'd learned about the weapons that had gotten her attention, it was the information about vampires. She'd known enough about dragons to know that playing with them was a bad idea. Vampires on the other hand hadn't seemed to pose so much of a threat. She would never have guessed that their scent could alternately soothe or arouse depending on the vampire's intent. She'd found out a lot, but she hadn't found any promising legends in the books. Still, she was optimistic that she'd find something.

"You're not finished with that for the night yet? I bet you haven't even stopped to eat." A deep voice came from behind her.

She turned in her seat. Jaeson leaned against one of the tall, polished *asa*-wood bookshelves. His silver hair hung in a straight fall down his back. He looked very relaxed as he waited. In a way, she couldn't believe that a man like him was focusing all that attention on her.

"If you're offering to go get all of us something to eat we'd appreciate it." She smiled at him. She'd known that he hadn't meant that, but she took the opportunity his words gave.

He laughed. "I'll arrange for something for them, but I think you've done enough for today. We'll get something to eat and talk."

"I've already had a break remember? There's still so much to do."

"And it will wait until tomorrow. I assume you learned the truth about what we told you. We take our role very seriously." Jaeson came away from the book shelf. He turned and left the room. "Get ready to leave. We'll be going when I get back."

She raised a brow as she watched him go. He definitely had no problem with giving orders. She looked back at the book in front of her. There was so much to go through, so many things the Dark Sorcerer could want.

"Don't tell me you're seriously thinking about staying here and sending that man away. You'd have to be insane. Lady, if I had the attention of a man who looked like that, I'd drag him away before someone else grabbed him." Merilyn Satae's voice sounded cheerful and almost laughing.

Meagan looked up and met her friend's blue eyes. She was considering it very seriously. The man was gorgeous, but he had some very arrogant tendencies. She didn't want to give him the idea that she'd jump to do his bidding.

"What I don't plan to do is let him think that I'll be following every order he cares to toss at me." Meagan looked over at Merilyn.

Merilyn's smile faded and she nodded. "Ah, good point. That is a good idea. You don't want him to think that. Still after you've made your point drag him into a closet before some other witch does."

Meagan wasn't worried about him suddenly becoming interested in other women. The man considered her his mate. From what she'd read, they didn't stray once they found their mate. He wouldn't be looking for sex from any other woman.

Jaeson appeared from between the book shelves. She stiffened when she saw him. She hadn't heard him even walking on the wooden floors.

"You're not ready yet." He looked pointedly at the books in front of her.

"Because I'm not finished. Work has to come before play, I'm afraid." She smiled and ran her finger down the page trying to find the spot where she'd stopped.

"This is the kind of work that can be delayed. Did you find anything interesting yet?" He strode over to the table and closed the book. "This isn't a battle."

"Nothing about the local legends or any old temple in the area." She shrugged. She did find out a lot of interesting things about dragons and vampires but she wasn't going to get into it here.

"It will wait. We aren't going to be able to finish this in one battle or even two. It's going to take a while to find out who's behind this and locate them." Jaeson gripped her elbow and tugged her out of her seat.

"That's easy for you to say. It's not your home that's being attacked." She pulled back, trying to free her arm. "Where's your dragon friend?"

"He's with another of the dragons flying over the area to see what else had been done. While he's out there he'll probably scout for a temporary lair in the mountains." Jaeson stared down at her. "Are you finished trying to distract me?"

She rolled her eyes. "We do need to talk. I can always come back later and get some work done."

He looked amused by that comment. "Then let's go talk. I'm interested to hear what you have to say now that you've had time to learn the truth."

She shook her head. If he thought just reading about the dragon and vampire was going to change everything, he was wrong. She needed time to know them before she made a decision. Not to mention the fact that she wasn't sure she needed them. It

wasn't as if battles were that common. Once the Dark Sorcerer was defeated, there might not be another in the area in her lifetime.

She walked out of the coven house beside him. He led the way through the streets to the inn. They detoured into the common room and he arranged for a meal to be brought up to the room. Once they were inside, she climbed the stairs to the room ahead of him. She noticed the snick of the bolt just as his scent hit her. She stepped away from him going around the bed to put some distance between them. She didn't want to be distracted by the arousal caused by his scent. That was just one of the things they needed to discuss. He looked across the bed at her and cocked his head to one side.

"What's the problem?" he asked.

"I want to talk. I don't want to be drugged by your scent while we're doing it." She lifted her chin maintaining eye contact with the vampire. "Besides it's not going to take long for them to bring the food up to us."

A knock sounded on the door. Jaeson shot her a narrow-eyed look, but she just shrugged as he let the young man into the room. A lot of the higher level witches came here to eat instead of the sect house when they needed a change. She knew that they fixed one huge meal and normally didn't make the food to order. All they'd had to do was fill the platters, grab a bottle of wine and arrange bread in a basket. He waited until the waiter had left.

He gestured to the table. "Let's eat, but truthfully my scent's not a drug. It can't make you do anything you don't want to do. It will heighten your arousal or soothe you if you're tense."

She took the seat on the opposite side of the table and watched as he slid into his. "That's something I'm going to have to confirm myself."

They ate in silence, but Meagan didn't find it uncomfortable. He didn't look as if he found it that way either. When they both had finished, he stood and walked over to stand by the bed. She knew from the look he gave her that he was only doing that because she'd said she wanted space and to be free of the effects of the scent.

"Now that we've both relaxed a bit, we can talk. As for your comment about finding out that my scent's not a drug, I'll make sure you have ample opportunity. Were there any questions you have now that you didn't earlier today?" He sat on the bed.

Meagan watched him. He looked a lot more comfortable than she felt in the hard, straight-backed wooden chair. The green blanket set off Jaeson's dark clothes. She just didn't believe he was as relaxed as he seemed to be. He hadn't suddenly come to the decision to give her all the time she needed. The man wanted her. She could see it in the way he watched her. His entire attitude was that of a man on the hunt. She'd have to watch him and make sure she didn't let things get out of control. She was more than tempted to relax and let the attraction take the lead, but knew that he wouldn't consider it just sex. She wasn't willing to think about anything more. Two mates. Just thinking about it made her nervous. The thought was great as a fantasy, but the reality came

with a lot of questions. And she knew only time and being close to them would give her the answers.

"Your questions, or are you just going to stare at me for the night?" He grinned and she could see the humor in his eyes.

Meagan felt the heat rush into her cheeks. She hadn't realized how much time had passed. Rising from her chair, she began to pace a bit. "I know that you two were telling me the truth earlier about a *Tiria* having two mates. I'm still not sure it's necessary and I can't see much to recommend it aside from having someone always near to help with the power levels."

"Was there a question in there that I missed?" Jaeson's tone was openly provoking.

She glared at him. He didn't seem at all worried about staying on her good side. She'd have loved to put him in his place but couldn't think of a way just yet. Walking around the bed, she tried to put her thoughts in order. The chaos in her mind was making her restless. She stopped when he was directly opposite her. He moved to the end of the bed so he could turn to see her without bringing his boots onto it.

"You and Samiel, how will it work? Won't someone get jealous? I'm not agreeing to anything. It's just something I wondered about." She tilted her head and bit her lip. That was only one question of many.

"Samiel and I will each want time alone with you, that's natural just as we'll make time to be with each other. We might feel envy, want to be part of it because we know just how good it feels, but no real jealousy, because we all belong to each other." Jaeson smiled, his voice turning a little husky.

She gaped at him. They'd want to be with each other. She hadn't even thought about them having anything other than a friendly relationship with each other. She felt utterly stupid for a moment, but that feeling was pushed aside as her mind began supplying her with details. An image of the two men in each other's arms kissing flashed through her head. It was disconcerting and arousing at the same time. She hadn't even thought that they might be lovers. She might just be the one who would be jealous. She'd never even thought about sharing a lover.

"You didn't realize that Samiel and I were lovers, did you?" He smiled obviously enjoying her surprise.

"No, I didn't know. There wasn't anything about the relationship in the books. As far as I know, you two could have just met." She shrugged.

"We've been together for years." He brought his knee up and rested the ankle on his thigh. He was utterly relaxed and at ease.

"If we have sex, are you going to immediately assume that we're mated?" She sat on the bed across from him, one leg tucked under her.

"We are mates. Having sex or not having sex isn't going to make it any more or less true." He angled his body a bit more so that he was fully facing her.

She shook her head. That really wasn't what she'd meant. She had been thinking more about his attitude than his philosophy. Apparently, she was going to have to ask in another way if she wanted an answer.

"Are you going to be all possessive and expect to act like my mate if we have sex?" She sighed. "I'm not just going to jump into something permanent. To me, having sex will just be sex. Is it going to be more to you?"

"I'll undoubtedly be possessive. So much that you'll object to it? I don't know. You are my mate. I'm not going to pretend that you're a woman for only a night." His intent golden stare didn't waver from hers.

She didn't have any doubts that he was absolutely serious. She couldn't change his attitude, not even dent it. Running her fingers through her hair, she exhaled slowly. She suspected that even if they didn't have sex, he'd be possessive. So she'd have to deal with his attitude regardless.

"Have we dealt with all of your questions?" He raised an eyebrow and looked significantly at the bed.

"You may consider me your mate but I don't consider myself bound in any way." She clenched a bit of the blanket in her hand. "I don't have any other questions at the moment, but there will probably be more later."

"Good. Then come over here. I wanted to kiss you when I walked into the library." He held out his hand.

She smiled. The man had a one-track mind. She had to admit that she'd been thinking about having sex with him too. Her questions had managed to distract her a little. She still had doubts about having sex with him, but it wasn't going to stop her. She was going to take the chance. It would probably complicate things, but she knew the desire building between them wasn't going to disappear. It was too strong. She was enough of a realist to know that it was going to happen. Samiel and Jaeson wouldn't just ignore the attraction between them. She wanted to make the choice, not have it made for her. Also, she had to find out if the pull between them was entirely physical or some sort of binding spell wrought by the blades to keep them together.

She stood and walked around the bed and took his hand. He tugged her into his lap. The move caught her by surprise and she lost her balance. She braced her hands on his shoulders as she fell. He caught her and settled her across his thighs. She looked up and found his beautiful eyes locked with hers.

"As much as I would love to take this opportunity and make love with you, I don't want you to regret it." He drew his hand down her back. "Are you sure this is what you want?"

"I've made my choice. I want you. I suspect you knew before I was ready to admit it. I'm ready to have sex with you. I'm not ready to talk about anything permanent. This is my home. I'm needed here." She lifted her chin. No matter what they thought, she would have a say in this.

He frowned. "You can't think that you can just walk away from us after this battle is finished. You belong with us."

"I'm not going to talk about that right now. We'll deal with it later. Now do you want me or should I go back to my research?" She pushed against his chest, putting just a little distance between them.

"You're not going back to your research." His hands tightened on her hips. "Not tonight."

Her hands stroked over his chest to his shoulders relaxing against him. His scent swirled around her. It seemed to intensify with every breath she took. Her need rose to an even higher level. He leaned down and his lips brushed over her cheek. She turned her head and met his lips. Her mouth opened beneath his. She licked at his lips when he did nothing more than brush his mouth from side to side. He laughed softly. His tongue stoked into her mouth. She relaxed against him and let the hot sensation sweep through her, but she wasn't passive. Her tongue tangled with his. She wanted to draw him as deep into the kiss as she was. His groan and the tightening of his arms only spurred her to do more.

She hooked an arm around his neck lacing her fingers through his hair. The feel of it amazed her. It was so soft and she loved running her fingers through it. She couldn't help wondering what it would feel like trailing over her body as they made love. His hand slid down her back and under her shirt. She drew in a gasping breath. His hand was so warm and she wanted to feel more. She pushed back into his touch.

"I want to see you naked. Let's get you out of these clothes." He drew back and looked down at her shirt.

"Only if we get rid of your clothes too. I'm sure you'd be much more comfortable without them." Her eyes trailed down his chest and stopped at the close-fitting pants. She traced her hand down his chest and to the hard ridge of flesh below his waist. She wanted to touch and explore just as much as he said he did.

He froze as her fingers slid up and down over his cock. His breath sounded raspy as he drew in a quick breath. She loved the quick, intense reaction to her touch. Only the fabric of his pants separated her fingers from his cock. She wanted that barrier gone.

Her fingers moved up, seeking buttons or laces. She found laces that fastened his pants, but the ends seemed to be knotted. She frowned as she looked down at the jumbled mess. It looked like it would be impossible to untie. How did he get out of them? His hands covered hers, pulling her fingers away from his pants.

"Let me do that. You start on your own clothing. Start with your pants. If you're slow I'll finish your shirt. You might just take my control, if I let you." His voice was harsh, but he was smiling. He didn't look as if he minded the idea at all.

Chapter Six

She wanted to take his control. The idea that she could sent a rush of excitement through her body. She got to work on her clothes so that she could get back to touching him. Her hands went to her pants. She unfastened the buckle of her belt and then unfastened the small row of buttons on the right side of her pants. The loose fabric slid down to mid-thigh. She kicked out of her loose slippers and then her pants. She began working on her shirt. His hands pushed hers away and began pulling the laces free on her shirt. He tugged the material over her head. When it cleared her head, she looked up, surprised. He was completely naked. Lady, he was fast. Her eyes roved over the light golden tan expanse of his skin. The muscles across his chest and shoulders rippled as he tossed her shirt over his shoulder. She let her gaze drift lower. His stomach was flat, defined, but it was the hard thick shaft rising from between his legs that held her attention. She licked her lips and felt the muscles in her stomach and pussy clench.

"Like what you see?" He stepped close, his hands sliding over her hips. "I definitely do."

His fingers flexed on the curve of her buttocks. She nearly laughed. Like his body? The question was ridiculous. She didn't know if she'd ever seen such a gorgeous naked man in her life. She wasn't going to ask if he liked her body. She didn't need to do it. His eyes burned with hunger, even if she had been able ignore the hard cock pressing against her stomach.

"I've been wanting to get my hands on these curves ever since I saw you." He guided her backward until her legs touched the bed.

His body pressed against hers. She slipped her arms around his waist. The tips of her breasts tingled as they came into contact with his chest. She wanted more than that light sensation. She wanted everything. Hunger rose and she felt a warm, slick liquid on her thighs. Power stirred within her, building.

Meagan tensed. That was strange. Her power had never been linked with her arousal before. Her hands froze and she tore her attention away from the hands roving up her back. She wondered what was happening.

"Is something wrong?" His hand tipped her chin up so that she was forced to meet his eyes.

"My power..." she began but stopped.

He was already nodding a small smile curving his lips. "It's normal for a *Tiria*. You have such soft skin. I had wondered if your skin was that gorgeous deep brown all over. It is."

Normal for a *Tiria*. She shook her head trying to clear her head a bit. She braced her hands on his stomach and pushed back. It wasn't normal for her. She couldn't just shrug and accept it.

"Do you mean this is going to happen every time I get aroused?" She stared into his eyes, not missing the tight lines of his face or the heightened color of his tanned cheeks.

His lips curved into a decidedly wicked grin. "Yes. You might as well get used to it. It's going to be happening a lot."

She took a deep breath and decided that it was something she would think about later. She wanted him now. He lifted her onto the bed. In a single smooth motion, he joined her. Reaching for him, her hands slid over his shoulders and her tongue brushed his lips in a soft kiss. He groaned and his mouth opened over hers. Her tongue swept into his mouth. She wasn't going to let him take control. She wanted to make him just as wild as the feeling inside her. He'd soon find she wouldn't be a passive lover.

One of his hands pressed her back into the soft mattress. Their lips parted with a soft, wet sound. She reached for him, trying to pull his head down again. She didn't want to lose contact with him. His lips brushed over her cheek, but didn't roam to her lips. She turned her head trying to capture them. She wanted a deeper, longer kiss. The brief tangle had left her wanting more.

"No, I want to touch these before you push me to my limits." His hands touched the swells of her breasts. His eyes locked on the darkened tips.

Push his limits? With a kiss? She wanted to do more than that to him. She wanted to explore every inch of that gorgeous body. The only reason she wasn't insisting on it now was that she knew he'd be around for a few days and she'd have plenty of opportunities to play with him. He looked intent, aroused. His almost unblinking stare heightened her arousal. She squirmed wondering when he was going to touch her. His tongue slicked over his lips as he watched his hand lift one of her breasts. His thumb flicked over the hardened peak. Heat speared through her.

His head lowered and he blew a hot puff of air across her nipple. The peak tightened and her grip on his shoulders increased. With effort, she resisted the impulse to shove his head down to the swollen mound. His tongue traced the disc. She shivered. He didn't seem to be in any hurry. She didn't know how long she'd be able to let him explore before the urge to push him onto his back and attack him became irresistible. He knelt beside her and cupped both the full mounds.

"Beautiful. I'd love to just look at these for hours. If we were home, I think I might hide your clothes so you'd have to be naked for awhile." His tongue flicked over a nipple.

She stiffened. Sharp sensation arced through her. The feeling, along with the image his words had conjured, only increased the fever building inside her. His hand gently squeezed one breast while his lips plucked at the other nipple. The soft tugs sent tingles shooting through her curling into her stomach. She could feel slick moisture on her

thighs. Her clit throbbed. She squeezed her thighs together. The ache increased. She reached down between her thighs, her fingers parting her shaved labia.

He gripped her wrist, pulling her hand away before she could touch her clit. Her head rose and her eyes clashed with his. His eyelashes nearly shielded his eyes, but she couldn't mistake his serious intent.

He shook his head firmly. "No, that's my job and I'm going to enjoy doing it. You just lay there and enjoy."

"You're taking too long." She frowned at him. They might have all night, but she didn't want one session to last that long.

He laughed softly. "Impatient. You're going to come and you're going to enjoy the time in between."

"Only if you don't take too much time, otherwise I might just have to take matters into my own hands." She let her hand fall to her side.

"I haven't even started playing with you yet. I'm going to explore and taste and touch. You'd be mad at me if I didn't." His teeth scraped over her nipple.

She drew in a sharp breath. It was easy for him to say he hadn't started. His body wasn't burning. The ache was building and she had to do something. Her hands itched to touch him. She arched her back wanted more than the teasing touch. His tongue circled the nipple tracing the line of darker flesh.

"You taste so good. Sweet with a little tang like the *sada* fruit. I haven't even tasted your blood and I can't get enough." His tongue flicked at the hard bud. His lips closed over the peak.

"Yes." The word fell from her lips.

She was just a little surprised she didn't shout it. The warm, wet moisture sent a shiver of sensation through her. He drew her nipple into his mouth, sucking. She arched against his mouth. A low hum rumbled against the full mound. She drew in a hissing breath. The vibration rolled straight to her core and thick liquid slipped onto her thighs.

"You're very sensitive, aren't you?" His hand cupped and squeezed the neglected mound.

She groaned and squirmed on the bed. He didn't have to sound so thrilled about it. She couldn't ever remember getting this hot just from someone playing with her breasts before. Maybe it had something to do with his scent. Maybe he was just very good at what he was doing. Maybe it was a mixture of both and the excitement of playing with danger.

"I don't know." She lifted her hand and tangled it in his long silver hair.

He laughed, a short burst that sent even more vibrations ricocheting through her. His fingers slid over her stomach pausing to circle the indentation of her bellybutton. He tickled and teased before moving lower. She widened her thighs. With just the tips, Jaeson traced the slick, swollen lips of her labia. She bit her lip. She was so close to

begging and needed to feel friction or pressure on her clit, stroking into her pussy. His hand or his tongue, it didn't matter which, but she ached to feel one of them. He parted the lips.

"Touch my clit, please." She tightened her hand in his hair.

His head lifted and his smile looked satisfied. "Demanding little witch."

"By the Lady, don't tease." She pushed up against his hand.

The pad of one of his fingers skimmed over her clit. She gasped and tensed as a shiver rippled over her body. Sharp hunger twisted in her stomach. She felt her inner muscles clench and the empty feeling intensified. She needed him inside her, something inside her. His fingers trailed down to her entrance. Two of them slipped into her.

"You're wet and those muscles are clenching and pulling at my fingers." His fingers slipped out of her as he rose over her.

She widened her thighs eagerly. Her hand tightened in his long, silver hair. She tugged his mouth down for a long, hot kiss. His gold eyes locked with hers as he positioned his cock at her slick opening. Her hips lifted against him, trying to take that rounded head into her pussy.

"I've wanted to fuck you ever since I first saw you," he whispered against her lips.

"In the council room?" She couldn't quite believe it. He had barely even looked at her.

"Yes, I wanted to bend you over that council table and drive into you, make you scream your pleasure." His hips rocked forward and the tip of his shaft pushed into her, but then slipped out again.

Her mind whirled. She could see it, almost feel it. His large body behind her. His hands gripping her hips as his thick cock drove into her. The idea pushed her near the edge. Her entire body pulsed with energy.

"You like that idea. Your hot juices are coating my cock. We can try that soon if you like." He dropped a kiss on her cheek.

By the Lady, the man talked too much. "If you don't move or do something, I'm going to take over."

He laughed seemingly unconcerned. "Now we can't have that, not after I've done all the other work."

He pushed forward, his cock slowly filling her. Her muscles rippled and clenched. It felt so good that she almost came right then. His hips settled against her. He remained still for a few moments. His eyes locked with hers then eyes roved over her face as if trying to read how ready she was. She trembled, desperate to come. Need raged and burned her. Her hand slid down his back and clutched the tight muscles of his buttocks. She pulled at him as she pushed up against him. She needed him to move. She nipped at his lips, wanted more.

He chuckled. "I have teeth, too baby."

His sharp teeth grazed her lips as he slowly pulled back. Her hips rose. Desperate she twisted, the tips her breasts brushing against his chest. Tingles spread from the tiny contacts. She hungrily captured his lips. Her tongue drove into his mouth stroking against his. His hips rocked forward. He sucked at her lip. She gasped as his hips ground against her, the rotating movement pressing her clit.

"Let go. Come for me." He rocked against her.

She couldn't stop herself even though she wanted to hold back and come with him. Her inner muscles tightened. His cock drove deep, finding a sensitive bundle of nerves. Light flashed in front of her eyes and pleasure roared over her. As she cried out against his mouth, her nails dug into his skin. Her thighs tightened, holding on to him as she came. He pumped into her and the feel of his cock stroking sent sizzling sparks through her. His teeth brushed against her neck and his muscles tensed as his hips drove against her. She felt the hot spurt of his seed a moment before a sharp pinch as his teeth sank into her neck. She stiffened in surprise. Her hands moved to his shoulders and pushed.

She felt his mouth moving, a light suction at her neck as he took her blood. His tongue swirled over her neck and a soft hum vibrated against her neck. The sound sent tingles straight to her core. She had to work to whip up the anger she knew she should be feeling. Pleasure still rippled through her. He hadn't even asked. Not that she would have said yes. In her opinion, it was a little too soon for anything beyond sex. It might even be too soon for sex, but she knew she wouldn't have been able to resist for much longer. The attraction was intense. His head lifted and he smiled down at her.

She pushed against his shoulders and forced a frown, teasing. "Did I say you could bite me?"

He shook his head, frowning. "I'm sorry. I intended to wait until you asked me or needed it. I usually have more control. I've never lost it before so completely."

He seemed more upset about it than she was. She had the strangest urge to comfort him. It was absurd. She barely even knew him. How he felt or if he felt guilty shouldn't matter to her. Somehow it did and that annoyed her.

"You didn't hurt me and it would have probably happened anyway." She brushed her fingers his long hair. It was so soft that she brushed her fingers through it again.

"I should have controlled myself. I will control the urges." His thumb brushed over her cheek. "I won't bite you again until you ask me."

"Why are you so upset about it if I'm not screaming over the bite?" She raised a brow. She'd have thought he'd simply be relieved she wasn't raging over the issue and let it be. She didn't understand him.

"I didn't expect such a strong pull as I came. I wanted it so badly." He grimaced.

"You're upset because you weren't in complete control." She clenched her jaw, trying not to grind her teeth. He couldn't have said anything that would make her angrier. "You're an idiot."

His eyes widened. "What do you mean?"

"If I wanted someone totally in control, someone who could give me multiple orgasms and then fuck me slowly all night without having needs himself, I'd make a toy man for myself." She pushed against his shoulder.

She didn't know if he was so stunned that she'd surprised him or if her anger had given her a surge of strength, but he fell to the side. She rolled and swung her legs over the edge of the bed. His hand clasped her shoulder, stopping her before she could get out of bed. He pulled her back onto the soft mattress. He rose onto one elbow. She glared at him.

"I just don't want to hurt you." His hand cupped her cheek.

The only reason she didn't smack his hand and stomp out of the room was that she saw the sincerity in his eyes.

"You didn't hurt me. Have you ever hurt a lover when you bit them? I'm not fragile and if you ever did you'd know about it. I'd blast you across the room." She folded her arms across her chest resisting the urge to touch him.

"No, I've never hurt anyone." He looked absolutely insulted.

"Well, why did you think you'd hurt me? I don't pretend to know much about vampires but I'm sure there was something behind the urge besides the fact that I have a very nice throat." She smiled trying to lighten his mood.

"You have a beautiful neck. I'm not sure what it was, but it might have had something to with our discussion about whether you were my mate or weren't." His mouth twisted. "I told you I was possessive."

He fell onto his side and rolled over to his back, pulling her across his chest. She put her chin on an arm and stared at him. He didn't seem entirely satisfied with the answer.

"I'm just glad you're not entirely contained. I want the man I'm with to enjoy himself as much as I do even if he can be a little controlling." She drew a finger up his ribs.

"That wasn't controlling, Meagan." He laughed. "I could show you how much you're going to enjoy control, but I think Samiel will have a few things to teach you about that."

"If he tries to be so controlling that he's not enjoying himself we're going to have something to talk about." She scowled. One man going nuts because he did something he hadn't planned was as much as she could handle.

"Not controlling like that. Tie you up controlling." He drew his hand down her back.

She tilted her head. The thought of being bound by them wasn't as scary as she'd have imagined. For some reason she trusted Samiel and Jaeson. She had no idea how it happened. She had barely even met them and they hadn't done anything to show that she could trust them.

"That sounds interesting. Do I get to tie you up too?" She drew her finger up his ribs again. When her finger found a spot under his arm that made him laugh and wriggle, he captured her hand.

"You may get to do it, but pushing could get you into trouble, especially with the dragon. Now close your eyes and get some rest. I have a feeling you'll be back to work early tomorrow." His fingers threaded through her hair and his eyes locked with hers.

She relaxed. His guess was right, but she wasn't worried about the accuracy. She'd said enough to show an idiot how important the search was to her. It would be strange if he hadn't expected her to want to go back to work. Just a little sleep and then she'd return to the sect house.

Chapter Seven

Samuel strolled into the sect house. A couple of younger witches gave him an annoyed glance, but he ignored it. His woman was here and he wanted to see her. As he walked down the hallway he noticed that the flowers in the vases were fresh and the floors clean and polished to a shine. The fact that the witches were keeping to the regular schedules assured him that most of them were still coping well. Now he just had to see how their witch was doing after last night.

He'd half-expected to find her with Jaeson at the inn. The sun had been up for a while, but he knew if he had her in bed with him, he wouldn't let her out of his arms. Jaeson hadn't been at the inn, but the innkeeper had told him that Meagan had left before the sun had touched the horizon this morning. He knew she was searching for a reason behind the attacks so he looked first in the library. She was at the same table she'd been at yesterday.

Her glossy black hair was confined in a long braid. The jewels along the upper curve of her ear glinted in the light. He liked that flash of color. She didn't even look up as he walked through the rows of shelves toward her. The neck of her flowing cream shirt dipped low revealing the valley between her breasts. He licked his lips at the sight of that beautiful, creamy brown skin.

"Find anything?" he asked. He tried to ignore the hardening of his body. She was right. They did need to find out why the sorcerer was so fixated on this area.

She sighed heavily as she lifted clear green eyes to meet his. "Too many things. Without any way to narrow down what he wants, this could take forever."

He smiled and took a seat beside her. "Let me help. We might be able to narrow some of it down."

"Some of what I'd considered to unbelievable might even be their goal." She gestured to a stack of papers on the end of the table. "There are a few references to mystical weapons. I was going to discount them because the books say they can only be used for protection but..."

"Dark Sorcerers are persistent and not inclined to accept something just because it's been written." Samuel nodded understanding her doubt. "Anything to do with the weapons or possible power shouldn't be discounted."

"There are references to treasure, to some legends. Now that I've begun to find things, I can't think of any way to narrow it down." She shut one of the books. "There are too many possibilities. We'll never find out why he's targeted these two cities."

"We'll narrow it down after we learn a bit more about the Dark Sorcerer. We'll learn what he wants. It's probably not wealth, because he could steal that during

attacks. Unless there's something else along with the treasure, a weapon, lost books of some sort, he wouldn't need to search for it." Samiel knew just how frustrating the waiting could be.

"What kind of revelation do you think you're going to make about the Dark Sorcerer? He's been attacking us for months. If there was a pattern or the minions were searching for something, you can bet we'd have noticed it." She folded her arms and glared at him.

Samiel tried to hold back a smile. She was practically radiating fury. If she got any angrier, she might just try to hit him with one of those books. He didn't know if she was always that quick to anger or if it was just this subject. Regardless, the thought of finding ways to soothe that fiery temper excited him. His mind automatically pictured her naked, beneath him as he drove into her or made her so wild with desire that she couldn't think about why she was angry.

"Well, since I can fly, if he's been searching for something in the mountains, I might see some evidence that would be missed on the ground." He shrugged unwilling to get into an argument about it. She wasn't going to be rational about it. Along with probably every other witch here, she was too close to this situation.

She glared at him. Her fingers drummed on the cover of one of the books. He could see that she was trying to calm herself down. Her beautiful green eyes swept over him as if she was trying to decide what she was going to do to him. He had a few suggestions in mind if she really needed help.

"Jaeson said you were out finding a temporary lair as well as scouting. Did you find what you need?" She took a deep breath.

He nodded. He'd found the perfect place in the mountains. As to the temporary part, he wasn't sure about that. This area needed at least one dragon in the area, since there wasn't a pair of wizards anywhere near this region. Then there was Meagan. She had definite protective feelings toward this region and would be worried as long as they were away from it.

"I found a lair. I didn't find any sign of *merdanons* in the mountains or near the town. Tell me about some of the legends." Samiel leaned back in the chair. He shifted, trying to get comfortable in the hard-backed wooden seat.

"You'll have to conjure some cushions. These chairs weren't made for extended stays. You're supposed to find what you need and get out," she told him with a smile.

He laughed and stood, doing as she suggest and creating cushions. "The legends..."

"Well, there's one about Goren Delisi, an ancient warrior wizard. He appeared in the area suddenly one day. There's not a specific date but they do mention the merging of the two moons which would be thousands of years ago, before the first Kings." She picked up one of the books to her right and flipped it open.

"I've heard of him and he wasn't a simple warrior wizard." Samiel pulled the book a little closer to him.

"What? Is he supposed to be some kind of dragon because a mere wizard couldn't have accomplished anything great?" She turned in her seat and scowled at him.

"He was a vampire, not a dragon. Wizards can do great things. I was just pointing out a fact. Don't get snippy on me, woman." He smiled. "Your bad mood might just need some adjusting."

She sniffed and turned away from him. "Even you're not big enough to do that."

The woman showed absolutely no fear of his greater strength. Maybe she didn't know just how much stronger he was than her. Or maybe Jaeson had simply made love to her. Samiel knew that easing her into their life might just be the best way to do it. She might not get scared and try to run from them if they moved slowly.

"The legend?" He raised a brow.

She laughed softly. "Goren Delisi supposedly fought and defeated a Dark Sorcerer in these mountains. From the stories in here, this wasn't a Dark Sorcerer as we know them. This guy would make ours look like apprentices."

"What did this guy do that made him so different from the other Dark Sorcerers?" Samiel tilted his head. If this guy had done something so unusual, so effective, then that could very well be why the Dark Sorcerer was searching for here.

"The stories tell of creatures worse than *merdanons*. Intelligent, fast. He created those beasts. They were called *tandini*. There are pages of stories about the death and destruction the beasts caused. There's something about them drawing power from those they kill." She put her finger on a drawing.

He leaned closer and looked at the illustration. A slender reddish-brown-skinned beast stood among destroyed buildings. Its face was vaguely human, but that was almost the only thing that seemed familiar. The yellow hair on its head flowed in every direction, some even seeming to stand up in spikes. The beast appeared to have fur of the same yellow sticking up along its arms and legs. Armor covered the beast's chest. Just judging by the size compared to the building, the beasts looked to be smaller than the *merdanons* they regularly faced. If this was the goal of the Dark Sorcerer, they had to stop him before he found a way to make these beasts.

"Did the story say what happened to the Dark Sorcerer's hold?" He looked up catching her eyes moving over his face.

"Not specifically. Just that he destroyed all the beasts and leveled the Dark Sorcerer's hold. My guess is that he destroyed what could be and hid what couldn't as we do when we stop a Dark Sorcerer." She shrugged. "If there was anything left, it could be anywhere."

"Maybe not anywhere. Just like witches, vampires and dragons are trained. There are patterns and techniques that are common." He sat back thoughtfully. "Are there any other interesting legends about this area?"

"I already told you there were more than I ever expected." She glared at him.

"Tell me about a few of them," he invited.

"Most of the stories I've found are mere mentions. I'll have to go back and try to find the specifics on each in different books, but there's more than enough to worry me." She took a deep breath.

"Like what?" He reached over and lifted her hand into his. He wanted to pull her into his lap, but knew she'd resist that. At least here, she might be a little shy about being so open within the coven.

"There are mentions of a weapon used to defend a village in this area. I have no idea what it did, but it supposedly kept an army of *merdanons* away from the village. If that's true, I'd hate to see what it could do in the hands of a Dark Sorcerer." She looked down at his hand but made no move to free herself.

"That's another definite possibility. If it wasn't destroyed or if there's a way to build another, the Dark Sorcerer could be after that." He nodded. She was right. It wasn't going to be easy to narrow down what the Dark Sorcerer wanted.

"And there's more like that. Every time I open another book, it seems like there's another possible goal." She sighed heavily and shook her head.

"I'd tell you to stop opening books, but we both know the more information we have the better we'll do in battle against this Dark Sorcerer." He looked over at her noticing the slump of her shoulders.

"I know, but I'd rather be out there doing something." She grimaced.

"Come on. You need a break. I know just what you need." He tried not to let the building anticipation leak into his voice. The sight of her shoulders slumping pulled at something inside him. The moment he'd noticed her frustration an idea had begun to form. He wanted to take her out of here and put the smile on her face again. He didn't know how she'd react but he definitely planned to try.

"You know what I need? Would it involve a full day away from these books and someone catering to my whims?" She raised her brows.

"Not this time. I'll keep it in mind for next time." He stood and tugged at her hand, not hauling her to her feet even though he could have easily done it. He wanted her to take a step toward him to accept of her own will.

She rose, her fingers tightening on his. "I'll expect you to keep it in mind and for it to happen. This had better be good."

He heard the lilt in her voice and saw a teasing gleam in her eyes. She walked at his side without question as he led her out of the coven house. He liked the feeling of her hand in his. She hesitated when they approached the gates. He saw her glance at him but he just smiled. He wasn't going to give her any hints. Once outside the gates, he released her hand.

He turned to her and put his hands on her shoulder. "Stay right here. We're going to fly."

Her eyes widened. "Fly? Really?"

"Really, just stand there."

"Can I ride on your back?" She licked her lips almost bouncing with excitement.

He tilted his head. He wouldn't mind her riding on his back, but he wanted to hold her. "Not this time. Remind me the next time and I'll let you."

She nodded. He walked away from her and when he was far enough away he turned to face her. He let the dragon rise inside him. He felt a slight pulling tug and then he was looking at the top of the wall. He looked down, searching for Meagan. She stood exactly where he'd left her. He lowered his head, needing to draw her scent into him. He needed to be able to find her. He saw her straighten, but she didn't step away from him. She stayed just as she was even as his head lowered. He drew in her scent, a delicious berry scent that tempted him to get closer so he could know more. He wondered if she tasted like berries too.

Chapter Eight

Meagan stared at the huge blue muzzle of the dragon. About the only thing recognizable were his eyes. Those deep brown orbs glittered with interest. A long, thick, forked tongue flicked out and stroked over her neck. A low rumble sounded, startling her. She jumped. Her muscles tightened and she stepped back, but her body seemed to lose all coordination. She almost fell onto her ass. She managed to catch herself and awkwardly stumbled back a few steps. Her fingers traced over the spot where he'd licked her. Tingles ran down her neck where that slightly rough tongue had touched. It hadn't scared her, but she hadn't expected that.

The dragon rose onto his back paws. Before she could panic, his large paws gathered her close to his warm body. The scales weren't hard like she'd expected. They felt a little coarse but supple. The muscles bunched beneath his skin and then he leaped into the air. She heard a soft whoosh of air and flapping wings.

Looking down, she saw the ground moving by at an unbelievably fast rate as Samiel took her higher. The trees blurred as he flew toward Mount Allian. He circled and glided low over the trees to a treeless, rocky area high on the mountain. The wind brushed over her cheeks and bare arms. It was chilly but refreshing. It was pretty, but she had no idea what they were doing here.

He released her after putting her gently on her feet. She walked away from him giving him room to lower himself to the ground. She had no idea how quickly he could change, but expected him still to be in transition. When she turned back to face him, a black mist was dissipating and Samiel was stepping forward.

"This is pretty. Is there something you wanted to show me here or did you just get tired?" She smiled.

"I'm not tired. I wanted to show you the new lair. Turn around, you're facing the wrong way." He put his hand on her shoulder and urged her to turn.

She slanted a glance at him from the corner of her eyes. She had no idea why he'd brought her to see it. She wouldn't be sleeping away from the village while there were Dark Sorcerers in the area. They could gripe or growl all they wanted. Their convenience wasn't her concern. She only cared about the safety of the town. To protect it, she had to be there. But she wasn't going to argue about it right now. She'd deal with his mistaken beliefs later.

Her eyes roamed over the area, trying to find some opening. When he said lair, she immediately thought of a cave, something underground. She couldn't see anything even resembling a cave. Maybe she was wrong about him living underground, but there definitely wasn't a house. What was she supposed to be seeing and where was the entrance to his lair?

"You plan to stay here while you're in the area?" She tried not to sound as confused as she actually was as she walked with him closer toward a rocky shelf that was taller than she was.

"We needed somewhere secure here while we hunt the Dark Sorcerer. This will provide a safe place for us and is still close enough to easily get to the village if we're needed." Samiel stopped and suddenly a rounded arch appeared in the rocky outcrop in front of them.

"How are you supposed to know when the village needs help when you're here in a cave, probably deep underground?" She stepped closer to him as he led her into the dark opening.

His curved an arm around her. The light streaming in from behind them abruptly disappeared. Before her eyes could adjust to the darkness light flared from lamps along the corridor. She looked over her shoulder and the opening had disappeared, a solid wall stood where it had once been.

"I never leave the opening to the lair unsealed for longer than it takes to get inside. Dragons are usually very territorial." His lips widened into a fierce grin revealing the sharp points of his teeth.

"Really, I'm honored you're showing me your lair." She laughed softly, but refused to be sidetracked. "How are you going to know when your help is needed?"

His hand tightened around her and he shot her a suspicious look as if he suspected she might be thinking of not coming here with him. She waited for him to say something, but he just kept striding down the white-gray stone hallway. She was on the point of asking him again when they walked out of the corridor into a large room. It stunned her.

It was different from what she'd envisioned. She'd expected something austere, maybe even formal with dark heavy furniture. She'd been wrong. The only thing she hadn't been mistaken about was the sheer size and high ceilings. She'd known he'd want a lot of space.

Jewels glittered in the walls. The gems flashed as they caught the light. Gold and silver stands held lamps. Three long couches sat in a semicircle around a large hearth. There was nothing formal about them. The fabrics were jewel-toned. One couch was a vibrant green while the other two were a brilliant blue and a deep golden yellow. A large hammock hung at one end of the room. She saw a door on one wall and another almost opposite. For a few moments, she completely forgot about everything they'd been discussing.

"Do you like it?" His voice pulled her from her study of the room.

She nodded.

She forced her mind off the room and back to their discussion. "So how do you expect to know when you're needed if you're underground? You certainly won't hear the trouble. I doubt you'd be able to hear a herd of wild *chitan* stampeding over the mountain."

"No, we wouldn't hear the battle. Jaeson can communicate with the other vampires psychically. So if anything happens, we'll know in moments." He drew her over to the couch.

"And what if Jaeson isn't here?" She tilted her head. The two men weren't always together. There could easily come a time when they were apart for days. His stance, the easy smile shouted confidence, but she knew it was the unexpected which fouled even the best plans.

"Look up." He chuckled.

She looked up and saw the pale green sky through what looked like faceted crystal. She blinked. The ceiling hadn't been like that. She was certain of it. It had been solid rock.

"If there's trouble, I'll be able to see the magical flare that will be shot into the air," he explained easily.

"And what if you're asleep?" She raised a brow. That arrogant attitude would get annoying fast. She hoped he didn't show that side too often.

A low tone sounded, seeming to vibrate through her head and tighten her stomach. She suddenly felt nauseous and dizzy. She put a hand to head and leaned into him. The noise stopped abruptly.

"Do you think you could sleep through that?" He sat down on the couch and watched her.

She stood there for a few moments waiting for the sensation to pass. She didn't know if she could tolerate that while she was awake. She certainly couldn't sleep through it. She didn't know anyone who could do that.

"You have to be joking. That would be impossible to sleep through." She took a deep breath and was relieved when the worst of the sensations didn't return. "That would happen every time someone lobs an alarm flare into the sky or a specific person?"

"Every alarm flare. The spell is keyed to sound whenever any flare spell is used." He held out his hand.

She ignored the invitation and walked around a little. Samiel turned his head, tracking her as she tried to look as if she was curious about his lair when her stomach was churning from her nervousness. His eyes burned with intensity and he seemed ready to bolt off that couch. Not that she intended to walk away from him tonight. She just needed a few moments to think. Samiel wasn't Jaeson. She knew he would take the physical intimacy as a sign of commitment. He'd be possessive from the first touch. One single kiss and a little touch and he would be absolutely certain she was his mate. She knew she didn't have a prayer of changing how he felt.

"Nervous?" His voice drew her away from her thoughts.

She looked up at him and smiled. "Maybe a little, but mostly I was just thinking."

"They must have been heavy thoughts. Want to come over here and share them?" He looked from her to the couch beside him.

She took a deep breath, half expecting an explosion when she told him. She didn't want to give him false hope. Whatever he thought she'd make her own decisions. She could have just sat down beside him and let desire take them both. It seemed too much like lying. She took a seat near him on the couch, but kept a little distance between them. It probably wasn't the smartest thing she'd ever done, but she wanted to be near him.

"I was thinking about the future." She licked her lips.

"The future will take care of itself. We need to deal with the Dark Sorcerer first." He shrugged.

"I wasn't talking about the Dark Sorcerer. I was thinking about you, Jaeson and me. I don't know if it's going to work. I know you expect me to be with you, but I don't know if I'll be able to stay with you." She tilted her head and watched him.

His expression froze. She waited for a growl, a head shake or some kind of denial. Aside from a slight tensing, he didn't seem to react. She let out her breath slowly. His eyes bored into hers and she could tell that that calm expression was a mask. But she couldn't read anything behind it.

"It will work." The words sounded as if they were ground between rocks.

She opened her mouth, but she snapped it closed as his eyes narrowed.

"It will work. None of us is going to walk away at the first sign of difficulty. Mates are for life and yours will be extended significantly when both of us bite you." His hand cupped the side of her cheek. "Now do you want to argue about it or would you like to kiss me?"

She looked up at him and couldn't resist a smile at the tone of his voice. He managed to imply that there wouldn't be any other option at all. It should have infuriated her. She couldn't explain why but it didn't.

"You say it and that's the way it's going to be?" She tilted her head and tried to pull her lips into a more serious expression. She knew she didn't quite succeed when he grinned.

"Usually, because I don't give up until I get my way." He drew his hand along her collarbone.

She could feel the heat of his fingers even through the fabric of her shirt. She had to clench her fingers to stop herself from touching him.

"I'll make my own decisions. You won't push me into a decision I think is wrong." She folded her arms across her chest.

He shook his head. "I'm not going to get into an argument with you about it. We'll be together years from now, because you'll see that this is right."

She sighed.

"Now come over and give me a kiss. I missed you last night." He gently tugged at her shoulder.

She moved closer, but looked at him. She didn't understand how he could say that, but she could hear the sincerity in his voice. "How can you miss me? You don't know me."

"You're a little late in coming to us. You should have found us years ago." His hands slipped down to her hips pulling her closer.

She shook her head, not sure if he was joking. "I should have found you? I hadn't even thought about a permanent man before you two came around. I was just a little busy with other things."

He laughed. "Give me a kiss and stop arguing."

She narrowed her eyes at him, but he just sat there and waited. Now she understood how he got his way. He simply waited and held on until everyone else gave up. She hooked an arm around his neck and brushed her lips over his. His arms moved up and his warm hands slid under her shirt. She eased closer to him, wanting to feel his chest against her breasts. Her tongue slicked over his lips. She nipped at the fuller lower one. His breath hissed out and his arm tightened.

"A real kiss, no teasing," he growled.

She felt that rumble beneath her fingertips as her hand slid up his chest. A little thrill slipped through her at that sign of his arousal. She loved that she had such a strong effect on him. She didn't tease. She wasn't in the mood to play too much. Her lips opened over his and she stroked her tongue over his lips. His mouth opened and his hand cupped the back of her neck. She brushed her tongue against his. She wasn't about to let him take over. If he did, she wouldn't be able to get it back until the next time. She sucked at his tongue. He tasted so good, spicy and exciting.

She felt cool air on her breast and pulled back. He nipped at her lips but smiled as he pushed her shirt off her shoulders. She pulled her hands free of the fabric, but she wasn't going to let him have all the fun. Working on the ties on his shirt, her fingers fumbled. She couldn't push his shirt wide as he'd done to her shirt. His shirt didn't lace to the bottom. She groaned when the shirt kept getting in her way. She pulled the shirt up his chest. He took over and tugged the shirt off tossing it to the ground. Licking her lips, she eyed the broad expanse of chest in front of her. She ran her hands over his ribs and inward. The muscles beneath her fingers tensed and flexed. She loved feeling the ripple beneath his skin. Her fingers flicked over the hard, dark brown nipples.

He groaned. His hands tightened as they smoothed up her waist. She almost screamed as they stopped just below her rib cage. She wanted him to touch her. He lay back on the couch, pulling her on top of him. He brushed her black hair over her shoulder as she leaned over him. She needed to kiss him. Her lips settled over his, her tongue stroking his. She lifted his hands to her breasts. He squeezed gently before his hands slid down cupping the mounds. The flesh didn't come close to filling his hands, but he didn't seem to mind. His brown eyes burned with desire. She felt the ridge of his cock against her buttocks. She wanted to rip away the cloth separating them. She

wriggled a little as she unfastened her skirt. She couldn't get it past her thighs. Frustrated, she used a little magic to remove the barrier.

"Slow down. We have plenty of time." His hands stroked down over her buttocks.

"I'm just getting more comfortable. Wouldn't you feel better if you were out of those pants and in me?" She traced her tongue over the firm line of his lips.

He groaned. "Are you trying to make me crazy? I want that but we should go slowly."

She could tell he was trying hard to keep his control. Just knowing he felt the need to hold onto his urges made her want to push him until that grip broke, but she sensed there was something more behind the urge than just normal controlling tendencies. So she decided to show him that she didn't need the extra time he was insisting on. Grasping one of his hands, she pulled it between them. Lifting her hips just a little, she urged his fingers between the slick lips. His finger curled, stroking over her clit. She gasped, releasing his hand to brace her hand on the couch near his shoulder. Her mouth slid over his chin and down to his neck. She nibbled along the strong column to his shoulder. Her tongue swirled and lapped at his slightly salty skin.

"We can go very slowly if you'll just cooperate." She felt a little wicked just suggesting it. She'd never been so bold before but he seemed so restrained that she just had to take some kind of action or he'd push them both to their limits.

He growled. She felt the rumble, thrilled at his response. She felt a tingle ripple over her lower body and then they were flesh to flesh. He smiled and nudged her hips backward. She rose onto her knees. His hand reached between them as she slowly lowered herself. His cock nudged at her entrance. She felt the head slip inside, a flare of sharp sweet sensation as the skin stretched. She lowered her body slowly. His hands grasped her hips.

"Ride me. Slowly, and lean down. I want to taste those gorgeous breasts." His eyes locked on the full globes.

She rotated her hips grinning at him, then leaned down, lowering her breasts so that he could reach them. His tongue flicked at the hard bead of her right nipple. She licked her lips as anticipation curled through her. She rocked her hips, keeping the strokes slow and shallow. Sparks and flutters of pleasure built inside her.

His fingers lightly brushed her cheek. "Close your eyes. I want you to focus on what you feel."

She looked into those determined eyes. He didn't even seem to have doubts that she'd follow those orders. His eyes dropped to her breasts as his hands cupped them, urging them closer to his lips. The arrogant, bossy dragon would be in for a serious disappointment sometime when she wasn't in the mood to cooperate. She knew that it would happen at some point. Right now, she was in the mood to be agreeable as long as he didn't stop touching her breasts. She shook her head and closed her eyes.

Without her sight, every sensation burned through her with surprising intensity. Even the light puff of his breath across the slope of her breast sent sparkling prickles

dancing over her skin. A slight wriggle of her hips shot a spike of heat straight to the growing knot of hunger growing low in her belly. Her breath caught and she stilled as shivers ripped up her spine.

Something slightly sharp scraped over her nipple. Sparks danced from that small touch through her. She almost opened her eyes. *What was that?* It didn't feel like a fingernail. Trying to figure it out only made the sensation so much more intense. Her back arched and she rocked against him. Need pulsed and writhed deep in her belly. She wanted to ride him hard and fast until she came. Holding back was only pushing the need higher.

"Samuel, it's got to be now," she whispered. Her fingers brushed over the fabric of the couch trying to find something to hold. If he didn't do something, she was going to attack him.

He groaned and one of his hands slipped down to her hips as he lifted into those slow strokes. His lips closed over the hard aching peak. A tremor ripped down her spine as he tugged before taking the tip into his mouth. Her thighs tightened and she pressed down against him. She bit her lip trying to hold back the need to come. She couldn't think beyond reaching the sweet explosion she needed.

"Be patient." He grazed his teeth over the tight nipple.

So easy for him to say. He didn't seem half as hungry as she was. Her body burned. Each time she rose only inspired a need for more. Her inner muscles clenched. She tried to ride him faster, but his hand tightened, restricting her movement. She groaned. He drew hard on her breast and the sound became a harsh moan.

"More," she demanded as she moved her hips in a slow circle. It was the only movement he didn't fully control.

"If you don't stop torturing me, I'm going to open my eyes and take matters into my hands. I don't do frustration well." She would have glared at him, but she knew he couldn't miss the hard tones.

His laughter sent vibrations through her breast. His hand left her breast and slid down her belly. The muscles tightened a tingling trail following the slight scrape of his nails. His hand slipped between them and stroked her clit.

"Come for me. Let me see you find your pleasure." His finger moved in slow circles, the pressure light.

The lazy strokes pushed her over the edge. She caught her breath, her eyes popping open as a blast of heat slammed into her. His hand withdrew and clasped at her hips, moving her on him. He came, his seed splashing into her. He stiffened beneath of her and a strangled moan came as his hands continued to urge her to ride him.

Her mind slowly began working again as the pleasure faded. The more she thought, the quicker the euphoria dissipated. She glared at him. He'd held onto control right to the last. She pushed at his hands. When they fell away, she scrambled off him and off the couch. Her anger rose. She felt used and that made her furious. He'd shown

less passion than he would have shown to a whore. Aside from the fact that he'd found sexual release, she didn't know if he'd enjoyed it at all.

"By the Goddess' gilded toes, what do you think you were doing?" She put her hands on her hips and waited for answer. He would give her one. She wasn't leaving without it.

"What do you mean?" He sat up frowning, apparently just becoming aware that she wasn't happy.

"I mean that having sex with you made me feel cheap. Except for the fact that you obviously came, I might as well have paid for it for all of the passion you gave me." She gritted her teeth and backed away from the couch as he came to his feet. She didn't like retreating, but she didn't want to be close to him right now. The temptation to hurt him was too strong.

His mouth fell open before a low growl rumbled through the room. "Explain. Now." The order fell between them like a huge stone.

"You controlled everything. What I did, what you did. You never let your desire get out of control. Not even when I was wild and aching for you. When you came, you still held control." She fisted her hands.

"I gave you satisfaction." He frowned.

"Argh..." She felt like pulling out her hair and throwing something. "I want more than an orgasm. I want a man who knows how to relax and have fun with the pleasure. I want to be able to give you as much enjoyment as I get out of it. But you'd never let that happen would you?"

She shook her head, feeling tired, alone and a little sick. She knew he wouldn't listen to her.

He took a step forward, his hand lifting toward her. She stepped back, not willing to let him touch her. He scowled. She could tell his anger was fast outpacing his surprise. She knew she couldn't be rational about this.

"What are you talking about?" One of his hands braced on his hip and the other hung at his side. Even nude he looked formidable. She created some clothes, unwilling to go around the room and pick hers off the floor. Being dressed made her feel a little less vulnerable.

"I'm not willing to take whatever you think you can give me. I want emotion along with the sex. I won't accept less than all of you in that part of your life. If you can't handle that, then don't come near me again." She turned and stepped forward as she created a spatial portal.

White light streaked by her in the dark tunnel. She took two steps forward as the tunnel opened in front of the coven. She wearily trudged up the steps. For the first time in days, she didn't even think about returning to the library and researching. She needed a bath and then to get out and do something. She didn't want to stay and think about what had happened. The wave of dejection and sheer helplessness wasn't something that was going to fade in a few moments. She needed to move.

Chapter Nine

Meagan grimaced as an enraged *merdanon* roar ripped through the night. They'd been spotted outside the walls just as the sun had set. She and some of the other witches had hurried to transport the citizens who weren't trained to fight to safety. Now there was nothing left to do but wait until the Dark Sorcerer decided to make his move. She was waiting, but it wasn't patiently.

The seven creatures outside the walls would be the least of their problems. The beasts would appear inside the walls when the sorcerer was ready to attack and there would be more than seven. She hated the waiting. It was the hardest part. Once the fighting began, she wouldn't have time to do anything more than focus on clearing the village. Now her mind was running in hundreds of different directions. A few of which led to the dragon and vampire who claimed to be her mates.

She still didn't completely believe that story about them being certain she was their mate by the feel of her magic. They had seemed convinced, but she hadn't seen either one of the men since she'd had sex with Samiel. She'd expected to see him shortly after she left. He didn't seem to be a man who'd quietly take an ultimatum like the one she'd thrown.

She'd expected an argument or at the very least an explanation. There was more to it than mere control, probably some incident in his past. She knew it wasn't fair to expect him to just change, but she knew she couldn't accept that little of him. There had to be some kind of fear or something behind it. There would be no other reason for him to put up that kind of wall between himself and her. She had thought of little else while taking the people unable to defend themselves to safety. The duty was tedious and the time to think hadn't yielded any answers.

She leaned against the wall. The attack would happen, probably after the moon rose. That was the usual routine. She looked around, alert to any type of movement. The sight of two men walking down the street caught her attention. Immediate recognition sent a thrill of nervousness through her. Jaeson and Samiel walking toward her. She didn't know what to say, what to expect. She straightened her shoulders, pushing the personal thoughts to the back of her mind. The battle had to come first. She'd have to deal with Samiel and decide what they were going to do later.

"There's movement outside the walls. *Merdanons* will begin appearing inside the walls soon. You'll be with us during the battle." Jaeson walked over and slipped an arm around her waist.

Meagan nodded. This should be interesting. She was fairly certain that those two had never worked with a witch. She'd worked with wizards before and a lot of the more powerful ones tended to believe that females were weaker and in need of

protection. The wizards had soon learned she wouldn't run and hide while they did the work—the dragon and vampire would have to do the same. She wasn't going to stand back and wait for them to kill the *merdanons*. She'd fight at their side or she'd go to another area where she could be of some help.

"You look serious." Samiel stopped in front of her. His eyes searched her face as if looking for some clue to what she was thinking.

She exhaled and tilted her head. She ignored the opening to talk about what had happened earlier. They'd never get through it before the *merdanons* attacked. It would only frustrate both of them to start before they settled it. Better to wait until after the town was safe.

"This is a serious situation. Protecting this village has been a duty and honor in my family for generations." She crossed her arms over her chest and held his eyes. She wanted him to know that she wasn't afraid of him or of meeting any challenge he offered.

"We'll protect this town." Samiel's mouth kicked up into a smile. "And we'll talk afterward."

"I'm sure we will." She kept her voice even, but a small thrill went through her.

She'd had a little doubt that he'd press for more. She couldn't be sure how much the relationship meant to him. He hadn't tried to bite her or even given much indication that he really wanted her. She knew nothing about him and she was fairly sure it was going to take years to find out what was behind that control thing. She just didn't know if she had the patience to work around it or if they'd be together for long after this Dark Sorcerer was routed.

"The *merdanons* are within the walls as well as at least one Dark Sorcerer." Jaeson straightened. His voice had hardened.

Meagan glanced at him. She could almost see the tension rolling off him. Pushing away from the wall, she summoned the sword and dagger. It was time to go to work. She stepped forward and looked up and down the street. They'd better get started. The sooner they began fighting, the less damage the beasts would do to the town.

"Did whoever told you about the *merdanons* give you any hint about where they are?" She raised an eyebrow. She felt confident that the beasts would be defeated. She just wanted to get that battle started.

"We'll be starting at the far end of the village. Come here and I'll transport us to the spot." Jaeson held out his hand.

She stepped forward and slid her hand into his. He drew her close until her body was pressed against his. Samiel stepped behind her. His muscled thighs pressed against hers even as she felt his chest against her back and head. She took a deep breath trying to quiet the sudden sensation of being trapped. Letting it out slowly, she reminded herself that this was necessary. Jaeson was taking them closer to the fight.

She felt hot moist air puff over the shell of her ear. She knew it was Samiel, because, she could see Jaeson. Samiel's tongue flicked over her earlobe.

"There definitely will be a next time." His voice rumbled into her ear.

Darkness surrounded them and she felt a light sense of movement as the tunnel carried them. She saw the streaks of white against the darkness and knew they were moving even if it didn't really seem like it. She felt a little as if her stomach flipped as the black mist dissolved, leaving them on a darkened street. That was definitely weird. She wondered if she'd be able to learn how to do that. It would be nice not to be launched out of a spatial tunnel. She waited until Samiel stepped away from her and then eased away from Jaeson.

The two men took a position side by side. From the first, she saw that the two men were accustomed to working together. She had no idea how they'd do with her or if they'd even given it any thought. She didn't know exactly how they planned to do this and if they had some sort of strategy for the fight. Opening her mouth to ask them exactly that, she gaped as they began walking down the street without even a word to her. She raised her brows. She hurried to catch up to them. Maybe they expected her to take the first step forward. Even if they didn't, reminding them that she was there couldn't hurt. They might need to see that she would be right at their side.

She stepped up beside Samiel. He looked at her and stopped. His eyes widened and he looked at her as if he couldn't believe she was there. She blinked. He couldn't have just forgotten about her. He'd just been holding her.

"What are you doing?" he asked. "You stay behind Jaeson and me."

She stiffened, felt all of her muscles lock tight. He couldn't have surprised her more if he'd taken a swing at her. In spite of her doubt about how they'd work with her, she hadn't expected her worst fears to be realized.

"No, I don't stay behind either of you. Not in battle. If either of you think that I'm going to stand behind you while you fight the *merdanons* and the Dark Sorcerer or even a minion, you're both idiots." She put her hand on her hips.

"You are not going to get hurt." Samiel growled.

"I can hold a shield and have been fighting on my own for years. If you can't treat me as a partner when we're fighting, then we won't be fighting together." She leaned closer, not intimidated by his scowl.

"We have work to do. We're going to work with you. It's just going to take some time to get used to it," Jaeson said.

Meagan glared at him. She knew he'd stopped her from delivering her ultimatum on purpose. She didn't know why he was so wary of her angering Samiel. She'd learned enough to know that whether in dragon form or human form, Samiel's primary focus would be on keeping her safe and with him.

"Let's get started then." She turned back to face the street.

Samiel nodded, but moved to her other side so that she was between Jaeson and him. She looked at him, considering the situation. He'd offered a compromise. She'd take the offer and do her best to make it work. She nodded. They started forward again. A gray-skinned beast loomed in front of them. Her heart beat faster and her mouth felt

as dry as the Agrio desert. All thought of her argument with them faded. She strengthened her shield, expanding it to cover both the men because she knew the tactics of these creations better than they did.

The *merdanon* ripped a lantern off one of the houses that lined the street and the hinged hook it was attached to hung precariously until the beast ripped it off too. He hurled the lantern toward them. Samiel's hand swept out and he pushed her behind him. She saw the flare of light even from behind his large body. She slipped away from his restraining hand. Going around his outstretched hand, she moved back between them. Fire burned on the ground at the base of the shield.

"Don't do that again. I know what I'm doing. Nothing's going to get through my shield." She glared at Samiel.

"It was instinct to protect you. I had no idea what your shield could stop. I couldn't take the chance." He put up his hand. "I would have done that for almost any female if I didn't know how she fought."

She took a couple of deep breaths while she thought about it. The explanation made sense. It would take at least two or three battles before they learned what to expect from each other. She smiled a little and nodded. Hope that they would be able to work together rose.

"Let's take down that *merdanon*." She looked at the advancing beast which was getting a little too close for her comfort. She pushed it back.

Jaeson threw a glittering orb of magic. It flew through the air and flared as it hit a shield in front of the *merdanon*. Magic sparkled as it fell to the ground. Samiel hurled two quick orbs. Meagan let the energy build inside her. It gathered at the tip of the sword. The *merdanon* hurled a chunk of rock and Samiel stepped in front of her. Her eyes widened and her stomach felt heavy. The sick feeling swept through her, leaving a trail of chill bumps over her arms. She had been preparing to throw a bolt of energy. If he'd stepped in front of her as she'd thrown that, he could have easily been killed. Her hand trembled. She stepped around Samiel and threw the bolt of energy. It hit the shield and flared as the barrier held.

"Don't ever step in front of me when I'm forming an orb." She looked at Samiel her throat felt tight. She wanted to yell at him. Her voice sounded raspy and almost strangled.

"What?" Samiel's head tilted to the side. He looked confused.

"I had formed an orb to hurl. If you had been a few moments later, it would have hit you in the back." She exhaled, trying to get the image out of her head.

"Point taken." He nodded, glancing down at the sword.

"Get back to work, you two. I'm not going to do all the work during this fight," Jaeson growled, grabbing her attention.

Meagan laughed softly at the annoyance she heard in his voice. She let the matter drop for now. *Give it time*, she reminded herself. She faced the *merdanon* again. She tossed another orb. The wariness and caution didn't fade. She swung her sword,

sending an orb flying down the street. It hit and the beast's shield finally fell. Jaeson tossed an orb. It slammed into the beast just before another ball of magic flew down the street. It hit the *merdanon* and the gray-skinned creation toppled back.

One dead, too many more to go. The thought fluttered through her mind. She saw movement in the shadowy street ahead of them. She knew another *merdanon* was already moving toward them even if she couldn't see it yet. She took a step forward, drawn to take the energy of the fallen beast so that the wizard couldn't use it again.

"Slowly. We'll get to it, but we're not taking any chances." Jaeson put his hand on her arm. "We have time. The sorcerer won't be close enough to know that his creation has been defeated already."

She nodded, but it wasn't easy. She couldn't just ignore it completely. Part of her was hyper-aware of what she needed to do. The other part focused on the shadows searching for the enemy concealed by the darkness. She formed a small ball of light and tossed it into the air.

Just as they reached the downed *merdanon* another appeared out of the darkness ahead of them. She kneeled and drove the blade into the beast. Energy flooded into her. Her eyes closed as she tried to adjust to the influx of power. She didn't know if she'd ever get used to that rushing surge. She slowly stood and fell into step between them.

The beast slowly advanced. Samiel tossed an orb toward the beast. He seemed tense. She threw a sizzling bolt down the street. The *merdanon* screamed. A man appeared just behind the beast. The creation didn't even seem to notice the man. Meagan didn't recognize the wizard. He wasn't one of the locals. She would have recognized him. There weren't that many wizards in the area. Most left when they reached maturity. Normally, there wasn't enough excitement or challenge here. Judging from the lack of greeting or even an attempt to kill the *merdanon*, he wasn't with the vampires and dragons.

"You won't keep this village. It's ours." The wizard stepped up beside the beast.

Meagan stiffened. She opened her mouth. "Your village—"

"Be quiet, Meagan. We'll handle this." Jaeson's hard voice slashed through the night.

Her head whipped around to look at him. He glared at her. Fury rose inside her. She'd told him she'd fight at his side as an equal. She didn't take orders from anyone in battle. Her days as an apprentice were over long ago.

"You don't tell me what to do in battle," she said quietly. She'd never been treated like this. Not even by her older sister and brothers just after she'd gotten out of training. Her youngest sister hadn't even been coddled nearly this much.

Jaeson's eyebrows rose as if he was surprised by her reaction. She didn't know how they treated other women, but they'd better learn fast. She was getting tired of giving them time. Many more incidents like this and she'd go where she could actually feel as if she was doing something useful. Truthfully, they could handle all of this on their own. They didn't need her. She'd only stayed this long because of something one of

those books had said. They were stronger as three. Her power was stronger with them. She had no idea how that would happen but she had a feeling they'd need it later. She wanted to get as much practice as possible. Even knowing that, she couldn't let them order her and do as they liked. She wanted their respect and she knew they probably wouldn't just give it to her. They were too accustomed to protecting others for that to happen.

"We'll talk about this later." Samiel's voice drew her attention. "Let's deal with this sorcerer and clear the town before we get into that."

Meagan had to admit that Samiel was right even though it infuriated her to admit it. They had to clear the town. That had to come before straightening out those two.

"Yes, just stand there and look pretty. I'll get to you as soon as I deal with your two escorts," the Dark Sorcerer said easily.

Meagan wanted to retort, but she wasn't going to let him know that he'd irritated her. She gathered energy, letting it build. With a swish of her blade, she hurled the bolt down the street. It flared as it hit the shield in front of the Dark Sorcerer. She didn't know if he was leader or minion and didn't care right now. That would matter only after they removed the threat. In spite of how strong he was, he couldn't hold out against all three of them.

The Dark Sorcerer glared and sent three bolts of energy hurtling toward them. The energy flared, forming a nearly solid curtain of white in front of them. Meagan was a little worried that the Sorcerer would flee while they were nearly blinded by the shower of magic. She didn't see any movement, but knew the man could disappear as easily as he'd appeared.

Samiel hurled a flaring ball of fire down the street as soon as the light cleared and they could see. Meagan gathered energy. She was relieved to see that the sorcerer was still there. The magic hit, but it didn't flare as much as it had before. The sorcerer's shield was weakening. Excitement stirred, but she refused to let her mind get ahead of the fight. Something could easily go wrong before the sorcerer's energy failed. Meagan let the orb fly. It slammed into the shield. She knew it wouldn't hold for much longer.

"I'm going to kill you," the sorcerer grated.

"Not this or any other time." Jaeson threw an orb toward the sorcerer.

The sorcerer slammed orbs down the street in quick succession. She felt an arm hook around her waist. Startled, she whipped her head around in time to see Samiel's determined face just before he put her behind him.

She stood there stunned, gaping at his back as the Sorcerer's magic hit her shield. Fury rose inside her. She'd warned them. Her first impulse was to leave right then and let them take care of the sorcerer. Her own sense of responsibility wouldn't allow that. Almost immediately she knew she couldn't do that. After the sorcerer was defeated was another matter. She moved to slip around Samiel. He pushed her back just as another bolt hit the shield. She heard a low rumbling growl. She couldn't believe he was actually growling at her.

"I told you that I'd fight right beside you." She moved up between them again.

Jaeson shot her a sharp look, but didn't say a word. Samiel's hand hooked around her and tried to push her in back of them again. She kicked him in the back of the calf and moved forward again. She formed an energy arc before he could make another grab for her. The man was stubborn, but he wasn't stupid enough to grab her when she was creating an orb.

The Dark Sorcerer flinched as Meagan's magic hit his shield. She saw the fury on his face. What she didn't see was determination. He wasn't going to risk his life tonight. It wouldn't be long until he left. She had been in enough fights to know when a sorcerer was going to run. She wanted him gone so she could move on to where she could actually be useful. She slashed her blade, slamming a powerful orb into his shield.

Jaeson hurled a bolt down the street. The magic hit and the shield flickered. The sorcerer turned and ran two steps and jumped into a tunnel. Jaeson cursed and swung around. Meagan slammed an orb toward the *merdanon*. She wanted to take it down while it was relatively unprotected. The bolt sizzled as it hit the beast. It picked up a huge chunk of rock and ran toward them. Its arms raised as it prepared to throw the rock. She formed another bolt of magic and sent it flying at the creature. The *merdanon* screamed as two more balls of magic flew down the street. They hit the beast. It fell to its knees. Meagan hurled a final bolt. She wanted the beast dead. It fell to the ground. She stepped forward and drove her dagger into its thigh. She turned and faced Jaeson and Samiel.

"Somehow we're going to have to learn to work together. I'm not going to try anymore tonight. I don't need your protection." She tried to ease the tension in her jaw. The urge to scream was nearly overwhelming. "If you keep it up, I can find someone else to help me easily."

"Don't do—" Jaeson began.

Meagan didn't hang around to listen to any more of the man's warning. She took a step back and formed a tunnel behind her. She knew they would follow if they could. She didn't intend to make it easy. As she stepped out of the tunnel, she sent out a burst of magic in all directions.

She looked around the area. She saw a downed *merdanon* on the street in front of her. Walking slowly forward, she looked around the dark street. *Merdanons* weren't subtle. She knew that if any were in the area they'd have made themselves known unless they were being directly controlled by a Dark Sorcerer. That was the only thing that worried her as she moved up the street. She had no idea how many wizards were involved in these attacks, but there was probably more than one in the town tonight. She kneeled and took the magic before beginning her walk down the street. Eventually, she found one of the battles. A lone witch faced a *merdanon*. Meagan walked slowly toward them. When she drew close, she stopped outside where she guessed the woman's shield was. She definitely didn't want to get shield stunned right now. She waited until the *merdanon* was stumbling back from the woman's magic.

"Hi, do you need some help?" Meagan asked quietly.

Lillia turned her head and smiled. "Get up here. I thought for sure that you'd be with the vampire and dragon during this battle."

"I was for a while. Now I'm here." Meagan walked slowly forward, still careful of any shield. She knew Lillia wouldn't take it down until the last possible moment.

"Ah, so what happened?" Lillia asked.

Meagan moved up beside her. "They didn't work well with me. I don't know if it's because they see all females as in need of protection or if it's something to do with me. Either way I was fairly redundant there. They didn't need my help."

Lilli hurled an orb down the street at the *merdanon*. "I don't think them needing you is what the relationship is supposed to be about."

"I know that. We're supposed to work together, but they kept making the same mistakes over and over. It frustrated and infuriated me. I needed a break from it. They didn't even seem to realize that they were doing anything wrong." Meagan slammed a ball of energy down the street. She wished she could get rid of the anger as easily as she did those balls of energy.

She knew something had to give. She really couldn't have stood being pushed to the back again even one more time. Even now, it made her so angry that she wanted to kick Samiel again even harder than she had. She shouldn't have to prove that she could fight at his side. She hadn't just been released from training. That hadn't been the case for years. She was a battled-tested witch.

Chapter Ten

Samiel felt shock roll through him as Meagan disappeared. He couldn't really believe that she'd actually left. He'd thought she was just using the threat to get her way. After the shock began to fade, fear and anger built. She belonged with them, where they could protect her and watch over her. She should know that.

"Where is she? Go get her and bring her back." Samiel looked over at Jaeson. He knew she could take care of herself and that physically she'd be safe, but the dragon part of him raged. He felt the urge to change and find her. Only the fact that Jaeson should be able to find her easily held him back.

"I don't know where she is. She sent out a blast as she exited her tunnel that blanketed the village in her power. By the time it fades the battle will probably be over. Don't worry. I've alerted the other vampires in town, they'll find her." Jaeson put his hand on Samiel's shoulder.

"She belongs here with us." Samiel couldn't keep the growl out of his voice.

"She can take care of herself, Samiel. You are being just a bit overprotective. I can't say that I blame her for trying to make her point." Jaeson looked over at him.

Samiel was in no mood to be reasonable about this. The dragon inside him growled and clawed to get out and search for her. As irrational as it was, part of him believed she was trying to leave them permanently. Her last comment certainly hadn't helped. Building a working relationship would take time. He didn't know why she couldn't see that. He couldn't take chances with her life and just wait to find out what she could do. His first priority would always be to protect her.

"Have they found her yet?" Samiel asked as they moved down the street. He forced his mind off the thought of her out there alone and back onto fighting the beasts. He still had to help clear the village.

"Not yet, it's going to take a little time." Jaeson walked at his side, his entire attention on the street in front of them.

Samiel growled. He could feel his muscles tightening and his teeth lengthening. He knew he wasn't that far away from changing into the midform. He didn't want to lose control with her. He was afraid he'd hurt her if he wasn't in complete control.

"Calm down and breathe. She'll be fine. She's well-trained." Jaeson stopped as a *merdanon* lumbered out of the darkness.

Even though they were busy, the wait until she was found tore at him. Finally, just as they received the word that the village had been cleared, one of the other vampires contacted Jaeson. They'd found her.

* * * * *

Meagan knew Samiel and Jaeson were coming. She'd expected it ever since she'd seen the first vampire. She hadn't expected it to take so long. She was a little nervous. She knew there would probably be an argument. Hopefully, it would make them see her as something more than just a female.

She heard a gasp and turned her head toward the sound. Her eyes focused on a shape moving down the street. At first, she had no idea what it was. The tall, two-legged creature had wings. Only when she saw gold streaks on his shoulders did she realize that she was looking at a dragon in some in-between form. That was Samiel. Just as her mind began to process that fact, his arms closed around her. She pushed against his chest.

"Let me go, Samiel." She managed to put only a little space between them.

He growled, baring his teeth at her. She drew in a sharp breath. She wasn't scared, but she was nervous. She didn't know how to handle him. He was even more intimidating in this form and the fact that he hadn't said a single word to her. He moved forward and changed completely. She suddenly found herself clutched in two large paws against his chest. Wind swirled around her. She felt her feet leave the ground and looked down to see it get farther away from her. She hooked an arm over one of Samiel's paws. She knew he wouldn't drop her, but she instinctively sought to have something to hold onto. As soon as he took a direction toward the mountains she knew he was probably taking her to his lair.

She wondered why he wasn't talking to her. Well, why he hadn't spoken when he could? She'd expected anger, but she had warned him that she wouldn't be put behind them again. He swept in a wide arc toward where she thought the entrance was. Gliding lower, he hovered for a moment. Air buffeted her. The instant his back legs touched the ground a black cloud surrounded the dragon. The large paws gripping her changed to muscled arms banding her to his chest.

She knew he wanted to have sex with her. She could feel the ridge of his cock, smell it in the rich musky scent. The thought should have frightened her, but it didn't. It excited her. She instinctively knew that regardless what form he was in, he wouldn't hurt her. Whatever was driving him, right now, he wouldn't respond to talking. He was as close to out-of-control as he was ever likely to get. The thought thrilled her. She didn't want him totally controlled like he'd been the first time he'd had sex with her. She wanted him to feel the heat and want as badly as she did. He carried her into the lair. She stroked her fingers over his cheek, curious about how it would feel beneath her fingers. Warm and supple, there was a little bit of a raspy grate, but she liked it.

"My woman, you're not leaving me." His head lowered and his breath fanned across her neck a moment before he nuzzled the sensitive hollow.

Her eyes widened at his words. He couldn't have thought that she was going to try to leave him permanently. She knew she'd told them that they'd have to learn to work together. There hadn't been anything about not ever seeing them again. She shook her

head. There wasn't any use trying to work out what he was thinking or why he was so upset. He'd probably tell her after he was a little calmer. She looked forward to helping him get that way.

He carried her into the large room and lowered her to her feet. His dark brown eyes locked with hers. He looked so intense. She didn't move a muscle. The heat in his eyes pinned her. His hands stroked down her arms.

"Be very still, Meagan. I'm going to take your clothes off." The growl rolled over her raising goose bumps on her arms and the hair at the back of her neck rose.

She merely nodded. Licking her lips, she kept her hands at her side. His hands slid to the fastenings on her shirt. She saw his fingers trembling. He was really close to the edge. She swallowed, suddenly having some doubts about this now. Maybe he was a little too wild. She wanted him to feel and express his desire without being in total control, but maybe he needed a little more time to calm down. She slid a glance toward the opening of the tunnel that led outside.

"Don't even think about it." His voice hissed in her ear. She knew he couldn't have seen her eyes move to the door with his head near her neck. She wondered how he knew what she'd been thinking.

He pushed the shirt wide and stepped back. As his hands urged the fabric over her shoulders, she let it fall to the floor, but she watched him. Even with the caution, she could feel the desire building. He smiled as his eyes slowly ran over her body, from her bared breasts and down to her hips and thighs. Even though she was still wearing pants, she felt exposed. His hands cupped her breasts. The movements were slow and controlled, but she could tell that it was an illusion. His thumbs flicked across her nipples. Shivers of sensation rippled through her and she felt the nipples tighten. The conflicting emotions and thoughts only seemed to enhance the arousal. He leaned close and his teeth scraped over her neck. She shivered and her eyes closed. His breath feathered over her shoulder and down. His teeth nipped at the swell of her breast. The sharp sting shot straight to her core. She could feel the slick moisture slipping from her. Her inner muscles clenched. Lady, she needed to feel him inside her. Her clit hardened and she could feel every beat of her heart.

Her eyes snapped open. His tongue swirled around the nipple just as his hand cupped her pussy. She felt the heat of his palm through the fabric. She looked down and saw his nostrils flare. He looked up at her and licked his lips. He looked predatory and hungry. His fingers pressed up against her clit.

"I'm hungry for you too, Meagan," he said in a low rumble that vibrated through her.

His fingers slipped between the lips, cloth rubbed against her clit. She moaned. It felt so good. The friction of cloth against her clit was maddening. Her hips rolled forward into his stroking fingers. He sucked at her breast. She ached, unable to remain totally still. Just keeping her hands off him was straining her control. His hand lifted

away from her pussy. She stiffened and gasped, reaching for him, but he pushed her hands back down to her side.

He hooked his arm around her, hauling her off her feet and close to his body. She wrapped her legs around his hips. He ground her against him, his hips rocking into her as his lips slanted across hers a moment before his tongue thrust into her mouth. She met the fierce kiss eagerly, stroking her tongue against his. On a harsh groan, his fingers threaded through her hair and he nipped her lips. As her hands glided up his shoulders, she pressed against him, rubbing her breasts against his chest. He lowered her to her feet. It was a struggle to remain still when she ached to touch him. She wished he'd use his magic to rid them both of their clothes. Tingles coursed over her skin and it felt as if currents were running over her body. She could barely stay still. Only the knowledge of how close he was to the edge kept her from ripping his clothes off. His fingers tugged at the laces of her pants. The moment the fabric loosened slightly, he pushed them down her thighs. She kicked out of the low boots when the pants got tangled there. The look in his eyes was intense. A puff of cool air skittered up her legs. She shivered and licked her lips. Without the heat of his body, it was a little chilly. He straightened and carried her over to the bed. When he set her on her feet on the bed, he urged her to face away from him.

"Kneel." His hands settled on her shoulders, pressing slightly.

She knelt, looking over her shoulder at him. His clothes disappeared. He dropped to his knees behind her. Anticipation curled low in her belly. His hands slipped around her, pulling her back against him. She leaned into him, eager to feel his cock filling her. His thighs touched hers and she felt the slide of his heated skin as he leaned closer to her.

His breath brushed against her cheek. His hand slid down to her pussy and his fingers slipped between the lips. He stroked her clit in slow circles. She moaned and pushed back into the too-light touch. Just before the ache inside her threatened to explode, his fingers slid away from that sensitive spot. His fingers pushed into her pussy pumping twice before withdrawing. She wanted to scream. Her body was on fire.

His fingers lifted. She glanced over her shoulder and saw him lift them to his mouth. He sucked on them, his tongue flicking as if he wanted to gather every last bit of her juices. She licked her lips and watched him finish. She wanted a kiss. His fingers trailed down her back before he urged her onto her hands. His body eased back, but only long enough for him to fit the head of his cock to her entrance.

His hips surged forward and his hands pulled her back into the thrust. She drew in a sharp breath as his cock hit some sensitive bundle of nerves inside her. Clutching at the silky sheets beneath her hands, she desperately tried to seize the pleasure. She wanted to grab him and pull him closer. The position and her inability to control anything both frustrated and excited her. His hips drove against hers, pushing the pleasure to a higher level. She felt his nails scrape along her thigh. It sent tingles running up her spine and over her body.

She threw her head back and desperately pushed back into every stroke. Light flashed in front of her eyes and sweet pleasure tore through her. She trembled as each

stroke sent an echoing pulse over her body. She felt the scrape of his teeth at her neck and then a sting as he bit. She tensed at the sharp bite of pain, but it quickly faded. His hips drove against hers and she felt him stiffen as he came. He groaned and the sound vibrated through her body. As his mouth moved on her shoulder, she felt magic flowing from her. She savored the lingering pleasure as his tongue swept over her shoulder.

Meagan knew when Samiel again regained full control. His body tensed and even though they were still joined she could feel him putting some emotional distance between them. She took a deep breath. Even though it had only happened twice, she hated it and she wasn't going to let it continue. She needed answers now. This wasn't going to fade away by wishing it would. Somehow, she had to get him to see that he could let go a little with her. Lady, just the fact that she wasn't fighting to get out of his arms should tell him that she could deal with his wild side. But she knew it wasn't going to be easy.

"I'm sorry." His voice sounded tight. He slowly withdrew from her.

"Why?" She had to ask. Maybe it would give her an opening to get him to talk more.

"I practically raped you." He moved to the side of the bed.

She sat on the bed and just looked at him. He felt guilty, that was obvious, but she didn't know how to make him see that there was no reason.

"You didn't do anything like that. I didn't say 'no' once, did I? I wanted you as much as you wanted me." She made no move to cover herself. She didn't want him to think she was afraid of him in any way.

"I didn't give you much of a chance." He shook his head and looked away from her.

"You're an idiot." She rose to her feet and put her hands on her hips. "Who did this to you?"

He blinked and looked a little confused. "I'm a — What do you mean?"

"I mean that you're an idiot. You didn't hurt me." She held out her hands and turned. She gritted her teeth and struggled not to scream at him. "You wouldn't. And if I'm going to pay for what someone else did, I deserve to know what happened."

"There are scratches on you. I did hurt you." He looked at her thighs.

She looked down and saw the scrapes on her thighs. She'd had worse from thorns and bramble in the forest. He was making something out of nothing. She wanted to shake him, to make him see that there was absolutely no reason for him to feel guilty.

"Then I hurt you the last time we had sex. I know there were scratches down your back. Maybe I should never have sex with you again." She tossed back, waiting to get some kind of reaction.

"Don't be ridiculous." He took a step toward her.

"You're the one who's being ridiculous. You didn't even come close to raping me. Even at your wildest, you made sure I wanted you. You didn't throw me down and jump on me." She threw her hands up and began pacing. "I wanted you even before we landed. I was just angry with you and confused."

"I could have hurt you badly." He looked down at his hands. "When I'm in that form, I'm so much stronger than I am now."

"You just don't get it. You may be physically stronger, but the dragon's instincts are stronger too. If he was as destructive and violent as you think, I'd be lying on the floor whimpering now." She scowled at him.

"You don't know that for sure." He looked at her.

"Yes, I do and I know another thing. I like that wild dragon a lot more than I do the controlled man I first had sex with. The dragon's honest and not afraid of himself." She magically clothed herself in fresh clothing. The other shirt and pants were covered with dust and smelled of smoke and she didn't want to get back in them until they were clean. "Now tell me who did this to you. What happened?"

"The dragon's all feeling and is dangerous." He took another step closer.

"Stop it. The dragon might make love to me until I'm ready to do nothing more than sleep, but his instinct to protect his mate would never let him hurt me. I don't think he'd hurt any woman." She ran a frustrated hand through her hair. By the Lady's mercy, she wished she could make him see the truth.

"The dragon has..."

"If you're going to tell me that the dragon's hurt some woman you'd better mean more than the scrapes on my legs. What happened? Broken bones, gouges, blood everywhere?" She deliberately tossed out the worst options available. She had a feeling it wasn't going to be anything like that.

"No, of course no bones were broken or any gouges or blood." He looked offended.

"Did the dragon not stop when a woman told you no?" She raised her brows.

"No, nothing like that," he growled.

"Well, you're not telling me what happened. I can only make guesses at why you won't let yourself really enjoy anything. If you didn't badly hurt her or keep going when she said no, what happened? Did the woman get scared when you were making love to her and partially changed?" She turned to face him, but couldn't stay still. When she spotted her dusty shirt on the floor, she picked it up and folded it, needing to keep her hands busy otherwise she might just try shaking him regardless of whether or not it would really work.

His eyes narrowed. "It happened."

She knew then that she'd guessed right. Some witch had gotten scared and turned on him viciously. She just didn't know how to get through to him. He wasn't going to hurt her and she wasn't going to walk in fear of him because some other woman had panicked.

"I don't know what happened. I hope you'll tell me about it some time. I already told you that I won't accept the little that you gave me the first time. I'm not going to run from you no matter how scary you think you are. Let that settle into your head." She smiled tiredly at him a little depressed. If he didn't see that she could take his lovemaking after what had just happened, she didn't know what would do it.

"You say that now, but..."

"You were half man, half dragon when you came to me earlier. You growled, you barely said a word. If I was going to run, I'd be running right now." She glared at him. Did he really think that a day or so from now she was going to get so scared of him that she couldn't even stay in the same village with him?

"Your doubts about yourself and your dragon, I can't do anything about that. Your doubts about me, I can do something there." She turned to the cave entrance.

"What are you going to do?" Samiel asked. She heard the tension rising in his voice.

"Prove that I'm not going anywhere. Dealing with you until you decide to trust me will probably make me want to scream, but I'll handle it." Meagan put her shirt on one of the couches. She was a little surprised. She actually hadn't known what she was going to say until it had come out of her mouth. When it had, she'd known that it was right. The only way to convince him that she wasn't afraid of him was to be with him.

"How are you going to do that?" He walked over to her and put his hands on her shoulders.

"I'm going to move in here with you. You wanted it and I held back from saying yes to it." She shrugged, but she felt far from relaxed or uninterested.

"Is it safe to come in?" Jaeson asked from the doorway.

Meagan turned her head and scowled at him. Did he buy into the dragon's beliefs too? He should know better than anyone else that in any form the dragon would only protect them.

"Of course, it's safe. I'm just trying to get through to him. It's going to take some time." She glared at Samiel. The fact that she hadn't been able to put even a doubt in his mind frustrated her.

"He's stubborn and doesn't listen. Are you all right?" He strolled over and hooked an arm around her waist.

"Of course, I'm all right. Samiel wouldn't hurt me and you should know that." She was tempted to drive her elbow into his ribs.

"I knew he wouldn't physically hurt you, but I thought that you might have been a little shocked. He doesn't exactly offer explanations." Jaeson smiled. "Don't get angry."

"Oh, it was shocking, but I soon realized that as angry as he was, he was also focused on me. So it was kind of impossible to be really scared." She leaned into him. She looked from Jaeson to Samiel. She felt at ease with them and she hadn't expected that. She'd thought it would be strange to be with both of them. It was different, but she

didn't feel as awkward as she expected. There was something right about being with them.

"Is everything settled?"

"As settled as it's going to be until he realizes I'm not the witch who panicked on him. But if he keeps as much control when he has sex with me as he did the first time, I might just have to do something intentionally to make the dragon come out again." She put a hand on Samiel's chest and met his eyes.

"You already know about that? He didn't tell me anything for months." Jaeson's voice held clear astonishment.

"Not the details, but I learned enough." She kept her eyes on Samiel. She expected some kind of reaction to her ultimatum.

"No provoking the dragon. Rule number one." Samiel raised a brow but a small smile curved his lips.

"I want you to have fun when you're with me. Whether I'm tied down and at your mercy or you're making slow love to me, I want you to enjoy every moment. You barely even let go of your control to come that first time. I won't be afraid of anything you do." She wanted to move closer to him and snuggle against him, but knew that she couldn't soften her position.

He had to know she was serious about this. Her temper was near the breaking point. She'd faced him at what he probably considered his worst and that hadn't shown him she didn't need him to control himself at all times. She wondered just what would finally show him that she wouldn't ever run in fear and that he wouldn't hurt her.

"So what are you going to do? Any plan to make him see that you'll be safe with him?" Jaeson asked.

"I'll be staying the night here or wherever you two are. That's the first plan. After that, I'll have to reconsider. I'll stick with it for awhile." She glanced at Jaeson. She had no idea what she'd do if it didn't show some kind of results. She couldn't force him to have faith in her.

Samiel's hand covered hers. "Give it time. We'll come to some accord."

"Like you have with Jaeson. It's not going to work with me. Maybe I'm greedy, but I want everything including laughter and play as we make love. Get used to it. I like having my way as much as you do." She turned her hand in his loose hold.

Samiel laughed. "You're moving your clothes in here as well as staying here, aren't you?"

"Yes, I should go get that as well as a few things I don't want to leave." She reluctantly stepped back. Even for what might be a temporary stay, there were a few small things that had belonged to her parents that she wouldn't be leaving in the sect house.

Chapter Eleven

Meagan leaned a hip against the table in the witches' council room and looked at the missive. Considering it had been delivered by one of the high witches from the coven in Dicsin, the neighboring town, she'd known before Elder Sarash had invited her to look at it that it was important. She read the letter, hardly believing what it said. They had a generator. Well, part of it. It had been part of a tool used to protect the village nearly a thousand years ago. Meagan had no idea what had happened to the other parts of the generator, why it had been broken apart or if the witches even knew where they were. That would have to be discovered later. They had to keep the Dark Sorcerer from getting it. Any part of it. After she had a moment to think, she started to wonder why the witches hadn't contacted the dragons and vampires helping to defend Dicsin. Then again, they'd been isolated for a while and probably wouldn't trust outsiders.

"We can't just move it and hide it. It has to be hidden and it's obvious someone knows about it," Elder Sarash said. "We have to make sure no one can get to it. Do you understand? Then we have to get the other pieces."

"I understand." Meagan nodded.

No one from the coven could know where the piece of the generator was put. And finding those other pieces was a priority. First, she'd need help. She hadn't been outside this area in years. Well, aside from claiming the blades. Having that generator in the area was too much of a risk. She didn't have the first idea where to hide it or where it would be safe. The only people she knew of who would know that were the dragons and vampires.

"I'll do this immediately. The Dark Sorcerer seems to want this very badly. When I get back, we need to discuss how to get this coven's piece and find the other pieces before they fall into the wrong hands." Meagan put the parchment back onto the table and straightened.

Elder Sarash held the missive up between two fingers. A moment later it burst into blue flames. She let it fall. The flame consumed the missive before it reached the table. Not even a fine ash remained of the paper.

Meagan turned and left the room. Now she had to find some dragons and vampires and go to get that piece of the generator. She'd need more than Samiel and Jaeson. If the Dark Sorcerer had somehow learned of its possible move then just getting to the sect house might not be easy. She just hoped the Dicsin sect been as careful as it seemed. Even if they had, a group of dragons and vampires arriving in the village would draw attention. If she was more certain of the precautions she'd go alone, but losing that generator wasn't a chance she was willing to take.

She left the coven house and looked up and down the street. She sighed. It figured. Just when she really needed to find a dragon or vampire, not one was anywhere in sight. She began walking looking for them. She was really hoping to see Samiel or Jaeson, but any dragon or vampire would do. They'd planned on checking the walls again. They were concerned about the village's defenses. She didn't see any near the wall at first, but she climbed the steps to the wall along its length. She saw a dragon in human form walking outside the wall apparently making sure it was intact. The green streak in his black hair made it easy to identify him. Not wanting to yell her request, she formed a tunnel and came out in front of the man. She took two quick steps forward as the momentum of the tunnel carried her.

"You really shouldn't be outside the wall. Samiel won't like it." The dragon's head tilted and he frowned at her. His dark brown eyes questioned her.

It took her a moment to remember his name from the brief introductions that had been made during the battle. Maxim. His name was Maxim. The green crystal dangling from his ear caught the light as he studied her.

"Being outside the town's wall isn't going to hurt me and Samiel should know it." She shook her head. Lecturing this man wasn't going to make any difference. She needed to get this discussion under control. "I need to find him or Jaeson. Do you know where they are or how to contact one of them?"

"I can get Samiel here. It's important?" Maxim asked.

"Very important." She tapped her foot. She could already be at the village and getting the generator piece, but she knew this had to be done with care.

"All right. You might want to cover your ears." He gave her a very serious look and then stepped away from her.

She put her hands up to her ears not quite sure if he was playing a joke at her expense or not. She knew how loud a dragon could be so she wasn't going to take any chances. Maxim's head tipped back and a booming roar came out. Even with her hands covering her ears, the sound seemed to echo and bounce around her head. She felt the sound all through her body. When he finally stopped, she pulled her hands away from her ears. Her ears rang and her head pounded. She waited a moment until the worst of it had passed. Lady, her hands hadn't helped. She should have used a spell and moved to the opposite end of the wall before Maxim called.

"Is that supposed to be Samiel's name in dragon?" she asked, hoping that she wasn't speaking too loudly. Everything sounded as if it was muffled by something. She just hoped her hearing eventually returned to normal.

"Yes, that's a call specifically for Samiel." Maxim turned to look at her. "He should be here shortly. He was supposed to be somewhere in the village. Are you in some kind of trouble?"

"Other than wondering if my hearing will ever be the same, not really. I just need some help with something. If it was possible I'd try to handle this myself, but there's

too much at stake." She shrugged. That was as much as she was going to say about it here. Someone could be listening.

Arms came around her and pulled her back against a hard body. She looked down and saw the rich, golden brown skin. She relaxed. Samiel. She knew it wasn't Jaeson, his skin was lighter.

"What did you need?" Samiel asked.

"How do you know I need something?" Meagan asked.

"Maxim wouldn't have called me if you just wanted to talk and you don't look as if you're in trouble." Samiel's teeth grazed the shell of her ear.

His tongue played with the four studs along the upper curve of her ear. She had a feeling that he liked the jewelry there. Maybe later she'd put in a few of her hoops and give him something a little different to appreciate.

"We need to talk privately and then you're going to have to talk with your friends." She took a deep breath. With each moment that passed she became a little more nervous.

"All right." He lifted her off her feet. She saw a tunnel open up in front of them just before he stepped forward. The feel of movement and momentum was less than it usually felt, but it was there.

The gate opened and she saw a bed in front of them. She recognized the blankets and realized he'd brought them to the lair. He released her, but took her hand and led her over to the couch.

"What did you want to talk about?" Samiel asked, tugging her down onto the couch.

"We're going to have to go to Dicsin. The coven's become the target of the attack and we need to remove the reason before the Dark Sorcerer gets any closer," Meagan said.

"Gets closer to what? We'll go. I need more information before we go. I'm not going to go into the situation blind." Samiel put his hand on her leg, squeezing gently.

"The coven in Dicsin has part of an old generator. The Dark Sorcerer wants it. It needs to be moved and hidden again. Since the Dark Sorcerer knows of it, someone in their coven told of it." She met his eyes.

"What did the generator do?" He straightened, his attention suddenly focused completely on the matter.

"I only know the legend. It's the only story of a generator I know so I think it's part of that generator. It was created by the witches of three covens in these mountains. It created a giant shield around the three cities hundreds of years ago before the Kings." She bit her lip.

"There are only two cities now," Samiel prodded.

"The other town fell just after the first Kings began their reign." She'd seen the ruins on the mountain as she'd traveled during her duties, but she'd never had time to explore.

"You said there was only one piece of a generator. Where are the other parts?"

"I don't know. I don't even know how many pieces they broke it into or why they felt they needed to do it. First, we have to get that piece and move it to somewhere it can't be found."

"You're right. We don't want a Dark Sorcerer getting his hands on it." Samiel nodded. "We'll go back to town and I'll gather up a few more dragons as well as Jaeson. Then we'll all go get it."

She nodded. "Let's go. I want this old part out of the area. Since I have no idea of a location beyond these mountains, you and the others are going to have to take care of that."

Samiel laughed. "We'll hide it, maybe even destroy it."

He stood and she rose to her feet. He took her into his arms and lifted her off her feet again. She didn't really mind. He took two steps forward and she felt the pull of a tunnel enclosing them. Bright sunlight nearly blinded her after the darkness of the tunnel. His strong legs easily handled the momentum and he took only a single step after the tunnel propelled them forward. She looked up at him, completely at ease and confident in his strength.

"You know I can walk." She smoothed her hand over his chest. She wasn't objecting to being held against him, but she felt that some objection was necessary. He had a disturbing tendency to take over, but she was in favor of any excuse that had his arms around her.

Samiel just hugged her tightly. "I like carrying you."

"You like to feel her softness, particularly her breasts, against you." Jaeson's voice came from somewhere to their right.

Meagan turned her head and saw him standing near Maxim. "I kind of got that impression. Hi, it's good you're here. We don't have to track you down."

"What's wrong? Why would you have hunted me?" Jaeson's face hardened and he lost all trace of humor.

"We're going to have a busy afternoon," Samiel said cryptically. "Get two other vampires here. Maxim, which other dragons are in the town?"

"Danan's here and so are Lissan and Kael," Maxim offered after a moment's consideration.

"Call one other dragon. We won't leave the village without extra strength of dragons." Samiel pulled her in front of him.

She leaned back against him and brought her hands up to cover her ears. She fully expected to hear that loud roar echoing vibrating through her entire body. Jaeson came over and pulled her hands away from her ears. He was smiling widely.

"We won't need one of them to call for the others. I've already taken care of it. I will admit they are loud. I'll bet your ears rang for a long time after that roar earlier." His thumbs stroked over her palms in small circles.

"My palms didn't block much of it." She shrugged. "They are coming, aren't they?"

"They're coming. Why are you so impatient? What are we doing?"

"We're going somewhere. I'll tell you when we get there. There are too many people who could hear." She shook her head. This wasn't something she was going to chance.

"Mysterious. If you didn't look so serious, I'd try to convince you to tell me." Jaeson leaned close and brushed his lips over hers.

She followed as he slowly pulled back. She didn't want to lose contact with those firm lips. Samiel's hold stopped her as Jaeson moved out of reach. She groaned and was a little irritated, but knew that it was probably for the best. There wasn't time now for distractions and both men definitely qualified as that. As soon as the last of the dragons and vampires arrived, they needed to leave for Dicsin. It didn't take long at all for the two vampires and one dragon to arrive.

"Good, we can leave now." Samiel released her to step forward. She knew he intended to form the tunnel. She put her hand on his arm. He could get them to the town. Any of the men could do that, but she could get them much closer to where they needed to be.

"I'll do the tunnel this time. I can get us right in front of the sect house. It will be better if we don't have to travel to it," she explained when Samiel glanced at her.

"Better as in you're expecting some kind of trouble?" Danan raised a brown eyebrow. He was one of the dragons who could have been mistaken for a normal sorcerer or vampire if he wasn't wearing the crystal earring. The red stripes in his hair weren't that obvious.

"There could be trouble. I don't know how high the information leak goes, but we might have some trouble after we get there. It won't be hard to deduce that we're there to get something important." She wasn't going to lie about it. They needed to be on their guard.

"True. We'll be ready for any sign of trouble." Jaeson nodded. "Let's go. I want to find out what exactly we're going to get."

Meagan created a tunnel. Danan and Grae stepped through the opening. Samiel kept her behind him as Maxim and Jadin went in next.

"You have a shield around yourself before you step into that tunnel." Jaeson squeezed her hand just before he stepped into the tunnel.

She smiled and watched the tunnel take him. The remark didn't offend her. It was just what she expected from both him and Samiel. She fully expected Samiel to give her some kind of admonition before he stepped through the tunnel. Samiel took her hand and looked over at her. He didn't say anything just stood there.

"What are you waiting for?" She tilted her head, expecting some kind of advice. He still didn't trust her abilities as a fighter. That would take time and experience to remedy.

"You. We'll go through together." He tugged her hand.

She smiled but stepped forward. It wasn't the lecture she expected, but it didn't surprise her. It was yet another example of his protectiveness. She walked into the tunnel at his side. The tunnel opened and she stumbled as the momentum propelled her forward. Samiel's fingers tightened on her hand, pulling her to a stop. No matter how many times she opened a tunnel, she could never prepare for the exit.

"What took you so long?" Jaeson walked over to her and curved an arm around her. "I was beginning to worry that someone had attacked you."

"No, he insisted on coming through at my side, but didn't say anything until I asked him why he was waiting." She stepped forward and moved out of the group of dragons and vampires.

"Of course, he did. If I'd been the last one with you, I wouldn't have stepped in without you either." Jaeson stayed at her side.

The coven house of Dicsin stood in front of her. Like the coven house of her village, two statues stood in front of the building, but these bore no robes or flowers. The last few days must have been hard even with dragon and vampire help. She could see the scars of the battle on the wall. She mounted the steps. It was time to get this piece of generator out of the village and take it out of Dark Sorcerer's path. She just wished she'd known how much the town had been targeted. She'd have been here helping.

One of the younger witches opened the large double doors before she reached them. Meagan nodded to the girl. She didn't pause at the doors, but headed for the Council room. She didn't have time for formalities. She heard the footsteps of the others as they followed her. The layout of the coven was similar to the coven house in Apolin except that the council room was at the back of the building and not the front. She knocked once on the council door before pushing it open and walking into the room. Three of the council members sat behind the long table. They looked up and smiled as they saw Meagan and the dragons and vampires. She didn't know all of them by name although she had seen them all before. She doubted they knew her by sight so she expected some questions.

"Elder Dahles, the elders of the Apolin coven told me that you needed a little help." Meagan stepped forward and nodded respectfully.

"High Witch Danae, it's good of you to come. This is Elder Valeas and Elder Bareck. I hope you don't take this the wrong way, but we need you to prove that you are the *Tiria*. We will only hand this over to the *Tiria*," Elder Dahles said.

"I don't mind showing you. I know how important this is which is why I brought the dragons and vampires with me as security for the artifact." Meagan smiled.

She flexed her fingers and called the weapons from the *Fa'ed*. The weapons settled into her hands. She looked up and arched a brow waiting for the verdict. The elders looked at her consideringly. Elder Dahles stood and walked around the table.

"May I see the dagger?" the elder asked.

"I'll hold it up, but don't try to touch it." Meagan stepped forward cautiously holding up the dagger. She didn't want the elder to be hurt.

"I know. I won't. I just want to see it." The elder stopped in front of her. Her head tilted. "I never thought I'd even see the weapons, but they're here."

The elder studied the blades for a few moments before stepping back. Meagan sent the blades back to the *Fa'ed*, the store place for them when not in use. Now that the elder had seen them, hopefully, they could get to securing that generator.

"Which of these dragons and vampires are yours?" Elder Dahles looked at the assembled dragons and vampires.

Meagan's mouth fell open. Which of them were hers? She'd never thought of it like that. She still wasn't ready to think of them like that. They were possessive and seemed so certain of everything, but they didn't know her. She didn't know them. And there were already problems between them. Samiel's control issue was a big one. She trusted him not to hurt her. She didn't know why he couldn't trust himself. There wasn't a major issue with Jaeson, but she knew there would be problems. The question was could they overcome them or would it be better if she walked away from them when the fighting was finished. She shook her head. This wasn't the time to analyze their relationship.

"This is Samiel and Jaeson. My magic is a match with theirs, apparently." Meagan didn't have to gesture. Samiel and Jaeson had moved forward to stand at her side. "The men behind me are Maxim, Danan, Grae, and Jadin."

"We have met and seen some of them as they helped protect the village." There was genuine warmth in the elder's voice. "Come. I'll take you to what the Dark Sorcerer has been after these last few attacks."

"Good. The sooner we get that to a safe place, the better I'll feel." She nodded and followed as the elder led the way to the back of the room.

Elder Dahles put her hand on the wall. Meagan knew there must be a door hidden there. The wall disappeared, revealing a dark opening. She saw stairs leading down but little else.

The elder turned and smiled. "This way. I'll lead you to it. Be careful on the stairs. They're quite steep."

Meagan moved forward. A hand on her arm stopped her. She looked over her shoulder expecting to see Samiel frowning, being overprotective. Jaeson stood there shaking his head. She turned her head as she saw something move from the corner of her eye. Samiel strode toward the opening.

"You don't go down any dark stairs first when we're with you," Jaeson said softly.

"This is the coven house. There isn't any danger to me here." She tugged her arm free, irritated. Tossing a ball of light into the air, she wanted to argue, but this wasn't the time or place for it. Even though she expected it, the pointlessness of it made her angry.

"Someone is obviously giving a Dark Sorcerer information and you were concerned enough to bring others with you. We don't take chances." Jaeson raised a brow in clear challenge.

"Not for the time of getting the artifact. I was more concerned about an attack after. Any spies here will know I didn't come here just to talk. The piece will be safe, but we can't leave the coven to face what will probably be waiting for us when we walk out of here." She shot a glare at him and stalked to the opening in the wall.

"I'm concerned about an attack here and now." Jaeson's voice came from just behind her.

She tensed. She hadn't even heard him come up behind her. Moving down the stairs, she focused on the uneven steps. Jaeson's hand settled lightly on her shoulder. The gesture reminded her of his ridiculous concern. She shrugged, but his hand remained where it was. As tempted as she was to pull away from him, she wasn't irritated enough to do it on the stairway.

"It doesn't make any sense. It will take time for the spy to get a message to the Dark Sorcerer." She took the final few steps and tugged away from his loose hold.

"And what if she's not only a spy?" Jaeson asked.

Meagan looked around the large circular room. Shelves lined the wall. Objects lined most of the shelves, but books lined a few of them. She had no idea what most of those things were. She hoped they weren't as important as the generator.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that the witch might not just be a spy," Jaeson said.

"The generator piece is over here. I want you to take it somewhere and hide it so that it won't be a threat to us." Elder Dahles stood beside a wooden table.

Her hand rested on a fairly large, rounded object with what looked like a yellowish crystal on one end of it. The dragons and vampires moved forward to look at the generator piece. Meagan hung back, not that interested in seeing the piece. She was a little curious about everything else in here. Could the elders be sure that the generator was what the Dark Sorcerer was after in all of this? It could just as easily be one of the books or one of the other artifacts. The elder walked over to Meagan. It was then that Meagan saw that the elder was holding a large book.

"Meagan, I need you to see to the protection of this, too." Elder Dahles held the book out in front of her.

Meagan took the book. "Do you want either of these things back after the battle with this Dark Sorcerer is finally finished?" Meagan asked.

"We'd like the book returned. The other, it would be better if it disappeared forever," Elder Dahles said. "If movement is seen in the ruins, check the book and the one that should be hidden in your sect. There's a clue to where the other piece is hidden in the fallen town."

"I'll keep the book safe. How can you be sure the generator was what they were really after?" She leaned a hip against the wall, glancing over at Samiel and the other men, who were still talking.

"Something one of the Sorcerer's minions was heard saying as we fought them. That soon they'd control this area and dragons and vampires would be kept out." Elder Dahles grimaced. "That generator is the only thing that would let them even try that."

"There's no other weapon here, is there?" Jaeson asked from across the room.

"No, the rest of this stuff cannot give or take power. There are a couple of keys, but they could only be used by certain people." Elder Dahles looked around the room and smiled. "They'd be useless to a Dark Sorcerer even if he or she knew what they opened."

"Jaeson," Meagan called. "Could you come here?"

He turned and walked over to her. She could see the question in his eyes. "Is something wrong?"

"I need you to take this to the lair. The elder would like me to keep this safe until the Dark Sorcerers are stopped." She smiled at Jaeson and handed the book to him.

"I will, but you don't leave here until I get back. Did you want the generator kept intact or is it all right to destroy it?" Jaeson asked.

"If all of it or even part of it can be destroyed, do it. That can't be allowed to fall into the wrong hands." The elder said firmly, and without hesitation.

"I'll see you soon. Don't go anywhere, Meagan." Jaeson's hand brushed her cheek just before the mist surrounded him. "Could you remove the shielding around the coven house or possibly just this room for a moment? Taking these things out into the open wouldn't be a good idea."

The elder nodded. Meagan felt a pulse of power. "It's done. You can leave from here with it."

Meagan watched as Danan lifted the generator. Grae stepped close and formed one of those enveloping tunnels vampires produced. She eyed the dissipating remains a little enviously. She'd like to be able to find out how they did that if it was even possible for a witch to do it. She'd love to exit a tunnel she created and not feel as if she'd been shoved.

"How long do you think it will take Jaeson to return?" Elder Dahles looked a little uncomfortable as she watched the dragons and vampires in the room.

"Not long. He's overprotective and I'm not really sure he trusts me to follow a simple sensible suggestion." Meagan shrugged. She didn't know how long it would take him to get to know her.

Samuel walked over to her and put his arm around her. He frowned down at her, but didn't say anything. She was a little surprised at his restraint. She would have thought he'd tell her what he was thinking no matter who was in hearing range. Jaeson appeared. He looked around the room and smiled as he spotted her. He strode over to join them.

"It's about time you got back." Maxim stepped forward to meet them. "We've all been waiting for you. It's time to go see how well-connected this Dark Sorcerer is. If he's not, we need to make sure he learns that we have what he wanted."

"The sorcerer won't go away just because I took a few moments to make sure the book was in a safe place." Jaeson dropped a kiss on her cheek and patted Samuel's butt. "If everyone's ready, let's go."

"I'm ready. Let's see if we've made someone nervous or angry." Meagan smiled. "Thank you for trusting us with this problem, Elder Dahles."

"Thank you for helping us. We're expecting the attacks to continue, but with the help from the dragons and vampires, we'll hold the village. We just needed to be certain that didn't fall into the Sorcerer's hands." Elder Dahles hugged Meagan.

"There might be a few strong retaliatory attacks, but they won't focus on the coven house any longer." Samuel sounded absolutely certain.

Chapter Twelve

Elder Dahles led the way up the stairs. Meagan followed immediately but found herself in the middle of the group. She didn't try to weave her way to the front. She just chalked it up to overprotectiveness and the men not knowing her yet. She hoped that would change with time. If it didn't, she'd change the way they saw her. When everyone was out of the room, Elder Dahles sealed it. Meagan said goodbye to the other elders and left the room in the middle of the group of men. Meagan flexed her fingers as she drew closer to the door. Nervousness, anticipation grew slowly. She didn't call her blades to her, but the urge was there. Something was going to happen. She hoped she was wrong, but she doubted it. A hand on her right shoulder surprised her. She glanced to the right and saw Samiel watching her.

"Relax. We're ready for any attack." Samiel's hand tightened.

"I'm always tense when I know there could be an attack." She shrugged. It seemed like a normal reaction to her.

Jaeson looked back at her and smiled. "It's just a dragon thing. You're with him so you should be relaxed when he's anywhere near you."

"Kind of egotistical. Especially, since I wasn't really fearing the Dark Sorcerers, just nervous about what they'll do." She slid a grin over at Jaeson.

Samiel moved a step closer drawing her attention. An eyebrow was raised in arrogant challenge. "You shouldn't worry about anything when I'm near you. Well, except for me."

Meagan laughed and the tension inside eased but it came back once she watched the doors open in front of them half-expecting to be attacked even before they stepped out of the building. The dragons and vampires fanned out as they descended the steps. She once again found herself behind a wall of males. She shook her head and pushed Jaeson's shoulder. When he half-turned, she slipped between him and Samiel. Arguing about it wasn't going to make them change. It was going to take time for that to happen. She was going to be at their side in battle even if she had to keep pushing the issue.

Meagan swept her eyes over the people walking down the street. She didn't see anyone milling around the area or watching them. She suspected the Dark Sorcerer or one of his minions was there, gathering strength and trying to find a weakness. They could teleport out of there without going any farther, but they wouldn't learn anything about their enemy if they did.

Jaeson's head tilted and he put his hand on her arm. "Don't use your magic for a little bit."

Meagan raised her brows but nodded. She wondered what had caught his attention. She thought it had to be some kind of magic he sensed, but without her blades she couldn't sense even a hint of magic. She didn't call her blades, but she was curious about what he felt.

"Do you feel that, Jadin?" Jaeson asked.

"Witch magic, but tainted. It's a first for me. I've never encountered a Dark Sorceress before," Jadin responded.

Meagan's heart lurched. Dark Sorceress. She'd known it was possible for a witch to choose the wrong path, but she'd never thought she'd even see one in her lifetime. She couldn't understand why a witch would betray her teachings and her friends. Who was it? Which coven did she come from? Meagan knew it could easily be a woman from either coven. With the two cities so isolated by the mountains around them, the witches moved freely and were quite friendly.

"Are you sure?" She looked over at Jaeson, hoping that there was a chance he was mistaken. Mainly because she didn't want to think one of the women she'd worked with so closely had plotted to destroy the cities.

"Yes, there's no doubt about it. There's a Dark Sorceress here now. I can't tell what she's doing, but she's doing something." Jaeson's hand settled low on her back and began rubbing in slow circles.

She relaxed into his touch. "Probably creating trouble. We'll find out soon enough. Are we going to stand here blocking the stairs or can we move?"

"We want to be near the coven, but we can go down the street a little bit." Samiel nodded and stepped away from the stairway.

Maxim and Jadin began walking slowly down the street to the left. Jaeson's hand guided her to the right. Only a few people were out strolling now. They were familiar. She knew she'd probably seen them in the village on other visits, but she didn't recognize any of them from the coven. Even as she continued to search for some sign of attack, she knew the woman probably wouldn't show herself. She'd hidden among the other women of the coven for a long time. The witch was obviously smart and wanted to use her connection to the coven for as long as possible. If she attacked, it would be from a distance. It infuriated Meagan. She wanted to find the woman now and stop the traitor from doing any more damage to the covens.

A scream drew her attention away from her thoughts and the street in front of her. Another scream sounded even as she spun. She fully expected to see a *merdanon* on the street. She first saw Maxim and Jadin in the middle of the street. What she didn't see was the big gray body of one of the Dark Sorcerer's creations. The running people told her that in spite of the absence of the big beasts something was wrong. She began walking up the street. Her eyes slowly scanned the street as she drew closer to Maxim and Jadin. She was aware of Samiel and Jaeson at her side. They'd shortened their stride to match hers. A streak of red-brown caught her eyes. The streak stopped near a wall.

She almost couldn't believe her eyes. Yellow fur stuck up on its head and arms. The beast shrieked.

"Well, that looks like one of those beasts on the picture, but it's certainly not acting intelligent." Samiel's head tilted.

"They don't feel much different from *merdanons*," Jaeson said. He frowned as the beast ran forward and slammed into their shield. It flew back. Almost immediately, it jumped to its feet.

"Someone is trying to imitate the *tandini*, but has really only created a smaller, faster *merdanon*." Meagan hoped the Sorcerer or Sorceress hadn't managed to figure out how to make the beast pull power from his victims.

"The fact that they know enough about it to make it look reasonably like the drawings is interesting." Samiel took the final steps forward and stood beside Jadin.

"Yeah it is, but we can discuss it after we deal with the fake *tandini* and his little friends." Meagan summoned her blades.

She had noticed the differences. There was no armor plating. The *tandini* copy looked far more animal-like than the one in the book with a snout and tusks, drool dribbling from its mouth. The only reason for the differences was that the Dark Sorceress hadn't seen the actual picture. A swarm of the quick, clawed beasts poured onto the streets.

"Don't get impatient." Jaeson ruffled her hair.

She brushed his hand away from her head and frowned at him. She wasn't some kid who needed encouragement or instruction. With a shake of her head, she focused on the beasts on the street. The small creatures never seemed to stop moving. They swiped at the walls and even each other when they drew too close to each other. They didn't have the strength or destructive power of a *merdanon*, but if they came upon someone without a shield they could easily maim or kill. The *tandini* never seemed to stop moving. Again and again, they threw themselves against the shield, Meagan put up a backup shield. She wasn't sure whose shield that was but she wanted her own there just in case it was stressed.

A fireball flew down the street and hit one of the beasts. It fell to the ground. Meagan was a little surprised that it hadn't been shielded. Even if this was just a testing probe she expected the Dark Sorceress to want to prove that she could do some damage, that she would be a formidable enemy. It just didn't make any sense.

"Are you going to help or just stand there looking at them?" Samiel's voice broke through her thoughts.

"Oh yeah, I was just a little amazed that they're not shielded." Meagan blushed and slung a bolt of energy down the street. It hit one of the short brown-skinned beasts. The *tandini* fell to the ground.

"You'll never be able to figure out why a Dark Sorcerer or in this case Sorceress does something. You don't think like they do." Jaeson glanced over at her. "But I'd bet

the Sorceress has more than this planned. Maybe she's just seeing how useful these *tandini* could be."

In a way, she was glad she couldn't think like the Dark Sorceress. She wouldn't want to know what could make a woman betray everything she knew. She still wanted to know what the woman was planning.

Meagan slung two bolts down the street. The first bolt slammed into a *tandini*. The second just missed. It flared as the energy smashed into the wall with a sizzling hiss. Two fireballs flashed through the air taking down two of the remaining three *tandini*. A loud roar sounded, Meagan knew that sound hadn't come from the lone *tandini* on the street. She swiped her sword through the air forming a powerful arc and sending it sailing down the street. She wanted that last *tandini* defeated before whatever had made that sound arrived. The bolt hit the small creation. It tumbled to the ground just as part of a building exploded. A *merdanon* rounded the corner. It picked up one of the *tandini* and threw it. The destroyed creation hit the shield and fell to the ground. Meagan drew in a deep breath. She knew that that beast would be heavily shielded. Stopping the *merdanon* wasn't going to be easy.

She straightened and braced her feet a little farther apart. The *merdanon* drove one of its huge fists into the wall to its right. The stone cracked, chunks falling to the ground. She swiped her sword back and forth gathering power. She wasn't going to play with this beast. There were too many people who could be hurt. The town hadn't been evacuated. She didn't want to chip away at his shield. She wanted to destroy it. With a flick of her wrist, she sent the glowing ball of light hurtling toward the beast. She took a step forward even before the bolt hit.

A hand on her shoulder stopped her. "Whoa, you're going a little fast. Calm down and take it slowly," Jaeson urged.

"There's been enough damage done to this village." Meagan shot a glare back over her shoulder. This wasn't the time to play.

"The witch is gone." Jaeson let his hand glide down her arm. "There won't be any more beasts."

"Does it matter? It can still hurt someone. Do we know if those buildings have been cleared?" She swept her hand to indicate the buildings around them.

"They've been cleared." Samiel sounded totally confident.

She didn't doubt that they'd been cleared. She just wished they'd tell her what they planned or were doing. She felt as if she was always a step behind on what was happening. Admittedly, she hadn't pressed it, but this was going to have to change. It could get dangerous. They were going to have to start sharing information with her. She wasn't going to talk about it now. They had to defeat and destroy the *merdanon*.

Jaeson tossed a ball of energy down the street. It hit the *merdanon's* shield and flared in a bright white shower. Meagan didn't wait. She slung an arc of energy. A large ball of fire followed only a breath after hers. Hers hit and then Samiel's exploded, flaring in a wall of fire as the shield fell. The *merdanon* roared and kicked one of the *tandini*

creations down the street. Maxim threw a ball of silver-white magic. The *merdanon* jerked as the ball of magic hit. It toppled to the ground. Relief and exultation rushed through her. It was over for now. Meagan moved to the closest *tandini*. She drove her knife into its thigh and took the power.

"You two need to start talking to me. I'm getting a bit tired of being the last to know things." She kept her voice even as she moved to the next creation. They were close to her, she knew it. Now that the battle was finished it was time to start clearing a few of the problems.

"Talk about what? What are you the last to know?" Jaeson's hand curled around her elbow and turned her to face him. His brows were drawn together and he looked genuinely confused.

"Oh things like the houses along the street being cleared. I worried about anyone in them getting hurt for a good portion of the battle. It would have been nice to know. That's far from the first time I was left wondering what was happening." She plunged the dagger into another *tandini*.

"It's just normal practice for us. If they haven't been cleared, we get anyone who can't fight out of the battle." Samiel stepped up on the other side of her.

Truly their habit of flanking her was getting on her nerves and at times it made her feel trapped. She pushed those thoughts away. She needed to focus and not let them distract her with side issues.

"Have I been with you long enough to know your normal practices? We're just learning to work together and sometimes that's in question too." She glared at Samiel.

"All right, we do need to talk a little more about the battle until you become a little more familiar with our practices. You have a point." Samiel dropped a kiss on her lips and quickly pulled back. "We'll talk about it back at the lair. Maybe over a hot meal or a warm bath."

She shook her head as she moved to the *merdanon*. She wasn't going to let him distract her. As good as a meal and a bath sounded, she wanted to get this settled. Too often, she felt as if she was fighting for every step with them. She had to push for every bit of closeness with Samiel and she still hadn't managed to push past his control issues. And Jaeson, she knew the surface, the easy front he let everyone see, but there was more there. She wanted to know everything.

"Now that you're finished, let's go talk." Jaeson cupped her elbow and lifted her to her feet as the last *merdanon* dissolved into dust.

"Talk not play." She saw the gleam in his eyes.

"I'm sure we can do both. You need to relax." Jaeson palmed her hip and pulled her close.

She stiffened. She had to admit that she was tense and Lady, did she want to lean into him. The heat from his body drew her just as much as his scent did. Relaxing just seemed to be out of her reach. A Dark Sorceress. It was someone within one of the covens. The thought of someone she knew being behind the attacks infuriated her. She

wanted to know who it was. Then there was the fact that the magic building inside her was rioting and her arousal was building as well.

Samiel glided up behind her. She swept her hair to the side, baring her throat and shoulder. His fingers trailed up the side of her neck. She shivered and leaned into him. She closed her eyes. He pulled her against him.

"Jaeson, take us home. It's been a long day and we're all hungry and tired." Samiel's voice rumbled in her ear.

She heard him inhale and felt his lips brush over her neck. His hands lightly clasped her arms. She'd expected him to pull her back against him or wrap his arms around her. That might have been too much. She was almost between them, but it didn't feel as confining. She knew it was probably because she'd calmed a little, but the fact that they weren't just picking her up and hauling her around gave her a little hope. Jaeson's arm hooked around Samiel's back while his other arm remained at her hip. A dark gray mist rose around them enclosing them. She felt only a slight lifting sensation. A moment later the mist opened and deposited them in the large main cavern of the lair.

"We'll start the food and while it's cooking, we'll take a bath and talk." Samiel walked over the hearth and started a fire.

She willingly followed the suggestion. She wasn't sure about the talking and bathing, if it was even possible, but they had to start somewhere. She went to a chest in the corner and pulled out a bag of grain and some vegetables. It didn't take long to get everything ready.

"Now for that bath." Samiel turned and his eyes swept over her body like a wave of heat.

Without a doubt, he had more on his mind than simply cleaning away the dust. She led the way into the bathing room with the huge pool, the gems and the golden lamp stands. One of the men really liked the flash of gold and jewels and she had a feeling it was Samiel. The room was warm and toasty. She didn't know how much talking they'd get done. Even if they had the control, she didn't think she did. She wanted to touch them.

"Talk to us." Jaeson began stripping out of his clothes.

"You already know what I want to talk about." She worked at the small buttons on her shirt.

"We know, but just tell us how you feel again. You were holding back when we were talking earlier." Jaeson turned and brushed his fingers across her cheek and fell back into the water.

Meagan laughed. She knew he was trying to make her laugh with his antics. She dropped her shirt to the floor and looked back at Samiel. His shirt was off and he watched her intently. She thought she saw a little uncertainty in his eyes. Depending on what he was unsure of, it could be a good thing. She winked at him before jumping into the water.

Chapter Thirteen

Samiel watched as the water closed over her head. She was so beautiful. Meagan made him feel emotions he'd never known existed. She'd taken the steps toward them and he didn't want to push her away now. He didn't know if he'd be able to curb his need to be in control. She seemed small and fragile. He knew he was too strong, too big and at times he felt clumsy around her. He didn't know how he was going to do it, but he had to find a way to give her what she needed. She'd shown she could handle him at what he knew was his worst. She hadn't run. That still surprised him. She seemed certain that he would never hurt her. Her faith gave him hope and belief that it was true. She hadn't been revolted or insulted by his loss of control. The opposite in fact. She'd seemed to revel in it. She wanted him to relax, enjoy himself, to have fun with her. He was going to try.

He took off his shirt. She splashed a wave of water at Jaeson. Jaeson lunged forward and made a grab for her. She dived beneath the water and swam away from him. The sight of them playing made him smile, but he wanted to be part of it. Samiel hurriedly tore out of his pants. He jumped into the water, more than ready to join in the fun. He swam over to Meagan and grasped her hips, pulling her under water. Her eyes widened as her head disappeared beneath the water. He released her and kicked to the surface. She came up sputtering and laughing.

"Oh that's just wrong. I thought you were going to kiss me." She splashed water at him.

"I'll kiss you." He swam close to her.

She looked so relaxed and happy. In the water, he felt a little more confident that he wouldn't hurt her with any games they played. And he was going to play now. He stroked closer to her. She paddled back, shaking her head.

"I'm not sure I can trust you. You already pushed me under water and I hadn't done anything to you." Her lower lip jutted out in a sexy pout.

Smart girl. He could see she was fighting a smile. Her eyes never left him. He moved forward again. She swam back right into Jaeson's arms. Jaeson laughed and pushed her forward. Samiel grabbed her before she could edge back out of reach. He laughed pulling her close to him. Samiel brushed his lips across hers. She relaxed against him and her arm curled around his neck. Her tongue traced his lips. He loved the aggressive move. Her fingers tightened in his hair. She nipped his lip. His hands pulled her tighter against him. Her leg hooked around his. She let him keep them both afloat. Her mouth opened and she kissed him hungrily. Without breaking the kiss, he stopped treading water. The water closed over their heads. She stiffened. He released her and kicked to the surface. She bobbed to the surface and glared at him.

"I'm going to get you, dragon." She swam close and tried to push him underwater.

He laughed managing to keep his head above water. "You said we needed to talk first and you were getting a little involved. I don't want you to say I deliberately distracted you."

She groaned and rolled her eyes. "After you start something, now you want to talk."

Samuel saw Jaeson smiling at him. He could tell Jaeson approved of his teasing. Samuel was still a little unsure about how far he'd be able to go, but he'd do whatever he could to make her happy.

"Then talk, Meagan. There are things I want to do before we eat and if you keep delaying, we won't even get through with our bath before the food is ready." Jaeson swam close and stroked his fingers over the back of her neck.

She sighed and moved back from them. "All right, but no touching. I *will* get distracted if you start touching me."

Samuel smiled. Satisfaction and the distinct urge to make her lose every thought in her mind slammed through him. He knew she hadn't meant them as a compliment, but he took them that way. If they could, he'd like to spend days doing nothing but distracting her and making love to her. Drops of water clung to her shoulders and her hair plastered to her head and back, but she was beautiful. Her creamy brown skin tempted him to taste and explore.

"No touching, but you can't draw this out deliberately," Jaeson said with a smile.

"I need to know what's happening just as much as you two do. Today was far from the first time that you had information and didn't even think about telling me." She looked from one man to the other. "At least not until I asked."

"We'll try to remember to tell you what we've done." Jaeson took a stroke toward her, but she moved back.

Samuel had known it wasn't going to be that easy. Jaeson should have waited. Her eyes narrowed in suspicion. It was going to take more than just a quick agreement to satisfy her tonight. Now it would probably take even longer to convince her that they would keep her informed.

"I'm not just complaining or whining. I need to know what you're doing. If I had kept you entirely unaware of what was happening we'd probably still be arguing and the generator would still be at the coven. You wouldn't have budged." She swam to the edge of the pool and faced them.

Samuel could tell she was irritated. If she was standing she'd probably have her hands on her hips. He admitted that she did have reason. He would have demanded she tell them before they went anywhere. While it hadn't been intentional, he would try to remember to tell her what they planned.

"I know you're not complaining and you're right. I wasn't going to let you lead me into a situation blind." Samiel stayed where he was. He wanted to swim over to her and take her into his arms, but he knew there was still more she needed to say.

"I want to learn to work with you two, but you need to listen to me. Sometimes I feel like you just humor me and don't really hear me. I want to be part of the team, not just to the side in a battle." She bit her lip looking so uncertain he wanted to kick himself. He didn't want her to feel that way. She should be confident of her place at their side.

"I know we've had some problems with our protectiveness during battle. We are working on it," Jaeson said. "If you'll think about the last battle you'll realize that we have learned a little."

She nodded. "I did notice that you had relaxed."

"Good. We'll keep working at it because this isn't a temporary thing. We are bound together." Samiel stroked forward and hooked an arm around her. "Are we finished?"

She relaxed in his arms. Her leg slid against his. He let his hand fall to her hip but didn't pull her tight against him. He wanted to do it. His cock was hard and he ached to thrust deep into her. But he wanted to make her happy even more.

"We're finished. Do you have something you want to do?" Her hands flattened against his chest and slid up over his chest.

"I have something I want to do." He laughed and cupped his hands under her buttocks, pulling her hips against his.

Her thighs widened without any urging. Her soft body pressed against his. One of her arms hooked around his shoulders and she kissed him, just a soft brush of her lips. By *Grimlan*, she was such a tease. He nipped at her lips before claiming them. She moaned against his lips then kissed him hungrily. Her response nearly sent him right out of his mind. He latched onto the edge of the pool and held on to keep them both above the water. Her fingers stroked through his hair. He could feel a rumbling growl working its way up his throat. He wouldn't be surprised if the woman had him purring soon. He pulled back, determined to get them to a dry surface so they wouldn't be in danger of drowning. He levered himself out of the pool. As he pulled her out, she began looking around the room.

"Where's Jaeson?" She frowned over at him as he set her on the side of the pool. She rose to her feet on the cool stone floor.

"He's taking care of the food right now." Samiel waved his hand and created a cozy nest of pillows in the corner of the room.

"Why?" She didn't move when he tugged her toward the corner.

"Because we need to learn to work with each other and there are still a few things we each need to work on with you. We don't need to complicate it any more than it already is." He cupped his hand over her cheek before tugging at her hand again.

She narrowed her eyes and him and leaned back, against his pulling. "And you two decided this without even talking to me?"

"Jaeson suggested it and I agreed." Samiel shrugged. He wanted to be certain that he could give her what she needed.

"Neither of you thought that maybe it might help for both of you to be here, making love to me. I know you'd trust Jaeson to make sure you didn't hurt me." She twisted her arm and tapped her foot.

Her lower lip jutted slightly. He wanted to take it between his teeth and nibble. She looked as if she was all set to get stubborn about this. He knew her passion hadn't cooled. It was just upset and sheer female perversity behind her hesitation. He hooked an arm around her waist and scooped her off her feet before heading toward the pile of pillows. She stiffened and drew in a sharp breath. He expected some kind of angry remark, but she simply stared at him. After a few moments, her arm curved around his shoulder. She slowly relaxed against him.

"What am I going to do with you, Samiel?" She shook her head and smiled at him. "You do like to take over."

"You're going to teach me to play again." He swept his thumb back and forth across her lips. "Because I want to give you everything you need."

"Someday soon you're going to have to tell me about what that witch did, but I think we should begin your lessons right now." She hugged him.

Her breath puffed over his neck, tickling. Her arms felt so good around him. His arms tightened just briefly before he lowered her feet onto the pillows. She tugged him to the center of the group of pillows.

"Lie down." Her hands pressed against his chest.

"You have something in mind already?" He did as she directed, sprawling on the large, comfortable pillows. His mind was full of ideas, but this time he'd let her take the lead.

"I do." She knelt beside him. "And a way to make love to you that might help too."

"No teasing me until I lose control." He put his hand on her hip.

She laughed. "That would be fun, but it's not what I have in mind this time. We're going to play with each other."

His hand moved to cup her pussy. He liked her idea. His fingers pressed up between the plump lips and stroked over her clit. She was wet and slick, but it wasn't just water moistening his fingers. Her hips jerked forward into his hand.

"You're a little bit ahead of the game. We're starting small, dragon." She nipped at his shoulder.

He knew the power inside her had to be fairly high, but she seemed to be in control. The sweet scent of her arousal was a heady perfume in the air, enticing and inciting his desire. She grabbed his wrist and pulled his hand away from her pussy. He laughed, letting her put his hand at his side.

"So what should I be doing?" he asked.

She peered at him through her lashes. She looked mischievous and hungry. "Use your lips and teeth first and don't go in for the kill immediately, Samiel."

"Dragons are predators. You expect me to play by your rules?" He trailed his finger down the middle of her chest.

"No rules, just go slowly and start with your lips. Try to be subtle for once." She nibbled his jaw as her hand stroked over his chest. "Think you can handle that?"

He grinned. She did like to challenge him. He liked that side of her. Most of the time, she seemed absolutely fearless. She swung her leg over his hips and straddled him. She settled on his stomach, but scooted back until her buttocks touched his erection. He drew in a slow, hissing breath and clenched his fists. She leaned down and nibbled along his collarbone before slowly working her way to his neck.

"I can handle that. We'll just have to see how long subtle lasts. Since you've been kissing and playing, it's my turn." He gently pushed her up until she was sitting.

She sat there and raised an eyebrow. She wanted subtle. It wasn't going to be easy to give her that. She was asking for a lot. He wanted to pull her down take her nipple into his mouth and make her wild, but he wasn't going to do it. He was enjoying this too much. He didn't know if he was going to be able to stay as relaxed as he was feeling now.

He rose up to his elbow. He saw her eyes widen. He knew she expected him to go straight for her breasts. That was why he wasn't going to do it. She wanted subtle and she'd get it. He took her hand and lifted her arm. Lowering his lips, he placed a kiss on her wrist. He kissed his way up her arm to her elbow. A shiver shook her body. Hiding a smile, he thrilled at her response. He grazed his teeth over the soft skin of her elbow, before sucking lightly at the skin of her upper arm. Her hand moved to his hair, gripping it.

"My turn now." She tugged lightly.

The slight sting surged through him. He growled as his body hardened even more. He wanted to push her hips back, lift her and sink into her sweet heat. Taking a deep breath, he tried to relax. He released her hand and sank back onto the cushion, ready to let her make her move.

She leaned down and ran her tongue over his chest. Her tongue swirled around his dark brown disc. She drew back and blew a puff of air over the wet nipple. The skin tightened. Stinging prickles danced over his skin as cool air hit the moist patch. Her mouth felt like fire and he couldn't get enough of it. Her teeth closed over the hardened tip and she tugged. He grabbed her shoulders. He was torn between the desire to hold her just where she was and the need to roll her beneath him. She released it and gave it a long, lazy lick.

"Your turn." She looked up at him a big smile on her face. She knew exactly what she was doing to him.

"That wasn't subtle." He wrapped a strand of her hair around his finger and tugged.

"I wasn't trying to be subtle, Samiel." She leaned close to nip at his neck.

He laughed, enjoying himself. She was such a brazen tease. He loved it. He grabbed her hands and held them as he leaned up. He nipped her collarbone. Her head tipped to side, giving him more room. He didn't take the invitation. He dropped a kiss on her chest just above the slope of her breast. She tensed. Her back arched, lifting the tempting mounds closer to his lips. He trailed kisses up the slope of her breasts. She drew in a shivering breath. He knew the tension was building and he deliberately worked his way around to the underside. Her arms tensed, but he held them to her side. He wanted to tease her. She moved restlessly. He licked his way up her breast, flicking the nipple with the tip of his tongue. He released her hand and slid his hand down her belly. She gripped his hair. He slipped his hand between them and found the wet lips of her pussy. His fingers pressed between them finding her swollen clit. She gasped, her hips pressing down into his hand. He moved it farther back and pushed two fingers deep. He felt her inner muscles clench. He wanted to feel that sheath pulling at his cock as he drove into her, but held back. There was something he needed even more. He sat up, urging her to her back in the middle of the pillows. Her eyes widened and she laughed.

"Are you taking over now? It's my turn." She gently pushed at his shoulder.

"I'm not taking over. I'm just extending my turn. There's something I want to do." He nipped at her belly as he crouched over her.

She smiled and raised her brows. "That's a little high-handed of you. I'm supposed to just let you get away with it?"

"Let me? I'm the dragon. I get what I want." He lowered his eyes to the glistening mound between her legs.

Her leg rose giving him a better view of her pussy. Her sweet scent filled his senses increasing his hunger. He leaned close and licked the juices on her creamy brown skin. She shivered. The taste sent a shaft of hot desire through him. He wanted more. He spread the folds and lapped at the nectar spilling from her. He wanted to hear her panting and crying his name. Her fingers tightened in his hair. He moved up to her clit and sucked at it. Her hips bucked. He loved her reaction.

"Lady, Samiel you're going to make me come." She tensed.

He could feel the shivers rolling through her body. He'd love to watch the pleasure take her, but he wanted her too much. He had to be inside her soon. Tasting her had hardened his cock to the point of pain. He lifted his head. Her eyes burned and her fingers tugged him closer. He rose over her but hesitated. He didn't know if he could give her what she needed. A bit of doubt hit him. Meagan didn't give him any more time to wonder about it. She shoved at one of his shoulders. He let himself fall to the side. He saw the determination in her eyes. She straddled him, her eyes fierce.

"My turn." She leaned down and kissed him as she slowly joined their bodies.

He closed his eyes, savoring the tight clasp of her pussy around his shaft. He gripped her waist and pulled her down until his hips pressed against her. She smiled, bracing her hands on his chest, and rocked slowly back and forth. His hands guided her up. He needed more than the gentle rolling pace. He wanted her riding him hard and fast.

"This isn't the time for subtle or gentle," he growled.

She sank onto his cock, taking him deep. A wicked grin curved her lips. He was sure that she was going to keep up her slow pace. Her hips rose. Just as he tightened his fingers to draw her back down, she surged down then up his length again. He loved it. She panted as she rode him hard. He gritted his teeth, trying to hold back. His balls felt tight. He wanted to see her come before he relaxed.

"Don't worry about it. Relax. I'll find my pleasure." She leaned down and nipped his lip.

Her hips ground against his. She was driving him to the edge. He resisted for a moment. She reached between them and began to stroke her clit. He let go. His fingers tangled in her hair and pulled her down to him. His lips brushed back and forth over her neck and shoulders. She groaned and tilted her head to the side. His hips pressed off the ground, lifting into her as she rode him.

Fire raced up his spine and he felt his teeth lengthen. His muscles tightened. As his seed spurted into her, his mouth moved to her shoulder. He bit. She gasped and shuddered. Her power flooded into him, but it was the hot sensation arcing through him that held him. He groaned. She continued moving on him. He felt the first ripple of her inner muscles. Her soft cry as she came sent a rush of desire through him. He felt his cock hardening inside her. When she stilled, her breath coming in harsh pants and her body coated in a fine sweat, she'd never looked sexier.

She leaned and lazily brushed her lips across his. "Thank you."

"For what?" He couldn't understand why she'd say that. He hadn't done anything for her or given her anything.

"You trusted me to take care of my own pleasure and let go of your control. I thought it would take months for you to do that." She nuzzled his neck.

He frowned. He hadn't thought of it that way, but now he was a little surprised. He didn't know if he'd have been able to relax and take his pleasure first before. He'd have rolled her over and made sure she came at least once before he took them both over the edge.

"You surprised me, but I'm glad you did." She nipped at his chin. "Maybe next time we can try it in another position."

He laughed and created the antidote for his bite. He wasn't going to leave her in any kind of danger. "Count on it. Now, let's go see if Jaeson has dinner ready. Drink this."

She was good for him. She took the small vial and downed it.

"I want a quick bath. I'll be there in a minute." She moved to the pool and slipped into the water.

He dived in and quickly washed. He was tempted to stay in the bath with her, but they did need to eat. Jaeson would also want to be with her.

Chapter Fourteen

Meagan walked out into the main room. She'd created a pair of flowing silky blue pants and a loose, matching scoop-necked shirt. Jaeson sat on the deep blue couch looking utterly relaxed but brooding. Hunger burned in his eyes. She wanted to go over there, slide onto his lap and kiss him, but the scent of the food reminded her she was hungry. Glancing over toward the hearth, she saw Samiel setting a table. He looked over his shoulder and smiled.

"You're just in time," Samiel said. "Come and sit down."

She started over to the table more than ready to eat. It had been a long day. As she drew even with the couch, Jaeson stood. Hooking an arm around her waist, he drew her close.

"I've been waiting for you. I heard your scream as you came for Samiel. I want to hear it again as I drive into you." Jaeson's breath puffed over her ear.

The feel of that warm breath sent tingles through her, but his words caused desire to curl and throb low in her abdomen. His hand slid down and cupped her butt, pulling her close. He nipped her ear. She leaned into him. Lady, he could tempt her.

"Eat first, Jaeson." Samiel's voice sounded very stern.

"All right, don't worry. I'm not going to carry her off over my shoulder. I just want her to know." Jaeson nuzzled her neck.

"And she's supposed to blind and totally numb? Your cock's pressing against her." Samiel laughed.

"He has a point and so do you." She smiled. She reached down and stroked her hand over the cloth-covered ridge.

Jaeson drew in a harsh breath. "Keep that up and you're going to miss dinner."

"It's only fair to tempt you when you did the same to me." She laughed softly and turned to walk over to the table.

Jaeson caught her hand and stepped up beside her. "Is it? We'll have to discuss it later when I make love to you."

"That sounds like something that might interest me for a little while, but I'm not going to be interested in talking long." She slid a glance at him. She wanted to see his gorgeous body, taste him and touch him. Thinking about it sent a tingle through her.

"It might just need a lot of discussion." Jaeson raised his eyebrows.

She could see the teasing light in his eyes. She knew he was trying to get a reaction from her. Normally, she'd just ignore his comment, but she felt like telling him how much she wanted him.

"It's not going to take too much time. After dinner, it's not going to be long at all before we're making love. I'm hungry for you. I want to kiss and stroke your body, especially your cock." She turned and swept her eyes down his body lingering on his broad shoulders and his hips and thighs. She loved his muscular body.

"She doesn't have a problem with her confidence tonight, Jaeson." Samiel laughed.

"I can see that. She's definitely in the mood to challenge us." Jaeson ruffled her hair before sliding his hand beneath the heavy fall to cup the back of her neck. "I like it and I'll see just how far it goes later."

She slipped into her chair. She loved the sexy rumble of his voice. It vibrated through her. At times, she wanted to cuddle against him and just listen to him talk. She got all hot and tingly just at the sound.

She ate slowly. Her eyes kept straying to Jaeson. She smiled as she caught him watching her. He was almost finished with the food on his plate. She chewed slowly, deliberately forking up tiny bites. She wanted to see what he'd do. Looking up from her plate, she saw him staring at her.

She licked her lips. "It's good."

His eyes followed the path of her tongue. "You're playing with a very hungry vampire, my witch."

"Not yet. Right now, I'm eating." She took a bite of the food.

"You're tormenting him." Samiel shook his head. "If you're really hungry, you'd better hurry up."

"Just because I didn't gulp my food down doesn't mean I'm not hungry." She tried to sound offended.

She was full and it was getting hard not to play with the rest of the food on her plate, but the game was so enjoyable. For some reason, she wanted to make Jaeson wild. She glanced over at him. He rose slowly from the table and came around to her side. As he moved behind her, she was acutely aware of the heat of his body. He leaned down and she felt the brush of his fingers against her neck as he pulled her hair back.

"I know a witch who's aching to get her ass spanked." Jaeson nipped the sensitive lobe of her ear.

"Nope, just hungry." She tried to keep her tone.

"Well, you're going to have to wait until later." Jaeson gripped her arms and pulled her out of her seat.

Her fork dropped to the table and bounced to the floor. She hadn't expected him to haul her out of the chair. Not without at least one or two more proddings to hurry or else. She stiffened, but didn't fight him as swung her up into his arms. She curled her arm around his shoulder and lightly stroked his hair. It was so soft and silky and she couldn't get enough of the feel of it.

"You're not going to calm me so easily, Meagan." His eyes narrowed as they slashed down to her.

"I wasn't trying to calm you. I just like touching your hair, but if it would soothe you on occasion, I'll keep it in mind." She couldn't stop the grin that curled her lips. It wouldn't calm him, but she felt wicked and wild.

Stopping in front of the bed, he allowed her legs to swing down. His arm hooked beneath her buttocks and pinned her hips against his. He rolled his hips forward, rubbing the ridge of his cock against her. The fact that two layers of cloth separated her from it frustrated her. The hot intensity in his eyes was exactly what she wanted. He looked as if he'd like to rip her out of her clothes.

"You've been teasing me since you walked out of the bathing room. Do you know what it's like to want for that long? And then you tried to draw it out even longer." His hand landed with a loud smack on her bottom.

She gasped, her eyes widening with surprise. Heat flared over her buttocks. The sting wasn't that bad but he'd surprised her. She hadn't thought he'd actually spank her. She started to squirm for freedom. Hanging in his arms like this left her too vulnerable.

"Let me go, Jaeson." She pushed against his shoulders.

"Do you?" He punctuated the question with another swat on her ass.

She gritted her teeth. The stinging swat sent a rush of warmth through her that heightened the throbbing pulse of desire inside her. She couldn't help thinking there was something a little wrong with that. A spanking shouldn't make her wet and needy. His hand lifted off her buttocks and she knew she'd better say something.

"Damn it Jaeson, you know I do. I'm a freaking *Tiria*. I was aroused for a good part of the battle, but definitely I was suffering while we were doing the cleanup and last check through the village," she said.

He laughed and his hand settled back on her rear. "All right, so you do know what I mean, but you're not going to get away with teasing me, my witch."

"Why not? You two tease me all the time." She raised a brow in challenge.

"Because I don't deal well with frustration. If that's not good enough for you, I'm bigger and I can get my way." His thumb stroked in slow circles at the base of her spine.

"You just need more practice. I'm sure Samiel could help with that. We could ask him now." She looked over at Samiel and found him sitting in the chair smiling widely.

"Not tonight, but he is going to be watching everything I do to you. He might even offer a suggestion or two." Jaeson's lips trailed over her chin to her neck.

Her stomach clenched and the muscles in her pussy tightened at the thought of Samiel seeing everything. Her imagination expanded on the idea and soon images of Samiel joining them floated through the little scene playing in her head. Her mind only came back to the present when Jaeson gently put her on her feet.

He inhaled. "Something's got you excited and it's not only me, I'd bet."

"Maybe, but are you going to do more than talk?" She trailed a finger down the front of his shirt.

"I'm trying to calm down here, woman, and all you're doing is pushing." He ran his hands up from her hips to just under her breasts and back again.

She cupped his cheek. "Maybe because I don't want you calm. Show me how much you want me. I'm not going to stop until you give us both what we want."

He tilted his head and stared down at her. He was quiet for so long that she thought he was grabbing for his control again. Maybe he needed a little encouragement. She caught his wrist and brought his hand to the juncture of her thighs. Pressing his fingers against her pants, she arched and rubbed against them.

"Feel how much I want you." It was as if the men had reversed roles tonight. Jaeson seemed determined to stay in control.

"You're wet." His voice sounded tight.

His fingers curled and began moving of their accord. She licked her lips and her eyes drifted closed. Her hips rocked forward as his fingertips traced circles over her clit. She could reach out and cup his cock. Lady, did she want to, but knew that he'd probably pull her hand away in moments.

"I need you. Can't you see that?" She let her fingertips drift up his arm.

"And smell it." He groaned.

"Then do something. You're supposed to see to my needs as a *Tiria*. I'm frustrated and my magic has to be taken down a bit. You're not going to hurt me." She knew it was a little low to bring up his role, but she was getting desperate. She didn't know what would get through to him.

Jaeson stared at her for a moment longer, but then he moved. He had her shirt off and the pants halfway down her thighs before she even realized what he was doing. She kicked out of her pants and hooked her arms around his shoulders.

"I wanted to give you everything you needed tonight, not be wild and out of control like the first time." Jaeson's mouth moved along her jaw to her neck.

Stinging little nips along her neck drew a gasp from her, but also a rush of slick moisture between her thighs. She tugged lightly on his hair before her hands smoothed down his back. He groaned and his hands fastened around her waist. He pulled her against him and ground his hips against her.

"Only want you, any way, as long as it happens now." She pressed kisses against his cheek, because his mouth seemed to be everywhere but where she wanted it.

He put her on the bed and peeled out of his clothes. She saw a button fly as he whipped off his shirt. He knelt on the bed beside her. His eyes swept down her body. She could almost feel their path. He licked his lips as his eyes locked on her pussy.

"I want to hear her scream, Jaeson." Samiel's deep voice rumbled into the silence broken only by their harsh breaths.

She'd almost forgotten he was there. Turning her head, she saw him sprawled on the dark blue couch with one of his legs drawn up and bent at the knee. His hand stroked over the leather-covered ridge of his cock. She licked her lips, entranced. Because she was so engrossed watching Samiel she didn't notice that Jaeson had moved until she felt him lift and part her legs.

She turned her head and saw him kneeling between her legs. His mouth brushed against her thigh. Sharp fangs scraped as he slowly moved closer to her sex. She drew in a hissing breath and reached for him. Jaeson barely lifted his head as he grabbed her hands.

"Keep them down by your side." Jaeson's growl reverberated through her.

"I want to touch you." Her body was on fire. The thought of just lying there frustrated and aroused her.

He nipped her thigh. "You said any way, yes?"

"I said that." Oh Lady, he was diabolical. She already regretted it. "I thought you wanted a hot ride, to hear me scream as you drove into me."

"This is my way. Stay still." His warm breath feathered over the wet lips.

She clenched her fists. His fingers slipped between them. She bit her lip. *Please touch my clit.* She barely kept the words silent. In his present mood, he might decide not to touch her where she wanted. His tongue lapped at her folds. She squirmed restlessly.

"Samiel wants to hear you scream. You're going to give him that before I make love to you," he said softly. His fingers drew slow circles around her entrance.

"If I scream now, will you get on with it?" Her voice sounded hoarse and strained. She almost didn't recognize it.

"I know the scream I want to hear. I'm not going to fuck you until I hear it." He turned his teeth and nipped her thigh.

She squealed and bolted upright. His hand settled just under her breasts and pushed her back onto the bed. She grabbed his wrist, intending to try to wrench free of it and do something about his teasing tendencies. His tongue stabbed against her clit. She froze. All thought of moving drifted away as his mouth settled over her clit. He sucked at the sensitive flesh. Sharp sensations pulsed through her in bolts as he continued. She trembled and gasped. His fingers slipped inside her pussy and began slowly stroking in time with the pulling suction of his mouth. The sensation built and swirled in her. She wanted to savor the sweet heat, but it felt so intense that she knew she couldn't hold her pleasure back long.

"Give me what I want, Meagan." Jaeson's voice rumbled against her clit.

The vibration sent a wave crashing over her. Light burst in front of her eyes. She arched and a scream ripped from her lips. She shook as the climax burst, leaving even her fingers and toes tingling with pleasure. Her vision cleared just as he slowly rose over her.

"That's the scream I wanted." Jaeson's lips slashed over hers, joining their mouths as his cock pushed into her.

Still riding the last ripples of her orgasm, she was surprised as his entry sent a shaft of sensation streaking straight to her core. Unbelievably, her body began to tighten again readying for delicious release. Her hips rose into his pumping body, taking him deeper. She gasped and clutched at him. Her nails raked over him, urging him to move faster and harder. This was what she needed. She trailed stinging little kisses along his neck and shoulders. His pelvis ground against hers. The tight knot of heat shattered and exploded. Her body arched and she could only hang on as she went right over the edge.

He groaned and shuddered as he came. His teeth sank into her neck. She felt him drawing her blood and power into him. Sighing, she combed her fingers through his hair. Her body still felt electrified from the two quick climaxes. A small smile curved her lips. It might have taken a little while, but he'd certainly seen to her needs.

Chapter Fifteen

Meagan walked down the street a smile curving her lips. She felt good, satisfied, rested and ready to face almost anything. She'd half-expected to be called to a battle last night. It wouldn't be the first time a Dark Sorcerer attacked to avenge a slight. Not that she minded the extra rest. A full night without an attack was something to savor.

She'd dressed to reflect her bright mood in a bright yellow top and dark green skirt. She hoped there wouldn't be trouble today. She needed to talk with the elders and maybe learn if the shield that generator had created had done anything else. Shields could be taken down in a number of ways. She knew there was a *Tiria* other than her who'd taken down a shield with her dagger. Even if there hadn't been alternatives, there were ways to weaken a small section to allow a group to get into the protected area. The only reason it hadn't been done by the Dark Sorcerer in the past was that he didn't have the number of people needed. It wouldn't be easy.

"Meagan!" The female voice carried over the noise of everyday life in town.

Meagan turned and saw Lissandra making her way down the street. Meagan frowned. Lissandra was one of the women who'd been trapped outside the shield. Meagan didn't know why Lissandra hadn't been inside the walls, but she wasn't going to jump to any conclusions. She'd worked with Lissandra before and had always been able to rely on her.

"Hi, is there something wrong?" Meagan moved to the side of the street so people didn't have to go around them.

"Nothing wrong, but the elders mentioned that someone needs to go to Gaeil." Lissandra leaned a shoulder against the wall. She smiled slightly, her stance relaxed.

Meagan's attention was grabbed by the mention of the deserted town. She studied the woman. Her pale blonde hair hung in a straight fall down her back. She wore a sleeveless blue shirt, blue pants and sandals. Lissandra didn't look ready for battle and she should if she were planning on going to the ruins. Something didn't feel right about this.

"All right, I'll go get a few dragons and vampires and you gather a few witches. I'll meet you back at the sect house." Meagan smiled and turned to walk down the street. She tried to think of where the dragons or vampires would be now.

"We don't need those dragons. Let's just grab a few witches and go," Lissandra exclaimed.

Meagan turned back. The young witch cast an astonished look at her, her hands on her hips. There was a time not too long ago that she would have done just as Lissandra suggested. If she didn't have this nagging feeling something was wrong, she might

have done it today. But it was there and she wasn't going to let Lissandra's reaction goad her into doing something stupid.

"The dragons and vampires are working with us now. They should be a part of it." Meagan shrugged.

"It's just a stupid walk through the ruins. We don't need them." Lissandra sighed and rolled her eyes. "Do they have you on some kind of chain, too?"

Anger snapped through her. She almost said, "Let's go", but held onto her temper. She wasn't some raw trainee witch who let her emotions rule her actions. Clenching her fists, she took a deep breath. The more Lissandra said, the more Meagan knew the dragons and vampires should be there. Suspicion was growing, spreading like heavy clouds did in the winter. She didn't want to believe it, but the woman's reaction made no sense otherwise. She just hoped she was wrong.

"Then we'll all be bored on our walk through the ruins, but that place is unprotected. If a Dark Sorcerer has been searching there, he could have laid a trap. A little inconvenience could save our lives." Meagan narrowed her eyes and waited to see if Lissandra came up with something else.

Lissandra nodded, but Meagan could tell she still wasn't happy. Meagan left Lissandra and walked down the street, keeping her eyes open for a dragon or vampire. Before they left, she was going to talk with the elders. As much as the wrongness of this was nagging her, she was making sure of everything.

She found the vampire, Gaellon, on a side street as she made her way toward the gate. Relief rolled through her and her muscles relaxed a bit. Halfway done, she knew if she told him to get Jaeson and Samiel, he would. Then she could go talk to the elders.

"Hi, Gaellon could you contact Jaeson and get him and Samiel to meet me in front of the Sect house? We'll need one or two other vampires and dragons as well," Meagan said without any other greeting.

"I will. Is something wrong?" Gaellon frowned, his black brows drawing down in concern. He took a step closer.

She bit her lip. It could be just her imagination. "Maybe. We have to go to the ruins, but there are a few things I want to check first."

"They'll be there shortly." Gaellon nodded.

"Thank you." She didn't waste any time walking back to the sect house. She formed a portal directly to the steps outside it. The actual sect house was protected by shields to prevent someone forming a portal inside it now that they knew a Sorceress had turned to the dark arts. The door opened as her foot hit the top step and the young trainee witch stepped back allowing Meagan to enter. Meagan nodded and headed for the council room. She really hoped her suspicions were unfounded but regardless she needed answers. Not that even confirmation of all of Lissandra's claims would make her relax her guard. She wanted to know everything she could before they went to the ruins.

She knocked at the thick doors. The door opened and a young witch came out as Meagan walked into the council room. The elders sat at the table. She stopped a good distance from the table out of respect. She waited until the elders noticed her. Elder Sarash looked up and smiled.

"Is there something you need?" Elder Sarash asked.

"Just a little clarification." Meagan felt a little awkward asking about it. It could be that something was might be wrong at the ruin, but she couldn't ignore everything that seemed off about it. "Lissandra tells me we need to go to the ruins. She's kind of young for the mission if it turns dangerous. A couple of things seemed a little strange. And her behavior threw me a bit."

"We didn't assign that to Lissandra. She is a young witch. I suggested she be included in the group. We told Carrie about the mission." Elder Sarash stood.

Meagan easily saw the concern on her face.

"I don't know if Carrie sent Lissandra to gather witches, but something feels wrong. I wanted all the information before I went anywhere with her." Meagan shrugged.

"Carrie could have done that, but she shouldn't have passed the duty at all, much less to someone as inexperienced as Lissandra. Your concern is understandable," Elder Haral said. Her frail form straightened and her thin gray hair shifted on her shoulders. "What do your instincts tell you?"

"That there's more to this than a simple mistake or laziness. I've enlisted some dragons and vampires to go." Meagan lifted her chin.

She half expected some kind of remark from the elders. Especially Elder Carit, an older woman who was one of the most outspoken of the group on some subjects. It wasn't often that they worked even with the wizards in the village on missions. When they did, it involved the town. Anything else was usually one or the other.

Elder Carit slowly pursed her lips, but nodded. "That's probably for the best. We'll want a full report on what happened as well as to speak with both Carrie and Lissandra."

"I'll tell them after the mission." Meagan turned and left the room.

She walked down the hallway toward the door. As she rounded the corner, she saw Samiel and Jaeson just entering the coven house. They smiled when they saw her. Both men were dressed in dark colors. It seemed to be their standard dress when they were expecting trouble. Samiel wore dark blue and Jaeson black from his shirt to his gleaming boots.

"We're getting some hard looks," Jaeson began.

"From a young woman with pale blonde hair and green eyes," Meagan supplied. She'd known Lissandra was likely to pout.

"Yes, is it us or because you went to see the elders?" Samiel nodded and put an arm around her.

"I think it's you and me. She wasn't happy when I insisted on contacting you." She hugged him and leaned into him.

"Give us a quick run-down of everything." Jaeson leaned in to kiss her cheek.

Meagan looked around to make sure no one was close enough to hear. She lowered her voice. "Lissandra found me in the street and said the elders wanted us to check the ruins. She's young and doesn't have much experience so I was a little concerned. When I suggested contacting vampires and dragons, her reaction made me even more curious."

"She wanted to just go? What did the elders say?" Jaeson tilted his head. His long silver hair swung over his shoulder.

"Basically. They didn't give the mission to Lissandra." Meagan stepped back. It was time to go to the ruins. "They gave it to another woman. Either that woman sent Lissandra to gather witches and there was a misunderstanding or something is very wrong."

"We're prepared for trouble," Samiel said.

She nodded. "Let's go. Something doesn't feel right about this."

Samiel looked at Meagan. The woman never ceased to surprise him. She'd been having trouble adjusting to working with him and Jaeson. He'd admit he was having problems adjusting himself. She was a strong witch and had worked alone yet she'd sent for them. It showed that even though she was a little cautious, she trusted them. She'd shown it before, he just hadn't thought about it.

They left the coven house and went down the steps to the group of witches, vampires, and dragons. Jaeson would have informed the other vampires of Meagan's concerns. They'd make sure the dragons in the group would be ready for an attack.

"Everyone ready?" Samiel hooked an arm around Meagan's waist.

"We'd already be there if we hadn't waited for everyone. It should be an easy check." Lissandra crossed her arms over her chest.

Even when she was trying to look angry, Lissandra had a distinct pout. He saw Meagan's eyes lift to the sky. Her eyes moved over the group. He knew she'd noticed that Gaellon was there but Lissan wasn't. Five men, including Jaeson and Samiel, as well as six other witches waited to leave for the ruined village of Gaeil. He put a hand on her shoulders.

"He's gone to do a flyover of the ruins to spot any obvious traps," Samiel said. "If he'd found anything, he would have roared."

"That's good. Let's go. This isn't going to feel any more right until we're finished." Meagan straightened.

"Don't worry. We'll take care of this. No one's getting hurt." Jaeson touched her shoulder.

She smiled and straightened. Samiel knew just by her expression that she was still worried. He wasn't sure about this mission himself. There was too much that was wrong with the situation. They'd all need to be on their guard.

"Gather together. I'll form a tunnel to a spot just outside the ruins." Samiel looked around the group.

"I'll make the tunnel. I know exactly where we need to be." Lissandra stepped forward.

"We're not going straight into a trap. We do this safely." Jaeson's voice cut the off before she could finish her sentence.

"A trap... Are you saying I'm trying to lead you into a trap?" Lissandra's hands landed on her hips.

"If you can't see why we're concerned, you're either naïve or trying to lead us into danger." Meagan's voice was calm and controlled, a stark contrast to Lissandra's shrill outrage.

"I'm not trying to lead you into danger," Lissandra protested.

"Then step back and let those with more experience take the lead." Meagan slid her hand over Samiel's arm.

He didn't know if she was showing support or if she realized she was touching him. Regardless he enjoyed the contact. He watched the young witch Lissandra. He saw the indecision on her face. She was obviously unsure what she should do. Finally she shrugged and nodded.

Gaellon formed a tunnel. It had been decided to travel by the vampire tunnel. If this turned out to be a dangerous situation, they didn't need any disorientation slowing them down. Not to mention the momentum of a normal tunnel. They needed to watch every step. Samiel stayed by Meagan's side. The black mist surrounded them, then faded, leaving them on the rocky ground outside the ruins. Lissan leaned against the wall, waiting for them.

"Nothing's moving here and this feels wrong." Lissan came away from the wall, his face too serious.

Leaving wasn't an option. They had to check the ruins. If there was a Dark Sorcerer or traps here, they needed to clear them. They couldn't leave it for someone else to find and trigger them. They couldn't let the Dark Sorcerer believe he'd won in any way.

"We'll split into five groups. There will be at least one vampire or dragon with each group." Jaeson looked at the assembled witches.

Samiel expected an argument at least from Lissandra. The woman had resisted their involvement from the start. She stared at them, totally silent for a moment. Her chin lifted and she glared at them.

"I want to be with Meagan to see her face when she realizes that there is no danger, that there's no trap here." Lissandra glared at Meagan.

"I think she'll be interested in seeing your face too." Jaeson's voice was dry.

Something in Jaeson's tone told Samiel more than his words. "You sense magic."

"The Dark Sorceress is here." Jaeson nodded. "I'll go with one of the other groups. If you need help, send up a signal."

"I can take care of our witch." Samiel frowned. He knew the prod had been meant to draw a reaction. Jaeson had been doing that more often now. Samiel was happy with the change. They were getting even closer now. Meagan's arrival in their lives had added more than a third to their bond. It had broken down walls that kept them at a distance from each other.

"Just make sure you do and no letting your dragon arrogance take over." Jaeson grinned just before he kissed Meagan, a hot quick melding of the lips.

Samiel shook his head. Meagan laughed softly. He loved the sound of her laughter. He forced his mind away from the softness and happiness she brought. They had a battle to fight. Then he could focus on his woman and his vampire. He looked over at the young witch, Lissandra. She looked stunned and a bit disbelieving. He didn't think she'd actually believe there was danger until the battle started. He wasn't sure if she was part of the setup or if she'd just been used to get Meagan here. Until he knew, he wasn't letting Lissandra out of his sight. She wasn't getting a chance to hurt Meagan.

They moved into the ruins. At times, it was hard to tell what was supposed to be the street and what had been buildings. Some of the weathered gray-white stone walls had disintegrated into rubble. Chunks of rock were everywhere. Most of the walls that did stand reached only about head height. A *merdanon* couldn't hide behind the pieces of wall anywhere near them. Which was good, but that still left the *tandini*.

"I just felt a surge of power. I don't know who did it or if one of our groups has been attacked." Meagan's eyes ran over the area in front of them.

"Keep your eyes open. That probably wasn't one of our people." Samiel looked away from her and back to the street behind them.

He knew she had a shield up around them all, but he put one up separating Meagan from Lissandra. Meagan was a professional, but she was loyal to her coven. She had her doubts about Lissandra, but Samiel wasn't taking chances. The woman's behavior alone made her suspect.

The street in front of them stretched ahead without any sign of danger. He knew it probably wouldn't last. The Dark Sorceress was here. He didn't know what she'd do when she learned dragons and vampires were here as well as witches. Her plan might suddenly change. If Meagan had come here alone, the Dark Sorceress would certainly have tried to kill her. He heard a skittering sound at the end of the street, but couldn't see anything. The sound grew louder and more skittering.

"Uh-oh." Meagan's soft voice reached him.

From the corner of his eye, he saw her wave her hand. Dust and rock rose in front of them, whirling spiraling into a tight vortex. Cracking sounds echoed as the rocks slammed into each other, pulverizing into a fine powder. The brown mass flew down

the street. As it settled back to the street, shapes began to take form. It wasn't *merdanons*. The Dark Sorceress had summoned some of the false *tandini*.

"Do that throughout the ruins. The Dark Sorceress probably didn't just send those here." Samiel looked at the advancing horde of creatures. There had to be thirty or more creatures in front of them.

"I'm doing it now." Meagan's words were clipped, short.

"What was the uh-oh about?" Samiel summoned a ball of fire.

"I think I might know who's behind this," Meagan said.

"How?" Samiel hurled the flaming orb down the street immediately forming another. The ball hit and one *tandini* fell to the ground. There were too many left.

"The invisible thing. I know only one witch who used it regularly." Meagan swung her sword, sending a ball of energy down the street. It hit one of the creatures.

"Who is it? The one who was supposed to lead this mission? We haven't seen any sign of her."

"No. I don't know where she is, but I've never seen Carrie do anything like this. I think this is Doria's work. She's a friend to both Lissandra and Carrie, but even worse, I've fought at her side many times." Meagan slung two quick bolts down the street.

"Doria. It can't be." Lissandra shook her head. "She doesn't even know about the mission."

"Carrie might have told her or it could be any one of your friends. It might not be Doria, but it's someone who's aware of her favorite tricks." Meagan's sword slashed through the air.

"You're sure this is something she does?" Samiel would have liked to stop and look at her as they talked but the *tandini* weren't going away. He could hear the stress in Meagan's voice.

"Yeah, when we went scouting in the mountains, she'd spell the *chitan* just like these *tandini* were spelled. Supposedly so that no one could spot them while we were on foot, but it made them damn hard to find when we came back to ride home. She always enjoyed that part." Meagan sent another bolt hurtling down the street.

"That's how you know what to do." Samiel nodded.

It sounded as if the other woman had a definite skewed sense of humor, even then. That didn't mean she was the Dark Sorceress, but the fact that it was one of her tricks was suspicious.

"Now you're trying to blame Doria. Even though you've become some kind of freak now that you have those swords, I never thought you'd let them make all your decisions." Lissandra threw up her hands, but quickly began throwing bolts of energy down the street.

"Pace yourself. You always have to remember your own strength. You have allies here. It takes time for a witch's power to rebuild." Meagan's voice sounded too even. Samiel knew that remark must have hit a nerve.

"I only wish she let us make all the decisions." Samiel couldn't hold back a grin. The idea was appealing.

"We're not making much of a difference, if you haven't noticed." Lissandra's tone dripped sarcasm.

"That's where being experienced and a freak comes in handy. That Dark Sorceress is pouring more *tandini* into this area. See that swirling wind at the back of the group? That's my spell making them visible." Meagan said.

"And what are you going to do?" Lissandra stepped into Samiel's peripheral view as she hurled two quick arcs. The young witch seemed intent on ignoring any advice Meagan gave.

"That's where being a *Tiria* comes in handy. I'm going to push the others back and destroy those we've already taken down. We don't want her getting that magic back. Any magic I take will give me strength." Meagan suited action to words.

The mob of *tandini* screamed and clawed at the ground as they were herded down the street by an invisible wall. Only the unmoving forms of the fallen *tandini* remained. Samiel led the way down the street. Meagan stepped forward and knelt beside the first beast. Samiel kept a wary watch on the seemingly defeated enemy. It wasn't unheard of for a Dark Sorceress to set a trap spell on *merdanon* or one of their other creations. Some exploded, injuring and sometimes killing anyone who got too near. Others snared the unwary in an attempt to hold the captive until the Dark Sorcerer could arrive to kill or incapacitate the victim. That wasn't happening to Meagan.

Chapter Sixteen

Meagan took the power from the first one then the next two *tandini* near her. Samiel kept watching until she'd taken the power from the last defeated beast. She took a deep breath and slowly straightened. The scent of her arousal drifted to him on the breeze. He could tell just by that sweet smell that her power was running high. If she needed a little power drained, she'd say something. He was confident about that. Samiel threw three fireballs at the front line of *tandini*. He didn't know what the Dark Sorceress was planning or if she'd even show herself, but this show of force probably wasn't just for intimidation.

Meagan didn't pause. Her blade swung through the air. He saw the power begin to glow on the tip of her sword before she flung an orb down the street. The battle took awhile, but finally only the last few beasts remained. Meagan sent an arc flying down the street. It hit and the *tandini* fell. The street had been cleared.

Meagan knelt between two dust-covered creatures. "This was too easy. She's not finished yet."

"She'll show, but she won't hang around if things don't go her way. She's not going to put her life on the line today." Samiel put a hand on her shoulder.

"How are you? Do you need to take some power? I'm feeling on edge and a little distracted right now." She looked over at him.

He inhaled, noting that her arousal had increased. She had taken a lot of power already and there were probably still *tandini* to destroy. She could probably take a little more without absolutely needing it, but he didn't want her distracted.

"I can take some of your power if you need. We'll probably be facing more trouble. I'll get someone here to help you if it's still too high." He waited while she finished with the last of the *tandini*.

"That would be good." She rose to her feet.

He stepped up behind her. He slipped an arm around her waist pulling her back against him. He conjured the potion that would counter the venom. He held it up in front of her. She took it and gulped the liquid. He waited until she'd sent the vial away. He wanted to be sure that there was no chance of any effects dulling her senses. He licked her neck to prepare her, then bit. She flinched a little. A bit of blood rose as he withdrew his teeth, but her power hit him just before he began to actively drawing it. Maybe he'd underestimated the amount of power she'd taken in. He took what he could. Her body relaxed back against him. He licked the drops of blood off her shoulder.

"I think we should move on and see how the others are doing," Meagan looked to Samiel and Lissandra.

"Yes, checking in with the others sounds like a good idea. I wonder if they were attacked as we were." Samiel nodded. "It shouldn't be too hard to find them. This village isn't that big.

They began walking through the streets. They moved cautiously through the debris-strewn roads. The false *tandini* might not be the only danger here. The Dark Sorceress could have set a trap. He was sure that there would be more than one attack. It took longer than he expected to find any of the other groups. They found Gaellon and two of the other witches first. They were in the midst of a battle with a swarm of *tandini*. From the scattered forms on the ground, there had been many more than they now faced. Meagan didn't hesitate. She stepped forward and began hurling bolts of magic down the street.

"Hang back, Lissandra, and conserve your energy. The Dark Sorceress could be trying to drain power from those sent to fight her. Meagan can give energy to dragons and vampires, but you'll need time to recover yours." Samiel gave the advice, but he didn't know if she'd accept it. Meagan had said Lissandra was inexperienced.

He stepped up beside Meagan and began to lob balls of fire down the street. He saw the moment Gaellon realized they weren't alone. Gaellon said something to the women with him and they stopped hurling magic toward the *tandini*. Gaellon obviously recognized the tactic. Dark Sorcerers flooded an area with *merdanons*—or in this case *tandini*—to make their enemies use a lot of power on the beasts before the Dark Sorcerer attacked. Weakened, sometimes vampires were forced to flee or risk death or capture. The Dark Sorcerers hadn't completely stopped trying it, but they'd stopped trying it as often since the first *Tiria* had been found. Most Dark Sorcerers were smart enough to know that flooding an area with creations when a *Tiria* was there wasn't a good strategy. It offered a ready source of power to the one person who could use it and supply it to others.

He didn't know if this was the first time the Dark Sorceress had ever attacked anyone before. He knew she'd set up trouble for others and probably a few ambushes. This assault seemed unprepared, as if it had been put together in a rush. It was the only reason he could think that she'd try this.

The *tandini* obviously weren't being controlled by the Dark Sorceress. When confronted by an attack from two sides, they didn't change their tactics. They kept pressing toward Gaellon. Not having a rush of beasts coming at them made destroying the creations easy. As soon as the last *tandini* fell, Meagan stepped forward and began taking power.

"I'm glad to see you. This isn't the kind of attack I expected, especially not with a known *Tiria* in the group." Gaellon made his way through the scattered carcasses.

"I think the plan might have been to keep us separated and take out those she could." Samiel looked around the area. "After these creations are destroyed, we'll need

to find the others. We're not going to remain separated. If she wants to play games, she can play them when we're together."

"Can you two stop chatting? I know you saw how many *tandini* littered the street. Someone's going to have to take some of this power." Meagan's voice broke into the discussion.

Samiel turned to face her. She knelt on the ground. He saw her drive her dagger into the shoulder of a *tandini*. The beast dissolved into mist. Samiel saw her shoulders shake. Her head tipped back and she groaned. She'd already destroyed most of the magic creations. Her power had already been running high. It was no wonder that she was stressed. She slowly stood. Her hands rubbed down her thighs. She was breathing a little too fast.

"If you don't mind, I could use some power." Gaellon stepped forward.

"It would be a relief." Meagan smiled. She extended her hand to Gaellon.

Samiel moved behind her and hooked an arm around her waist. The scent of her arousal drifted in the air. He'd take some more himself. Gaellon lifted her hand to his mouth. Samiel felt Meagan flinch a little. She was trembling and he knew that was because she had too much power. As soon as Gaellon released her, Samiel licked her neck, preparing her for the bite. Because the amount of venom from the multiple bites, he created another preventative potion. She'd probably provide power to the other dragons as well as the vampires. He held it in front of her. She took it and downed it. He bit. Power rushed into him. He took as much as he could but knew she'd probably need more taken if they faced the same situation when they found the others.

"Better now?" Samiel slid his hand over her stomach.

"I can handle it now. Let's go. The others are probably in the same situation as Gaellon was. I wish I knew what the Dark Sorceress was trying to do." She sighed, but then straightened, squared her shoulders and stepped away from him.

"We probably won't have to wait much longer before she does something new." Gaellon grimaced.

Samiel agreed. The Dark Sorceress probably wouldn't stick with this tactic. The fact that none of her actions made any sense so far was a little worrying. An unpredictable enemy was always dangerous. Samiel, Meagan and the others left the area and began to look for the other groups. It didn't take long to find more of their friends. They again found them battling another horde of *tandini*. Eventually they found all of the others. They moved as a group through the ruins. Jaeson hugged Meagan. Samiel was looking around, wondering where to begin looking for the Dark Sorceress when he noticed Meagan slowly moving down the street.

"What's wrong, Meagan?" Samiel asked as he moved up beside her.

"I feel power in this direction." She kept looking down the street, but she did stop.

"She's right. The Dark Sorceress is doing something." Jaeson took position at Meagan's side. "Do you know what was down that way?"

"I know the coven house was supposed to be at that end of the village." Meagan bit her lip. "I can't think of anything else that would draw the sorceress."

Samuel could tell that she was ready to face the Dark Sorceress. If she'd seemed angry or too eager, he might have been concerned. All he saw in her eyes was determination. She wasn't taking this personally. He knew she was probably angry both with the Dark Sorceress' betrayal and the fact that she hadn't seen it coming. Betrayal was hard for anyone to take, but Meagan was treating this as just another battle. That reassured him.

They began walking toward the area where the witch was using power. They passed what had once been two blocks of buildings and houses. When they went around a last wall, they spotted a figure in the middle of a cleared square. It was a woman with long, black hair. She walked and then swept her foot over the ground. She was looking for something. A wave of magic cleared a layer of dust away from the rocky surface.

"Do you think they would have left it in such an obvious place when they realized the town was going to fall?" Meagan crossed her arms over her chest.

He knew Meagan wanted confirmation that the woman was a Dark Sorceress. She might be able to feel magic, but she couldn't feel the taint as Jaeson could. Meagan stood stiffly at his side. He probably wouldn't have been as composed as she was if someone he'd known had turned to the dark arts. Meagan seemed totally calm, as if this were just another mission.

"Ah, Meagan. And you brought your friends." The woman turned and swept her eyes over the gathered witches, vampires and dragons with a look of disdain. "I wasn't expecting you so soon."

"Those *tandini* you sent weren't much of a challenge." Meagan's voice was light, as if she were discussing the weather.

"Well, I didn't expect so many people. I would have given you a little more to think about if I'd known." The woman turned to face them fully.

"You never did work well with others, did you, Doria? In fact, didn't you once leave the group you were with when the fighting got a little tough?" Meagan's arm brushed his as she shifted her stance a bit.

"If they don't know when to get out, that's not my problem. I know how to take care of myself." Doria shrugged, completely unconcerned.

What amazed Samuel was that she wasn't denying anything. Most Dark Sorcerers tried to deny the taint until they were blatantly caught or it suited them to reveal it. Doria was brazen and uncaring who knew. He wondered if she'd ever really hidden it or if only luck had kept her secret until this point.

"You should have paid more attention to working with a group. Then you might not have been so surprised that we showed up with help." Meagan looked over at Samuel then slid a glance at Jaeson.

"Oh spare me the 'I'd trust them with my life' speech. It's all a bunch of shit. If things fell apart, they'd leave you without a second thought." Doria shook her head and swept her hand in a wide arc.

A wave of dirt swept toward them. It hit a shield in front of them and fell to the ground. Samiel barely had time to register what was happening. He didn't have time to throw up a shield. He was astonished when the wall of sand hit a shield and fell to the ground. Glittering, triangular shards of sharp rock littered the ground when the dust settled. He hadn't seen anything like the dark, mottled projectiles before.

"Did you seriously think I wouldn't be expecting something like that? You like grand gestures. The starburst explosion in the coven when you became a full witch is one of many examples." Meagan shook her head. "You're going to have to do better than that, Doria."

"Better. I can do better." She raised her hands above her head, a smug smile on her face.

The air in front of Doria shimmered. Samiel watched as a horde of *tandini* and *merdanons* appeared in front of her. Samiel saw Meagan take a step forward and sweep her sword in an arc gathering power. She let a ball of magic fly toward one of the huge *merdanons*. The beast disappeared just before the bolt hit. It reappeared in another place a moment later. He saw Meagan tense, but she didn't say a word. She gathered power for another bolt as he threw his first ball of fire. His orb hit a *tandini*. He saw a glowing orb fly from the tip of her sword. The *tandini* the orb had been flying toward disappeared. He knew Meagan was getting frustrated. He could see it on her face.

Laughter rolled from behind the mass of enemies. "Is that good enough for you Meagan?"

He saw Meagan's frustration grow. Every time she threw an orb, her target disappeared before the energy could find its mark. The Dark Sorceress didn't seem to care what anyone else did. She was focused on causing problems for Meagan. The other vampires and dragons took down the *tandini* and *merdanon* without the Dark Sorceress' interference. Finally he heard Meagan heave a sigh as she stepped back.

"You'll have to do it. She's determined to thwart me, but you take them down and I'll take the power. I'm not going to stand here wasting my power playing her game." She took position behind the line of vampires and dragons.

"Are you sure?" Samiel knew what it must be costing her in pride to take herself out of the battle. He looked back at her.

She smiled at him, but it looked a little tight. "You take these creatures down. I'll definitely move up beside you again if Doria decides to stick around and fight. I trust you, Jaeson and the others to handle it."

Samiel felt something inside him loosen, but he didn't have time to think about it. He went back to work on the horde of creations slowly pressing forward. He threw a ball of fire toward one of the *merdanons*. It screamed as the fire spread over it. He could see the wall of beasts thinning. Meagan stepped forward. She pressed the remaining

beasts back. The others kept working on the mass of creations. Samiel kept a worried eye on Meagan. The Dark Sorceress had a grudge against Meagan and Samiel wasn't going to let his witch get hurt.

Meagan kneeled and drove the dagger into the shoulder of a *merdanon*. The beast dissolved into a gray mist. She moved to the next. He kept a ball of fire ready.

"If that burns me, I'm going to burn you, dragon." Meagan didn't look over her shoulder as she spoke.

He laughed. "It's not that easy to burn a dragon."

"Maybe with fire, but I wonder just how your hide would take being stewed." She stabbed the dagger into a *tandini*.

"Vicious little witch. You wouldn't want to boil my hide. You like what my body does to yours." He looked at the group of *merdanons* and *tandini* still standing. They'd thinned so much that he could see the Dark Sorceress looking around worriedly.

She laughed. "But I have a spare."

He shook his head. "You wouldn't want just him. You'd be bored in no time."

"Save the bickering for later," Jaeson said, the humor in his tone obvious. "Let's deal with the Dark Sorceress then you can tease each other."

"I think he's a little jealous." Meagan shot a grin over her shoulder toward Samiel.

"You're right, but so is he. We'll finish this and then we can continue our discussion." Samiel watched as she finished taking the power from the last of the *merdanons* on the ground. She rose, moving slowly, carefully. She tilted her head to the right then the left. Just the deliberateness of her movements told him the power had grown very high. He moved over and hooked an arm around her waist, pulling her back against him. He could give her a little relief even though he didn't need the power. He gave her the antidote and bit. Power rushed into him as soon as his teeth broke her skin. When he drew back, he could still feel the tension in her body.

"How does it feel to be their tool, Meagan? Do they give you a pat on the head and a few good words after you've supplied them with energy and serviced them?" Doria's voice dripped with scorn.

Samiel felt anger rise at the slur. He felt Meagan straighten but she didn't try to step away from him. Her hand settled over his arm and rubbed briefly. The sound of her laughter surprised him.

"It's a little the other way around, Doria. They're more useful to me than the other way around. But that's a nice try. Care to give it another go?" Meagan's hand smoothed over Samiel's arm as if to sooth the tension in his body.

Doria glared at them. Samiel released Meagan and stepped to the side. He began throwing magic at the few remaining *merdanons* and *tandini*. He could see the Dark Sorceress' nervousness. The woman would flee soon.

"We will get that piece of the generator, Meagan. Don't doubt it. You can't stop it." Doria's eyes moved to the woman she obviously saw as a rival.

"You won't ever touch it." Meagan stood beside Samiel.

"How do you think you'll accomplish that?" Doria scoffed. "When you're not even hunters enough to fully come after me."

"There's a time for everything, Doria and I'm smart enough not to press into an obvious trap. We'll have that piece, Doria. If you think you'll be able to find it then you're even more stupid than I thought after discovering you'd given in and become a Dark Sorceress." Meagan shook her head slowly. "You're already lost and are just too stupid or blind to see it."

"You can't already have it. It's impossible!" Doria shouted.

Samiel held back a smile. Somehow, she'd misunderstood what Meagan had said.

"Not too much is impossible for me. I'm not alone. I don't have to do everything on my own." Meagan took a slow step forward. "I'd bet that with the help of the vampires I can work my way through your traps and shields in no time."

Doria's eyes widened and she fled. Samiel knew that Meagan was aware of the facts. They would have to face Doria again, but there hadn't been much chance of catching her this time. And Doria wasn't the only problem. There was more than one Dark Sorcerer involved here and Doria was probably one of the weaker pawns. They needed to find the Dark Sorcerer who controlled the others. It was likely he would decide to move once he discovered there was no chance to create the kingdom he planned. There was also the slight chance the Dark Sorcerer could go for another goal here. It all depended on his ego and his belief in his ability. If he thought he could craft something like the generator he might try it.

"You let her go," Lissandra said accusingly.

"We weren't going to catch her today regardless of how much energy we poured into going at her. This was a test to see how I'd behave, if I could be lured away from Samiel and Jaeson as well as to see what we can handle." Meagan glanced back at Lissandra.

Samiel wished they could have caught the witch, but Meagan was right. There hadn't been any chance that Doria would have stayed and fought. The Dark Sorceress wasn't prepared to risk her life yet. He personally thought the woman wouldn't ever be ready. She was the type who'd probably run if possible at any time.

Clearing the area took some time. The vampires took care of the traps the Dark Sorceress had left. Meagan finished taking the power from the last of the *tandini*. She stood. He saw her hand tremble as she sent her weapons into the *Fa'ed*. She'd definitely need some power taken.

When they finished with the traps, the vampires turned and looked around the area to make sure there wasn't any lingering danger. Meagan supplied power to those who needed it and they returned to the village. Meagan left them to make a report. Samiel remained outside waiting for her. His mind was slowly beginning to focus on other things besides the battle and the Dark Sorceress. Meagan's trust immediately came to the front. She made him feel invincible.

“Jaeson.” He turned his head to look at the silver-haired man. “You want to have some fun with Meagan tonight?”

Jaeson’s brows rose, but a slow smile curved his lips. “Definitely. Do you have a plan?”

“Yes, I think she’s going to like it.” Samiel turned to Jaeson.

“Tell me what you’re thinking of.” Jaeson’s voice lowered.

Chapter Seventeen

Those two were up to something. Meagan had known it since she'd stepped out of the coven house. They'd been talking quietly. She'd walked down the steps before they noticed her. When they did, they stopped talking and moved forward to meet her. Their smiles had given her the first clue. Those smiles held such anticipation that she couldn't possibly miss it. She had no idea what their plan was, but by the heat she could see, it would curl her toes.

They took her in their arms and almost without a word to her, transported them back to the lair. Samiel held onto her. His lips moved over her neck. She relaxed back into his hold even as Jaeson walked away from them. That did send a pang of sadness through her. She didn't want either one of them to be the one left to the side. She certainly didn't want to be the odd one. They hadn't made any move to bring their threesome together. It had always been one on one. She hoped to be able to bridge that distance, because she didn't want to tear them apart.

"I bet your power is still high even though you gave power to most of the dragons and vampires." Samiel's palm skimmed over her stomach. She could feel the heat of his palm through her shirt. His hand rested just below her breasts. She drew in a slow breath, waiting for his hand to move up. At the thought of his hands on her breasts, her stomach clenched.

"A little." She bit her lip. The anticipation wasn't helping much. Her power was rising with the desire.

"We'll help you with that after we've made it even stronger," Samiel whispered.

His teeth scraped over her earlobe. She shivered and clutched at his arm. She wanted to pull his hand to her breast, but couldn't budge it. His tongue flicked over her earlobe. Such a small touch shouldn't send a spear of heat straight to her core. It did. She tilted her head to the side as she slowly rubbed her buttocks against him. He stiffened and his hands fell to her hips, stilling her movement.

"No, Meagan." Samiel's tongue trailed along her neck. "We'll be doing the touching tonight."

"I may have some say in that." She rubbed her shoulders against his chest. She reached back and ran her hands up and down his muscled thigh.

"You think that? I don't." Jaeson appeared in front of her.

She wondered where he'd come from. She certainly hadn't seen him walk back across the room. She hadn't seen any sign of magic. The question didn't hold her attention long. With a gorgeous man in front of her and one behind her, other things began to take priority.

She reached up and trailed her fingers over his lips. His lips opened and she gently stroked her fingers over his teeth. "Are you sure about that? I seem to be getting mixed signals. It looks like you want me to touch you."

Jaeson laughed. "I always want your touch. But tonight we're going to do things our way, no interference from witches."

"I didn't agree to that." She leaned forward to place a nibbling kiss on his collarbone. She wanted to push him and see just what he had planned for tonight. His use of the word "we" excited her. They hadn't ever talked like that before. She didn't know how far they were going to take it, but she was going to enjoy it while it lasted.

"Were we foolish enough to ask her agreement, Jaeson?" Samiel's hands lifted from her hips and banded around her waist.

"No, she'd probably try to play and tease. It's better if we just take control." Jaeson's hands captured her wrists.

"So it's going to take two of you to control me?" She couldn't help laughing. It was something about the thought that either one of them would have doubts about his ability to control anybody or anything.

Jaeson shook his head. "It's going to take two of us to give you all the pleasure you deserve."

She had to admit that was a great answer. Not that she was going to let them get away with it. If they wanted the control they were going to have to prove they could hold it. She glanced over her shoulder. She found Samiel waiting to meet her eyes. He licked his lips. His arm tightened. Her feet left the floor. She drew in a gasping breath, her head snapping to face forward.

"Everything ready?" Samiel asked.

"Yes, the room and everything we need is ready." Jaeson leaned forward and nipped her lips.

"Good. Lead the way." Samiel's lips moved over her neck.

"That means you'll have to let go of my hands, Jaeson." She wriggled her fingers. She couldn't hide her grin or anticipation.

"Mmm, for a few minutes maybe, or I could hold onto them and carry you in there over my shoulder." He lifted her hands high and switched to grip both of her hands in one of his.

She knew he could do it. Samiel would help Jaeson get her over his shoulder. The men seemed to be working together tonight. She pulled down wondering just what he'd do. He kept her arms over her head, his grip not even tightening. The easy way he restrained her was a little infuriating. He should at least strain a little. She wasn't a weak woman.

"So are you going to decide or are you going to stand here until I get bored?" She used her foot to stroke Jaeson's calf. Just to show him he wasn't in complete control.

"You're with us and you think you'll be bored? You still have a lot to learn. Even standing here we could make you scream with pleasure." Samiel's teeth clasped the muscle where her shoulder and neck met.

"Are you ready to prove that?" Were they determined to tease her all night? She sighed heavily and shot a glare at Jaeson.

"Sorry, sweet Meagan, not tonight. We have plans and as much of a temptation as you are, we're sticking to them." Jaeson released her hands.

Samiel loosened his hold and spun her to face him. She smoothed her hands over his chest, relishing the flex of muscles. The barrier of his shirt did bother her a little. She wanted to feel his skin, the warmth. His arms tightened again. Her feet left the floor and her hands were trapped between their bodies. She wriggled and tried to free them but couldn't manage it. He chuckled and turned to follow Jaeson. She did the only thing she could. She spread kisses and nips up the side of his neck. He growled, but that was all he could do without releasing her. She knew he wouldn't do that. He wanted to keep her hands confined.

Jaeson lead them into a tunnel. Her brows rose. He must have created a play room rather than use one of the existing rooms. The short passage opened into a round room. Colorful pillows covered the floor like an inviting nest. She drew in a shivering breath. Her mind readily supplied images of what they could do on those pillows. If they managed to hit just a few of her ideas, she'd die a happy woman.

Samiel moved to the center of the cushioned haven and lowered her. His arm scooped her feet and he placed her on her back. She was just glad to be able to touch him again. He smiled and shook his head. He captured her left hand and pressed it to the cushion. She felt a tingle on her skin. Then he released his grip. When she tried to lift her arm, it wouldn't budge.

"That is so not fair." She reached across to see what she could do about the spell he'd put there.

Jaeson grabbed her wrist before she could touch her other wrist. She didn't have time to begin working on the spell. He guided her hand down onto the pillow. Prickles ran over her skin as the spell set. Two different spells by two men. She'd have to take them one at a time while the men played.

"You're not exactly the model of obedience. Yet. You need to be restrained so we can give you the pleasure you deserve." Jaeson leaned down and brushed his lips over hers.

Her mouth opened. She put thoughts of removing the spell to the side and enjoyed the thrust of his tongue. She sucked at his tongue, wanted to savor the kiss. He nipped her lips as he pulled back, but returned to lick the full lower curve before he straightened.

"We need to get rid of those clothes. So stop monopolizing her lips for a while." Samiel's voice drew her attention.

"You could kiss her, too." Jaeson lifted his head and flashed a wicked grin. His hand cupped the curve of her cheek.

"I will, but I want her and us naked." Samiel's hand ran up the outside of her thigh.

She could feel the heat of his palm through the sturdy material. Her thighs shifted without conscious thought, widening in invitation. His eyes met hers and a very toothy smile crossed his face. There was no mistaking the heat and hunger there. She thought he might unbutton her pants or release her hands to get her shirt off. She'd use the opportunity to touch them and give them a little of their own methods back. She didn't get the chance. A rush of magic danced over her skin, making every part of her feel over-sensitive and on fire. Lady, they were playing a tough game. She focused on the magic Samiel had woven around her wrist. She probed at the magic with her own, trying various tricks to disperse the spell.

"You won't release it with anything that simple, Meagan." Jaeson's palm settled on her stomach. His other hand brought a vial to her lips. "Drink. You're definitely going to get bitten tonight."

She swallowed the sweet liquid, licking her lips. They did take care of her. She looked at them from beneath her lashes. Those probes should have released most light manacle spells. That it didn't meant she was just going to have to try harder.

"Not so easy to defy us this time, is it?" Samiel leaned down and ran his tongue up the side of her breast. "I'm going to enjoy making you so wild, you can't even think of slipping those bonds."

His lips brushed over her nipple, causing the hard peak to tighten even more. But he didn't take the firm tips in his mouth. That fleeting touch was all. He drew back. She wanted to grab him and pull his head back to her breast. She tensed but couldn't lift her arms.

"Have I ever told you how much I like the jewels here?" Samiel nibbled along the shell of her ear.

His tongue traced the jewel along the upper curve. She shivered. He couldn't seem to make up his mind where he wanted to touch her. It was driving her wild. She couldn't anticipate his next move.

"Open your mouth." Jaeson's voice drew her attention away from the patterns Samiel was tracing on her ear.

She stared up at him, uncomprehending for a moment. He held a slice of *andui* fruit just above her lips. The wedge of fruit nudged her lips. It was on the tip of her tongue to tell him she wasn't hungry. The way his eyes had turned to a deeper gold held her back. That wasn't concern for her. Pure lust swirled there almost making his eyes glow. She opened her mouth. He brushed the slice back and forth across her lips.

"Bite," Samiel whispered. His teeth closed on her earlobe lightly.

She bit. Sweet juice burst into her mouth as her teeth pierced the outer skin. Jaeson drew his hand back. She watched as he took the piece into his hand and squeezed. Juice

and fine pulp dribbled over her breasts. He tossed the fruit into a nearby bowl. Jaeson turned back. Samiel moved to her side.

"We're going to enjoy this and so are you." Samiel drew a finger over her breast. He brought the finger to his mouth and sucked. "My favorite, *andui* and lusty witch."

He leaned down and licked the slope of her breast. His tongue circled the dark nipple. Her hands clenched. She wanted to touch them, to prod their desires as high as hers. She arched trying to bring her nipple closer to those lips. A laugh rumbled against her breast as his hand wandered over her stomach.

"Patience, we'll give you what you need." Jaeson lapped a stream of juice off her chest.

He kissed her. She could taste the sweet fruit on his lips. She licked his lips and nipped at them before he could draw back. She lifted her head trying to follow. She saw the satisfied smile on his lips. He knew she wanted more than a kiss. He kissed the skin just above her collarbone. Frustrated, she twisted and arched, trying to touch him. Her lips tingled and she craved more of his kisses, but she needed to hold and stroke both her men.

"Let me loose." She pulled at her arms, but they didn't move.

She kept forgetting to probe at the magic at her wrists. The feel of their lips and hands distracted her. She felt a tongue swirl over her rib and move slowly across her stomach. She lifted her head and looked down to see Jaeson's tongue following a trail of juice lower.

"You're not excited enough if you can still form coherent sentences." Samiel's fingers closed over her nipple and squeezed.

A jolt of pleasure shot straight to the knot of tension forming in her belly. She gasped. He brushed his lips across the tip. His warm breath puffed over the peak. Prickles of sensation flared outward. His tongue swirled over the peak. Jaeson nipped the spot just over her hipbone. Sensation seemed to be coming from everywhere, so fast that she couldn't think. She could only feel. Jaeson's hand drifted up her thigh. Her thighs parted, giving him more access. The scrape of teeth over the tight nub of her nipple drew her attention away from what Jaeson was doing. Heat bubbled and boiled through her. She wanted them to stop playing and she ached to be able to do more than writhe and clutch at the pillows near her hands. She wanted to see their eyes burning, their bodies hard and ready. She felt out of control. Part of her reveled in it and part of her wanted to scream with the frustration.

"I can see the juices glistening on your sweet lips. You want this, don't you?"

How could he even ask that? She always wanted them. If they didn't have a Dark Sorceress and a Dark Sorcerer to catch, she didn't know if she'd even let them out of her reach until they were all exhausted.

Jaeson nipped her hip. "Do you like it?"

She looked at him and found him staring at her. She blinked and drew in an uneven breath. It was hard to focus with Samiel's lips and teeth working at her breast. Not to

mention what Jaeson's attentions were doing. Jaeson's fingers drew up the separation between the lips of her pussy.

"Has the dragon stolen your tongue? Do you like this?" Jaeson trailed his tongue over her inner thigh. He lifted her leg and moved in between her legs.

She swallowed hard. "Yes." Her voice sounded very much like a croak.

He laughed. "I'm not going to ask which one you mean. I don't know if you'd be able to tell me. I like you this way."

Samiel's hand cupped her breast, squeezing as he sucked at the nipple of her other breast. She arched. If she could have done it, she would have threaded her fingers into hair and pulled him as close as she could. Her nails dug into her palms. Samiel licked and nibbled his way across to her other breast. Jaeson's finger stroked over her clit. A shudder ripped through her body. Her muscles clenched and she was close. So close. Jaeson's fingers left her. She moaned, lifting her hips desperately.

"Not yet, Meagan." Jaeson's hands smoothed up her thighs. "I want to taste you."

Oh Goddess, he was going to make her scream. Her magic kept rising. It had been at an almost manageable level. Now it raged and flared. She tried to hook her leg over his shoulder but he caught it and pressed her foot back to the pillows.

"No. I'll give you what you need. Just trust me." Jaeson licked the inside of her thigh.

"Now!" she demanded.

Jaeson laughed. His fingers traced a pattern on her thigh.

Samiel lifted his head. "You don't give the orders tonight. Put yourself in our hands."

He leaned up and kissed her. She could taste the sweetness of the fruit still on his lips. She opened her mouth to argue with him about it. Jaeson's fingers stroked over her clit. A shiver rolled over her. The sensation ripped any thought of further protest from her mind.

His head lowered and he lapped at her slick lips. His fingers rubbed in circles over her clit. She felt his fingers move lower just as his tongue brushed the sensitive nub. Her hips bucked. His mouth pressed against her and his fingers drove deeper. Fire scorched up her spine and blasted through her body. She shook as pleasure flooded her. A scream tore from her lips.

Samiel's hands stroked her belly. She slowly came back to reality. She could feel the puff of Jaeson's breath on her thighs. She lifted her head and looked down at the two men. They were staring up at her, seeming to be waiting. They weren't finished.

"We told you we'd satisfy you and there's more to come, impatient witch." Samiel's hand slid back up her stomach to her breast. His hand cupped the mound, plumping the flesh. He took the tip in his mouth dragging his teeth over the stiff peak. A whimper escaped her. She wished she could call it back almost immediately. Two male chuckles sounded. She tried to lift her hands, but still couldn't raise them.

Chapter Eighteen

They still had plans. The words rang through her. She wriggled. Jaeson's fingers stroked into her pussy. Her muscles clenched around his fingers. Desire began to build again. His mouth opened over her clit. He drew circles with his tongue before sucking.

Samiel rose and kissed her. She eagerly returned his ardor. Sucking at his tongue, she tried to draw him deeper into the kiss. She wanted to hold on to him. His teeth nipped at her lips. He drew back. She followed and sucked at his bottom lip, not wanting to give up the contact just yet. The teasing, fleeting touches were making her desperate.

Her hips lifted as Jaeson pulled back. She gasped and lifted pleading eyes. He was staring down at her. His eyes blazed. She saw him look to Samiel, and Samiel nodded. She moaned.

"Don't leave me like this." She locked her eyes with Jaeson's. She hoped he could see the need and desire there.

"I'm not going to. We're not going to." His hands stroked up her thighs.

He moved up between her thighs and fitted his cock to her entrance. Samiel's mouth closed over hers as Jaeson slowly pushed into her. She moaned as he filled her. His cock throbbed inside her. Samiel's tongue slowly stroked over hers. She hungrily kissed him back. Being even slightly connected with him as Jaeson fucked her only pushed her arousal higher.

"I love seeing him fuck you," Samiel growled against her lips. "I can't believe we wasted all this time."

Jaeson's hips drove against hers. She felt a hand skim across her ribs and up to her breasts. She wasn't sure and didn't really care, but she thought it was Samiel's. The fingers tightened, squeezing and lifting the mound. The added sensation had her arching, pushing her hips up to meet Jaeson's strokes. Samiel's lips caught her moans and gasps. She tried to lift her arms, but the magic at her wrist held her again. The helplessness sent a spike of heat straight to her core.

Samiel's teeth nipped hers just before he pulled back. She groaned. She needed his mouth. Jaeson's lips moved over her neck and throat. Anticipation curled and sizzled as she waited for his bite. It sent her right over the edge. She jerked as her body clenched. Waves of sensation slammed through her. Her hands clenched and her body shook. She heard Jaeson groan felt his hips slam into hers. His pelvis ground against hers and he stiffened. She felt his semen splash against her core.

Samiel's lips moved softly against her, coaxing her attention back from the hazy pleasure still floating through her. He lifted his head and smiled. His hand moved over

her breast, pinching the nipple before tracing the dark areola. She almost couldn't believe it, but she felt arousal rising already. Almost, because she definitely wanted the pleasure promised by his smile.

Jaeson moved to the side. He licked his lips. He practically glowed with satisfaction, but his hands moved over her slowly, softly. It was obvious he wasn't going to just sit back and watch as Samiel enflamed her again. She licked her lips. She loved the things they made her feel, but she didn't want just to feel. She wanted to make them feel too.

Samiel's hand spread over her stomach. He traced small circles up and down, but didn't touch her breasts or her pussy. The light touch should barely have registered after the pleasure she'd just experienced, but her skin was exquisitely sensitive. He licked at her shoulder. Jaeson drew his fingers over her thigh. His lightly callused fingers drew inward, but then wandered outward. It still amazed her. She felt so much every time they touched her.

"I'm not going to be able to wait very long for you, my witch." Samiel's lips nibbled along her collarbone.

"You won't have to," she admitted breathlessly. She could feel her body, loosening and readying for him.

She felt the scrape of his teeth along her neck. His hand slid up her stomach and cupped her breast. His thumb brushed over her nipple. She bit her lip. The fluttering feeling in her stomach tightened as the two men's hands moved over her body.

"See if she's ready for me, Jaeson." Samiel's voice dropped to a low growl.

That rumbling vibration rolled through her. She shivered. Jaeson's hand slid up her thigh. She parted her legs, eager to feel his hand on her. His fingers traced the divide between the lips, teasing for a few moments before he parted them. He drew one fingertip down flicking over her clit. Her hips bucked. He began stroking with a teasing rhythm that drove her slowly insane. She saw a wicked smile on his lips and knew he was enjoying himself. He didn't stop until her hips rocked against his hand.

"She's hot and flushed. I'd bet she goes off in only a few strokes." Jaeson's fingers danced over her clit.

She mewled and her body arched.

"Release her hands. I want her on her hands and knees." Samiel drew his hands down her stomach. "So beautiful."

Jaeson drew his hand from between her legs. He reached up and his hand circled her wrist briefly. She felt a tingle of magic and then she could lift her hand. She didn't have time to reach out for them. Samiel lifted her and turned her onto her stomach.

"You know, I would like to have a bit more say in this." She shot a glance back at him.

His hands drew along her thighs and his cock pressed against her buttocks. "Later. You'll have me coming within moments if you start exploring now. I need to be inside you. Watching you come for Jaeson made me want to see you do that for me."

His words flamed through her. It didn't take her mind much to jump from him pressing against her to his cock pushing into her. Her head fell and she shivered. She wanted that.

"Now." She forced the words out on a groan.

"That's one order I don't mind following." Samiel's fingers tightened as his shaft entered her.

She didn't know how he had the control to move so slowly. If she could reach him, her hands would be pulling at him to get him to move faster. His breath feathered over her shoulder. She shivered and pushed back against him. She needed him to move.

"Samiel," she whispered.

"Do you need more, baby? Jaeson help her out." Samiel's lips moved along her shoulder.

She felt Jaeson's hands reach under and begin to play with her breasts. That wasn't what she needed. She needed Samiel to move. Having his cock inside her felt wonderful, but she ached to feel him driving against her as desperate and out of control as she was.

"Help him. He's too controlled." She bit her lip trying to keep from coming. She wanted to come with him, as he moved inside her.

Jaeson kissed her, his lips moving over hers softly as he continued to pluck at her nipple. "He's not controlled, Meagan. He's trying desperately to grab enough so he can take you over with him. He's so hot for you."

His words pleased her. When Samiel's hips began to rock into her, she pushed back into him, eager to let the gnawing hunger grow and consume them both. His strokes quickly pushed the desire so high that she couldn't think beyond reaching for the shimmering explosion she knew was building. Ripples of sensation sizzled over her body. She arched back, pressing into his thrusts. Every muscle in her body clenched as the orgasm slammed over her. It felt as if sparks danced across her skin from her head to her toes. She barely felt when Samiel's teeth pierced her skin. His big body shook and a roar echoed around the room as he came.

She would have collapsed if Samiel hadn't been holding her. Her head rested against the plush pillows. She tried to concentrate on breathing. Samiel slowly withdrew and lifted her to settle her more fully on the cushions. He sprawled beside her. His hand splayed possessively just under her breasts.

Meagan drew her fingers over Samiel's jaw. Jaeson sprawled on the nest of pillows at her side. One of his feet hooked over her ankle as if he wanted to make sure she wasn't going anywhere. Right now, it was the dragon who'd stirred her interest. His eyes held her attention. She could see something there, something that hadn't been there even a few days ago. She couldn't quite put a name to it except that he'd relaxed his control but she thought there had to be something more to it than a simple decision that after years he'd decided it was all right to relax. Something had changed. She

didn't want to press, but she was too curious not to give it a shot even if it was in a roundabout way.

"I've been wondering if we'd ever be like this." She turned threaded her fingers into Jaeson's hair.

"I want more of that stroking. You can't just tease a man and move on to someone else." Samiel's hand cupped her chin. "Especially if you want answers."

She laughed. "Don't you think you've had enough your way? Besides, I'd get back to you, blackmailer."

"I didn't want to wait." His hand circled her wrist and put her hand on his chest.

"You know how impatient and demanding the dragon is. His behavior shouldn't surprise you." Jaeson rolled onto his side. "Don't worry. I'll help put him in a more talkative mood."

She watched a little bemused as he reached over and gripped Samiel's cock. Samiel groaned. He reached down and placed his hand over Jaeson's. He rose onto his elbow and looked at Jaeson. Meagan's lips twitched at his imperious expression.

"You're helping her?" Samiel asked.

"I helped you, now I'm helping her, besides I'm just as curious as she is." Jaeson ran his thumb over the head of Samiel's cock. "You've kept yourself separate. This change is a little sudden."

"The actual change might have been fast, but the things behind it have been brewing ever since our witch burst into our lives. She made me think." Samiel sent a smoldering glance toward Meagan.

"She changed things. I think I might be offended." Jaeson leaned over to lick Meagan's lips before he looked up at Samiel and thrust his lower lip out in a pout. "You and I were together for years and it took a long time just to get you to drink from my neck."

Meagan laughed. She could see the teasing glint in his eyes. The man couldn't pull off a good pout. He just looked too damned regal to carry off the sulk. She could tell Samiel was on the verge of laughing too. She loved the relaxed way they were teasing each other.

"She's prettier than you are and has different methods of getting what she wants." Samiel released Jaeson's hand long enough to reach over and ruffle his hair. "And if you're not planning to follow through, let go."

Jaeson's hand stroked down just once before he released Samiel's cock. "I'm not ready just yet for another round. I want to know more about why you changed your mind."

"The simple version is that I finally registered that I could trust Meagan, you and most of all myself." Samiel slid his hand over Meagan's stomach. "I wouldn't hurt either of you and you'd never deliberately hurt me."

"What about the long answer?" Meagan asked.

"Pushy witch, maybe he's not ready to spill his thoughts and feelings out." Jaeson winked at her. "He's not as vocal about his feelings as you are. Talk, talk, talk."

Meagan shot a look at Samiel. "Do we really need him?"

"I know what you mean. He has the most warped sense of humor I've ever encountered." Samiel grinned. "But yeah, we have to keep him. He's part of the bond and when he's not being obstructive or trying to tease, he's not that bad."

"So now I'm not that bad. You were screaming for me not too long ago." Jaeson turned to glare down at Meagan.

"He said that. I didn't." Meagan tickled him, her fingers dancing along his ribs.

His lips twitched and he pulled away a little, but her hand followed. He laughed and captured her hand sending her a stern stare. She just smiled at him, knowing it would irritate him. His head flashed down and he nipped her shoulder.

"Ow! That stings, damn it." She rubbed at the spot, trying to see it. She could just see the edge of a red mark.

"Mess with a vampire and you've got to beware the teeth." Jaeson settled on his side beside her. He looked smug.

"Just not as much as you should beware the dragon." Samiel leaned over and ran his tongue over the tender spot.

"You may have distracted the vampire, but I remember that we were talking about the long answer of why you decided you could let yourself relax enough to play and enjoy yourself." Meagan pushed on Samiel's shoulder, shoving him onto his back. She crawled over him so that he was between her and Jaeson now.

Jaeson frowned at her. "You know I wanted to touch you."

"You can touch him. It's not like it would be the first time. I'll move back to the middle a little later." She ran her hands over Samiel's chest. "With me in the middle, you were a little unfocused."

"I liked what I was focusing on." Jaeson reached over and gripped her arm. "We have years to talk about what changed his mind."

"And we can make love again as soon as he tells us. Don't try to give me that mistreated look." She shook her head. "You can wait."

"You know he'll keep arguing with you. He's annoying that way. He's distracting you from what you want to do until you attack him or try to ignore him." Samiel's hand slid down her stomach. "Then he'll pounce."

She blinked realizing that Samiel was exactly right. Jaeson had successfully distracted her and delayed her finding out why Samiel had seemed to change his mind. Damn vampire, she'd have to be more wary of his tricks.

"So tell me about what happened in depth before he decides to interrupt again." She dropped a kiss on Samiel's chest.

"Interfering dragon." Jaeson growled nipping a spot just above the dark, flat nipple.

Samiel laughed. "I like being the center of attention. When you're arguing with her, she's focused on you. It's completely selfish."

"And that's a dragon thing." Meagan winked at Jaeson. He could frustrate her, but she wouldn't change him.

"Definitely. Well, Samiel, come on. Tell us all about it so that I can get into Meagan." Jaeson leaned up and brushed his lips over Samiel's.

Samiel's fingers cupped the back of Jaeson's head and the two men kissed deeply. Meagan watched, enjoying the sight. She had only seen them touch each other once or twice. She didn't think it was because they'd tried to keep that part of their lives separate from her. They'd all been busy and she really didn't mind being the focus of their attention. She knew they'd make time for each other just as they did with her.

"Over the last few days, I've been thinking about what happened with the witch. She was young and I wasn't that experienced myself." Samiel grimaced.

"So that incident happened a *long* time ago." Meagan titled her head.

It was the first time he'd talked about it since the time he'd made love to her in that half dragon form. She didn't want him to stop telling the story but she also wanted him to know that she was interested in what he had to say.

"Yes, before I'd even finished training. She seemed to want me, but then I lost control. She panicked and when she did I let her go. She was frightened and said something. I overreacted and I never really stopped to think about it. I can't believe I let that rule me for as long as I did." He grimaced and shook his head.

"Habits are hard to break." Jaeson said quietly. "And there wasn't really anything to push you to change."

"Until our witch delivered her ultimatum. Then I began thinking and watching. I was slow, but it suddenly hit me. If the dragon part of me had been out of control, I wouldn't have been able to stop when the woman panicked. I could trust myself as much as you trusted me."

"Good. Now, are you finished?" Jaeson reached across Samiel's chest and grabbed Meagan's arm.

"Yes. Do you have something you'd rather be doing?" Samiel asked with a smile.

"Definitely. I have an urge to hear Meagan scream with passion." He hauled Meagan back between them.

She laughed as she landed on the soft cushions. Samiel's hands stroked over her cheek before his lips closed over hers. She opened her mouth, eagerly returning his fierce kiss. Her hands rose and her fingers tangled in his hair. She loved kissing him. She felt a palm cover her pussy. A single finger pressed between the slick lips. She didn't know which man was touching her but the feeling of his fingers stroking her clit drove any thought of names out of her mind. Blessed Lady, the heat was rising so fast. Two fingers pressed into her pussy. Her hips rose and she widened her thighs. She

couldn't think of anything she wanted more at the moment than to be with her two men.

Chapter Nineteen

Meagan didn't scream. She wanted to yell, to rage, but held it back by sheer will. A witch didn't lose control in front of the council even if there was cause. She forced herself to think. Sometime before Doria had become known as the Dark Witch, she'd been shown the book this coven held. What had Doria learned? She couldn't believe Doria had gotten a look at the book.

Meagan rubbed at her temples and looked down at the book then back at Elder Sarash. "Do you know what she could have found in there? Any specifics?"

"Well, she won't know the exact location of the third piece of the generator, but she could get close. She definitely doesn't know where our piece is." Talia Sarash opened the book to the middle.

"How did she convince someone to let her see it?" Meagan drummed her fingers on the table.

"I'm not sure. I wasn't there. From what I understand, there was some play on the trust one of the elders had for her." Elder Sarash said with a shrug.

"The piece of generator this coven holds needs to be removed, hidden and if possible, destroyed." Meagan looked at the elder. The older woman's gray and black hair hung down her back in a long fall. It stood out against the elder's white robes.

This was one of the last things she'd expected to happen. Everyone had known there was a Dark Sorceress opposing them. She'd thought they'd be especially careful about who saw anything that important.

"We'll arrange that with the dragons. You need to take this to where you put the other book and find out where the third piece of the generator is. It needs to be destroyed before the Dark Sorceress or the Dark Sorcerer can find it. In the meantime, we want you to keep this safe." Elder Sarash closed the book and lifted it from the table.

Meagan took the book. The elder was right. Who and how didn't matter now. The book had to be protected and they did have to find that piece of the shield generator. Even if the Dark Sorcerer only had part of it, it would be a risk. She tucked the book under her arm and looked around the room.

"I'll be back as soon as I get the information I need." Meagan took a look around the room.

The news of Doria's knowledge was pushing her into a move before she'd wanted to make it. Meagan was certain Doria wouldn't believe that they had that third generator for long. Only days before the battle in the ruins, Doria had somehow talked one of the elders into letting her get a look at the book. Meagan was simply glad that Doria hadn't managed to steal the book or the piece of the generator from the coven.

Now they'd have to do something. They couldn't hold back and take things cautiously as they had planned. She didn't carry the book out of the coven. The elders had volunteered to remove the shield spell from the coven long enough for her to get out of the building.

Meagan created a portal to the lair. Her mind raced. She'd leave the book there and then go find Jaeson and Samiel. They had a lot to do. Getting that generator piece within the coven to safety came first. The part in the old town was important, but she couldn't be certain that the Dark Sorceress wasn't there right now. It would have to wait.

She stepped forward into the tunnel. White streaks whizzed in front of her until the tunnel opened hurling her forward. She stumbled a bit, but caught herself. She put the book on the lounging couch and encased it in a spell. She knew it would be safe here. The lair was shielded well. Only she, Samiel and Jaeson could get in easily. Anyone else would have difficulty finding the underground haven much less getting into it.

She returned to the village to find Samiel and Jaeson. The tunnel opened in front of the coven house. It was a central location and the vampires and dragons tended to pass it often. She hoped she'd be able find one of her men or another vampire or dragon relatively soon. She looked to the left and right. No dragon in sight and the men she did see she didn't recognize as the vampires she'd met. Fuck, she was going to have to search. The way her day was going she'd probably find them all together the last place she searched. She started down the street. Her eyes scanned the men along the street, but she didn't see anyone familiar.

"Meagan!" Jaeson's voice came from behind her.

She whirled to see Jaeson coming down the street. Dressed in a dark red shirt and gray pants, he stood out from the men around him. A smile curved her lips. Maybe the day was getting better. It hadn't taken long at all. She started walking toward him, meeting him in the middle of the street.

"I felt your magic a little earlier. Is there something wrong?" Jaeson walked over to her and hooked an arm around her waist. His palm settled over her butt, molding to the curve almost as well as her blue pants.

She slipped her arms around his waist. His hips pressed against her and she felt the hard ridge of his cock against her. She loved the way both Jaeson's and Samiel's bodies seemed to immediately harden whenever they were near her. His lips brushed over hers. She relaxed into him and her tongue tangled with his. Blessed Lady, he was such a good kisser. Every thought left her mind. Her hands swept up his back, urging him closer. His teeth scraped over her lip. She pulled back. As much as she'd like to kiss him for the rest of the day, there were a few details they needed to talk about before one or both of them became too involved.

"I need to get to Samiel and there are things we need to do." Her arms tightened around him, holding him tighter.

He pulled back. "Trouble?"

She just nodded. It was going to be trouble. She really didn't think that getting the piece from the ruins was going to be easy. Jaeson looked at her, but didn't press her more. He released her with a sigh.

"This Dark Sorceress is really getting on my nerves. She seems to have no respect for the time I need to spend with you." Jaeson shook his head. He looked a little frustrated. "I'll take you to Samiel."

"It could be the Dark Sorcerer." She just had to insert that since he was so freely blaming the sorceress.

They had no real idea who was actually doing the planning. They knew there was a Dark Sorceress, but they knew there were also Dark Sorcerers. And Dark Sorcerers didn't tend to be the type of men to follow a woman's orders. In fact, the few Dark Sorcerers she had the misfortune to talk with had the attitude that women were only good for breeding and a little power if needed.

"You were at the coven earlier if I remember right. Anything that went wrong there had something to do with the Dark Sorceress." Jaeson shook his head. "Now stop being argumentative for a few breaths and I'll get us over to Samiel."

She grimaced. He had a point even if she wasn't going to admit it. She glanced to the side in time to see a dark cloud roll over them. She felt lifted a little and just enjoyed the ride. The blackness dissipated and she felt the ground firmly beneath her feet again. She looked to her right and saw nothing but a wall and door. Glancing to the left, she saw Samiel and most of the other dragons and vampires. They were in the tavern portion of one of the inns. She shook her head. It figured. It would have taken her forever to find them if Jaeson hadn't shown up. All in one place and not out on the street where they could be spotted.

"Was she in trouble?" Samiel asked. He leaned back in his chair. One of his black boots was braced on the seat of another chair. He definitely wasn't dressed as he usually did for battle. He wore a bright green shirt and loose-fitting black pants. He looked comfortable and relaxed.

"If you really thought I was in danger, why didn't you come to see? Not very concerned about me, were you?" Meagan smiled as she walked across the inn to stand in front of him.

Samiel raised an eyebrow and rose from his chair. "I'm always concerned about you but especially when you suddenly leave town without a word to anyone."

"She wasn't *in* trouble, but she said there *was* trouble." Jaeson came up beside her his palm settled on her shoulder.

"What kind of trouble?" Samiel frowned. His hand cupped her cheek.

"Not here. We'll talk about it in private." Meagan kept her tone firm. She wasn't going to budge on this even if Samiel and Jaeson tried to sway her.

"This is something real? Not just an excuse so you can get your hands on my body?" Samiel's mouth kicked up in a wicked grin even as he let his eyes drift down her to her breasts.

She sighed. Sometimes she wondered if he thought of anything other than sex. If they weren't actually engaged in a battle, there was always heat in his eyes.

"As gorgeous as your body is, this time I really need to talk to you. I'll jump your body after we get finished with what needs to be done." Meagan rolled her eyes.

"If it takes your mind off sex with me, then it must be important. Let's go and you can tell us what's wrong." Samiel stepped forward, but looked back at the others. "We'll be back shortly."

"We want to hear what's gone wrong this time. So hurry." Gaellon turned in his seat to shoot a look at them.

"We won't make any big move without backup," Jaeson assured the man before putting his arm around Meagan.

Meagan watched the black haze rise and surround them. She rested her head against Jaeson's shoulder. Lately it seemed as if everything seemed to explode at once, demanding immediate action. She didn't like feeling rushed or pushed into just reacting. She held onto Jaeson even as the black mist dissipated. Jaeson released her and Samiel stepped back.

"So why did you leave the village?" Jaeson asked.

"I had to bring this here." She walked over to the couch. She released the spell and picked up the book. "The elders had some bad news to tell me."

"What did they tell you?" Samiel asked as he guided her to the lounge.

She dropped into the seat and drew in a deep breath. Lady, she still could barely believe what had happened. Before that, she'd thought they had everything under control. Now she felt rushed and on the verge of panic. She knew the feelings would go away, but she didn't like them.

"Doria talked one of the elders into letting her get a look at this book. Elder Sarash said that she won't know the exact location, but she could get close." Meagan dropped the book onto the chair again. "They'll arrange for you to take their piece of the generator, but we're going to have to do what we can to get that third piece before the Dark Sorceress finds it."

Samiel's mouth fell open and for a moment he looked as though he was going to start asking questions. She knew he was wondering how it happened just like she had. He shook his head and his expression hardened. She could tell that he was getting angry now.

"I'm not going to ask how or why they let her talk them into looking at the book. Right now, that doesn't matter. We'll have to make plans, work out the location of the third piece. Then we'll get the piece of the generator from the coven." Samiel lifted the book and opened it. "Do you know where the clue is in here or are we going to have to search?"

"I'll go get the other book," Jaeson said as he turned.

"Here, I know where the reference to it is. They showed me before I left." Meagan took the book and opened it to the middle.

She flipped a couple of pages. Pointing to the page on the left where the first of the clues began, she looked for Jaeson. Where had he hidden that book? Turning her attention back to the passage, she focused on finding the references to the generator piece. She knew it was on Mount Araki. That much she'd been able to tell just from a glance at what had been written. It wasn't in code and right now she wished it had been. Then Doria wouldn't have been able to learn something so important so easily.

"Here's the other book. Any idea where it is?" Jaeson came out of the hallway carrying the large book from the coven in Dicsin.

"Somewhere on Mount Araki. Then there's the first gap in the clues. So the precise location is probably in that one. While part of how to get it is in this book, the other part is in the second book." Meagan watched as Jaeson strode over to join them. She loved the way he moved. It was a graceful, rolling gate that brought to mind the smooth rock of his body against hers.

"Here, see if you can find the page we need. I'd have to search through the whole book." Jaeson handed the book to Meagan.

Meagan rolled her eyes. As if she wouldn't have to search the book. She hadn't been shown where it was. She flipped open the book, hoping it was near the middle like the book from her coven. She slowly turned the pages, looking for the information they needed. It seemed to take forever. She finally found the clues near the end of the book. She read the passage in the second book.

"It's in a temple dedicated to the Goddess. I know which one they mean. My ancestors helped build it. I've gone there a few times. It's deep in a cave near the peak of Mt. Araki." Meagan smiled.

That cave was rather obscure so it should be safe there until they could get to it. She didn't think Doria even knew of the small temple there. That didn't mean they could wait to get it. It was too important to leave unprotected.

"If we go to the mountain, the Dark Sorceress will be waiting for us." Jaeson dropped onto a cushioned chair he'd created.

"And I can't transport us into it because it's protected as well as forbidden to enter a temple like that." Meagan grimaced and looked at the book. Jaeson was right. The Dark Sorceress and the Dark Sorcerer would be watching that mountain. Any activity there would draw them and there would be a battle.

"I think I have a plan, but you'll have to show us where near the peak it is." Samiel rose to his feet and began pacing.

"What's your plan?" Meagan looked up from the book.

"We're going to give them what they want, at least what they think they want." Samiel's lips turned up in a wicked grin.

"We're not handing over that piece to them." Meagan tossed the book down and stood. Her hands slammed onto her hips and she glared at him. How could he even think they'd let the Dark Sorceress get her hands on that?

"That is exactly the attitude the Dark Sorceress is going to be expecting. She knows she can't beat us straight on. She won't try it. I don't think the man she's allied herself with would do it either. They won't attack unless they have an edge."

"Fuck. The witches they've captured, they'll use them." Jaeson's eyes widened and the words came out in a low angry growl.

Meagan felt the shock roll through her. That's what they would do. The Dark Sorceress wouldn't hesitate to use one of the women they'd captured. Meagan knew that Doria would carry through any threat to get that piece of the generator. For some reason, even when one piece was out of her reach, Doria seemed fixated on getting a piece of the generator. Meagan wondered what the woman thought she could do with only one piece. There wasn't much chance that they could make a generator that worked from just one piece. Shaking her head, she focused her attention on the matter at hand. In spite of Samiel saying they'd give the Dark Sorceress what she wanted, she really didn't believe he was just going to hand over the piece of the shield generator.

"What exactly do you plan to do? And don't tell me give her what she wants because I know better." Meagan glared at Samiel who was grinning at her. The fiend was probably enjoying her confusion. She reached out and flicked the dangling green gem hanging from his ear.

"No, we won't be giving her the actual piece. We'll create something that looks a lot like the generator piece we already have. We'll let her take that. If I didn't think she'd expect it we'd put a tracking spell on the piece." Samiel glided forward and slid his arms around her.

"And then we'll find out why getting those pieces even when they can't have them all is so important. It has to be more than the possibility of creating a full generator. Maybe something to do with the pieces themselves rather than what they did." Jaeson moved up behind her and hooked an arm around her waist. He nuzzled aside her hair and kissed her neck.

"So we're going to try to lure her to a fake location, let her take the piece you've created, and then get the real piece. When she discovers she's been tricked, she's going to be pissed. As well as her ally, the unknown Dark Sorcerer." Meagan leaned back against Jaeson's chest. She liked being held between them. She felt wanted, secure, and as sexy as hell, especially when she could feel their cocks pressing against her.

"Someone else will be getting the generator while we're baiting the Dark Sorceress. But yes, that's what we'll be doing. Now that we know where it is, let's go talk to the others and begin planning." Samiel's hand slipped down. She felt it stroking up and down. Since his palm brushed her mid-back she knew that stroking probably wasn't for her. A harsh groan rolled against her neck as Jaeson pressed tighter to her. She chuckled as she realized Samiel was teasing Jaeson.

"You think it's funny. Let's see how you like being teased when you know that there isn't a chance that you'll be able to satisfy the hunger anytime soon." Jaeson nipped her neck.

She felt the sharp edge of his teeth, but knew he wouldn't break the skin. Those nips sent a thrill straight to her core, but it was pure excitement causing her to gasp. His hand slid down her belly. His fingers traced over her thigh. She drew in a slow breath. She knew where that hand was going and she wasn't about to let him tease her and leave her aching. It was funny when it happened to him, but she didn't intend to walk around frustrated for the rest of the day or until she could get one of them alone for a reasonable period of time. She grabbed his wrist and pulled, determined to keep his hand away from her pussy. Those fingers were too talented. He laughed and his hand moved slowly down in spite of her grip.

"No, Jaeson." She tightened her fingers digging her nails in enough to let him know she was serious. "Don't make me get mean. You haven't see me mean yet."

"Ooh, a threat. I wonder if she actually thinks she can scare you." Samiel laughed.

Jaeson's low chuckle was filled with amusement. "I've seen worse than what you'd probably do from Samiel. Do you think that's going to hold me back? I could have you begging in almost no time."

"And I'd get even. How would you feel about a long stay with the Acolytes of the Bruis? They've got a nice little potion that would give you some time without worries over your magic. So your talent wouldn't do you much good." She didn't have to keep the grin off her face since he couldn't see it.

"You wouldn't do it, Meagan. Never threaten unless you're prepared to carry through with them." Samiel laughed softly. "I know you wouldn't put his life at risk and so does Jaeson. You'll have to try something else next time."

She didn't have to ask what he meant by next time. Jaeson's hand slid down. She felt the warmth of his palm through her pants as his hand cupped her pussy. In spite of her grip, she couldn't stop him. He didn't seem to even feel her nails. A finger pressed between the plump lips of her labia. Cloth rubbed against her clit as his finger moved slowly back and forth. The slight friction of fabric added an extra layer of sensation to the mix. At the first stroke, she could feel sensation curling low in her belly. Just playing and teasing had heightened her awareness, now excitement began pulsing through her. She tried to push it down and control it. The last thing she wanted was to feel the burn of desire when she knew he'd leave her hanging.

Jaeson's finger circled her clit. Her hips began to rock into his hand. Samiel's fingers cupped her chin, tipping her face up to his. His face seemed drawn tight and his eyes glowed with hunger. His lips brushed over hers. The contact was brief and light and left her wanting more. She groaned and reached for him. She let go of Jaeson's arm. Her hold wasn't making any difference anyway. Her hand slid beneath Samiel's golden hair and cupped the back of his neck. She wanted him close again. He didn't resist as she pulled him closer.

Samiel's mouth opened beneath hers. She wanted—expected—him to kiss her, to feel his lips close over hers in a fierce kiss. She liked the way his mouth claimed and possessed. His mouth moved softly against hers. Soft wasn't what she wanted. She nipped his lip. Her tongue lapped at his lips just once before driving deep into his mouth. She felt his laughter and then his tongue stroked into her mouth. She moaned. Her hips rocked into Jaeson's hand. His fingers stroked over her clit. His teeth scraped over her neck. The feeling low in her gut tightened. It felt so good. Her eyes drifted down. She was close to coming, just a few more strokes. She pushed into his fingers. Jaeson pulled his hand back. Her eyelids snapped open. She ached. She tore her mouth away from Samiel and drew in a gasping breath.

"I think that's fair. Now you feel just as much as I do." Jaeson's hand slid up her stomach.

"You are just so wrong. I don't like you much. You know that, don't you?" She stood stiffly in between them. Frustrated, her mood soured, she gripped Samiel's shirt. Just a few moments alone, that's all she needed, but knew there wasn't time. They had to go back to the town.

"You don't like me now. You will when I have a chance to finish what we started later." Jaeson's tongue slowly lapped at the skin above the pulse at her neck.

"I don't need you to finish what you started. I can do that myself or I'm sure Samiel would volunteer. You shouldn't have teased." She winked at Samiel. "Now take us back to the inn so we can get the details of the plan worked out."

"Don't laugh at and tease a vampire. We bite back." Jaeson didn't sound too concerned over her anger. "Are you going to try to hold a grudge? You know, you never stay angry long."

"I don't think you've known me long enough to say I never stay mad long." She looked back over her shoulder and arched a brow.

He was so arrogant. And he was right, probably. She didn't think she'd be able to stay mad with him very long. There wasn't anything that would induce her to tell him that now though. He was already overconfident. She wasn't going to encourage it.

"She's right we need to get back and secure a room so we can talk undisturbed. You two can finish your argument after we get some work done." Samiel's arms tightened, pulling Jaeson closer. "To the inn."

Chapter Twenty

Jaeson looked over at Meagan. She was nervous. He could tell by the way her eyes continuously looked around the area. She expected trouble immediately and had said so before they'd left the lair just before dawn. She looked ready for battle and absolutely grim. Dressed in tan clothing from head to toe, she appeared ready to fight, but wouldn't blend in too much against the rocks and trees. They wanted to be seen. Jaeson had been tempted to wear white, but had settled on all brown. Samiel was in black, but then again the dragon did like to stand out.

The planning had gone long into the night and it hadn't been easy to decide who'd go after the actual generator piece because everyone wanted to be part of both groups. No one wanted to miss confronting the Dark Sorceress, but getting that artifact to safety was important too. In the end, Lissan and Gaellon had gone. Danan and Grae as well as Maxim and Jadin had come to bait the witch into believing that she was getting the actual generator part. Otherwise if the Dark Sorceress actually tried what they expected, the situation could end with someone dying.

The mountain loomed over them, casting them in darkness even though the sun had risen. They were near its base on the north side while Lissan and Gaellon did their duty to the west. He knew that nothing he could say would reassure her. Only when this actually worked would she relax. Then they'd have to find a way to discover what it was the Dark Sorceress wanted from those pieces. It obviously wasn't a generator. If it had been, she'd have stopped once the first piece was lost. There had to be something she'd be able to do with only one part. Jaeson abruptly pushed the thought aside as Meagan moved to the dark entrance of the cave they'd chosen. According to Meagan, it had a few carved rooms in it. She didn't know what they'd been used for in the past, but had said they could have passages or hiding places.

Meagan tossed a ball of light into the air and led the way. Jaeson stepped into the cave just behind her. He heard Samiel's firm tread a step behind him. Meagan led the way down the tunnel. She bypassed several connecting tunnels, leading them deeper beneath the mountain. Finally, she turned to the right and led them into a room full of carved statues and detailed murals on the wall. If he hadn't known better, he'd have thought this would be an ideal spot to hide the second generator piece. He grabbed Meagan's hand and drew her to the side of the room. He pulled her into his arms. She leaned back and raised a brow at him. He suspected she thought she looked imperious or demanding but to him she just looked as if she needed to be kissed into a better mood. He was tempted, but they wouldn't be here long enough to satisfy either of them. Beside that she was just getting over being mad at him for teasing her last night.

"Samiel doesn't need that much room." She shook her head and tried to turn out of his arms.

He flattened his palm on her butt and held her in place. She felt too good to let go just yet. After wriggling a little more, she settled for shooting him a hot glare and an irritated huff.

"I'll use any excuse to hold you. Now be still before you make simply holding you even more difficult than it is. It won't take him long to create the piece." Jaeson rocked his hips to give her a better feel of his hardening cock.

He wanted to push her up against the wall and make her as hot as he was. No play, no teasing, just the feel of her body against his and how his body had hardened. His cock throbbed, a low ache beginning to build. He didn't know if he liked the fact that she had such a strong effect on him.

"If it's so difficult, then why don't you let me go? As you say, we won't be here long." Laughter lurked in her husky tone although she kept her eyes fixed at some point on his chest, so he couldn't see her expression.

"I like holding you too much." Jaeson stroked his hand up her back as he watched Samiel create a very good copy of one of the generators.

They weren't afraid that the Dark Sorceress, or the Dark Sorcerer if he showed, would notice the newness of the magic. The only thing that caused Jaeson any worries was convincing the Dark Sorceress that they didn't want to give the generator up, but would do it to protect someone's life. It was a risky game they were playing, but without knowing what the Dark Sorceress and her ally were after they couldn't let the generators fall into their hands. They wouldn't give their enemy any kind of weapon. The Dark Sorcerer and Doria were already formidable enough.

"I like being with you too, but we should be focusing on the coming confrontation. We have to control it as much as possible." Meagan's arms slipped around him. Her head rested against his chest. He could feel the tension in her body.

"We've done as much as we can. Now we have to see if the Dark Sorceress takes the bait. She might not be watching as we suspect." Jaeson dropped a kiss on her head.

He hoped that they'd guessed right, but in the end it all came down to chance. If they were lucky, the Dark Sorceress would come to them. He knew she hadn't gone after Lassar and Gaellon. The two men already had the real generator out of the mountain. Lassar had contacted him when he was sure they were safe.

"If you two are finished chatting and cuddling, I'm finished and we need to get this out to the others." Samiel's dry voice cut into Jaeson's thoughts.

He felt Meagan stiffen and shot a glare at the dragon. Samiel was right, but Jaeson didn't have to like it. He slowly let his hands slide down to her buttocks. With a last squeeze of the deliciously rounded curve, he released her. She stood on her tiptoes and brushed her lips across his. He immediately wanted to grab her again and pull her close for a real kiss. Hell, that quick caress was only a tease. He leaned toward her.

"No Jaeson, we don't have time. I told you we'd both want more." Meagan danced back before he could get his hands on her. She smiled smugly and strode over to look at the generator piece.

She walked around the thing, her head titling to the side as she stared at it. He wanted to wipe that smirk off her face with a hot kiss and a long, slow fuck. He took a long step forward. Samiel stepped in front of him, blocking his view of the taunting witch. She'd been swinging her hips deliberately. She normally didn't walk with that extra sway.

"No." Samiel folded his arms across his broad chest and looked as though it would take at least three men to move him.

Jaeson felt like growling. If he could have done it as impressively as Samiel did, he would have. "Why do both of you think you can get away with telling me what to do?"

"Right now, because you know we don't have time for what you want to do." Samiel grinned.

Jaeson didn't like it, but the dragon was right. They had to get the piece out into the open and see if the Dark Sorceress was going to attack. He sighed and relaxed. He'd have to wait, but he knew he'd get his hands on her soon. He'd enjoy turning the tables on her.

"This looks good. Now we need to get it outside and make it look like we're ready to leave with it." Meagan sounded cheerful and too damned innocent.

"Of course it looks good. Don't try baiting me, little witch." Samiel's tone may have been gruff, but his smile was all teasing warmth.

Meagan laughed. "It was supposed to be a compliment. I didn't know it was a given that you'd do a fabulous job."

Jaeson felt his lips twitch. He couldn't resist poking a little at the dragon's ego, especially since Samiel had been so eager to stop his fun.

"That's the way it is with our big dragon. You should always expect him to do a perfect job unless he makes a mistake." Jaeson walked over and threw an arm over Samiel's shoulder.

Samiel humphed, shot Jaeson a disgruntled look and walked over to the generator. His hand moved and the created piece rose off the floor. Samiel could have easily lifted it himself, but most people would expect it to float out the entrance. Samiel walked out of the room and the generator piece floated after him. Jaeson waited until Meagan stepped into the tunnel and then followed. They strode into the slowly lightening day. Jaeson looked around the area. There was a heaviness in the air and it wasn't an approaching storm.

The Dark Sorceress was here. Even though he couldn't feel any magic, he knew that she or the Dark Sorcerer had come to claim the piece of the generator. His muscles tensed and his pulse began to race. He didn't let his awareness show. They had to seem surprised when the woman made her presence known. He didn't say anything to

Meagan or Samiel. They'd find out soon enough. The Dark Sorceress wouldn't chance them leaving with it.

"Everyone ready to go?" Meagan asked, her eyes surveying the group around her. She seemed relaxed and cheerful. "We've gotten what we came for."

"Meagan!" The female voice echoed in the valley between the mountains.

Meagan's head snapped up. He saw her looking around the area because there was no way to tell which direction it came from. He turned slowly, looking into the trees. He finally saw a man and a woman standing near a large boulder. The woman he recognized as Doria, the man he'd never seen. The brown-haired man hadn't been at any of the battles. It was probably the Dark Sorcerer Doria had mentioned, but it could be one of the lesser minions.

"What do you want, Doria? I told you, you wouldn't get your hands on the generator piece." Meagan put her hand on the piece and stepped slightly in front of it.

Jaeson held back a smile at Meagan's protective move. He didn't doubt that the Dark Sorceress believed fully that the generator piece was real. The way she stiffened and her face reddened was evidence of that. Oh yes, she was too angry to think about why no one had been on lookout for an attack. Hopefully the hazel-eyed Dark Sorcerer, too, was focused on his own goal. Jaeson could tell the man wasn't as invested as Doria was. Jaeson wasn't sure what the Dark Sorcerer's aim was, but it wasn't personal.

"Let's get this out of here. They can't do anything more than rage and lob a few orbs at us as we leave. Not much of a threat at all." Jaeson put a hand on Meagan's shoulder. The last he added as a dig against the Dark Sorcerer. He wanted the man angry and not thinking clearly.

He saw the color rush over the man's golden skin and the man's body tensed. He snapped his fingers. Two *merdanons* appeared. Each *merdanon* held a woman above the ground. Jaeson hadn't expected that. It showed even more clearly that the Dark Sorcerer wanted this very badly. Jaeson felt a surge of magic and recognized it as Meagan's.

"Now you know I'm not going to let you hurt those two women. It's not very smart bringing them out here." Meagan stepped forward to the front of the group. He saw her sword and dagger held securely in her hands.

"You can't completely protect them as much as you may want to. You probably already have a shield around them, but could you hold it forever? We could leave and use other methods to get rid of them. There are things you can't protect them from." Doria smiled, sliding a glance from one of the women to Meagan. "You don't want them to die, do you?"

"I'm not going to let you kill them, Doria. And you're damn sure not taking them anywhere."

"Then you know what you have to do," Doria looked relaxed now, as if she was certain of the outcome.

Jaeson waited tensely. This couldn't be too easy a surrender. The Dark Sorcerer standing beside Doria would see the truth even if Doria was too busy gloating. Jaeson

heard a low growl. He looked over and saw Samiel bare his teeth. Jaeson felt a surge of magic, Meagan's. He wondered what she'd done.

"Now you can't leave. I have all the time I need to take them from you. Then I'll take care of you and your friend." Meagan began gathering power. Her eyes narrowed and she looked determined.

Jaeson was impressed with her tactics. The Dark Sorceress couldn't know that Meagan could take down the shield in front of her with ease. They'd feel safe behind their shields with the *merdanons* holding the two women.

"Ah, Meagan, you just don't understand when you're beaten." Doria turned to one of the *merdanons*.

The beast to the right put the woman on the ground and planted his foot on her chest. The woman screamed but it was cut short as the pressure forced the air from her lungs. The woman's hands flailed at the thick gray leg, but it didn't budge. Her face reddened.

"Stop, Doria." Meagan took a step forward.

"Are you convinced you can't win? Give it to me and she'll live. Continue to play games with me and I'll kill her just to show you I mean what I say." Doria's face was hard as was her voice.

"I don't trust you to keep your word. I need proof that you'll let them go, because leaving them in your hands is tantamount to killing them anyway." Meagan didn't immediately give in to the demands.

"We've got other witches. We don't need them." Doria waved off the concern. "Because I'm feeling so generous, I'll give you what you seem to need. If you try any tricks, they'll be dead before you can get to them."

"That's not my way and you know it. Do what you're going to do and let's get this finished." Meagan sent her weapons away and folded her arms across her chest.

Doria waved her hand. Both *merdanons* released the women they held. The two women ran forward, but hit a shield before they could reach the group of vampires and dragons. Jaeson put a shield between the women and the Dark Sorcerers. The two were weak and he'd bet they currently didn't have the power for even a light shield. He wasn't going to chance the Dark Sorceress or her friend deciding to kill the women out of spite.

Meagan waved her hand and the generator floated slowly forward. "Don't get too attached to it."

"You don't quit, do you? You lost this piece, just as you'll lose in the end." Doria stepped forward and claimed the generator piece. The gray mechanism lifted off the ground and floated over to the Dark Sorcerer.

Doria stepped closer to the Dark Sorcerer. They formed a tunnel. Just before the two stepped into it, Doria hurled a large orb toward the two captives. He knew his shield

would hold. Jaeson shook his head as he watched sparks fall to the ground in front of the two women.

"Now that's finished. Let's go see what we can learn of the piece we do have." Meagan turned and gave Jaeson a wink.

"I'm so sorry," one of the witches said. She sounded near tears as Maxim helped her to her feet.

"Don't worry about it. We don't need that to ensure the cities remain safe." Meagan turned back to face the two women. Her voice softened and she walked over to them. "You're more important than that piece of ancient witchcraft. Let's get you home."

"They only let us go because they know we'll be useless. They drained our power." The stronger of the two women stood shakily on her feet.

"It will come back. It'll just take some time." Jaeson walked forward to join Meagan. "Don't worry about those two. They may think this gives them more of an edge, but I can guarantee it doesn't."

"Let's go. If they decide to come back, I don't want to be here." Meagan looked around at the assembled group.

Chapter Twenty-One

Meagan watched Samiel as he paced the length of the room and back. She enjoyed the flex of his tight buttocks beneath the dark gray leather pants as he walked away from her. She wanted to get her hands on the taut curve, but he hadn't come near her. The man was nearly bursting with energy yet continued to stay with her. She could tell he needed to be outside. She didn't know why he was inside when he obviously needed to move.

"Samiel, why don't we go outside and enjoy the day?" She stood and walked over to him.

He turned and frowned. "I thought you said your head ached. It's why we left the coven."

Her head still throbbed, but lying quietly wasn't helping much. The noise and sheer activity at the coven had been torture. Watching him pace as if he were caged wasn't doing her much good either.

"I'm thinking maybe getting outside in the fresh air could help. Laying still isn't doing it. If you don't mind going with me that is." She shrugged.

He nodded. "Let's go. I know a place by the river where flowers are in bloom and the water falls into a wide pool."

"It sounds pretty. This place better deliver." She poked her finger against his chest. Her finger slid against the dark blue shirt

"It will." He tugged her into his arms. "Ready?"

She nodded. She fully expected him to release her so that they could walk there, but his arms tightened, her feet left the floor, and he carried her a few steps closer. She felt the tugging pull of a tunnel low in her belly, only then realizing they weren't going to hike to the river. Samiel stepped forward with the momentum as the tunnel opened. He lowered her to her feet and turned her around. She saw a crystal clear pool just in front of her. The sound of water cascading onto rocks filled the air. On the other side of the pool, flowers and long green grass swayed in a gentle breeze. A sweet scent teased her nostrils. It was better than he'd described it.

"We're on this side of the river with a few patches of grass, the occasional flower and lots of rocks when that's over there. Why?" She gestured to the flower-strewn field.

"Because this is the nicest view of it. There's a shallow crossing and you can find a nice shady spot and rest." Samiel led her to the shallow portion and followed her across it.

"What are you going to be doing?" She tilted her head and looked back at him. He was such a gorgeous man.

"I'll probably fly a little, but will stay close enough to keep an eye on you," Samiel said.

"I'll be fine." She decided on a spot where two trees provided shade. "Don't worry. Have fun."

Conjuring a lounging couch beneath the trees, she walked over and relaxed on it. With a soft breeze feathering over her, she finally managed to rest. Her headache faded. She didn't know how long it had been since she'd relaxed, but she didn't see any sign of the dragon. Not that she was worried. She could feel the shield around the area.

At first she'd only been able to feel magic when she was holding the blades. Now she could feel it any time. To get a sense of where the magic originated she still needed the weapons, but the growth over such a short time amazed her. Standing, she stretched. She scanned the sky, but didn't see a sign of Samiel. She sighed.

The dragon was usually so persistent about staying close. Now when she wanted him here for some serious playtime, he'd gone missing. She shrugged and peeled out of her clothes. She wasn't going to wait around for him. That pool had looked inviting earlier. Now she wanted to feel the clear water surrounding her.

She ran across the grassy field straight into the water. She screeched as chilly liquid touching her calves shocked her. She stopped. Slipping in the mud, she fell onto her butt. She drew in a deep breath, giving her body a little time to adjust to the temperature instead of running right back out which was her first inclination. Eventually, she realized it wasn't bad, just a little cool compared to her warm body.

She waded deeper and began swimming. She loved the feel of the water flowing over her body. The only thing she could think of that would make it better would be Samiel or Jaeson. A sudden shadow caught her eyes. She stopped and turned in the water. She saw Samiel sweep around in a wide circle before coming in for a landing. She watched as he stalked over to the water still in dragon form. His blue scales gleamed in the bright sunlight and the gold streaks shone almost as if they were made of some precious metal. He walked right up to the edge of the water. His head lowered and his tail swished slowly from side to side. She'd swear that the dragon grinned. If she wasn't reading him wrong, Samiel wanted to play. She swam to the left just to see what he'd do. His head turned and his tongue flicked over his lips.

"So the big, bad dragon is back." She swam to the edge of the water and stood in front of him. The water only reached to about mid-thigh now. Her hands planted on her hips. "Do you think all you have to do is show up and you can have anything you want?"

The dragon's head nudged her out of the water. She would swear his brown eyes glittered with laughter. He definitely wanted to play, but she wasn't sure just what he expected her to do. His teeth snapped very close to her thigh. She felt a hot rush of air.

"Watch those teeth. You bite me and I won't be happy." She poked a finger against his muzzle. "I'm going to assume you want to play chase the witch and this isn't some bid to get the pool all to yourself. You'd better give me a head start since I can't fly."

The dragon licked his lips. She had a feeling he wasn't going to play by any rules other than his. His head slowly lowered in a single nod. She backed away from him, watching him warily. She created some shoes because she wasn't going to make this easy on him. She whirled and ran for the forest.

A huge splash drew her attention. She turned and saw Samiel swimming around the pool. Furious at being tricked out of that water, she walked to the edge of the pool. Her hands landed on her hips. What was she going to do with him? Well, she wasn't going to let him get away with this. He wasn't even paying attention to her. She took off her shoes and weighed one of them. It should do the job. She threw the shoe and watched in satisfaction as it popped him in the head. His head came up and he bared his teeth at her.

"Don't think you're getting that pool all to yourself." She deliberately walked into the water.

She knew he would be a little cautious still, but he needed to understand she wasn't afraid of him in either form. The dragon swam around the large, clear pool seemingly unconcerned. She dived into the water. Her long strokes carried her right over to the dragon. She hauled herself onto his back, careful of his wings. He suddenly rolled. She hit the water, gasping. Water filled her mouth and she struggled to reach the surface. Hands came around her waist and she felt a foot brush against her calf as they broke the surface. Samiel held her while she sputtered. He looked concerned, but not horrified as he once would have. Finally, she drew in a deep breath and rubbed at her chest.

"Rogue." She splashed water at him.

She could tell he'd intended to dump her in the water. He smiled widely. His hands linked at her waist. She shook her head and relaxed against him. Her legs tangled with his.

"I caught you." His lips brushed across hers.

"You caught me? You didn't even try." She laughed at the assertion. He had nerve making that claim.

"Why should I chase you through the forest, getting us both hot and sweaty when we can be getting sweaty doing something more enjoyable?" he whispered.

"Sounds like you got a little lazy to me." She looked at him through her lashes and tried to hide her grin. "And I thought you'd enjoy the chase."

"I'm not in the mood for the chase." His hand slid down her side and slipped between them.

His palm cupped her pussy. She hooked a leg around his hips. She wasn't afraid that he'd let them drown. His fingers curled up and stroked her clit. A bolt streaked through her, settling like a heavy weight low in her stomach.

"I'm so disappointed." She faked a pout. "I wanted wild and ready for any challenge. I get a lazy dragon. Next thing I know you'll be blowing smoke rings." Lady, she loved teasing him.

"You won't be disappointed soon. I'll practice the smoke rings and lounging after we're both so sated we can't even summon the energy to make it home." He leaned down and she caught the flash of fangs as he scowled at her.

"That seems like a big challenge for someone who couldn't even chase me." She grinned not intimidated at all.

His thumb circled her clit slowly. She drew in a shaky breath. He didn't respond immediately. His lips turned up into a wicked smile. Two fingers pushed into her pussy. Her eyes nearly rolled to the back of her head. It felt so good. She licked her lips and tried to hold back a moan. Teasing him was fun, but this was so much better. She arched in his hand, trying to force a firmer touch. Every time her hips would rock forward, his hand would pull back.

"No, you're the challenge. Chasing you would have been just a little anticipation. I wanted to get to the real game." He leaned and nipped her lips.

She realized he was slowly moving them toward the waterfall and the smooth rocks there. She looked back at them. In places the fall of water was gentle, barely a light rain. That was where he seemed to be guiding them. She nipped at his lips unwilling to let him have all the fun. Her hand slid over his chest. When her fingers skimmed across his rib cage, he grabbed her hand and pulled it up, placing it on his shoulder.

"Not this time, baby. I captured you. So this time you're mine." He eased her onto a ledge. Water drizzled over them both. She was mostly out of the water. Only her lower legs from mid-calf down remained submerged. She shifted restlessly. Her hands tugged, trying to pull him up onto the rock with her. He shook his head.

"I told you that you didn't capture me." She tangled her fingers in his hair and tugged just to get his attention.

"I didn't?" His eyes slashed up to hers. His hands smoothed over her thighs. She felt the slight scrape of his nails on her skin.

"No." She shook her head, smirking openly because his attention seemed to be focused on her legs and pussy. "You did dunk me. I'll give you that. But capture me? It would take more energy than you seem to have."

His hands pushed her thighs wider apart. She wondered what he was going to do next. What he was going to say? She wanted to see what he'd do to convince her he'd actually captured her, because she knew he believed it. His tongue swept over her thigh, lapping droplets of water. He nipped at her skin just above her knee.

"Whose tongue and teeth do you feel on your legs?" His fingers drew small patterns on her inner thigh.

They didn't move to her pussy as she wanted. She held back a groan with difficulty. He was going to torment her until she admitted that he'd captured her. She knew she'd enjoy every moment of it before she gave him the words he wanted.

"Your tongue, but..." Her voice trailed off as he drew his fingers over the slick lips of her pussy.

She held her breath, hoping he'd touch her clit. Just thinking about it had her wet and aching for him. He knew it too. She could tell by the grin on his face as he drew his hand back. His hand lifted but went to her breast. He cupped and lifted the full mound before sweeping his thumb across the hardened nipple. She drew in a hissing breath as tingles darted straight to her core from the brush across the sensitive peak.

"Who's playing with these luscious breasts, witch? Who's making your nipples hard?" He tugged at the stiff nipple, sending another shaft through her.

She gasped and her back arched. He was wicked.

"You are." She couldn't believe how breathy her voice sounded.

His fingers traced the plump lips of her pussy and not all of the moisture was caused by the mist lightly falling around them. He made her so hot so fast. She licked her lips, not caring much about taunting him anymore. She wanted his lips on her and his hands everywhere. But not as much as she wanted to feel his cock pumping into her pussy. His fingers parted the folds. He licked his lips as if he couldn't wait to taste her. Her inner muscles clenched at the thought. She wanted his fingers in her and his mouth on her. He had to know it.

"Who caught you beneath the water?" He blew over the pink lips. She shuddered.

"Y-You," she stammered. She couldn't think beyond saying what she needed to get his hands or mouth on her.

He stroked his fingers over her clit. Her head fell back. She lifted into his fingers wanting more than the light touch. He plucked at the bud, sending a jolt of pleasure streaking up her spine.

"Ah, so I did capture you, didn't I?" His fingers drew back just brushing over the sensitive lips.

She felt like screaming. Fine tremors ran over her body. She grabbed for his hand, but couldn't make him touch her again. When she tried to give herself the extra push, he grabbed her hands. He laughed and held her hands away from her pussy. His tongue lapped at thigh. She wanted to feel that tongue dancing over her clit.

"No, tell me. Did I capture you?" His voice hardened.

Demanding dragon, she seethed. Her body burned so much that even if she wanted to, she couldn't deny him an answer. She squirmed and moaned trying to entice him into touching her without a full surrender. He just grinned and shook his head.

"You captured me, evil dragon," she said on a sigh. She needed his touch and couldn't hold back anymore.

His lips brushed over her thigh and she felt the vibrations of his satisfied growl. He leaned closer and inhaled. His tongue slicked over his lips. His lashes lowered, nearly veiling his eyes completely. The skin over his cheekbones was taut and he looked intense, hungry. His tongue traced over the lips of her pussy. She tugged at his hair. He was going too slowly. His fingers brushed over her clit. She drew in a sharp breath and her back bowed as pleasure arced through her. His tongue lashed from her opening up

over her clit. He feasted. She couldn't stay still or quiet. It felt as if pure magic washed over her skin, leaving searing desire in its wake. He rose out of the water joining her on the large rock. He lifted her back and to the side, then slipped between her thighs. She hoped he'd finished playing because she wanted his cock inside her now.

"Samiel, please." She hooked her arms around his neck and tried to tug him up her body.

His tongue circled the darkened nipple. Every puff of warm air sent stinging prickles dancing straight to her core. Her skin was unbearably sensitive. Even the light touch of mist hitting her body was unbelievably arousing. His hands weren't helping. His fingers tormented her clit, but didn't put enough pressure or intensity to give her what she needed.

He looked up from her breast, but his teeth grazed her nipple even as his eyes locked with hers. Her breath locked in her throat and she'd swear her heart skipped a beat. She hooked a leg over his, but he didn't move.

"What do you need?" His tongue swirled around the stiff peak and he seemed to be enjoying tormenting her.

"Fuck me." She grabbed two fistfuls of his hair and lifted his mouth away from her nipple. She couldn't take any more. It felt wonderful, but it wasn't enough to send her over the edge. All it did was push the need even higher.

"Are you sure you're ready?" His fingers moved down from her clit to the slick entrance of her pussy. "Let's see."

Two fingers slipped into her. They stroked in and out. His thumb brushed her clit. Her hands fell away from his hair. Something exploded inside her. She trembled and screamed as release hit her in an ecstatic rush. His fingers pumped into her lengthening her orgasm. Even as the thrilling pleasure faded, his thumb began circling pressure on her clit. She could barely believe it when the demanding hunger began to build again. His lips closed over her nipple. He drew it deep into his mouth and sucked. His free hand lifted and cupped the neglected breast. His thumb flicked across the sensitive tip. She couldn't believe how fast her hunger was rising again. His fingers plucked at the hardened bud. Her hips rose against his hand.

"Now you're ready and so am I." He gave her nipple one last flick.

He rose over her with a surge of his powerful muscles. His mouth met hers as the rounded head of his cock nudged at her entrance. Her hips rose as he thrust forward, his shaft sinking deep into her pussy. Sweet thrills tore down her spine. This was what she needed. She craved the heat, the passion and the brush of his skin as he drove into her. Her nails scraped over his back. He growled and nipped at her neck. The sharp sting forced her over the edge. She clutched at his shoulders, trying to pull him even closer. Her body arched as pleasure roared over her. It kept rolling over her as his hips thrust faster against her. He stiffened and his body shook. Her hands stroked over his back and she relaxed, wanting to savor the closeness and peace of the moment.

Everything careened out of her control in reality, but this seemed like another world. She felt secure and relaxed and right now didn't worry about anything.

"I love to play with captured witches." Samiel framed her face with his hands and planted a noisy kiss on her lips.

"Smug dragon." She shook her head.

"Victorious dragon. Give me a kiss and I'll let you ride on my back home. If not, I'll carry you back like a sweet piece of treasure. Better decide quick because that's sounding really attractive." His eyebrows rose.

"On your back? Really?" She barely got the words out before his lips slanted across hers.

She let herself get lost in the kiss. The feel of his tongue stroking against hers, his taste. He finally pulled back and smiled down at her.

"Really on my back, but no playing around or stunts. You hold on and be still." He got to his knees and pulled her into a sitting position.

"As if I'd try anything like walking along your back in midair on my first time." She rolled her eyes at his orders. He had overprotective down to a fine art.

"Not ever." He leaned close and gave her what was probably meant to be an intimidating stare.

It didn't work. She knew he'd sooner rip off his wing than hurt her. She just smiled up at him knowing even if she did do something he'd probably only lecture her.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Meagan waited next to a building near the edge of the village. *Merdanons* had been gathering for most of the day. There wasn't any doubt that the Dark Sorceress and Dark Sorcerer were pissed. She looked over at Jaeson. He'd arrived back almost the moment they were called to help the town. From his expression, a very satisfied smirk, she'd known that he'd found something. That expression had faded quickly when he heard the flare alarm. There hadn't been time to ask any questions before, but since they were waiting now, she was going to try.

"What did you learn?" She turned so that she could see him better.

He smiled. "You know Samiel will want to know everything as well, so you could wait until after the battle."

She didn't believe that for a moment. "One of the other dragons will tell him since you've probably already told your vampire friends. He won't ask and you'll forget to tell me. And I'll be the only one who doesn't know!" She crossed her arms over her chest and tried to pout.

He laughed and hooked an arm around her waist. She snuggled up against him. Her stomach brushed against the hard ridge of his erection. She wriggled a little as if getting comfortable, just to tease him. He groaned and his hand tightened.

"I'll tell you, but if you have to hear it again, I don't want any whining." His teeth grazed her shoulder. "Did I tell you how much I missed you?"

She tried to hide the shiver that went through her. Even through the fabric of the gray shirt she'd put on earlier, she felt the sharp tips of his fangs. The scrape of those sharp teeth never failed to send a thrill through her. Wearing durable black pants, she was ready for battle, but looking into his eyes, she'd never felt sexier.

"Yes, but I like hearing it." She pulled back enough to smile up at him. She loved hearing that and the many other ways he showed he cared.

"We found something. Well, the others did. We're fairly sure it's why the Dark Sorcerers want those generators," Jaeson said. "This area is very public place. We'll go into the details later."

"You are such a tease." She shook her head. She'd really thought he'd tell her what they'd found. She could understand why he didn't but there were ways of getting privacy without going into a building or somewhere isolated especially if it was just for a short time.

"You need some patience. It's not going to hurt you to wait until later." Jaeson ruffled her hair.

She glared at him. "I have patience. If I didn't, I would have done something drastic to you and Samiel already. You're not the easiest people to live with, you know. Demanding, not familiar with the word compromise. Let's not even get into the fact that living and working with a woman is something new to you."

"That doesn't sound familiar at all. We didn't haul you off the moment we met you and believe me the temptation was there." Jaeson brushed his lips over hers. "Do you know how much I just wanted to grab you? I was half afraid you'd disappear on us."

"There are bigger things in life than two arrogant men who think they have a claim on me. I really wasn't worried about you." She nipped his lip to show him that he'd irritated her.

"Oh, we learned that soon after talking to you. Your focus was entirely on stopping the Dark Sorcerer. Speaking of him, it's time to get to work. Three huge tainted bursts of energy have just popped up within the walls." Jaeson released her and straightened.

Meagan took a deep breath. She'd known the Dark Sorcerer and Doria would come after the village with everything they had. It wasn't only revenge they were after. As far as they knew the last generator was still held there. It wasn't anymore, but they wouldn't know that the dragons and vampires had taken it away days ago.

Doria had lost all her contacts when it became widely known that she was behind the attacks on the coven as well as the disappearance of several coven members. They would want revenge for the way they'd been tricked. It was going to get very busy very quickly. Meagan just wondered if Doria would continue to flood the area with *merdanons* and *tandini* or if she'd learned from the other battles. *Merdanons* would mean massive destruction which would undoubtedly be one of their aims. Jaeson squeezed her shoulder, drawing her thoughts away from the Dark Sorceress and what she might do.

"Don't overthink it. We'll know soon enough and it'll probably be worse than you're imagining. They're going to think this is their last chance to get one of the generators." Jaeson kissed her. "We need to move. The fight is beginning."

She took a deep breath. She knew he was right. It didn't make it easier to get her mind off what would happen. She wouldn't stop thinking until she began working and then she'd be too busy to think about what Doria intended.

"Where?" She frowned. There wasn't any sign that the battle had started. She hadn't heard a *merdanon* roar or seen a single flash of magic.

"Up the street and around the corner. We can run there and I'm not sure that the area's been cleared." Jaeson gestured down the street leading closer to the wall.

"There is a vampire or a dragon posted at the coven, so we'll know if there's an attack there?" Meagan looked over at Jaeson. That was one of the things she'd intended to ask after she'd discovered what the vampires had learned, but had gotten distracted.

"Of course. A vampire and a wizard are guarding it. They're not happy because they won't be involved in most of the battle but they know that a vampire needs to be there in case it's the focus of a large attack." Jaeson nodded, his tone matter of fact.

They ran down the street. As soon as they turned the corner, Meagan saw a mob of *tandini* pressing toward the other end of the street. The witch and dragon there were trying to keep the creatures at a distance while they thinned the numbers of the small beasts. Meagan and Jaeson took a position about a quarter of the way down the street. Meagan strengthened the shield around them. She wasn't taking any chances. The destruction in the village was all Doria was going to get a chance to do.

Meagan summoned her blades. They settled into her hands and she lifted the sword. She channeled power and sent an arc of energy hurtling down the street. It hit one of the *tandini*. The mass of beasts split and part of them came down the street. It was readily apparent that these creations were just meant to harass and distract. They weren't controlled or heavily shielded.

"You tell me if there's trouble in another location, because this is either simply step one of the plan, or a way to pull others away from what they want." Meagan glanced quickly at Jaeson then back at the *tandini* throwing themselves at the shield.

"Of course. Let's get this done. I think you're right. The Dark Sorcerer is trying to test to see what we'll do. We know they'll try for the coven, but there's been no sign of any activity there yet." Jaeson formed an arc of magic and hurled it down the street.

"Yes, but a few of the elders are out in the streets helping with the fight. Doria or her ally might try to go after them," Meagan said. That was something that worried her because the elders weren't with a dragon or vampire, they were with other witches.

"That probably won't happen until after they make a try at the coven. When they realize they can't get what they want." Jaeson kept sending balls of magic at the swarm of *tandini*, but she could tell by his tone and the look on his face that he'd given the answer some thought.

Meagan nodded and continued to work at thinning the number of *tandini*. It took a while to clear the street and then Meagan began to destroy the creatures. The routine was familiar, but now that night had fully fallen she could see the flash of magic from the other parts of the village above the rooftops. They would have to move as soon as she finished. She hurriedly moved through the downed creations, taking the energy. The magic inside her grew as power flowed into her. She'd need to give some of it if this pattern persisted but not just yet. With what she'd used, she could handle the magic from this batch.

"We're needed, Meagan." Jaeson's voice sounded strained.

She looked up and saw his hand clench. His mouth was compressed into a thin line. She swallowed at the intensity in his eyes. Something bad had happened. She knew just from that look. She hurriedly took the magic from the last few *tandini*.

She straightened. "I'm ready. What's happened?"

"Samiel's been hurt. There is only a vampire and wizard with him. They're being heavily attacked by a Dark Sorcerer." The words were clipped and precise.

Meagan felt as though her heart had jumped into her throat. Her pulse raced and pain seared through her. She wanted to scream, but knew she had to keep herself under

control so that they could help Samiel. She stepped into Jaeson's arms. He'd get them to where they needed to be. Her arms tightened and she relished the comfort she found just being close to him. Samiel had to be all right. She wouldn't accept anything less.

Jaeson's arms closed around her. She saw the blackness that surrounded them and felt the slightest rush of movement before the blackness lifted. At first, she couldn't see much beyond the destruction. She saw the flash of magic and turned. Samiel lay on the ground in dragon form. His body had crushed several buildings. One wing was cocked at an odd angle. Blood ran down his muzzle and neck from a head wound. Pain and panic lanced through her. She gulped and ran toward him. The rise and fall of his chest reassured her. He was alive. She threw up a shield in front of the wizard and the vampire, Grae, fighting the Dark Sorcerer as she reached Samiel. She put her hand on him just to reassure herself.

"He'll be all right," Jaeson said as he put a hand on her shoulder. His fingers tightened for a moment focusing her attention on him. "I need you to go up there and help the wizard while we heal Samiel enough that he can change forms."

She wanted to stay and help Samiel, but knew that Jaeson and Grae could heal him better than she could. She hadn't ever healed a dragon. She nodded and slowly lifted her hands away from Samiel, then walked over to help the wizard.

She focused her attention down the street. A Dark Sorcerer stood in the shadows. She could just see his outline near the hulking shape of a *merdanon*. She shook her head. Anger burned inside her but she kept her emotions under tight control as she moved up beside the local wizard, Farriss. She couldn't let rage rule her. From the chunks of debris on the ground in front of them, she suspected she knew exactly how Samiel had been hurt. It wasn't uncommon for *merdanons* to throw chunks of a building. Usually they threw them at the witches and wizards to test a shield's strength. She'd never seen one lobbed up at a dragon. She tossed up a ball of light. It wasn't only because she wanted to know who she was fighting. Dark Sorcerers liked anonymity. She wanted to take that away from him.

The light bobbed as it floated down the street to hover over the Dark Sorcerer. She didn't recognize him, but did notice that another of the big creations had been hidden in the shadows behind him. He didn't look evil. In fact, in a way, he was an attractive man. She wouldn't have even guessed that he was a Dark Sorcerer if she'd just met him on the street. He had long, blond hair and golden-tan skin. His eyes looked almost icy in the bright light, but she thought they were probably green. He was tall and thin, but in no way did he seem feminine. A smirk curved his lips. The man looked too damned smug for her taste. Time to make him start worrying. He sure wasn't getting away with doing that to Samiel.

She formed an energy arc and hurled it toward the *merdanon* at his right. It hit a shield in front the beast flared and dissipated. She'd expected shielded beasts. This wasn't going to be easy. So far the shield appeared to be strong. The only thing that seemed strange was that there were only two of them. It was just a little unusual

compared to what they'd faced before. She watched as the second beast lumbered up beside the Dark Sorcerer.

"So I finally get to see the *Tiria* who's ruined some of our plans. Did I have the good fortune to actually hit your dragon?" he asked. His voice was smooth and he looked as if he was close to laughing.

"I'm sure he'll be back in fighting shape by the time I take care of you." She wasn't going to let him make her angry with those taunts. It was too common a tactic.

She slammed two bolts of magic down the street. The first hit the shield in front of the *merdanon*, the second sent a wave of magic flaring as it collided with the Dark Sorcerer's shield. She wasn't going to let him just strengthen the *merdanons'* shield. She would push him to making a choice between maintaining his shield or strengthening the shield protecting his creations. He wasn't just going to stand there smirking at her. At her side, Farriss began doing the same. Silently, she approved of that move. It shouldn't take long. She'd force that Sorcerer to do something.

She saw the moment he decided to go on the attack. The smile faded and his entire body tensed. Both *merdanons* roared and plodded forward. She slipped a ball of magic between the lumbering beasts, hitting his shield again. She needed to keep him worried. He flinched and threw a bolt of magic back at her. She kept hammering at the *merdanons'* shield as well as his. Finally the shield in front of the first *merdanon* fell.

She looked over her shoulder and saw Jaeson and Grae still working over Samiel. The damage had to be really bad to take this long to fix. She drew in a deep breath and pushed her worry back. He had to be okay. She couldn't think of any other option. She couldn't let her panic take over her mind. The battle with the man at the opposite end of the street had to take first priority.

Facing the Dark Sorcerer, she advanced and pressed the other creation back. Dropping to a knee, she took the power of the fallen beast. She shot a smile at the Dark Sorcerer and stepped back. Fury hardened his face. He threw a bolt down the street. It exploded as it slammed into the barrier in front of her. Meagan flinched at the blinding light. As soon as her vision cleared, she slung two bolts down the street. The first hit the Sorcerer's shield and the second struck the shield of the second *merdanon*. The beast lumbered forward. She knew that she and Farriss needed to keep the pressure on the Dark Sorcerer. In the end, he'd have to make a choice to run or stay. She couldn't tell which he'd choose. So far he'd been arrogant and supremely confident. The only emotion she could see on his face was anger.

"You'll never win." The Dark Sorcerer threw two bolts. They hit her shield, flared and cascaded to the ground.

Meagan slung two blasts at him. She wasn't going to respond to his taunt. It was a distraction technique that she'd experienced before. Both balls of energy hit the Dark Sorcerer's shield. She didn't wait to lob one at the *merdanon's* shield. The creature's fist smashed into the wall of a house on its right. Light flashed as one of the Dark Sorcerer's orbs burst in front of her.

"The village will fall and we'll take that generator from the ruins of the coven." The Dark Sorcerer threw two orbs down the street. One hit the shield in front of her, the other slammed into the shield in front of Farriss.

Meagan frowned. Something in what he said struck her. It was normal bragging, but it caught her attention. She didn't have time to work out which bit was something more or why. Swinging her sword back and forth, she gathered power at the tip of the blade. She slammed the magic down the street. It flared as it hit the shield in front of the *merdanon*. Farriss threw an orb and it took out the invisible wall protecting the creature. Meagan followed with a blast that finished the beast. She stepped forward and took the power from it.

What surprised her was that the Dark Sorcerer didn't at least try to reclaim the magic before she could pull it into her. He didn't seem a bit concerned that she'd recouped some of the energy she'd used. She threw a bolt of magic against his shield, testing his determination. The Dark Sorcerer stood his ground and threw bolts back at her. She really didn't expect a straight magic against magic battle, but he didn't try to use any *merdanons* or *tandini*, even to make her use some power.

He began to form a mass of magic above him. Her shield was strong, but no way was she letting him hurl that much energy at it. She lifted her dagger and threw it. She planned to take his shield so that she could force him to make a decision to run or stay and fight. A bolt of magic hit the protective barrier just before her blade reached it. She saw the shield fail and her blade slam into the Dark Sorcerer's shoulder. The magic above him disappeared and she saw the Dark Sorcerer jerk spasmodically.

She had no idea what the weapon was doing to him. His eyes locked with hers as he fell to his knees. She saw stark horror cross his face. His hands rose and grabbed the hilt of the knife. As soon as he touched it, his hands flew away from it. That she fully understood. Those not meant to touch the blades would experience a jolt of magic.

He dropped to the ground. His arms flopped and bounced as he hit. He looked almost boneless as he fell, ending sprawled in the middle of the street. She took a cautious step forward. The Dark Sorcerer didn't move. Keeping her shield in front of her, she approached the still form. She felt someone move beside her, but kept her full attention on her fallen opponent. He could be faking trying to lure her close enough and make her complacent so that she'd feel safe. She nudged his foot with the shield. Nothing. Someone stepped in front of her. She saw a boot just before it pressed down on the Dark Sorcerer's wrist. She looked up and saw Jaeson. Just the sight of him reassured her. She knew he'd finished helping Samiel. He wouldn't have left the dragon for any reason if he was still hurt.

"Well, get your dagger. We still have other Dark Sorcerers to take care of in the town." Samiel's voice came from just to the side of her.

Her head snapped around and she smiled. Lunging for him, she threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly. Her head nestled against his chest and she drew in a deep breath. Holding him felt wonderful and just smelling his rich scent reassured her as nothing else could.

"I know you like me, but you need to get your dagger so we can secure him before he regains consciousness." Samiel gently pulled back.

She took a deep breath. He was right. Thoughts about the Dark Sorcerer at her feet had completely flown from her mind. Surprise had been part of it, but relief and release from the worry filling her mind were responsible for most of it. She pulled back, kneeled and dropped her shield. Approaching a downed Dark Sorcerer was always dangerous, but with those two she felt safe. She reached over and pulled her dagger free of the Dark Sorcerer's shoulder.

A wall of magic slammed into her from the blade. She nearly fell back as the power rushed into her. When her dagger hit him, he must have been actively channeling power. The dagger had drawn on it much as it would if she'd driven the blade into one of his creations. From what she'd learned of the abilities of a *Tiria*, she'd known it was possible. She'd just never thought it would happen. That was the reason she hadn't connected it at first.

Abilities like this were why some considered *Tirias* dangerous. Magic flowed through a person as well as around them, especially when spellcasting. They feared that the *Tiria* would use the ability to take someone's power without regard to if that person was good or evil. She rose and moved back. Jaeson gripped the man's hands bringing them together. Magic encircled the man's wrists. Meagan knew that the spell would bind the Dark Sorcerer's powers as well as his hands.

She sent away the weapons and turned to face the men. Samiel smiled at her, but he watched as Jaeson lifted the man to his feet.

"Now, Jaeson will take our friend to those who'll guard him until the battle's finished. Hopefully he won't be the only Dark Sorcerer we send away tonight." Samiel put a hand on her shoulder. "We're needed near the coven."

"Let's go then. Are you sure you're all right?" She looked at him worried. She knew he was completely healed. Jaeson wouldn't have stopped at anything less. Her only questions were did he need power and was he ready to fight?

"I'm fine, Meagan. All I'd been doing was scouting before I was hit as I flew over." He ruffled her hair.

"Are you sure?" She looked up at him. There were many people who after being hurt took a defensive role in battle.

He hooked an arm around her waist. His voice was a low irritated growl. "Stop coddling me. When I need a rest, I'll tell you."

Before she could say another word to him, he lifted her off her feet. She grasped his shoulders just as he stepped forward. She felt the pull of the tunnel and held on a little tighter as they exited. Samiel took one step forward and then lowered her to her feet. He still looked a little offended by her questions. She shook her head. He was just going to have to live with her concern.

Glancing around, she noted he'd put them at the end of the street leading to the coven. She could see the flash of magic ahead near the large building. She summoned

her weapons and threw up a strong shield. She couldn't see more than shadows at the moment, but she was ready for attack. They began advancing slowly toward the battle.

A *merdanon* roar echoed down the street. Finally, they drew close enough to see what was happening. *Merdanons* and *tandini* flanked an obviously female form. Meagan could only see the back of the woman but she knew it was Doria. At least, she hoped it was Doria. The thought of two Dark Sorceresses in the area was a little sickening. That would mean two witches had turned traitor. She couldn't understand one woman doing it. The soft pressure of a hand rubbing her lower back tugged her attention away from the thoughts.

"Is something wrong?" Samiel's voice was soft and low.

"No, just a few thoughts troubling me. Nothing that's important." She shook her head. It was the time between battles, that time to think that always gave her problems. She couldn't stop her mind from questioning and turning things over in her head.

"Well, now it's time to work. Let's inform this Dark Sorceress that she won't be getting into the coven." Samiel tugged on her hair.

She grabbed her hair, pulling it free of his grasp and swung her blades slightly gathering energy. Teasing dragon. That did reassure her that he was ready to battle. She didn't think she'd ever get the image of him sprawled on the ground in dragon form out of her head. She swung her blade and sent a bolt of energy hurtling toward the female attacking the coven. The ball of energy hit a shield. The magic flashed in the darkness. The woman turned and Meagan could easily see that it was Doria.

"Hello, Doria. Are things a little more difficult than you planned?" Meagan smiled as she walked down the street.

Doria looked stunned. "Nothing that will hold me for very long."

"I think you'll be leaving soon unless you choose to go down fighting." Meagan slung another bolt of energy at Doria's shield

Samiel tossed a flaming ball down the street. It hit the shield and flared over it. Meagan smiled at the showy move. He seemed relaxed. She slung another volley of magic. She didn't know how long Doria would stay to fight. A lot of it depended on how desperate she was to get into the coven. Was she willing to risk her life and freedom for it?

Meagan's magic battered at Doria's shield, but the woman didn't seem to pay any attention to it. Doria continued to slam balls of magic against the shield around the coven. She didn't taunt. She didn't create *merdanons* and *tandini*, although Meagan could see that there had been some used by the forms littering the ground near the steps.

Meagan could tell when Doria's power began to be stretched. The woman grew tense and desperately tried to bring down the shield with a final volley of orbs. Doria threw one harassed look over her shoulder and jumped into a portal. Meagan walked forward to take stock of the damage near the coven. The coven itself seemed untouched, buildings around it hadn't fared as well. There were chunks of wall missing and one

building looked as if it was going to collapse at any moment. It could all be fixed. She kneeled and took the power of the *merdanons* nearest to her. She was just surprised that they were still here. From the way she'd attacked and the determination she'd shown, Meagan knew the other woman would have called them back for the extra power. The only reason she could think of for them still being there was that Doria hadn't created them.

Jaeson arrived. She could tell by his expression and the tension in his body that he expected to find the battle still in progress. Once he realized it was over, he relaxed. She saw him looking around and realized he must be looking for her and Samiel. Jaeson came to stand near her.

"You still owe me an explanation." She glanced over at him. "I expect to hear it as soon as we get back home."

"You will. If we don't get distracted." Jaeson glanced over to where Samiel was checking one of the damaged buildings with one of the wizards.

"You won't. I have plans. And if you cooperate, you can play too." She grabbed his shirt and tugged him close for a quick kiss.

"That sounds interesting." His hand settled on her butt.

"It will be when we eventually get back to the lair. There's still a lot of work to be done," she said on a sigh as she looked around the street.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Samiel gently lowered Jaeson and Meagan to the ground outside the lair. For once neither had even asked to ride on his back. That made him more than a little suspicious.

Everyone was in a good mood after the victory. Two other Dark Sorcerers had been eliminated. One captured, the other died trying to destroy the wall closest to the mountain. That one had obviously been a lesser Sorcerer, but the others were a little harder to figure out. Why had they stuck around the village so long? Getting the generator didn't seem like a goal worth dying for. He had no idea if one of these men had allied with Doria or if she was behind it all. Most people expected Dark Sorcerers to be male. She could be using that as a ruse to lessen the appearance of her guilt. He'd have to think about that, but later. Now Jaeson and Meagan had his attention.

They were up to something. It was something involving him if the sultry glances Meagan sent him were any indication. Her black hair gleamed under the moonlight and she smiled. Her lips glistened wetly in the light. He wanted to peel her out of her clothes and lick and stroke every curve and plane of her light brown skin. But he knew they needed to talk about what had been discovered about the spell generators. That didn't mean he couldn't torment them both with a little touching while Jaeson told them the latest news.

"Inside. We have things to talk about and that wasn't the shortest battle we've ever fought." Samiel curved an arm around Meagan's waist.

He guided her to the lair. He waved his hand dispelling both the shield and the illusion protecting the entrance to their home. Meagan strolled down the tunnel toward the main room. He could tell she was tired, but still too energized from the battle to sleep. That was good. He didn't want her falling asleep when he made love to her. When she went over to the dark blue couch and flopped onto it, he just followed her. She tucked a pillow under her head and wriggled onto her side. She looked comfortable and he couldn't resist joining her. He slid onto the couch behind her. With a satisfied sigh, he tightened his arm around her waist. She looked over her shoulder and shook her head.

"All right, Jaeson, tell us what you've discovered before Samiel's hand starts wandering." Meagan winked at Jaeson.

"How come he gets to be next to you and I don't?" Jaeson took a seat on the opposite couch.

"Because he's an opportunistic dragon and the couch isn't big enough, otherwise you'd be over here too. And that's in spite of the fact that we need to talk and whenever we're this close, not much talking gets done." Meagan couldn't keep the laughter out of her voice.

"Well, that is true." Jaeson grinned.

Samiel growled. "Get to it."

"Touchy dragon." Jaeson stretched his legs out and looked at the ceiling for a moment. "They weren't after the shields. Not for the capabilities of the shield as we believed."

"They why did they want the shield generators?" Meagan frowned.

Samiel couldn't see the downturn of her lips, but he could hear it. He was just as confused as she was. What had the Dark Sorcerers been after? He traced his hand from her stomach to her thigh and back again. He loved the warmth of her body, but would rather not have her dark gray shirt and the thick, durable fabric of her black pants in his way. His mind automatically turned to what he'd like to do to her. His first goal was to get her out of these clothes.

"There are pieces, orbs, inside the generator. The only known reference calls them focus stones. The stone enhance the power of a spell. They wanted those. Like the generators, it usually takes more than one to anchor a spell but when they do work, they can be hard to stop. The stones can't be destroyed." Jaeson grimaced.

"No wonder they were after them. I wonder if they have any others." Meagan sat up and Samiel's hand slid to her thigh.

"I don't know. We'll have to find Doria's haven. She has to be hiding somewhere. The other vampires and dragons will be looking for more ancient tools holding those. We don't want them falling into the wrong hands, especially when we don't know how they were created," Jaeson said.

"We'll have to do some research after we finish the battle with Doria." Meagan slipped out of Samiel's arms. "Now it's time to see just how fully healed our dragon really is."

"I'm fine. What do you need me to do to prove it? I can transform and show you that even my dragon form is whole and unmarked as it should be." Samiel rose. His head tilted and he frowned.

He didn't mind reassuring her, but he didn't know how much patience he could summon tonight. Her caution and the way she looked at him as if she thought he might collapse was a little irritating. Especially when he knew she could see that he was whole and healthy.

"I know that you're not exactly happy about this, but I need to see and touch you to make it real. Please try to be calm and patient. Besides that, you know you're going to enjoy this once you get over your pique." She put her hands on her hips.

She looked absolutely gorgeous with the flags of red flying on her cheeks. He bit back a smile because he knew she wouldn't appreciate it.

"I can show you that it's real." He sat and slid his eyes down over her breasts to her hips.

"I'll get my own proof, Samiel. Now, are you going to cooperate with us?" She cocked an eyebrow and held out her hand to him.

He took her hand because he'd use any opportunity to touch her. He looked from her to Jaeson. "Us?"

"Do you think I can find you on the ground, seriously hurt, and simply shrug it off? I need this as much as she does. Now get over to the bed or I can carry you." Jaeson came off the couch in a fluid rush. In a few steps, he stood beside Meagan. His fingers brushed over Samiel's cheek.

Samiel put his hand over Jaeson's. He couldn't resist giving them the time and reassurance they wanted. "No need to carry me. I'll walk over to the bed. Do you want me to take off my clothes?"

"No, we'll do that. Stand over by the bed." Meagan's smile widened and he could tell she was relieved.

"You like giving orders, my witch." Samiel's hand glided over her buttocks.

He'd love to show her how much fun taking his commands could be. She wanted him. He could smell her hunger. His cock pressed against the front of his pants and he held back a groan. It wasn't a good idea to think about that when he suspected there wouldn't be any relief until they'd assured themselves that he was all right.

"No touching for you right now." Jaeson grabbed Samiel's hand. "If you like, I can touch her while we're checking you."

Samiel glowered at Jaeson, but he could see that Meagan was amused by it. She bit her lip and kept from laughing, but the amusement in her eyes was plain to see. He wanted to grab her and turn those eyes slumberous with desire. He wanted to pick her up and feel those long legs wrap around him. He took a deep breath. It was going to be sheer torture to keep his hands and mouth off her until they were satisfied he was healthy.

He strode over to the bed, determined to get this done as soon as possible. Meagan glided up beside him. She rose on tiptoes and her hands fisted in his shirt. Her light brown skin seemed even darker against the black cloth of his shirt. As her lips neared his, he had to resist the urge to lace his fingers into her hair and pull her close. Almost too lightly, her lips brushed across his. His mouth opened, but she didn't deepen the kiss. She pulled back and smiled at him. He growled and his hands settled on her hips. She laughed softly and tugged free of his loose hold. His eyes narrowed, but he did release her. He just hoped she knew how close he was to grabbing her and carrying her to bed. Once he finished, she'd be reassured. He'd make sure of it.

She let her fingers trail down the front of his shirt. Samiel concentrated on breathing evenly. They hadn't even started undressing him yet. He tensed as he felt a hand brush over his cock. He looked down and saw Jaeson's hand gliding up and down over the cloth-covered ridge. His hips rocked forward. Samiel didn't know how long he was going to be able to hold onto his control if Jaeson kept doing that. He'd go over the edge before they even finished getting him out of his clothes.

Jaeson's hands trailed away from Samiel's cock. It was both a relief and frustrating. He wanted to feel those hands, but he knew that they hadn't been satisfied yet. Meagan's fingers slipped the first of the buttons free. His shirt gaped open as she continued to unfasten the buttons. When the last fastening slipped free, he shrugged out of the shirt and let it fall to the floor. He stood tensely. He ached to feel her hands on him or even better, her body moving against his. Her fingertips traced over his stomach and moved slowly upward. Her touch felt like fire and seared through him. She leaned close and dropped kisses over the hard planes of his chest. She turned her head and pressed her cheek to him. He felt a fine tremor roll through her. At that moment, he realized that this wasn't just an opportunity to tease. She really needed to see and feel that he was here. His arms closed around her and he pulled her against him.

"I'm fine." His lips brushed over her head.

"I told you we needed to see for ourselves," Jaeson said. His hands cupped Samiel's buttocks. His fingers flexed and they held Meagan between them. "Do you know how scary it was to come out of the portal and find you on the ground? You looked broken."

Samiel included Jaeson in the embrace. "I'm whole and healthy, but you can both assure yourselves of it."

He released them and held out his arms as if he was giving them free rein. As soon as Jaeson moved back, Meagan stepped to the side giving him room to finish with Samiel's pants. She glided behind Samiel and ran her hands over his butt, cupping and squeezing.

"Now lay on the bed." She drew her hands up his back to his shoulders.

"Not until you and Jaeson lose at least some of your clothes. I want to look while you're torturing me." He raised an eyebrow and simply stood there waiting. This wasn't something he was going to compromise on.

"Do you think we should give the dragon what he wants?" Meagan glanced over at Jaeson.

"I'd like to see you naked." Jaeson smiled and his eyes ran down to her breasts.

"I'm not surprised." She grinned.

They were smiling and playing, getting more relaxed.

She peeled out of her shirt and dropped it to the floor. He couldn't take his eyes off her. It was almost impossible to control the urge to reach out and touch her. Looking over at Jaeson, he realized that Jaeson was just as entranced by the sight. Jaeson merely stared. He hadn't even taken off his shirt. Samiel just hoped they both realized that their time for reassuring touches was limited.

"Your clothes off and you on the bed." Meagan put her hand on her hip and looked first to Jaeson and then to Samiel.

She was enjoying this time of being in control. Samiel shook his head, but sprawled on the bed. He laced his fingers behind his head, because he didn't know if he had the

control to keep them to himself once both of them got close. He tried to think of anything but what they might do, but his mind seemed locked on the possibilities. He watched as Jaeson skinned out of his clothes. Jaeson was in such a rush that buttons flew and Samiel heard a distinct rip. Eventually, both of them were naked and moved to kneel, one on either side of him. He loved the view, but he wanted to do more than look at them.

Meagan and Jaeson moved at almost the same time. Their hands feathered across his chest. Kneading and stroking, they touched every part of him within their reach. Meagan's fingers drew across his cock, but the caress was fleeting. He almost reached for them then, but he held back. He wanted to give them what they needed. When Meagan began trailing kisses across his chest, he didn't know how much longer he could last.

"Give me some of those kisses." Jaeson's voice held laughter as he lightly tugged Meagan's hair.

She rose and laced her arms around Jaeson's neck. Their lips met softly at first. Jaeson's hands cupped her face and held her still. Samiel liked watching it, but he wanted to feel those lips on him. He let them enjoy the kiss until he saw Jaeson's hand cup Meagan's breasts. The moment he heard her soft moan, he knew that he couldn't just watch.

"Hey, the attention's supposed to be on me," Samiel growled.

They laughed, but pulled apart and smiled down at him. Jaeson gave her nipple a parting flick before letting his hands fall back to Samiel's chest. He drew his fingers over the darker brown skin of Samiel's nipple. Samiel hissed as Jaeson traced slow circles around the dark disc. Meagan's lips moved down his stomach. Samiel's muscles tightened. There wasn't any way he could keep his control if she got her mouth on him. He pulled his hands out from beneath his head.

"Together. I want us to be together this time. Do you want that?" He cupped Meagan's cheek bring her up so that he could kiss her.

"Yes." Her breath puffed over his lips.

He nipped at her lips savoring her taste and the scent of her arousal. "Are you wet for us?"

"Yes, I wanted to jump you almost from our arrival, but I had to make sure you were completely healed." She leaned her forehead against his.

He could see the remembered worry in her eyes. He drew her down for another kiss, hoping to wipe away that look. Her lips opened over his. His intention might have been to distract her from her thoughts, but it did the same to him. Her taste and the feel of her body as she pressed closer to him flooded his senses.

He felt movement to the side of him. He saw Jaeson moving even closer. When Meagan moaned and broke off the kiss, Samiel realized that Jaeson must be stroking their witch.

"Will you let me take you here tonight?" Jaeson's voice dropped to a low smooth timbre.

Samiel could almost see Jaeson drawing his hands over Meagan's buttocks. He knew the moment Jaeson's fingers probed that tight back hole. She stiffened and her eyes widened. It wasn't rejection. He could see the heat in her eyes, but he waited for her answer. He wasn't going to push her into something she wasn't ready for. She'd given them so much. They could give her time.

"You want to take me there?" Her voice was husky.

"Oh, yes, you'll be tight. You'll take us both, bringing us together in a way that we haven't been before. Do you want it?" Jaeson leaned down and nipped at her shoulder.

Samiel felt her tremble. It was going to be a fight for him not to come before they both were inside her. His balls were already drawn tight. Her squirming wasn't helping and she wasn't even fully over him. Only her chest touched his.

"Yes, I wondered if you'd want me like this," she said. Her eyes were a little unfocused and he wondered if she even realized what she'd said.

"We've wanted you like this since the first." Jaeson met Samiel's eyes. "I'm going to get her ready. You make sure she's hot. I don't want to hurt her. Try to hold still for us, Meagan."

Samiel reached down and grabbed her hips. He lifted her until she straddled him. He wanted to thrust his cock deep into her, but held back. Reaching down, he parted the slick lips of her pussy and found the hard nub of her clit. He rubbed at it with his thumb while he pushed two fingers into her tight channel. Warm liquid coated them and her inner muscles clenched. From her expression and her body's response, he knew she was almost there.

Jaeson caught Samiel's glance and nodded. Samiel withdrew his fingers, positioned his cock at her entrance and slowly urged her down. He kept his hand between them. She was going to need a little extra stimulation to maintain her arousal as Jaeson stretched her. He saw Jaeson pressing her down and felt her breasts flatten against his chest.

It seemed to take forever. Her inner muscles rippled and clamped on his cock as Jaeson worked lube into her and slowly stretched the tight rear opening. It was torture of the sweetest kind and he ground his teeth praying for control. Finally, Jaeson moved close. Samiel pulled his hand from between their bodies and held Meagan still. Jaeson slowly worked his cock into her. She was panting and her body was coated with a fine sheen of sweat already as she tried to keep from moving.

They rocked her between them, moving slowly at first to let her get used to the penetration and rhythm. Soft moans escaped her lips and her nails sank into his shoulders. He arched up into her. Trying to restrain himself long enough to give her pleasure, he kept his strokes slow and deep. The way her pussy was pulling at him wasn't helping him. If Jaeson's moans were anything to go by, he was having problems too.

He slanted his mouth over hers and wedged his hand between them enough to claim her nipple. Her teeth nipped at his lip. A growl rolled through him with that sting and his hips punched up. She gasped and her head tipped back. Her body shook. He tugged on the tight peak and she moaned.

The clench of her inner muscles drove him past all restraint. He lifted against her, driving deep into her. He heard Jaeson's groan as a rush of fire burst over him. It scorched over his body leaving his skin tingling and sensitive. He held onto her as he tried to regain his breath.

She was so good for him, for them. She was absolutely perfect. He'd never dreamed someone like her existed. She was their perfect complement and belonged with them. The only problem he had right now was that he had no idea if she was even thinking of a future with them. She'd always focused on finishing the battle and hadn't discussed a life with them after it.

It was that time limit that made him nervous and set his possessive instincts to raging. The dragon part of him would like to grab and hold. As long as she wasn't trying to run from them, he could hold that back. He wanted her to realize freely that she was a part of them and they were just as big a part of her. But if she didn't see it on her own, he wasn't averse to keeping her with them any way that he could.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Meagan paced the confines of the coven elders' Council room. She was waiting with a group of seasoned witches, wizards and Jaeson for Samiel to return. Or if they found more than a clue, for one of the vampires with the dragons to send word that Doria's hideaway had been found. The dragons thought they knew the general area where Doria was now. That was the reason they were all gathered. The large room was crowded. Chairs had been brought in, but only a few of them were being used. Some people stood, some leaned against the dark gray wall. She even saw one wizard sitting on the edge of one of the long tables. Their expressions ranged from boredom to frustration. Meagan could understand the frustration. She was feeling a little caged and definitely impatient.

"You're exhausting me and I'm just watching you." Jaeson leaned back in the chair.

His eyes had been following her every move. She'd seen it every time she looked over at him. He seemed calm, but she knew that he was just as ready for this to end as she was. He was just better at hiding it.

"I just want to get to it. I know they'll find the place today. They've been narrowing it down for the past few days." She sighed and stopped beside his chair.

Jaeson opened his mouth, but he went still. "You're right. They've found it. It's time to go."

Everyone gathered behind Jaeson. He slipped an arm around her waist just before he formed the darkness surrounding them. Meagan felt the lifting sensation and leaned into him. She blinked as the black haze lifted, leaving them standing on a mountain. It wasn't the glare of the sun that made her try to clear her vision. She doubted what she was seeing.

"Oh, it's real. They have some grandiose plans." Samiel strode over to join them.

Meagan hugged him, but couldn't take her eyes off the building in front of her. Two domed towers sat at either end of a three-story building. They'd made a castle. Doria really had planned to rule. Meagan shook her head. There was no time to think about it.

"What are we facing?" Meagan ran her eyes over the front of the castle.

"Not much in the way of shields out here. There's a strong one over the door. We haven't seen any activity, but there's someone in there. The place was protected by one of those camouflage spells like the *tandini* at the ruins. Once we'd revealed it, the spell was completely removed." Samiel's hand rubbed in small circles at the base of her spine.

The absence of any kind of attack did worry her. What was waiting on the inside of this castle?

"So someone's in there and they know we're here. We might as well start inside and see what they're going to throw at us." Jaeson dropped a kiss on the top of her head. His arm tightened around her before he stepped away from her.

It felt reassuring to have them hug and hold her. She felt a little calmer and little more assured. She'd never noticed before now. It didn't scare her, although she knew it once would have. It was one of many things that made Jaeson and Samiel special.

She summoned her weapons, careful to keep them away from Samiel's thigh. "I'm ready if everyone else is. It's probably going to be a long day."

"If you'll take down this shield, we can go inside. No use battering it down when we don't have to. We'll probably need all the energy we have for this. This is very different. Most Dark Sorcerers vigorously defend their haven." Jaeson looked at the two solid double doors.

"I can do that." Meagan nodded and started forward. She put her own shield in front of her out of habit.

Samiel and Jaeson stayed very near her and she had no objection to that. Jaeson was right. This was strange and it had her stomach tightening with dread. They were going into enemy territory. They knew there would be traps and tricks to face, but this wasn't what they'd expected. Right now, she was much more cautious herself.

The shield was practically flush with the door. Meagan knew that was probably a test to see if she'd be able to take it with the weapons. She drove her blade forward. It passed through the shield and struck the door. She drew in a slow breath as the power pulsed into her. The shield wasn't as strong as she expected it to be, as it should be if it was really supposed to keep people out of this building.

Meagan's unease built. She wished she knew what this Dark Sorcerer was planning. She wasn't even sure that Doria was here anymore. These tactics were so different from what they'd faced before that she did wonder if Doria hadn't moved on and left it to one of the lesser Dark Sorcerers. She wouldn't be the first to flee and set up in another location.

The door swung open. Meagan looked down the hallway. The white floors gleamed and there didn't seem to be anything moving there. There weren't any rocks or anything in front of her to smash. She turned her head to find something, because she didn't want to be surprised by any invisible enemies.

She saw Samiel turning back with a rock. She hadn't even heard him step away from her. He tossed the rock into the hallway. She caught it with her magic and spun it, smashing it against the sides of the wall. Dust billowed in the hallway and fell slowly to the ground. Nothing was there.

"Let's move forward, but go cautiously," Jaeson urged.

Meagan wasn't planning on sprinting down the hall. The place was too quiet and she felt as if they were being watched. She heard the soft sound of the others' shoes as they entered the castle. They walked slowly down the hallway. There were no doors. The hallway seemed to stretch on forever. She knew it was an illusion, but she couldn't

feel the magical energy. The Dark Sorcerer or Sorceress hadn't wasted a lot of energy on it. It was light, but good enough to do the job. They'd have to find where it was anchored to remove it. Unless there was some other development, that was the first order of business. So far this mission seemed absolutely unreal.

"We'll need to find out what kind of game this person is playing," Samiel said.

"He or she is definitely up to something. Let's find the anchor to this spell so we can see what it's hiding." Jaeson nodded and looked around.

She wondered if he could feel the magic. He was more sensitive to it than she was now. Maybe that ability would grow in her in the future, but she knew he or one of the other vampires could find it. Samiel and Jaeson stayed right at her side as they moved down the hallway. The group began to spread out as they searched. Meagan felt a rush of magic behind her and whirled. A solid white wall stood in front of her. It looked like there had never been a corridor there, even though she knew it had.

Meagan stepped forward and felt Samiel's hand brush her arm. Both he and Jaeson stayed with her. Was this an illusion or was it solid? She reached out, but felt Samiel tug her back.

"Be careful, Meagan." A growl rumbled in Samiel's voice.

"I will." Meagan turned to toss a quick smile to him.

She reached out using her dagger to probe at the wall. It was solid, not an illusion. What was the plan this time? Why did the Dark Sorcerer want them separated?

"Just a wall. There's not even a trap attached to it." Meagan turned away from it.

The hallway was now much shorter and led to a single door. She looked back at the wall. There were two choices. Wait and try to get the others through or go forward. The last choice was much more risky.

"They've got some problems on the other side of the wall. There's at least one Dark Sorcerer and many *merdanon* and *tandini*. They want us to try to find if there are any others over here." Jaeson put his hand on her shoulder. His fingers tightened.

"They don't need help?" She didn't want to leave them in danger.

"They can handle them. The quicker we find the person in charge of this castle and begin fighting them, the faster the illusions disappear. The minor sorcerers won't keep the others too long." Samiel's eyes locked on the dark wood of the door.

"Let's go then and find out who is behind this." Meagan drew in a deep breath.

"No separating. I don't want to be cut off from you like the others were cut off from us." Samiel frowned down at her.

She could tell that he was really worried. It wasn't just the usual dragon arrogance or protectiveness. She had to admit that he had cause. This was strange. She tightened her fingers around the hilts of her weapons and tried to concentrate on calming her racing mind and heartbeat.

"I'm staying right beside you." She put both of her blades in one hand for a few moments and reached out to squeeze his hand. She wouldn't mind some reassurance herself.

Jaeson's fingers gave a slight push on her shoulder. "Let's move."

They walked slowly to the door. It opened before they reached it. Samiel stepped in first, but he kept his fingers on her shoulder. Almost as if he was afraid that the door would shut, separating them. She didn't mind. That was something she wanted to avoid just as much as he did.

The round room was large and seemed to be empty at first. Meagan looked around. There were no other doors, no obvious entrance or exit other than the one behind them. The domed ceiling was painted with gold and blue. She didn't see any place for someone to be even watching them up there. They were here. She could feel the building magic. Where were they?

"You brought your two guardians with you. I'm a little disappointed. I was hoping to face you alone." Doria's voice rang in the cavernous room.

"I like them and they're rather useful to have around." Meagan simply shrugged.

Doria's comment wasn't entirely unexpected. Her motive would have been transparent even to a young witch. Meagan wasn't going to get defensive and separate from Samiel and Jaeson. The tactic was so obvious she didn't feel anything but a little amused.

"They certainly are keeping you close, or is it the other way around? Aren't you confident enough in your power to come at me on your own?" Doria put a hand on her hip.

Meagan rolled her eyes to the ceiling. "Your taunts aren't going to work. I'm not that stupid. Your time is up, Doria. Even now, they're clearing the *tandini* and *merdanons* from the building. The other Dark Sorcerers will either flee or be captured. Regardless of which choice they make, you will soon be facing more than me and my men."

"They'll be occupied for quite a while and no one can get in here. I've made sure of it. Even if you kill me, you won't be able to get out. You're trapped." Doria smiled grimly.

Meagan tilted her head as she tried to sense the magic around the room and not that inside it. It was a little hard to do, but she could tell there was some strong spell work there. She wasn't too worried about being trapped forever in here. All spells would fall with time and enough force applied to it. What worried her was Doria's attitude. Doria didn't plan to walk away from this at all. That made her far more dangerous than the normal Dark Sorcerer.

Meagan swiped her blades in front of her gathering energy. "Let's get to this. I believe there's a celebration being planned in the village for when we finally defeat you and your friends."

"Sadly, you won't be able to attend it." Doria hurled an energy ball at Meagan's head.

Meagan flinched back instinctively even though she knew her shield would hold. Bright light exploded in front of her eyes. She blinked, clearing her vision. When she could see clearly, she hurled a ball of power at Doria. It burst against the woman's shield. She could tell by the way the magic burst against the shield that it was strong, but she didn't think it was going to be strong enough to hold for long. Not with the amount of power going into the shield around the room. For some reason, Doria didn't seem to care about winning. The only real purpose Meagan could find was that Doria wanted to do as much damage as possible.

"Your attitude's a little different from our last encounter." Meagan drew her blade back and forth gathering power.

"You're going to pay for what you did." Doria hurled another burst of magic at her.

"I only did what I was supposed to do. I protected the village and will continue to do so." Meagan drew her blade in slow sweeps gathering the power.

She waited until the light faded. She wanted to draw more from Doria. More anger and more power from her. Meagan could tell that for some reason Doria was furious. Provoking her more was the only way Meagan was going to get any answers.

"You killed him." Doria flung two quick orbs at Meagan.

That energy was strong. Meagan pushed a little more power into her shields. She saw Samiel hurl a ball of fire at Doria. It burst against the shield. Jaeson followed Samiel's lead and slammed two bolts of energy across the room. Meagan kept her swords ready, but decided to conserve a little power. They might need it to get out of here. Doria was burning through her magic without much encouragement. That statement about killing someone was informative enough to let her know what had Doria so furious.

"The only person I'd take down would be a Dark Sorcerer and everyone knows they deserve what they get. The rampant destruction they cause is reason enough." Meagan smiled and shrugged because she knew it would enrage Doria.

Doria shrieked and gathered a huge ball of energy above her head. She launched it at their shield. Meagan was prepared for it and the shield held without any trouble. She didn't want to kill Doria unless it was absolutely necessary. Meagan knew if she could keep Doria mad enough it wouldn't be. She sliced a ball of power right at Doria.

"Do you actually expect sympathy? After you've attacked the village where you were born and the coven where you were taught? After using and draining who knows how many witches? This world is better off without you and those like you." Meagan kept her tone as righteous as possible. She knew it would only add fuel to Doria's anger. The self-righteous, I'm-better-than-you-because-I-took-the-the-right-path attitude wasn't really her style.

"You'll pay for killing him. You'll die a slow painful death here. Meagan, your dragon friend will eat you so that he has a better chance of surviving." Doria glanced significantly at Samiel.

Samiel laughed. "We won't be here that long."

"Yeah, I'd bet we'll be out before the end of the day." Meagan leaned briefly against Samiel.

"You'll never get out of here." Doria glared and slammed three quick balls of energy against Meagan's shield.

Meagan shook her head, but tossed some magic toward the shield guarding Doria. "Why is every Dark Sorcerer I meet so damned overconfident? In your case Dark Sorceress, but still. There are three of us in here and more out there. One way or another, the shield surrounding this room will fall."

"No!" Doria slammed glowing balls of energy against the shield right in front of Meagan.

Meagan saw Jaeson's magic flare over Doria's shield and knew the magic was going to fail soon. She looked from Samiel to Jaeson and noticed that they seemed a little more tense. Meagan formed a ball of energy and was a little relieved to notice that they held back. This wasn't the time for mistakes.

The energy flared over Doria's shield, but it held. Samiel formed a ball of fire and tossed it. The shield flickered as the flames licked over it. Meagan sent away her weapons. She wouldn't be needing them for this. She formed a light ball of energy.

"Go ahead. Kill me. You know you want to." Doria's words came from between clenched teeth as she stood there with her hands at her side.

Meagan threw the ball, but it didn't hit Doria. It wrapped around her, binding her magic. Doria screamed and ran toward the shield. She hit it and bounced back. The woman stumbled and fell onto her butt.

"I don't need to kill you. Aside from that, if I did, you'd never see the man whose loss sent you out of control. I didn't kill the sorcerer if you're talking about the one from the last battle. He was captured and sent to the prison world of Tomeai. You can join him soon." Meagan shrugged.

"You'll never get out. We'll die here." Doria's shoulders slumped.

"Don't be any more stubborn than you have to be. There is another *Tiria* in the world. If they can't do it with sheer force or it's impossible to access it from in here, they'll call her in to do it." Meagan walked over to the door to inspect it. The shield wasn't where she could get to it right now, but maybe if they worked at it.

"The others are through with the battle out there. They're beginning to work on this. They've found where it's anchored to one of the power stones. It will be broken soon regardless of what we do, but let's see what we can do." Jaeson's hand rubbed in small circles at the base of her spine.

"Samiel, can you burn through this wood?" Meagan ran her hands over the surface of the wood. She had a feeling that the shield wasn't touchable from either side and that was going to make it difficult regardless.

"Let me see what I can do, but if she thought of that, I'm sure one of the stones will fail with enough force." Samiel turned his gaze from the door to the wall.

"If you punch that stone, you're going to break your hand and I don't want to listen to any whining." She folded her arms across her chest but didn't move.

Jaeson laughed and pulled her away from the door. "He won't punch the stone, but you're right, he would whine."

Samiel formed a ball of fire and tossed it at the door. The flames flared higher and then dissipated. She saw a char mark, but even as she began to hope that they'd be able to dig away the charred pieces the blackened mark began to fade. She tossed a narrow-eyed glare over at the bound woman. Doria smiled and looked to be gloating, but she didn't move.

Samiel walked over to the door. "Jaeson, find me a patched stone, please."

She knew why he was looking for a stone that had been sealed recently by magic. It would be the easiest place to get through to the shield. Getting through to the shield would save the magic of those outside and their own. Jaeson held out his hands and closed his eyes.

"Up there." He sent a tracer up to the point where the domed ceiling met the stone walls. "It's a whole section of them. It looks like there was another battle in here at some point."

Jaeson pulled Meagan back as Samiel changed forms. The large dragon flapped his wings and rose off the ground. His front claws raked and pulled at the stone glowing from Jaeson's tracer magic. Bits of rock fell to the ground. She bit her lip, waiting. The stone didn't regenerate like the wood did.

A pile of rubble littered the floor when Samiel descended to the floor. He didn't change forms. He simply stood there waiting. She summoned her weapons and walked over to him. He took her into his paws. Wind buffeted her as he propelled them off the ground.

"Tell them the shield's coming down, Jaeson," Meagan yelled as they rose.

Samiel lifted her to the spot he'd cleared. She could feel the energy pulsing from the shield. She stuck her dagger into the opening. It hit stone, but also found the shield. Energy roared through her. Her head tilted back and her breath rushed out of her. She didn't even have the air to scream. Her body shook and every part of her felt oversensitive and raw. The power alone was almost too much. With the arousal, she didn't know how long she could hold it and stay sane.

Jaeson was there as Samiel lowered her to the floor. His arms folded around her and she felt a sharp sting as his fangs sunk into her throat. He took a bit of the power, but it wasn't enough. Samiel took her into his arms when Jaeson released her. He moved her shirt to the side and his teeth pierced the spot where her throat and shoulder

met. He pulled the power from her. When he stepped back, she knew that he'd taken as much as he could, but the magic still felt too high.

"Don't worry. There are vampires and dragons right outside that door who will help with the excess." Samiel handed her the vial of antidote.

She sighed with relief. "Let's get our captive and get out there then. It's time for her to join her favorite Dark Sorcerer."

Chapter Twenty-Five

Meagan prowled around the lair while Samiel and Jaeson were in the bath. She'd have loved to join them, but she was too agitated. Her eyes lingered on the golden lamp stands and the glitter of jewels in the wall. She was memorizing how everything looked and smelled. Part of her was half afraid that they were going to say they were needed elsewhere any day now or even worse that they had to return to their home wherever that was. They had told her about a desert, but she didn't know where exactly it was. She couldn't go with them if they did return there. She was needed here and would be for some time.

They'd seen her distraction and the way she watched them. She knew it. She was surprised that they hadn't approached her yet. It wasn't like them to delay. The other vampires and dragons had already left so there wouldn't be much to distract them or hold them here. She knew she couldn't put it off much longer, but she didn't want to ruin what they had. It was so good. Especially since they'd gotten past Samiel's I'm-too-strong hangup. Now, she just had to find the courage to surmount her own.

By the time they strode back into the room, she'd settled on the couch. She hadn't come up with any solution, but she knew they needed to talk about it. She wasn't getting any answers worrying. All she'd done was lose some sleep and miss out on time with them. That was more than reason enough to discover the truth. No one ever knew how much time they'd be given, so wasting it was almost a crime.

"Are you thinking about leaving us and returning to your coven?" Samiel stopped directly in front of her. His hair hung in a straight fall down his back and his bare chest glistened with water.

She swallowed hard. "Not exactly."

"What exactly were you thinking about? We won't let you walk away easily. We'll fight to keep you." Jaeson moved to stand beside Samiel.

He too was still damp, clad only in pants, and absolutely gorgeous. Standing there in front of her both of them were almost irresistible. She wanted to reach out and touch them, but knew she had to get through this explanation and the answers. Whatever that was.

"I was wondering when you have to leave. Everyone else has already gone. You have a life outside these mountains." Meagan licked her lips. It was breaking her heart to think of walking away from them.

"Why would you think that we would leave without you?" Samiel framed her face with his hands.

"You have a home there and a duty. I can't go with you. Not for long periods of time. I'm needed in this region. There's not someone here to protect the people." Her hands tightened into fists. This wasn't easy.

"You could have just asked us this the first time you thought about it. You wouldn't have worried for nothing." Samiel shook his head. He reached out and took her hand. His thumb began stroking over her knuckles.

"You're right. This area does need protection. Once we knew about it, we weren't going to let it remain without guard. We've chosen to be the ones to stay here. If we're needed, we'll be called." Jaeson curled an arm around her waist. He dropped kisses on her shoulder. "We liked this area even before we met you."

"You're staying?" Tilting her head to the side to give him access to her neck, she tried to process what he'd told her. She almost couldn't believe it, but she knew they wouldn't lie about it. Not when they knew how much she'd obsessed about it.

"Yes, we understand about your need to protect this area. Even before the Dark Sorcerer began to attack, this area needed the strength of a dragon. If only to deter someone from seeing it as an easy target." Samiel's mouth settled over hers in a definite claiming.

Only when her hand fell to her side did she realize he'd released her fingers. She felt a bit bereft. She wanted him touching her, but knew she wouldn't have to wait too long.

"Now it has a vampire and a *Tiria* as well." Jaeson's palm slipped down to cup her buttocks.

She let her eyes roam first over Samiel's brawny, gorgeous form to the delicious expanse of Jaeson's chest. "And what do you get out of this?"

"A great view when we step outside, a place to call our own and a happy witch. There's not much more we could ask for." Jaeson stepped so close that his thigh brushed against hers.

"Will you be happy here, watching over small cities?" She tilted her head and leaned into Jaeson. It thrilled her that they wanted to stay, but she didn't want them to be miserable.

Jaeson's hand slid away from her buttocks and around her hip. He brushed over her dark brown pants and inward. She held her breath, hoping that he'd start peeling her out of her clothes or at least touch her pussy, but his hand stroked down her thigh. She wasn't going to be left out. If he was going to touch and tease, she was going to have fun too.

She turned her head and nuzzled against his chest. The muscles shifted beneath her cheek. Her tongue smoothed over the rise of his pecs. His hand tightened on her thigh. She smiled and nipped the skin just below the hardened bead of his nipple. He drew in a sharp breath.

"You bit me." His hand tangled in her hair and tugged her hair back.

"I get bitten so often that I've discovered a penchant for doing it myself." She kissed the small reddened spot. "Maybe it's a bit of revenge."

She heard Samiel's laughter. His body brushed against hers. Oh, yes, this is what she wanted. Both her men at her side, loving and holding her. Her arm slipped around Samiel's waist. She traced her fingers over his ribs lightly, but not with the intention of tickling him. It was such a relief not to have to live with the worry and fear that she was going to lose them. She didn't doubt what they felt was love. His teeth scraped over her shoulder drawing her thoughts away from her feelings. She shivered.

"I think you might be right." Samiel's hand cupped her breast. "But then, you've always seemed to compliment us. You brought out the best in both of us."

"As well as the beast at times." Jaeson drew his hand up her inner thigh. Sparks of sensation followed the path of his fingers even though she was wearing sturdy pants.

"And I love it." Meagan licked around the darkened disc. He tasted wonderful. "Guess what I want."

Samiel drew his finger over the taut peak of one breast. Even through the fabric, she could feel the heat of his hands. Her nipples hardened and she ached to feel his hands on them instead of the slightly abrasive texture of her shirt. She wanted to peel out of her shirt, but she didn't want to stop touching either one of them.

"You want us to fuck you." Samiel's teeth scraped over her neck.

"That would be nice for a start." She gave him a wicked smile. With a few quick moves, she'd opened the fastenings to his pants and her hand circled his cock.

She stroked slowly. His eyelids lowered and a harsh groan rolled through his chest. She traced the length with her fingers. His body had tensed, but he made no move to stop her or take over.

"I want to do this." She feathered kisses on his chest. She glanced down at his cock and licked her lips.

He didn't seem to need any clarification. "Only if Jaeson fucks you while your sweet mouth is on my cock. I'd like to see that."

"I don't know if I'm ready. I haven't had much attention other than a few kisses and teasing touches." Her lashes lowered. Her body tingled with anticipation. She had no doubt that Jaeson would make sure she was burning for him.

"I'll take care of that." Jaeson moved behind her. "Are you going to tease Samiel or give him what you've promised?"

"Well, you'd better get started. If you take too long, I'll be done with him before you even make me squirm, much less come." She glanced over her shoulder and sent him a deliberately challenging glance.

"You do like to live dangerously." Jaeson chuckled. "On your knees. I want to get started. I wouldn't want to make you wait."

She drew her hand up the length of Samiel's cock and rubbed her palm up over the rounded head. Just to delay and because she wanted to do it, she rose on tiptoes to

feather light kisses over Samiel's lips. His tongue thrust into her mouth in an aggressive claim. When he pulled back, she barely resisted the urge to grab at him. She always wanted more of him, but there'd be time later.

She kissed her way down his chest. Deliberately, she kept her eyes on him resisting the urge to look back at Jaeson. She wanted to know what he thought and see his expression, but she also wanted to provoke him a little. Aside from that, the anticipation was delicious.

Slowly lowering to her knees, she ran her hands over his hips. She pushed the material down to his knees where it fell to the ground on its own. Samiel stepped out of it. Her fingers danced up and down Samiel's thighs. She felt movement behind her and looked back to see Jaeson kneeling on the floor in back of her. Jaeson's hands skimmed down her thighs in an imitation of what she was doing to Samiel. She lifted her hands to Samiel's cock and stroked his hard length just to see what Jaeson would do.

"You are such an uncooperative witch. The least you could have done is taken off your clothes before you were on your knees and made it more difficult." Jaeson sounded aggrieved, but she knew he was exaggerating it.

"Maybe you should have been doing something while I was kissing Samiel. I got his pants off. You seem to have fallen behind a little." She grinned and traced a winding path up Samiel's thighs.

She felt magic tingle over her. When she looked down, she wasn't surprised to find herself naked. She'd known he wouldn't waste much time. His arm hooked around her waist, pulling her back against him. His cock nestled in the crease of her buttocks. She realized then he must have removed his own clothing as well as her own.

"Let's see how much coaxing you're going to need to catch up to Samiel." Jaeson's hand skimmed over the rise of her stomach and down to her pussy. His fingers skimmed over the slick lips, pausing there.

"It seems that you're more than interested." Jaeson nipped at her shoulder as his hand pressed forward.

Her breath hitched as the pad of his finger brushed over her clit. He didn't pause or repeat the move before he continued to draw his hand down. She held her breath for a moment when the slight pressure at her entrance sent a shiver through her. A single thick digit slipped into her pussy and pumped. Just when her hips shifted back into his hand, he withdrew. When his fingernails drew over her clit as he pulled his hand away, she knew it was deliberate.

"You're wet and the way those muscles were tugging at my finger, you'll come before he does." Jaeson's breath feathered over her ear as his hands moved up to her breasts. "Better get started if you hope to prove me wrong."

The challenge startled her almost as much as her desire to win it. Not just because she liked to win. She wanted to watch him find his pleasure. She wanted to make Samiel come first, but she knew Jaeson wasn't going to make it easy. His fingers

plucked at her nipples. The tugging and pulling sent sharp little jolts straight to her core and rush of liquid to her pussy.

She took Samiel's cock in her hand, stroking it as she leaned forward. His cock hardened and thickened even more as she held it. A bead of pre-cum glistened. There was no denying he wanted this just as much as she did. Leaning forward, she ran her tongue over the darkened tip. Samiel's breath came out in a sharp hiss. His fingers brushed the hair away from her face before he cupped the back of her head.

She tried to focus on Samiel and his enjoyment. She took his shaft in her mouth letting him feel the edge of her teeth. Jaeson made it impossible to completely ignore him, though. His fingers plucked at the hardened beads of her nipples before lightly stroking over them as if to soothe the sting. He cupped and lifted the mounds. The feel of his hands on her breasts alone was driving her desire higher. Her memories and images of what she wanted him to do to her sent a ripple of hunger straight to her core.

She sucked at Samiel's cock, keeping her strokes shallow at first. Using her teeth and tongue, she tried to push him to the edge. Lifting her hand, she cupped his balls. He groaned. She echoed the sound when Jaeson's cock thrust into her. She'd been so focused on Samiel and the feel of Jaeson's hands on her breasts that she hadn't realized he'd moved.

His deep strokes pushed her forward. She took Samiel's cock deeper into her mouth before rocking back. Samiel's fingers tightened in her hair and his hips rocked. The tension in his body and the heavy sound of his breathing told her he was close. She scraped her teeth over his length as she pulled back. Jaeson's fingers found her clit and began rubbing. She lost all thought of watching, winning or holding back. The only thing on her mind was the feel of the cock in her mouth and the one in her pussy.

Samiel's fingers tightened in her hair, urging her against him. She swallowed as he came. He pulled his cock from her lips, but his hands remained in her hair. Jaeson kept driving into her. His talented fingers on her clit sent the heat spiraling higher. It burst and she gasped as her orgasm rushed over her. She was almost blind and deaf from the pleasure, but felt Jaeson trembling against her moments later. She knew he'd found release.

"I love seeing that." Samiel's deep growl brought her out a little of the haze.

She blinked and realized she was looking up at Samiel, who was watching her with a smile on his face. He looked satisfied and a little arrogant, but she knew the last was more the normal attitude of her dragon. She couldn't get too upset about it though, not with the tingling sensation still washing over her body.

She felt too boneless to move right now and was in no hurry. Jaeson's body was still pressed tight to hers and his cock was still inside her. She knew that he'd be up for another round soon. When Jaeson drew back, she wanted to turn and grab him, but couldn't because of Samiel's hold.

Samiel drew her to her feet. Her legs felt a little shaky at first, but she simply leaned into him until the strength returned. He held her until she straightened. His arm

remained curved around her as they began walking over to the bed. Jaeson ruffled her hair as he moved up beside her.

"I love you. I love both of you." Meagan looked at the two of them. Maybe it wasn't the best time to tell them, but she didn't want to wait.

She saw Samiel and Jaeson look at each other and then back to her. They seemed a little surprised, but the smiles on their faces told her they were happy about it. She was glad about that, but part of her was holding her breath. Even though she knew it might be too soon for them, she wanted them to feel something for her.

"I don't know when I started loving you, but it grew fast and strong." Jaeson dropped a kiss on her cheek. "Almost from the first, I knew you were part of us and more than just the third in our bond."

She looked up at him and could see the emotion in his eyes. Her eyes stung with tears as she realized how much she needed that. She felt a hand turning her face and found Samiel looking down at her.

"You already know you changed everything for me." Samiel's lips brushed over hers softly. "I didn't realize how closed off I was by the control I felt I had to maintain. The love didn't explode suddenly. It developed slowly and now I can't imagine not feeling it."

"You love us, but are you ready to make our relationship permanent formally?" Jaeson's tone was a little taunting, as if he was daring her to say yes, but she could see the importance of her answer in the tense lines of his body and his intense stare.

"I've known for a while that walking away from you wasn't something I wanted to do. I knew deep down that we were meant to be together. Our relationship is permanent, but if there's a ceremony or some kind of words that will make it more formal and proper, I'm more than ready to take that step." She turned her head and kissed Jaeson, lingering and letting him draw her deeper into the desire that always rose whenever they touched.

She thought for a minute about what they'd said earlier. It had touched her then. Now she realized that she had what she needed too. The area was safe at last and that was what her main goal had been. She had a home, even if it was very different from what she'd expected. A dragon's lair had never entered her mind. She had her two men. She hadn't been sure at first if she needed them and she did, but not because she was a *Tiria*. Just as they said she complimented them, they made her feel complete in a way she'd never expected. It was a good feeling and she looked forward to living and loving with them for years to come.

About the Author

Rebecca Airies has always loved to read. Futuristic, the classics, mystery or horror, the genre doesn't matter as long as the stories capture her interest and take her on an adventure. She soon discovered a love for writing and characters just waiting to tell their stories. Since that time, writing has become an obsession.

Rebecca lives in the heart of Texas. She loves the outdoors, growing things and working on crafts when she's not lost in the worlds of her characters. Please feel free to write and tell her what you think; she'd love to hear from you.

Rebecca welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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