

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ELLORA'S CAVEMEN

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DREAMS OF THE COAST VOLUME I

DRAGONMAGIC

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Chapter One

Arys felt his dragon body turn inside out, then there was a bright light and he was standing, naked, on two human legs inside a cozy, one-room cottage.

“Damn witch,” he growled at the voluptuous woman bent over the fire. “What do you want now?”

The witch Clymenestra stood up calmly, eyeing him with her usual smugness. Arys was tall, with bronze-colored skin over hard muscle, waist-length white-blond hair, and dragon silver eyes. Clymenestra looked him over like she owned him.

The bitch knew his true name and could call him from Dragonspace anytime she liked. Not forever, darling, he thought. Not forever.

“I need dragon’s blood,” she said, letting her gaze rove his body.

“Always blood. What is your spell this time?”

“Never you mind.” She looked at him with dark, possessive eyes. “I hold you, dragon, and you’ll give me your blood.” She smiled. “I’m always willing to pay for it.”

He knew her thighs were wet with her cream, her opening hot, anticipating. Arys’ cock was already swollen and hard, standing straight out from his body. His long hair warmed

his back, but his arms prickled with cold in the night air. Human skin was too damn thin.

Clymenestra had bound him to her with the magic of his name—but one day, one day, he'd be free. He knew the secret of his freedom, she didn't.

"So you called me all the way from Dragonspace for a drop of blood?" he growled. "I was deep in important business."

"Two drops. And you were lying on your back in the snow, sunning yourself. Silver dragons are the laziest things in creation."

Arys didn't deny this. In his dragon form, he lived to eat and hoard and mate as often as possible. He also worked his own kind of magic, which was lightning fast, like a fiery needle in his brain.

He loved dragon magic. Human magic was too much like work.

He watched the witch gather up the ingredients for her spell, checking and double-checking the cracked parchment book spread out on her wooden table. She ground herbs with a mortar and pestle, her muscles working as she smashed the herbs into a paste.

So much effort simply to work one little spell. Of course, her tedious magic worked on Arys—she could yank him from the dragon world whenever she wished.

But all human magic required a price. Arys picked up a knife, eager to get on with her payment. "Ready?"

She ground a few moments longer, then set aside her pestle. "Ready."

He quickly sliced his palm and let two drops of blood fall into the bowl she held out. Magic gathered and danced above it, faint magic, not very strong.

He peered into the bowl, seeing nothing more than green bits of leaf stained dark with blood. "Is that it?"

"No. I need more."

He frowned and held out his hand again. "More blood?"

"Not from you. I need a maiden."

"A maiden? What for?"

Clymenestra looked up at him, impatient. "Never mind, I said. I need maiden's blood. So I want you to bring me a maiden."

His blood was pumping hard with lust, his mind barely registering the odd request. "Right

now?”

She looked him over, from the top of his head to the soles of his bare feet. “Maybe later.”

“Good.” He closed his hand, annoyed at the tiny pain of the cut. Dragon hide was so much tougher than human skin.

Clymenestra put down the bowl as Arys approached her. Her dark eyes went completely black as her excitement mounted.

Arys grabbed the top of her loose dress and ripped it open. She was naked underneath—of course, she’d be ready. Her breasts were firm and upright, the nipples round and dark. Her taut belly held a jewel in its navel. Beneath that, her quim curved between her legs, a shimmer of pale hair twisting through it.

Arys tossed the dress aside, snaked his hand through her hair, and forced her to her knees.

Clymenestra’s eyes widened with joy as she closed her mouth around his enormous cock and began to suck.

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A witch’s lot is to be exiled—to live far from others. The words echoed in Naida’s mind as she stopped on the path through the woods to catch her breath again.

What kept her going, and kept her from despair, was the excitement of finally confronting her rising latent powers. At least, she thought they were rising latent powers. Hence, her journey to Clymenestra to seek the witch’s opinion.

Or, Naida thought, I might just be insane.

In that case, I can sit comfortably by the fire and talk to myself while others bring me cups of tea. She grimaced, her sense of humor no longer comforting her.

But she knew the words that called power to her. She’d known the right moment to grab Farmer Beluh and yank him from his barn. The roof had groaned and fallen in a second later.

When her father’s lamb had been born dead, suffocated in its struggle to enter the world, she’d called the words to push air back into its lungs. The lamb had shaken its head, climbed to its newborn feet and bleated for its mother.

These occurrences could be dismissed as coincidence or luck—she might have heard the timbers of the barn creaking just in time, and when she pushed on the lamb’s chest, she might have encouraged its lungs to not give up.

She could have dismissed the events except she hadn’t heard the timbers, she had only

touched the lamb, and she had the dreams.

The dreams were so vivid that afterward, the waking world seemed sluggish and not real. In her sleep, white-hot power called to her and frightened her. She could not recall details of the dreams when she awoke, but she remembered pain and elation, and she always woke very aroused.

Her quim would be creamy wet, her opening burning. She'd have to press her hands hard against herself until she found release. She muffled her sounds in the pillows, lest she wake her sisters and brothers, who slept with her in the loft of her father's farmhouse.

After her release came and dark joy receded to sweet lethargy, she couldn't resist putting her fingers to her mouth, tasting the wild flavor of her own come.

She loved the dreams, yet feared them. She wanted the power that called to her, though she knew she'd lose everything to get it.

Naida held her side as she climbed the hill to the house in the clearing. Or maybe, she reminded herself, I'm just insane.

She reached Clymenestra's cottage, a cozy white-washed affair with a well-kept thatched roof. The men of the village would do anything for Clymenestra, freely. Clymenestra never paid in coin or eggs or hens, though she would occasionally do a spell to heal. Naida never knew why, and the men would not speak of it.

Naida's palms went slick with sweat as she neared the door. What would Clymenestra say? Would she smile and be glad that Naida was now a witch? Or would she laugh and tell Naida that she simply liked to touch herself under the quilts after her dreams?

But she had to know.

Naida lifted her hand to knock, then dropped it. She had never been to Clymenestra's cottage and did not know what to expect.

A well-stocked window box hung from the tiny window next to the door, holding scented five-pointed summer flowers. Naida gripped the box and rose on her toes to look through the window's thick pane.

What she saw inside made her gulp with shock and lose her balance. She grabbed at the window box to stay upright, feeling splinters drive into her fingers.

Clymenestra, her thick blonde hair caught in a knot at the nape of her neck, knelt before a huge man who stood in front of her, naked.

The man had silver-blond hair that hung down to just above his backside. His hair shimmered like true silver, glittering and beautiful. His hips were narrow, taut with muscle, what she could see of his backside a pleasing curve. His chest was sculpted muscle, as

though he'd been chiseled by the goddess in bone and sinew. He clenched his fists, knotting biceps that gleamed with his sweat in the firelight.

Naida could see his cock, which was enormous, thick and long. The end of it rested in Clymenestra's mouth, and she was happily suckling it.

Something dark fluttered in Naida's belly. The man's face was square, sharp, and a little odd-looking, but most attractive. Not handsome, but fierce and hard, and his eyes...

His eyes were breathtaking. They were silver and large, luminous with their own light. While she stood, gaping, he turned his head and his silver gaze rested right on her.

Her heart banged in her chest. He saw her, and he smiled. His grin was infectious, tugging at her, telling her that he liked her watching and invited her to continue.

She couldn't have looked away if she tried.

Clymenestra's tongue laved his cock all over. Seeing the huge thing stuck in Clymenestra's mouth, and the man's balls drawn hard and tight, made Naida's knees shake.

She wanted to slide her hand under her dress and touch herself like she did in bed. Never mind she was outside and very rudely watching what was meant to be private between Clymenestra and her—

Her what? Lover? Husband? Was he another witch? He certainly looked like no man she'd ever seen before.

He placed a hand on Clymenestra's forehead and abruptly withdrew himself from her mouth.

"No," Naida heard Clymenestra plead through the glass. "I want to swallow you."

"Later," he said. He had a rumbling bass voice, a powerful man's voice. It also held a hint of something else—something wild and hot, and why did she think of flying?

He snatched a piece of cloth from the bed, wrenched Clymenestra to her feet, and tied the cloth around her eyes, blindfolding her.

The witch gasped with excitement. Her hands went to her bare nipples, fingers squeezing them. Naida knew exactly what Clymenestra felt, the same sense of aliveness Naida experienced every night in her dreams.

But Naida thought she knew why the man had blindfolded Clymenestra. He didn't want Clymenestra to see Naida at the window.

He wanted Naida to stay and watch, and didn't want Clymenestra to grow angry and send Naida away.

That he wanted Naida to watch him made her more excited still. Why should he want me to? she wondered.

He did, though. He guided Clymenestra to the edge of the low trestle bed and pushed her down on her back. As Clymenestra fell willingly, he grabbed a piece of twine from her worktable and used it to bind her hands in front of her.

Clymenestra offered no peep of protest. She squirmed on the bed, smiling, aroused and needy.

The silver-haired man climbed onto the bed, hovering over her on hands and knees. He yanked Clymenestra's thighs apart and bent down, opening his mouth over her cunt.

Naida squeezed the flowerbox, her own quim pulsing. She imagined his tongue on her, imagined feeling the hot slice going inside her where only her fingers had ever been. It would be the sweetest heaven.

Clymenestra writhed beneath his mouth. The witch's naked body was shapely and beautiful; Naida thought of her own softer limbs with some regret. Clymenestra reached for the man, but was hampered by her bonds. She moaned.

The man licked and licked, his hands spreading Clymenestra's legs as wide as they could go.

Naida wanted desperately to touch herself, to make her fingers do what the man's tongue did to Clymenestra. But if she lost her grip on the flowerbox, she'd fall and miss everything. She bit her lip and squeezed her legs together tighter, tighter.

Clymenestra screamed. She bumped on the bed, wriggling and moaning, her face twisted in ecstasy.

The man backed away. He grasped Clymenestra's hips and flipped her over, facedown. He lifted her hips, pulled her back toward him, then rammed his very long cock straight into her waiting quim.

It was raw, brutal sex. The man pumped into her, his hips working, broad hands brown on Clymenestra's white hips. Clymenestra went on screaming.

The man continued a long time, stroking her, fucking her, while Naida held on to the flowerbox, her eyes wide, watching hungrily.

The man threw his head back and groaned as he came. Clymenestra's screams had wound into breathy moans by this time.

He pumped a few more times, then withdrew.

Clymenestra collapsed on the bed. The man stood above her, breathing hard, his cock still rampant, wet and glistening.

“Oh,” Clymenestra moaned. “Arys.”

He glanced over at the window, brawny shoulders moving, and he winked.

With a sudden wrench, the flowerbox came away from the wall. Naida stifled a shriek as she went down, flowerbox and all, to the mud below.

Shaking, she scrambled to her feet, her hands stinging with splinters. Without waiting to see whether the couple inside had heard her, she sprinted away into the darkness of the woods.

Chapter Two

“What was that?” Clymenestra asked from the bed, her voice hoarse.

Arys untied her bonds and pulled off the blindfold. “Nothing.” He shrugged. “Probably an owl. Do you want me to hunt?”

“No.” She groaned as she slid off the bed and got to her feet. She walked away from him, snatching another dress from a hook as she went back to the table. “Go find me a maiden. I need to finish the spell.”

Clymenestra was always like this. Fuck, then get back to work, almost like she forgot about the fucking the moment she got off the bed.

The girl peeking in the window, now, she’d looked most appreciative. She’d also looked curious, astonished and interested, more emotions than he ever saw in Clymenestra.

Clymenestra liked sex, but she didn’t like men. Or dragons. She had no use for women at all. She might have tried to hurt the sweetheart at the window, and that would have been a shame.

Clymenestra shrugged on the dress and started grinding herbs again, clearly finished with him. Arys opened the chest that stood in the far corner and took out the old breeches and threadbare shirt Clymenestra kept for him in case he had to wander around outside.

I am enslaved to a witch who can’t even bother to get me new clothes, he thought in disgust.

Keeping a neutral expression, he pulled on the breeches and buttoned the fly. “Hunting a maiden,” he said. “This will be fun.”

“Arys.” Clymenestra looked up. “I need her to still be a maiden when she gets here, understand?”

He slid on the shirt and settled it over his body. “I do know what maiden means, witch.”

“And I do know how randy you are.”

“Hey, I’m young. I’m sowing my wild oats.” That’s how the bitch had caught him in the first place. He hadn’t been paying attention, until there she was, speaking his true name...

She glanced up, a curious light in her eyes. “Just how old are you?”

“Nine hundred and seventy-two.”

She laughed. “A mere stripling, are you? I’d love to see you full grown.”

“I am full grown.” He decided not to explain. Clymenestra was a fool and there was no use explaining things to fools.

He straightened the shirt, not bothering to tie it closed, and went to the door. On the threshold he paused. “Dragons mate for life, you know.”

“Yes, you mate all the time. You’ve told me.”

“No,” he said slowly. “I mean when a dragon finds his life-mate, it’s forever. No one else matters from that time forward.”

Her brows arched. “Are you proposing to me, Arys?”

“Never,” he growled, his afterglow evaporating. Clymenestra understood nothing beyond her own pleasure, the shallowest kind of person.

He closed the door on her cool laughter and started down the path, barefoot. Clymenestra hadn’t provided boots.

He stepped on a sharp twig almost immediately.

“Ow,” he snarled. “I hate these feet.”

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Naida had stopped running. She sat on a boulder, which was sharp on her backside, trying to catch her breath.

She would be a fool to run at breakneck speed through the night woods, and she knew it. Not to mention the wolves she might attract. But she ran instinctively. What she’d seen in Clymenestra’s cottage had unnerved her and aroused her and confused her.

The beautiful man had winked at her, as though he knew how wet and excited she was, as though he knew the wild thoughts that raced through her mind, as though they were friends sharing a secret.

She thought of his huge cock, and Clymenestra licking it all over, a wide smile on her face. What would it be like to have that cock in her own mouth, to feel the warm tip bump her lips?

She drew in a long, ragged breath. She'd likely never get the chance to know. He was Clymenestra's lover, and the witch had him, and that was that. Naida's father would likely marry her to one of the local farmers' sons, probably Angus, who liked to drink beer and belch a lot.

No tall, beautiful man with silver eyes for her.

Naida felt foolish now for hurrying toward Clymenestra's house, excited and eager to learn whether she was a witch. She wondered if the man would after all reveal that Naida had spied on them, and whether Clymenestra would be angry.

She decided she'd better make her way home. The moon was huge and luminous tonight, lighting the woods a little, but it was still nearly black under the densest trees. She was not afraid of the dark, she never had been, but she was cautious. A wolf, bear or wild boar would not care how brave she was, only how fast she could run.

As if it had heard her, a wolf appeared from between the trees and hesitated at the edge of the small clearing in which she sat. He sniffed, nose working, eyes gleaming yellow in the moonlight.

Naida stilled. "Oh, goddess," she murmured. "Please let him have just eaten a big meal."

The wolf took one step into the clearing, his eyes on Naida.

If I have magic, this would be good time to learn how to use it.

But she hadn't the faintest idea what to do. Cast a spell? Will it to be gone? She didn't know.

The wolf took another step toward her, oblivious of her frantic thoughts. A twig snapped in the woods behind the wolf, followed by a muffled Ow.

The wolf did a curious thing. Instead of fleeing the intrusion—a wolf was not fool enough to take on two people at once—it sat down and looked behind it as though waiting.

The silver-haired man from Clymenestra's cottage appeared on the path. He walked toward the wolf, unafraid and unconcerned.

Naida sat, mesmerized, as the man called Arys stopped two feet from the wolf and met its gaze. The wolf studied him intently, as though trying to understand something, then it rose from its haunches, turned, and slipped away into the woods.

Naida let out her breath. "Thank the goddess it wasn't hungry."

"He is hungry," the man said. His words were slightly accented, as though he came from a foreign land. "I asked him to look for you and protect you from harm."

Her eyes widened. "You asked him?"

"To look for you, yes. But I did not really need to. I felt you. You reek of power."

He strolled to her, his silver eyes swimming with sparks like fireflies on a summer night. The plain homespun breeches and linen shirt he wore could not disguise the raw sexuality of him, which struck her like an avalanche.

He sat down next to her on the boulder. His skin smelled damp and fresh and his hair was slicked back from his forehead, dark with water.

"I reek?" she asked faintly.

"Of power. Strong power. I felt it when you were at the window." He smiled, one corner of his mouth lifting. "You smell nice, though. Like a maiden."

She did not know what to say to this. "Why are you all wet?" she asked.

"I had a swim in a moonlit pool. Would you like to join me?" He watched her eagerly, hand extended, as though he'd like nothing better than to strip with her and dive into a warm pool in the middle of the woods.

She saw the red streak across his palm. "You're hurt." She caught his hand, turning it toward the light.

"'Tis nothing."

"But if you don't wrap it, it could take sick." She dipped her hand into her pocket and brought out the clean kerchief she always kept with her. She wrapped it deftly around his hand, tucking in the ends.

When she looked up, she found his gaze on her, unnervingly close. His body was warm and hard, his strange eyes studying her intently.

"A beautiful maiden with a kind heart," he said softly. "The very thing to ensnare a dragon."

She looked away, curling her fingers in her skirt. "Do not talk about dragons. Everything

has been so very strange tonight. I do not want to hear Clymenestra's lover tell me he has seen dragons."

"Of course I have seen dragons. I am a dragon."

She shook her head, red braids dancing. "No, please don't tell me."

"Why not? I am a silver dragon. I am Arys."

"Who?"

"Arys." He waited for her to be impressed, then deflated. "Oh, never mind. Why did Clymenestra have to enslave me in this world?"

Naida looked up, indignant. "Clymenestra enslaved you?"

"Yes." Arys lifted Naida's hand and kissed it. "But don't worry, I'll be free of her soon."

The warmth of his mouth shot heat through her body. She still ached from unreleased tension, her quim throbbing and damp. Even her run through the woods and the encounter with the wolf had not eased her completely.

"She should not have," Naida said.

His smile returned. "You are sweet. It was my own fault. A moment of foolishness, a hundred years of slavery."

"A hundred years?" Her mouth went dry.

"In my dragon lands, I am still free. But whenever she calls me, I must come. I have no choice. I'll be free, though, very soon."

"You sound certain."

"'Tis certain," he said, looking wise. "For everything that is taken, something must be released. I try to tell her. She does not listen."

It was easy to believe him. Sitting in the moonlit clearing, his feral eyes on her, after her own dreams of bright power, all this did not seem so strange.

She understood nothing, but at the moment it was not necessary to understand. Only to be here with him was important.

"You said I reeked of power."

He licked her palm, his tongue a hot streak. "I taste it on you, as well. Are you not a witch?"

“I do not know. That is why I was coming to see Clymenestra. To ask her what to do.”

He smiled, hot and wicked. “And you saw us fucking instead. Do you enjoy watching?”

Her face heated. “No. That is, I never...I couldn’t look away for some reason. I do not know why.”

“You needed to see. Your body is ripe for it, and you crave it.”

“How do you know that?”

“How could I not know?” He still held her hand, the night air biting where he’d licked her palm. “I smell your need, I sense it. That is why I blindfolded Clymenestra and let you watch.”

He was right, she wanted him. She’d envisioned herself in Clymenestra’s place, first having his tongue deep inside her, then spreading her legs to receive him.

Swallowing, she withdrew her hand from his, clasped the skirt of her dress, and inched it upward. “Will you touch me, Arys?” she whispered.

He pressed a kiss to the side of her mouth. She turned her head and let her lips meet his. His mouth was hot and felt good, his tongue, caressing.

“What is your name?” he murmured.

“Naida.”

He placed his hand, large, calloused and warm, on her thigh. As he kissed her, he brushed the skirt out of the way and pressed his first two fingers to her quim.

She gasped aloud at the new sensation. He moved his fingers, stroking, circling her opening and stirring the cream there.

“Naida,” he said. “Like the Naiad. A lady of the water.”

He opened his mouth, drawing her tongue into him. She’d never tasted the inside of a man’s mouth before. He was spicy, a little like nutmeg. When she stuck her tongue in farther, chasing the taste, he began to suckle it.

Dark feeling swirled at the base of her spine. She opened her legs, welcoming his fingers inside her. She thought of his cock, long and hard and ready. She wanted that inside her, too.

“Please,” she whispered.

“Please what?”

“Please, I want...” She grew confused. What did she want? Love. Lust. Him. Magic.

He watched her with strange silver eyes, beautiful and intense.

“You said you sensed my magic,” she said. “What did you mean?”

He traced her opening, rubbing fingertips along the petals of her quim. She squirmed with need.

“Strong magic,” he said. “Sharp and hot. Raw power. Very dangerous.”

“I don’t want to be dangerous.”

He smiled. “I like you dangerous. When I fuck you, it will be wild and intense—and dangerous.” He licked her cheek. “And then you’ll fuck me.”

If any of the farm boys had said that to her, she’d have screamed or fainted or run away. Maybe all three.

But she sat still, feeling the burn of his tongue on her skin, his fingers plying sensations all along her pussy, and wanted him.

“Will you?” she asked. “Arys? Will you fuck me?”

The word felt strange on her lips, but she liked it. Fuck. It was rather freeing to say it. “Fuck,” she whispered again.

“No.”

She jumped. “What?”

He stroked two fingers in and out of her, blunt, raw sensation that promised so much. “I must take you to Clymenestra. She wants a maiden, and you must be a maiden when you arrive.”

Her heart began to pound in sharp, panicked beats. “Why must you take me to Clymenestra? I do not want to go to her. I changed my mind.”

“She tells me I must take you to her, and I cannot disobey. She holds me, but not for much longer.”

“Can we wait then, until you are free of her?”

He shook his head. “No.”

He went on stroking her, thumb teasing her clit while his fingers pressed inside her.

“I don’t want to go to her, Arys,” she tried. “I am afraid of her. I would rather face the wolves and try to get home than go back to her.”

“The wolves will not harm you. I told them to leave you alone. But I will take you with me to Clymenestra.”

She clenched her teeth. She wanted nothing more than to sit here and let him play, while her cream flowed all over his fingers, but she made herself return to sanity.

She pushed his hand from her, and stood up, breaking all contact with him. He watched her, not very alarmed. “What if I refuse to go?”

“Then I will take you by force.” He said it matter-of-factly.

“You have just told me I had powerful magic, that I was dangerous. I might hurt you.”

“I know.” He grinned. His eyes sparkled with anticipation. “This is going to be fun.”

Chapter Three

Arys watched Naida stare at him, her beautiful brown-green eyes wide with alarm.

Then she whirled around and ran from him, heading into the woods. Her skirt hitched up, revealing her plump, shapely legs, and her thick braid of red hair bumped against her back.

Arys stood up, blood pumping. Her hot come still clung to his fingers, and he licked them clean, taking a moment to savor the taste of her.

What a lady. He would take Naida to Clymenestra as he was compelled, but then he’d show little Naida the wildest lovemaking the universe had ever known. He’d tell her who she was and what she had to do to free him from Clymenestra the big, bad witch.

He started to run after her. Oh, this hunting would be good. He could easily outrun her, and the sweet morsel would be his in the end.

He stepped on a sharp rock. “Damn!” He danced in a little circle, cursing in pain. Wolf. Stop her!

I’m eating dinner, came the thought back.

Is food all you think about? Stop her, now.

He heard a snarl in his mind then silence as the wolf loped off after Naida.

Arys caught up to her not far from the clearing. She stood on the path, panting, staring anxiously at the silver-furred wolf barring her way.

Arys came up behind her and slid his arms around her waist. His heavy cock, thick with wanting, nudged her through their clothes.

“Is he your friend?” she asked shakily.

“Maybe.”

The wolf was a fearsome sight, tall and yellow-eyed, its jaws stained red from whatever animal it had caught.

“Go away now,” Arys told him.

Sure. No problem. Call anytime. I’ll drop everything and come running. Just for you. The wolf stalked away, its thoughts dying into low-pitched mutters.

“Will all the wolves in the forest help you?” Naida asked.

“Probably.”

“Then I have no chance.”

“No,” he said.

She suddenly elbowed him in the ribs, twisted from him, and ran. He caught up to her in three strides, laughing as he scooped her into his arms and spun around with her.

“I think I love you, Naida of the water. Now let’s find some.”

He could slide sideways through space if he needed to, and he did so now. In a few moments, he was back at the pool he’d swum in earlier, the moonlight bright on its surface.

He thumped Naida back to her feet. She clung to him, alarmed and breathless. “What did you do?”

“Dragon magic. Want to see some more?”

“I’m not sure I do.”

“This will be easy. Watch.”

He thought of what he wanted, and suddenly, Naida’s dress and underdress vanished from her body and landed harmlessly in a pile a few feet from them.

She shrieked and clutched her arms over her chest. "That wasn't fair."

He grinned, tilting his head, looking his fill. "Goddess of the moon, but you're beautiful."

She had a lovely body, plump and curved, her breasts round with dark, lush tips. Her pussy, too, was cute, brushed with fiery red hair to match the curls on her head. His cock jumped. He had never been partial to human women, but she was the finest thing he'd ever seen.

"Swim with me," he said. He stripped off his clothes in the usual way and dove into the silvered pool.

When he surfaced, he saw her watching him, her look appreciative. She might be frightened and shy and uncertain, but she liked looking at his body. He'd seen that when she'd peered avidly through Clymenestra's window.

He thought she'd try to run away again, but she stepped to the edge of the pool, raised her arms above her head, and dove in, her body a graceful curve.

She surfaced, water cascading from her. Water beaded on her lips and her lashes and on the skin of her neck.

He stepped to her and slid his hands around her hips. "Naida," he said against her mouth. "Do your magic now."

Her breath tasted like honey. "I don't know how."

"You want Clymenestra to show you?"

"Yes."

"She can't." He swiped his tongue across her lips. "Clymenestra's magic is of the earth. Yours is of the air, like lightning, or white fire in your mind. You have the dreams, don't you? Of being elsewhere, of knowing something different than this?"

Her eyes rounded. "How did you know?"

"My magic is the same. Concentrate. Try to make something happen."

She closed her eyes. Her face grew calm, and he felt the power inside her begin to crackle and glow.

Suddenly he found himself flying backward through the air. He landed in the water again, smack, his backside stinging.

He struggled to his feet, shoving his wet hair from his face, laughing.

Naida gasped. "Did I do that?"

"Yes, sweetling."

"Oh." She looked startled, then slightly pleased. "I have no idea how."

"I do. I will teach you."

"Will you?" Her eyes were wide, luminous.

"Of course. I can teach how to control your magic and use it when you need it." He grinned. "And then you'll learn how beautiful your body is, and how much I can pleasure it."

She gave him a skeptical look. "What has that got to do with magic?"

"Much, sweet Naida. Very much."

He placed his hands on her shoulders, finding them soft, his fingers indenting her flesh. She was lush and beautiful, and his cock, which had already been hard, swelled to its tightest point.

He bent and swirled his tongue over her left shoulder, trailing it to her neck, then to her ear. He dipped inside, knowing the hot sensation that would flow through her. "Put your hands around my cock," he said.

She swallowed, eyes darting sideways at him as he continued to lick the shell of her ear. Then, lovely sensation, she put tentative fingers on his very needy cock.

"Take it." He nibbled her earlobe. "Put your hands all the way around it."

She nodded once, her pretty red hair tickling his nose. And then, goddess, I love you, she closed both hands around him.

His hips involuntarily jerked, his cock wanting the sensation of her squeezing him. He stilled, forcing himself to go slowly. No sense scaring her away. "Part your legs," he said.

Another sideways glance. "I thought I had to remain a maiden."

"You will. I am going to show you what it is to be pleased, and teach you to pleasure me."

"Oh." Her eyes darkened in anticipation, the pulse at her throat jumping. Slowly, as though still uncertain, she moved her feet apart.

He slid one hand to the curls of her pussy, swirling his fingertips through delightfully wiry hair as he'd done earlier in the clearing. He spread his fingers, nudging her to part her legs

farther.

She drew in a breath, eyes widening.

“Do you like it?” he whispered.

“Yes.”

He opened her a little more, feathering his touch along the folds, then he slid one finger inside her, finding her juices already flowing for him.

He swirled his finger, pressing it deeper inside than he had been able to before, feeling the exquisite tightness of her cunt. It excited him. Even as a dragon, he'd never known a virgin.

Naida turned her head, her lips hot against his. “It feels like when I touch myself, but better.”

He happily imagined her with her hand pressed to her pussy. Her eyes would be heavy with desire, her head lolling back, her red hair spilling over her. She'd stroke and stroke, moans escaping her parted red lips.

“You feel nice,” he murmured, and slid a second finger into her.

She groaned and tightened her hand around his cock.

“Like this,” he said. He guided her fingers to his tip then closed his hand around hers and stroked down to the base. The sensation burned and tingled, and he felt the building pressure of his seed.

He released her hand, letting her have a go on her own. She let her fingers drift to the tip, then, sweet girl, squeezed him down his full length, just like he'd taught her.

“Oh, love,” he breathed. “You learn fast.”

He scooped her to him, letting the buoyancy of the water lighten her. He let his third finger join the others, pressing deep inside her. She was wet in there, and hot and tight. He wanted to be inside her, and not just with his fingers.

“Why does Clymenestra want me?” Naida murmured.

“She needs your blood. But do not worry, I'll not let her hurt you.”

She lifted her head. “How will you stop her, if you must obey her?”

“I have ways. Now, stop talking.”

Obediently, she closed her mouth. He laced his tongue over her lips, prodding the closed

line like his fingers prodded her opening.

“I want to show you so many things,” he whispered. He angled his fingers to press forward on the inside of her walls. “Things like that.”

She gasped. “Arys, what are you doing to me?”

“Showing you pleasure.”

“Too much. I can’t...”

“Yes, you can.” He slid his tongue over her lips again, dipping inside. He kissed her chin, her cheek, and the hollow beneath her eye. “You taste good, Naida.”

She’d gotten the idea of how to rub his cock, though he could tell she really did not know what she was doing. Her grip moved up and down like he’d taught her, but she also explored him in quick little strokes. She found the sensitive place beneath his tip, the warm tightness of his balls, the place behind his scrotum that excited him.

As she played with him, he played with her, fucking her with his fingers. The walls of her cunt squeezed him, harder and harder as she grew more excited.

“Arys.”

“Have you ever come before?” he whispered against her skin.

She nodded, eyes closed. “In bed. Alone.”

“It’s much better when someone else takes you there. Do you want me to take you there?”

“Yes.” The word came out a groan. “Please.”

“All right. Hold on.”

She tightened her grip on his cock at the same time she slid her arm around his shoulder. He wriggled his fingers inside her, pressing forward against the walls of her cunt to find her place of greatest pleasure.

At the same time, he moved his thumb over her clit, teasing and circling. She was so wet with cream that his fingers were soaked with it.

He moved his other hand to the warm space between her buttocks and dipped his forefinger between her cheeks, finding her anal star.

Her head fell back. “Goddess, what do I feel?”

“You feel me.” Arys pressed a kiss to her forehead, a strange tenderness washing over

him. “You feel me feeling you.”

Slowly, so as not to hurt her, he dipped the tip of his forefinger into her ass.

She squeezed his cock, hard. In response, he slipped his finger farther into her ass, until she let out a strangled moan.

Goddess, he wanted her so bad. He felt the constraint of the order Clymenestra had given him. He could sense the witch’s magic around him, like a net of fiery threads, compelling him to obey.

He strained against it, wanting Naida, knowing she could free him if he could just—get—through.

“Too late,” he groaned. “Oh, too late.”

Naida screamed. Her juices flowed hot around his fingers, sweet come, oh, yes, love. She bucked and rocked against his hand, her hold on his cock an iron-firm grip.

“Naida. Fuck.” His climax took him hard. His seed shot into the water as he pumped and pumped through Naida’s grip.

Her spicy scent surrounded him, her skin sweet under his tongue. He kept pumping, wishing her hand was her pussy, all warm and wet around him.

Clymenestra was going to pay for every thrust that he could not have inside Naida. He treasured this woman, and every sound of excitement she made, and Clymenestra would not let him have her.

Not for long.

Naida cried his name. She rubbed herself against him like she wanted to climb inside him, nails biting his back. He guided her hand to his scrotum, cupping her fingers around it while he moved his hips to release the last of his come.

Breathing hard, he gathered her against him. “Naida. Love.”

Her own climax broke, dying off into breathy little sighs. They held each other for a long time, her hand still on his cock, his fingers still buried inside her pussy.

“I’ve never felt like this before,” she murmured.

“Neither have I, sweet love.”

Arys kissed her lips. She returned the kiss with faint, shaking pressure, her mouth weak.

It was new to him, this tenderness, coming hard on the heels of the best climax he’d ever

had in his dragon life. “Neither have I.”

Chapter Four

Naida swallowed as Clymenestra’s house came into view. Arys’ hand in hers was strong, and when he looked back and gave her a smile she felt slightly comforted. But only slightly.

She understood now that Arys would not let Clymenestra hurt her. And yet he still brought Naida here, unable to disobey Clymenestra’s commands.

Naida felt flushed and open and warm from his hands and mouth on her. She should be ashamed, she thought, but she wasn’t. The warm glow that pulsed through her body was more than pleasure. She did not understand why or how, but she’d fallen in love with Arys.

And why not? He turned his head and gazed at her, his smile warm and wicked. He was beautiful, and he made her laugh, and the way he looked at her...

She knew better than to think he could possibly return the feeling. He was Clymenestra’s lover, Clymenestra’s slave. Clymenestra had a lush and enticing body, and Arys had to obey her.

After Clymenestra had taken from Naida what she wanted, everything would be done. Naida would return home, trying to come up with a clever explanation for why she’d been gone all night, and this would be over. She’d likely never see Arys again.

That thought brought an ache to her heart.

They approached the house. The window box still lay broken near the threshold.

At the door, Arys stopped. He slid his arm around Naida’s waist and kissed her gently. “I am pleased I found you this night, Naida of the water. All will be well, I promise.”

Without waiting for her reply, he opened the door. Keeping his strong hand on the small of her back, he guided Naida inside.

Clymenestra’s cottage smelled of lavender and patchouli, sandalwood and poppy. The witch herself stood at the sturdy table in the middle of the room, chopping herbs with a wicked-looking knife.

She did not bother to look up as they came in. “You brought her? Good. Tell her to stand over there.” She pointed with the knife to the space beside the bed.

“It’s all right,” Arys said in Naida’s ear as he led her across the room. “I’ll not let her hurt you. And then, when she’s done, I will be free.”

Naida did not really understand why he was so confident, but the strength of his voice, coupled with the heat from his hand, calmed her a little. As long as Arys was with her, she could face anything.

Clymenestra straightened up, knife in hand. She stared at Naida, then her face changed, irritation giving way to surprised delight.

“Oh,” she said. “Clever Arys to bring me this one.”

“I am very clever,” Arys said, his voice rumbling. “You should remember that.”

Clymenestra ignored him. “Do not worry, my dear. I need your blood, but only a drop or two. Of course...” she neared Naida and touched her cheek with a cool hand. “Your blood will be special.”

She licked her finger and drew it across Naida’s lips. Naida recoiled, cringing against Arys behind her.

“She’s mine,” Arys growled. “I saw her first.”

Clymenestra laughed. “I care not what you do with her, Arys, after I am finished. Have her, do what you like.”

“Oh, I’ll do whatever I like when you’re finished,” Arys said.

Clymenestra shot him a puzzled look. Arys simply smiled a wonderful, dazzling smile that said he knew much better than Clymenestra what the world was really all about.

Clymenestra didn’t bother trying to understand. “Lie down,” she said to Naida. “You might want to take off your dress, first.”

Naida started. “You said a drop or two. Why should I have to lie down?”

“A drop or two,” Clymenestra replied impatiently, “from a maiden’s hand in the moment she ceases to be a maiden. That means you need to deflower her, Arys.”

She turned away, unconcerned. Arys scowled at her back. “You didn’t bother mentioning this before.”

“I did not think I had to. Don’t tell me you don’t want to deflower her, because I won’t believe you.”

“She is not for your use. She isn’t your slave.”

Clymenestra smiled a nasty smile. “No, but you are. I command you to fuck her, slave. There is a convenient bed next to you. I’ll take the blood as soon as you break her hymen,

then you can have her to your heart's content."

Arys folded his arms across his broad chest. "This I will not do."

Clymenestra gave him a disbelieving look. "But she's a lovely thing. I am surprised that you don't want to ravish her."

"What is between Naida and me is between Naida and me," Arys said. "It's nothing to do with you. She's a maiden, and a sweet lady, and I'll not let you foul her with your magic."

Clymenestra stared at him a moment, as though amazed a docile pet cat had grown claws, then her eyes narrowed. "Oh, yes you will. You will do anything I like, anytime I like."

"Not this time," Arys said.

Clymenestra closed her eyes. Naida slid her hand into Arys' large one, suddenly worried.

Clymenestra balled her fists, drew a long breath, then opened her mouth. From her parted lips came a musical, rather beautiful chant, full of long and nonsense syllables.

The sounds filled the air like smoke, hanging in the scented cottage. They wound among the beams, flowing into Naida's ears, filling her body with music. She felt the syllables try to grasp her, but they could not, and slid away.

Arys suddenly released Naida and clamped his hands over his ears. "Damn witch."

His face white, he sank to his knees, his eyes wide with shock. The silver color of his irises drained nearly to white. His whole body shook, his strong, muscular frame racked with tremors.

Naida realized that the words that had tried to grasp her had found purchase inside Arys. They held him like fiery bands, wrapping him in pain. She did not know how she understood this, but she did.

"Stop!" she cried.

Clymenestra did not move. Naida strode forward and seized the witch by the shoulders. "Stop. Leave him alone. I'll do your stupid spell."

Clymenestra closed her mouth. The musical words slowly faded, floating away like dying snowfall. She raised her head, opened her eyes, and smiled. "Excellent," she said. "I knew I could count on you."

* * * * *

Beautiful Naida stripped her dress from her body and stood naked in the cottage's heated air.

Arys forgot a moment about Clymenestra and her spells, and the needle-hot agony that had laced every bone and sinew while Clymenestra chanted his true name.

Naida was all that was beauty. He'd seen her in the moonlit pool, when his hands floated all over her lovely body, but this room was bright, firelight touching her and flushing her skin.

She had plump limbs, tapering to delicate wrists and ankles, hands a little rough from her farm work, feet dainty in shabby leather shoes. Her waist nipped in over round hips, buttocks full and lovely.

He admired her sweet, pretty ass that he'd touched and filled with his finger. Some day he'd fill it with his cock. He'd teach her to take it little by little, until he could slide in full length.

Her breasts were round and plump, dark areolas tightening to points in anticipation of what they would do. Her neck was long and lovely, bared by the braid that kept her red hair confined.

Clymenestra smiled, sweeping her own appreciative gaze over Naida. Annoying woman.

Arys stripped off his shirt and breeches, tossing the threadbare clothes aside. If all went as planned, that was the last time he'd have to wear them. He saw Naida's gaze flick to his muscled chest and then down, and her eyes widen. He grinned to himself. His cock had inflated in a big way.

"Lie on the bed," he told her. "Spread your legs for me."

She glanced at him in trepidation, but obeyed. Her buttocks swayed enticingly and her breasts swung as she crawled onto the bed. She lay down, arranging herself comfortably, and moved her legs a few inches apart.

Beautiful sight. He wouldn't hurt her though, never that. He'd go slow, get her used to him, make her so wet and slippery and use his dragon magic so that she'd not feel a maiden's pain.

He climbed upon the bed with her. She watched him, concern in her green-brown eyes.

"Did she hurt you?" she whispered as he knelt over her.

"Not too much. Don't worry, sweetheart."

She ran her hands over his broad shoulders and he realized she was trying to soothe him. "She should not have hurt you," she said.

He leaned down and kissed her lips. "You are sweet, Naida. But never mind about me. I

need you to open your legs a little more.”

She complied. She did not look at Clymenestra, who’d moved back to her worktable, but at Arys. Her eyes fixed on him, watching him, trusting him.

Trust. He’d never had the pleasure of someone’s trust before.

“It won’t hurt, love, I promise,” he said.

Clymenestra approached them, silver bowl in hand. “I do hope it hurts. I need her to scream.”

“Too bad.” Arys lowered himself onto her. Naida’s scent surrounded him, sweet, heady, and spicy. He was losing focus, forgetting about the hot room and Clymenestra and the too-rough blanket under his knees. “Do not listen, Naida. Look only at me.”

Naida did. He could get lost in her eyes, green-brown and framed with dark lashes, and her skin that warmed him.

He ran his hands down her sides, swirling fingers over the bones of her hips, dipping to her thighs and spreading them wide. He brought his legs together and lowered himself to her.

“Lift your hips a little.” He splayed his hand across her opening, sliding fingers through her cream. He dipped a finger inside, then brought it to his mouth and sucked it clean. “I love tasting you.”

She pressed her fingers to his biceps, rubbing them a little. He fused his dragon magic to her mind, gently shutting it to pain. Clymenestra would not get Naida’s pain.

“Ready?” he whispered.

Naida swallowed, her throat working. She nodded.

He sensed Clymenestra hovering next to the bed, a bowl and small silver knife held ready. Naida stretched out her hand.

“Take me, love,” Arys said, then very slowly, he slid himself inside her.

He felt the change in her instantly. Her eyes widened and she gasped, the walls of her cunt closing in on him tight, so tight.

Her whole body jerked, and not in hurt. Infused with her mind, he felt the magic in her take hold, like white fire snaking through every nerve. He smiled with the joy of it.

She smiled back, a very dragonlike smile.

His heart sang. It was coming.

And then with the suddenness of a firecracker, Clymenestra, her hot, stuffy cottage, and the stink of her magic—went away.

Chapter Five

They were in a meadow of tall, lemony-smelling grass and large blue flowers. Soft blue sky arched overhead. The grass tickled Naida's back, but all she really felt was Arys inside her, stretching her, filling her.

"Naida," he said, his silver eyes glowing at full strength. "Love."

He pumped into her, sending her down into the grass. The friction of his cock in her slippery cunt sent wave after wave of delight crashing through her. He licked her lips, sliding his tongue between them as she laughed.

"Damn, you're beautiful," he said. "And goddess, so tight."

He focused on her, his eyes wild with lovemaking. His shoulders bunched as he braced himself, his hips rising as he fucked and fucked her.

"Fuck," she said out loud. She had come to like the word.

He grinned. "All right, darling. If you insist."

He thrust harder and harder, then suddenly slowed to a near stopping point. She wriggled her hips, wanting more, begging for more.

He laughed and started again, faster and faster. He snaked his hand between them and rubbed her clit.

She screamed. The sensation of him inside her body and his magic inside her mind spiraled waves of joy through her. She came, harder and more crazily than she had in the moonlit pool—having him inside her made all the difference.

"Arys," she said. She hauled him down to her. "I love you."

He groaned aloud, face twisting, as his own climax came. Hot seed burst into her, and sweat dripped from his flushed body.

He crashed on top of her, riding out his climax while she writhed in the hot feeling of it. "I love you," she said again.

He lifted his head, smiling widely, his silver eyes diamond-sharp. "Naida." He laughed

and licked her mouth. "I knew you'd free me. I knew you had the magic."

"What happened? Did you bring us here?"

"No, sweetling. You did."

Naida gaped at him. "I did?"

"You and your vibrant magic. You are strong, sweetheart. That's why I love you."

She stopped, stunned. "You love me?"

"Of course. I knew you were for me the moment I saw you."

He was still inside her, stretching her tight, her legs wide. "How could you know?" she asked. "I do not understand."

"Your magic nearly knocked me over when I saw you at the window. I knew you had it, magic so strong you could kick Clymenestra's cottage to Hades if you wanted to. I knew if you took me as your mate, you'd free me. And you did. I'm free of her."

"How? How could I have freed you?"

"You said you loved me." He traced her lips with his thumb. "You wanted me, and said you loved me. That's all it took."

"There has to be more to it than that." She paused, still feeling the hot magic inside her mind. "Doesn't there?"

"Well, you are a magical being. That helps."

"Don't laugh at me. I am trying to understand." But his laugh was infectious and she could not help giggling back.

"You are a strong and powerful woman, Naida. I will make you understand what your dreams meant, and what you can do. And if you agree to remain my mate, I will protect you, forever." He lowered his head, caught her nipple in his mouth and suckled. "And I'll do this, too."

"Arys, make love to me."

"That's what I've been doing."

"Again. Please. Make me feel what you did in the woods, and what you did now."

He grinned down at her. "You're a demanding one."

“Teach me how to make you feel good.”

“I think I can do that.”

He withdrew himself and knelt back, his stem standing out hard from a circle of golden curls. He was so beautiful, bronze skin on hard muscle, silver-blond hair falling to his waist. “Stand up,” he said.

She got shakily to her knees, then her feet, unsteady. She felt drained and yet exhilarated, exhausted yet excited.

He did not stand. He leaned forward and licked her pussy from back to front. “I could taste you forever,” he murmured.

He licked her again, slowly. He took his tongue across her opening, then began to flicker it a little faster. He tasted her clit, and then her opening again, licking her come, increasing his speed. She clasped her own shoulders, rocking on her heels as he feathered his tongue faster and faster.

He withdrew suddenly, and she nearly moaned in disappointment. Then she gasped as he moved behind her, parted her cheeks, and slid his tongue to her anal star. “Arys.”

“Do not move, love,” he whispered against her skin, hot breath on her flesh.

He dipped his tongue into the hole, a wet sensation that made her rise on her toes. He went on licking, pleasuring the sensitive opening, from time to time dipping his tongue inside. She squealed, never having experienced anything like it.

Her hands slid down to her clit, massaging the mound while his tongue played in her ass. She came very soon, screaming her joy into the open, quiet air, the large flowers nodding at her.

After that, he showed her how to take his cock in her mouth, closing her lips around it, using her tongue to arouse him like he’d aroused her.

And then he laid her down and entered her again, hard and fast, digging into her with intensity.

“I love you, Naida,” he whispered as he climaxed. “Love you.”

“I love you.” She wrapped her arms around him. “My mate.”

“Mmm, I like the sound of that.” He smiled lazily, tracing her cheek. “Can we do more mating?”

She laughed, so tired and yet so happy. “As much as you like.”

* * * * *

Much later, as they drowsed under the warm afternoon sky, she asked, “I wonder why I came to Clymenestra’s cottage tonight of all nights?”

“Fate,” Arys said. He was stretched out next to her, his body strong and protective. “Magic.” He paused. “Actually, I don’t give a damn, I’m just happy you did.”

“And I’ve truly freed you?”

“Yes. I’ve sensed Clymenestra calling to me while we’ve been here, but I no longer have to obey.” He brushed his fingertip across her nose. “Of course, you can call me anytime. I’ll come running.”

“What was the spell she was trying to do? It had something to do with dragon magic, didn’t it?” Naida frowned. “That’s why she was happy you’d brought me to her.”

“She wouldn’t tell me, but when we flashed here, I understood.” Arys stretched, a joy to watch. Every sinew and muscle moved in a delightful way, then he relaxed again, rather like a lion in the shade. “She was trying to steal my magic. She thought your blood could help her, since you have strong magic. Silly witch. She helped you free me instead, which enabled you to bring me here.”

Naida raised up on her elbows. “What is this place?”

“It’s my world.”

She swept her gaze across the meadow, to the misty hills in the distance. It was beautiful. “How did I know to come here?”

“Because you were drawn to it. You have dragon in you.” He chuckled. “Besides me, I mean.”

Naida eyed him in sudden suspicion. “Why aren’t you a dragon, if we are in the dragon world?”

He shrugged. “I can be human when I want to be. I wanted you to get to know me like this first.”

“When will you be a dragon?” she asked, a little nervously.

“When I’m ready. Let’s finish with Clymenestra first.”

She looked at him in surprise. “I thought we were finished with her.”

“Yes, but we ought to say goodbye.”

He flashed her a mischievous grin. He stood up, extended his brawny arm to her, and helped her to her feet.

She looked across the meadow, wondering how they'd get back to Clymenestra's world. As she scanned the clear horizon, she saw a man coming their way.

Strangely, though she was naked, and so was the man walking toward them, she felt no embarrassment. It was as though clothes were of the other world and no longer mattered.

Arys raised his hand in greeting. The approaching man was as large and muscular as Arys and had brown hair and amber eyes.

"Still at it, I see," the man said when he reached them.

"Wouldn't you be?" Arys asked, sounding smug.

"Do you know him?" Naida whispered.

"He's the wolf," Arys said. "Or at least he is in your world."

"Just call me Wolf," the man said. "I don't take human names." He looked sideways at Arys. "Unlike some conceited dragons I know."

It was the wolf, and it wasn't. Naida seemed to see both the man and the feral, powerful wolf-form interposed on each other. And then again, she just saw the man.

"I think I have much to learn," she breathed.

Arys slid his arm around her waist. "Don't worry, I will teach you."

The wolf laughed. "When you're tired of him, come and find me."

Arys ignored this. "We are returning to deal with Clymenestra. Want to watch?"

The wolf snorted. "Not really. I have things to do. Go easy on her, she can't help being stupid."

"True." Arys looked down at Naida. "Ready?"

"I suppose—oh!"

As soon as the words were out of her mouth, the tranquil meadow flowed away and they stood once again in the dark woods before Clymenestra's cottage.

Arys moved away from Naida and faced the cottage. "Come on out," he said, his voice stronger than she'd ever heard it. "Get it over with."

Naida did not think Clymenestra would respond. She was a powerful witch, why should she? But in a few moments, the door opened and Clymenestra walked slowly outside, past the broken flowerbox like she did not notice it. Her hand was clenched, and Naida sensed power in it, a spell of some kind.

Naida moved protectively toward Arys. Clymenestra sneered at her. “You stole him,” she said.

“No,” Arys interrupted. “You stole me. I belong to no one now, except Naida.”

“How did you enslave him?” Clymenestra asked Naida, as though Arys wasn’t there. “How did you take him away from me?”

“I loved him. Can you understand that?”

“No,” she scoffed. “But I suppose it doesn’t matter what I understand. Your magic is stronger than mine. Very well, you won. I know better than to fight a more powerful mage.”

Her smile was disdainful, and her fist began to glow.

“Arys,” Naida said nervously.

Arys shook his head. “Ah, Clymenestra. Foolish to the end.”

Clymenestra’s lip curled. “I needed you. You would have done the same.”

“No. You stole my name, you stole my soul. Now that I have it all back—”

“What? You are going to kill me?”

Arys laughed, not an angry laugh. “No.”

Clymenestra lifted her hand. She began to chant, an ugly, thick chant that darkened the air around it.

Arys watched her with a pitying look. “You know what they say, Clymenestra.” He held up his clenched fist. Flame and light danced from it, crackling with power. “You should never play with fire.”

He sent the spell straight at Clymenestra’s cottage. The tiny house exploded into flames. It burned lightning fast, falling to a pile of ash in only a few seconds, as Naida and Clymenestra watched, gaping.

Clymenestra shrieked, and the spell in her hands vanished. “My power—you—” She fell to her knees. “Goddess, help me!”

Arys moved back to Naida and held out his hand. “Ready to go, love?”

Naida gulped, almost as shocked as Clymenestra. “What did you do?”

“The cottage held her power. Her magic is earth magic, as I told you, and she built much of it into the walls of the cottage. She will be too weak to enslave any more magical beings, I think.”

“Oh.” She stared at Clymenestra, weeping in the mud.

Arys touched Naida’s arm, surprisingly gentle in light of the violent spell he’d just cast. “Come, love,” he said. “We are finished.”

He lifted one hand and sliced through the darkness. A bright rent appeared at his fingertips, and behind it floated the soft smell of meadows.

Arys stepped through the tear, reaching back for Naida. She clasped his hand, letting him pull her into his world again.

As she landed on the bright grass, she saw his body elongate and flash and grow, becoming brilliant silver in the sunshine, liquid light. Huge wings unfolded and mighty legs propelled him from the earth into the blue air. The downdraft of the first flap of his wings poured over her, stirring her hair.

She watched him for a long moment, her mouth open, as he flew and spun and spiraled over the earth. A long stream of flame came from his mouth, spitting fire for the joy of it.

“Come with me, Naida.” His voice rang in her head.

Suddenly, she knew just how to do it, knew what all those dreams in the loft of her father’s farmhouse had been trying to teach her.

She reached up with her hands and sprang straight into the air. Wide wings unfurled and caught her, and she became dragon, gold and white, streaking through the heat-laden sky. She caught up to Arys and dove over him, laughing, rolling and floating as though she were in water.

Arys chortled, his strong voice surrounding her. “Of course, you’d be a golden,” he said. “Rarest dragon in the universe. I ought to have known.”



