



MARK ALDERS

FIRE OF THE HEART

PEMBROKE EVE CHRONICLES

Fire of the Heart is the fourth instalment in the Pembroke Eve Chronicles and takes place a few weeks after the Spring Dance.

Jacob, Callum and Zane are packing up for the night in the Food Emporium, when Mr. Barnaby bursts in, proclaiming Aloysius is missing. Where could a twenty-foot dragon have disappeared to in a small town like Pembroke Eve? And what's more, when Jacob and the gang go to investigate, they are sucked into a wormhole that so happened to materialise right in the main street of the town. Coincidence? Hell yes!

The vortex is a one-way ticket to the dragon realm, where the problems for Jacob and his friends have only just begun. Why? Well, they've walked right into a time when the realm is at its greatest unrest, their leader, Aloysius, no longer there to guide them. If only Jacob could ask Mr. Barnaby for advice. Trouble is, he's disappeared now, too!

To top it all off, Jacob unwittingly accepts an advance by a dragon shifter warrior named, Nottolu. The warrior claims Jacob as his mate and it's up to Callum, his fiancé, to claim him back...even if it means his death.

Everything becomes a race against time. The gang must work together to find not only Aloysius and Mr. Barnaby, but to get Callum and Jacob back together, too. All before an all out war threatens to destroy everything, even the hope of ever returning to Pembroke Eve.

Can anything else go wrong? There is no doubt...

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Fire of the Heart
The Pembroke Eve Chronicles Book 4

By

Mark Alders

Dedication

For my Family

Chapter One

Zane left us.

I knew it would happen, it was inevitable. He was with us while he healed, while he found himself. We, and here I mean Callum and me, gave him all the time he needed and he decided on his *own* terms how our relationship proceeded. We will always love him. He knows that, too. We were family. Then again, we still shared intimate moments together, hugs and kisses most of the time. And of course, being Zane, he never tired of parading around with nothing on. If you've got it flaunt it. Boy, did Zane have it.

He continued to help around the Food Emporium and even made himself a home by the chip fryer. He cooked damn good chips. Just the right amount of chicken salt and not too crispy or soggy. I mean, for Aloysius to ask for Zane's chips, twenty kilos at a time, they must have been something. The only difference to the new arrangement—Zane had moved into the spare

room. A couple of nights he must have got tired of jacking off, so he snuck in to our bed and helped himself to our loving. Callum and I continued to give him whatever he needed, whenever he needed. The arrangement suited us all.

Then there was the other matter. Suzy. The scare with her previous boyfriend, Evan, was a concern. Thankfully, she had come to her senses and dumped his sorry arse. *She* asked Zane out about a week later. They were meant to be together and he accepted without hesitation, of course. Even though their relationship had just begun, I sensed good things. Suzy didn't want to rush and, as a result, she understood when Zane got what he needed from Callum or me. We were all open and honest about what we did, and I think Suzy was more relieved than anything by our arrangement. It meant that Zane wasn't clawing at her like a drunken octopus on heat. Me, on the other hand, I liked Zane's hands... everywhere.

Callum and I were in the midst of arranging our engagement party, too. The problem we encountered was how we were going to invite the whole town. Everyone wanted to come, including the workers at the tanning factory who would normally never, ever be seen anywhere near a gay guy, let alone his partner. The boss was a burly bloke named Bruce with more hair on him than I

had I had ever seen. He was a wall of muscles, dark piercing eyes and such thick rough hands I felt insignificant just looking at him. Still, when he came into the Emporium, winked at me, and asked when the engagement was on so he could get himself scrubbed up, I could only stand with my mouth open, looking like I was catching flies. Callum came to my rescue and said the party was planned for next month.

Next month!

Holy fuck. We had a month to arrange a function, food, guests, entertainment, everything. On top of that, we had the Emporium to run. Thank God Zane was helping us, both with the shop and the function. Then again, if Callum hadn't set a date, knowing me, I'd never get myself organised. I was terrible like that.

Callum and I were soaked in each others love and I couldn't help but ravage him with passionate kisses and sensual touches every time I passed him in the hallway of our house or met him in the cool room or freezer compartment in the shop. I had to admit, kissing an engaged man was quite thrilling, creating a new spark to our already well stoked fire. I loved Callum more than life itself.

When he accepted my proposal of marriage, I think every emotion ran through me, including the desire to protect him. I had faced aliens and

insect human zombies and time vampires and I wasn't about to let him be taken away from me now, not by anything. We had been through a lot these past few months, so I could only imagine that whatever else to come our way would be a walk in the park in comparison. I hoped.

Then again, I lived in Pembroke Eve. I swear the place would do anything to conspire against me. Never mind I had found happiness so deep it touched my soul. I don't mean that the town was a bad place, quite the opposite. It's just that when something happens in this town, I can pretty much bet I'll end up fighting tooth and nail for the things I hold dear. Something in my gut told me I was going to be tested once more. I couldn't explain how I knew. I just did. So yeah, scratch the *walk in the park* theory. Being with Callum was going to be a challenge, but one worth every second of every day in my opinion.

My fear of something being amiss was confirmed when the shop bell tinkled and Mr. Barnaby burst into the Food Emporium just as we were about to close up for the night.

The time was five to nine on a Tuesday to be exact. Our quietest time of the week. Zane had turned off the deep fryer and Callum was counting the till. I had wandered over to the tables, placing the chairs on top of them so I could sweep and mop the floors.

“Aloysius is missing,” the old man declared, his voice a tremble.

He looked flustered and fidgeted on the spot like a school boy standing in line in front of the principal’s office. In fact, he dashed over to the counter and plunged his hand into the sweet jar we kept for the kids who were good while they waited for their order. He scooped down a handful of M&M’s, crunching them and swallowing before going in again for another handful.

“Careful, Mister B. Don’t want you to go into a diabetic coma or somethin’,” Zane said, grabbing the jar and putting it behind the counter.

I went to Mr. Barnaby and patted him on the shoulder to let him know I was there for him. He gave me a quivering smile.

“Tell us everything. Tell us from the beginning,” I said. Talking like this with him was a complete role reversal. I was the one who was supposed to hear that from him. Some turnaround. Then again, a missing dragon wasn’t something that happened every day.

The old man swallowed. “Well, dear boy, I have no idea really and there’s not much to tell. I went into the storeroom, about to check up on how much stock I had left for this month’s special buy—you know, the olive oil I got in at a dollar a litre—and I couldn’t see Aloysius anywhere. I couldn’t even sense his presence anymore. I got

panicky, so I looked and looked. I even went out back to check under the apple tree, his favourite night time haunt. Jacob, he's nowhere to be seen. He's always around. What could have happened to him? What am I going to do without him?"

I offered him a reassuring smile. "We'll find him."

"Besides, he's not exactly small, is he?" Callum said, joining us. "I mean, a dragon should be easy to find, right?" He bent over to place the money bag from the till into the safe under the counter. "We'll all finish up here as quick as we can and come out and help you look. Okay?"

Mr. Barnaby's face relaxed somewhat and his stance returned to normal, no longer like a man on tenterhooks. "Thank you, gentlemen. I'm just beside myself with worry. I had prepared a char-grilled beef quarter for him tonight, too. What am I going to do with all that meat?"

"I'll go call, Suzz. The more the merrier in our hunt, hey?" Zane interjected, already headed for the phone on the wall by the drinks machine.

"We'll find him," I repeated. It was the only thing I could say. I didn't know how long Aloysius had been with Mr. Barnaby, but from his reaction and concern, I don't think that really mattered. Friends were friends.

"I really do hope so. I really do." Mr. Barnaby grabbed a chair I hadn't put up yet, plonking

down on it like a man who needed to rest his weary bones. He even sighed. How long had he been looking for Aloysius? "I sure hope we can find him. I'll be worried sick if I know he's not getting his sleep in the warmth of my storeroom. Dragon's need their warmth, you know."

"Suzz will be here in ten minutes," Zane said, returning to the counter.

Callum and Zane prepared the shop for closing. Wednesday was our day off, the shop closed. Seemed Aloysius's disappearance was good timing in a way. We could spend all night looking for him if we had to. I hope it didn't come to that, but for Mr. Barnaby I don't think any of us would entertain the idea of not helping for as long as was required.

Ten minutes passed and Suzy pulled up in her little black VW her parents had bought her last year when she graduated. The look on her face when she opened the shop door and the bell tinkled wildly was exactly the same as Mr. Barnaby's a few moments ago.

"Have you seen what's out here in the middle of the street?" Suzy said, keeping the door open.

We all looked at each other. I had vision of a great big red dragon splayed out on the road. I stepped toward the doorway. The cool night air struck my skin. We may be coming into summer, but around these parts, especially near the river,

the nights still held a chill.

Callum came to my side, grabbing me around my waist. I held his hand, noticing straight away that the engagement ring was glowing, the Celtic writing a burning red against a golden fire.

"What's happened to your ring?" I asked, genuinely concerned, wondering why I hadn't noticed it before.

"I don't know, but it's been like this for a couple of minutes now," Callum replied with a shrug. "But it's not been this bright before. Weird, hey?"

That seemed to answer my question. Something or someone had affected the ring. What had changed? Did the strange thing in the street Suzy had told us about have something to do with it?

Zane came behind us, sticking his head over my shoulder so he could get a look, at both the ring and the reason for Suzy's concern. I also heard the chair squeak. Mr. Barnaby had come to the door, too. Gee, the doorway sure was getting crowded. Good thing we had a wide entrance to the Emporium.

"Say, I knew that ring must be magical or somethin'" Zane touched it, but quickly drew his hand away.

I knew the reason for the withdrawal.

In the middle of main street, between us and the General Store, there was something I could

honestly say I had never seen before in my life. My jaw dropped open and I let go of Callum's hand.

"Oh, my dear," the old man said. "Aloysius warned me about this."

"What the fuck is it, Mister B?" Zane stammered.

There was a vortex-come-wormhole thing, like something out of a science-fiction film, in front of our shop. It hung in mid-air about half a metre off the ground, sucking in everything close to it, including a nearby car. Its tyres screeched on the bitumen of the road before it was lifted up, forced past the event horizon and sucked into the vortex itself, disappearing. I thought, Mr. Johnson will have to buy a new car now.

"It's a gateway into the dragon realm." Mr. Barnaby pushed his way through us, coming out onto the pavement in front of the Emporium. "And I think I know where Aloysius has gone."

Chapter Two

“What are you talking about, Mr. Barnaby?” Suzy asked. Her gaze on the vortex and her hands planted on her hips. But then, within a blink of an eye, her face drained of blood. “My car!” she added with a scream.

Sure enough, the little VW was no match for the vortex. Suzy ran to her car and grabbed at the handle of the passenger door in a futile attempt to stop it from being sucked up into the whirlpool.

“Suzz!” Zane called out, going to her, grabbing her by the waist.

“Shit!” I said, springing into action to render assistance, my hand clasped in Callum’s. He had no choice. He came, too.

If I had thought about it, I’d say what I did was stupid. Then again, what else could I have done? Suzy wasn’t about to leave her car, and I didn’t want Zane or her disappearing like Aloysius. We were in this together, wherever the vortex may take us.

Before I knew it, we were all at the VW, even Mr. Barnaby. Geez, we must have looked like tools as we tried to fight the supernatural winds that pressed against us. We were sucked into the vortex.

The experience was something I wouldn't like to have to go through again. The rush of wind, harrowing against my ears, and the feeling of being pulled in all directions at once overcame me. I looked at Callum, water streaming from the corner of my eyes. He was holding out his hand, the ring so bright it became a beacon for us in the darkness we were soon surrounded by.

"Fuck!" I heard Zane scream over the sound of the vortex.

Suzy was unable to keep her grip on the car. Zane caught her before she spiralled away. They fell, their arms and legs tangled together, like they were performing some sort of bizarre mating ritual. The look on their faces showed they weren't having fun. I was helpless to do anything.

"I can't hold on anymore!" Callum let go before I could respond. "Callum!" I clutched at his shirt to try and stop him from getting away from me. Who knew what greeted us on the other side. We needed to stick together.

The car's handle slipped out of my hand. I didn't have the strength to keep my hold on the car, no longer the bridge between Callum and the

metal. Besides, in that instant I decided he was far too important and I needed to hold onto him for dear life instead of the car. I wrapped my arms around him tight as we fell.

I twisted my neck to look behind me. Mr. Barnaby and the car were moving further and further away, a sight that struck dread into my heart. We were lighter than the car, able to travel quicker through the vortex. I just hoped we would all be together on the other side.

“Let go, Mr. Barnaby,” I screamed at the top of my lungs.

I don’t think he heard.

Callum and I were in freefall for what seemed an eternity. I clung onto him, burying my head into his neck. He responded by tightening his embrace. I felt myself dive and turn, weave and spin as we travelled the length of the vortex. I pulled away from him, taking in a lungful of the ethereal air. I had decided, in a moment of madness perhaps, that I needed to see where I was going and, if we were plummeting to our deaths, then even more reason to stare it in the face. Unfortunately, the light from the ring blinded me. I was forced to close my eyelids.

The next thing I knew, there was a slight change in pressure against my back. I blinked. Confronting me was what I believed to be a cloudless purple-hued sky. The sun blaring near

the horizon another clue as to what I was looking at. Yep. The sky. But not a sky I had ever seen. I didn't recall us landing either.

I got up onto my feet. A warm breeze caressed my skin. I knew straight away we were no longer in Pembroke Eve. This wasn't Main Street for a start. The vortex had disappeared, too. How were we supposed to get back? Where were we? Didn't Mr. Barnaby say this was the dragon realm?

"Hey, where are our clothes?" Suzy asked, coming into view.

She was naked, her perky breasts jiggled as she walked toward me. I looked around, not because I didn't want to be caught staring at her, but because the surrounds interested me more. That was until I caught a glimpse of Zane and Callum in their skins, too. That was a pleasing sight. Seemed the vortex had disintegrated our clothing. How interesting. Now I knew why the breeze tickled at me and continued to do so. I had no clothes either.

"Just fuckin' great," Zane said. "I was wearin' my best jeans, too."

"Zane!" Suzy's face hardened and she flashed a glare at him that would have made bears hibernate.

"What?" he questioned, offering her one of his gorgeous smiles.

"You know very well. Don't get any ideas, you

hear me?" she said, looking around. I bet she was searching for something to cover up her modesty. "And watch your mouth, too. I'm a lady, you know."

"You weren't very lady-like last night."

I decided to ignore Zane and Suzy, and the banter they shared between each other, by scanning the surrounds further. I knew where the conversation was going, and to be honest, I think he enjoyed her telling him off. It added fuel to his many fires. A pang of dread coursed through my bones as I realised Mr. Barnaby was nowhere to be seen. Where could he have got to?

"I think we've lost Mr. Barnaby, too," Callum said, reiterating and reinforcing what I had realised. He grabbed my hand.

"Say, you're right," Zane said. "Fuck, we've got to find him. I hope he's not hurt or nothin'. I swear, if anythin' happens to him, I'm gonna be mighty pissed off."

Suzy came around to hug him. He quietened.

The landscape around us amazed me. We must have landed in a clearing, because we were enclosed by jungle. Strange noises, whooping of monkeys and calling of birds, surrounded us as thick as the mists that swirled around the branches. The trees looked like they towered more than a hundred metres. Vines were as common as the leaves, and I swore I saw small primates

clambering along them. Beyond the jungle, mountains, snow capped and rugged, finished off the scene.

I turned my attention back to the four of us. I became amused. Here we were, standing with nothing on in the middle of a clearing that happened to be carpeted with purple flowers to match the sky. Being naked didn't bother me and I had to admit that the purple light filtered down from the strange sky made Callum and Zane look even sexier than normal. Their alabaster skin reflected the light to give them a warm glow. Even the stark metal of our alien navel rings were softened in this light. If no one else was getting any ideas, I sure was.

"It's gone, Jacob," Callum said with a gasp, knocking me from my thoughts. With his words, a stricken look etched onto his face. He didn't seem to be sharing my enthusiasm for this place. That wasn't like him at all. He should have been the first to pass comment.

At first I thought he was talking about the vortex, but when I went to him, I noticed he was holding out his hand, staring at it.

Our engagement ring was missing.

I held his hand, running my finger over the indent where the ring should have been, squeezing him to let him know everything was going to be all right, even though I didn't believe

it myself.

"We'll find it," I whispered.

"I think it has something to do with this place," he began. "The ring glowed so bright when we were falling through the vortex that when it finally did fade, it was gone. I don't know how I know it has something to do with us being here, but I do. I think the ring opened the vortex and brought us here. I really do, Jacob."

I shrugged my shoulders. I hoped he was wrong. If the ring had something to do with us getting here, then we were sure as hell going to need it to get back. Great. Now we had to find Aloysius, Mr. Barnaby and the ring. Why couldn't anything be easy? Shit!

"Hey, look!" Zane called out, gesturing toward the sky.

A dragon, as white as the snow on the mountains, came down to land in front of us. I had never seen one with wings. Then again, my experience with dragons was limited to my knowledge of Aloysius. He was a *walking dragon*, as he so eloquently put it one day when I asked him why he couldn't fly.

The breeze increased for a moment, the flap of its wings fanned my skin. I realised the air was tropical, and I could see why we didn't need clothes. Wearing anything in this heat would have been uncomfortable and I would have stripped

down after a while anyway.

“Look at the size of the mother fucker,” Zane said, taking the words out of my mouth.

The dragon coming toward us was indeed huge, all scales and teeth and claws. I’d say it was as big as Aloysius, if not more. I stepped back, taking Callum with me. What the dragon did next surprised me beyond words. It turned into human form.

It was a male. His skin a stunning white, just like the dragon had been a few moments ago. Why the purple light didn’t reflect off him I had no idea. But there he was. He was also naked. If I were to put it into human terms, as that is now what he was, I’d say he was handsome in a funny sort of way. He had white hair, deep red eyes and, to top it all off, his skin was smooth and hairless. Not even a tuft of hair sprouted from where his pubes should have been. His muscles flexed as he walked. He was damn fit. Even his cock was a sight to behold, one to rival Zane’s fine equipment. I gasped. The dragon man’s foreskin was unlike Zane’s though. His covered his glans, forming a nice pucker tip, just like Callum’s and my own.

When he was closer to us, the dragon man smiled, then said in smooth, yet deep voice, “Welcome to the realm of dragons and the hold of the Clan of the Light. I am Devlyn, flyer for the

Mountain Cradle tribe.”

If I thought him turning from a dragon into a human was something to make me open my mouth in awe, what he did next was something I shall never forget for the rest of my life.

When he was close enough, he kissed my earlobe and at the same time grabbed my cock, shook it twice, then let go of it. He did the same to Callum and Zane. Was this how dragons welcomed each other? Damn. Sure beats a handshake. Good thing I was naked. I think I would have reacted differently if Devlyn had unzipped my pants and began rummaging around in my underwear just to say hello.

I could tell the others didn't have time to react either. Callum would have said something dirty and Zane would have said something both witty and dirty. They looked stunned.

When the dragon man got to Suzy, his greeting was different. He bowed, grabbed his own cock, lifted it up to expose his testicles for her to see, and said with a voice more saccharine than a pot full of honey, “Greetings, my Lady. Do you like what you see?”

Suzy stammered something, but nodded. I bet she reacted on an instinctive level rather than making a conscious decision to answer him. Then again, I would have done the same in her place. This whole experience was quite bizarre and these

dragon men were going to make things interesting as we searched for everything we needed to find. I had a feeling, deep down, that this was going to be an adventure. Good or bad, I hadn't decided.

"She's with me," Zane snarled, bringing his arm around her waist.

Devlyn kept his smile. "I know you are not of this realm, so I will give you the benefit of the doubt, my Lord. But she does not have the garland of belonging around her genitals and neither do you."

"What's a garland?" Callum asked.

Zane's face scrunched up and his nose wrinkled, looking at the dragon man through narrow eyes. He wasn't concerned with the what, just the how. "So how do I get this garland thingy? I don't want you lot chasing my girl, not while she—"

"Thanks, but I can take care of myself, Zane," Suzy snapped, stepping away from him. "I'm sure Devlyn was just being friendly. Besides, if we're ever going to have any hope of finding Mr. Barnaby and Aloysius, we're going to need all the help we can get." A nervous smile crossed her lips and Zane folded his arms, continuing to eye off Devlyn.

The dragon man let himself go, his cock slapping onto his balls. The sparkle in his eye was unmistakable. He wanted for Suzy. I knew that.

Zane knew that. I just hoped Suzy caught on before she got herself into something she couldn't get out of.

"I think it is time we left this place," Devlyn continued, changing the subject but keeping his gaze on Suzy. "Too many eyes are watching and it's too open here. Other tribes' flyers are always in the air. Follow me."

Chapter Three

Devlyn dashed into the jungle. His tight muscular arse the last thing I saw before he disappeared into the undergrowth.

"Well, you heard the dragon guy. Let's go." Callum was the first to follow. I think he must have enjoyed the greeting. He was perky. I liked that.

"What was all that about?" Suzy asked, clasping her hand into Zane's. Damn, she *was* oblivious. Poor Zane.

Callum chuckled. "I kind of liked it."

"You would, Cal," Zane said, his face still dark, like thunder clouds were dropping rain upon him.

I slid my gaze over to my fiancé. I couldn't help but smile along with him. Anything involving his dick was fine by him. Perhaps I should adopt the dragon man's method and greet Callum and Zane with a cock shake every morning. That would make for a nice start to the day.

Devlyn led us along a well worn path through

the jungle. The chatter of wildlife grew louder and louder as we became covered by the canopy and the purple light gave away to an eerie greenish hue. The air was even more stifling once we were in the jungle proper. It was also moist. Perspiration dripped from my brow and Callum's hand slipped out of mine a few times. The humidity in combination with the heat was terrible. I was sure glad I had nothing on. I don't think I could have coped with the weather otherwise.

A monkey, or whatever, cried out, piercing the din of the jungle. Devlyn stopped dead in his tracks, holding up his hand, gesturing for us to be still.

"What is it?" I asked. I tried to keep my voice quiet, but at the same time be loud enough for him to hear.

Devlyn didn't answer straight away. Instead, he went over to the nearest bush and pissed on it, his urine splashing all over the broad leaves of the plant. "The tribe's land must be marked so others will know when they have trespassed."

"But how will we know if we've crossed into someone else's land, Devlyn?" Suzy said. "I can't smell anything in this humidity."

Devlyn turned to her, shaking his cock of excess. "I will make sure you don't."

Again Zane's hackles came up. "You just lead

the way, dragon dude."

"I don't know why you're being so defensive, my Lord. I told you I'd let you have the benefit of the doubt." Devlyn rubbed his chin. "But I can see where you'll have problems when we get to camp. I will make sure you are both adorned. That way others will know you are joined."

Zane nodded slowly. "Thanks...I s'pose."

"I told you he was just being nice, Zane," Suzy said. "Now stop acting like a great big testosterone soaked footballer and let me handle this, okay? It's nice seeing all you guys naked, but Christ, it sure brings out your possessiveness."

A thought crossed my mind. Did Callum and I need garlands, too? Was Callum in danger of being courted by another, either male or female, because he didn't have any visible ties to someone else? Devlyn showed interest in Suzy straight away because he couldn't see a so-called garland. My stomach tingled with butterflies. I wasn't going to let my Callum be touched by some stranger. We were engaged. Only Zane could touch us intimately. That was our arrangement. Then again, Devlyn did say he'd offer to help. Did that cover Callum and me, too?

"I notice you haven't got a garland, Devlyn," I said, trying to keep my thoughts and fears to myself. Perhaps there was nothing to worry about. Perhaps it was only me being too cautious.

"I am unjoined. I have only recently come of age, passing the six tests of the tribe leaders about a week ago. I now have the right to claim a mate and, when I do, my garland of joining design will be set. Something I look forward to."

"So what exactly is a garland? I mean, geez, I can't see how anything would stay on the skin in this heat," Callum said, repeating his previously unanswered question. "I'm practically boiling here."

"Why, it's a tattoo that crowns the genitals." Devlyn trawled a line through Callum's pubic hair with his finger about an inch from the top of his cock. "It is drawn here and is designed for each member of the tribe and their mate by the feelings they have for each other in their hearts." When finished, he gestured for us to follow him again. "But I will explain it better when we get to the camp. It will be evenfall soon and in the dark ambush is more likely."

Callum turned to me, holding me tight around my waist. "So I guess we'll have to shave to get ours on then, hey?"

"You betcha," I said, glad he had said what he did. I felt reassured.

The jungle grew thicker and thicker as the light waned. More than a few times Devlyn stopped to mark a bush. Heck, Zane must have begun to trust him, because he started pissing over bushes, too.

The next thing I knew there was a lot of back slapping and raucous laughing and a few more cock shakes and earlobe kissing thrown in for good measure, between them. I'd say Devlyn and Zane had bonded as tribe kin. Suzy rolled her eyes. While Callum saw an amusing side. I, on the other hand, worried.

A light ahead guided us now that night had fallen. I assumed it was from a fire. Thankfully, we didn't have to travel far in the dark. The noises of the jungle became more sinister as soon as the sun set. My skin crawled as I tried to imagine the creatures the calls belonged to.

We entered a large clearing. Many tents made from animal skins were scattered about. There were a few communal fires here and there with men and women gathered around. All were naked, but the thing that struck me was the fact that they were all of different races. Or should I say all different dragons in human form. There were Asians, Caucasians and Africans. You name it, they were here. I even saw some of Middle Eastern decent. At least the tribe of the Mountain Cradle were diverse. I immediately felt welcome as soon as I stepped foot onto the camp ground and into the light of the fires.

"Well. Now I've seen everything," Callum said with a whistle.

When we neared the main fire, Devlyn called

out, "I bring us guests from the human realm. They are here to help search for our Aloysius. Please make them welcome, my tribesman. Please make them feel like they're one of us."

With those words, all the men of the tribe made their way toward us. The women hung back, tending to whatever it was they were doing before we entered the sphere of light created by the fires.

Soon a line up had formed and each male member of the tribe greeted us, one by one. First Zane got his cock shaken, along with the customary earlobe kissing, then Callum and finally myself. I could get used to this. I found the greeting so deep and personal I couldn't help but feel like I *was* a part of the tribe.

"Come, my Lord Zane. I will prepare you and your mate for your garland," Devlyn said, grabbing Zane by the arm and dragging him off toward the nearest tent once the last of the tribesman had welcomed him.

Suzy huffed. "I'm Suzy, not his mate and I don't know if I'm ready to be tattooed..." her voice trailed off as she was escorted away with Zane. I couldn't help but smile. I wondered what design they'd end up with.

I was still being greeted, as was Callum. A lot of the men had a tattoo where their pubic hair would have grown. The designs were as varied as the people themselves. Some were abstract, others

were animal designs. Some were simple, others complex and intricate. All were beautiful. One thing was certain, I knew who belonged together. The design only came in pairs.

A couple of women close by were mated to some of the men who had greeted me. Some of the men were mated together, too. I even noticed a few of the women were together. What a wonderful culture they had. Humans could learn from them. Plus, I had to admit, it was sexy. I don't think I would mind at all if Callum and I got tattooed and shared a design.

The next man in line grabbed my cock and shook it, knocking me from my thoughts. I smiled and accepted his welcome by leaning forward so he could kiss my earlobe without effort. I didn't really see who he was, my attention on deciphering the garlands. Funny how quickly this welcome had become normal to me. I knew Callum was enjoying himself. His broad smile evident of that.

A shadow passed over my eyes. I knew it was the next man coming to greet me. This time, he took my cock and didn't let go, not straight away anyway. Was there cock shaking etiquette just like humans had hand shaking ones? How many shakes were considered too many? Was there a desired pressure? Most shook me twice and that was it. Not this man. He even pinched my foreskin

closed, pulling at the skin. My stomach tingled when he came to kiss me. His lips hot and wet against my earlobe.

My eyesight focused. He was a huge African man, all muscles on muscles and with hairless skin as beautiful as French polished ebony. His presence overwhelmed me. I gasped.

"I am Nottolu, head warrior of this tribe, and you please me, human," he said through plump sensual lips. I couldn't tear my gaze off him.

"I'm Jacob," I stammered. He was without a garland. That fact making my stomach turn even more. I swallowed hard.

He smiled, his teeth perfect white. "Good." With that he let me go and walked off. The sight of his muscular arse something to dream about, something to keep my desires kindled until I could ravage Callum tonight.

Callum nudged me. "He's a friendly bloke, isn't he?"

"Yeah. Did he...um...did he grab your dick for longer than usual?"

Callum shook his head. "Why?"

"I don't know. I had a funny feeling about him, that's all."

"Hey, you want to get in the sack with him, that's fine. Just save some for me, okay?"

I grabbed Callum by the waist. "Don't you start. I've got enough to worry about already."

Once all the men of importance had greeted us, an old man came up to me. His skin was loose over his bones and his garland was as faded as his age. "Follow me. I will show you where you will sleep tonight." He didn't reveal his name. Perhaps he was a servant, if this tribe had such things. I didn't have time to think about it. The tent flap opened and the smell of animal hides and incense burned my nostrils.

Inside the tent, even though I wouldn't have thought it possible, the air was more stifling than outside. Callum had flopped himself onto the nearest bed, stomach to the covers. His cute bubble butt a welcome sight. God, he was hot.

"I'm so going to plough you, baby," I said, sitting next to him, running my fingers through his hair. "It's the least I can do seeing as I've had to stare at your beautiful cock all this time."

He slid up onto his elbows, planting warm, wet kisses over my lips and cheeks. "I want to be fucked real hard tonight. Can you manage that, then?" He had such a way with words. Damn cheeky bastard. I was rock hard before he had even finished his sentence.

"Hell, yeah."

He had grabbed my cock, but not in a *hello* gesture. He wanted me like I wanted him. I moaned, but before he could wrap his delicious lips around my length, the flap of the tent's doors

burst open.

Nottolu stood in the doorway, a hulking bulk of masculinity. “Come, Jacob. I want to claim you as my mate.”

Chapter Four

My cock deflated quicker than it took to get hard.

“You fucking what?” I said, getting up off the bed and planting my hands onto my hips in a show of defiance. No one was coming to claim me, not if I had anything to say about it.

Callum got up, too, bringing his arms around me in a gesture of protection. I felt him behind me, his cock pressed against my buttocks. That comforted me.

“He belongs to me for your information,” Callum said, his voice lacking the confidence of a few seconds ago.

Nottolu frowned. “I don’t see your garlands. Now come, Jacob. I don’t want a scene and I don’t want to have to claim you through the rite. Your *friend* may not survive.”

I knew a threat when I heard it.

“I will do whatever it takes to make sure Jacob stays mine, you hear me?” The fear in Callum’s

voice increased. He moved around to stand in front of me. My heart melted for him, for everything he had done up to this point, even when faced with a force more powerful than himself. Callum loved me without condition. I knew that with all my heart.

Nottolu let out a guffaw. A whooshing of wind ruffled Callum's hair, and in that instant I knew he didn't have a chance if he chose to challenge the warrior. Nottolu had transformed into a dragon, his huge, dark scaled head the only part of him that fit inside the tent. A curl of smoke wafted from his nostrils, and his eyes, even though reptilian, reflected a deep fire. A wanting. His massive lips that held hundreds of sharp teeth, salivated. "Very well, human. You must challenge me to claim him. Is that your true desire?"

I grabbed Callum, turning him so he had to face me. I looked him in the eyes. "Don't Callum. There's got to be another way. We don't know all the rules of the tribe. Besides, if you fight him...like this...he'll fucking kill you." Tears blurred my vision and my voice cracked from emotion. "I can't lose you, you hear me. I can't."

"But... Jacob."

I pressed my finger onto his soft, beautiful lips to silence him. "Nothing will happen, I promise. I'll go with him if he wants it, but know in your heart that I do it for you. Clear? Now please, baby,

go and ask Devlyn what you can do to claim me back without having to fight this...this man."

Callum pulled away from my touch. Tears rolled down his cheeks, leaving clean trails. "I can't let you go. I just can't. You mean everything to me, Jacob. You're my life."

"What good will you be to me if you're dead," I said without sounding harsh. "Devlyn has shown interest in wanting to help us. He's helped Zane and Suzy. Now go to him. I love you with all my heart and everything I have within me, too, Callum. But we have to do this by their rules now. It's the only way to beat them at their own game." The final sentence was nothing but a slurred whimper. My emotion choked me. I missed him already.

Callum's shoulders heaved and he fell into my arms. "I love you so much."

We kissed, one that spun my head and brought a sick feeling to my stomach. I yearned for him more than any other time since I had known him. His smell surrounded me, the sweat off his skin so sexy, so comforting that if Nottolu weren't here, then a hard love making session would have just been the beginning. I would have kissed and held him the whole night long and then some, never letting him go. I would have tasted his love and comforted him until the purple sky was bright again outside.

Then determination took over my feelings of sorrow, shoving them aside. My stomach knotted as I looked over to Nottolu. If I had to let this man touch me to give Callum a chance to claim me, then so be it. The world, no matter what realm, had to know that Callum and I were together.

His taste lingered on my tongue when I broke our kiss and I licked my lips to savour it. I knew this wouldn't be the last time I'd be with my beautiful Callum. I had to think like that. If I held onto that hope, I'd at least stay sane while we looked for Mr. Barnaby and Aloysius and Nottolu did whatever it was he was going to do to me.

Callum's eyes pleaded, his hands not letting me go. My heart and my soul and my body didn't want to leave him either. "I miss you already," he said.

"Come. I am losing patience," Nottolu boomed. He had changed back into human form, the great wall of muscle blocking the escape. Not that I wanted to run. I knew what I had to do. I just wished it wasn't my only option.

Nottolu grabbed me by my hand, his strength obvious.

"Let Devlyn know about this, Callum, *please*," I said before I was pulled out of the tent.

All eyes were fixed on me as he led me to his tent on the other side of the campsite. The weight of their stares and the whispers behind their hands

caused me discomfort, my nakedness evident, or rather, the lack of a garland above my genitals, became apparent. Why hadn't I asked Devlyn to tattoo me and Callum, too? I cursed myself.

When we were inside his tent, a rather lavish set up with cushions and rugs scattered about everywhere and incense burning on every table, he said, "Sit."

A wooden chair was nestled between two large futon-like beds. "No." I replied, my voice as flat and as uninterested as I could make it even though I was churning with fear inside.

"Suit yourself." He went over to a large urn and poured water into a bowl from it. "But I cannot wash your feet when you are standing."

I was taken aback. "You want to wash my feet?"

"Yes. It is the first gesture of mateship. You did show interest in me, and I am now claiming that right."

"Interest?" I saw red. "How the fuck did I show you interest? You've forcibly taken me away from my lover and now you claim I led you on. Fuck, you're a piece of work, aren't you?"

"You didn't knock my hand away when I showed my intentions at our greeting," he explained, continuing on with what he was doing, bringing the bowl full of water over to me. "When I clasped your foreskin, that is when you should

have acted. You wouldn't be here if you had done so."

I hadn't realised it, but I was seated. He knelt before me and grabbed my left foot. The care in his touch was tangible. With a soft sponge, he dabbed my skin. The water was cool and I sighed with relief, the sensation of the fluid over my heated flesh more than welcome.

"How the fuck was I supposed to know about that. I've only just arrived here," I said, trying to keep the venom in my voice while he caressed my skin with the soft sponge and his caring touch.

He shrugged his massive shoulders. "I cannot answer that. All I know is that I want you and, when I acted out my desires, you accepted me. I am of age and I have the right to a mate."

He took my right foot and continued his ritual. The cool water over my ankles and weary feet helped to refresh me, and I had to admit, I enjoyed this kind of attention even though I would have preferred it from Callum. I tried to hold onto my anger, let it fester and seethe inside me, but his actions and demeanour chipped away at my reason. Did he care for me?

"And I have a right to one, too. I didn't choose you. Whether you believe that or not."

"I do not," he said, his voice losing an ounce of patience. "You have no garland, no mark that you belong to another and you acted like a man

wanting to be bedded. Believe me or not, but I can only see this how it was presented to me. You are ripe and ready and you are my choice."

"I've given Callum my ring," I blurted. "That's how us humans proclaim their love for one another." But as I spoke those words I realised the flaw in my logic. The ring was gone.

He was quick to point out the weakness in my argument, too. "I saw no ring on your human friend. Now accept the consequences. Or are you not a man of honour? Are you only worthy for the badlands where the vultures can pick at your bones while you roast alive under the heat of the sun?"

Geez, he struck me at my weakest point. I may be many things, but I always prided myself on my honour. Besides, if I didn't accept him, then from the sound of it I would meet my death. What a choice. If I went to Callum, he would be killed. If I rejected Nottolu, I would be killed. I hoped with all my heart and everything in my being that Devlyn could come up with some sort of plan to get me out of this. I wanted to be in Callum's arms right now instead of in this smelly, gaudy tent that represented my prison, no matter how nice the warden was.

He moved the sponge up my leg. I shivered. The water dribbled down onto the rug like the sound of rain patting on artificial grass, but he

didn't seem to mind. He continued to douse me, wash the sweat and grime from my skin.

With a sigh of resignation, I said, "Then I accept your claim."

He smiled. "I would like to shave you, prepare you for our garland."

I swallowed hard. All hope I had extinguished within me with those words. Once I was tattooed, then any chance Callum had of claiming me would be gone. I would be Nottolu's mate...forever.

Chapter Five

The purple morning light streamed into the tent, waking me from a night of disturbed dreams. I unfurled the covers, my shaven state obvious in the brightness that surrounded me. Every hair around my genitals, including those sprouting from my balls, had been taken away. I sighed, more out of despair than anything.

When Nottolu had said he would shave me, I thought he meant with a blade. Instead, he had used some sort of stone with Celtic markings engraved on it, running it over my skin. While he performed that ritual, he sang to me. Yep. Sang. I think that's what made me fall asleep in the end, his voice a beautiful lilt and the words a surreal lullaby.

He told me the hair removal would be permanent, only able to be reversed by the same stone with the ritual performed in reverse. Seemed I was ready for my garland. Another thought that depressed me further.

I had to face the fact I was going to be hairless down there for some time. I couldn't imagine Nottolu wanting me to get my pubic hair back, that would hide his claim to me then. I had never shaved myself, I never saw the appeal. I liked pubic hair, especially Callum's. His smelt pungent and manly. Fuck, I missed him.

I got up off the bed. Nottolu wasn't anywhere to be seen.

Before I went outside, Zane entered the tent. "Holy fuck, Jakey, I heard what happened. Are you okay, man?" He hugged me. I didn't resist. Soon I was surrounded by his familiar touch, something that brought a smile to my face.

"Kiss me," I blurted, wanting more from him.

He did so without question, pressing his beautiful lips upon mine, sending in his warm, wet tongue, to not only share his love with me but to remind me that I did have a connection with Callum. I had him.

Besides, I don't think Zane was any concern to Nottolu. As far as he was concerned, Zane was taken. When we parted, I stepped back to look at him. He had been shaven and tattooed as Devlyn had promised. Fuck, he looked hot. I had to say, I adored his pubes, but seeing him with a lovely Celtic bird, wings spread so the feathers fanned to his pelvic bone, was a sight to behold. The tattoo was stunning, so intricate. A deep, rich ink, as

black as the hair on his head, complimented his skin with such perfection I would have sworn he had always had a tattoo.

"Do you like it?" he asked, parading around, his cock swaying hypnotically as he gyrated his hips, his smile as cheeky as ever.

"I love it." But I lowered my gaze.

"What's wrong?" He hugged me again, his warmth pressing against me as he kissed my neck.

"I want to share my tattoo with Callum."

"I know you do. And don't worry, Jakey. Devlyn said that Callum has until the Moon wanes to make a counter claim." Zane's eyes glistened with a hope I thought I had lost. "In other words, he's got two days, or forever, to hold his peace or some shit like that."

I ran my lips over his before I kissed him all over his face. "Oh, thank God." The relief in my voice was tangible. I hoped Callum had been told how he was going to claim me. But one step at a time. At least there was hope.

"Now c'mon, let's gets some chow. I'm starved."

"I could so get into bed with you right now, you know that."

Zane left the tent first. "I would love to, but fuck I don't want to mess with that Nottolu dude. Have you seen the size of the fucker, even in human form?"

I couldn't help but smile. Zane had brightened my day more than the sun ever could. "I have. He scares the spit out of me, too."

"Man, your arse is gonna be sore for a week when he gets into you...but that's not to say I won't sneak in a good grope every now and again...for Cal, you know."

"Of course."

We went to the campfire. An animal cooked on a spit. It smelt divine and for the first time I noticed my hunger. Amongst the crowd gathering for breakfast, I saw Devlyn and Callum. He had shaved himself, too. I tell you what, I could see the appeal of shaving off the pubic hair. Callum's cock looked even bigger than it already was. I forced myself not to look at him. I didn't want to incite the wrath of Nottolu. Not yet.

Then again, why couldn't I talk to him? He was a friend and even Nottolu couldn't deny friendship. Could he? I went over to Callum, offering him a nervous smile. I so wanted to hold him, feel his breath against my skin.

"You okay?" he asked, the nervousness in his voice apparent.

I nodded. "Yeah, he treated me well."

A smile crawled across Callum's lips. "Next time a dragon man clamps your foreskin when he says hello, can you please make it clear you're not interested."

I knew he was teasing me. God, it was good to hear his voice. "You heard?"

"I heard."

Before I could ask him how his claim was progressing, Suzy came up to us. Her tattoo matched Zane's. "What do you think?" she said, handing me a plate of cooked meat and vegetables. "I actually like it, and I think they're right, it does bring about a sense of belonging to someone."

I took the food, hungrily stuffing the meat into my mouth. "Looks good," I answered, my mouth full. I didn't care. "At least you belong to someone you want to be with." My voice sounded harsher than I had intended. I didn't mean to take out my frustration on her. She didn't deserve that.

"I'm sorry." She turned away from me.

"Suzy, wait. I'm the one who should be apologising, not you."

"We're doing everything we can to make this right, you know."

"I know."

Zane took a piece of meat off my plate, gulping it down. "I heard the camp's movin' after we've all eaten. They reckon they've sighted a red dragon at the foot of the mountain a few days walk from here."

"Aloysius?" I questioned.

Devlyn offered Zane a plate of food. "That is

the news from our air scouts. I will take wing and try to confirm a sighting. Lord Callum, you should come with me, ride on my back. Best if we plan things away from the eyes of the tribe."

I took his words as a warning that I shouldn't be seen in the presence of my fiancé. Great. Seemed Zane was going to get all of my frustration, after all.

Before I had finished my meal, Devlyn had transformed into a dragon.

"Make sure you ride on the soft spot between my wings, Lord Callum. I don't want you to be damaged before you stake your claim."

I felt somewhat like an object with those words, something to be fought over and possessed. Then again, if I was ever going to be with Callum, I suppose what he said was true. I knew Devlyn meant well. At least his voice sounded positive. Did he have a plan?

Callum got up on the creatures back and with a rush of wind and a flap of wings they were in the air, soaring into the purple sky. They headed for the mountains.

A shadow came over me. "Come, Jacob. I need to prepare you for tonight before the camp breaks and we move to our next site," Nottolu said, his eyes dark with desire.

Zane and Suzy had stepped away.

I swallowed the meat in my mouth. "What

happens...tonight? I asked, my voice weak.

"I do not wish to discuss such matters in the public arena." He grabbed my hand and led me toward his tent, the plate of food fell to the floor.

"Hey, I haven't finished eating yet."

He didn't speak, but I never got a sense of anger from him. He was more like a man determined to accomplish something before his desire waned. I came to believe that Nottolu was a man of few words and that he relied on his actions to speak for him. Last night proved he would treat me well. Even now, as he led me, his touch was gentle. I could release my hand at any moment if I so wished. Funny, those looking on would have believed I was being conquered, forced away from my meal like I was his slave. I had a feeling that was the idea of it all. This was all for show.

I assumed from his behaviour that his rank amongst the tribe wouldn't be questioned. I was willing to play along, at least until Callum came to rescue me. Only two nights, I told myself. Then this mess would be over and I could concentrate on finding Aloysius and Mr. Barnaby and hopefully get back home with all my friends by my side.

I hoped.

"Quickly, Jacob. We don't have much time. The next part of the ceremony must be completed before midday."

I could see many men pulling down tents all around us, most were the large communal ones. The women, including Suzy, began packing up the cooking implements and dousing the fires. The camp would soon be ready to move.

“But the sun has only just risen. We’ve got plenty of time, haven’t we?”

“No. I have ground scouting duty soon, as do you. I must bring forward our courtship.”

“Oh, great,” I said under my breath.

Chapter Six

Inside his tent, Nottolu had rearranged the cushions so there was plenty of space in the centre. The central rug had a stunning Celtic design of dragons in flight, one of them as dark as his skin. He let me go and dragged the chair out from between the futons, placing it near me. He didn't ask me to sit this time. I stayed standing, observing his actions as he prepared for whatever he had in mind for me.

The time might have been short, but he did everything with care, including arranging many vials into a neat group near the front leg of the chair. What they were used for I had no idea, but I bet I was about to find out.

Nottolu fastened the door flap shut. The atmosphere inside the tent became closed in, and for the first time I realised how hot the air was. Being naked sure helped regulate my temperature, but geez, the smell of incense and the humid warmth of the air made me feel light headed and

uncomfortable.

He came to me, but didn't touch me. The glint in his eye and the smile on his lips sent a wave of reassurance through my discomfort, both for the heat and for the fear of what might happen next.

"Please stay standing for a moment longer, my beautiful man," he said, his voice a soft growl. "Then you can be seated."

"Yes." I was curious.

He picked up one of the vials and poured the contents into the palm of his hand. The fluid was clear, but it didn't look like water to me. I would say it was some sort of massage oil. At least he had the decency to lubricate me before he ravished me, I supposed.

While he rubbed the oil between his palms, he began to sing. I didn't understand the words, they were Celtic or Latin or something, but the tone and melody was beautiful. I smiled. How could a warrior, so muscle bound and rough looking, be so kind and gentle?

"I will oil you. It will cleanse your skin and give you protection from the elements...and—" His words fell away like the oil from his fingers onto the carpet. I'm sure there was more he wanted to say, but chose not to.

Before I could add any more to the conversation, including asking him to continue with his train of thought, he placed his huge

muscular hands onto my chest. His touch was electric, and I gasped when he rubbed me, taking in an intoxicating mouthful of incense.

At first he worked in circles, concentrating around my nipples. Then, when the oil became thin, he poured more into his hands and continued, picking up with his singing.

Soon he concentrated his efforts below my navel, rubbing me where I once had hair. My stomach became filled with butterflies, and the combination of the heat and the incense and his touch all let me down a carnal path I couldn't help but walk. I was hard and ready for whatever he wanted to do next.

His singing had become a distant hum in my mind while I tried to stop myself from plunging deeper and deeper into ecstasy. Soon I'd be unable to control myself, I just knew it. I let out a moan again as he massaged my cock. His effort was making sure my foreskin was well lubricated, gently rubbing my sensitive skin between his slippery fingers. What a sight.

"This feels good," I offered through trembling lips.

He didn't offer any words other than the continuation of his melody and of his touch over my heated skin. A tear rolled down my cheek and I couldn't help but think of letting myself be his. Against everything in my being I wanted him to

take me, even though I knew my beautiful Callum was only a few tents away. So close yet so far. What was I supposed to do? I was going to be taken, that much was clear. Did this cleansing with the oil also help rid me of any dirtiness or guilt I might feel? Was that the real reason for the ritual? At the moment I had to accept the way of these dragon men, but with Callum and Devlyn's help I'm sure we could come up with a way to make everything all right.

Where he had placed the oil onto my skin I felt revitalised and refreshed, another positive to this whole process. I'm sure that was the intent. The oil washed away any doubt, too. Then again, I had a feeling the stuff wasn't oil at all.

Soon my balls, my buttocks, my legs, my back and every square centimetre of skin in between were covered in the oil. His touch over me was fantastic and I could only think of positive thoughts. When he was satisfied he had achieved his goal, he stood in front of me smiling, his eyes misty and his face as soft as I had ever seen it.

There was no doubt he was a beautiful man. Pity was, he wasn't my man.

"Please sit," he said, his voice wavering and cracked.

I sat. The oil had soaked into my skin and unlike any other massage oil that I had ever had on me, I didn't feel greasy or slippery. The chair

was warm against my cooled flesh, comfortable and welcome.

"I'm going to take you into my mouth. You must give me your seed to complete the cleansing ceremony. Then tonight, once you have experienced a day with me and you understand what it is I do and why I want you, the joining ritual can begin."

If anything, he was direct. I opened my mouth, about to answer, when he was on his knees and taking my erection into his huge hand. I wondered if everything these dragon people did was centred in ritual. It all sounded so mysterious and somewhat sexy. Again, I'm sure that was the intent.

My eyes widened as he brought his plump beautiful lips around my length. I whimpered when he worked on me, my cock slick with his saliva. Oh, fuck he was good. Oh, fucking fuck! He slurped and growled, too. Not once did he waver, not once did he lessen his perfect pressure and not once did he take his stare, complete with those gorgeous deep brown eyes of his, away from me. To him I was his world. Double – no, triple fuck!

My state of arousal and everything that had preceded this moment made for an easy ejaculation into his wet, warm mouth. In that moment of perfect clarity, I didn't see a fearsome warrior, capable of turning into a dragon who

could rip the flesh off a human in no time flat with his claws and then make sushi out of them just for fun, but a gentle, caring man who needed love. The joy in his eyes when he tasted me was tangible. He didn't *want* me at all. He *needed* me.

For the longest time he kept me in his mouth, making sure I had given him all I could, licking and sucking and playing with my cock, relishing every moment. I closed my eyes, thinking of how my life had turned and how, above all, I was going to make sure this beautiful man before me wouldn't suffer when Callum came to claim me. Nottolu deserved someone special. I just wasn't that man.

When I went flaccid, he rose from his knees and offered me his hand. I accepted. My body had come off my erotic high and while I watched him, guilt prickled in the back of my mind. So much for the oil washing away any negative feelings.

"Your seed has been added to my strength." He went over to the corner of the tent and picked out a long staff-like sword from a rack of weapons. "With it inside me I can conquer my enemies with even more power than I had before. I am becoming complete thanks to you, my beautiful man."

Oh, dear God. Now he thinks I'm magical, too. "Um, I'm not the kind of guy you think I am...I'm only human."

He handed me a similar weapon. "Come. We are on scouting duty and in the first group with Saar and Ibrahim and we have kept them waiting long enough." When he was at the door, he added, "Stay close to me."

With that, he left the tent. The air and sunlight burst in, invading the sanctity of what we had shared, shedding light on my predicament. And boy, was it a predicament. Did I have feelings for Nottolu as well?

I followed him out of the tent.

Before I could gather my thoughts, I was standing next to Nottolu, and two other dragon men who I assumed were Saar and Ibrahim, in the middle of the camp ground. I had not met them yesterday during our welcome, but I had to admit, they were handsome, in a rippling muscular kind of way.

When I approached, Nottolu placed his hand on my shoulder and drew me close to him. I was a waif compared to him and he towered over me, but I had become aware of how easy I could be considered a trophy of conquest to him. He had claimed me and I was his. He was letting everyone else know that fact, too. It didn't matter how gently he treated me behind the closed doors of his tent, in the outside world, with all the eyes of the tribe upon him, he had to act as expected. And so did I.

I began to understand the reason why Nottolu had claimed me for himself. I suspected a mated warrior was more valuable than one who wasn't. I added to his status. But I wasn't a dragon. I was different. And different meant that I was even more valuable.

"I am Saar," the dragon man with a Romanesque appearance said as he shook my cock and kissed my earlobe. Thankfully he didn't clamp my foreskin. I don't think I could have coped with any more wanting to claim me. Although, thinking about it, he did hold my dick for a bit longer than most would have. My stomach fluttered with butterflies. Seemed my value might be my enemy as well. Saar didn't have a garland.

"I'm Jacob." I didn't know if I was supposed to speak or just accept his welcome, but I didn't get the impression I had done anything wrong. Then again, I didn't think I had yesterday either and look at the mess I was in now.

"And I am Ibrahim," the other said, also greeting me in the traditional way before I could think any more about the etiquette involved and whether or not I had just given out the wrong signals or said the wrong thing. He was shorter than the others but no less imposing. His green eyes and black hair struck me as an odd combination. Thankfully, he was attached, his

garland – a fish swimming in swirling water.

Saar said, “You have done well, Nottolu.”

The man named Saar slid his gaze over me. I felt uncomfortable, but at the same time, strangely secure with Nottolu behind me, his skin pressed against mine.

Ibrahim let out a laugh. “You may be a strong and mighty warrior, Saar, but you are not stupid. Let’s not waste anymore time, our clan leader is missing and it is in our care to help find him.”

Nottolu joined in, his deep laugh resonating through me. “For a moment I thought you were offering a challenge, Saar. But I didn’t see any signs of your intent. Explain yourself and the reason of your words.”

I looked at Saar, as did everyone else while we made our way toward the jungle, Nottolu making sure I was never far away from his reach.

“Ibrahim is right. I may be single in status and I may be strong, but not even for ten beautiful mates such as the one you now possess would I go against you, Nottolu. I value my life above all else. I was just being friendly. Now lighten up otherwise you’ll be too tense to do anything with your new mate when you get him behind your closed tent flap.”

I would have said that Saar had just withdrawn any intent he may have had only a moment ago. Thank God.

“That pleases me to hear that, Saar,” Nottolu said. “And you can be certain I am more than relaxed and my performance is nothing you should be concerned about unless it affects the tribe.”

Saar smiled. “Never wise to be too cocky, Nottolu. Someone else could challenge you for your mate. After all, you have only begun your rituals. I can see you’ve cleansed him, but your joining will not happen until the deadline has passed. Then and only then is the mating set in stone.”

Wait a minute. Did Saar just say that the joining ceremony shouldn’t happen until tomorrow night? Didn’t Nottolu say he wanted to join tonight? I twisted my neck to look at him.

Nottolu was smiling, his presence even more imposing than before.

“Stop talking like women folk,” Ibrahim snapped. “No one is going to challenge Nottolu, Saar. He can do as he likes as he has earned such a right. We must concentrate on the job at hand.”

No one seemed to argue with Ibrahim. But I could sense the tension between Saar and Nottolu as much as I could sense my own confusion. Perhaps they had been rivals in the past. One thing I gathered from the conversation was that Nottolu wasn’t going to take any challenge lightly. Just my luck.

We travelled through the jungle for more than an hour in silence. At least, I think it was an hour. I was beginning to feel pain up my legs from walking barefoot over rough ground for so long. I longed for shoes.

I was about to ask if we could have a break, perhaps grab a drink or something to eat, when Ibrahim, the man in the lead of the party, stopped dead in his tracks.

"What is it, my friend?" Nottolu asked, his voice soft and like velvet.

"I heard a noise."

Before anyone could ask him what sort of noise, a snap of many trees and a crash of logs falling hard onto the ground echoed through the jungle with the chatter of many animals in panic.

My heart went into my throat when a huge yellow-green dragon came into view, its eyes a piercing red. It charged toward us.

Chapter Seven

“Ascout for the Clan of the Dark!” Nottolu screamed as he transformed into a dragon, knocking me onto the dirt because of the sudden mass that invaded the space where he and I stood next to each other.

I wasn’t hurt, more stunned than anything. Everything happened so fast. Both Saar and Ibrahim transformed, too, and the sounds of teeth and claws ripping through flesh filled the air. I was scared out of my mind, cowering behind the thickest bush I could find while trying to make myself as invisible as possible. I had to wonder what the use of the spear sword was when being attacked by a ten metre high dragon.

Within a matter of seconds the scuffle was over. The attacker was dead, fertilizer for future generations of the jungle. Nottolu, shifting back into human form, had a large cut across his chest, blood tricking down to his stomach.

I went to him without thought. “Are you all

right?"

He smiled and kissed me on my cheek. "Better than the Clan of the Dark's scout."

I frowned, looking at the quivering mass of dead flesh already being consumed by the jungle's insects. "That may be so, but you're hurt. You need medical attention," I said.

He said, more seriously, "I am fine. But I think we should find the healing leaf before the cut becomes a permanent scar."

"What does the leaf look like?" My concern was tangible.

Ibrahim came over to us. He had speared the heart of the dragon invader, making sure the beast was dead. The squelching noise was a sickening addition to the cacophony of birds and animals that had returned to their normal activities. One use for the weapon, I supposed. "It's a triangle leaf. Look for silver fur underneath."

There was so much foliage around, finding anything was going to prove quite a challenge. I could get lost so easily amongst the trees in the thick of the jungle. I wasn't so sure I should search these parts alone, and I was even more sure I shouldn't be alone with Saar. His eyes were filled with the same desire all men had when they lusted for something.

"It is found where a tree once lived," Saar said, helping narrow down our search. "Its roots able to

get nutrients from rotting wood.”

When Saar finished speaking, the realisation struck me that none of the dragon men had scars over their skin. All of them were blemish free. I knew they fought, I had just witnessed such a horrible thing. Perhaps the healing leaf was common. That was my hope anyway.

Nottolu sat himself down at the base of the nearest tree. “I need to catch my breath for a moment.” His cut was worse than I thought, the wound not sealing and the blood continuing to flow freely.

I came to sit in front of him, letting his legs engulf me. Soon, I was wrapped in his welcome presence. When I ran my hand across his chest, checking for any other signs of the attack, I couldn’t help but notice how beautiful he really was. His skin was as dark and rich as the finest chocolate. I bet he tasted good, too.

He smiled, letting me touch him wherever I pleased. My hand wandered down to his stomach. It was quivering.

“You’ve been alone for a long time, haven’t you?” I asked, coming closer to him.

“Yes,” he replied.

I stopped my movement and he caught my hand, a look of wanting radiating out from his eyes.

“I think I’d better help find that leaf. Otherwise

I'm good for nothing around here."

"Stay. The others can find it."

I pulled my hand out of his, missing his touch the second I did so. I could see he was hurt by my gesture. "Did you want me to continue?"

His words deceived his desires, I could tell. "Not here. Tonight. Just sit with me and rest for a moment. I know you need to. I can see it in your face. No one's any good to me weary."

"I'll be all right. I can take care of myself."

"Of that I have no doubt."

I listened to him breathe for a moment before my thoughts wandered beyond the tree we rested under and out into the jungle proper. Many paths criss-crossed through the undergrowth. Sure, the jungle may be thick, but it was also well used. I wondered how many tribes lived here. Were they all enemies? From what I could gather all of the tribes were divided into two groups, the Light and the Dark. But was there more to it than that?

Movement in my line of sight pulled me from my reverie. It was Saar and Ibrahim. In their hands they held a couple of large leaves, like elephant's ears, but their appearance matching the description I had been given of the healing leaves.

"Here, Jacob. Rub the fur side along his skin," Saar said, shoving one in my face. "The wound will heal and close within a few seconds. Then we can get on with what we are supposed to be

doing.”

Nottolu growled with a throaty rumble, getting up onto his feet to face Saar eye to eye. “Careful, Saar. I don’t want you to have to use the other leaves. The wounds you would suffer may be too great.”

Saar stepped back, his head low, breaking eye contact. “I am sorry, Nottolu. I meant no disrespect. I was merely pointing out that our own concerns are secondary to the main objective at hand.”

Coming between the two dragon men, I applied the leaf to Nottolu’s skin. He hissed between his teeth and I don’t know if it was because I had hurt him when I touched the gash across his chest or he was making sure Saar knew he had stepped over some line. Whatever the reason, I sure wouldn’t want to cross Nottolu, not for all the money in the world. Fuck. Callum was in deep shit if he challenged Nottolu’s claim over me. I had to stop it. I’d rather spend the rest of my life with Nottolu knowing that Callum was alive. If he were killed, I’d never forgive myself.

“Does that feel any better?” I said, trying to ease the tension between the two men.

Ibrahim must have felt it, too. “He’ll be all right. Come, Nottolu, we will need your tracking skills soon as we approach the root of the mountain and the last known place where

Aloysius was sighted."

We walked through the jungle for another hour or so. Again, I couldn't tell how long, but once more my feet felt the weight of my burden. I stumbled a few times and Nottolu grabbed me before I fell. He picked me up without effort. His strength was so apparent that I couldn't help but offer him a quivering smile when he got me back onto my feet. If he wanted to, he could snap me in half and I could see why Saar, or anyone else for that matter, wouldn't want to cross him. Not without good reason anyway.

Thing is, was I a good enough reason? Was I so *different* that Saar thought the risk might be worth the reward? I knew he wanted me. The proof was when Nottolu touched me and Saar glared then turned away. Then again, Nottolu did grope me at every opportunity. Even when I helped mark the bushes by pissing on them, he patted me on my arse to remind me I was his.

Was Nottolu testing Saar?

Soon, we came to a clearing, one filled with flowers. Most of them were purple to match the sky.

"We will rest here for a while. Jacob, can you help me search for some dry wood for the fire?" Ibrahim said.

"Sure," I said without hesitation. I was glad for the distraction to tell the truth, both from

Nottolu's touch and Saar's wandering eyes.

"I will hunt us some food," Nottolu stated. "Do you have any particular taste in meat, my Jacob?"

I shook my head. I wasn't fussed with what we ate so long as I got something into my stomach soon. I was famished.

Saar remained silent, but cleared away the flowers in preparation for the fire. Nottolu disappeared into the jungle again, while Ibrahim gestured for me to follow him.

When we were under the cover of the canopy and out of sight of the clearing and anyone else, Ibrahim said, "Saar's a good man, you know."

I picked up some wood off the floor. It was warm and wet. Not what we needed for a fire. I threw it back, then said, "So is my Callum."

Ibrahim snorted. "You must think we're strange. But you have to understand, our society is shrouded in tradition. Nottolu is only doing what he thinks is right."

I picked up another piece of wood. That, too, was wet, covered in fungus and lichen. "Yeah, yeah, I've been through all this. I understand. Still doesn't change the fact that I want to get married to Callum, does it? Having Nottolu claim me isn't what I want at all. Sure, he's a nice guy, but he's just not for me, that's all. I can't help the way I feel."

He picked up some wood. It looked dry, an

observation that was confirmed when he bundled it under his arm. "Then it is simple. You must get your Callum to claim you before tomorrow night or have someone willing to become your fiancé's warrior to fight in his stead."

"Wait a minute." I dropped a length of wood by now. A far cry from the few sticks I had managed to gather. "Are you saying that Callum can appoint someone to fight Nottolu for him?"

Ibrahim snorted again, this time adding a guffaw, too. "I did say that."

"Would *you* fight for Callum so he can claim me?"

Ibrahim had gathered a large bundle of wood. "Only Callum can ask me that. You are already owned by Nottolu under tribal law, and the challenger to that claim must make such arrangements of his own accord." He stopped and looked to the canopy. "But what I think you're really asking is, would I fight him if I were asked."

"Yeah." I had gathered a few more sticks and dead branches. "That's what I'm asking, I suppose."

Ibrahim looked forlorn for a moment, and his eyes reflected a distance far deeper than the eternity of the sky above the jungle. "I would be honoured to be asked and would represent your lover to the best of my ability. However, don't misunderstand me when I say this, but that role

should be given to someone more...single."

It struck me that all this talk about my own problems, I had completely ignored Ibrahim and how he felt, especially seeing as he was partnered, his garland proof of that. "You love your partner very much, don't you?"

He came back to the moment, his stare fixed on me. "She is my soul mate." He paused for a moment, adjusting the wood so it was more comfortable in his arms. "I am nothing without her."

"What's her name, Ibrahim?"

"Giselle," he whispered with lips hardly parted and a deep wanting sigh.

I knew in that moment that Ibrahim couldn't fight for us even if he wanted to. His partner wouldn't allow it. I don't blame her. I don't want Callum to fight. Why should I expect anyone else to?

"I'm in deep trouble, aren't I?"

Ibrahim slapped me on the back, nearly making me drop my bundle of wood. "Come on, let's get this lot back to the clearing. I'm sure Nottolu has caught something quite tasty and Saar is busy trying to look like he's not infatuated with you."

I knew Saar wouldn't fight for me or Callum, he wanted me for himself. That much was obvious even before Ibrahim spoke those words. Although, if Saar did pluck up the courage to fight I'm sure

he wouldn't be so willing to give me up to Callum. He would want me for himself.

I sighed. "I think I'll gather a bit more wood before I head back, if that's okay with you. I need some time alone."

"Sure. Just call out if you need me." Ibrahim disappeared into the gloom of the jungle, heading south.

I don't know how long I stood there and my mind refused to quantify time anyway. My head spun with ways to try and get out of this mess, including running away. I even had the dreadful notion that Devlyn may want Callum for himself, the reason why he didn't mention before that someone could fight in Callum's place.

"Fuck!" I screamed. The noises of the jungle ceased for a brief moment before returning to a level I had become used to and the creatures who made the sounds realised I wasn't any threat.

A bush moved up ahead, from it Saar emerged. "Quite an interesting conversation you just had with Ibrahim, I must say."

My stomach knotted and I found I couldn't move. "What are you doing here, Saar? Shouldn't you be making the fire or something?"

"I came here to tell you that there is another way out of your predicament. One Ibrahim failed to mention."

"There is?" I questioned disbelievingly,

realising I had spoken before I had thought about it. Saar was teasing me, offering me false hope. But why?

“Yes.” He came close to me. My skin crawled as his gaze roved over my body. He even licked his lips to complete the picture of utter creepiness. Great. All I needed right now was another dragon man lusting over me.

“What is it then?” Again my words were more out of reaction. I was so desperate I was prepared to hear him out, even though what he had to tell me wouldn’t be worth anything. I had to get out of this mess by following tribal customs and law.

He cocked an eyebrow. “I would need some...some favour...before I divulged any information, of course. You understand.” His cock was semi-hard, his foreskin retracting to reveal a tear of pre-cum as it emerged from his exposed piss slit. Yep. Just as I thought. Now I knew without a shadow of doubt why he had offered to help me.

This time I chose my words carefully. “What sort of favour?”

He reached down and grabbed my cock, clamping my foreskin and holding me for as long as he dared considering Nottolu could come charging through the trees at any moment. He didn’t need to answer my question, his actions spoke louder than any he could have spoken.

I didn't knock his hand away. Oh fuck. I was going to regret this.

Chapter Eight

“I see that we understand each other,” Saar said, running his finger across my stomach and up toward my chest.

I became dizzy and decided to sit on a large fallen log. The wood was soft, carpeted in moss. “What do I have to do?”

He came and sat next to me, placing his hand onto my knee. I didn’t even look at him. I couldn’t. I shuddered every time I thought of him touching me and felt even worse when he did. Sure, he wasn’t unattractive, not by a long shot. He was just, what’s the word? Creepy. And creepiness, no matter how nicely wrapped was repulsive. I’d rather be with Nottolu, at least he cared for me on some level by showing me concern for my wellbeing. More than Saar ever would, I’d wager.

“I want you to come into my bed tonight once Nottolu has fallen asleep. Once there, you will give yourself willingly to me, doing everything I ask of you.”

Geez, he didn't stand on ceremony, did he? And I'd bet my left nipple he wasn't going to bother with the feet washing and the oiling, either. "Then what? How do I get to be with my Callum without him having to fight Nottolu?"

"Not so fast, Jacob. I will tell you how when you have given me *everything* that I want."

My stomach churned even more. "What if I don't want to do what you tell me? What if what you tell me is against some tribal law or something? I don't want to be in any more trouble than I already am. Why should I give myself to you if my reward might not be worth the risk? Sure, I want Callum with all my heart, but I don't want to do anything that will hurt him or hurt my chances of ever being with him. I'd rather stay with Nottolu knowing he's safe."

Saar got up and walked toward the clearing, the jungle mists swirling about his legs. "That is the chance you will have to take."

"You're a fucking bastard, Saar, you know that?"

He laughed. "I know. And one that'll soon have a nice tight human arse around my cock. And besides, I've got to take every opportunity presented to me, otherwise what sort of a warrior would I be, hmm?"

"I hate you," I said.

But my words weren't heard. He had

disappeared into the undergrowth. I knew with every fibre in my being that spending any time with Saar wouldn't be a good idea. I bet there wasn't any way out of this other than how Ibrahim had said, otherwise he would have mentioned it. Ibrahim had no reason to hide anything from me.

I narrowed my eyes. Yep. Saar was bluffing, no doubt about it. I mean, the only way I could get out of becoming Nottolu's without Callum coming to claim me would be to kill him myself. How was I going to kill a dragon man? Besides, believe it or not, I liked Nottolu.

Gathering up the wood, my head no clearer than what it was before I spoke with Ibrahim or Saar, I headed toward the clearing. The smell of smoke and of meat cooking spurred me on. My stomach rumbled. I was hungry. Perhaps I could come up with something better than being Saar's bitch once my belly was full. I sure hoped so.

We ate in silence.

The meat Nottolu had provided us with was stringy but filled a hole, I supposed. Not that it did me any good. I was no closer to coming up with a solution to the problem Saar presented me than I was an hour ago.

I was unable to look at Saar, let alone sit near him. The tension must have been tangible because he kept his distance, too. I caught him sneering to

himself, probably thinking of how he'd got what he wanted, when I did chance a look in his direction. I did hate him.

"It's funny how we have seen no sighting of Aloysius," Ibrahim stated, coming over to cast a shadow over me. "We are near the foot of the mountain where the air scouts said he had been seen."

Nottolu snorted. "You are right, Ibrahim. Even if he had been captured by a tribe of the Clan of the Dark, he would have left us a clue. A broken branch. A turned leaf. A marking. Anything."

I had totally forgotten about Aloysius and indeed Mr. Barnaby. I was so embroiled in my own problems the reason why we were traipsing through the jungle had left my thoughts.

"Perhaps he has been injured and can't leave us any clues," I said.

They all looked at me.

"Perhaps you are right, Jacob." Nottolu looked toward the sky, sniffing at the air. "We will wait here until the camp arrives. The leaders will advise us of the course of action that should be undertaken."

"Shouldn't we scout around some more?" I asked, getting to my feet.

Ibrahim patted me on my shoulder. "No. The tribe are approaching. Look."

I looked up into the purple sky. A dragon could

be seen in the distance and I assumed it was Devlyn, the flyer for the tribe. My stomach fluttered. My thoughts then went out to Callum. Oh God, I would give up anything and everything to be in his arms right now, no longer concerned with having to be Nottolu's mate or Saar's plaything. But such a wish was futile.

Reality hit when Nottolu grabbed me, bringing me close to his body. I felt his warmth against me, his body press against mine. I was never going to get back with Callum.

Soon many dragon men and women walked through the jungle carrying bundles and pulling carts loaded with provisions and belongings. A few minutes after that, the camp was taking shape. Ibrahim and Saar had gone to greet their tribe while Nottolu and I stayed where we were. I watched as the camp took shape, tent's going up as quick as I had ever seen.

"Our tent will be set up next," he said, his voice suddenly distant.

I couldn't help but be concerned for him, and the next words out of my mouth reiterated how I felt. "You all right, Nottolu?"

He didn't reply straight away. Rather, he watched with an intent I had never seen in his eyes before as Devlyn came to land in the clearing. I saw Callum clamber off his back. The sight of my beautiful man, all naked and handsome, took my

breath away.

"I am fine. But something is not right here. Aloysius would have left us a clue, I know it. I have not seen anything to even indicate anyone has walked these parts within the last week, in dragon or human form."

I turned and clasped my hand into his. The look I got was both disbelief and surprise. "I also think something more is going on here than meets the eye, Nottolu. I really do."

"I agree." Nottolu led me to where his tent was being erected.

I didn't know whether or not to tell him about Saar and his proposal. To have Nottolu charging over and fighting the man on my account would be the last thing I wanted. I mean, I had a feeling there would be plenty of blood spilled on my account in the near future as it was. I swallowed hard. Bloody typical, isn't it? For the first eighteen years of my life I wasn't even kissed by a man, now I have three willing to fight to the death over me.

A man, tall and well built and with hair as dark as Zane's, came into view. He was one of the first in the greeting line last night and a man of importance.

He shook our cocks, and said, "Nottolu, I hear you had no luck locating Aloysius?"

Nottolu nodded and offered a slight bow. "That

is correct, Orin. The only one we encountered was a member of a tribe who was affiliated with the Clan of the Dark...but that was nowhere near the site in question."

Orin cocked an eyebrow. "He was alone when the flyer saw him."

"Then someone or something has got to him before we have and covered their tracks well," Nottolu said.

I cleared my throat. "Um, Orin, sir, aside from the dragon we saw earlier, have there been any other sightings near here or anyone else?" I was thinking out loud more than anything, but Nottolu was right when he said something wasn't right. If they had seen Aloysius and no one else was around other than a stray here and there, what happened to him?

Orin puffed up his chest, but not a move made out of defiance. Rather, I think he accepted my question and considered it for a moment before replying, "No. None. I have been assured of such a thing."

I scratched my chin. "Then what's happened to Aloysius? If he couldn't have been taken, where is he?"

Nottolu snarled. "There is magic at work here, I can feel it." He looked up at the sky once more. "Magic can twist and turn reality. It can make flesh weak and create power out of objects that

seemingly have none. Yes, that is what we are dealing with here. I know it."

I wasn't so sure. I knew that in the eyes of those more primitive, science would look like magic. I wasn't saying that in a nasty way, not at all. It's just that Nottolu and his tribe didn't exactly require technology, did they? Would a microwave oven be considered magic because it could cook their meat without fire? Were they even aware humans used technology? Sure, they knew of our existence, but travelling through the vortex robbed us of everything but our skin. To them we were just another tribe but unable to shift into dragon form.

"Was everyone accounted for yesterday?" I blurted, deciding to do a bit of detective work. Hey, if I was going to be here for a while, I might as well get involved.

Nottolu's brow creased and he released his grip. "Now that you mention it, Saar was gone most of the day. He said he wanted to hunt the Juniper deer alone. He said it was part of one of his trials."

If Saar had something to do with Aloysius's disappearance, then I had to find out exactly what that was. Which meant one thing. I had to go and see him tonight. Oh, fuck. Why is it I had a terrible feeling this was going to get me into trouble? "And you didn't question him?" I asked, trying to

keep the conversation going. Although, I wasn't sure why I would do such a thing other than the fact I had noticed that Nottolu's tent had been erected and the sun was beginning to set. Soon I would be taken, and not by my Callum, either.

Nottolu was taken aback. "I did not. And besides, it would not be my place to do so."

"What are you saying, Jacob?" Orin asked.

I looked at Orin, then at Nottolu. I wasn't sure what I was saying and I hoped I hadn't stepped over any line by doing so. Was I accusing Saar just because he made an advance at me? Even I could see that was stupid. "I'm saying we should consider all the options, is all."

Both men nodded.

"Sage advice, Jacob," Orin said, sliding a glance toward Nottolu. "You will make a good leader of the tribe one day."

"That he will," Nottolu said, relief in his voice. He grabbed me by my arm, his touch gentle. "But such things can wait until tomorrow. For now we will concentrate on more important matters."

I knew what that meant. Nottolu had that look in his eyes again. He wanted me. Geez, he couldn't even wait until after the evening meal. Talk about keen. Then again, I couldn't blame him. I was the same with Callum and Zane. I remember once going without food for the whole day because all three of us decided to spend it in each

other's arms. I sighed. Those were the days.

After we gave our parting bows to Orin, I was led to Nottolu's completed tent. The familiar scent of incense struck me once the door flap was open. The darkness beckoned. I went inside, letting my eyes adjust for a moment before I turned to look at Nottolu.

He held me. "The time for ceremony is over. I want to have you, Jacob."

"Aren't you supposed to wait until tomorrow night before you can do this?" I said, taking a step away from him.

"Tomorrow night I must fight for Callum. He has been claimed and this morning he asked me to fight for him, to be his champion. Our leaders approved. I want to...I would like to have you before I meet my fate. Please, Jacob, I have never felt like this before for anyone. It would mean a lot if you accepted me."

"What?" When did all this happen?" Holy fuck, my Callum had been claimed, too? By whom? Why hadn't I been told? My stomach turned and I heard the blood rush loud in my ears.

"It happened this morning before we set off for our scouting mission and you were still sleeping."

"Who claimed him," I spat.

"Devlyn."

Fucking hell. I knew it.

Chapter Nine

“You knew all day and you didn’t tell me?” But my anger subsided. How wonderful was Nottolu? He had accepted Callum’s call for help without so much as asking for anything in return. Not like Saar. Then again, I couldn’t blame Devlyn for moving in when he did, even though I felt a tinge of betrayal crawl up to niggle at my thoughts. I supposed he was within his rights to do so. Devlyn knew I was with Nottolu now. Why not make an advance? Callum was just as valuable as I was, being a human. I’m sure Devlyn’s status would be improved once he had mated with Callum. That thought made me shudder.

“I didn’t want to concern you,” Nottolu said, knocking me from my thoughts.

I went to him and hugged him, as tight and true as I could. “And you don’t mind fighting for him?”

“I know he means a lot to you. I did it for you.”

“But you could be killed.”

Concern rose up to replace all the other emotions I had felt since I had walked into the tent. When I had calmed, taking in deep breaths, I realised my stomach now turned with butterflies. Then it struck me. He was damn handsome, and not just on a superficial level either. He had a caring and gentle depth I found attractive. I wanted him, too.

I kissed him. His big plump lips pressed against mine and his taste, as strong as the incense, overwhelmed me when I sent in my tongue. I explored him, chasing and teasing and wanting so much more. I kissed him as deep as any other man I had loved in my life and I became hard.

When we parted, Nottolu groaned and picked me up like I was a doll. He placed me onto one of the futons so I was flat on my back, my erect cock slapped onto my stomach. He sat so his legs brushed my hips, feasting his gaze over my body. The next thing I knew, he was oiling his thick, hard cock, readying himself for what I so needed right now.

He licked his lips. "I have waited for this moment all day," he said with a wanting growl, his eyes so intense they reflected a desire as deep as my own.

He ran his fingers over my stomach. I quivered. "Don't worry about the damn courtship, just fuck me real hard," I said with a gasp, my insides

churning and my body writhing in ecstasy. I had to have him now otherwise I would burst.

"You are so beautiful," he said, his voice breaking from his emotion.

When he had finished oiling the rest of his body, he sang with that lovely lilt in his voice in the language I didn't understand but enjoyed so much.

He stole my breath away, but the time for admiration was over. I wanted him. I gasped, then said, "I don't want to have to beg, but I'm not going to last much longer."

Nottolu must have got my message because he grabbed my cock, pulling down on the root of it so my foreskin retracted to reveal my ripe head for him to do with as he pleased. Pre-cum dribbled from my piss slit down onto his fingers.

"I will make you a part of me."

"Take me," I said with a groan so loud I think the whole campsite would have known right there and then that I was about to do the nasty with their lead warrior. I didn't care. Fuck, I wished he'd just hurry up.

Nottolu grabbed me under my arms and picked me up, raising me high above him as he sat himself on the bed. His biceps bulged and I soon found myself facing him, my legs on either side of his massive body. With gentle deliberate movements, he brought me down so my arsehole

came to his cock. I shuddered and my dick pulsed in time with my accelerated heart beat. He smiled. A beautiful sight.

I whimpered, feeling the pressure of him against me. I opened my legs wider and arched my back so my view was of the fabric of the ceiling and not his wonderful, muscle bound and oiled body. He didn't rush. Instead, he continued to let me come down on him at a slow and steady pace, letting my arsehole open of its own accord as I took more and more of him into me. I yelled out my delight.

My lips trembled, and even though the oil made for an easy entry, the sheer size of him and the thickness of his cock inside me made me shudder with both delight and pain. I was overcome. I was his, now and whenever he wanted me. Oh, God.

"You feel good around me," he said with a whisper, although somewhat detached and emotionless, like his lust had taken him over.

I nodded as I squirmed. I'm sure his cock was only half way in, because he still held me, guiding me. His strength was unbelievable. I became filled with his love and I was sure there was plenty more to come. Tears formed in the corner of my eyes and I could do nothing other than cry out while he kept directing me down so I could take him all.

“Ohfarkinghell,” I garbled.

A few moments later, I was resting on his hips, all of his magnificence inside me. Fuck, he sure did make me a part of him. My balls touched the skin where his pubes would have been and he grabbed me around my stomach, keeping me in place. My skin was his and he offered a deep and satisfied grin, making me well aware of my status and my place while he was inside me.

I embraced him while he fucked me. I clawed at him, trying to control my arms that tingled from his attention, unable to get a sure grip around his massive frame. What the fuck was wrong with me? I blinked and tears fell onto my cheeks. I felt hot, my body heated and aroused from his attention. I was numb.

Nottolu kept his smile. I realised he didn't move himself or gyrate his hips as every other man had done who went inside me, soon to be puffing and panting. He kept perfectly still, my arse around his cock more than enough to please him. That was more than enough for me, too.

All I could do was get lost in his eyes as he sang to me and kept his cock rock hard and huge inside my arsehole. I had heard of this kind of thing, I believed they did it during Tantric sex. Well, if this was it, I must admit I could become a fan. I had become a part of him, as his voice and his beautiful gaze pierced my flesh just as much as his

cock did.

His song went on for ages. All the while he rubbed my skin with his big, strong hands, sending me higher and higher into joy. He was gentle, but at the same time exuded the strength of a mighty warrior and the stamina of a god.

Nottolu controlled every move I made, making sure I gave him as much pleasure as he needed. A few times he pulled me close, then once he had tired of that position, pushed me away. I could feel his cock move about inside me when he shifted my weight around while I sat on him. This experience was totally new for me. I had to admit, I'd never been the one who was required to do nothing, my presence enough to satisfy. I was his joy stick. Nothing more. Nothing less.

I wanted him to cum first, however long that might take. Not because I needed him to cum first, but because when he did, I would know that my role in this encounter would be over. Sure, my cock was wet with my own pre-cum, glistening like a jewel in the dim light of the tent, but that didn't change how I felt. I wanted this to end. Perhaps it had something to do with the combination of his song, his touch and being inside me. Perhaps it was because I had realised I didn't really care for him now that I had experienced him on an intimate level. Why should I? Yep, he was going to fight for my Callum, there

was no denying that. But, the truth be told, his love wasn't a two-way street. I was something he owned. I was an object. Yes, I'd give him whatever he needed for as long as he wanted so long as Callum was safe, but my heart just wasn't in it.

He pushed me down onto him again. His cock went in deeper. I yelled again, this time my voice was a mix of pleasure filled with a tremble of pain. I was his fuck tool, but at the same time, I did enjoy being fucked. I was in a dilemma. Could I live the rest of my life like this?

I decided to let myself surrender to the moment. For now. I closed my eyes, imagining it was either Callum or Zane giving me their love. I bit my bottom lip, letting my thoughts take over.

That helped. Soon wave after wave of ecstasy shot through me, radiating from my arsehole. My breathing had become laboured and my body would have fallen off him like it were made of boneless rags had he not been supporting me. I gasped. Nothing mattered anymore. I was close to climax and my mind became a muddle of confusion caused by my rising ecstasy. Sure, Nottolu and I were one, but it was the thought of someone else that got me to where I needed to be. Guilt pricked my thoughts. I wanted Callum and Zane.

He closed his eyes. "Oh, by the Gods," he cried out, gripping me tight and bringing me close to

him.

In that moment I knew he had reached his climax and was filling me with all of his seed. He let go of me, grabbing my cock hard and jerking me off. I lasted about two pumps. I blew, too, painting his dark skin in ribbons of white. Both of us shuddered together. He embraced me tight. Moments later, I was lifted off his cock and placed onto the bed with so much care and attention I'm sure he thought I was made of glass. I was precious to him, after all.

In a strange way, I did miss him as soon as I realised I was no longer a part of him. Then again, perhaps it wasn't him I missed at all, rather the feeling of having someone inside me. I hurt where he had pushed himself so deep. My arse would take ages to get back to normal, stretched beyond belief, I'm sure. But I was happy it was over. There was no doubt he loved me. Pity I couldn't say the same about him.

He came to curl next to me, holding me, bringing his face into the crook of my neck, kissing my skin. I stared at the ceiling, watching the cloth of the tent rise and fall from the wind outside. My stomach quivered and soon the tent was filled with the breathing of his sleep just as much as it was filled with the smell of our sex.

I lay there for the longest time. So long the incense soon overpowered once more and I knew

it was time for me see Saar. I didn't want the bastard to touch me, I didn't even want to be in the same tent as him, but I had to know where Aloysius was, no matter the cost.

I snuck out of the tent, trying hard not to wake Nottolu. I needn't have worried. The man was out for the count. Then again, fucking me for well over an hour would do that to a person. Actually, scratch that. I think we had been joined for at least two hours. Outside it was dark. Holy fuck. No quick one in the bushes with Nottolu then. Thank God I had Zane to grope.

Speaking of Zane, I saw him over by the campfire chatting to Suzy and Devlyn. He glanced at me as I tried to rush by without looking like I was rushing by and therefore draw attention to myself. Did Zane and Suzy know that the man had put in a claim for Callum? I bet they didn't. I shook my head. I had other things to worry about at the moment.

I got to Saar's tent without too much bother. Most of the dragon folk gave me a casual glance and then got on with whatever it was they were doing, which involved eating and drinking from what I could tell.

When I reached out to open the tent's door flap, I was struck by a pebble on my leg. It didn't hurt, but it made me turn real quick toward the direction it had been thrown from. If I didn't

know any better, I'd say someone was trying to get my attention.

I caught a glimpse of a figure lurking in the dark between Saar's tent and another. My curiosity got the better of me and I went to that person. I hoped they had something important to tell me.

Chapter Ten

“Who is it?” I said as loud as I dared.

“Psst, Jakey, we need to talk,” a familiar and welcome voice said.

It was Zane. When he stepped out of the shadows to confirm in my mind that it really was him, all my thoughts and doubts and fears melted away. I missed him just as much as I did Callum.

“Boy, am I glad to see you. What’s up?”

“Not here.” He slid his gaze to look at a few of the dragon men who had gathered around to see what was going on.

Zane grabbed me by my hand and led me away from Saar’s tent. Gee, why was I always being taken somewhere by handsome men? I could get used to this.

When we were away from the direct light of the camp’s fires and any prying eyes or sticky ears, he grabbed me and embraced me tight. “Has Nottolu been treatin’ you okay, mate?”

I nodded. “Yes.”

“Good. There’s been a change of plan.”

I let him go, stepping back a bit so I could take in all of him. The strange warm glow of this realm’s moonlight made his beautiful features soft and welcoming. He was so devilishly handsome. “You’re telling me there’s been a change in plan. Did you know Devlyn’s gone and claimed Callum?”

His glare intensified. “That’s part of the plan.”

“What?”

Zane paused for a moment, as if he had heard someone approach or something. I couldn’t see anyone. Why was he being so cautious? When he continued, he said, “If Cal had just asked someone to fight the Nottolu dude for him so he could claim you, he would have been laughed at. No one here could stand up to him and therefore Nottolu gets you without any fuss.”

“And Devlyn can?”

“Devlyn can ask someone to fight for him, he has enough status to do so.”

I was confused and my mind span. “Wait, let me get this straight. Devlyn claimed Callum so he could appoint a champion to fight Nottolu in his place. But why?”

“So Nottolu will be defeated and you and Cal can get shackled up again, as it should be.”

“You mean kill Nottolu?”

Zane shifted his weight, his cock swaying

hypnotically. "Let's walk together for a bit. It's damn hot near these fires."

"It's damn hot everywhere in this place, Zane."

I walked with him. We went into the jungle, making sure we could still see the camp. I took his hand to reassure him and he seemed to relax. We both sat on a fallen tree, staring into each other's eyes. I touched his cheek and he smiled.

"I've missed you so much, Jakey." He kissed me, brushing his sweet lips across mine. "Cal is worried sick about you. He can't sleep, the poor guy. I've tried to help, but he only wants you."

I swallowed hard. Hearing that didn't make me feel any better. This whole situation was one great big mess and I was neck deep in it. "I've missed all of you, too...but I'm not having anyone killed on my account. I don't care who it is. I'd rather stay with Nottolu knowing everyone is all right than live with that sort of guilt."

Zane nodded. "We knew you'd say that. So that's why Devlyn has appointed someone who'll make sure Nottolu backs away from his claim. It's the only way we can do this so it keeps in with their tribal laws and ensures you and Cal can be together."

"You mean Nottolu has the option of fighting or not?"

"You betcha."

"But who would strike that much fear into him

so he wouldn't fight?" I ran my fingers through Zane's hair, raking his fringe away from his eyes. "The next best warrior that I know of was Saar, and he's not interested in fighting Nottolu. He told me himself. I can't blame Saar really. I've been with Nottolu, Zane. I know he's not afraid of anything and I know everyone else is afraid of him. Who in their right mind would even fight such a man? Actually, scratch that. Who in their right mind thinks they're stronger than Nottolu to fight in Devlyn's stead anyway?"

Zane smiled, coming to lay ravishing kisses all over me. "Aloysius."

I laughed. "Aren't you forgetting one small detail? *We can't find him.* And besides, *if* we find Aloysius in time and *if* Nottolu backs down, who's to stop Devlyn from following through with his claim and taking Callum from me?"

"Nottolu *will* back down. No one will fight Aloysius for the very same reasons you just gave me about Nottolu. And, if all goes to plan, Devlyn *will* claim Cal."

"Then what's the point of all this then? Aside from the fact it all hinges on finding Aloysius, I've lost Callum either way."

Zane kissed me again, sending in his warm, wet tongue. For a long moment I became immersed in his affection, momentarily forgetting the thread of the conversation. I groaned. He held me and I

reciprocated.

When he parted, he said, "And that's where you come in, Jakey."

"Oh, let me guess. I step in and claim Callum for myself, right?"

"Spot on." Zane reached down and rubbed me along my stomach, sending shivers of delight up my spine. "And Devlyn will concede when you do so. He doesn't want to fight you, he's a mate."

"So he says."

"It's all good, Jakey. Trust me."

I trusted him. That was never in question. It's just that the plan was complicated and I could see more than one part of it falling to pieces. "I don't doubt you at all. It's just that...it's just—"

"Don't worry about trying to find Aloysius. Devlyn said he spotted him about a kilometre from here near some caves. He hasn't told the tribe and we're to go get him before anyone realises, okay?"

A terrible thought struck me, one that hit hard. "I'm supposed to be with Nottolu. What if he wakes up and finds out I'm not in camp?"

Zane brought his leg over mine, snuggling in as close as he could get. I felt his breath tickle my face and his touch was more than welcome. "Suzz's got that covered. She'll be watching his tent and when he comes out, she'll tell him you've been given flying scout duty with Devlyn. Nottolu

won't question that."

"You've got this all organised, haven't you?"

Zane offered me one of his beautiful smiles. I melted. "I've got it so organised Cal said to give you a present from him."

"He did?" I understood why Callum couldn't be here now. We weren't to be seen together. Not until all this *claim* nonsense was dealt with anyway. Geez, I wished that would be sooner rather than later. "What is it?"

"I'm to give you a good time...from him, of course. Now, you gonna fuck me before we get goin'? I need some cock, real bad."

My stomach fluttered with those delicious butterflies I suffered from when I got horny for the men I loved. "Hell yeah, I'd do anything for Callum, you know that." I smiled, in the cheekiest way I could manage.

"Good. I'd do anything for him, too. But so you know, I'd do anything for you as well, Jakey. In fact, I need you so bad right now."

Those words were music to my ears, more beautiful than anything Nottolu could have sang. But before I could say another word, Zane kissed me, muffling any more conversation. I didn't care. I wanted him, too.

We kissed and kissed and with each passing second I got harder and harder and more aroused. While I swam in his affection and relished his

hands all over my body, I realised how much he thought of me, how caring and sensitive he really was. Fuck he was sweet. I mean, my arse hadn't recovered from Nottolu's massive cock and Zane, knowing that, offered to lay down for me. I couldn't see Nottolu doing that. If Callum were here right now, this would be perfect. Still, this was the next best thing.

Zane parted his kiss, his lips wet with our saliva. He then lay down onto the soft moss that peppered the log, opening his legs for me. "Give it to me, Jakey. Fuck me like I'm your bitch."

I shuffled on my knees so I was between his legs. The sight of his arousal drove me on, both physically and emotionally. I retracted my foreskin. "Spit on it," I said as I thrust my hips forward, giving him the chance to wet my erection.

"I'll do better than that."

Zane pushed himself up with his elbows so he could get to my cock easier. I gasped when he grabbed me. He did spit, but he also brought his mouth around my length, too. Soon, he was sucking and slurping and making all sorts of other delicious noises as he blew me. His tongue explored all of my skin, including my frenulum. I really did miss him.

"Get off me if you want me to last much longer," I said with a gasp, pushing his head away

from my cock.

He came away with a wet, slurp. My cock dripped with his saliva, and my God, what a fantastic sight that was. "Now get on with it," he said.

I didn't need to be told twice. I pushed him down and he opened his legs as wide as he could, exposing his beautiful arsehole for me to enjoy.

A split second later, I pushed my rock hard cock into him. He let out a whimper as I sunk myself deeper and deeper into his body. He felt fantastic around me, letting his sphincter muscles relax so I could slip in nice and quick.

"Oh, Zane," I said with a whine.

When I was ball deep inside him, he began constricting and relaxing his muscles, sending shivers of pleasure through my cock and up into my body. I took that as a signal to begin my rhythm. The sound of my cock moving in and out of him tickled my ears and the sight of him pleasuring himself as I worked added to my joy.

"You don't play fair...you've fucked me too good. I'm so gonna blow."

I didn't slow my pace. In fact, I pumped harder, making sure I pushed myself in as deep as I could go. Zane's cheeks had flushed and his legs were wrapped around the small of my back. He was writhing in pleasure, jacking himself off faster and faster. To see him enjoy himself so much was a

delight for me, too. I may have been one with Nottolu tonight, but Zane and I were beyond that. We were *equal*. Nottolu would never understand that I needed that equality in a relationship. If I couldn't have equality, how could I become a part of a whole that encompassed my mind and my soul as well as my body? Nottolu would always take control, even if his intentions were good. That's not what I wanted at all. I wanted what I had with Zane and Callum. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Zane blew his load, ribbons of white exploded out of his cock to cover his stomach and chest. I withdrew from inside him. I wanted to add my cum to his. Much to my delight, when I did blow, some of my sperm found his face and lips. I smiled.

I then licked our love off his heated skin.

Chapter Eleven

When I had finished and I had kissed and licked him as much as I could, taking in all of our taste from all over his skin, I helped him up off the log. I don't know how much time we had until dawn, but I think if we were to have any chance of finding Aloysius, we'd better get a move on.

I grabbed Zane's hand and together we walked as fast as we could through the jungle in a north-westerly direction. I hoped he knew where we were going, because I certainly didn't. What did he say? About a kilometre from here. How fast could we travel that distance through darkened jungle? I knew it wouldn't be easy, the moonlight no longer filtered through the canopy now that we were deeper inside the trees.

"Wouldn't it seem funny to the tribe that Devlyn claimed Callum seeing as he's not interested in men? I mean, you know yourself how he was taken with Suzy. Right up until you put him in his place, that is."

Zane didn't seem to be as concerned as I was, and his reply confirmed my suspicion. "S'pose someone might get suspicious. Devlyn reckons stuff like this happens all the time, especially amongst the warriors as they fight each other for status in the tribe. And Cal would certainly add status to whoever claimed him, that's for sure."

I knew exactly what he was talking about. "You're right. I'm a bit of a prize myself. You're lucky you've got that garland, otherwise you'd be beating off dragon folk left, right and centre, too. I really feel like I'm a piece of meat or some object and I'm getting sick of it. Nottolu cares for me, but in the end I'm just his cock holder, one who he can parade around the tribe."

"But you're a damn fuckin' fine piece of meat," he said with a chuckle, roving his gaze over my body. "And you can hold my cock any day of the week."

"You aren't helping." But I laughed, too. Zane sure had a way of making me feel better about everything, in his own special way, of course. God, I loved him.

Our pace slowed. Finding our way wasn't as difficult as I first thought. There was a natural light in the depths of the trees. The sight amazed me. I believed it was made by some insect or something that feasted on the moss, because every tree and bush was highlighted. It was surreal.

“Hey, look over there,” Zane said, breaking a comfortable silence we had shared while we walked hand in hand through the jungle.

Sure enough, where he had pointed, an orange light danced amongst the undergrowth. I knew it wasn’t an artificial light, it was too intense for a torch or a lantern. To me it looked like it was created by something about the size of a bat. Then again, I’d never seen a bat move like that, let alone glow.

“What is it?” I asked.

The light moved toward us.

Zane and I stepped so we were closer together. Whatever the light was, it was coming at us fast. Before I could draw in my breath, it was upon us. Both of us bathed in its orange glow.

From that glow a figure came into existence, like the air had been branded. After the light had subsided, the result was astonishing. We were confronted by a woman, full size and as real as anything. She reached out her hand and shook our cocks in turn. Thank God she didn’t pinch my foreskin. I think I would have died on the spot if anyone else wanted to claim me.

I have to say, for a female, she was stunning. She was blonde, naked, hairless, including having no pubic hair just like us, and held a smile that would melt butter at a hundred paces, I’m sure.

“I’m the nymph, Persona, and aren’t you two

the handsome ones?" she said, her voice like the breath of the trees, profound and ancient.

Zane was the first to speak. Typical. I bet he'd come up with some crack about how he'd love to see her wrapped around his cock. But you know, what he did say surprised me.

"So, who are you when you're at home?"

She tilted her head, looking at us with curiosity. "You're not dragon Lords, are you?"

"No," I said. "And you didn't answer my friend's question, either."

"Forgive me, I'm the Mistress of the Wooded Lands and I'm at your service." She walked around, examining us with deep intent, her eyes widening. "I haven't seen the likes of you in these parts before."

"We're human," Zane said. He squeezed my hand tighter. I take it from that he wasn't interested in her. I couldn't blame him. I couldn't put my finger on it, but there was something about her I didn't like and it had nothing to do with my orientation. "Say, do you know where the caves are from here? We've got to find...some dude."

She smiled, one I didn't think was filled with joy. "The only person I know of in the caves is Aloysius and he's being held captive."

"That's him." I said, finding myself become quite excited by the mention of his name. "Where

are the caves? Can you take us to him?"

She stepped away from us, the look in her eyes like that of Saar and Nottolu and every other who wanted for me. "Would such a service be free?"

My heart sank. "What do you want from us?"

Her lips formed a smile, one filled with lust. "You both confuse me. I see you are together, yet only one of you has a garland. Why is that so?"

Zane said, "I'm with someone else, too. I had to claim her before any other dude got his dick in. But me and Jakey, we're tight, don't you worry about that."

I couldn't help but admire him. Here he was defending me again. And, if the truth be known, he did a damn sight better job than Nottolu would have done. Nottolu would have used his fists instead of his head, I'm sure.

"I so love you, Zane," I said, pecking him on his cheek.

"I know."

Her eyes lit up brighter than the glowing form she was before she became a woman. "Ah, yes. Dragon law. How boring. It never allows for any imagination or free spirit. Tell me, would you like to know the price of my help, hmm?"

Perhaps I was seeing things differently now, but I had a feeling her lust wasn't what I first thought it was. She didn't make any advance when she greeted us, yet she eyed us like we were

prized objects. What was going on here?

"You'd better tell us or we'll leave and go find Aloysius by ourselves," Zane snapped, his patience getting thin.

She nodded. "Very well, I'll tell you. I wouldn't want you wandering off into the jungle without a guide. Two handsome things like you could find yourselves in all sorts of bother, couldn't you?" She came closer, her lips curled with desire. "I find it attractive that two young men would want for each other. It's so fascinating I can't quite put it into words." She came even closer, her stare meeting mine. "Show me how you make love. I want to see the affection you share for each other, up close and as your witness."

I was dumbfounded.

Zane didn't seem to be as taken aback as I was. "Let me get this straight, you want us to fuck each other for your entertainment?"

"Oh, yes," she said, again her voice as ageless as the jungle.

Before I could respond, because I was taken aback, Zane said, "Cool. And then you'll help us, right?"

She nodded, licking her lips. "Of course. I'm a lady of my word."

Well, I now knew the focus of her lust. But my mind filled with another concern. "Who kidnapped Aloysius, Persona?"

"It's more complicated than that. I'm sure Aloysius will explain when we get him out of the caves, but for now, just know he's being held by a tribe of the Clan of the Dark."

Great. Not exactly what I wanted to hear. "So how were we supposed to get him out of there?" I added.

"There are many ways," she said, her impatience clear in her voice. I think I had reached the level of her tolerance. "But first you will complete our arrangement."

She wanted a show and if we were to get any more out of her, we would have to provide it. Fine with me, I supposed. So long as I was with my Zane I didn't care who watched.

"Okay, we agree. Don't we, Zane?"

His attention was directed at me. He had that gorgeous look in his eyes, one of both lust and love and one where I was the centre of his universe. I took his other hand.

That was the only signal he needed. He grabbed me by my hips and pulled me close. I gasped.

"This time, Jakey, it's nice and slow. I wanna taste you and I wanna make sure you give me heaps."

"Oh, fuck," I said.

Three times in one night. How lucky was I?

Chapter Twelve

Zane kissed me. His tongue explored my mouth and his beautiful taste ignited my taste buds. I moaned some more. I embraced him tight, taking in everything he offered, his closeness, his touch, his affection. I could feel myself get hard. I could also feel he was hard as well, his erection pressed against my stomach.

His hands raked my back. Seemed our earlier encounter hadn't satiated all of his desire. A good thing, too. I'd heard of getting out of a sticky situation, but I'd never heard of using lovemaking as a means to an end before. How wonderful.

I was hot from our affection, asphyxiated by his love. I loved it. Now that we had started, I didn't want it to end. His touch was perfect, his kisses strong yet subtle and sweet at the same time. I closed my eyes, letting him take me to the full height of my ecstasy.

In a brief moment, I stole a glance toward the nymph. She was touching herself, her glare intent

on us. In that moment, I felt uncomfortable by her stare. That was until Zane broke his kiss and got down onto his knees, licking and kissing my chest and stomach on the way down. I delighted in the fact he paid such wonderful attention to me, our love not a fit of passion like it was before. That's not to say we lacked passion this time, far from it. We had plenty. But now I could savour it.

I grabbed him by his hair, massaging my fingers along his scalp. He pulled at my cock, retracting my foreskin and taking in my swollen and wet with pre-cum head into his mouth. The sight of his lips moving across my length made me shudder. I was as hard as I could be, more than a mouthful for Zane. Not that he minded. He tried his best to take me all in, offering gagging and slurping noises while he blew me, his reward my groans and quivering stomach.

"Oh, so excellent," said the nymph.

I agreed with her. Zane was fantastic. I had to admit I quite enjoyed being watched. No longer did I feel embarrassed or like I had to censor what I did. I found her gaze upon us quite liberating in a funny sort of way. It proved beyond doubt that I loved Zane and would do anything for him.

"I want to suck you off now," I growled, pulling him off me.

My cock slipped out of his mouth with a slurp. His lips wet from his work. He smiled, his sexy

eyes looked up at me. My God, he was hot. When I looked into his beautiful eyes, my heart fluttered. Yep. I loved him.

“Do it, Jakey. I’m ready for you.” He played with himself while he rose, his cock such a delicious sight.

His huge head, filled with blood and ready for my attention was no longer protected by his foreskin. He had retracted it, ready for me. On the way down I licked him, too. Only seemed fair to return the favour. I concentrated my efforts around his pierced nipples before I moved down to taste the skin where his garland had been drawn.

Because he had been naked for a day, exposed to all the elements and heat, he tasted wonderful. So manly. So strong and tangy and earthy all at the same time. I grabbed his cock, jacking him off so I could milk as much pre-cum out of him as I could before I blew him.

“This is just perfect,” Persona stated.

I took Zane into my mouth. I pushed my lips over his length, going as deep as I dared without gagging. I didn’t want to throw up with someone watching, that’s for sure.

Zane’s stomach quivered like it always did when I sucked on him. He held my head, too. His touch helped guide me, let me know when I was doing everything right. When he released

pressure, I was doing good. When he scrunched up my hair and pulled, I knew he wanted me to go a little faster or suck a little harder. We had a great communication and the result benefited us both.

“Jakey,” he said with a gasp. “Oh, fuckin’ hell, Jakey, can I have you? Can I fuck you real good?”

I came away from him, his cock glistened with my attention. A clear droplet of pre-cum oozed out of his piss slit. What a magnificent sight. I gathered it up with my tongue, tasted his goodness.

“Yes,” I said.

He helped me to my feet, kissing me some more, lavishing his affection all over my heated lips. Zane then turned me around so my buttocks touched his erection. I held the nearest tree for balance. But he didn’t pierce me. Not yet. Instead he rubbed my back, moving his warm hands down to part my arse cheeks so he could grope me. I moaned when he ran his fingers down to my arsehole, preparing me for his loving.

“Excellent...just excellent,” the nymph said when Zane pressed his cock against my warmth.

I let out a moan. I opened my legs, hopefully making his entry easy.

Zane seemed to understand and, like the true gentleman he was, made sure he didn’t rush. He slid in his cock nice and slow, my arse opening up around him, sending twinges of pain through me.

I let out a little yelp, but calmed when waves of pleasure soon overtook any hurt. My stomach trembled and my mind swam with delight. I loved being filled with Zane's cock.

He leaned over, and whispered into my ear, "Let me know if I hurt you too much, okay, Jakey?"

I nodded and closed my eyes. He pushed himself in deeper and deeper and the feeling of being consumed by his love added to every sensation that clawed at my emotions. He felt magnificent. What's more, to help me enjoy him even more, he moved himself in and out, gaining a rhythm. The effect was perfect. My asshole took in more and more and when our balls touched I knew I had all of him.

"You're wonderful," I said with a deep satisfied sigh.

Zane kissed the back of my neck and ears. He caressed my chest and stomach, holding me tight, his touch sensational. We made *love*. That's the only word I can use to describe what he did to me and how I felt.

Sure, Nottolu went inside me, too, but that's *all* he had achieved. Zane didn't use me for anything other than to express his love for me. We were complete and again, equal.

Time seemed irrelevant. Zane kept up his movement all over my body. We were one, both of

us writhing, panting and lavishing our affection on each other. I had twisted my neck a while ago so I could accept his tongue into my mouth like I accepted his cock into my body. I wanted all of him and he was willing to give it.

What seemed an eternity later, Zane shuddered, gripped me tight around my stomach and let out a cry. I could feel wave upon wave of his release as his whole body gave me what I wanted.

"I'm going to cum soon, too, Zane!"

He slipped his cock out of my warmth and came around so he could get back down onto his knees in front of me. I was breathless from our lovemaking, but he hadn't finished. Not until I filled his mouth with my cum, anyway.

The nymph came into my view. Her face had softened to a satisfied glow. "You have both been wonderful."

"It's not over yet," I said, my muscles tensed. I was about to reach the point of no return.

Yep. I blew. Zane took all of me, every drop. When I had released all I could, he opened his mouth to show me my efforts. He hadn't swallowed. I had a feeling he wouldn't. He liked to snowball. I liked it, too. Geez, we were going to show her the depth of our feelings, that's for sure. Nothing said love to a man more than someone else willing to taste his cum. Nothing.

He got up so he could kiss me. Moments later,

the taste of myself saturated my tastebuds. I rolled my tongue around his, taking from him what I had given him. My cum was hot and thick in my mouth and some dribbled over my lips to cover my chin. He licked it all off me.

Fuck, I loved him so much. I grabbed him, pulling him closer to me, our cocks touching. I opened my mouth wider and for the longest time we shared the deepest kiss two people ever could. My head spun again and this time my knees went weak. I fell in his arms, relying on his strength to hold me up. He was my support as well as my perfect lover.

I know I've already said it, but this was love. Pure and simple. Nothing two men could share compared to this. He had taken my cum and unselfishly he offered it back to me so I could taste myself mixed in with his flavour. We had shared each other on a deep and intimate level. Nottolu would never be like this—well, not that I was aware of with how I had experienced him so far anyway.

"I've never seen anything like this before," Persona said. "I feel so honoured. Thank you."

But Zane and I kept on with our passionate embrace. If the urgency of rescuing Aloysius didn't weigh down on me, I would have held Zane all night. In fact, after our bodies had cooled I would have let him take me again. He made me

that horny.

Finally, we parted. I licked my lips, savouring our taste.

“Take my hand,” he said with a wink and a beautiful satisfied smile.

I slipped my hand into his, warm and welcome. “Lead on, Persona. We’ve got a dragon to rescue.”

She bowed. “Again, I don’t know how I can thank you enough. What you have shown me has pleased me almost beyond words. I’m humbled by the love you have between you. Now, follow me.”

I looked at Zane, deep into his eyes. My love was reflected back at me. He was so handsome. Fuck, I was one lucky guy to have him in my moment of need, especially when my poor Callum couldn’t share what we had given each other.

“I love you, Jakey. Promise me you’ll still need me even when you and Cal get married.”

I squeezed his hand. I can’t believe he would be worried by such a thing. Callum and I had made it clear how we felt. Heck, we’d both marry Zane if we could. “I couldn’t imagine my life without you. And, Zane, Callum will back me up on that, too, no worries at all.”

“Cool. Now I just gotta work on Suzz to come and join in the fun.”

I smiled. “Actually, after having Persona watch us just then, I don’t think it would worry me having Suzy there in our bed. Weird, hey? I don’t

think I'd have ever said that before tonight." I squeezed his hand once more. "Now, let's go get Aloysius?"

"Sure thing."

We walked behind the nymph for about an hour, the jungle getting thinner and thinner until we came out into a clearing. In front of us was the foot of the mountain and a campsite nestled between two large outcrops of rock. I take it the camp was where Aloysius was being held.

"We're here," Persona said. "Now get down. I have a plan, but it'll need to be timed perfectly. Aloysius is being held away from the camp in the caves over there."

She pointed to the right, away from the main campsite. There I saw numerous caves. One or two guards milled about by the largest cave.

"What'cha gonna do?" Zane said, crouching down behind a large boulder.

She looked at us. "I'm going to distract the guards at the cave while you two go in and get Aloysius out. All right?"

"How are you going to do that?" I blurted, not really thinking.

I missed the point of how attractive women could be to men, especially ones as naked as the day they were born and as beautiful as Persona.

Zane nudged me. "She's goin' to flash her tits around a bit, hey?"

“Oh.” I smiled, now getting it. Sometimes being gay did have its disadvantages. But only sometimes.

She stood up. “Dragon men are so single minded and so dull. Just watch and make your move when they all follow me like lambs.” And with that she trotted off, wiggling her hips. Zane watched her with intent.

Seconds later, she was near the cave closest to us. I heard a wolf whistle. Yep. She had their attention.

Chapter Thirteen

“S’pose we watch and wait now.” Zane said, bringing his arm around my shoulder.

“Yeah.” I moved in closer to him. “And she’s right, you know.”

“What’cha mean?”

“Dragon men are single minded.”

“You talkin’ about that Nottolu dude?”

I nodded. “Yeah. He treated me nice, washed me and oiled me and made me as comfortable as possible, but not once did he ask me what I wanted. Basically, he wanted to fuck me and that was that. Claim me proper, if you know what I mean.”

Zane cocked an eyebrow. “So was he any good?”

“I suppose so. He didn’t fuck me how you and Callum do, that’s for sure. There was no emotional connection—well, not how we have it, anyway. I just felt like I was his fuck tool. Not a bad thing, but not something I could live with every day.”

Zane snorted in agreement. He lifted his gaze away from me for a moment. "Say, looks like the nymph chick done what she said she'd do. Look."

Sure enough, three men had been drawn away from the entrance of the cave. The opening was clear.

"Now's our chance," I said.

We sprung to action. Zane grabbed my hand and together we sprinted to the mouth of the cave. I don't know if anyone saw us, and I really didn't care at this point. I wanted to get inside, if only to catch a glimpse of Aloysius. Would he be in human form?

The cave was dark like Nottolu's tent, only it lacked the smell of incense. Instead, it smelt damp and earthy. I had to stop for a moment until my eyes adjusted to the gloom, because the only light offered was from a couple of torches on the walls.

I gasped when I noticed a large cage in the centre of the cave. In the cage, shackled and huddled, there was a man.

"Aloysius?" I called out.

The movement of the shackles rang in my ears. I went up to the cage, testing the steel for movement. Nothing. The bars were solid. We needed the key.

Zane must have read my mind. He was searching the cave, rummaging through crates and boxes to the right of the cage, but doing so as quiet

as he could.

The man stood up. He was naked – as was to be expected – and my god, he was handsome, but also familiar. Actually, it was like I was looking in the mirror, looking at myself, only I'd say the man was in his thirties in human years. What struck me besides him resembling me in an uncanny way was that his eyes sparkled with the hope of eternity, just how I remembered. The man *was* Aloysius. But he was also me. I couldn't help but stare at him. My gaze wandered over the rest of what he had to offer.

Aloysius was well hung, with a foreskin that puckered beautifully just like mine. He had a body that wasn't too muscular or too thin, either. Again, just like mine. He had red hair and thick eyebrows in the same colour and, much to my surprise, no garland. Fuck. Was I looking at an older me?

"Jacob!" Aloysius said. "About time you got here."

"Are you okay...and what am I looking at?" I questioned, my mind intoxicated with so many questions, none of which I had answers to. I didn't mean to sound rude, not to Aloysius. But geez, what *was* going on here?

Aloysius came closer to the bars. I noticed the shackles glowed with a magic similar to the ring I had given Callum. Were they what stopped him from shifting into dragon form and busting out of

the cage? Because I thought it weird Aloysius hadn't done so. Or were the bars made of some super solid alloy, one which was dragon proof? Then again, more important I suppose, was why Aloysius looked like me. See? So many thoughts that had so many questions attached to them. My head ached.

"You are looking at your kin, that's what," Aloysius said without so much as batting an eyelash, like what he said was common knowledge and that I should know what he was talking about. I didn't.

My mouth opened. What the fuck did me being his kin mean? I stood there. Frozen.

"I found it," Zane declared, knocking me from my many thoughts. He held the key up like it was a trophy he had just won in a race or something. "Now, let's get Ali out of here so we don't get the shit kicked out of us by any angry dragon dudes." From his next words I'd say he hadn't noticed the similarity between Aloysius and myself until now. "Holy fuck, Jakey, Ali looks like you!"

"I know," I said, still bemused.

Aloysius said, "I don't mean to state the obvious here, but don't you think you should get me out of here, hmm? Do you know how terribly I've been missing Mr. Barnaby's dinners and your cooked chips, Zane?"

"I'll get you out of there quick smart." Zane

inserted the key into the lock, seemingly unperturbed by this whole turn of events. He was a better man than me, that's for sure.

Seconds later, and with a clang and grind of metal on metal, Aloysius was free. The shackles came away, too, with the same key. After he had rubbed his ankles and wrists, Aloysius hugged us both and greeted us with a cock shake and kiss on the earlobe.

"I'm so glad to be out of there, let me tell you. I miss Mr. Barnaby's storeroom where it's snug and filled with food. In fact, I want to go to the human realm now. I'm tired of all the tribal mentality of this place, I really am. I'm so over it, let me tell you."

"You are?" Was that why Aloysius came to our realm? Perhaps he didn't want to be the tribe's leader anymore and they kidnapped him as a result. I bet Nottolu was involved. I knew there was something funny when he claimed me so quick. I bet he wanted the status of being with a lookalike of their leader. My stomach knotted. I had a feeling deep down that there was more to this than I first thought. Then again, there always was, wasn't there?

Before Aloysius could comment, Zane let out a laugh with one of his cheeky and dirty smiles, also unable to keep his eyes off Aloysius. "Man, do you know how cool this is having two Jakey's to stare

at all day. You're twins, I swear. Fuck, I'd be so turned on having both of your cocks in my mouth. Never done it with twins before and it's givin' me a semi just thinking about it. It's the stuff of my porn dreams, you know."

I let out a guffaw. "Trust you to think of something like that, Zane. And besides, I thought you were already in your dreams, seeing as this realm is filled with so many naked folk and we've only been here a day and you've managed to get your end wet on more than one occasion." I wasn't really upset with him. He was right. Sex with him would be hot with Aloysius by my side. No wait. That was wrong to think like that, wasn't it? Besides, I was more curious as to why a dragon in human form would look like me in the first place. I didn't think my Mum had any more kids than me. So how was this possible?

"Now now, Jacob, don't be too hard on him. There *are* two of you. I'm just a dragon as well."

"Now I'm totally confused," I added.

"Me, too," Zane said.

Aloysius walked out of the cave. "Follow me. Now is not the time to be discussing such matters."

"I suppose you're right," I said.

"Yeah, this place gives me the creeps," Zane said. Sure enough, he did have a semi erection, a droplet of pre-cum caught the torchlight. I smiled.

Zane was a dirty dog, but an absolutely adorable one. I grabbed his hand.

We followed Aloysius out of the cave, treading carefully so as not to make any noise. When we were clear of the lights and any wandering eyes of the enemy camp, he turned to me and grabbed me and Zane by our hands. His touch was warm and welcome, like slipping on a familiar pair of jeans straight from the dryer.

When in the jungle proper, Persona joined us. She bowed to Aloysius and in return he lifted up his cock like Devlyn did to Suzy, showing her his testicles. She smiled. Was Aloysius interested in Persona? Or was that how all dragon men greeted women?

"I'm glad you're back with us, my Lord," she said.

Aloysius chuckled. "I think Jacob and Zane need to know a few things before we proceed with our plan, my dear."

She turned to us. The smile kept on her face. I bet she was imagining me and Zane doing it with each other. "There are many things going on here in this realm, and trust me when I say this, everything that we have been planning and everything that you are about to discover has been done to prevent war—" She cut herself off, a snap of a twig had caught all of our attentions.

A few agonising moments later, Aloysius said,

"It's all right. It was a Juniper deer. Nothing to worry about. But we'd better not hang around. Let's make our way back to the camp of the Tribe of the Mountain Cradle, okay?"

Again we walked. Again my mind filled with questions. This time I shook my head, trying to get them out of my head. Until I knew what was going on, there was no point in conjecture. I had to wait until Aloysius and Persona were good and ready to tell us.

"Jacob, you are to be the new leader of the Clan of the Light and all the tribes that fall under its umbrella," she continued. "The time is right for such a move to be made. We feel it will bring stability to the realm."

I stopped, unable to contain myself any more. "Wait a minute. I'm not going one more step until I'm given some answers. I think I've been rather patient. Tell me, Aloysius, what the fuck's going on here?"

"I'm with Jakey. How can he be a leader of dragon dudes when he's not a dragon? And what about Cal? He's been taken away from us. Or even Mister B. He's missing, you know."

Aloysius said, "There will be a time for everything, my Zane." He turned and faced me, his stare meeting mine. "Jacob, I wouldn't have done any of this if I knew you didn't have it in you. You must understand that. Do you remember

the time when you dealt with the eternal and I said you'd understand how I could know what I knew even though time had been changed and we hadn't met?"

"Yes." I swallowed hard. The memory of Thomas and the sacrifice he made flooded back into my thoughts.

"Well, today is that day. You are to be the leader, the King if you will, of this realm. I will show you how."

I think the jungle spun around me. I knew Zane grabbed me, stopping me from falling. Persona helped, too. I held my head, pinching the bridge of my nose.

"A king?" I asked, my voice as strong as it could ever be considering I felt as though the wind had been knocked out of my lungs. How was I going to be a king, especially of dragons? I was only human. A weak and silly and naked human at that. I mean, what was I going to do? Clamp all their foreskins and flash my testicles to claim them all? Hardly.

"Jacob, we are linked by time and realm and blood. I am your brother. It is your right to take what is yours. My time is over. Now it is all up to you."

Chapter Fourteen

But I don't have a...a brother," I said with an astounded gasp. Yet, in a strange way, I knew the words he spoke were true. Aloysius had always been familiar to me, even when in dragon form. We had a connection, one that reached beyond the barriers of time and place.

Aloysius held me by my shoulders. I knew in that moment what he was going to say next would be the most profound I had ever heard in my life. I was right.

"Many years ago your mother was being chased by an eternal. She, through the distortion of time the eternal creates when it chooses a victim, discovered the ring I had created. She transported here, just as you did. Unfortunately, upon her arrival she was claimed. Before others could challenge the claim and return her to the human realm, an ancient and powerful dragon King impregnated her. I am the result of that consummation, as are you."

I moved my mouth. No sound eventuated. Even Zane stood silent. I hadn't realised it, but we were near the fallen tree on the edge of the clearing where Zane and me first made love in this realm. The camp was silent, the fires nothing but glowing embers. It must be late. I had to admit, I felt tired.

"How does an eternal feed from a woman? I mean, I thought they fed by cock-docking with their victims," I questioned.

"There are many methods they can employ, trust me. Where there is a will, there is a way. Suffice it to say, blood and saliva can transfer time energy just as efficient as semen."

I felt for my mum in that moment. I knew what she had gone through. The horror. The feedings. I began to sweat, my skin clammy. I swallowed hard. My mum was a hero if she could outwit an eternal. I only survived because Thomas sacrificed himself.

"So no fucker is safe then," Zane said, knocking me out of my reverie. "And I was contemplating getting circumcised, especially after what Jakey has told us about the eternals. The bastards."

I turned to Zane. "Don't you dare get cut. I love all of you just as you are. And besides, the eternal only has to be in the body of an uncut dude to still dock with you."

"Yeah. I wasn't going to do it anyways. I love

my skin, too. Just thinking out loud, is all."

Aloysius said, "Thinking out loud is fine with me. But my brother is correct. An eternal will find any way necessary to feed off a human. That is why they are so dangerous."

A lone figure emerging from the tents caught my attention. It was Devlyn.

"Thank the Gods you're all right, my Lord Aloysius." He shook Aloysius's cock and bowed low once they had embraced. The respect and warmth they felt for each other was something to be admired.

"I am safe, thanks to my friends and my brother."

Devlyn's glanced at me. "So he knows?"

Persona came forward, quiet up until now. "He knows. But I don't think he understands just yet."

"You got that right," I said.

"I'm guessing he doesn't fully understand the ramifications of being related to a dragon." Devlyn smiled at me before returning his attention back to Aloysius. I didn't say a word. He continued. "Does he know that dragon sperm can lay dormant within a female for years? Does he know that because of that dormancy, when his human father impregnated his mother years later, his DNA mingled with the dragons? He is one-third dragon, but a dragon nonetheless."

"We have not explained all yet as Persona has

said,” Aloysius said. “And I think that there is a matter of a claim that needs to be sorted out before we can proceed with the rest of the plan and any further explanations are in order.”

Persona and Devlyn nodded.

She then said, “Yes, otherwise Lionel ‘s life could be in jeopardy if we don’t get the petty squabbles of the dragon men of this tribe out the way.”

Zane asked what sprung into my mind. “Who the fuck’s Lionel?”

Aloysius let out a gentle laugh. “Mr. Barnaby, of course.”

“Shit! Is Mr. Barnaby in trouble?” I asked without thought, concern washed away all of my questions that had built up over the course of our journey back to camp.

“I hope the old dude’s okay. I’d die if anything happened to him.” Zane let my hand go. “So where is he anyway?”

Aloysius’s cheery disposition darkened. “He’s been trapped between realms, half of him in the dragon realm, the other God knows where. There is a tribe who have managed to trap his essence from what Persona has told me, but we don’t have much time. They are to the west of the mountain, near where the ocean tribes live.”

“Let me guess, the tribe who have captured his spirit are members of the Clan of the Dark, right?”

I asked.

Aloysius didn't answer. From that I took it that I'd answered my own question. I hated when I was right.

"Fuck, this just gets better and better." Zane spat.

"So who do I have to fight in your place to claim Callum back for you, my brother," Aloysius said, obviously wanting to get on with things and change the subject, too.

"Nottolu."

Aloysius's smile returned to his lips. "I thought as much. He seeks power that one. As soon as he saw you he would have realised your worth and acted before anyone else could. So predictable that one, but a good ally in a fight. He helped us defeat the ancient King and return your mother to the human realm. "

Again I was interrupted before I could speak. Devlyn said, "Shall I prepare for your battle, my Lord?"

"Yes," Aloysius answered. "But first we must all rest. Jacob, you return to Nottolu's bed, comfort him if you must. He cannot know of my return. Not yet. Zane, you to your Suzy. I will act when the sun has risen and I have food in my stomach, but not before."

I headed toward Nottolu's tent. The words spoken by Persona and Devlyn and Aloysius rang

in my ears over and over. I missed Aloysius as soon as I was out of sight of him. His presence had calmed me. Was that part of our brotherly connection? I couldn't tell. Up until this point I didn't even know I had a brother, yet it felt so right.

I woke to the sounds of trumpets calling out to break the dawn chorus of birds and critters of the jungle. Next to me, breathing gently, was Nottolu. I couldn't help admire him. Sure, his motives were his own when he claimed me, but I now knew he helped get my mother home and defeat the one who had claimed her. He was a hero in my eyes and deserved to know about my intentions.

"You awake, Nottolu?" The man stirred, the remnants of sleep still clung to him. "I have to tell you, I know why you claimed me."

"I claimed you because I wanted you, nothing more."

I ran my hand across his chest, feeling every ripple of his form. "I know that I am Aloysius's brother," I said flatly.

He turned to look me in the eye. His once sleepy demeanour had changed to one of concern, his eyebrows knitting. "You know?"

I nodded.

Again the trumpets rang out.

He came around and embraced me. "You must

understand my motives.”

“I do.” I kissed him on his lips, enjoying his taste and touch. When I parted, I added, “I am to be King, you know.”

Nottolu nodded. “So Aloysius has been found then?”

“Yes.”

“I am to fight for Callum this morning, you know?” His eyelids narrowed.

Did he suspect the plan? Did he know that Aloysius was going to fight in Devlyn’s place and therefore make Nottolu back down so I was then free to claim my Callum back? Damn. Why was everything so complicated all of a sudden?

I couldn’t contain myself and blurted, “Aloysius has been appointed to fight in Devlyn’s stead.”

Nottolu let me go, his silence tangible. Finally, he said. “Then I will withdraw. I also assume from this, that Aloysius will fight for you, too?”

Guilt pricked at the nape of my neck. “Yes.”

“You will be a wise King, Jacob. Yes, you have too much human in you so you can’t shift into dragon form, but that is of no concern. That which makes you different is that which you will draw your strength. You can control dragons because you are one of us, yet you are apart from us, too. I respect that. You know I tried to claim you because I wanted the status of being the King’s

consort, but now you can have the one you truly love. You can be with your Callum." He took away his gaze. "I am so sorry I caused you grief, but know I really do want to be with you...that I do love you."

I heard myself say, "I love you, too, Nottolu. You have treated me well. Never fear, your place in the tribe will still be something you can be proud of."

"I would like to show you my affection for one last time, if I have your permission, of course."

We kissed again, but this time he let me explore him with my tongue. I found myself wanting him. I pulled away. Now wasn't the time. I had a better idea anyway. One that would give him something he'd never forget. But not yet. There was something more important to attend to. "I need to see Callum first. You understand."

"I do." His thick, meaty cock had become semi-hard. The sight of his foreskin retracting, revealing the jewel of his head glistening with his excitement was almost too much to bear. I did want him, but had to force myself to stop. My true yearning was for my Callum. He added with a whisper, "Go. Be with him, but know that I am coming with you."

"You don't have to, you know."

"It's not because I want to see you in the arms of someone else instead of being in my own, but

you must know that your claim for him must be witnessed and your garland chosen." He reached over me and grabbed one of the stones from a bedside table, one with Celtic writing upon it. "If I go with you, it will prove to the tribe that I have withdrawn my claim and that you are claiming Callum."

"I thought the garland could only be presented after the claim had been made certain. You know, after a couple of days or something."

"The waiting time is forfeit in your case. No one will challenge you. I will see to that." He cocked an eyebrow. "I take it that Devlyn's claim over Callum was only a ruse, too?"

"Yes. I hope you're not too upset. But I had to do whatever it took to be with my true love." I kissed Nottolu on the forehead and got up out of his bed. "I know you understand that."

"I do."

"Thanks."

I ran out of the tent, Nottolu close behind me.

Chapter Fifteen

When I opened the door flap to Devlyn's tent, the most wonderful sight I had seen for a long time, greeted me. Callum was asleep on one of the make-shift beds, the gentle rise and fall of his stomach so alluring. He was on top of the bedclothes, spread-eagled. He always took up a lot of the bed. Bless him.

I turned to Nottolu. "If you don't mind, can I have a moment alone with him? I will call you when I am ready."

Nottolu nodded.

I went to my Callum and kissed his warm lips while he slept. He stirred. When his eyes opened, the most wondrous joy filled his expression, from his beautiful smile to the sparkle in his eyes. I kissed him again, this time parting his lips and experiencing his cinnamon and tangy taste when my tongue became married with his. I missed the sensation of his touch so much.

Before I knew it I was on the bed with him. We

embraced, an embrace that was so strong and tight I knew in that moment I would be in his arms forever. The sensation of having my man hold me was more than enough to satisfy me right now. Ah fuck, who was I kidding? I wanted Callum inside me more than anything. My stomach did somersaults and I went dizzy with giddy delight as we continued to touch, kiss and hold each other.

My heart pounded loud in my chest and with each passing second I felt the blood engorge my cock and press against my lover's stomach. Callum was hard, too. I didn't need to see his cock to know that. We were one. A leg tangled, arm embraced writhing mass of heated flesh on Devlyn's bed.

Callum groaned. A moment later, a hot sensation burned across my stomach. He had cum. Fuck! I had to admit, being in his arms, kissing and holding him so tight had almost brought me to the edge of ecstasy, too. I couldn't help but be validated by his excitement. His sperm was now the glue that bound us as we continued our hold on one another.

He parted our kiss for the briefest moment, but never letting his lips move away more than a couple of millimetres away from mine. His breath was wonderful across my skin.

"Taste me," he said with a gasp.

Now, I knew Callum well, yet he always seemed to surprise me whenever he opened his mouth. Sure, I would have expected something more along the lines of *I missed you so much*. But no. This was Callum.

He let me go and in that instant I missed him. The heat we had generated together, the passion we had built up dissipated into the air. But the sight of his stomach and chest covered in the slick sheen of his cum made up for any loss I might have felt. What's more, he was still hard. Holy fuck. He wanted more and right away, too. Geez, he was hornier than I was.

He placed his hands onto my head, pushing me down with gentle encouragement. I began to do his bidding, running my tongue over his chest, concentrating on his nipples and making sure I lapped up all of his fluid.

I loved his taste. Sure, his cum was bitter and tangy and not as sweet as Zane's, but nothing was going to stop me from enjoying him on every level. I rolled my tongue down his chest on the way to his stomach, leaving wet trails of my affection all over him. His stomach quivered and the taste of him became stronger, the smell of him, too, was so wonderfully overpowering I didn't know how much longer I could hold out myself.

Soon I approached the point of no return, especially considering I now had his cock in my

mouth. I enjoyed his hardness and the sensation of his manhood sliding across my tongue toward the back of my throat. I grabbed him by the root of his cock, changing the angle of him so I wouldn't gag.

"Oh fuck, Jacob!" Callum cried out.

In that moment he ejaculated again, his cum filled my mouth. I experienced all of him again and again as he shot more of his load into me and I relished it. My tongue tingled with his taste and the back of my throat was soothed when what he gave me had nowhere else to go but down my oesophagus. I sucked him dry, and again, to my complete and utter surprise, he didn't go flaccid straight away.

My God, he must be horny. I came away from him, his cock slapped wet against his stomach and I came up so I could kiss him over and over once more, our tastes mingling.

We embraced. Again we were one, our skin and our love so close and so together I couldn't imagine ever letting him go. "I want you," I said between both gentle and deep kisses.

"Fuck me hard and quick. I can't wait any more for you." Callum opened his legs and he grappled my buttocks so I had no choice but to come between his legs. My hardness found his warmth and before I knew it my cock sank into his arse, lubricated by my excitement.

He arched his back, forcing me to plunge

myself deeper into him. I didn't resist, not at all. My cock slipped into him without too much bother, my foreskin assisting in my efforts, helping my cock glide into him, my pre-cum adding to the ease.

Moments later, I was root deep in his arse and our kisses once more deep and meaningful. So much so the room span around me and I became lost in his experience. His fingernails raked my back while I gained a rhythm within him and he let out deep guttural noises, ones that reverberated through me. He was such a delight and yes, I missed him so much even though we hadn't said such a thing to each other.

I blew my load. Yep. I didn't last half as long as I normally did, which was to be expected, I suppose. Callum lit my fires and then fuelled them, too. I shuddered. Each pulse of ecstasy coursed through me, releasing more and more of my love into my beautiful Callum. I collapsed onto him without pulling myself out. I found that I, too, didn't go soft after I had spent all I could give him. I wanted more.

He was still hard, too. I felt him against my stomach. I had an idea, one I'm sure Callum wouldn't say no, too, considering we were both as horny as the first time we'd been together in the cabin in the Westfell forest.

I parted our kiss and called out, "Nottolu."

Callum's eyes flickered concern for a moment. Then, when Nottolu entered the tent, all rippling muscles and a cock you could gag over with joy, Callum smiled.

"Oh you're a dirty boy," Callum said.

I smiled. "I think he deserves our affection. He's been good to me, Callum."

"A friend of yours is a friend of mine."

I didn't have to tell Nottolu what was going on. He understood. Within a heart beat, he was at the bed, kneeling down so his magnificent cock was positioned near Callum's lips.

I kissed Nottolu's stomach and fondled his balls, feeling myself harden inside Callum once more. Callum let out a moan. He grabbed at the root of Nottolu's cock, pulling back on his foreskin in the process, exposing his big, beautiful head for Callum to taste. Callum didn't waste any time. With a delicious wanting smile, he took Nottolu's erection into his mouth.

The sight of Nottolu's cock being taken in stirred me even more. Nottolu let out a groan, one that would have shook the pegs of the tent out of the ground I'm sure. If everyone were asleep in the camp, they'd sure be awake now. Still, it was great to see Nottolu smile. He held us both.

I grabbed the warrior's muscular buttocks, edging my fingers toward his arsehole. I wanted to get him ready. I wanted to fuck him, show him I

loved him, too. When I slipped my finger into his warmth, gentle and with enough care so as not to hurt him, he let out a cry again. A warrior's cry, deep and meaningful. Fuck that was sexy.

Callum had managed to get most of Nottolu's cock down his throat, the sight of his Adam's apple bobbing up and down while he sucked on the warrior made me instinctively push myself deeper and deeper into Callum. Now it was Callum's turn to groan and the sound of both men letting me know of their delight, made my stomach turn with delicious butterflies.

I pushed myself inside Callum, again to my root. I was as hard as I was ever going to be and again the pangs of ecstasy rose up to consume me.

Nottolu leaned over and kissed me. I took his tongue into my mouth as willingly as Callum took in his cock. Everything was wonderful. Everything was perfect. Nottolu needed this and Callum and I were complete once more. So complete we could share our love with anyone.

Callum continued to suck and slurp on Nottolu's cock and I moved myself within him with much enthusiasm, enjoying my fiancé's warmth around my hardness. I now had two fingers inside Nottolu. He had come around so I could enter him more easily but kept up with his kisses. I knew he would want more soon, but for now he was happy with our attention as it was.

We remained as we did for what seemed an eternity. All three of us shared our love with one another on an intimate level, on and on until the heat of the jungle air, filled with the odour of our sweat and our sex, became cool around us. Sweat dripped off my fringe and our skin was slick with our efforts, but I was glad Nottolu had accepted that I wanted to be with Callum. After all, his acceptance had led us down this path. A path I was happy to walk down.

My needs then changed, like a light had been switched on inside me. I needed a cock and my desires became so powerful that the butterflies of pleasure turned to ones of want. I wanted Callum or Nottolu or both at once. I didn't care. I just wanted cock. No, I needed cock.

I was about to suggest either Callum or Nottolu take me when the tent flap opened and light streamed in to blind me for a moment.

"Holy fuck!" Zane's voice rang out. "And you didn't invite me to your party. I'm hurt."

Nottolu parted his kiss, my lips wet with his attention. "You have a garland. You should be with your match."

I let out a laugh, especially seeing Zane's cock hard and ready. "Zane is with us, too, Nottolu."

I was glad Zane came in. Having his magnificent cock inside me would be perfect. I gestured for him to enter. Like Nottolu moments

earlier, Zane came onto the bed with enthusiasm, his wonderful and cheeky smile adding fuel to my desire.

A puzzled expression crossed Nottolu's face. "He is? I don't understand."

Callum came away from the warrior's cock. The sound of him pulling away filled the tent and Zane took the opportunity to sidle next to us so that he, too, could be experience our affection. "Zane's always been with us," Callum said, spittle dribbling onto his chin. The sight of Nottolu's erection slick with Callum's attention was beautiful. "Now you can be as well, Nottolu."

"I would like that," the warrior said with a groan of sheer desire as Callum grabbed his cock once more.

I blurted, "Now will someone please fuck me, I don't know how much longer I can hold out."

Callum reached up and embraced me. "I thought you'd never ask. Now, get out of me so I can plough your arse real good."

"I want some of that arse, too," Zane said.

Dirty thoughts invaded my mind, thoughts spurned on by my yearnings. "Heck, you can all have me if you want."

"I do, too," said Nottolu.

Nottolu picked me up like I was a rag-doll, my cock slipping out of Callum. I missed his warmth around me but decided that having all of the men

I love take turns to have me far outweighed any momentary loss I may have felt at the moment.

Callum had got up off the bed. He and Zane were kissing, glimpses of their tongues a sight I so missed. Nottolu lay on the bed, all wanting smiles and needing glances. He pulled me down so I was on top of him. I opened my legs and he reached down and guided his wet with saliva cock into my arse. I gasped when he entered me. I arched my back so I could take more and more of his hardness, my prostrate more than stimulated by his massive erection.

“Fuck!” I screamed out with quivering lips. “I need more!”

Zane didn’t waste any time. He parted his kiss with my Callum and edged his way toward me so that his cock was so deliciously close to my mouth I kissed his bright red head, one that glistened with so much pre-cum I gasped. I knew what he wanted to do. I had asked for it, after all. Zane wanted to enter me with Nottolu. I don’t know how I was going to take two big, beautiful guys at the same time, but I was more than willing to give it a try.

I sucked on Zane’s cock, but only for the purpose of lubricating him for my benefit. He seemed to understand. When I had taken all of him into my mouth he pulled himself away. He was wet. Fuck, what a beautiful sight.

Zane went behind me.

In the meantime, Callum had come over Nottolu. He was positioned so I could suck on his cock, too. This served another purpose, because he was basically resting his balls on Nottolu's lips. The warrior began licking straight away. I would imagine the warrior could now enjoy Callum just as much as I was going to. I was pleased. We had all found a way to maximise each other's affection, not one of us missing out on being satisfied.

Callum's gentle moans indicated that Nottolu was pleasing him to no end, and his gasps encouraged the warrior to move his hand across my fiancé's buttocks. I bet Nottolu had decided to give Callum a bit more than a lick of his balls. A quick glance confirmed it. Nottolu's finger was deep in Callum's arsehole. I smiled. I wondered if the warrior knew this was what I had in mind for him. He certainly looked like he was having the time of his life.

Then again, I didn't have time to contemplate such things. I could feel Zane lick my arsehole while I was filled with Nottolu's cock. I would say Zane would have gone to town back there, enjoying both me and the warrior at the same time. My mind span with both desire and anxiety. I was about to experience two guys. Fucking hell, would they split my arse? I hoped not. I could really get used to this.

Callum had made it clear that he wanted me to enjoy him. He pushed me down onto his erection. I took him in, enjoying the salt and tang of his cock, running my tongue over his frenulum so that I could experience the sight of his stomach quiver with delight. I so loved that, as did he.

When I had taken Callum's cock in as far as I could go, Zane pushed his magnificence into me. A searing pain shot up through me to consume me. I pulled away from Callum and let out a yelp.

"You all right," Zane said, withdrawing his cock and kissing my back with gentle care and concern.

"Yes," I said, gasping. My vision was stained by tears. But the pain was soon dissipated by pleasure. Nottolu hadn't gone as deep as he usually did and Zane had lubricated me well, his tongue seeing to that. I wiped my eyes and added, "Don't stop, Zane. I need you."

"You sure, Jakey?"

"Fuck, yeah. Now do it. Give me all you've got and do it now before I change my mind."

Zane entered me again. This time there was the pain, but not as intense. He was gentle, slipping himself in as carefully as he could. My stomach knotted with both delight and tension. I felt him, every inch, enter my arsehole. It was wonderful. I had done it. I had two of the men I so dearly adored inside me. Relief washed over me. Sure,

there was the pain of being filled and the nervous tension remained, but I was glad I could accommodate them both.

Callum reminded me once more that he needed attention, too. I got to it, sucking his magnificent cock, tasting the pre-cum he had produced in the short time I had been off him.

Zane and Nottolu gained a gentle rhythm and with slow and sure movements, they both made love to me at the same time. I felt Zane's hands massage the small of my back. I felt Callum hand's on my head, gripping my hair tight, his approach to climax would soon be a reality.

Nottolu let out a moan, his eyelids squeezed tight. He ejaculated. I could feel every pulse of his love fill me more and more. Then Zane let go. Before I could register the wonderful sensation of both of my men giving me their love, Callum's sperm spurted out from his cock, too, my taste buds bursting with his wonderful flavour.

I was overwhelmed. All three had released themselves into me. This was perfect and as far as I was concerned, couldn't have happened any other way. All groaned and let out cries of joy as their bodies quivered and released more and more into me. I took all they gave me, relishing the experience.

"You're so good, Jakey," Zane yelled.

Moments later, Zane pulled out of me and so

did Nottolu. Callum took away his cock as well. I missed them all, now feeling empty. Then again, I knew without a shadow of doubt that I would have them all again soon.

Chapter Sixteen

We all kissed and shared each others embrace for an eternity more. I had never seen Nottolu so happy. Then again, I was happy, too. I had my Callum back and added benefits, too. What wasn't there to like? What more could I want?

Zane had decided he wanted more and lay me down and made love to me again, being as gentle as ever. When he had blown his load, Nottolu came over me and entered me again. Callum, obviously spent, decided to suck me off and kiss and lick me all over while both Zane and Nottolu were inside me. I was swimming in ecstasy, again. How fucking fantastic.

Then, all three decided that they needed to taste the result of their efforts and I had their tongues at my arse before I could protest. When I blew my load that was cleaned up, too. If I had died and gone to heaven, then so be it. I was content—no, I was complete. And nothing felt better than that.

I don't know how long we shared each other

and I didn't really care. I heard trumpets in the distance and sounds of many dragon folk near the tent. Not once were we disturbed. They must have known what was going on inside, it wouldn't take a genius to work it out. One thing I liked about these folk, they seemed to respect privacy. I could live here in this realm no worries at all, especially considering I had Nottolu to play with as well.

Finally, Nottolu, said, "It is time for your garlands, my beautiful ones."

"Cool. What will they be?" Callum said between tender kisses on Nottolu's lips.

"There is no doubt what they should be. You have proven your desires for each other and those you love around you. Come. Sit. I will tattoo you both."

"Then can we all fuck again when you're done," Zane said.

I kissed Zane, nibbling his bottom lip. He was such a horny bastard and I loved it.

Callum was the first to get up off the bed. He sat on the chair, his legs spread-eagled, ready for his garland. The sight of Nottolu kneeling before him, tattoo stone in hand, stirred me once more. I embraced Zane who now sat next to me on the bed. How hot was it seeing the men I loved touch and experience one another? Damn fucking hot if the truth be told. Damn hot.

Nottolu sang something in his dragon tongue

before he touched the stone onto Callum's shaved pubic area. Before my eyes, as the stone was moved across my fiancé's skin, a design revealed itself. At first it was nothing but a mess of lines, but soon, when Nottolu had finished doing whatever it was he had to do, the design was revealed.

The tattoo was fantastic. It was a Celtic heart wreathed in fire. The point of the heart touched the base of Callum's cock and the flames that surrounded filled the skin where his pubes would have been had they not been permanently shaved off by the magic stone. The ink wasn't black, but a wonderful shade of red.

"You both have a fire for each other in your hearts that will never die. You both will have this garland forever, one that shows your passion and your love you share."

"It's perfect," I said.

Nottolu kissed Callum's tattoo, uttering more words in his language before adding, "Now your turn, Jacob."

I jumped up off the bed with enthusiasm. As much as Zane and Callum and Nottolu had shown me while we all made love. When I was seated, he parted my legs and once more sang his song.

Seconds later, I had the heart and fire tattoo. Pride and love and the overwhelming sense of accomplishment rose up to consume me. I cried.

Yep. I let it all out. My vision nothing but what I could see through my tears, only able to catch Callum's beautiful shape come over and embrace me tight. I cried in his arms, nestling my head into his neck, feeling his pulse and ravishing kisses all over his skin.

"I love you with all my heart," he said, squeezing me, his warmth once more washing over my senses.

"I love you, too, my beautiful Callum."

"You both look awesome, I have to say. Besides, I so love happy endings," Zane said with a clap of his hands. Nottolu had sat beside him on the bed. "So, now that it's all official and all, we can get on with finding Mister B, hey?"

Zane's words brought reality crashing back.

"Mister B?" Nottolu questioned.

"Yeah, he's a dear friend of ours who's gone missing. Aloysius says he's trapped between realms or something like that."

A flash of concern struck the warrior's face. "Then we must help him. There are three realms, the human, the dragon and the eternal. For the sake of your friend, I hope he's trapped between here and your realm."

Now it was my turn to raise a concerned question. "What if he's trapped between here and the eternal realm?" Again, thoughts of Thomas flooded my mind. That and the image, the scary as

fuck image, of the shadow-like eternal that resided within him, controlling him.

Nottolu nodded. "Then we have a lot of work to do."

Callum got off me and together, hand in hand, we went over to Nottolu and Zane. Zane was holding the warrior around his waist. If our conversation hadn't turned so dark I'm sure Zane would have wanted more play time. As it was, his lips quivered, a far cry from the cheekiness they normally held. He looked as concerned as I felt.

My thoughts reached out to Mr. Barnaby. "I think we should help Aloysius and the others before Mr. Barnaby is lost to us forever or something. No matter what it takes. Agreed?"

Zane nodded. "If the old dude needs us, then by Christ we'll go get him back, just like we did with Aloysius." Zane stood up, determination in his expression, his hands on his hips.

"I so missed all this, you know," Callum said.

I squeezed his hand. "Yep. Looks like our adventure in this realm isn't over. Not by a long shot."

We all left the tent together, the remnants of our love still lingering on my skin. The sun struck my nakedness as soon as we were outside and I felt reassured by it. For the first time since I had arrived in this realm, I felt a peace within myself. I could walk proudly with Callum by my side, our

garlands proclaiming that fact for all to see.

Yes, of course I was concerned for Mr. Barnaby, who wouldn't be? But I also knew his rescue wouldn't be something I would do alone. We would find him. I had all those I loved around me to help.

When my eyes were accustomed to the bright light, another trumpet sounded, this one different to all the others I had heard. There was a cry from one of the dragon folk and before I knew it, Nottolu bolted past me.

"What the fuck's goin' on?" Zane said, slipping his hand into mine.

I walked onward, both Callum and Zane holding onto me. I had never felt so loved. Sure, I had said it many times before, but this time our love had been validated, not only in our own eyes, but in the eyes of everyone else.

Suzy came up to us, a smile on her lips when she looked down at our garlands. Zane went to her, but not before kissing both me and Callum on the lips, his tongue a gentle tickle, one that send a shiver of delight through me.

"I see you've been playing again, Zane," she said. "Can't help yourself, can you?"

"You know me, babe. Can't help lovin' everyone I can."

"You're so sweet." She kissed him.

Nottolu returned, his stare intent and his lips a

snarl. "Saar has alerted a tribe of the Clan of the Dark to our whereabouts." The warrior pointed to the sky. Above, many dragons circled, some breathing fire onto the ground below, sending the tents alight. Saar was on the back of one of the largest flyers. "He has betrayed us and for that he will die."

Before I could add how Saar had tried to seduce me using methods less than savoury, Callum let out a scream. More and more dragon flyers came into view. In fact, hundreds upon hundreds of them filled the air.

Aloysius screamed something in the distance beyond the campfire, obviously ordering the tribe's flyers into the air to attack the intruders. Nottolu shifted, his huge black reptilian frame taking up my view.

"Jacob, Callum, get on my back. I will protect you. You, too, Zane and Suzy."

We got up upon the warrior's back. I had a feeling this wasn't going to be a pleasure ride. The fact my balls ached from being pressed against hard scales confirmed my suspicion almost straight away. Great. Why weren't dragons more comfortable?

"There's some coming through the trees," Zane screamed, right into my ear. It rang with his voice, but my sight saw all too well his concern. Hundreds of land dragons crashed into the

campsite, uprooting trees and creating confusion amongst the folk of the tribe.

By now, all of the dragon folk had shifted into reptilian form, including Aloysius. His huge red bulk dominated all those around him.

“Hang on, my friends, we ride and we fight,” Nottolu cried out, rearing up and slamming himself into the first enemy dragon that had come too close for comfort.

Callum was thrown from Nottolu’s back.

Chapter Seventeen

“Callum!” I screamed, clambering over Suzy and Zane so I could get off the dragon’s back and go help my fiancé.

Not an easy task. When Nottolu reared again, ending the enemies life with a flash of teeth and claws and blood and I felt sickened by the sound of crunching bone, I fell, too. Thankfully, I was prepared and I landed sure-footed onto the dirt. I had to say, I was glad Nottolu was on our side.

Callum was all right. He had taken a hit to the head when he fell, but other than looking a little groggy, he would be fine. I made sure of it by checking him out everywhere for any signs of broken bones.

“Save that for later,” he said with a chuckle when I prodded around his upper thighs and pelvic area.

Bloody typical. Here I am concerned for his well being and again he’s thinking about getting me between the sheets. Then again, I couldn’t

blame him. Sure, it was nice sharing our love, but it was also nice having quality time alone. I made a promise to myself. Next time we became intimate, it would just be me and him.

For now though, I had other things to worry about. The fact that there were hundreds of angry dragons, both in the air and on the land, heading in our direction kind of brought reality into perspective.

"What we gonna do, Jacob?" Callum questioned, seeing Nottolu bound away to his next kill. I don't think the warrior knew we were no longer on his back. "Nottolu's gone without us!"

"Nottolu!" I cried out. But the sounds of battle, of gnashing teeth, ripping claws and yells of both defeat and victory rang out all around us.

We were alone. Oh, so very much alone. We were fragile humans in nothing but our skin, our only strength our love for each other. When I was about to suggest we run and find some shelter at the very least, claws came around both mine and Callum's waists.

I twisted my neck to see who those claws belonged to. To my absolute relief, it was Aloysius.

"Thank fuck you're here," Callum said, taking the words right out of my mouth.

"We must go. The tribe of the Mountain Cradle

can defend themselves long enough for us to find Lionel Barnaby. Persona will meet with us in the forest on the south side of the camp."

"But shouldn't we stay and help fight off the other tribe first?"

Aloysius shook his head. "No. Lionel holds the key to what's been going on here. I have spent many years sinking my magic into a ring and preparing for your ascension to the crown. With that ring, you'll be able to tap into your inherent dragon genes and shift, just like we can. You would truly be a leader in all respects."

Oh, fuck. Aloysius was talking about the engagement ring I gave Callum. What surprised me even more, was that the ring had been intended for me, even though the method of how I obtained it wasn't exactly as Aloysius had hoped. "But I got that ring off an eternal."

Sadness washed over my brother. "Yes. It is the eternals, who with help from some inside this realm, have been able to travel at will between realms and instigate their plans for domination, I'm afraid. They will use that freedom to go wherever they please, using all of us to help feed their lives."

"Oh, this just gets better and better, doesn't it?" I said, emulating Zane.

"What's he talking about, Jacob?" Callum asked.

"I am talking about the eternal taking over all of the realms." Aloysius had taken us clear of the camp. We were now in the jungle proper and he had returned to human form. "They kidnapped me, stole the ring and, with the eternal patience they have in abundance and the ability to manipulate time, gave it to you so you would eventually come here, too."

It was true. I had received that ring years ago, back when I was fourteen. Geez, if they could wait almost five years for a plan to come to fruition, imagine what they could accomplish with everyone's lives at their disposal. I shuddered.

"But why?" Callum added.

"Food...and revenge." Aloysius grabbed my hand, Callum's, too. "Jacob did kill an eternal, after all."

He led us through the jungle. The sounds of battle faded with the distance, but were soon replaced with a different noise. That of falling water.

We had come to a natural waterfall. The pool in which the water fell looked cool and inviting and I had a sudden desire to wash my sweat soaked skin. Standing beside the water's edge was Persona.

"I see you have finally got your garlands," she said when we approached. "Very becoming of you both, I must say."

I smiled at her. The look in her eyes was the same as it was when Zane and I had first come across her last night. I bet she wanted to watch Callum and me make out. Hey, under normal circumstances I wouldn't hesitate. But not now. Not after what I had just found out. Seemed the eternals were a threat to everyone...and they were pissed off, too. Not a good combination.

"Now, now, Persona. There will be time for you to have some fun later. For now we must locate Lionel. You know that." Aloysius gestured for us to bathe in the pool. Callum led me into the water.

She bowed. "Yes, my Lord."

The water was wonderful. So refreshing against my skin, both from the heat of the air and of all the love I had shared with the men I admired of late. Callum washed me and I washed him. Such a simple thing was so wonderful to experience. I wished it could have lasted much longer.

A few moments later, when my brother had seen that we had washed ourselves, his patience ran out. "We must go. Now."

He led the way, Persona close behind him.

I enjoyed the chance I had to clean my skin and cool off for a moment. Callum looked so sexy, all wet and tattooed and a twinkle in his eyes that drove me crazy. Water dripped of my hair. Callum and I left the pool, hand in hand, something I cherished.

We walked through the jungle in silence, the sounds of critters going about their business the only disturbance to the serenity I found out here in the wilds.

On occasion Aloysius would gesture for us to stop. A flyer would wheel overhead for a moment and then leave. I couldn't tell what side any of them were on. A dragon was a dragon as far as I was concerned.

We approached a clearing and again my brother made us all wait. He sniffed the air and stood still, listening with intent.

I had noticed that Persona had taken Aloysius's hand on numerous occasions on our journey. Yep. That sealed it. Aloysius and her were an item. Were dragon folk allowed to mate with nymphs? Still, they were a cute couple, and I suppose if I were straight, Persona would be the type of girl I'd want. Then another thought struck me. If they were together, why didn't they have a garland? Then again, no one I knew in the tribe would go against Aloysius, so I gathered from that there was no need.

Also, my brother had chosen to spend a lot of his time in the human realm. Perhaps Persona didn't want to make that sort of commitment. I mean, if Callum wanted to live on the Moon I would be there with him. Perhaps they weren't that close, after all.

“Shhh,” Aloysius whispered, stopping dead in his tracks. “We are not alone.”

I looked up to the canopy. It had thinned. I could also smell salt in the air. From that I assumed we were near the ocean, but I couldn’t see any dragons, flyers or otherwise, anywhere. Didn’t Aloysius say that there was a tribe living here?

Callum squeezed my hand. I knew in that moment something was wrong. When I brought my attention to those around me, that’s when I saw what my brother had detected.

A human approached. It was Saar.

Aloysius shifted into dragon form, uprooting some of the trees that wanted to take up the same space as his changing form. “You should be cautioned, Saar. I will protect my friends and family with my dying breath.”

Saar halted, but his lips held his smile. “I captured you once, my King. Don’t think for a moment I won’t do it again.”

Aloysius stepped closer to the betrayer, flames licking his reptilian lips and an intensity in his eyes I had not seen before. “Pity you did not realise I had family. Your plan might have succeeded the first time.”

Saar looked at his hands, turning them, staring with such intent I thought for a moment he was going to do something profound. Instead, he said,

"I will still get what I want. After all, feeding off your younger brother was always my intention. Call it revenge if you like."

"Saar?" I muttered. Then it struck me. Saar wasn't Saar at all. He had been taken over by an eternal. First Thomas and now this. I shook my head, coming closer to Callum. We embraced each other. "My God, he's an eternal."

"I suspected as much," Aloysius said, changing back into human form. "Now that you have revealed yourself, know that it will be difficult for you to walk in this realm without risking your life."

"Then this is a warning. We are ready to pounce, and with your old friend, Mr. Barnaby, able to help us soon, many more of my kind will soon walk this land and the land of the human realm. You won't know who is who until it's too late. Just think, there will be nowhere to hide. Now come, Jacob. Feel the honour of once more feeding an eternal. I know you want to."

I had become mesmerized by the eternal's words. Was he affecting me, even now? Sure, I had defeated an eternal before, but something inside me yearned for the feeling of their power through my veins.

My cock stiffened and my desires within me confused and confounded me. I had been touched by an eternal before, was I now a prime candidate

for their feeding? Was I going to be eternally compelled to give any eternal what he wanted no matter what?

“I don’t want you at all,” I said with a stutter. What did he mean by Mr. Barnaby being able to help him soon? Was the old man all right?

I could feel Callum’s hands grasp me tight. I even saw my brother and his mate come over and hold me back. But Saar’s smile pierced me, right into my very soul. Just like it had when Thomas first seduced me. Would I ever be rid of the eternals? Would I ever be free?

Aloysius shouted something at Saar, but the eternal’s stare stayed fixed on me. My stomach turned, both with disgust and pleasure. I shook my head again, trying to clear the confusion the presence of the eternal had upon me.

No good. I was struck with fear and hate and desire and wanting all at the same time. My cock was fully engorged, a dribble of pre-cum a glistening reminder of how much I was still affected by my previous experience with such a being.

I wanted to lash out and kill the thing. Yet, at the same time, I so wanted to be in Saar’s bed. Have his magnificent cock dock with mine. I wanted his foreskin to secure me tight, joining us until I screamed out for my life. I wanted the feeling of pure ecstasy to wash over me as I came

over and over again, my whole body convulsing with pleasure. Just as it had been when I was with Thomas. Just as I wanted it now.

“Jacob!” Callum screamed out.

My head spun. That single word brought me wheeling back to the moment. I gasped, my lips a tremble, I said, “Thank you.”

Callum leaned over and kissed me.

“Yes, that’s it, my brother,” Aloysius said, shifting back to dragon form. “Enjoy your fiancé. He is what you need. Not this eternal bastard.”

I heard strange noises, cries out in the jungle. I wondered what was going on, but decided to concern myself with what my beautiful Callum was doing to me right now. I needed him more than ever in this moment. He gave me strength.

Callum parted my lips with his tongue. With so much care and so much attention to detail, he teased and touched and delighted me beyond my wildest dreams. I opened my mouth wider, letting all of him in. My thoughts soon became immersed with his presence. His touch. His taste. His breath. His beautiful stare.

I closed my eyes, savouring the moment, letting him conquer me, letting his tongue touch me on a far more intimate level than any eternal ever could. With roving hands I gripped him tight, pulling him in close. I no longer thought of the eternal. My fiancé was all I needed, forever and

ever. He was *my* food.

Callum, whether he knew it or not, had saved me from doing something terrible and I knew how I would repay him, too. After all, making love to the most beautiful man who had ever walked in any realm was payment enough.

Thank God I had asked him to marry me. Best decision of my life.

Chapter Eighteen

We kissed for ages. I don't know what happened in the time Callum and I remained locked together in our passion, but when I finally did open my eyes and my vision returned from my high, Saar was nowhere to be seen.

Persona was smiling at us. Typical. I bet she got just as much joy from our kiss as we did. Then again, I didn't mind. What concerned me more was the claw marks all over Aloysius's chest.

"Are you all right? What happened?" I said, letting go of Callum and rushing to my brother's side. "I'll go find some of those healing leaves. You stay here, okay?"

Aloysius raised his hand. "The eternal made Saar more powerful than even I could believe. But yes, in answer to your question, I'll be all right. A lot better than Saar, let me tell you?"

"What happened to Saar?" Callum interjected.

"I disposed of him." Aloysius grabbed Persona's hand. "And I have to say, eternals sit

even worse in my craw than Insectmen do. Now come. We must make it to the portal before any more damage is done."

"And rescue Mr. Barnaby, too, right?" I asked.

Aloysius fell silent for a moment, before he added, "If he can be saved, then yes. But I can't make any promises."

Again we walked through the jungle, not a word spoken between us. The jungle was getting thinner and thinner and the smell of the ocean more prevalent in my nostrils. I sure hoped we'd be there soon. I needed to sit down for a moment. I was beat.

Soon I could hear waves crashing onto the shore. We came out of the jungle to an open field of yellow and purple flowers. A camp lay at the line between the sand of the beach and the field. A wisp of campfire smoke marred the sky, yet I couldn't see any activity between the tents.

"There are no tribe here because they are attacking the Mountain folk," Aloysius said, taking the lead and walking with a brisk pace through the grasses and flowers. "The eternal's are stirring up more here than food. I can feel it in my bones."

He had cuts on his back, too. It must have been some fight between him and the eternal and in a strange way I was glad I wasn't a witness to it.

"Do you suppose the eternal's are drumming up

war between the tribes so they can take advantage of those who are left?" Callum asked.

I had to admit, what he said made perfect sense. I remember Aloysius saying that war had been on the agenda for a while. Suppose it was the eternals who sparked the fire in the first place. That would sure make a lot more sense than dragon folk attacking each other for no apparent reason.

"I fear you are right, my friend," Aloysius said.

Persona said, "That is why, Jacob, you will bring balance to this realm. You have defeated an eternal. You are respected for that."

"So has Aloysius," I said, without thinking really.

She smiled. "Aloysius is already King. Such a thing would be expected."

I pondered her words for a moment. "I suppose you're right. To the dragon folk I'm not just another weak human, am I? And besides, with the help of the ring, I can change into dragon form anyway. Right?"

"Yes, you are correct. But we must get the ring back first." Aloysius gestured toward a cliff face to the west of the camp. "That is where the portal is being held open. I can sense it, like a weight pulling at me. Can you feel it, too?"

"No," I said flatly.

"So what am I going to use as an engagement

ring seeing as it's supposed to be yours, Jacob?" Callum said, changing the subject, his eyes flashed concern.

"I will make you another. Then you will both have something with dragon magic within it," Aloysius said. "They would be my gift to you both."

"Cool." Seemed Callum was happy with that. A gentle squeeze of my hand confirmed my thoughts. I think he liked the idea of matching magical rings.

Soon the limestone cliffs loomed above us, birds circled above, disturbed by our presence. The face of the formation was dotted with numerous caves and I couldn't help but wonder if the portal to the eternal realm was somewhere inside one of them.

The next words out of Aloysius's mouth confirmed my fears. "We must search each cave. The portal is within one of them."

I scanned the cliff. There were caves everywhere, most high above and well out of reach without a sturdy climb. "Can you narrow it down a bit? We'll be here for days otherwise."

"We don't have that much time," Aloysius said with a snort. "No more eternals must come here. Look at the damage one has done already."

"Well, we could split up," Persona said. "We would search more caves in a shorter time that

way.”

I jumped in straight away, adding, “I’m not going anywhere without Callum or Aloysius.”

“Seems to me it’s settled. We search together, starting at the caves on the ground first and working our way up from there.”

Callum squeezed my hand again. “What if more have got past and are here right now?”

Aloysius rubbed his chin. “From what Saar told me, I believe Lionel is blocking the portal, the ring of mine keeping him in place and preventing travel between the dragon and the eternal realms.”

“So the only eternal to get past was the one inside Saar, right?” I questioned, my stomach doing somersaults at the prospect of there being any more in this realm. Having seen two eternals was more than enough for my lifetime.

Aloysius nodded. “I believe that’s correct.”

“So how did that one get through? I thought you said you needed magic to cross realms, like that ring you made me.”

“I did. But Saar stole it when he drugged and kidnapped me and the eternal did the rest when he opened the portal.” Aloysius let out a deep sigh. “He always sought power that one. What a stupid fool he was thinking he could gain that power from the eternals. They had other plans, ones that would lead to the downfall of this realm and of yours, too...eventually. And before you say

it's impossible to have the ring in your possession and in Saar's at the same time, don't forget time is meaningless for the eternal. An object can be in many places at once when time is manipulated, as you know all too well, Jacob my brother."

Persona tutted. "Poor Saar. What's the human saying? Be careful what you wish for, you might just get it."

I was taken aback. Saar deliberately went to the eternal realm? Fucking hell. I'm glad I didn't go to his tent last night. I'd be a mindless meal for an eternal right about now. I shuddered and licked my lips. Geez, the eternal are bastards, through and through. Thank God Mr. Barnaby did get trapped when we came here. Otherwise our greeting could have been a whole lot worse than a seven foot warrior clamping my foreskin and wanting me for his mate.

Callum let go of my hand, an action that brought me back to the moment. He was heading toward one of the caves with Aloysius and Persona. At first glance it seemed there were five caves right at ground level. The one to the far right was too small, even to crawl through. The couple in front of us were the largest.

Aloysius headed for the central cave.

"Hey, wait for me," I called out.

"Then stop daydreaming and hurry up," Callum said with a cheeky smile when he turned

back to look at me.

Inside the cave it was like any other I had ever been in, dark and wet and creepy. All except the fact that it was as hot inside as it was out, which I suppose was a good thing considering there was no chance of getting clothing any time soon.

I missed wearing clothes in a funny sort of way. Sure, it was nice to look at Callum and all the other men, but sometimes a bit of mystery was just as sexy. Guys in boxer briefs were as much a turn on as anything. Still. No use complaining. I don't think anyone here would agree with me, especially Callum or Zane. They were happy parading around all the live long day in nothing but their skin.

We searched the cave and found nothing but crabs and other sea critters that wanted a rest from the waves. Then we searched another and another. By the time we came to the fourth cave I was really, really ready for a rest and I plonked myself down on the sand. Not in protest, I was just exhausted and my legs ached. I was starved, too. I hadn't eaten since we had first arrived.

Aloysius gestured for us all to try the last cave, the promise of food and rest all too alluring if the search of that one proved fruitless. Callum groaned but grabbed my hand once more, lifting me up. Seemed we were going to search the cave.

"Hey, do you know you've got sand all over

your backside,” he said with a delicious smile and a wink.

“Yep. And you can brush it all off if you like.”

“I’d love to. But first we’d better catch up with your brother. The man’s a machine, I swear...and a slave driver.”

“Come quick, all of you,” Aloysius said, before I could add a witty retort to Callum’s cheeky comment.

Sure enough, the last cave we entered held the portal. I gasped. The sight of Mr. Barnaby, naked and locked in an eternal state of fear, made my blood freeze. The expression on his face, twisted with pain, was too much to bear. I turned away, straight into Callum’s hold. His embrace my comfort.

I managed to force myself away from Callum, missing the touch and smell of his skin the moment I did so, only to realise that my ring was being held outside the event horizon of the portal. To me it looked like the only thing holding Mr. Barnaby here was the fact that his hand that held the ring was acting like an anchor to the dragon realm.

“This isn’t good,” Persona said, studying the old man’s hand for a moment before walking around the portal.

“I can see now how he got trapped,” Aloysius said, again rubbing his chin in thought.

I licked my parched lips. "I can, too. When we were travelling through the portal the ring slipped off Callum's finger. Mr. Barnaby caught it...and he looked – well, he looked exactly like he does now, but not as scared. If that makes any sense?"

"Yes. It all makes sense. When the ring left Callum's hand, a series of events unfolded. Two portals exist in each realm, you all came through the one that led you here. Unfortunately, for Mr. Barnaby, catching the ring diverted the magical energy. The only place he could materialise would be in the eternal realm. I don't know exactly what happened, but something, call it sheer willpower combined with the magic of the ring if you will, kept him from falling into that realm proper." Aloysius walked with Persona around the open portal. "It's a miracle really, but I am concerned about one thing."

"What's that?" I asked, my voice cracking from the sight of Mr. Barnaby looking so helpless. Again my emotions rose up like the tide to consume me. Tears clouded my vision.

Aloysius continued, "Well, I have no idea how to get him out of the event horizon without killing him and dragging us in there with him in the process. The thing that is worrying me the most is I may not have to do anything."

"What do you mean?" Callum questioned.

"He's moving. Sure, ever so slowly, but take a

closer look. It's inevitable he'll fall into the realm of the eternal, it's just a matter of time."

Sure enough, I could see movement. Like a huge ocean liner that sank slow and steady into the sea, Mr. Barnaby was sinking, too. Millimetre by millimetre his arm was disappearing, the event horizon was up to his elbow already.

"How much time do we have?" I asked.

Before Aloysius could answer, a voice, distant and haunting, said, "Take the ring from my hand. Save yourselves. Save yourselves. Take the ring...please. Take it. Take it."

The look on Mr. Barnaby's face sent shivers of fear right through to the core of my being. I gasped. Not even in a mad fit would I consider taking the ring from him. He'd fall into the eternal realm for sure without it.

Aloysius reached out. I grabbed his hand, stopping him. "What are you doing?"

"As my dearest friend has asked."

"But that'll be the end of him. We won't see him again. Then what?" I glared at my brother. He didn't budge. "Please, Aloysius, there has to be another way."

"There isn't. You heard him. We've got to save ourselves. If the eternal get hold of the ring *again*, then they would be free to travel between realms. They can't make magical objects like we can. Do you want to give them the opportunity they

desire? The portals remain closed for a reason. Do you want the eternal to enter our realms as freely as you walk through doorways?"

"How do we know that's what'll happen for sure?" I asked, my voice filled with emotion.

"We only know that if the eternal have the power to travel between realms, then all is lost. The ring is the key. If they have it, we may as well accept our fate and willingly feed them. Is that what you want, Jacob?"

Those words stung me. The sight of Saar an hour or so ago affected me enough. I dreaded to think what would happen the next time I met an eternal, especially if I was alone.

I let go of my brother's hand. "Let me do it."

Aloysius nodded and took a step back. I turned to Mr. Barnaby. His cheeks were stained with tears, his face a mask of terror. My stomach turned. In that moment I hated myself. But I understood the consequences of my actions. I understood what it meant to be eternal food. I had made a promise to myself long ago no one should have that fear thrust upon them, even if it meant sacrificing one man for the saviour of millions. But right there and then I made a new promise to myself. I would get Mr. Barnaby back, no matter what.

I reached out and plucked the ring from the old man's hand.

Chapter Nineteen

Mr. Barnaby fell.

The portal closed and the silence of the cave consumed me. No one spoke. Not even Callum said a word when he came over and held me tight. I cried in his arms.

Aloysius and Persona left us alone. I don't know where they went and at that point in time I didn't really care, either. All I wanted was to remain in my lover's arms.

A long time later, I said through tear soaked lips, "You take the ring. It's yours, remember?"

Callum didn't question me. He took the ring and slipped it onto his wedding finger. I was happy he had it back, but furious with myself because the ring had affected us all.

For something that was meant to help ease my ascension to the crown of the dragon realm, it sure got misplaced. I know Saar, in his quest for power, probably gave the ring to the eternal before he was consumed himself. That's how Thomas—I

mean, the eternal who consumed him came to possess it I was sure. Did Thomas's eternal have *feelings* for me after all? Surely it must have...or was it Thomas himself who felt for me? Why else would it have given me the only object that could have assured their dominance over all of the realms?

I grabbed Callum's hand. Together we left the cave only to be confronted by the sight of a campfire and the smell of fish cooking upon it. My hunger became apparent and I ran to them.

"I see the smell of food finally lured you out of the cave," Persona said, handing me a portion of the fish. It was steaming hot and cooked to perfection.

I ate it in one go, wanting more when I swallowed the last mouthful. Callum devoured his share just as quick, too. Like I said, I hadn't eaten for ages.

"This is great," Callum said, his mouth full.

"I'm glad you like it," Aloysius said, also with his mouth full. "You'll need your stomachs full. We must help the Mountain Cradle tribe fight off their attackers. They are in dire need."

I sighed. "I was afraid you were going to say that."

"Say, how do you know they're in need, Aloysius?" Callum asked. "I thought you said they could handle it?"

A shadow came over me. I twisted my neck to see a sight that brought joy to my heart. It was Devlyn, Zane and Suzy. Callum and I hugged them, our embrace filled with love and relief knowing they were unharmed. Then Devlyn shook mine and Callum's cheeks and kissed our foreheads, as I had come to expect.

"Now, my Lords, we must fly," Devlyn said. "Ibrahim and Nottolu have requested aid and we shall answer them."

I came between Devlyn and Aloysius. "Hang on, what about Mr. Barnaby? We can't leave him, no. We haven't even tried to rescue him from the eternal realm."

Aloysius reached over and placed his hand upon my shoulder. "You know that he is lost to the eternals. I am his best friend and even I know it is foolish to follow him into the portal without preparation."

I looked him in the eye. "But...but poor Mr. Barnaby. We have to do something, don't we?"

Aloysius smiled. "This is why you will make a fantastic King. You have compassion for others beyond condition, especially to those you consider your friends. A quality many should emulate."

I took it from that, that Aloysius didn't approve of me jumping into the portal and risking my life to save another. "But?" I added with a meek voice, unsure of how we were ever going to get Mr.

Barnaby back.

Aloysius looked at Devlyn. I took the expression to be something significant, because a split second later, Devlyn shifted into dragon form. His huge wings shading us from the intense sunlight of midday.

Aloysius said, "Once we have freed the Mountain Cradle tribe from the attack, then and only then will we formulate a plan to get back our Lionel and our friend. That is the best I can promise. All right, my brother?"

I nodded. "I understand." And it was true. I did understand. The urgency of having his tribe wiped out far exceeded any individuals' life. I just wish it wasn't Mr. Barnaby's life we had to put on hold until we had accomplished other goals. I knew for certain he'd have been taken over by an eternal by now. I also knew it was going to be as difficult as all hell to get him back to us. I hated the way things turned out sometimes, I really did.

"C'mon, Jakey!" Zane yelled out, already on Devlyn's back.

Suzy and Callum were with him, too.

Once I was sitting in place, an exercise that was a bit more comfortable on Devlyn because he had a soft spot where his wings sprouted out from his body, we were in the air.

The scenery below was even more stunning than what I had witnessed walking through it. I

could see the ocean, the beach stretch for miles and the massive jungle. Geez, I bet the trees covered more than half the planet, I couldn't see where they ended beyond the horizon.

A moment or two later, we were back at the campsite. Actually, I heard our approach well before I saw the clearing where the tribe had pitched their tents. The sounds of battle rang out beyond the canopy, a grisly reminder that the fighting was far from over.

"Hold on," Devlyn screamed.

I didn't hesitate. I grabbed one of the dragon's scales near his shoulder blades and clung on to it as best I could, my knuckles white.

In an instant I could see why Devlyn shouted out such a thing. Heading straight for us were two other dragons. One was breathing fire, the stream of heat searing down Devlyn's left side. He tilted to avoid the flames. The other dragon peeled away from the fire breather and came to flank our right side, stopping any idea of escape. The only choice Devlyn had was to go through the middle between the two dragons. I had a feeling we were flying into a trap.

Remember when I said I hated when I was right? Well, that was one of those times. About twenty metres behind the two dragons who flanked us, another was waiting.

The dragon, a huge white beast, was hanging in

mid-air. Waiting. I couldn't tell straight away whether or not Devlyn had seen their tactics, but I needn't have worried. When he passed the fire breather, he lashed out with his claws. The soft underside of the enemy dragon was sliced open and all of us were showered with blood. The creature fell into the jungle a tangle of wings and limbs. It didn't move again.

Devlyn flew at lightning speed. Shit, it was as scary as all fuck. There I was, part of an aerial dog-fight. And what's more, I dared not wipe my eyes of blood and tears for fear of falling. The tears weren't from me crying either. I had done enough of that today. Rather, it was from the sheer force of the wind rushing past me with no protection other than my own ability to hang on for my life. If I did let go, even for an instant, I was certain I'd lose my grip. I clung on to that scale like I depended on it, because I did.

The other dragon, the one who had flanked us on the right had turned and was heading toward us. I imagined it was now his job to stop Devlyn from backing away from the white behemoth who waited with unnerving patience for us to arrive.

The wait wasn't a long one. In fact, I don't think any more than ten or so seconds passed. The white dragon lashed out with its claws and Devlyn, thank God, managed to dodge the strike. He was good. I just hoped I was better at holding on.

Actually. I hoped Callum and Zane and Suzy were, too.

“You all right?” Devlyn questioned.

None of us answered. I think they all felt the same as I did. I mean, I was scared to even open my mouths for fear it would distract me and make me lose concentration for a moment. And I knew all too well the result of that. A plummet to my death.

The other dragon gave chase and the white monster joined it. Now it was a game of cat and mouse, with us being the mouse. The white dragon spewed out huge flames and thick black smoke. I felt hotter than normal. When I turned to look behind me, I could see why. Devlyn’s tail was on fire!

This time I did speak up, “Holy fucking fuck!”

Hey, I never said any of the words I spoke would be profound. But the sight of Devlyn on fire warranted such a curse. Even Callum let out a gasp. He had seen it, too.

Although, I had to say, I don’t think Devlyn was as affected as we were. He kept on flying. Turning and twisting as best he could so he didn’t send his passengers to an early grave.

Unfortunately, no matter how eloquent is aerial gymnastics, the two dragons never gave up their chase. In fact, the white one gained on us. I could see the intensity in its eyes. Not a comfort

considering that intensity was directed at us and our demise. I swallowed hard, nervous and terrified all at the same time.

“Hold on again,” Devlyn screamed out.

My fingers were numb. My nails bled. I ached all over from having to sit in an awkward position on Devlyn’s back, but when I was told to hold on, by geez, that’s what I did.

Devlyn dived.

Not only did he dive, he did so in a spin, too. The ground became a blur of purple and green and I think—no, I was pretty certain, I was going to lose the fish I had back at the caves. Bloody typical. The first thing I get into my stomach in twenty-four hours and I have to let it go.

The ground got closer and closer and Devlyn showed no signs of easing up with his descent. I closed my eyelids tight, then decided that made matters worse. The vertigo that consumed me made me almost lose my grip, so I opened them again.

Devlyn stopped his spinning, thank fuck. I tried to clear my head, but that worry was soon superseded by the fact that in front of me I could make out objects on the ground. And not large objects, either. I could see tools and wood collected for the campfires. This all told me we were way too close to the ground. When was Devlyn going to pull up?

Fuck! My stomach turned and not in a nice way. My lips were so dry they must have cracked and I licked them furiously. The speed Devlyn generated was phenomenal, even though gravity gave him a helping hand.

I turned my head around. The two dragons were still following us, both breathing fire. When I turned back to look to the front, the ground would have been no more than five metres or so distant.

"Oh my fuckin' God!" Zane screamed at the top of his lungs next to me.

I didn't have time to say anything. When Devlyn came within a metre of the ground, he pulled up and I lost my grip.

Within a blink of an eye, if not sooner, I found myself tangled within the wings of the great white dragon. Darkness surrounded me and the beast screamed out in agony. I struggled to break free, unable to do so. Being in the wing of the beast was like being wrapped in latex-like leather. I felt suffocated and I gasped for breath while the wing tightened around me, my struggle tangling me more within its frame.

Moments later, I felt a thud and pain shot up through me. My mind sank into a darkness darker than my winged prison.

Chapter Twenty

I don't know how I survived to be honest. I woke inside a tent. It was Nottolu's, the stench of incense removed any doubt. I had to say, the aroma was almost welcome. His tent brought back so many happy memories for me.

Callum was lying beside me. He was either still asleep or unconscious. No matter. He was alive and safe and unharmed and that was all that mattered. I reached out and held him, running my hand over his chest.

The flap of the tent being opened disturbed me from my thoughts. It was Zane who entered.

"You okay, Jakey?" he asked, coming to sit beside us.

I sat up and pressed my fingers to the bridge of my nose, before answering, "Yeah. But I have no idea how."

"It was cool."

"It was?"

"Yep," Zane said with his cheeky smile. "You

were way cool.”

The bastard. Was he going to tell me or what? I had a feeling he enjoyed teasing me. Just wait until I got a hold of him. I’d give him a reason to smile. I leaned over and grabbed him, wrestling him to the bed.

Callum groaned and woke up. He joined us in our play fight. Soon, we were all on the bed rolling around in laughter, a tangle of limbs.

I managed to pin Zane down. I kissed him on his plump lips, then said, “Well? Are you going to tell me or not?”

Callum came to hold us both. He kissed me and I accepted him with such warmth and affection I was soon hard, the worries of dragon flight leaving my thoughts.

“You’re gonna have to suck me off before I tell,” Zane said.

Right. I didn’t need to be told twice. “C’mon, Callum. Give me a hand here. The sooner we make him cum the sooner he’s going to have to tell.”

Callum smiled.

We were both at Zane’s cock a heart beat later. The sensation of Callum’s tongue touching mine while I licked and sucked on Zane was a delight I never wanted to end.

Callum pulled down on the root of Zane’s cock, retracting his foreskin and exposing his beautiful

head for us both to enjoy. Zane was as hard as ever, groaning and wriggling on the bed. Even his toes were curled. I'd say he wanted this all along. The horny devil.

I continued to suck him, stopping to let Callum have his share. With a shudder and a cry out into the incense-filled tent, Zane blew his load over both of our lips. Callum kissed me, Zane's cock still between us. We tasted him and enjoyed each other at the same time. My senses exploded with all the delight the men I love could impart onto me.

"My turn now," Zane said, sitting up and not wasting any time.

We knew exactly what he wanted. We knelt so we were either side of him. He grabbed both our cocks and took them into his mouth. He was fantastic, licking and slurping and enjoying us both in equal measure. All the while, Callum and I kept up with our passionate kiss, our tongues lubricated by Zane's love.

A few short ecstatic moments after that, Zane was taking in all I could give him. Then Callum moaned. I knew he had blown, too. My stomach tingled. I hoped Zane kept our cum in his mouth. I wanted to taste all of us and I wanted it now.

He had. Fuck it was so hot sharing sperm with those I so dearly loved. We were once more a tangle of limbs, holding each other tight. This

time, instead of rolling around on the bed, we sat upon it, enjoying the touch of each others tongues and lips. I was in heaven.

When the taste of salt and cinnamon and that unmistakable tang of Callum and Zane's ejaculate had faded from my taste buds, Zane said, "Now, I believe you want to know somethin'?"

I ran my hand over his stomach. "Yes. I'd like to know what happened after I blacked out."

Callum piped up, "So would I. I thought I lost you for a moment. Then I blacked out when Devlyn pulled up from his death dive or whatever you want to call it."

I looked at my fiancé. "You blacked out, too?" I kissed him, running my lips across his, feeling his warmth once more.

He nodded.

"Okay. Okay," Zane said, that smile still on his lips. "But first I think you need to see somethin', Jakey. Besides, Nottolu sent me in here to come get you both."

Callum let out a chuckle. "And you couldn't help but get some action, hey?"

"Hey. A guy's gotta do what a guy's gotta do. Suzy may be great and all that, but I love you both, too. I'd do anythin' to keep everythin' the way it is, even fight off dragons and aliens and shit." With that he patted me and Callum on our shoulders and climbed off the bed.

I had to say, I now understood Zane. He was what I would call a true pansexual. By that, I mean he needed love from those he cared about. To him it didn't matter what gender they were. Being intimate was his way of expressing that deep love. I knew in that moment he would be with us always. I welcomed that, too. As I'm sure Callum did. What we just shared was proof of that.

Zane strutted to the tent flap, his cute little buttocks jiggled while he did so. I took it that was a signal to follow him.

Callum grabbed my hand and together we left the tent. Outside, a sight I thought I'd never see struck me like the break of a new day. Every adult member, from Nottolu to the lowest male in their tribe, was lined up to greet me.

Nottolu roared, "All hail Jacob, the eternal slayer, the destroyer of the dark and the bringer of light. All hail our King!"

The crowd went wild. Cheers and cries of joy rang out to fill my ears. Callum squeezed my hand. A look of pride washed over him. Suzy and Zane also looked upon me with the same serene expression.

"What did I do?" I asked meekly.

Aloysius came out of the crowd, all smiles. I was glad to see him, that's for sure. "You killed the leader of the enemy tribe, that's what. The rest of their warriors fled, their tails between their legs.

We were victorious, thanks to you, my brother."

"I did?"

Laughter rolled through the crowd.

Nottolu took my hand. Callum had no choice but to be pulled along with me. Zane and Suzy followed, hand in hand.

"The ceremony of ascension will begin. Prepare yourselves for your pledge my tribe," Aloysius called out.

A hush calmed the folk around me. I was led to a podium, carved with Celtic drawings and writing I couldn't decipher. Nottolu picked me up with ease and placed me onto it. All I could see were hundreds of eyes all looking at me. I felt rather exposed I had to say and nervousness crept up to invade my thoughts.

"It was such a brave thing you did jumping into the enemy's wing and causing him to fall to his death," Nottolu said. "You are truly great."

Before I could open my mouth to protest, to tell him I fell off Devlyn's back and it was sheer luck I landed on the dragon's wing and it was all an accident, Nottolu did the strangest thing. Well okay, not too strange considering I was in the dragon realm and everything here had been a learning curve.

He grabbed me by my hips, bowed and kissed my cock right on my foreskin, uttering the words, "I pledge my allegiance to you." When he was

done he moved aside so another member of the tribe could step up to the podium.

Again, before I could speak one word, I was kissed again on my cock. Every person in the tribe took their turn to *pledge their allegiance*, from the youngest warrior to Aloysius himself. By the time I had been kissed by everyone except Suzy and Zane, I was still in shock.

Zane came up to the podium, that smile on his lips and those beautiful eyes made my stomach tingle with delight. "You know I'm so gonna kiss you there, too, don't you?"

All I could do was nod, my mouth agape. I was still in shock. He kissed me, lingering for a lot longer than the others. I was so going to bend him over and fuck him red raw at the next available chance I got, that much I promised myself. Callum let out a chuckle. He had remained at my side while the tribe completed their bizarre ceremony.

"I'll do a bit more than kiss your dick later tonight, my King," Callum said, laughter mixed in with his words. He was going to get it, too.

Zane added, "Me, too."

"I so love you both." I said.

"Hey, what about me?" Suzy said, stepping up to the podium. "Don't you love me, too?"

I hadn't forgotten about Suzy. She was the best girl I'd ever met in my life, aside from my Mum, of course. "I love you, too, Suzy."

"That's better." She grabbed Zane's hand. "Now, I suppose I'm going to have to make the pledge as well, aren't I?"

"You don't have to. I know..."

She didn't give me time to finish my words, leaning down so she could lay a quick kiss on my foreskin. Her action surprised me more than the whole ceremony, I had to say. Never in a million years would I have thought she would have done such a thing.

"There, I did it," she said. "Now we can get on with trying to get back to Pembroke Eve and putting in place some sort of plan to get Mr. Barnaby back, hmm?"

Her words struck me. She was right. Here I was playing King, selfishly lapping up all the attention the tribe thrust upon me, when all the while the real issue remained. We had to do something to get Mr. Barnaby back from the eternal realm. How? I had no idea. But I was sure going to try.

Nottolu and Callum helped me off the podium.

Aloysius said, "There will be a feast tonight in your honour, my King. You must get some rest. The celebration will last well into the early hours."

I turned to look him in the eye. "Is the tribe safe from any other attacks?"

He nodded, adding, "Yes. From what I believe by the latest report from our scouts, the Clan of the Dark have ceased any threatening activities. I

would imagine not having an eternal in their ranks stirring things up sees to that.”

“Good. Then I think I’m going to have to hold you to your promise, Aloysius.”

He offered a slight bow. “I wouldn’t have expected anything less. Yes, the feast will be held, but you are not required to attend, you have already ascended to kingship amongst us. The rest is a formality really. Besides, there are things I must do to make sure my dear friend’s General store is looked after in his absence.”

A smile found my lips. “You mean we have a chance to rescue him?”

“There is always a chance, but one only worth taking if we open the human realm portal as soon as possible. Besides, I think there’s a delivery of egg noodles coming into the store today from memory. I need to be there for that, the townsfolk will be in a frenzy, I’m sure.” He paused for a moment, rubbing his chin. “I feel things are going to get a bit more interesting from now on.”

Zane said, “So who’s goin’ to rule the tribe if we’re all goin’ back home?”

Nottolu came into view. “I will. I consider it an honour to serve in my King’s stead if he chooses to pursue honourable deeds.”

“Thank you, Nottolu,” Aloysius said, shaking his cock and kissing him on his earlobe.

“Well, everything seems to be settled then. Let’s

go,” Callum said, holding out his hand, the ring ablaze. “Oh, I suppose we need the ring for this, don’t we?”

“That we will,” Aloysius said. “Now, all of us must hold hands. And please, don’t let go under any circumstances.”

Chapter Twenty-one

With a few words spoken by Aloysius in dragon tongue, the portal opened. The members of the tribe who remained next to me stepped away, bowing. Hand in hand, we all stepped through the event horizon. The tunnel of light I had experienced to get to the dragon realm greeted my senses once more. The sensation of falling gripped every fibre of my being.

Before I could get accustomed to the sensation I was flat on my back in the middle of Main Street. The sight of the blue sky above so reassuring and so welcome I was relieved and glad to be home.

Callum came over me, offering me his hand. "C'mon, we better get some clothes on." He chuckled, pulling me up to my feet. "We'll create a bit of a spectacle otherwise."

Sure enough, I was still naked. Not a good thing in the middle of Pembroke Eve. Sure, all the folk had seen me naked, but still, many were as narrow-minded as ever. Aloysius and Suzy had

slipped into the General store via the back entrance. There was a crowd gathering outside its doors, I bet the lure of cheap noodles was too much for some. I hoped Aloysius could find some clothing for Suzy in there otherwise there would be some raised eyebrows in the town.

Zane walked over to us, his smile as welcome as the blue sky. "So, you wanna get some gear on or fuck like rabbit's before we go rescue the old dude?"

I was about to answer when Mrs. Peterson, the mother of the boy who had bullied me in high school, raced up to me and said in a voice beyond contempt, "I know you're the so-called *saviour* of this town, Jacob, but for the love of all things holy can you stop parading around with nothing on? It's disgusting. I know you're a homosexual, but that doesn't give you the right to do what you're doing. Now go get some clothes this instant or I'll call Sheriff Tucker."

Zane's eyebrows knitted and his cheeks flushed red. Before I could stop him, he said, "You know he's just saved this town again, this time from a threat more dangerous than damn stupid aliens. Have some respect."

She looked us all up and down. Snorted and added, "If you ask me, homosexuals should all be locked up. I can't believe for one moment that what you do is part of our Lord's plan." She

glared with piercing eyes, the hatred more than apparent. Her hands planted on her hips.

My stomach turned. I had experienced folk like this many times and the one thing I had discovered was that ignoring such bigotry was the best approach. Nothing I could say would change her mind anyway. She'd go to her grave narrow-minded and in my view worse off. Humanity was a wonderfully varied thing. That was God's plan.

Mrs. Peterson mumbled some other hate filled words before she trotted off, her self importance and ignorance going with her.

I grabbed Callum's and Zane's hands, pulling them away from the woman. At the Food Emporium's door I hugged them both, thankful I had them beside me for support.

"Man, what a bitch," Zane said.

I kissed him on the cheek. "Don't let her ruffle your feathers. She's always been like that."

"Yeah, but she's still a bitch." Callum kissed me, too.

I opened the door to the Food Emporium, the familiarity of the place striking warmth into my heart. Zane closed the door.

"I have to say, I'm beat," I said.

"So what, a quick fuck's out of the question then?" Zane said.

I let out a laugh, one that sent a wave of relief over me. "I'm so glad to be home, but I think we

should rest. Aloysius was right when he said we're going to need all the strength we can muster to rescue Mr. Barnaby."

Callum held his arm around me. "I need a shower before anything, you want to join me?"

"That's an awesome idea," I said.

"I'll be in that," Zane added, bringing his arm around me, too.

When we stepped beyond the access way in the Food Emporium's main counter, an apparition materialised in front of us. At first it was nothing more than a blur of light and dark, then like a miracle, a familiar shape emerged from the chaos.

"Fuck me, it's Mister B!" Zane yelled.

Zane was right. The ghost *was* Mr. Barnaby. Without thought I went to him. Unfortunately my hand passed through him without any resistance, his body held no substance. However he was managing to communicate with us, he hadn't been able to get a proper physical hold into the human realm. He was still trapped. My heart sank.

Mr. Barnaby opened his mouth and the next words his spoke offered a small vestige of hope for the first time since he had fallen into the eternal's realm.

"Go to the lighthouse," Mr. Barnaby said with an ethereal and distant voice. "Go there as soon as you can, my dear friends. It's the only place where you can find the key. Go to the lighthouse on

Pembroke Bay. It holds the key. Go to the..."

"What key?" Callum offered.

But Mr. Barnaby's voice had trailed off. He had disappeared just as quick as he had arrived. To me it looked like he was pulled away. Was it his mind struggling against the eternal within him that had transmitted that image beyond the realms? It was a blessing if it were.

With the words he spoke ringing in my ears, I said, "Well, looks like we've got a trip ahead of us."

Zane grabbed my hand. "I hear the lighthouse is haunted."

"You scared, Zane?" Callum questioned.

"You betcha. Some real scary shit been going on there over the years. Folk have disappeared, most never returned from what I've heard."

I swallowed hard.

I knew I would have to get Mrs. Leary to look after the Food Emporium. I had a feeling we'd be gone for a while. I know she'd be happy to help, especially if I told her we were going to get Mr. Barnaby back.

"I'll give Aloysius a call and let him know what's going on," I said. "He might want to come, too."

"Make sure Suzz is on board, too," Zane said.

I nodded. We were all in this together anyway. "Sure thing."

“Yeah, good idea,” Callum said. “While you’re doing that, Jacob, I’ll go run the shower.”

Zane and Callum disappeared into the hallway that led out to the house. I picked up the phone from its cradle, dialling the General store. The silence before the phone connected was a clear reminder that no matter what happened I would have to do whatever it took to get Mr. Barnaby back, including visiting a haunted lighthouse.

*To be continued in
Hope of the Spirit
part five of the Pembroke Eve Chronicles*

About the Author

My name is Mark Alders. I live in a house. This house has a street in front of it which is a good thing because if it didn't I wouldn't be able to drive down to the shop and purchase the chocolate I need on a daily basis. *giggle* Seriously, I am a mild mannered post office worker by day and an erotic romance writer (mainly male/male) at night. Not much else to say other than, like everyone else, I have bills to pay, a mortgage and family that I love and drive me crazy all at the same time. Oh, and I have a dog, too! See? Average Joe...except when I get down and write...then I let my imagination go to places I never knew existed and my characters invade my mind.