

# DARK ELVES II: MASTERED

Loose Id

JET MYKLES



## Praise for the writing of Jet Mykles

### *Dark Elves 1: Taken*

*Taken* is an erotic tale that will require something cool to be on hand when reading it. Not only are the illustrations breathtaking but the story of an angry woman who finally finds the love and acceptance that she has been missing is heart touching.

-- Claudia, *The Road to Romance*

*Dark Elves 1: Taken* is a delightfully wicked romp through the darker side of sex. Jet Mykles creates for the reader a sinfully sexual world where very little is taboo and few have the desire to say when.

-- Joletta, *Fallen Angel Reviews*

Ms. Mykles has written a tale of love, lust and magic that I enjoyed very much. I recommend this sizzling and sexy book to anyone who enjoys stories of elves and the paranormal. *Dark Elves 1: Taken* is a keeper!

-- Susan White, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

*Dark Elves 1: Taken* is fast-paced and imaginative... Mykles is not afraid to push the envelope in order to create a story that captivates the reader.

-- Rho, *A Romance Review*

I think *Dark Elves 1: Taken* would appeal to all readers, vanilla and not so vanilla. The sex was scorching, and I loved it, but it's the romance that will make me read more from Ms. Mykles.

-- Dani Jacquel, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

*Dark Elves 1: Taken* is now available from Loose Id.

# DARK ELVES 2: MASTERED

Jet Mykles

LooseId  
[www.loose-id.com](http://www.loose-id.com)

## Warning

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers. Loose Id e-books are for sale to adults ONLY, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

\* \* \* \* \*

This book is rated:

 SCORCHING

**For substantial explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable (ménage, BDSM).**

DISCLAIMER: Many of the acts described in our BDSM/fetish titles can be dangerous. Loose Id publishes these stories for members of the community in which these acts are known and practiced safely. If you have an interest in the pleasures and pains you find described herein, we urge you to seek out advice and guidance from knowledgeable persons. Please do not try any new sexual practice, whether it be fire, rope, or whip play, without the guidance of an experienced practitioner. Neither Loose Id nor its authors will be responsible for any loss, harm, injury or death resulting from use of the information contained in any of its titles.

# Dark Elves 2: Mastered

Jet Mykles

This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Published by  
Loose Id LLC  
1802 N Carson Street, Suite 212-29  
Carson City NV 89701-1215  
[www.loose-id.com](http://www.loose-id.com)

Story and images copyright © June 2005 by Jet Mykles

All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the purchaser of this e-book ONLY. No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared in any form, including, but not limited to printing, photocopying, faxing, or emailing without prior written permission from Loose Id LLC.

ISBN 1-59632-138-5

Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Raven McKnight  
Cover Artist: Jet Mykles

## Dedication

*This book is dedicated to those who gave me those last pushes to actually submit my story somewhere. Nythande and Suzana for helping me finish. And Angela Knight for shoving me in the right direction.*

## Chapter One

Sunlight had faded from the cracks within the thick blanket of leaves and branches overhead. Soon it would be night. When the wagons reached a small stream that ran alongside the road, the caravan master called a halt. Quietly, quickly, the dozen guards dismounted and set about their nightly tasks. The horses were watered, fires were built, and the caravan master himself lit the cooking fire and set out the nightly stew. The master's main assistant, a small man in a homespun tunic and wearing a slave's collar, filled the water bags and set to watering the slaves within the wagons.

Suzana waited her turn, quite used to the routine after several nights of the same. As the smallest of the five women within the wagon, she was the last to get water, simply because she did not fight to grab the waterskin first. As she waited, she continued to glance out into the surrounding trees. With the onset of night, the gnarled giants took on a more sinister look, branches reaching up and over to intertwine above the wide road and babbling stream.

At first she had wondered why camp was always made on the road. Then one of the women had explained that this was the Dark Forest. At Suzana's blank look, the woman and some of their companions had embarked on tale after tale of people entering the trees, never

to be seen again. Of haughty men, who thought the world of themselves, stepping off the road, only to have their bones found days later and miles away *still within their armor*. When bodies were found, it was clear that the damage could not have been from an animal attack. Bodies were always those of men, never women or children. Something intelligent guarded the forest, something that would often -- but not always -- allow isolated trade caravans to cross beaten tracks within the periphery of the forest, but rarely allowed individual travelers to be seen again. Suzana was not sure she believed the stories, but if even a quarter were true, it was worth the caution.

She took the waterskin from the last woman and drank her fill. The filling stew was next. Not tasty, but not horrible. At least the wooden bowls were always rinsed in the streams by which they stopped every evening.

This night was eerily quiet. On previous nights, animal sounds abounded in rustling grass, distant snorts, and far-off cries. The animals had learned, it seemed, that the humans were restricted to the road. But tonight, all sounds were muted. Or absent.

The guards huddled about the fires that marked the corners of the camp, all facing the darkness beyond the light. They would sleep in shifts. Those who remained awake would not take their eyes off the sinister trees. The caravan master came to stand by the door of the wagon that held his female slaves. As his assistant took them one by one to the creek's bank to relieve and rinse themselves, he stood sentry himself. Although he had hired them, the master did not trust his guards with the females. They were precious cargo and *would* reach his destination unmolested.

Especially Suzana. When it came her turn, he personally escorted her to the creek's shallow waters. She fought the nightly embarrassment of taking care of private business with an audience. The caravan master knew she was a virgin, because he had seen her among her family before the shipwreck that had killed them all. And he took great pains to keep her pure. She waited, eyes averted, as he unlocked and removed the chastity belt fastened about her waist. He did not so much watch as hover over her, alert for any of his men who might



take a chance to gain his prize. She ignored him as best she could, finished her business, then waited for him to secure her again.

“You will fetch *such* a price!” He smoothed a hand over the crown of her head, petting her long black hair. She avoided his gaze, hating the look she knew was there. He lusted after her. Not for her body, but for the gold her sale would bring him. It was disgusting!

She preceded him past the nearest guards, headed for the wagon, her eyes directed at the ground before her and not at the curious faces that would dart glances her way. She had made the mistake of looking up during one of the first nights, and she could still feel the palpable lust aimed her way from the guards.

The assistant stood beside the wagon’s open door, a blank look on his face. She frowned up at him, but he didn’t see her. The sound of a heavy fall had her spinning around just in time to see the caravan master slump to a heap on the ground. She stood, shocked, unable to believe what she clearly saw. Not only was the caravan master laid out asleep, but all of his guards seemed to be in a likewise state!

“What’s happened?” asked the frightened voice of one of the female slaves.

Suzana shook her head.

“Mother of the gods!” cried one of the men from the other wagon. Suzana glanced over to see him pointing at the trees.

She looked. And gasped.

Men like none other peeled away from the shadows. At first she saw only floating white, which soon materialized as the hair on a number of heads. The bodies beneath the hair were astounding, skin darker than night, gleaming in the patchy moonlight. Male bodies, muscles chiseled under the dark flesh. Only a few wore anything but trousers and boots, and those few wore open vests that still revealed acres of skin.

Suzana spun to see more of them emerge from the opposite side of the road. They were all around! The slaves, the only ones not passed out in deep slumber, cried and muttered

piteously as the black-skinned men approached. Suzana could only stare, dumbfounded. Terrifying, yes. But they were all incredibly beautiful!

They spoke to each other in low, rumbling voices. It wasn't commonspeak. Even Suzana, who was fluent in two languages and could recognize at least a dozen others, didn't recognize it. Some stopped just outside the men's wagon, studying the cowering human contents. The majority of them, though, approached the women's wagon.

A pair of them in particular caught her eye. From the way one pointed and called out and the others obeyed, it was clear he was the leader. He stood half again as tall as Suzana, his lean torso minimally covered by a dark purple vest. His milky white hair was smoothed back and fell in loose waves to just below his shoulders. He turned his head, and the number of rings that pierced his right ear sparkled. His *pointed* ear.

Elves? But Suzana had met elves before at court. Never in her life had she seen any with skin so dark or eyes so vividly red as those of the leader, who came to stand an arm's length before her. His companion, equally dark and exotically beautiful, crossed behind the stunned -- *spelled?* -- assistant, who still stood at the door of the wagon. The elf's bleached-honey hair fell forward, obscuring his face, as he leaned over the man and muttered. The assistant's eyes rolled back in his head, and he slumped to the ground.

A woman in the wagon screamed, the sound piercing the quiet night. Suzana tried to step back, only to find her back pressed against the side of the wagon.

"Don't be afraid," said the leader in clear commonspeak.

"Who are you?" Suzana heard herself say.

His eyes, red as fresh blood and faintly *glowing*, fixed on her. Obsidian lips pulled back into a half-smile; one snowy brow arched. "We've come to save you, lovely lady."

Her heart skipped.

"Save us?" demanded Kyla, one of the other slaves.

“Quite.” The leader’s eyes never left Suzana. She clutched her arms about her torso, trying to hold closed the loose tunic that was all she wore. Unfortunately, it was so short that as he glanced down, he could see the glint of the chastity belt. “We’ve come to rescue you.”

“What do you plan to do with us?” Suzana asked.

His smile spread across his face. His companion chuckled. “Why, we’ll take you home, of course.”

“Home?” squeaked one of the women. “You’re taking us home?”

The man turned to her. “But, of course. *Our* home.”

Radin closed the small distance between himself and the tiny woman. “What astounding eyes,” he said to Savous, switching to *djinar*.

She shied but didn’t bolt. Carefully, he tipped up her chin with his forefinger so he could see her better. Her face was perfectly round, every line within also softly rounded, from plump lips to soft brow. Her heavily lashed eyes looked almost too large for her face, and he had to wonder if she had pixie or fae blood, as the extraordinary violet of those eyes was not any color he had ever witnessed in a human. Entranced, he lifted his free hand to brush aside a heavy lock of pitch-black hair. Even dirty and tangled, it fell in thick waves almost to her knees.

“What’s that about her hips?” Savous asked.

“A belt humans use on women to keep them from having sex.”

His apprentice was shocked. “Why?”

Radin inhaled deeply. “Unless I miss my guess, that delicious scent means this one’s a virgin. I’ve heard they strap them so to keep them ‘pure’ sometimes.” He rolled his eyes.

“One of the stupidities of human males.”

Interest piqued, Savous eyed her carefully. “Are you sure she’s of age?”

She knew they were talking about her. Those expressive eyes darted toward Savous and back to him, dying to know what they said.

Radin laughed. "She's of age. No child could smell so ripe."

"I still don't understand the belt."

"She's worth more when she's sold, if she's a virgin."

"Ah!"

His nostrils flared. *Ah!* The scent of aroused woman. With six *raedjour* standing about the caged wagon, the female cargo was beginning to react in that blessedly familiar way. Glancing up, he could see the fascinated stares the women laid on his men. One leaned against the open door, preening as Savous reached up to stroke her cheek.

Radin smiled, turning back to the little one. She would bear watching, but he had other responsibilities at the moment. In *djinar* he asked, "Savous, how long will your spell hold?"

Savous kissed his fawning companion gently, then led her down the steps to stand before him. "Not much longer. There were more of them than I thought."

"Hmm. Trying to stick your cock into too many holes?"

Savous glared, handing off the woman to one of the *raedjour*, then reaching up to take the hand of the next woman. "You could help."

Radin grinned. "And why would I do that? This is your test."

"And a farce," said another voice from the vicinity of the men's wagon. The male slaves were off-loaded, as well. "We should just kill them and have done with it."

"Now, Krael," Radin chided. "It was Savous's choice."

"And he chooses to spare them. And show off."

Savous growled. "You meat-brained lout! We can't just keep killing every human that comes across the mountains!"

"Why not?"

Savous rolled his eyes, leaving the women's wagon to confront his adversary. "If you *knew* anything, you'd know that the human population is expanding at an astounding rate. We can't keep them at bay forever. And if we keep *killing* them, they'll gather together and attack us!"

Krael yawned in Savous's face. Although he was nearly a head shorter than Savous and not a mage, Krael did not back down. He never would. He was one of the *raedjour's* prime warriors, second only to Commander Salin. "I've lived longer than you, pup, and seen more. Humans are good for taking women, and that only. Human males are servants, fuck toys, or walking corpses that need to be put down."

"You know nothing."

"I know your virgin is escaping."

Savous spun, gaping at the space where the violet-eyed woman had stood. Radin was aware of her escape, but chose to do nothing.

"Radin, you let her go?!"

"I did no such thing." Radin looked to Krael. "I thought Krael might need to chase off some frustration."

Krael chuckled, tossing the long fall of his loose, silver-white hair behind his shoulder. "I would."

Radin raised a cautionary finger. "Remember, she's a virgin. You can't have her."

Krael snorted. "Yet. If she's worthy."

"She's getting away," Savous pointed out.

Krael glanced disdainfully at him, then returned his gaze calmly to Radin. "Where should I meet you?"

"The old tree entrance."

With a nod, Krael took off, sprinting after the woman.

Radin cast his gaze about to see that his men had all but disappeared into the trees with their human cargo. The wagons were bare, the caravan master and his men sprawled in heaps on the ground. Some were even snoring. This would make quite a good story to perpetuate the legend of the Dark Forest.

He returned his gaze to Savous, who glared at him. "Yes?"

"What was *that* about?" The younger man gestured into the trees where Krael had departed.

Radin shrugged, kneeling beside the caravan master. "If she was aware enough to run, then she needed to run, virgin or not."

"What if he fucks her?"

Radin snorted, digging in the caravan master's pockets. "You don't think I'm going to trust him that far, do you? Aha!" He produced a tiny key from a chain within the man's waist pocket. "Besides, Krael's not likely to get at her sex without this to unlock that blasted belt." He stood, dusting off his knees. "Take the others and return home. I'll fetch Krael and she of the violet eyes and meet you there."

Savous's face was skeptical, but he questioned no further. With a last, wicked grin, Radin took off after Krael.

## Chapter Two

Suzana ran. Shadowy branches reached out to grab her, and rocks burst forth from the ground to trip her. She fell often, but picked herself up and continued.

*Stupid!* She railed at herself, even as she continued. She had only the scant clothes on her back, no food, and no survival skills. She did not have the key to the belt around her waist. Nor was her body fit for such exercise. She fully expected a huge, wild animal to come crashing down on her at any moment and end her life.

In fact, she welcomed the idea. Her entire family was gone. Everyone she had loved. Gone in a shipwreck she had somehow managed to survive. By rights, she should be dead, as well, deep in the depths of Lir's watery embrace.

She stumbled again, fell to her face and tasted dirt. Stunned, she lay for a moment, catching her breath. Her fingers dug into the scrubby grass as she tried desperately to think what to do.

Weight descended on her. She screamed, instantly struggling, but went nowhere. Shadows encased her wrists, pinning them to the ground, and a solid mass straddled her hips, imprisoning her without smothering her.

Her screams stopped abruptly when a sheet of white came hissing down from the shadow above her. Shocked, she watched it catch the scant moonlight, glowing faintly blue as it curtained her and the shadow above her.

A dark chuckle sounded over her head. "Caught you, little one," said a voice that resonated in her very spine.

Slowly, she twisted her neck to see his face, which loomed just above her left ear. Even in the meager light, she could see his strong features and could just make out the lightning tattoo that crisscrossed his features. He smiled, flashing white teeth from between ebony lips.

Suzana felt her existence halt. Her entire self lost itself in those eyes, eyes she was suddenly obsessed with seeing in the light so she could know their color. Her body heated, and reality faded away. Her nostrils filled with the strangely exciting scent of him, unlike any other male she had ever encountered.

His grin faded, burned away by the heat of his gaze. In one swift, sudden move, he backed up and flipped her over. Before she knew what had happened, the length of her front was pressed against the hard mass of his body. Only her clothes separated them, as he was gloriously bare from the waist up. Instinct rolled her hips to rub her aching center against his flat belly, the short tunic riding up her hips. But the horrid metal of the chastity belt covered her pleasure and denied her the touch she sought.

"What's your name?" he demanded, the fingers of his big hands spearing the hair at either side of her head to force her to face him. Not that she wanted to look away.

"Suzana," she breathed, fascinated by one short stray lock of white that drifted down from the crown of his head to caress her cheek.

"Suzana," he rumbled, bending his head to seal their lips.

Suzana had never been kissed. Not like this. Not by a man. Even her suggested suitors back home had only kissed her cheek or hand. No man had ever before crushed his mouth to hers, stolen her breath by inhaling it himself.





He pulled back slightly. "Open your mouth."

She did, more out of surprise than anything else. Instantly, his tongue plunged in, shocking a groan from deep in her chest. She pulsed upon hearing an echoing purr from him. He took from her, and she could only lie there and accept. And enjoy. Oh, he tasted good!

Her hands sailed up the slick skin of his arms to find the wealth of hair that hung from his head. Gods of water, he smelled *good!* His calloused hands slid from her face, down her sides, to command her hips. His fingers slid in under the metal panel between her thighs, stroking her dripping core. Her gasp was lost in his groan.

"Krael!"

She heard the voice only distantly. Her hands had filled themselves with silky white hair, clutching it near his head as his fingers struggled to enter her body.

"Krael!"

Abruptly, he tore from her. Eyes open, she shuddered at the fierce growl that vibrated in his chest, matched by the snarl on his upraised face.

He was beautiful!

"Krael, you can't take her like this."

Again the snarl as he glared at someone over her head. Someone she irrationally hated for interrupting their tryst.

"Leave off, Radin."

"I can't do that."

Krael growled, his lips peeling back from his teeth just like a caged black jaguar she had once seen. Unable to help herself, she whimpered.

Distracted by the sound, Krael's attention returned to her. He instantly forgot the other man's presence, again bending his head toward Suzana.

Eagerly, she parted her lips, anticipating his kiss. Unfortunately, she fell unconscious before he could touch her.

Krael knew she was gone when his lips touched hers. They were slack and unresponsive, worlds apart from the heated return kiss he had enjoyed just moments before.

“Radin!”

“Don’t snarl at me.” Radin’s purple boots appeared beside Krael. “You know Rhae’s edict just as well as I do.”

Krael muttered every obscenity that came to mind. Added a few more. This choice little bit in his arms was far too tasty to release. He ached to tear away that damned belt and rough-spun tunic to bare all her creamy skin to his gaze. To his hands. His cock threatened to burst through his trousers to reach the moist, heated entrance he could smell but barely touch. He wanted to devour her, to live in her for days.

Which is what gave him pause and allowed him to catch his breath. What was he doing? Never had a woman affected him like this. Not so suddenly and not so harshly. Did all virgins affect *raedjour* like this? Not ever having known one -- at least, a *female* one -- he wouldn’t know.

Still muttering, he eased away from her. Suzana. He took a long moment to gaze at her lush body, so tiny, but beautifully curved and full. He picked her up, delighted to find that she was heavier than expected, not a weak little flower that would break if breathed on.

He rose easily to his feet with her in his arms. A groan tore from his chest. He’d never make it back to the city.

“Here,” he told Radin, unceremoniously dumping his precious bundle into the startled man’s arms. “You take her back.”

“Where are you going?”

Krael's hand lingered in her tangled hair. He yanked it away. "To hunt." To run. To kill something. To do something, *anything*, to put down the fire in his blood.

## Chapter Three

She woke in a small bedchamber, nestled in a pile of blankets. A cheery fire kept the room warm as well as lit. A basket lay on a small table beside the bed, a loaf of bread and several cheeses poking out from the linen in which they were wrapped.

Suzana sat up and gasped. Her tunic and the chastity belt were gone! What remained was a pretty, if small, embroidered vest and a tiny pair of panties. Her hair had been brushed. What had they done to her?!

The door clicked, and she clutched the blanket to her near-nakedness.

The red-eyed leader of the men who had taken her entered. *Lir! He looks even better in full light!* He was mostly dressed, at least from the waist down. Pale gold trousers hugged his muscular thighs and tucked into knee-high boots of soft violet leather. His sculpted chest and arms were bare. A thick silver choker hugged the base of his throat. The rings in his right ear twinkled in the light.

“Greetings, little one,” he purred, shutting the door softly behind him. “Did you sleep well?”

She nodded, watching him warily as he approached.

“Do you have a name?” he asked conversationally. “Or should we continue to call you ‘little one?’”

“Suzana.” She supplied only her common name.

“Ah. How beautiful! It is a pleasure to meet you, Suzana.” He sat on the bed at her feet. “I am Radin.”

“My clothes are gone.” She said the first thing that occurred to her.

“Not so, Suzana. I left you with some clothing.”

She hugged the blanket closer. “You undressed me?”

He nodded. “And got rid of that horrible belt. You’re welcome.”

“Thank you,” she said automatically. Then she lowered her gaze, staring at the hand he had casually rested on a muscular thigh. “Did you ...?”

“No, Suzana. Your virginity is intact. For now.”

“For now?”

He chuckled, edging closer. “For now. You see, I must fill you in on some details of your new situation.”

*New situation.* As a slave. Still as a slave! She blinked back tears. This was not happening!

Radin’s hand appeared at her cheek to gently brush away the tears. “Now, little love. Don’t cry. I promise you this new life could be heaven.”

“It’s *not* my life.”

Suzana widened her eyes in a vain attempt to keep further tears at bay. Her family was dead. Her beloved homeland lost to her. Yet she survived. Perhaps this capture was punishment. Perhaps she deserved this.

The fear and anxiety of the days since her capture crashed onto her. She crumpled, sobbing, burying her face in the blankets.

“Oh, little one,” Radin crooned, immediately leaning forward to scoop her, blankets and all, into his lap. “It’s all right, Suzana,” he soothed, seemingly sincere. “You won’t be hurt. You’ll be treasured.”

She barely heard him through her body-wracking sobs. Distraught, she clung to him as a warm comfort. Despite his being a stranger, he was the first source of comfort she’d encountered in what seemed like a lifetime.

Radin held her throughout, tenderly stroking her hair. At length, her sobs subsided. He prompted her to use the blanket as a handkerchief, assuring her that other blankets would be forthcoming. She huddled in his lap, accepting this strange man’s comfort.

“Are you hungry?”

She glanced at the basket of bread and cheese. Nodded.

Securing her with one arm, he leaned over to snag the basket. Bringing it back, he opened it and laid it in her lap.

She ate silently for a moment, staring fixedly at the contents of the basket while entirely too aware of the muscular body that held her. The blankets had fallen down during her crying fit, which meant that her right arm was snuggled up against the smooth, hot skin of his chest. Completely hairless. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the strange white tattoo that flowed down his belly, like parallel waves, each inward point aimed down so that the entire tattoo drew the eye toward his groin. She slowly became aware of the smell of him, as well, a warm, musky scent that spun her thoughts far from depression and into melting interest.

“As I was saying before,” he began, either oblivious of her interest or ignoring it, “you will be treasured among us. You see, we’re a race entirely of men.”

She frowned. “How can that be?”

“All children born to us are male.”

She frowned harder. “But who gives birth to them?”

“The women we take from the world above.”

She froze, a bite of bread momentarily forgotten in her mouth.

He took advantage of her silence to continue. “We’re a long-lived race. We think we’re related to the elves we’ve heard about but never seen, but we can’t be sure. We do know that we were created as a race by our goddess, Rhae. To be blunt, She created us as sexual consorts and bodyguards. When the gods left our world, She tried to do what She could for us. She told us to take human women and change them.”

“Change them?”

“To *raedjour*. We have a spell that will change you into one of us.”

She looked pointedly at the glossy skin of his chest. “Do you mean black skin?”

“I do mean black skin. Which, by the way, is almost as hard to cut as cured leather but --” He smoothed a hand over the outside of her thigh. “-- is much more pleasant to the touch.” She squirmed at his touch and heard him laugh softly. “I also mean you will develop night vision and a long lifespan. Changed women tend to add at least three to four hundred years to their lifespan, possibly more.”

“Three to four hundred?”

“Yes.”

“You mentioned living underground.”

“I did. But, as you can see, we don’t exactly live in bat-infested caves.”

She had to smile.

At his urging, she stood, and he stood with her. He led her to a window and parted the curtain. She gasped. Beyond lay a wondrous world she could never have fathomed. Her window was at least four stories up and looked out over single-story buildings. The layout was roughly like that of a castle, complete with a wall marching across the terrain in the distance. And there *was* distance. Stalactites hung from the ceiling, some touching the floor to cause columns, but the open space extended for miles. She glimpsed other structures, a



few as massive as a castle, others the size of a house. Beyond the walls was what looked like a city, complete with meandering streets and a cleared town square. Scattered figures walked the roads. In the distance ... was that a lake? The shining, shimmery surface had to be water.

“It’s beautiful!”

“It is.”

“Are we under the forest?”

“No. We’re much farther under the mountains. We are in the heart of the city here. Most *raedjour* live within the main foundation, but many choose to live in the outskirts. We also have small gatherings, somewhat like villages, throughout the cavern system.”

“I could never have guessed such a place could exist.”

“It will be your home now.”

She stepped back, but kept her eyes on the distant shimmer of the lake. “What happens now?”

He tugged at her hand to turn her, then released it to cup her face with both his hands. “I start the process to make you one of us, little one.” He leaned forward even as she began to protest. “Welcome home.”

She wanted to protest. She suspected that part of making her one of them included taking her virginity, and, as it was all she had left, she did not just want *anyone*, even this beautiful man, to take it from her. But his kiss overwhelmed her. More than a kiss, more than a meeting of lips. She tried to push away, needing to argue, sensing that his next actions would seal her fate. But her body already pulsed with a need she didn’t understand. Her hands slid along the slick surface of his skin. Finally, she gave in to her desires.

Radin delved deep into Suzana’s mind. As she was ungifted in magical defenses, her natural shielding was child’s play to penetrate once he had distracted her with the kiss and a little push to the natural attraction humans felt for *raedjour*. With a sigh, she sank against

him, and he had to release her face to surround her body with his arms to hold her upright. Her firm, high breasts pressed against his flesh, tempting him to take more than he should.

*If only she weren't a virgin.* He sighed, putting his thoughts back on track as he sifted through her mind. If she weren't a virgin, he could volunteer to be her first and enjoy the lush body he felt against him. However, there were very definite rules regarding virgins, and he would be defying his goddess if he broke them.

Although he couldn't read Suzana's precise thoughts or memories, he could get feelings and inklings. He read enough to know that she had to be well-born, and he read her guilt over the death of her family. He felt for her, but he could only hope that these pains from the past would ease in time.

His first task was to judge her capability. Could she handle the change? Could she live amongst them? He saw nothing within her to convince him she needed to be freed, and he saw ample that convinced him that her compassion and demeanor would be welcome among the *raedjour*.

Task complete, Radin broke the kiss. Suzana fell easily into his arms as he scooped her up and carried her to the bed. He laid her down, then stretched out beside her. Her eyes were closed, her plump, moist lips parted slightly. He smiled ruefully. Unfortunately, the planting of the spell would make this experience with him hazy in her mind. She would only remember fragments.

Taking his time, Radin smoothed his hand down her body, flipping aside the flaps of her vest to expose her breasts. His mouth salivated, but he didn't taste. They weren't his to explore just yet. If ever. But he could look!

His fingers trailed down her softly rounded belly to the silky panties that guarded her sex. He pulled aside the flimsy fabric and fluffed his fingers through the curly hair there. Delving deeper, he found her moist heat. A moan escaped her lips as he caressed, finding and coaxing her little nubbin of pleasure to waken. It did, pushing at his finger.

He concentrated on her face as she began to writhe in pleasure. Her hips rocked into his hand, but he was careful to keep his fingers from her channel. He couldn't take her innocence. The rules were very explicit. He was to plant the spell, leaving her virginity intact. It was an interesting task for Radin, who had never planted the spell without also planting his cock deep inside a woman. He'd known the theory that it could be done, but had never seen the reason to deny himself before.

He fondled her, allowing the natural oil from his fingers to mix with her already copious lubrication. He often wondered how other males existed without the oil that covered a *raedjour's* body. The scent delved deep into a human's sexual center, starting the simmer of pleasure that a *raedjour* man learned to cultivate with skill.

Suzana writhed, and more oil from the skin of his chest rubbed off onto her arm. Even in her semi-conscious state, the smell and warm burn would push her just enough ...



When she burst, he was ready. As her body convulsed in orgasm, he sealed his lips to hers and planted the spell within her. The orgasm weakened her defenses further and made

her receptive. Her pulsing body and racing blood tangled with the spell, helping to lace it through her being, to tie it to her soul. Before she subsided with a contented sigh, it was done. The seeds were sown to convert Suzana into *raedjour*.

Sighing, Radin pulled back his fingers and restored her panties. He licked his fingers clean of her cream, then shifted away from her and stood. Carefully, he arranged the blankets and pillows around her sleeping body. Then he left.

## Chapter Four

Leaving a suitable guard outside Suzana's door, Radin emerged into the hallway, took a sharp turn, then climbed. It took precious minutes before he was in range. As soon as he was, he probed mentally in the direction he was going.

*Are you there?*

A sleepy thought met his, not coherent. Smiling, Radin probed a bit harder. Finally, Salin woke.

*Ah! Finally he answers me!*

*When did you get back?*

*Nearly seven days ago.*

*Really? Salin gave a soft laugh. I must have been distracted.*

*I noticed. Is she that good?*

Salin didn't have to answer. Radin could feel the overriding warmth in his brother's thoughts. Having shared a mind-to-mind contact with Salin his entire life, he knew the difference and was intrigued by its strength. As far as the brothers knew, they were a unique pair among the *raedjour*. No others shared a mind-bond, at least not to Radin's knowledge.

Selfishly, they'd not told anyone of their secret, not even Radin's master, Nalfien, enjoying it through their youth and finding the secret useful in adulthood.

*We could never have guessed at this,* Salin assured him.

*Mind if I join you?*

*Yes. I believe she's ready.* Salin chuckled sleepily. *I thought you'd never get back.*

*I tried to reach you when I got back. Then I had to take Savous on a caravan hunt. We found a virgin.*

Mild interest. *Really?*

*Complete with chastity belt. I'll present her tonight.*

*Excellent! Diana is ready to leave our rooms. The feast is a perfect excuse.*

Radin emerged from a stairwell to the floor on which Salin's suite was located. *Is she awake?*

Salin's mind warmed with another chuckle. *Yes. And coveting Jarak's ass as we speak. I know we promised that the first of us to truemate would include the other in the first threesome, but you'd better hurry.*

Diana's eyes were riveted to the slight dip in Jarak's lower back, just above where the waistband of his trousers covered the intriguing gleam of his skin. Young and ripe and firm. She bit her lip hard as she struggled not to think of what else was ripe and hard on Salin's squire.

*Whore!* she called herself, fiercely shutting her eyes. Jarak was unaware she watched him. He knelt before one of Salin's chests, putting away freshly laundered clothes. She lay on the bed, peeking at him through the furs tucked around her head. Of course, the worst part was that she was also spooned into the naked curve of Salin's sleeping body.

For weeks now, she had been with him and only him. After she'd given up and admitted her love for him, they'd been enclosed in this room, fucking almost constantly.

When they occasionally came up for air or weren't sleeping, Salin assured her that this was normal. Even though she was already pregnant, her craving for his body, his seed, his very presence was necessary. She thought it was waning. She was pretty sure she could now think of a few things besides Salin's cock buried somewhere deep in her body. But now she was looking at *Jarak!*

Jarak rose from his crouch, and she shut her eyes, feigning sleep. The squire had been their only contact to the outside world in the past few weeks. He brought their food, fetched water for baths, and replaced any soiled linens or broken furniture. So why did she want him *now?*

Scowling to herself, she decided she needed Salin. Determined, she rocked her hips, grinding her butt into the erection that had never quite fully gone away in the last few weeks. A sleepy moan reached her ears.

"Awake?" she asked innocently.

He growled. The hand which had been resting on her thigh slid up and forward to glide over her belly and between her legs. "Awake," he muttered, the sleepy rasp in his already deep voice causing ripples of delight down her spine. Or was it the long finger that probed her drenched folds?

She sighed. "Good."

Squirming, she twisted her body until she lay on her back, the thigh near him draped over his hip. The position opened her further to his exploration while allowing her to reach for a handful of his silver curls and bring his lips to hers.

She heard the door opening. She assumed Jarak had forgotten something. She certainly didn't stop. The squire had witnessed far more lately than Salin fingering her pussy.

Salin's kiss was not near deep enough. He held back. Growling, she moved to force the issue, but he pulled back completely.

“What are you ...?” Then she saw him. A tattooed *raedjour* stood at the foot of the bed platform. Glowing red eyes marked him a sorcerer, and she was pretty sure the designs on his chest and face similarly marked him. She was immediately intrigued by the belly tattoo that spilled over a perfectly shaped abdomen and pointed toward the promising bulge at his crotch.

“Who are you?” she demanded. There was something familiar about that face.

“Diana,” Salin began, voice laced with amusement. “Meet my brother, Radin.”

So *this* was the famous Radin! Salin, she knew, was quite close with his brother. Radin the brilliant. Radin the rogue. Radin the wanderer. Radin the powerful.

*Radin the fucking beautiful!*

He tilted his head in greeting, his gaze freely roaming her naked body. Diana realized that she probably should close her legs, but she was amazingly turned on by allowing him to see. Besides, she didn't really want to stop Salin's marvelous fingers from their task.

“You're a lucky man, Salin.” His voice was every bit as beautiful as Salin's, deep and rich as honey. Perhaps a touch more ... *refined?*

“I am, aren't I?” Salin mused, nuzzling Diana's ear.

Diana made note that he didn't seem at all bothered either by his brother's presence or by his brother's perusal of her wet and welcoming body. Interesting.

“Nice jewelry.”

Salin raised his head to frown at Radin. Diana smirked. On each wrist, her truemate wore leather restraints. They matched the ones on her wrists, except that hers were black and his were white. “My truemate's idea,” Salin explained. “To show I'm as much hers as she is mine.”

“Your men will love it.”

“I couldn't care less.”



Radin nodded. Smiling, he cocked his head to the side. Sleek white hair fell in waves to his shoulder. She was beginning to wonder anew why he was there, when he said, “Mind if I join you?”

Her interest perked. Radin’s eyes were on her face now. She quirked a brow, then turned to Salin. Her bastard true-mate was smirking at her. “I take it you don’t mind?”

“Not at all.”

She narrowed her gaze. “Why do I think that even if I said ‘no,’ you’d try to *persuade* me?”

He pursed his lips, unsuccessfully hiding a smile. “Are you saying ‘no’?”

She returned her gaze to Radin, who waited patiently. The smirk matched Salin’s. Obviously, the family resemblance was not just in appearance.

She sat up, her thigh still draped over Salin’s. Casually, she wrapped her arms around the upraised knee and raked a gaze up and down Radin’s body. “Can I at least *see* what’s being offered?”

They knew, of course, that they had her. They could smell her arousal, and Salin, no doubt, could feel it. She failed to care. Salin had thoroughly altered her way of thinking, at least sexually. If he was game, she was game.

“I believe I can oblige.” Radin stepped back.

He bent and showed wonderful balance as he removed his violet boots without having to sit. Diana couldn’t remember ever having seen a man in leather of that particular shade.

“Nice boots.”

Salin laughed. “Radin is, shall we say, fond of color.”

“I am.” Boots dropped to the floor.

The gold trousers came next. She had yet to encounter a *raedjour* who wore undergarments, and Radin was no exception. *Oh, my!* Unless she missed her guess, he was actually longer than Salin, who was *quite* enough, thank you very much!

He stood back, arms spread. "Do I meet with your approval?"

*Oh, quite!* But she didn't want to give in *too* easily.

"Hmm." She heard Salin's chuckle as she pulled away, but he seemed content to let her pretend to consider the situation.

She sat on the edge of the bed and motioned for Radin to move closer. He did, and his erection bobbed a little fuller. Just a tad lower than her mouth. Perfect. But she ignored it for the moment, instead sliding her hands up the hot skin of his thighs, over the sharp bones of his hips. She considered the tattoo. "Someday, I want to know where these come from," she announced to the room, delicately tracing the patterns. His skin twitched beneath her touch.

Finally, her fingers found his erection. She teased him, using only her fingertips to smooth over the tracery of veins. She tilted his length up and gently pulled the loose skin of the shaft back so she could rub one thumb along that sensitive spot just under and below the head.

His entire body shuddered. "Ah, Salin, you've shown her a trick or two."

Salin snorted. "I showed her a few tricks, but she comes up with quite a bit on her own."

"Mmm, you sweet talker, you," she murmured, leaning forward to flick her tongue out and catch the drop of moisture that seeped from the head of Radin's cock.

A soft moan escaped him. "I take it I meet with your approval?"

"Not so fast," she said, making sure her breath caressed him. "I'm still judging."

She pursed her lips and leaned forward to slide the head and much of the shaft into her mouth.

*Goddess!* Radin cursed.

*Feel good?* Salin asked lightly, clearly amused.

Radin shut his eyes, the better to enjoy the slow, gentle raking of Diana's teeth as she pulled away from him. She kept the tip trapped by her lips and used a wicked tongue to lash over what remained in her mouth.

"Hmm." He shook again as her hum vibrated his cock. Opening his eyes, he watched her moist lips swallow him whole, her hazel eyes half shut.

*I'm so glad we made our pact,* Radin decided.

*Yes. I'd imagine you would be. At least she seems to be enjoying you.*

A corner of Radin's mind wondered what it was like for Salin to be truemated. Radin could feel the echo of her pleasure, as could any *raedjour*, but he knew Salin's enjoyment of Diana's pleasure would be magnified. Not only was he her truemate, but they were also still in the throes of the initial heat. It was the first heat, the first furious melding, that cemented the truebond for the rest of their lives.

Salin shifted, moving up behind Diana. Radin kept his eyes open to watch his brother's long black tongue drag up Diana's spine. It was her turn to shiver, and she again moaned around Radin's cock.

"Ah, Salin! Do that again," he moaned.

"Wait," Salin muttered. "This is better."

Radin watched as his brother's mouth hovered over Diana's right shoulder, a hand fisting in her hair to move it aside. She tilted her head to expose more of her neck, clearly anticipating even as she continued to lave Radin with her tongue. At first, Salin only breathed on her skin, his lips almost but not quite touching. She moaned. Then he reached the bend of her neck, just at the apex of her shoulder. His tongue darted out, and her body jerked, surprising Radin. Salin laughed, and her ripple of arousal grew. Lovingly, he lapped at her nape. Salin's head blocked Radin's view of his exact movements, but he soon didn't care. Diana's reaction to Salin's attentions was to clamp her fingers and mouth around Radin's cock and pump it.

*I'm going to come, Radin informed Salin.*

*Do it. Take the edge off. You'll need it.*

But still. "Diana," Radin warned, placing his hands gently on her head.

She growled. Pulled back enough to pop him out of her mouth and glare up at him.

"Come, or I don't do this," she threatened.

Pleasantly surprised, he gave in as she swallowed him whole. Salin shook with laughter as he continued his assault on Diana's neck. His hands reached around to pluck at her breasts. She moaned. Radin let the urgency burn, released his control, and came. The lovely woman swallowed most of it.

He leaned back from her, still half hard. Salin sat back, pulling Diana with him. Radin enjoyed the sight of Diana sprawled and open, back against his brother, one of Salin's hands plucking at an engorged nipple, the other sunk deeply into her plump, wet sex. Her eyes were shut tight, her fingers digging into Salin's thighs. It didn't take long. She was already primed. Suddenly she arched, nearly pulling free from Salin. He had to clutch her to keep her. It looked painful. Perhaps it was. She didn't seem to mind.

He held her as she subsided, muttering nonsensical words up her neck to the curve of her ear. Her skin was beautifully flushed.

Finally, she took a deep breath and opened her eyes to look at her true mate. A sudden worry crossed her lovely features. "Salin?"

"Sweet?"

"Are you sure?"

Radin recognized the fear, but he let Salin explain.

"Yes, sweet, I'm sure. Radin is the closest person to me other than you. I'm delighted to share you with him. If it would please you."

She smiled. Some private lover's joke? "But ..."

“No, Diana. Don’t worry that I’ll be jealous. *Raedjour* are lucky in that we don’t have a human’s need to make sure his mate is his by keeping her from all others. We *know*.”

Without looking, Salin reached out a hand to Radin. Seeing his cue, Radin placed his hand in his brother’s. Salin tugged him forward and down until he was kneeling on the floor, draped over the side of the bed.

“Let Radin taste you, sweet.”

Her sharp eyes were on Radin, hazed by lust. Salin released Radin and used the same hand to part her sex for him.

Not one to pass up such an offer, Radin leaned in.

The fierce echo of Diana’s desire punched through Salin when Radin’s tongue touched her folds. Another benefit of sharing his woman was that, as her true mate, he could enjoy her desire and feed off it without the necessary distraction of performing.

Carefully, he slid out from underneath Diana’s twisting body and moved to stretch out beside her. He plumped one firm breast as she arched under a particularly pleasant assault from Radin. She subsided, and her head fell to the side, those beautiful hazel eyes opening to capture his gaze. She stared a moment, then reached out to grasp a handful of Salin’s hair and haul his face to hers.

“Mine,” she muttered before sealing their lips.

*Who’s tamed whom?* Radin asked wryly, sensing the surge of fierce pleasure that heated Salin’s blood at Diana’s declaration.

*Jealous?*

Both brothers subsided as Diana’s body tensed then exploded, her hands pulling painfully at Salin’s hair while her thighs clutched Radin’s head.

She let her thighs flop open, wonderfully spent. For the moment. Radin laid a fond kiss to her nether lips and stood. She released Salin to watch as Radin fondled his cock, pumping it slowly to draw her attention to it. She blessed Rhae for giving her consorts such wonderful recuperative abilities!

Granted, it was a pretty sight, but she wanted it in her! She looked up and realized he was waiting. She glared. "Fuck me already."

"As the lady commands."

Oh, didn't he just drip sexy? He knelt between her thighs, bending forward to brace himself above her. He hovered, lips a breath away from hers. The heavy weight of his cock rested on her belly. *Not* where she wanted it. He bent his head to take her lips, plunging into the inviting cavern of her mouth with his tongue. She sank one hand into the thick, silky hair at the nape of his neck and wrapped the other around his cock. His moan matched hers, his hips pushing his cock through her fingers.

She cried out, her pussy bereft. "This is not fucking."

He laughed, letting her guide his cock lower, waiting for her to aim, then pushing home with one slow thrust. Her back bowed.

"Feel good, sweet?" Salin murmured. His lips caressed the side of her jaw as Radin dipped his head to nuzzle her neck on the other side.

"Gods!" Intense! She groped and found Salin's cock, taking possession of it as Radin began his exit slide.

"I can feel it, sweet," Salin rasped as he traced her ear with his tongue. "You're loving this."

"Oh, yes," she moaned. Then screamed when Radin abruptly slammed forward.

Salin's head fell forward to press against Diana's shoulder. *Rhae's tits, that feels good!*

Radin didn't reply, busily working his cock into and out of Diana's tight passage. Salin trembled with her, almost feeling the friction of Radin's cock inside her. If this was what it was like to share a true mate, Salin was all in favor! He forgot himself, forgot his own bodily pleasures as waves of Diana's crashed over him. She pumped back into Radin, wantonly sucking him deeper into her body.

It took Salin a moment to realize she was tugging at him, trying to get his attention. He raised his head to meet her gaze, struck by the blazing heat within. "I want to suck your cock," she told him. "Now."

Not one to disobey that particular command, Salin dragged himself to his knees. He laughed at himself, at his seeming weakness. But it wasn't weakness, exactly. He was not at all used to the bombardment of sensation from not only his body but hers.

Radin readjusted, sitting back on his heels. He pulled Diana's hips up until her buttocks rested on his thighs, her legs spread to either side. Salin crawled up to kneel beside her, but she slapped his thighs to maneuver him until he was above her head, nearly straddling her face. Satisfied that he was where she wanted him, she grasped his cock and gulped him halfway down her throat. He cried out, shocked by both the move and the sensation. She moaned, adding a vibration that was nearly his undoing. He fell forward, trying to brace himself, trying to hold back.

*Too much?* asked Radin's amused voice.

*I... ah!* He cried out as Radin pumped his hips forcefully, causing Diana to clamp about his cock in her pleasure and to pass that pleasure along in a chain reaction to Salin.

He ignored Radin's mental chuckle, too unnerved for a quick rejoinder. Finding his brother's shoulder near enough, he used it to brace his head. His hands found Radin's thighs, doubled up under Diana's splayed legs, and clutched them for support.

Radin's amusement was laced with unadulterated envy. He cradled Salin's head to his shoulder, supporting his brother as Salin obviously dealt with incredible sensations. In the past, they had shared women. They had shared men. But this was far more intense. The addition of Diana added another level to Salin's pleasure that neither of them had clearly anticipated. Oh, they'd known that a man could feel pleasures through his true mate. But knowing and feeling were clearly two different things.

Radin worked his cock within Diana, a sensation wholly enjoyable in itself. She was tight and wet, with a strong grip. And she was a demanding little bitch! Each time she thought he wasn't going fast or hard enough, she threw herself at him or rotated her hips in clear instructions.

He tried not to be distracted by Salin, but how could he avoid it? It was amazing to watch his strong, always-in-control brother fall apart at the seams. The mental bond they shared allowed him to hear the mental stutters, the incoherent groans, and Radin briefly wished their connection were more like a true bond so he could feel the sensations himself.

Sensing Salin was on the edge, Radin picked up the pace, his goal to drive Diana to an orgasm that would set them all off. Salin groaned, his thoughts incoherent as he tried to hold on, tried to let the pleasure go on.

He snapped first. His release into her mouth triggered Diana. Radin let her clutching channel fire his own release.

Salin sagged against Radin, breathing hard. Radin held him gladly, enjoying his own after-warmth.

Radin moved first, lowering Salin down to lie beside Diana, whose eyes were closed as she tried to catch her breath. Slowly, Radin pulled out, dragging a small moan from her. He left them on the bed and went to retrieve a bottle of Salin's favorite wine, chilling on a side table. *Bless Jarak*. Pouring a cup of the rare light, fruity wine, he drank it himself before taking another full glass to the bed. The truebonded pair hadn't moved.



“Drink?”

Salin cracked an eye. Apparently thinking it a good idea, he pushed up to sit and took the cup from Radin.

“How do you feel, sweet?” Radin asked, unthinkingly adopting his brother’s endearment.

Diana groaned, lifting a hand to run through her hair. “Is this normal?”

“Which?”

“Just tell me that I’ll get a break from sex *sometime*. No, scratch that. That I’ll *want* a break from sex.”

The brothers laughed, prompting an angry glare from her.

“It’s already waned, sweet.” Salin lazily caressed her thigh. “Days ago, we were hardly conscious of other people.”

“So, what now?”

“You’ll always want Salin,” Radin assured her, taking the empty cup to refill it. “But the initial heat is done. You’ll feel more like interacting with others, and you won’t feel the need to fuck him *every* moment of the day.”

He returned with the cup, handing it to her. She struggled and, with their help, sat up. She drank, then eyed him. “You explain nicely. I like you *so* much better than Nalfien.”

He smiled. Salin laughed. “Thank you.”

“Where were you when I was taken?”

“Likely on the far side of the mountains. Radin wanders,” Salin answered for him. “He’s often gone for moons at a time.”

“Where do you go?”

Radin sat beside her and tucked her hair behind her ear. “Anywhere I can. I’m limited to the forest and mountains, and I need places where I can find shelter for the day, but I’ve explored most of our limits.”

“Alone?”

He smiled. “Usually.”

She nodded, accepting that. Yawning, she slumped to her side, cradling against Salin. “So. When do I get to leave these rooms?”

“Tonight.”

Surprised, she twisted to see Salin’s face. “Really?”

He nodded. “There will be a celebration tonight.”

“What for?”

Salin hesitated.

*What’s wrong?*

*She’s not going to like this.*

*Why not?*

Her gaze narrowed at the verbal pause. “What?”

Salin sighed. “Radin found a virgin.”

“I assume you mean a woman. So?”

“Virgins are a cause for celebration.”

“What the hell for?”

*Hmm.*

*Yes.* Salin sighed. But another part of him perked. Diana’s anger aroused him. *The hellcat emerges.* “We don’t often get virgins, sweet,” Salin said reasonably.

“So?”

“When we find one, there is a celebration. Unmated males are invited to compete to see who will win the honor of being her first.”

Scowling, Diana pushed up to sit, the better to fully see her truemate. “What?”

“It’s a coveted honor to be a woman’s first.”

“Why?”

“It can only happen once,” said Radin, trying to help. He grinned, warming to the topic. “Also, Rhae’s given us a spell that amplifies a virgin’s lust so that everyone can share it. I’m told it’s a heady feeling.”

“Because it only happens once.”

“Yes.”

“Just women?”

“Virginity isn’t the same for men.”

“Yeah. It doesn’t hurt.” She scowled. “And it does hurt, you know. I’d think it’d hurt more to be breached by a man hung like a fucking stallion.” She made her point by reaching down to flick a finger at Salin’s semi-hard cock. “You make an honor out of torturing the poor girl?”

Salin brushed his fingers lightly down Diana’s cheek, the look in his eyes infinitely sad. “I’m sorry your first time was traumatic, sweet.” She flinched away from him.

Her scowl still firmly in place, Diana shoved out of the bed. Both Salin and Radin had to duck to avoid getting kicked. “Just when I thought it’s gotten as bad as it’s going to get,” they heard her grumble, “you pull another surprise on me.”

“Where are you going?” Salin asked mildly.

“Away,” she proclaimed, finding one of Salin’s tunics and sliding it over her head.

“Alone?”

“Yes.”

“No.”

She growled at his tone. “Fuck you.”

Ominously, Salin rose to a crouch, eyes fixed on her as she tore open a clothes chest.

“Diana, you’re not going anywhere without me.”

“That’s too damn bad, because *you’re* the one I want to get away from.”

“Or Radin.”

“As if *he’s* any different.”

“Diana.”

She leveled a finger at him. “Don’t you dare. Don’t you fucking dare!”

*The nerve!* She fumed, watching the too-quiet predators that eyed her from the bed. Somewhere in this hellish cavern was a poor, terrified woman who was about to be a *prize* in a fucking competition. As the prize, she would get ripped apart from the inside when some over-eager *raedjour* shoved his cock into her. At least when Diana was taken, she had known sex. Not *good* sex. Nothing like what she had with Salin. But at least his mammoth cock was not the first she’d fit inside her body.

She spun, racing. She reached the door and actually got it open. Farther than she really expected. She knew that look on Salin’s face. Knew the narrowed slant to his dark crimson eyes, the tiny hint of a grin to those black lips. There was no way she would make it out of the suite.

But she would damned well *try*.

One set of hands caught her shoulders and hauled her back. Another set ripped the door from her grasp and slammed it. Salin’s arms wrapped about her shoulders, one hand spanning her neck. Squeezed just enough to make breathing difficult. She snarled, furious that this fired her blood. Her foot shot out at Radin, but he caught it and tossed her foot

aside. He stepped into her widened stance so that she ended up sandwiched tightly between them.

“Get off me!” She clawed Salin’s arm, swinging the other arm in what would have been a good jaw punch if Radin hadn’t caught her hand.

Together they walked her back. Salin caught both of her arms and dragged them behind her as he sat, forcing her to kneel, spread wide over his thighs. Although she kept telling them to let go, she never said stop. Could not bring herself to do so.

Radin knelt, sliding his fingers through her weeping pussy. Bending forward, he sucked her clit into his mouth as his fingers slid down to rim her back entrance.

“No, wait!”

“Yes,” Salin hissed, his teeth at her neck. “We’re going to fuck you now, sweet. Both of us. Together.”

She squirmed, fear momentarily overriding pleasure as Radin’s finger penetrated. “No, Salin. You won’t fit.”

“We’ll fit.”

“Salin ...”

“Trust me, sweet.”

She groaned, all thoughts flying from her head save those of two beautiful obsidian rods impaling her.

Radin slicked her with her own juices, then positioned Salin’s cock himself. “Push down, sweet,” he murmured. Behind her, Salin breathed heavily into her shoulder.

She did. She had had him there a few times, knew the sensation by now. But not in this particular position.

“So fucking tight,” he muttered, lapping and nipping at her sensitive neck.

She made him moan with a twist to her hips. Gaspd when Radin reminded her of his presence by again catching her clit between his lips. Crying, she fell aback against Salin. He released her arms to take control of her hips, bracing her so she wouldn't hurt herself too much.

She came in Radin's mouth, her ass clutching Salin. Her truemate panted, biting her shoulder to maintain control. He fell back on the bed, taking her with him. She opened her eyes in time to see Radin crawl onto the bed, over them. Smiling down at her, he positioned his own massive cock at her pussy and penetrated.

"Fuck!" she screamed, the heat spiking when he hit her just *there*.

Inexorably, he kept coming, smoothing through her slick walls. Beneath her, Salin pulled out, making more room for Radin to slide home. Then Salin pushed in while Radin pulled out. Diana clutched the furs beneath them, pinned between them in midnight ecstasy. If she closed her eyes, they were one massive male body, invading her from both sides. As one, they worked together, finding a rhythm of push and pull that left her mindless and squirming, screaming and crying into orgasm. Another. Or maybe the same. Finally, as one, they growled. As one, they came, triggering another shuddering release within her body.

## Chapter Five

Suzana awoke with a start when a hand softly shook her shoulder. She opened her eyes to behold a woman smiling down at her from the bedside. Her skin was dark, pearly gray, not nearly as dark as any of the *raedjour* men Suzana had seen. Her eyes were a startling ice-green that seemed wrong for her skin color. But she had a kind, pretty face, and her smile was filled with warmth.

“Hello, Suzana. I’m Gala.” She stepped back, politely giving Suzana space as she sat up.

Modestly, Suzana gathered blankets around her nudity. Then it dawned on her that this woman was practically naked herself. Her slim, muscular body was covered only by a silky green wrap about her hips and soft leather boots dyed a matching color. Her pale blonde hair spilled in smooth waves from the crown of her head past her shoulders, some of it curling delicately just above the smooth mounds of her breasts.

Gala smiled, extending a bundle of fabric she held in her arms. “I brought you something to wear.” She looked down at her own “clothing” and snickered. “It’s not much more than I’m wearing, I’m afraid. But I managed to get a vest to cover up top, if you like.”

Suzana glanced down, embarrassed. “Will I ever get to wear proper clothing again?”

Gala laughed. "Therein lies the problem. To the *raedjour*, this *is* proper clothing." She held out the bundle again. "Come, get dressed. I promise you've nothing I haven't seen before." Feeling silly, Suzana slipped from under the covers, but her eyes went immediately to the closed door. "No, don't worry. They'll wait outside for a while yet."

Suzana took the bundle. "They?"

"Radin. My truemate, Hyle, and a few others. We're here to escort you to the festivities."

"Your truemate?"

Gala sighed, turning toward a small table to retrieve a brush. "Didn't Radin tell you anything?"

Suzana shook out a tiny lavender vest, a color she knew would bring out the color of her eyes. Delicate silver embroidery made the vest sparkle. She slipped it on, only to find that it wouldn't quite close across her ample bosom.

"Here." Gala dropped the brush on the bed, took the ties in front of the vest, and helped to lace Suzana in. "What *did* Radin tell you?"

Suzana thought about it. Truthfully, her memory of her time talking to Radin was a bit of a blur. She remembered seeing the city and talking about a few things, but after that, nothing. "That I would be treasured. That he was going to change me into one of them. That this was now my home."

"That's it?"

"For the most part."

Gala sighed. "Typical. I'm glad they allowed me to talk to you, then. What little he said *is* true. You will be treasured. The *raedjour* as a whole treat us very well."

"Us?"



“Women. But for a race that follows a goddess, they’re remarkably domineering of women.” Gala shrugged. “But in that, they’re very like most men. Also, Radin did cast the spell to begin your change into one of us. It will take a while, from what I’m told.”

“Then you ...”

Gala nodded, smoothing the now-laced vest over Suzana’s breasts. The edges barely covered her nipples, and the taut laces pushed her breasts in and up, creating a deep and bountiful cleavage.

“The change was started for me a few moons ago.” She held out her arm, displaying the gray skin that gleamed in the light. “It’s remarkable to watch your skin turn color. Not that I notice, most of the time.” She ran a hand over her forearm. “And it *feels* different. Tougher but softer.” She shook her head, as if unable to explain it. She fingered a lock of her pale hair. “And my hair was dark blonde.” She shrugged. “As I said, it’s gradual and gets more pronounced as time wears on. I think the pregnancy helps it along. Or causes it. I haven’t quite pinned that one down.”

“You’re pregnant?” Suzana couldn’t help her smile. She *loved* babies!

Gala matched it, smoothing a hand over her very flat belly. “I am.”

“Congratulations.”

“Thank you.” Picking up the brush, Gala climbed onto the bed behind Suzana and took hold of her wealth of hair. Someone had brushed it since her run through the forest, but her hair could always use brushing. “You have beautiful hair!”

“Thank you.”

“You must never have cut it for it to be this long.”

“No. Only trims to keep it healthy. My people only cut their hair as a sign of grief or shame.” She felt the pang of loss at speaking about her lost home. She *should* cut her hair, a sign of grief for her lost relatives.

Gala must have sensed that, for she went on. "Life among the *raedjour* for me has been a wonderful experience. It's so beautiful down here. I would never have guessed that an underground kingdom could be so varied. You must visit the main bathing cavern some time. It's a huge cavern with dozens of pools. Some are big and you can go swimming. Others are small and naturally heated." She babbled on a bit, her talk and manner putting Suzana at ease. "And since I found my truemate, Hyle, I couldn't be happier. He's wonderful! So sweet and loving. You see, one of the other drawbacks for the *raedjour* is that they're only fertile with one woman. Ever."

Gala spoke in a stream of words that Suzana was pleased to find she had no trouble following. Gala was a lot like a few of her friends back home. "Only one?"

"Only one. That's another reason that they're very careful with us. They'll make note of what you like and who you like so they can find your true match. So you'll be taken from man to man until your truemate is found."

Suzana started. "From man to man?"

"Yes." Gala's friendly manner all of a sudden seemed hesitant.

"Do you mean ...?"

Gala sighed. "There's no good way to say this, so I'll just be blunt and say it. You'll be given to one man before today is through, and you'll stay with him for nine days. He will have sex with you." Gala's voice was warmly amused. "A lot." Suzana's face flamed, and she was glad Gala was behind her so couldn't see it. "At the end of the nine days, you'll be tested to see if you're pregnant. And yes, they can tell after such a short period of time. The sorcerers, anyway. I'd imagine Radin will test you. Anyway, if you're not pregnant, you'll be given a night or two of rest. After that, you'll be given to another man for another nine days. That will be your life until you truebond or until they decide that you're not likely to truebond."

Suzana froze, hearing Gala's words. This was truly happening?

“But you’re special. Because you’re a virgin. Rhae thinks virgins are special. So, you get a contest to see who gets to be your first,” Gala continued blithely, still stroking Suzana’s hair. “They’re going to hold a contest for you, tonight. *Ilk vet metmre*, Radin called it. It means ‘brawn and domination.’ He’s spread the word, and any unmated male who thinks he’s worthy and is of a mind is going to come fight for you.”

Mind racing, Suzana shook her head. “No.”

“Suzana, really, it’s not that bad. Their goddess, Rhae, created them for sex. She gave them a special sense. They can actually feel your pleasure or pain. So it actually *benefits* them to see that you enjoy sex.” She chuckled. “They’ve made the act of making love an art form. Because, to them, it’s the way they worship their goddess.”

“But ... No! They can’t! My virginity is all that I have left!”

Gala sat back on her heels. “Suzana, calm down. Really, it’s not ...”

“No! They can’t!” She stood, ripping her hair from Gala’s grasp. Frantically, she eyed the room, settling on the open window.

“Suzana, please. Calm down. There’s nothing you can do --”

Again, Suzana shook her head. “I can’t.”

“Radin!” Gala screamed as Suzana darted to the window.

Behind her, the door crashed open. But she was at the sill. She ... Froze. Not of her own volition. The air itself coalesced around her body, confining her in the spot where she stood. Magic.

“Trying to take flight without wings, little bird?”

She felt Radin coming up behind her but could not move a muscle to turn toward him. He materialized at her side, head cocked in question. He seemed calm, but she thought that might be anger or annoyance burning in those red eyes.

Her mouth, she found, was not confined. “You can’t take my virginity.”

“I didn’t, Suzana.”

She shook with the effort to move, her gaze cast out the window and down at the welcoming cobblestones below. “You’re going to give me to some man to take my virginity tonight. You can’t.”

“Why?”

“It’s all I have left.”

He leaned casually against the edge of the window, crossing his arms over her chest. “Small comfort in a thin barrier buried deep inside your cunt, Suzana.”

She flinched at his vulgarity.

“Besides, did you think we *weren’t* going to take you? You were headed for a slave auction when I first saw you, Suzana. What do you think your new master would have done?”

“Radin, don’t be cruel,” Gala admonished.

He waved a hand in her direction but kept his eyes glued to Suzana. “Talk to me, Suzana. Don’t you think we’ve been rather kind so far?”

Tears welled in Suzana’s eyes.

Radin sighed. “Don’t cry, little bird. It’s not as bad as all that. You’re not headed for a vulgar rape. After all, *you’re* going to choose the winner of the contest.”

She blinked, trying to contain her tears. “I am?”

“In a manner of speaking.”

“What does that mean?”

“Part of the virgin contest involves a spell that’s tuned to your arousal. I’m actually quite excited to see how it works, as I’ve never cast it before.”

“You haven’t?” This from Gala, somewhere behind Suzana.

Radin’s eyes remained on Suzana. “No. Suzana’s the first virgin we’ve found since I reached my majority.” He smiled. “And I reached my majority nearly two hundred cycles

ago.” He waited for Suzana to digest that tidbit of information before continuing. “The spell takes your arousal and allows everyone at the contest tonight to experience it on a low level. The men fighting for your favor, however, will feel it more strongly.” He lanced her gaze with his, making sure she heard his next words. “Your focus will give your favorites a needed edge in winning you. So, in a way, you will be choosing the winner. If you can’t decide, then those who are among your favorites will fight it out until one remains the victor.”

She swallowed the last of her tears. He was right. She was being given far more choice than she would have received as a slave. They were being *nice* to her. She was warm. She was clean. She instinctively trusted Gala. And Radin. Despite his mischievous grin and exotic nature, she did feel that she could trust him. Her instincts were rarely wrong.

“Will Krael be there?”

Radin laughed. “You remember his name, then? I noticed your instant attraction for him. Your reaction to him in the forest is the reason I chose *Ilk vet metmre* for you.” He eyed her, red eyes shining. “Yes. He, and those like him, will be among the combatants.”

“Can’t I just choose him?”

Radin’s eyes widened. “A moment ago you were protesting that anyone take your innocence, and now you’re asking for Krael? Are you so sure, little bird?”

She nodded, so intent she didn’t realize that she could now move freely. “Yes.”

“How do you know? You’ve only met a handful of us. I assure you that Krael is not the only arrogant, long-haired warrior among us.” He snorted. “We have those in abundance.”

She shook her head. “No. I want Krael. I know it.”

His humor slipped. “You *know*? How?”

She lowered her head. “I just do.”

“Yes. I sensed some magic in you,” he mused. “But it was faint, so it must be mostly instinctual.”

He reached out and gently grasped Suzana's shoulder. "I'll make a bargain with you, little bird. Come with us to the contest. See the combatants. If it's Krael you truly want, your attention alone can ensure that you have him."

He guided her firmly away from the open window, turning her to face the room. Gala stood at the bed, an encouraging smile on her kind face. Another *raedjour* man, shorter and younger than Radin, stood behind her. Suzana assumed it was Gala's true mate, Hyle.

"Do I have a choice?"

"Truly? No," Radin answered, voice stern but not unkind. "Regardless of anything you or I say or do, you will be taken by a *raedjour* tonight. Potentially fertile women do not go untried among us. But take my bargain and at least you'll have some say in the matter."

"Do as he says, Suzana," Gala urged. "It was more choice than I was given at first."

Suzana considered. Radin was right. The offering was far more than she would have received from whoever would have bought her from the caravan master. After a short silence, she nodded.

"Good." Radin turned her and tipped Suzana's chin up with one finger. "Don't be afraid, little bird. We'll take very good care of you."

## Chapter Six

Suzana was overwhelmed. She sat amongst a wealth of silken, embroidered pillows on a dais raised perhaps four feet above the dirt floor of a small arena. The perimeter of the cleared central area was lined with similar pillow-strewn platforms, only one set higher than hers. That one stood against the wall to the right of Suzana, empty.

Radin lounged beside her, half seated among the pillows. A low table -- more of a tray -- lay between them, supporting a trencher of rich stew as well as assorted small loaves of different kinds of bread. Gala and her truemate, Hyle, lay loosely entwined next to Suzana, sharing their own tray. To Radin's other side sat another woman, introduced to Suzana as Diana. Diana, unlike the other women, wore a burgundy leather tunic, which cut off just below her breasts, and snug matching leather trousers. Oddly, about her wrists and neck she wore restraints, but these she treated more like jewelry than bondage.

The other platforms were rapidly filling with a multitude of people. The far majority were *raedjour*, men and women, their shining onyx skin mostly bare. Men wore trousers and boots. Women wore skirts or wraps and sandals or boots. Most of the women were topless. There were a few human-looking women within the crowd, each paired with a man. There

were a few human men, as well, but they seemed to be servants of some kind as each wore at least a collar around his neck.

Krael was nowhere in sight. When Suzana asked Radin about him, he would only say that the warriors would “soon make their appearance.”

At present, a man sat in the center of the arena, entertaining the crowd with song as he played his lute. Born to a people who held music in the highest regard, Suzana paid him the attention he deserved. When he rolled into his next song, she was delighted to discover her name in the phrasing. While he sang, he focused smiling blue eyes on her. When he completed his ballad, Suzana was not the only one to applaud enthusiastically. He seemed to be a crowd favorite.

“Donnal, haven’t I heard that ballad before?” Radin asked, amusement lacing his low voice.

The musician darted an anxious glance at him. “Uh, no, Radin.”

“Really? I could have sworn I’d heard it. Although, the name was ‘Tiana,’ not ‘Suzana.’”

Suzana covered her mouth with her hand to hide her giggle.

“You’re correct, Radin,” shouted a female voice from across the room. A woman stood on one of the platforms. Her white hair was piled atop her head in luxurious curls, held in place by violet ribbons, and a matching violet sheath hugged the curves of her black-skinned body. “Donnal, I’m wounded.” Her smile and amused voice ruined her act.

The musician cast an agonized gaze at Suzana. Raised among musicians, Suzana took pity on him. “It’s a lovely song, sir bard.” He puffed up at her choice of title. “Thank you.”

“Come here, *sir bard*,” said the woman as Donnal left the area. “I’ll give you something to sing about!”

The crowd laughed, Suzana with them. Happily, she accepted a plate of sweets from a young boy and turned to share them with Radin.



“All right, Radin. When does this show start?” Diana grumbled once the laughter had died.

Radin looked at Suzana instead. “Please forgive Diana. She’s a bit put out, being separated for the first time from Salin since they truemated.”

Diana snorted. “I’d be less ‘put out’ if I didn’t have to witness this farce.”

“Diana,” Radin warned.

“What? It’s barbaric.”

“No,” Radin disagreed lightly. “‘Barbaric’ would be if we laid her out on a table and then stood in line to take a turn at her.” Suzana gasped, but he smiled at her to make light of his words. “Which we won’t do.” He looked back at Diana. “Despite what you want to think, we do want her pleasure.”

“Of course.” This from Gala. “Remember, the *raedjour* feel your pleasure.”

“And tonight, everyone here will feel your pleasure.” He waved at the crowded arena. “Which is why there are so many of us here tonight. As Suzana’s arousal grows, so everyone will feel it.”

Suzana’s face flamed at the reminder.

“Well, isn’t Rhae just full of surprises,” Diana muttered.

Of a sudden, the din of the crowd hushed. Confused, Suzana looked up to see most attention directed toward the largest entrance directly across from her. The crowd parted. And *they* entered.

The first man to enter was a marvel to behold. Tall, slim, and completely naked, the *raedjour* was nearly covered head to knee, elbow to elbow with gleaming white designs. These seemed more vivid than the tattoos on Radin, nearly as bright as the shimmering white hair that fell in heavy waves to his knees. From across the room, Suzana could plainly make out the burning orange of his eyes. To each side, he was flanked by another man. The one to his right was slightly taller, with short gray-white hair. He wore loose trousers and

tall boots, and swords were tucked in either side of the embroidered red sash that bound his slim waist. Weblike tattoos decorated his chest. The man on the left was shorter and rounder, his white hair bound and braided close to his head. He wore a vivid red robe that swathed his body from shoulder to ankle but was left open in front to reveal nudity beneath.

Behind the trio were at least a dozen other men, warriors all, to judge by the weapons at their waists or held expertly in their hands. And Krael was at the head of this group! He strode just behind and to the right of the short-haired swordsman in front. Gleaming obsidian muscles rolled, a sinuous predator in motion. His shining white hair followed as an unbound cloud behind him. Krael's eyes locked on Suzana, and an evil grin possessed his lips.

The procession advanced until all the warriors were within the open area. The warriors stopped while the man in front and his two companions continued to the empty raised dais. Radin tapped Suzana's shoulder, leaning close. "That is Valanth, our *rhaeja*. Consider him our king."

Suzana only nodded, her eyes still glued to Krael, who now stood at the head of the procession of warriors. He fingered a long black whip that was curled up and attached at his hip. Mesmerized, she watched him slide the tail of the supple leather weapon through his fingers, the gleaming black the exact same shade as Krael's skin. She wanted to feel those fingers on her skin, have them caress her as they caressed the leather. Her mouth went dry at the thought.

"Radin," came a strong voice from the larger the dais, startling her. "Bring forth the virgin so I may see her."



With a small sigh, Radin rose and extended a hand to help her to her feet. A glance at the *rhaeja* showed his attention on her, and fear pulsed in her throat. Luckily, the training drilled into her since birth as a noble lady also kicked in. Head bowed, she allowed Radin to hand her down the shallow steps at the back of the platform, then lead her to meet the *raedjour* ruler.

The *rhaeja* lounged back among a wealth of pillows atop the dais. A woman had been brought to him and now served as his backrest. She was as naked as the *rhaeja*, her lovely onyx skin smooth and unadorned except for a white leather collar strapped around her neck. A chain dangled down her chest to the pillow below her, the handle conveniently located for the *rhaeja's* hand. Her white hair fell in thick waves past her shoulders. She sat placidly, but not as a lover would. She stared blankly to the side, her face and green eyes entirely devoid of emotion or feeling. She focused on a space inches before her nose and seemed to see nothing. *What could cause someone to look like that?*

“*Rhaeja*, may I present Suzana,” Radin pronounced, halting her at the foot of the steps leading to Valanth.

Valanth no more noticed the woman against whom he lay than he noticed the silken pillows beneath them. “Come closer.”

Hesitantly, Suzana mounted to the final step, keeping her head bowed.

“Look at me.”

She did and found that meeting his gaze was nearly impossible. Every fiber of her being wanted to stumble back down the steps and hide from this man. His eyes burned fiery orange, hotter than the glowing red of Radin's eyes, and the wicked slant to the lips below them did not convince her that he was entirely sane. His skin was not wrinkled, but he did look older than Radin somehow. Perhaps his skin gleamed just a little less, or perhaps his muscles were a tad less defined.

His voice was smooth as silk. “Aren't you tiny? Where are you from, child?”

“Dinnah Mar, my lord. Just off the north coast.”

He nodded. “I have heard of such a place. An island nation, yes? Under the god Lir?”

“Yes, my lord. *Rhaeja*.” She ducked her head, but the view was no easier lower on his body. The white designs on his flesh were disturbing, much brighter than those on Radin’s chest, face, and abdomen. If she stared at any of them too long, the design looked like it moved, or began to hover over his skin. His stenciled cock lay long and semi-hard against his flat belly.

“We have never seen the sea, of course, but we have heard of such a wonder. You are a long way from home.”

She settled her darting gaze on his shoulder, knowing he would take offense if she simply looked away. “Yes, *rhaeja*.”

“And exquisitely well behaved. You are familiar with courtly manners.”

“Yes, *rhaeja*.”

“Nobly born, then?”

“Yes, *rhaeja*.”

“Ah. Would that I could teach the *raedjour* to respect courtly behavior. I fear we are quite lax in the proper modes of respect.”

By his words, she knew his kind. A man who thought much of his position and thrilled at others’ recognition. The trouble with such men was they rarely *earned* the recognition they sought.

“Perhaps I may rely on you to ...” His words trailed off. Suddenly, he rolled forward to his knees, leaning toward her. On instinct, Suzana stepped back, but he grabbed a handful of hair just behind her ear to still her. Frowning, he stared at her face. “This one’s a mage!” He glared over her shoulder. “Radin, all mages are to come to me *first*.”

An abrupt hush settled over the arena.

Radin spoke calmly. “Beg pardon, *rhaeja*, but she’s not a mage.”

Valanth sneered over her shoulder. “Do you doubt my abilities to tell such things, *sorcerer?*”

“No, *rhaeja*. She does, indeed, have magic, but she is not a mage.”

Valanth turned back to her. “What say you, virgin? Are you a mage?”

“N-no, *rhaeja*.” Terrified, she trembled under his glare. “M-my family, my lord, is born with some magic, but it is very specific.”

“Such as?”

“Music. I’m a bard.”

“You cast spells with your voice?”

“N-not exactly s-spells, my lord. I can enhance and sometimes cause strong emotions.”

The death grip on her hair eased a touch. “I see. A useful trait.”

“Yes, *rhaeja*.”

“But she’s not a mage, my lord.”

She swallowed a cry as Valanth thrust her aside, bringing her to her knees beside him while keeping hold of her hair. “You’re new to your position, *sorcerer* --” The word was said with a sneer. “-- to be judging magic for me.”

“My apologies, *rhaeja*.”

Suzana knelt, frozen, as Valanth turned back to her. The fingers in her hair pulled cruelly, but she bit her lip over the pain. Like a frightened bird before a cat, she stared up at his considering gaze.

“Perhaps in this, you’re right.” Suzana held her breath when he tilted his head, the long fall of his silvery white hair tumbling across his shoulder. “She would have to have more power to be the answer to my needs. Besides, I don’t have the patience to train a virgin.” He released her, pushing back slightly to force her to struggle to keep her balance. A smile took

his lips as he settled back against the empty-eyed woman. "So tell me, are you prepared for a thick black cock to take your virginity?"

She gasped. He chuckled, grasping his own organ with a long-fingered hand. Suzana watched, unable to tear her gaze away, as it grew in his grip. The odd stenciled designs reformed as it grew. "*Ilk vet metmre*," Valanth murmured. "You are certain of this, Radin? She doesn't strike me as the type."

"Quite certain, *rhaeja*."

Valanth nodded, still stroking his cock. Suzana struggled not to squirm where she stood, aroused despite her fear of the august presence before her. "Stare like that, virgin, and I may reconsider my decision not to train you."

Blushing, Suzana dropped her gaze to the planks at her feet.

Valanth laughed. "Very well. Let's get on with this."

Krael clutched the whip, his relief slow to diffuse through the boiling rage in his blood. He was as loyal as any to the king, but he wanted that tasty virgin morsel for himself.

Radin led Suzana back to their original seats, accompanied by Salin. Salin relinquished his usual spot beside the *rhaeja* in favor of wrapping himself around his truemate. Krael watched the hellcat snarl at him, putting up a token struggle before Salin finally settled her in his arms. Krael shook his head. Salin was quite obviously pleased with his truemate, but Krael didn't understand it. The woman had put him through hell, had repeatedly denied him. She'd forced the commander to practically beg for her. Krael well remembered that one horrible moment when his closet friend had ordered him to sink a dagger into his heart and end his misery.

Krael dragged his gaze away from the happy couple as Diana finally relented to a kiss. That wasn't for him. Krael knew the joys of a woman's flesh, knew how to pleasure a woman, but he wouldn't be tied to one. There was far too much angst involved.

He barely listened as Radin stood and proceeded through the formalities of describing the contest for the crowd. The litany was for young *raedjour* and the virgin herself. Any seasoned man knew what was about to happen, even if they, like Krael, had never actually participated before. Contests of *metmre* were common among the *raedjour*. A way of easing tensions and expelling the need for violence that went with their highly sexual nature. The only difference in this contest was the prize.

She sat like a jeweled statue on her pillows, eyes wide as she gazed at the crowd, her wealth of thick black hair strewn about her like a blanket. The tiny vest she wore guided attention to the fullness of her breasts. Krael idly wondered about the color of her nipples.

Radin didn't call him for the first battle. Not that it mattered. Some of the others were fierce, but they were not him. They were not marked as a warrior by Rhae Herself. He barely recalled the time in the dark, when he had given himself to Her will, but he had emerged victorious, with lightning strikes etched across his face. It made him a primary captain, answerable only to Commander Salin and the *rhaeja* himself. Few other warriors could boast such a feat or would even try the test to see if they were worthy of Her favor.

He sat back to wait his turn

Suzana winced as the first contest ended with one combatant out cold on the floor. The winner stepped toward her, saluting with the long staff he had used to pummel his opponent.

"Would you reward this warrior with a kiss?" Radin asked mildly.

Suzana blinked, still trying to come to terms with the heated arousal that tingled on her skin and deep in her belly. She had never felt anything like this before.

She turned her eyes, trained them on the man's handsome face. "I --"

"It's not required," Radin continued lightly, plucking a sweetmeat from the tray between them. "But you may. If you wish."



She felt the weight of Krael's stare. Despite her fixation on him, the first battle had captured her attention. Horrified and fascinated, she had watched every moment. The warrior before her was tall and wonderfully built. His obsidian skin shone with what should be sweat, but didn't quite look right. His black eyes flashed with his warm grin.

"I ..." It seemed only fair to reward him somehow, did it not? Besides, what would his lips feel like? "I wish."

The warrior's grin grew as he stepped forward. Radin's hand steadied Suzana among the pillows, helping her to her knees. With her kneeling on the platform and the warrior on the ground, he was still a bit taller than she.

"I'm Rigiell," he informed her, leaning forward. His hands he kept to his sides.

"Rigiell," she repeated, resting her hand lightly on his shoulder to steady herself as she touched her lips to his.

He leaned into her, a slight moan catching in his chest. Radin cleared his throat, however, and Rigiell abruptly pulled back. He smiled at her. "Thank you, little one."

"You're welcome," she breathed.

Radin helped her sit as he called two more names.

Krael barely contained himself, watching that whelp Rigiell kiss the girl. Then Callip after he trounced Garn. Then Dreidon when he beat Waldaz. After each battle, with each kiss, Krael -- and all those around him -- could feel her arousal grow. Suzana's sweet, heady lust permeated the room, caressing the skin of every *raedjour* in the arena. Krael's cock pressed against his trousers, hard and ready. All around him on the pillow-strewn platforms, couples and threesomes were well into kissing and caressing, tasting and exploring as they enjoyed the pulse of the virgin's innocent appetite.

Krael suffered through yet another two matches and another two kisses before it was finally his turn. He only barely calmed as he stepped forward to face Vanzanter, his opponent in the final match of the first round.

He uncoiled his whip, watching Vanzanter eye it warily. Fool. Vanzanter was better than that. After his nine days with Suzana were over, Krael would take the man to task for showing a weakness so obviously.

Vanzanter fought with two cudgels, expertly flipping them in his hands. A distraction technique that didn't work on Krael, who knew the cudgel as well as the whip. Krael simply waited for the less-experienced man to attack.

*Sssssthack!*

Suzana nearly jumped from her skin when the whip hissed through the air and caught the man on the back as he tried to duck away. Such a sound! She felt as though invisible fingers pinched a sensitive spot between her legs.

Krael pulled the whip back, all the while dancing aside and away from an attack. The other man tried to engage the whip, tangle it, but Krael used it as a six-foot-long, snaking extension of his arm. The other arm, he used to bat away any advances Vanzanter might make.

Suzana fidgeted, aroused beyond measure at the sight of the wild male who had chased her down in the forest. His long, lush hair billowed about him like wings. How he avoided tangling it with the whip, or how he managed to keep Vanzanter from grabbing it, she had no idea. Like the whip, it simply seemed an extension of his body that he controlled effortlessly.

Krael wrested one of the cudgels from Vanzanter, using the butt end of the whip to knock the man aside. Now he fought with both weapons, corralling Vanzanter with the

whip, then rapping any available appendage when the other man came too close. And he was often close. How could he use a six-foot whip effectively at close range?

With a particularly loud *crack*, the match was over. Vanzanter fell to his knees, then to his side, clutching his head. Dismissing him, Krael tossed the cudgel to the side and boldly strode to the edge of Suzana's platform.

She heard Radin chuckle. "Again, Suzana, you may choose not to bestow reward."

"No, I --" She stared longingly at the smooth expanse of Krael's chest, the wicked smile he pointed at her. "-- I want to."

She knelt on her own and edged forward. Krael's hands lifted to reach for her.

"Krael," Radin warned.

Krael snarled at the sorcerer, and Suzana very nearly swooned on the spot. His lip lifted, revealing gleaming white teeth, and the lightning bolts that crossed his face sizzled to life. Her skin burned to feel the touch of those hands. She failed to swallow the moan that vibrated in her throat.

Obviously pleased, Krael switched his attention to her, even as he braced his hands on the edge of the platform. She stopped when she knelt before him. She was shocked to find that he was not as tall as the other *raedjour* she had met. Still far taller than she, but not a towering mountain like some of the others. Kneeling on the platform, she was about on eye-level with him. It was comforting, made him seem more tailored to her. At least in her own fanciful thinking. She reached out a tentative hand. A thick hank of silky white hair rested on his chest, and she laid her palm on it. Instantly, her fingers moved, weaving into it.

His smile turned feral, and again Suzana thought she might melt. A sensible woman would be frightened. She *was* frightened. But, oh, her body responded to this man!

She leaned forward, and he tilted his head to more fully catch her lips. She started back when she felt his tongue swipe the seam of her lips.

"Krael," he told her, naming himself as the other men had. Even if it wasn't necessary.

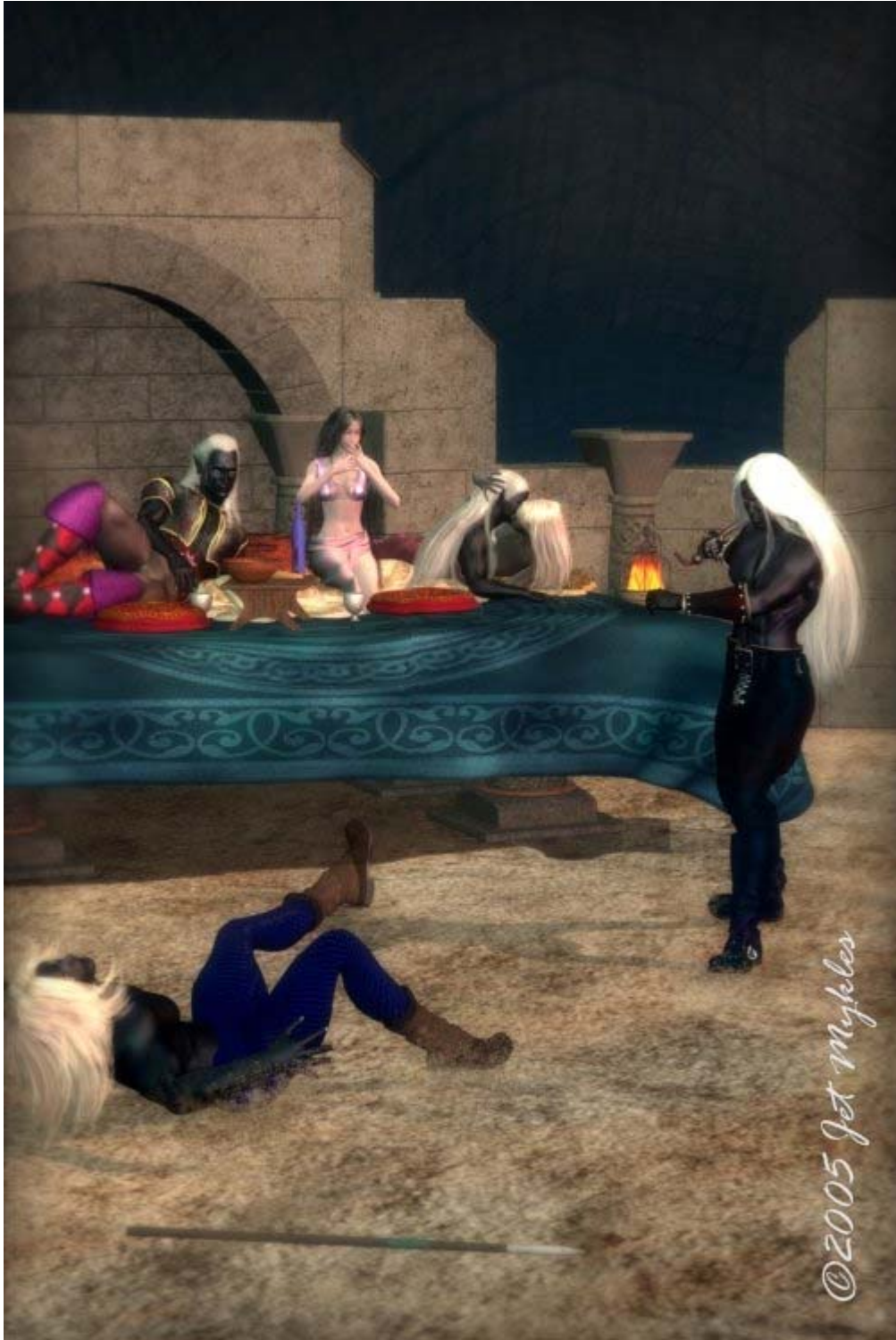
She nodded, knowing she couldn't possibly forget.

The final match. Krael's cock was hard enough that he could have used it as a weapon itself against Callip. Suzana's lust was thickly palpable, driving him insane. It was like but unlike the feeling a *raedjour* experienced with a lover. It was that tingling sense, that phantom echo of pulsing pleasure, that drove a *raedjour* to please his lover. But this virgin lust was slightly different, a lighter taste but no less potent.

Around him, few of the onlookers watched the contest. The sounds of sex, slapping skin and frantic moans, had accompanied that of the clashing weapons during the last battle, which had seen Dreidon unconscious under Callip's mace. Some of the audience had left for private quarters, but most simply stayed and enjoyed the impromptu orgy while they siphoned off Suzana's arousal.

Krael tuned out the activity about him. He concentrated solely on the man before him and the surge of extra confidence he received from Suzana. Her attention was on him and him alone! He felt it as clearly as if her tender flesh was pressed against his.

Impatient to experience her flesh in the physical sense, Krael faced Callip. It was over almost before it began. His aim had never been finer as his whip wrapped about Callip's neck, his arm never stronger as he pulled the startled man off his feet and kicked the side of his head. Callip, victor of three fights this night, was out.



## Chapter Seven

Triumphant, Krael spun to face his prize. Her huge violet eyes rounded impossibly larger as he approached, but she didn't take flight. Frozen, she awaited her capture. He saw Radin's smile and his faint nod. Beside Radin, Salin had rejoined Diana. They were locked in an embrace, as were Gala and Hyle to Suzana's side.

"Well done, Captain," boomed the *rhaeja*.

Krael stopped in mid-step and forced himself to turn and face his ruler. Valanth was alone with Tishna on the platform, the empty-eyed woman spread across his chest like a blanket. Valanth's stenciled cock was buried deep in her pussy, but his eyes speared Krael's.

"Treat her well, Captain," the *rhaeja* told him, turning an admiring gaze toward Suzana.

"Yes, my lord." Krael turned his own gaze to her, smiling as he felt her trembling need hammer at him. "I intend to."

Crossing the distance between them, Krael scooped Suzana from the platform, tossing her high before him like one might a toddler. Again he tested that delectable weight he had discovered when he held her in the forest. She looked delicate, but there was solid woman in that body. Solid woman to wrap around his cock. Unable to meet those eyes directly any

longer lest he throw her down and take her right then, he threw her over his shoulder, keeping a tight grip on her plump little ass.

He followed a boy to the room the winner of the virgin was assigned. It would be bigger and better equipped than his rooms, and at least one squire would be assigned to attend them during the nine days. For that, Krael was thankful; he never took on squires of his own.

They reached the room, and he took his trembling bundle inside. He knew she was frightened, but he also knew she was aroused. If he couldn't already feel it, he could certainly smell it wafting from between her silky thighs. He tossed her carefully onto the pillows and blankets heaped atop an overlarge bed. Primly, she pressed her legs together, turning her hips so that she was closed to him. His gaze narrowed. He didn't realize he'd growled until he saw her cringe.

He thought to reassure her, but words were beyond him. After the fight, his heart rate was skipping furiously, and it was all he could do not to tear into her. Also, her fear added a tangy spice to her scent.

Slowly, he knelt before her. Never taking his gaze from hers, he took hold of her ankles and placed them to either side of his hips, spreading her nicely. The silk wrapped about her hips annoyed him.

Snarling, he twisted a finger in the knot holding the wrap and yanked. Suzana gasped as the shimmery fabric tore. He flipped the cloth aside and fastened his gaze on her exposed sex.

Suzana didn't know if she wanted to scream or groan. All reassurances from Radin and Gala flew from her thoughts as she was confronted with the wild man before her. His movements were carefully contained, barely leashed violence evident in everything about him. But even the knowledge that he was probably going to hurt her didn't detract from the

deep, pulsing arousal that suffused her body. She knew arousal. She knew attraction. Both were paltry feelings from her innocent past compared to the heated blaze that burned in her belly and pooled in her groin as she lay spread before this man.

Heavy eyelids and thick white lashes didn't hide the dark, vivid blue of his eyes. As he leaned forward, a heavy hank of his long, straight hair fell from the top of his head, over his shoulder, to curl deliciously on her thigh. She moaned. The sound brought his gaze to hers. She could only stare in fascination at his harsh features, the gleaming obsidian skin bisected with a crisscrossing lightning design. He continued forward, closing the distance between them, his brawny arms keeping his body from touching hers. More of his hair hissed forward to curtain them on either side. She squirmed, wanting to run but wanting to grab handfuls of that hair to rub all over her body.

"Suzana," he breathed, lips hovering over hers for just that moment before he sealed their lips.

The kiss was hard. Not hurtful, just demanding. He pulled back long enough to demand, "Open." Just like in the forest. Now, like then, she parted her lips to his plunging tongue, squirming deliciously beneath his assault. This was all-encompassing, explorative and possessive. He touched every surface of her mouth that he could reach, branding it his own.

Suzana clutched the blankets beneath her, wanting to reach up and touch him but scared to do so. She could only follow his lead because this was a new experience. She was deathly afraid she'd get it wrong, that she'd displease him, that he'd stop this glorious exploration. She couldn't think on her own. She was his to direct.

He pulled away, leaving her bereft. Muttering darkly to himself, he took hold of both sides of her vest and tugged. The two laces that held the sides closed snapped. His nostrils flared as the vest fell apart, exposing her breasts. One huge hand closed around one of those mounds of delicate flesh, plumping, pinching. He wasn't exactly gentle. She cried out when he dropped his head, sucking her nipple into his mouth. Dark, fiery warmth spread through her chest, melted through her belly, and oozed from between her thighs. He worried her



nipple with tongue and teeth, a rumble in his throat setting off a vibration in her breast. Her hands flew up of their own accord to grasp the hair near his head. Eagerly, she tangled her fingers in the cool silk of it, pulling to press his face closer to her breast.

He switched to the other breast, each hand now cupping one mound. He brought the other nipple to painful awareness, then opened his mouth wide to suck as much of her breast into his mouth as he could. She held her breath, unsure whether to enjoy the sensation or brace herself for intense pain if he bit her.

Krael reared back, dislodging her hands from his hair as he sat back on his knees. “Suzana,” he groaned again, sliding his hands down her ribs to smooth over the curve of her belly. Sweet, creamy skin, flushed a lovely pink by her arousal. The curve of her belly entranced him. His entire hand could splay the width of her waist! His hands trailed lower, smoothing out to the sway of her hips, then down over the plumpness of her thighs. With both hands, he gripped those thighs and tugged her forward so that her bottom rested on his knees. All the while, his gaze remained riveted on the dark triangle of curls between her legs, curls that parted due to his action to reveal juicy, wet lips and an intriguing, seeping hole. He glanced up to see her eyes locked on the fall of his hair, and he smiled. She’d fallen under the spell of his hair, a common occurrence for most of his lovers. While she gazed at him, he trailed his fingers through her pussy lips, his cock stiffening when he realized just how *big* his fingers looked. If his fingers looked big, his cock would truly find a snug fit!

She moaned, her eyes finally falling shut as he smeared her cream over her sex. He found the nub of her clit easily and had to grasp her thigh with his free hand to keep her still as he rubbed it. Her cute little mouth pursed to frame the “Oh!” that escaped her lips.

Oh, he wanted to fuck her! He wanted to wear her ankles as a necklace as he pounded into her. *Later*, he promised himself. He had nine days with her. Despite the boil of his blood, he had to be careful.

Her hips started to pump. He wasn't surprised she was close. The entire night had been one long foreplay session for her. He kept rubbing her clit, bringing one finger of his other hand down to her entrance to probe just inside to find the right spot ...

There! She shattered, her hips pumping furiously at his fingers, instinct seeking to drive him deeper. He shut his eyes, letting her orgasm roll over him like a warm tide, allowing it to ease some of the urgency in his blood.

Leaving her limp among the blankets, he slid out from under her and stood beside the bed. Breathing heavily, she rolled her head to watch as he bent to remove his boots.

"Don't move." She froze in the midst of sitting up. Uncertain, she remained on her elbows. "Keep your legs spread. I like the sight of you."

That helped her embarrassment. Her thighs relaxed, bowed open as instructed.

One boot then the other found the floor. He straightened to unlace his trousers. Even now, her manners tried to rule as she wondered whether to watch or not. *How cute.* She finally decided on his eyes, and he let his gaze heat as he finally pushed his trousers down over his slim hips. She practically panted in the effort not to look, and, since he stood calmly, it finally overwhelmed her. Her gaze dropped, and those huge violet eyes got even bigger at the sight of him. Her thoughts were plain. How was she going to fit *that* inside her? He was hard and thick, and he wasn't entirely sure he'd fit it all, either. But he'd fit as much of it as he could!

He dropped to his knees beside the bed, disregarding her panic as he scooped his hands between her thighs and under her lush buttocks. With a practiced move, he let his hair fall forward and flipped it slightly. Hair fell to obscure his face as locks of it pooled over her belly and waist. Distracted by the hair, she didn't realize what he was about until his pointed tongue just touched her engorged clit.

A ragged groan rattled through her, her hips instantly rocking forward to slide her clit neatly between his sucking lips. His own groan settled into her pussy as he lapped at her

juices. Rhae's mercy, she tasted divine! Warm, salty, almost flowery, her nectar coated his lips and tongue. Reveling, he rubbed his chin over her fleshy lips. He dipped his tongue down to her channel, plunging inside before licking back up to torment her clit.

She groaned, writhing, and he left her sensitive little organ long enough to remind her, "Be still." She froze again, and he grinned at the agony on her face as he again put his mouth to her sex. He knew very well it was impossible to stay still. But the struggle would make it all the hotter for her.

Screaming, she came around his tongue, her thighs thrashing against his cheeks. He held her firmly, opening his mouth over her sex so that his teeth pressed her clit, sending her right over the edge into another climax.

Suzana was blind. Her sight had gone the way of her voice. She could only moan as her body writhed incessantly beneath Krael's assault. She had never felt so alive yet so helpless. Never so out of control.

She sighed in relief when he finally lowered her bottom to the blankets and released her cunt. But then he crawled up her body, carefully lowering himself so that his hips were fitted to hers.

Her eyes flew open, sight suddenly returning as she realized what was happening. This was it.

That blue gaze seared hers, barely contained behind heavy eyelids. "It will hurt, Suzana," he promised, bending to kiss her forehead. Her own juices smeared her skin. "But it will also be worth it."

"Please," she squirmed, panic rising.

"Be still." She instantly complied. What was it about this man that her body obeyed him before her mind realized the fact? "It's been nothing but pleasure so far."

She had to concede that fact. But still, as he shifted his weight and she felt a nudging at her entrance, she squirmed.

A hard smack on the side of her thigh froze her. And exhilarated her. To her own surprise, she felt another gush from herself moisten the head of his cock. He chuckled. "Relax, or it will hurt more." His voice was dark, rich cream that oozed over her chest and sank into her heart.

Smoothly, he breached her opening. Now, that felt good! He forged forward an inch or so, then pulled mostly out. The heat of his cock felt wonderfully odd within her body.

"Scratch and scream all you need." He pushed deeper. Retreated. She clutched at his shoulders, feeling the unfamiliar stretch of inner muscles. She hissed, trying to decide where this was supposed to hurt. Because it didn't. It filled a void she'd only just realized was there.

"Now!" he grunted, yanking her hips to thrust even more deeply into her body.

There was the pain! She howled, nails digging into the tough skin of his shoulders. She kicked out feebly with her legs, her struggles ineffectual. He remained absolutely still until the first of the pain subsided; then he pulled out slowly. She whimpered, tears in her eyes. His lips caressed her forehead, nipping at the hair atop her head. The fingers of one hand slid from her hip to the side of her breast, toying lightly with it. She wondered at his actions, until he pushed back in. She tensed, ready for more pain, but was shocked when there was only a faded echo from before.

He took hold of her hands, pulled them out to the sides, and braced them to the bed with his own hands. He hovered above her, connected only by his cock within her, watching until she looked up at him.

Grinning, he pulled out and thrust back. She groaned. The pleasure she'd felt before was back, and deeper. He did it again, and she was sure he butted at the entrance of her womb. No, she changed her mind. He was nudging her heart!

Her eyes drifted closed as he found a rhythm. Her body followed suit with his, arching, twisting, clutching. Oh, yes, clutching! She concentrated on that. It still hurt some -- he was big, after all! -- but the pain wasn't enough to detract from the pleasure. In fact, it might have been making it better!

He growled, and she opened her eyes to a glorious sight. Framed by that wonderful, shining hair, his face was contorted in sheer pleasure. His belly contracted as his hips worked. Looking down, she could even glimpse that onyx rod, wet with her cream, as it dipped in and out of her channel.

Too much!

"Ah!" she cried, riding the orgasm. She was beginning to recognize the sensation. That implosion deep inside that caused her entire body to tense and writhe.

Suzana lay limp in the pillows, trying desperately to catch her breath. Krael was poised above her, breathing deeply but not quite heavily. She peered up at him through a sweaty haze. While her long black locks were plastered to her damp skin, his ever-flowing white hair still drifted about them like a curtain. Rather than sweat, he was covered in a fine, glossy oil.

He smiled, a dark, possessive expression that curled her toes. She drew in a startled breath when he slowly pulled back his hips, withdrawing the cock that was still huge and hard within her. Her heart skipped a beat. Wasn't there something missing? She knew the rudiments of sex, though her poor nurse's explanations fell *far* short of what she'd just experienced. He was supposed to empty himself. In her nurse's words, his "tool will spill its seed in you and get soft. Then you know he's finished, and you've done your duty."

What did it mean that he was still hard?

He stepped off the bed and padded across the room to a small door she had not noticed before. A short moment later, he returned with a bowl cradled in one hand, two thick, soft cloths in the other.

“Be still,” he told her when she would have moved aside as he sat.

He told her that a lot. Why did she like it? She’d never particularly enjoyed it when coming from her father and brothers. Why was it exciting when this man demanded it of her?

Calmly, ignoring the erection between his legs, Krael dipped a cloth into the water in the bowl and then very tenderly used the cloth to wipe moisture and blood from between her legs. She bit her lip, her heart expanding at the sweet gesture.

“You’re sore,” he declared, a statement rather than a question. “That’s normal.” He dropped the cloth he’d been using to the floor. Dipping the second into the water, he used it to wipe perspiration from her brow, her neck, her torso. She welcomed the coolness, as the room was toasty warm from the fire and their exertions.

She glanced at his cock, opened her mouth to ask, but stayed her words.

He noticed and smiled. “Yes?”

She looked up at him, instantly lost in the crystal-blue world of his gaze.

“Ask.” He discarded the second cloth and bent to place both cloth and bowl on the floor beside the bed.

“Did you ... finish?” she asked, unsure she’d used the correct words.

But he understood. Was amused. Leaning back, braced on one muscular arm, he idly traced his fingers over the shaft of his cock. “You mean did I come? No.”

Her eyes were riveted on the long organ, fascinated by the bunch and pull of loose skin, the domed head when it was revealed. “Did I do something wrong?”

“No. It was your first time. I did all I could not to make it too painful for you. My concentration didn’t allow me release.”

“It was wonderful!” Sitting up on her knees, she winced only slightly at the soreness between her legs.

She felt her face mirroring the warmth in his smile. “I’m glad you were pleased.”

She glanced back at his cock. His big hand surrounded the gleaming shaft. She licked her lips. He chuckled. "Do you have more questions? Or ...?" He leaned into her, breathing softly at her temple as she continued to stare at his cock. "... would you like to do it again?"

"I --" Her mind, just now awash with questions, cleared completely when a pearly drop of liquid seeped from the tiny hole at the end of his shaft. She could not have said why the sight arrested her, but it did.

He released his cock and reached over his body to grasp her hand. She watched in wonder as he folded her fingers around his hot organ, amazed that something she couldn't even encompass with her fingers had actually fit within an opening of her body. And said opening, while admittedly sore, pulsed with a need to be filled once again.

"You're mine to teach over our days together," he purred, freeing his braced arm so he could use it to cuddle her closer to his side. She laid her cheek on the broad muscle of his shoulder, her eyes still fixed on their hands as his led hers up and down the length of his cock. "We'll find out all the things you enjoy. All the things that will make you come."

"Come?"

"That explosion of feeling you felt." He dipped his head to nuzzle her ear. "Four or five times, if I counted correctly."

She giggled, smoothing her thumb over the head of his cock to smear the liquid. His purr made her squirm. "Is it always that way?"

"No. I'm told some women have difficulty coming. Rarely with one of us, though."

"Us?"

"A *raedjour*."

"Oh. Is it because of your goddess?"

"Yes."

Impulsively, she squeezed, gratified to cause a shudder to race through his body. He groaned. His hand left hers, and she paused. "Keep doing that, Suzana," he demanded softly, his hands now burrowing in her hair to turn her lips to his.

Assaulted by his kiss, she could barely remember her name, let alone how to move her hand. But he pulled back and again demanded, "Don't stop." Obedient, she squeezed, and he groaned. The sign that she pleased him encouraged her. She caressed his shaft as he again plundered her mouth, his long tongue twining with hers, coaxing her tongue to foray into his mouth, as well.

At length, with a growl, he pulled from her. He grasped her hips and bodily swung her up and around until he dropped her across his lap, her legs to either side of his. He was so big that her knees didn't even touch the blankets on which he sat. Scowling in need, he placed one big hand across her buttocks and slid her forward until her hips were locked to his, her open sex caressing the shaft she'd been forced to release. She moaned, instinctively rocking her hips to bring his hardness in contact with that little nub of nerves he'd found with his mouth earlier.

"That's it." He took possession of her mouth again, fisting a hand in the hair at her nape while sliding the other down her back to grip her buttocks.

They came up for air, barely. The only distance he'd allow between their mouths was hardly enough for air to escape their panting lungs. The hand left her hair to grip her hips. Again he lifted her bodily "Suzana, reach down and guide me inside you."

Shuddering, she braced one hand on his shoulder, then obeyed. His cock was wet with both her juices and his own. As he lifted her, she placed him. He let her slip down just enough to lodge him snugly inside her.

"Grip me with your thighs and take as much as you're able."

Biting her lip, she nodded, concentrating on the sweet ache as he filled her. She reached her limit at last, sure she could feel him bumping at her heart.



“Lean back and brace your hands on my legs.”

She did. Bent back, the position gave him better ability to control how far down she went. She let him have her weight, sighing as he lifted and lowered her on another forever slide.

“Ah!” She gripped him with her thighs, which tightened her channel around him. Both of them cried out at the added friction.

“Ride me, Suzana.”

Shyly, she rocked her hips. Oh, that felt so good! She shut her eyes, throwing her head back, and did her best to move. Awkward at first, she finally got the rhythm. Rolling her hips with his help, she found places to aim his cock that felt positively exquisite!

Holding her to make sure she didn't hurt herself, Krael nonetheless let her weight bring her down farther than before. How did such a little woman take so much?!

All of her curves were sleek with sweat, her body completely open to him as she leaned back. Her luscious breasts bobbed to her rhythm; her long hair caressed his thighs and calves. The ass in his hands flexed, helping those muscles inside her squeeze the life out of his cock. And the trust! That was the most amazing part. Her instant obedience and open trust were not lost on Krael.

He felt her impending orgasm and knew he had to let himself go this time. She likely wouldn't make it through another. He pumped up her rhythm, adding a roll from his own hips. She stiffened. Screamed. Nails dug into his thighs. Pulsing lust washed over him. He followed her over the abyss and lost himself in her sweet, warm depths.

## Chapter Eight

“... no sooner had Dreidon said ‘Well, naturally *I’m* in charge,’ than Salin walks in. Only Dreidon doesn’t see him, so he goes on about how, now that both Salin and you are laid up, he’ll be taking charge and running the place.” Radin and Krael shared a belly laugh. “Calm as you please, Salin taps him on the shoulder -- when he’s done, of course --”

“Of course.”

“-- and asks him if he ‘may proceed.’” Radin shook his head. “I’m told Dreidon collapsed from exhaustion by the time Salin was through with him.”

Krael grinned at Radin’s story, glad the commander was back at his duties. The men *could* function without either he or Salin watching over them, but they really *shouldn’t*.

He drummed his fingers on Nalfien’s worktable. It was late in the day, judging by the time statue, and Krael had only recently awakened. Regretfully, he’d eased away from Suzana’s warmth to come to this meeting. It was expected. The sorcerers kept an especially close eye on a woman’s first few lovers, using the initial experiences to hone their future choices for her. It helped to find a truemate. Krael had served the function many times in the past.

Why did it bother him this time?

“Are you all right?”

Krael scowled. “I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine. Was it hard on her?”

“What?”

“Suzana. Did last night not go well?”

“Oh. No. It was fine.” Great. Stupendous. Exquisite!

Why?!

“Then what aren’t you telling me?”

Nalfien’s arrival spared Krael from answering. The elder sorcerer swept into the workroom with Hyle in his wake. The younger sorcerer carried the requisite journal and quills. In that journal, he would record what Krael told him about Suzana. He would make note of the fact that she responded well to dominance. That she had a fondness for long hair. That even in her first times, she took an amazing length of cock into her tight little body.

*Why* did it bother him that they would know this?

He felt Radin’s gaze on him but ignored it as the other sorcerers sat at the table.

He answered the same questions he had answered on previous occasions, and he answered them calmly. He ignored the hard pit in his gut at the thought that he was preparing Suzana for another man. *Sharing* her was an attractive idea -- giving her over to another was not.

Nalfien proclaimed himself pleased that Krael had made her first experience a memorable one. Nalfien had presided over the last virgin found by the *raedjour*, but Krael, Radin, and Hyle had not even been adolescents, much too young to participate back then.

The interview had just about completed when the door opened to admit Betaf. In his flashy, shiny red robes and with his silver hair bound with numerous braids, the man was one of the king’s pet sorcerers, rather than Nalfien’s, and was therefore not precisely welcome in Nalfien’s quarters. Krael sat back, content to stay outside their animosities.

“Excellent, you’re here.” Krael was surprised to see Betaf’s attention on him. The lanky man’s red gaze pinned him from beneath heavy eyelids. Then he scanned the others, nodding slightly.

Radin toyed with his wine goblet. “What do you want, Betaf?”

“The *rhaeja* has decided that he’ll have the virgin after Krael’s time. He’s sent me here to arrange it.”

Krael froze. Valanth wanted Suzana?

“Why?” Nalfien voiced Krael’s question.

Betaf sniffed. “It is not your place to question the *rhaeja*.”

“Humor me.”

The younger sorcerer considered Nalfien, but was just intelligent enough to know he was no match for his crafty elder. Fear of Nalfien was one of the reasons he remained plastered to Valanth’s side. “If the *rhaeja* wished you to know his reasons, he would tell you. But he will have her. So be it.”

With that and a flourish of his robes, he was gone.

“Why?” Krael turned to Nalfien.

The elder sorcerer’s eyes trained on the shut door, squinting, as if the answers were written there in miniscule script. “I can only guess.”

“You can’t let him have her.”

Nalfien turned at Krael’s insistent hiss. They shared a weighty gaze.

It was known, but never talked about. The *rhaeja* was ... not right. Sanity had not been his for nearly a hundred cycles. Not since the death of his truemate. The *suspicious* death of his truemate. The pair had gone into chambers one day, and the next she was dead. He mourned her, of course, and the *raedjour* watched him carefully for several moons afterward. It was uncommon for truemates to outlive each other by more than that, *if that*. Once the connection was formed, breaking it through death almost always broke the will to live in the

survivor. But Valanth had not only lived, he'd thrived. After a hideously short mourning, he had emerged and claimed one of the women in the brothel. He claimed that Rhae Herself had deemed he should not remain without a partner. She had even given him a prophecy: "A mage's love to save the *rhaeja*."

The woman he'd claimed had survived, physically, but she was forever after mute. And withdrawn. There was no discernable reason. She was also quite timid and avoided contact with others until and unless her sexual urges became too much. She died within a few cycles of being with Valanth. After a short remorse, Valanth took another. That one stayed with him for many cycles, but she also lost herself somewhere along the way. No one knew what happened -- or if they did, they didn't speak of it. The woman simply became a walking, breathing body without a mind to speak of. After she died quietly, Valanth took another.

"What will we do?" asked Hyle.

The *raedjour* endured Valanth's odd, cruel behavior only because there was no heir. Rhae very clearly marked those she deemed worthy, and Her *rhaeja* she marked profoundly. Nalfien, for all his power, had not emerged from Rhae's test with the marks of *rhaeja*. Nor had Radin or Salin. Nalfien had even undergone testing a second time, only to emerge without any additional markings. No other likely candidates were of age to yet be tested.

Nalfien glanced at Radin, who barely contained his own anger.

"We do nothing." Nalfien raised a hand to forestall arguments from three mouths. "Allow me to rephrase. Radin, Hyle, and I will do what we can to discover why the *rhaeja* wants Suzana. If possible, perhaps we can persuade him differently. You," he said to Krael, "will return to Suzana. You have eight days left with her. I suggest you make them memorable for her."

Krael heard the ominous undertone loud and clear. Make them memorable, because they might be the last pleasant memories she has for quite some time.

## Chapter Nine

A knock woke Suzana from a deep sleep. She roused, disappointed to find herself alone. Krael had been such a marvelous warmth curled about her when she fell asleep, she had hoped to awaken with him still there.

The door opened, and a young *raedjour* stepped halfway through the opening. “Lady,” he greeted, smile wide, “I’m Rhon. I’m to see to your needs during your time with Krael.”

She smiled. He was very cute. His face was rounder than any of the full-grown males she’d seen, his hair a tumbled mass of short curls that barely touched his shoulders. She wasn’t sure how she knew he was young. He just seemed to have an unfinished look to him. He glanced down. If his face weren’t pitch black, she was sure she’d see him blushing. Not that she could fault him. She was, after all, quite naked, even if she was covered by the blanket she held to her chest.

“Would you, uh, that is, should I bring food or a bath?”

She perked. “A bath?”

He looked up and beamed at her excitement. “Yes, lady. I could order a tub and bring all that you need.”

“Oh yes, please do. And, Rhon ...” She stopped him as he turned. “A meal would be wonderful, as well. And, um, clothes?”

His smile took a decidedly wicked turn. “I’ll bring the meal, my lady, but not the clothes. You won’t need them.”

It was her turn to blush. No, she supposed she wouldn’t.

She studied the room around her. She hadn’t gotten much of a chance to see it the previous night, as she’d been distracted by Krael. She sighed, the very memory of what they had done causing things low in her belly to melt.

The room was quite cozy and surprisingly roomy. The stone of the walls was gray, with shots of yellow and green that made the room seem lighter. A fire in a large fireplace warmed the room nicely. The floor was polished stone covered in colorful, scattered rugs, both fur and woven. Aside from the bed, the only other furniture was two sturdy chairs set at an equally sturdy table, and three smaller tables set against the walls. The smaller tables held bottles of various kinds, along with a brush-and-comb set on one. Three beautiful woven tapestries hung on the walls, each depicting a peaceful forest scene.

She wondered if these were Krael’s personal rooms, then decided not. There were no personal effects. And somehow, the room just didn’t have the *feel* of him.

She shivered. Where *was* he? She didn’t want to waste a moment!

Rhon returned with a tray of food. Famished, Suzana wrapped a blanket around her torso and joined him at the side table. The youth was nearly a head taller than she, a fact that seemed to surprise him but didn’t faze Suzana at all. The bread was sweet and nutty. Responding to her questions, Rhon told her that the deep-golden spread was butter but that the milk was from a *yarak* rather than a cow. She asked about the *yarak* as he emptied the tray of a plate of sweetmeats, another of plain bread, and a last of cold meats.

Before he was done, the door opened and two more youths carried in a small copper tub. They set it before the fire, then took buckets from within the tub and disappeared through a door she knew led to the washroom.

Curious, she followed them to the door to watch. The facility was small but fascinating. Part of one wall was a trickling waterfall that shimmied down the stone into a polished stone basin set at hip-level to the young men. They took turns filling the buckets from this and going back to the main room to fill the tub. Peeking in, Suzana found the room also contained a covered hole on the far wall that could only be the privy. Cleverly, a bit of the waterfall had been diverted to run through it, as well.

Once the boys were done, she discreetly excused herself and closed the door to use the facilities in private. When she emerged, an older youth had joined them. This one was more of a man, taller, with muscles far more defined and developed. His hair, white with faint honey highlights, fell in soft, loose curls that decorated the back she initially saw. When he turned, her eyes widened. She recognized the second man who had been in charge of the party of *raedjour* that had captured her. The younger one who had escorted the female slaves from the wagon.

He smiled. "Greetings, lady." He held out his hand, and she automatically placed hers within. She watched, wide-eyed, as he bent nearly double to place a warm, dry kiss on her wrist. He straightened, and his eyes lingered over her, causing her blood to heat. "You are beautiful, lady," he murmured.

"Thank you," she breathed.

"I'm Savous."

"You were in the forest the night I was taken."

He smiled. "I'm pleased you remember me."

She blushed. "I'm Suzana."



“Excellent,” chimed in an annoyed voice. Suzana jumped away from Savous, spinning to face Krael, who lounged against the doorway. Her lover, however, only had eyes for the youth. Angry eyes. “Now that official introductions have been made, you can heat the water and go.”

Savous only grinned. “Are you sure you don’t need ... help?”

Krael growled low in his throat. Suzana shuddered, sure there wasn’t a sexier sound. Savous glanced at her, a brow raised, then heaved a melodramatic sigh. “Whatever you say, Krael.”

Krael snorted and continued to glare as the younger man approached the tub. Humming to himself, Savous extended a hand over the water. Back to Krael, he cast a sly, sidelong glance at Suzana. She gasped when she saw steam begin to rise from the water.

“The red eyes,” she said before she realized. “That means you’re a sorcerer?”

His grin hiked up a notch. “It does.”

“He’s an *apprentice*,” Krael corrected.

Savous rolled his eyes.

“Oh!” Recalling herself, she glanced at Krael. He was very carefully not looking at her. She smiled at Savous, manners drilled into her from her cradle coming naturally. “Um. Thank you, my lord.”

Savous chuckled, walking to stand before her again. “I’m no one’s lord, Suzana. We only have one, and that’s the *rhaeja*. I --” He recaptured her hand. “-- am simply Savous.”

“And he’s leaving,” Krael snarled.

At that, the younger man laughed outright. “And I am leaving.” A kiss to her palm this time. “Farewell, lovely lady.”

Krael hated Savous at that moment. It was simple. Radin's apprentice was simply too cocky! Obnoxious. Smart. Powerful. The youngest son of the *rhaeja*, he had mage blood from both his father as well as the *rhaeja's* deceased true mate.

But that itself didn't piss off Krael. The fact that he had impressed Suzana did.

Krael glared at Savous as the younger man passed, receiving only a cheeky grin in return. Suzana, however, was more interested in the steaming water than in the retreating sorcerer. She stood by the tub, bending to put one finger tentatively into the water. The look of sheer delight that glowed on her rounded features punched at his heart. She was so tiny. The blanket she held closed just above her breasts trailed nearly two yards behind her and dipped enticingly low on her back. Her tousled black hair fell to her knees and glowed from the firelight behind her. Those cute, plump little lips were drawn into a delighted "O" and her eyes ... He could drown in those eyes.

She looked up as he closed the door, shutting out anyone but the two of them. Those eyes speared him, first with attention, then slowly with interest. Ha! She enjoyed the sight of him more than Savous!

"Drop the blanket," he said.

Immediately, she let go. His cock kicked the inside of his trousers at the alacrity with which she followed his instructions. She kept her gaze on his face, devouring him whole as he stepped up to her, stopping two paces away.

"You *are* beautiful," he murmured, palms itching to cradle the luscious round breasts that almost seemed too big for her frame.

"Thank you, my lord," she responded, clearly pleased by his words.

"I'm not a lord," he felt compelled to explain. "As the whelp told you, we've only one lord, and that's the *rhaeja*. I've a number of men that I command, but I'm their captain, not their lord."

Her gaze dropped a moment, thinking, then returned to capture his eyes. In all sincerity, she responded, “But you’re *my* lord.”

His heart stopped. Of that he was sure. He stared into those violet pools that served for her eyes, and with that one statement he was willing to do anything for her. *Anything*.

He forced himself to calm. Forced a small smile rather than the foolish grin his mouth wanted to form. Unable to help himself, he reached out to brush a stray lock of hair from her face, his fingers lingering on her ear as he tucked the strands behind it. “Does it please you to call me ‘lord?’”

She turned her face into his palm, tilting her head to rub it like he’d seen jaguar cubs rub their mother. Pure affection. “It pleases me that you’re my lord.”

If he could, he’d purr. He trailed his fingers down the soft curve of her jaw to her rounded chin. “Then the taking of your virginity was a pleasant experience?”

“The most wonderful of my life, my lord.”

Ah, yes, he had died and was in Rhae’s bed!

He leaned in, carefully, slowly, and brushed her lips with his. She stayed absolutely still, only her lips pursing in a slight return of his kiss. Her tiny sigh thrilled him.

Torturing himself, he stepped back.

“My lord?” she asked, not moving.

He made no reply. He spun one of the chairs so that the back faced her. He straddled it, folding his arms over the back and leaning his chin on his hands. “Proceed with your bath.”

Suzana licked her lips, imagining that she could taste him even though she knew it wasn’t true. The kiss hadn’t been enough. But she could smell him, all musky male and something else that was *raedjour*. And she felt the soft caress of his lips, of the loose hair that had fallen forward to lightly drape her shoulder as he leaned into her. And now he was across the room. Close, but entirely too far away!

“But, my lord ...”

He raised a brow.

She glanced at the tub. It was inviting, but ... “I thought we ...”

He chuckled, leaning his strong chin on one palm. “Rest assured, Suzana, I’m going to fuck you. I’m going to fuck you for a very long time.” He nodded to the tub. “But first, I want to watch you bathe.”

She colored at his language even as it thrilled her. Watch her? No one had ever watched her bathe except her nurse.

“Suzana.”

She returned her gaze to him, and her knees nearly gave way at the intensity in his eyes. “I want to watch you bathe.”

Slowly, she smiled. She understood. A sensual game. An arousing performance. *Oh, yes!*

He pointed to a side table. “The bottles to your right contain soaps and oils. Use the yellow bottle.”

She took the two steps to the side table. An array of perhaps a dozen glass bottles was laid out. “May I ask why, my lord?” she asked, even as she picked up the bottle of shimmery yellow glass and unstopped it. The strong scent of honeysuckle assailed her nostrils.

“It suits you.”

She warmed. It was one of her favorites. She peeked over her shoulder at him, allowing her hair to partially obscure her view. In the past, she had seen other women use such looks, and they seemed to work on men. “Thank you.” Judging by the way his eyes shuttered halfway, by the way one corner of his mouth quirked up, it seemed to work.



She picked up the bottle and a similarly scented bar of soap and returned to the tub. “May I ask a question, my lord?”

“You may.”

“I was told the *raedjour* are unable to withstand sunlight,” she said as she stepped into the tub. The water was deliciously hot, just the way she liked the start of a bath. “Where, then, did you get honeysuckle oil?”

“Caravans.”

She grimaced, reminded of the slave wagon. “Are there many slave caravans that cross the mountains?”

“Enough. We get most of our information and goods from them. And they’re not all slave caravans. There are others who brave the mountains.”

“So some do pass?”

“Yes. Some.”

She leaned back in the tub, tilting her head back and ducking quickly under the water to wet her hair. She emerged to find an enraptured expression on his face and wondered if he knew his lips were parted.

She asked a few more questions. Small, meaningless matters. She didn’t want to touch on anything serious. She rather enjoyed the light chit-chat. It enabled her to concentrate on her performance.

And perform she did. She sat up straight in the tub because that kept her breasts visible. She made sure that her movements were languid, lathering the soap in her palms, then raising her arms to scrub it into her hair. Perhaps she *pushed* some of the foam off her head so that it trailed down her neck and dribbled over her breast. And, yes, it took a while to scrub her hair, and perhaps she lingered a bit overlong, but who could blame her when Krael so obviously enjoyed the sight? She rinsed her hair by again dipping back. Unfortunately, she couldn’t see his reaction to that, but she hoped it was good.

“My turn to ask,” he told her as she settled against the curved back of the tub to soap her skin.

She glanced up and smiled. “Ask me anything, my lord.”

“Last night you mentioned a magical ability. You can affect others with your voice?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“How is it you’re not a mage?”

She shrugged. “It’s actually a fairly common trait among my people. I’ve a higher ability than most others. But it’s not a matter of spells. It’s a matter of feeling.”

“Do you have more ability because you’re of noble birth?”

“Perhaps. One of my brothers also had the ability.”

*Do not think of them!*

She stood, happy to distract him for a moment as she soaped and washed her hips and thighs. She sighed when she ran her soapy hand between her legs, risking a glance to see his eyes riveted on her hand.

She sat back down before he continued their conversation. “Do you play an instrument?”

“Yes. I had a lovely harp that was handed down from my grandmother. It’s ... gone.”

“I know of someone who would love to fashion one for you. He doesn’t get much call for instruments.”

“No?”

“There are precious few *raedjour* with any talent for music. Or any desire to make it.”

She frowned as she lay back. Her bathing was finished. The water was still nicely warm, and the fire at her back supplied more heat. She was lazily content. “How many *raedjour* are there?”

He shrugged. “Perhaps a thousand of us.”

“So few?” Even the three other elven races she knew of had numbers in the thousands.

“You know our problem with procreation.”

“Well, yes, but you do have women.”

“Yes. And once you’re truemated and turned, you’ll only be fertile once every five or six cycles.”

“Really?”

“Pregnancy itself lasts for two.”

Two cycles pregnant?!

Krael stood, distracting her. Suddenly, she was no longer content. She wanted to lick him all over! He stopped at the foot of the tub. Took a moment to rake his gaze over her naked body, mostly hidden by the murky water. He extended his hands and she took them, allowing him to raise her to her feet. He stepped to the side and indicated, by his actions, that she should step from the tub. She did, onto a thick woven rug. He motioned for her to stay and retrieved one of two thick, long cloths Rhon had left. Unfolding it, he lifted it and laid it atop her head, gently rubbing. Oh! He was drying her! She bit her lip.

“Are you all right, Suzana?”

“Please call me Suza, my lord.”

“Suza.”

She trembled. “Yes. I’m wonderful, my lord.”

The cloth drifted to her back, and warm lips pressed to her forehead. “Yes, you are.”

He used the cloth on her from head to toe, kneeling for the latter. He retrieved the bottle of oil. Kneeling before her again, he poured it into his big palm and, starting at her toes, rubbed the oil into her skin. She moaned, unable to help herself. He smiled, but didn’t stop the wonderful massage. His hands traveled up one leg, then the other, skirting her drenched sex. Meeting her gaze, he slid his hands around her hips to her buttocks. Deliberately, he squeezed. She gasped, reaching forward to brace her hands on his shoulders.



Still smiling, he kneaded her buttocks, a cheek in each of his big hands. Once the globes of her butt were oiled, he dipped his fingers between. Her jaw fell open in surprise as he delved the depths, rubbing oil in thoroughly. Eyes still glued to hers, he used one finger to tease her opening, dipping in marginally. An embarrassing squeak piped from her lips, but she forced herself to relax. His smile of approval and a brief kiss to her belly were her reward.

He pulled back to pour more oil into his palms, then proceeded to rub it into her belly and sides, reaching behind to reach her back. It was easy for him. He could probably wrap his arms around her twice without trying. Remaining on his knees, he took her right arm and oiled it from shoulder to fingertip, then did the same to the other. Pouring more oil, he started at her neck, then slid down to circle her breasts. Her nails dug into his shoulders as he toyed with her, skimming her skin with the lightest touch he could manage while still transferring the oil. He tested the weight of her breasts, supporting them with his hands, squeezing gently. She closed her eyes and moaned, unable to stand it. She was alive with need.

“Suza,” he breathed, and she opened her eyes just in time to see him stick out his tongue and use it to lightly trace her nipple.

“Oh!” She arched her back to bring him closer.

He glared at her playfully, hands at her hips to push her back and keep her there. She moaned. “Please.”

“Please?” He traced the other nipple.

“Oh, please, suck them.”

He grinned. “Happily.”

She gasped, arching again, as he took the nipple and half of her breast into his mouth and bit gently. Her feet shifted, her hands sliding over his skin. She was positively unable to keep still as he pulled back until only the hard peak of her nipple was in his mouth. Between his teeth. Mercilessly, he lashed her with his tongue.

He pulled her to him, allowing her to press her hips to his chest as he feasted on her other breast. He wrapped his arms around her waist, one big hand sliding up to grab a handful of her wet hair and yank it back. It arched her into him, kept her off balance, so that she only remained upright because of his support. Gladly, she gave over control to him, entirely willing to be his plaything.

He stood, lifting her easily. She floated in his arms across the room until he laid her gently on the bed. His hands on the inside of her thighs spread her wide, and she cried out when his mouth engulfed her sex. Her back bowed, and she eagerly reached forward to grab two fistfuls of his hair. Giving in to the urge, she drew the silky sheet up and over until it covered her to her neck.

Krael's heart swelled. Her taste was finer than any sweet he'd ever sampled, by far the most delicious cunt he'd ever lapped. Growling, he slid his fingers closer until he could sink both thumbs into her channel, pulling her open to further expose her sweetness to him. His hair covered them, but he paid it no heed, content to let her enjoy it while he plunged inside in further search for treasure. He tongued the sensitive spot just inside and had to hold tight as her hips bucked. Withdrawing his tongue, he twisted one thumb to put it against that spot, rubbing hard.

She came in a glorious gush of cream and a matching scream. Before she'd subsided, he sucked her clit into his mouth, still massaging her from inside with his thumb. She shuddered and writhed, pulling his hair. Not that he minded. He wanted her mindless, and the pain just added an extra edge to what he was feeling.

He took her to edge after edge until her body subsided. He licked at her clit, and she could only shudder and moan, her muscles remaining lax.

Grinning, he pulled back and stood, careful to let his hair linger and caress her as it fell away. Her fascination with it was not lost on him.

With effort, she turned her head and cracked open her eyes. A sheen of sweat had joined the oil on her skin, making her sparkle in the firelight.

Silently, he put his hands to the tie of his trousers and unlaced them. Using the bedpost for support, he bent to remove first one boot, then the other. Then he shucked the trousers. His aching cock sprang up, eager for her. She eyed it appreciatively.

Bending forward, he tucked his hands under her armpits and lifted. She easily slid farther up the bed, and her hips were a welcome cradle to his as he lowered himself atop her.

“Sleepy?” he asked, calmly brushing sweaty locks of hair from her face.

“No,” she assured him, sliding her hands up his arms to his shoulders. Her legs wrapped around his waist.

“Are you certain?” he teased, tracing her lips with one finger. A finger that still smelled of her juices. “I wouldn’t want to tire you.”

She sucked his finger into her mouth and he groaned, watching the black digit penetrate her wet, pink lips. “Please,” she said finally, without releasing his finger. “Please wear me out, my lord.”

He laughed. Pulling his hand away, he brought it down to grasp his cock and place it at her entrance. He laughed again when she wiggled forcefully to impale herself on that first inch.

“Impatient, Suza?”

“For you, my lord. Yes!”

“Mmmm.” Seated, he slid forward a bit, loving the way her breath stuttered and her eyes lost focus. “You want me to fuck you then?”

“Oh, yes.”

He slid in some more. “Say it.”

Her eyes flew open, her mouth as well. He took the opportunity to suck at that plump lower lip briefly. “Say it,” he repeated.

“Fuck me,” she said softly.

Another inch. “Mmm.” He watched her lips. “Again.”

“Fuck me,” she said, bolder.

“Ah.” He reached her limit, butting up against her womb.

She pushed up against him, her arms snug about his torso as far as she could reach. He hissed in a breath when her wet little mouth closed about his nipple and pulled. He braced himself above her, careful not to pull too far away and lose her mouth, then rolled his hips. She moaned against him and clung, eager to take as much of him as he could fit into her snug channel.

He pounded until she shattered around him, taking him into oblivion with her.

She dropped to the bed with a little sob. He remained braced above her, breathing hard. “Are you all right?”

She nodded, unable to open her eyes. Her small smile reassured him. “I believe you have worn me out, my lord.”

Teasing? He chuckled, dropping to her side, then scooping her small body into the curve of his. “Sleep then, vixen.”

She giggled tiredly. Within moments, she was asleep. Surprisingly, he was not far behind.

## Chapter Ten

“A mage’s love to save the *rhaeja*.”

Krael looked up at Savous. The younger man shrugged. “That’s what he said when he emerged. I wrote it myself.”

Krael switched his gaze to Nalfien, who stared thoughtfully into the fireplace. “What does it mean?”

The men again sat in Nalfien’s study, but they had yet to discuss Suzana’s sexuality. The subject hadn’t drifted from Valanth’s request to have her.

Nalfien shook his head. “Likely, exactly what it states.”

“But he doesn’t need saving.”

“Doesn’t he?”

“No. Save him from what?”

“Himself?”

“Speak sense, old man.”

“He is speaking sense.” This from Radin, who stood in the corner, toying with his belt knife. “Valanth very likely knows that he’s sick. He killed those women.”

“Radin,” Nalfien warned.

“No, Nalfien, let’s be blunt. He killed those women. There is no denying it, no matter how hard we try. The question is, why? And how? Rhae may have let him escape with one accidental death, but they can’t *all* have been accidental.” His voice was low and the walls were solid stone, but each man in the room tensed just the same. Radin’s words could easily get him killed.

“You’re saying that Rhae’s looking for a mage to put his head right?” Krael asked.

“Maybe.”

Both men looked to Nalfien, who now studied Radin. “Perhaps.”

“But he’s already had a truemate. That’s ridiculous!”

Neither sorcerer answered. Savous, when Krael looked to him, only shrugged. Krael sat back, pounding the thick table with his fist. “It’s not Suza.”

“I agree.” Nalfien turned to face the table, calmly folding his hands before him. “But my belief is not what will save her.”

“If he takes her, he’ll ruin her.”

Nalfien watched Krael closely. “Yes.”

Krael snarled, shoving from the table. “I will *not* let that happen.”

“Tell me, why --”

Nalfien stopped at a knock at the door. He glanced at Savous, who instantly rose to answer it.

All four men stood and froze. Valanth himself strode in blithely and stood at the end of the table. He actually wore robes, the voluminous white silks settling softly about his body. He was accompanied by only two bodyguards. Thankfully, he had left Tishna, his latest mindless plaything, behind.

“Krael. I have something for you.” He held out his hand. The robe’s sleeve fell back to reveal what he offered. A whip.

Krael extended his own hand and accepted the slap of the whip’s handle into it. “Thank you, *rhaeja*.”

Valanth’s eyes danced as he smiled into Krael’s face. “You’re to use it on her.”

“*Rhaeja?*”

“Use it on the virgin. She’s to be used to it by the time she comes to me.”

Krael could only stare at Valanth, unwilling to put words to the thoughts careening through his mind.

“Don’t disappoint me, Captain.” With that, he turned on his heel and led his bodyguards away.

Krael stared at the whip in his hand. Memories flooded his mind of the many times he had trained women to the whip. The weapon was his specialty, and the use of it in sexual play his forte, as well. It was another oddity that it had not yet occurred to him to introduce Suzana to that particular aspect of sex. Not during her first nine days.

Savous cursed softly. “Krael, you can’t ...”

Krael lifted his gaze to meet the eyes of the youth who might someday be *rhaeja*. “It’s what the *rhaeja* commands.”

Savous threw furious glances at both Radin and Nalfien, but neither sorcerer had words.

“Are we done?” Krael asked softly.

“Yes.”

Savous caught him by the arm as he went by. “You *can’t!*”

Krael shrugged him off and left the room.

He pictured Suzana's lovely, creamy skin striped by marks. *His* marks. Her succulent round buttocks would dance becomingly as he struck her. The thought inflamed him.

But, no. He couldn't. Not yet. First she had to know and appreciate sex without pain before she could truly enjoy whipping. *If* she could ever enjoy it. Krael was well aware that not all women could stand it.

But neither could he directly defy Valanth. The *rhaeja* was owed absolute loyalty as Rhae's chosen. There were rules to *raedjour* society, in place for a reason. To keep the race of all men in line. The two primary rules were that you never jeopardized a truematch and you always obeyed the *rhaeja*.

He compromised, stopping by his personal rooms to pick up a necessary object before returning to the rooms he shared with Suzana.

He entered the outer room of the suite and placed Valanth's whip on a chest. He had seven days more to enjoy her company. He had time to prepare her for Valanth's request. Then he strode to the bedchamber door and opened it.

And froze.

The thick wood had obscured the sound, but now he heard it perfectly. Suzana's beyond-lovely voice traced the air, accompanied by the harp she cradled in her lap as she fingered it. Rhon and two other boys stood transfixed just within.

He was just in time to hear the last of the song. Suzana trailed off, her fingers causing a twining ring of music to disperse in the air. The boys clapped appreciatively. Suzana smiled, then turned her face to him. It was then the boys noticed his presence. Together, they bowed their heads and vacated the room.

Krael stood transfixed, hardly noticing their absence. The music he'd heard coming from this woman astounded him. He could not believe she was real. Nor could he quite believe she smiled so beatifically at him!



Her gaze trailed down his body, and her smile died at seeing the flogger dangling from his hand. Anxious, she returned her gaze to his face. "Have I displeased you, my lord?"

He glanced at the pleasure-weapon. Unlike Valanth's whip, this was meant for sexual play alone. Loose leather straps fell like a tail from the handle he held in his grasp. A few of the strands were knotted at the end. He slapped it smartly against his shin. "No."

Carefully, she set her harp on the floor beside the bed. She stared at the flogger the entire time. He lifted it, slid the loose black straps through his hand. As he approached, he gripped the ends, snapping the flogger taut before him, displaying it for her. She held rock still, her eyes trained on the leather in his hands. He stopped before her, extended the weapon out and over her too-still body. Slowly, he dragged it up her back until he could wind it around her neck. She shivered as he bent, using the flogger to draw her close for a kiss.

Carefully, he monitored her response. Fright. Uncertainty. Desire! Yes! She was afraid he would hurt her, but if he didn't -- or if he did it just right -- she was game.

He touched his mouth to hers, lips slightly parted. She waited, trembling, but he did no more. Finally, she needed the contact. She leaned forward that little bit to seal them in a kiss. He responded languidly, parting his lips, caressing hers. Waiting. After a moment, she whimpered, and he felt her hands grip his arms as she pressed her lips tighter to his. Still he teased, until finally he felt her tongue tentatively foray between his lips. He opened further, luring her in. Flicked her tongue with the tip of his. With an impatient little moan, she thrust her tongue further. Humming softly, he suckled it, toying with her as she grew bolder.

Ever so slowly, he released the loose ends of the flogger, letting them trail down her naked back. She stiffened, but didn't stop their kiss. He pressed forward, forcing her to fall back into the pillows. Kneeling, he straddled her hips. He played the flogger over her body, letting the supple leather caress her naked skin.

“There are people who find pleasure in being whipped.” She stiffened again, eyes wide. “And there are people who find pleasure in whipping others.”

She licked her lips, stammered once. “I-is that what you enjoy, my lord?”

“Which?”

“Either.”

He smiled, nudging the underside of her breast with the end of the handle. “I’ve enjoyed whipping others.”

She swallowed. “I-is that what you --” She hissed when he rubbed her erect nipple with the handle. “-- wish to do to me, my lord?”

The smile drained. He let her see the heat of his gaze. “Yes.”

The surge of her arousal nearly made him groan. Vastly trusting, her body went limp, her eyes trained on his. “I’m yours, my lord. Do with me what you will.”

His nostrils flared. “And if it hurts?”

“If it pleases you, my lord, it pleases me.”

He heard the growl before he realized it came from deep within his chest. Her trembling response made it worse. He threw back his head, breathing deeply of her intoxicating scent. She *was* turned on.

Slowly, he lowered his head and edged back, straddling her calves, so he could trail the flogger down her body until the straps trailed over her thighs and groin. Her breath caught when he nudged the edge of the handle between her thighs, grazing it through her drenched pussy. His smile returned. “Bend your knees.” She did, eyes closed. “Watch, Suza.”

She dragged open her eyes. Her heart still pounded in fear. She wanted to believe that he wasn’t going to hurt her, but that weapon! She glanced down. In the sparse lighting, the black leather almost seemed an extension of his arm. She groaned when he seated the handle more firmly in her pussy and used it to rub her sensitive skin. Gods, that felt good!

He took her hand and closed it around the handle. "Pleasure yourself."

Another groan, but she did. Just as he had, she used the leather-wrapped wood to press against her aching center.

When he was satisfied that she was obeying, he stepped back off the bed. A toss of his head sent his cascade of hair flying behind him and a clutch of warmth to Suzana's belly. Leisurely, he removed what there was of his clothing. Eyeing his cock, Suzana unwittingly pushed the handle a bit deeper and shallowly penetrated herself. Her groan was unstoppable.

"That's it." He took his cock in his hand, eyes trained on her pussy. "Make yourself come."

She squeaked. "Myself ...?"

"Yes."

Her eyes dropped hungrily to his cock. "But ..."

"Make yourself come first." He continued to stroke himself, that maddening smile on his too-handsome face.

The flogger was such a wonderful black. If she squinted, it almost looked like his cock. It was certainly hard enough, although the leather did not quite have the same feel as him. *Oh, yes!* She watched him watching her, imagined the flogger's handle as his cock. Her pussy swelled and wept. Her hips began to rock. Something coiled just below her belly, aching, wanting, almost ... It snapped and she howled her release, furiously rubbing her pulsing cunt with the flogger.

"Very nice," he said when she subsided.

She licked her lips. Yes, it had been. But now she knew what would be even nicer. "Please, my lord."

The left side of his mouth hiked up in a grin. "Please?"

"Please fuck me."

"You learn fast."

She beamed.

“Roll over. Get on your hands and knees.”

She didn't ask why. In two days, Krael had shown her nothing but pleasure, even with the whip. She had no reason to doubt him.

“Turn around. Ass facing me.”

She laughed and complied.

“What's funny?”

“I -- oh!” His big hands slid over her ass, squeezing her cheeks like ripe melons. “I was laughing at myself for feeling embarrassed.”

“Ah.” His thumbs trailed down the crack of her ass, delving deep. “You're not embarrassed?”

“I am. But it's silly to be.”

His fingers slid around until two of them slipped into her channel. She moaned. “Yes,” he agreed, pumping slowly. Once. “It is.” Twice. “Silly.”

She couldn't agree more, but lost her voice for the words. Her back arched at the sheer ecstasy of having any part of his body penetrating her.

He adjusted, and the fingers left her channel. She groaned at the loss, only to gasp and flinch when his palm cracked against her ass. She froze, staring at the blankets before her. The same hand smoothed over the sting. She had just relaxed when he slapped the other side.

“Ask why.”

“Why?”

She squealed when he landed heavily atop her, shoving her into the blankets. “Because your pleasure is mine to give.”



Smothered by his body, Suzana tried to squirm. She gasped when he dug the fingers of one hand into her hair and yanked her head back. Lips brushed her cheek. All at once, Suzana's body tightened and trembled. "My lord!" she moaned.

"Yes," he hissed, pushing back. "Back on your knees."

She scrambled to comply, crying out when he spanked her again. Not stopping. Not until her backside was aflame. Then, with a harsh cry of his own, he slammed his cock deep into her dripping depths. She screamed, the pleasure-pain far too intense to contain. Instantly her body convulsed, her mouth gaping as she struggled to gulp breath as he filled her. This position put a whole new meaning to deep! She fell to her elbows, pressing her forehead against the blankets as she adjusted to the impossible fill of his invasion.

"Gods!" she gasped, clutching and panting. "Lir, yes. More, please!" It hurt, but oh, what a hurt! "Yes!"

He pulled out, then thrust hard back in. She couldn't stay still. Her hips canted to the side, finding a delicious angle where he rubbed her in another new spot. The next time he shoved forward, she threw her hips back at him. They both gasped as she managed to take just a little bit more of him.

"Fuck," he muttered, pressing his forehead to her spine. She shoved back again, and he growled, catching her hips. "Stop moving. I'll come."

"Yes!" she cried, pushing back again.

"Goddess!" He reared back, and she chanced a glance over her shoulder, just to watch that hair slide behind him, his eyes closed, his face tight in concentration. He caught a firm grip of her hips and set the motion, almost fucking himself using her body. And she was a more than willing tool. She spread her thighs and pushed back, furiously matching his rhythm.

She spiked with a scream, and he growled, fucking her through her convulsions so that the orgasm never *quite* ended. She cried and clutched and moaned, quite sure she was in agony but feeling nothing but ecstasy!

When she could almost take no more, he came, filling her with wet warmth.

He wasn't finished. Propelling her forward with a push, he fell atop her. Eagerly, he pushed her long hair aside to devour the sensitive skin at her neck. She shuddered, the wash of pleasure a surprise after such a great release. He lapped and nipped at every inch of her back, down to the cheeks of her ass. She wiggled when he bit her there, groaned when he slapped her.

Why did that feel good?

She buried her face in the pillow. Yelped when he fell heavily beside her and flipped her body so that she was cradled in the curve of his. He tucked her top thigh onto his hip, spreading her, then guided his cock back inside her. Again he drove her until she sobbed with release.

He lay back a moment to catch his breath, then rose to retrieve water and cloths to wipe her clean. Her smile, though tired, hurt her mouth it was so wide.

When he finally crawled onto the blankets beside her, she snuggled against his side. Her cheek pressed to the hard muscle of his chest, her shoulder tucked neatly under his arm. Her breasts pressed against him and her leg thrown over his, she'd never felt more at peace. More at home.

"I love you," she murmured as sleep took her.

## Chapter Eleven

The door opened. Suzana muttered in her sleep but remained snugly tucked against Krael's side.

Rhon dipped his head through the doorway. "Nalfien sent for you, Captain."

"Tell him not today," Krael muttered, sliding his hands through Suzana's hair, which lay in thick curls across his chest and belly. The shining black nearly disappeared against his skin.

"But ..."

"Tell him not today. He can come after me if he dares."

"Yes, Captain."

Krael sucked in a breath and let it out slowly as he rubbed his cheek against the top of her head. Why bother? Valanth wanted Suzana. He would have her. Krael's time with her was precious. Why should he waste it with the sorcerers?

*"I love you."*

She'd said the words. Why? She could not be in love with him! It didn't happen that way. Besides, what did he need with a truemate? He had never felt a particular need to breed and had always enjoyed many women. Why would he want one teeny little one?



She sighed, rubbing her cheek against his chest. Her breath lightly caressed his nipple. The damned thing hardened just from that! As for his cock? Unless he'd just pulled it out of her -- and not always then -- it had been constantly hard the last few days.

He felt her smile against his skin. Watched her hand extend from its adorable curl on his sternum to flatten against his ribs. Delicately, she traced his muscles, finding a few old scars that were barely noticeable unless seen up close.

"Do you say 'good morning' here, my lord?" she asked, the sleepy rasp to her voice yanking at his lower spine.

"Not generally, no."

Her hand trailed down his belly. "How do you greet someone when you wake?"

His cock jumped when she extended one elegant finger to trace the very tip. "If we wake in bed with someone, usually we fuck."

She raised her head, shocked. "No!"

He smiled. "That's what we were created for."

"But ... *every* morning? What if you're ill? Or out of sorts? Or ...?"

He reached for the hair behind her ear. Used it to pull her face toward his. "Then greetings are rarely in order."

He kissed her, amused when her attention wandered from her question to their tongue-tangle.

She protested when he pulled away. Dragging her eyes open, her heart leapt to see the wicked amusement in his clear blue eyes.

"Next lesson."

She blinked. *Oh!*

Quite easily, he pushed her neck and shoulders, nudging her down his body until she was face-to-cock. It was so big! How in the wide ocean did she fit *that* inside her body?!

He released her hair and, while she stared, positioned a pillow behind his shoulders to prop him up. “Suck it.”

She turned wide eyes on him. “Suck it?”

His half-lidded eyes burned. “Yes. Lick your lips, then take as much as you can into your mouth.”

Unsure, she did as he commanded. She had to get up on her hands and knees, her head bent over his lap. She took the long column of hard muscle into both hands, barely able to span the width. Expanding her lips wide, she slid the head into her mouth.

“Mmmm,” she hummed, finding his taste delicious. The width of him was difficult to manage, but the natural oil that seeped from his skin proved to be quite spicy.

He groaned, and she chanced a quick glance up to find his eyes shut, head dipped back. What a sight! The wide, long landscape of his belly and chest shone in the firelight. That glorious hair framed his face, fanning out to cover quite a bit of the bed to either side of him. The design on his face glinted alive in the flickering light.

She drew him out and lapped at the pleasing taste just under the plum head. He bucked, breath catching. Experimentally, she did it again, delighted when he squirmed, clutching the blankets beside them. Oh, what fun! Wetting her tongue, she traced the entire head, squeezing the shaft with her hands.

“Yes.” His hands found hers to show her how to squeeze. How to slide up and down. When and where to apply pressure. She learned her lesson, all the while keeping the tip of his cock wet with her tongue.

“Goddess! Suza, suck it. Suck it hard!”

She obeyed, her cheeks caving in. She gagged when he abruptly thrust up, but recovered quickly. She used her hands, realizing that she needed to make a pussy of her hands and mouth to give him full enjoyment.

*Nine torments of Rhae!* How could one little innocent drive him wild like this? She barely knew what to do, but the touch of her hands and the feel of her tiny little mouth, those teeth scraping his sensitive skin as she struggled to get as much of him into as possible ... Sweet mother of night, he was lost!

“Suza, stop!”

She didn't listen. He had to lean forward and yank her head up with one hand, using the other atop her fingers to pump his seed from his cock. She watched, bewildered, her tongue caught between her teeth, and he came harder just at that sight. Roughly, he yanked that gorgeous mouth to his, fucking it with his tongue the way he'd just fucked it with his cock. Until he was drained. And drenched.

Groaning, he fell back in the pillows, needing a moment.

On her knees beside him, Suzana surveyed his body. Then, quietly, she got up and went to the privy. This time it was she who returned with bowl and water to wipe him clean. If he was any judge, she took great delight in wiping him down. He made a mental note to let her bathe him. Oh, yes, she'd love to wash his hair.

After returning the bowl and cloth, she climbed onto the bed and onto his body. He enfolded her in his arms as she spread herself across his chest, her head tucked beneath his chin. For long moments, they lay quiet -- she toying with a lock of his hair, he stroking her hair and back.

Bliss.

“I love you, Krael.”

He stiffened. Suzana held her breath. He'd heard her words. She knew it. "My lord ..."  
"Shhhh, Suzana."

She shook her head, pushing up to brace on her arms above him. It wasn't easy to span his width, but she managed. She met his blue-eyed gaze straight on, wanting no mistake. "I love you."

One black lip lifted in a snarl. Her heart stopped. Abruptly, he lifted her away and left the bed.

"My lord ..."

"Suzana, you can't love me."

She sat on the bed, watching him pace before her. "But I do."

"No!" He stopped, the wave of his hair swishing forward before settling about his naked body. Oh, what a body?! She wanted to run her hands over that beautiful expanse rather than argue, but the words must be said. "You don't. It's infatuation, nothing more."

She frowned, then carefully erased it from her face. "I'm not a child, my lord. I've been infatuated. I know the difference."

"No. You don't. Humans can't help but want us. It's part of what we are. Part of what Rhae made us. You might have strong feelings for me now. But I'm the first one you've been with. There will be others."

Panic burbled in her chest, but she struggled to suppress it. "No."

"Yes."

"I don't *want* anyone else."

He shrugged, holding himself very still. "Now, perhaps."

"Never!"

He snarled, pacing away from her. "We have nine days together. That's it. If you're not pregnant by then, you'll go to another."

“What if I *am* pregnant?” She touched a tentative hand to her belly.

He blew a blast of air through his lips, an exasperated sound. “Suzana, I told you. It doesn’t happen all at once. It takes time for the sorcerers to find the right match for you.”

What was that flash of emotion she saw pass over his stern features? No matter. As fast as she saw it, it was gone, lost as he turned his head and that wonderful fall of hair obscured his face.

She tried a new tactic. “Does this mean that you don’t love me?”

He spared her an angry glance before retrieving a cup from the side table. “Didn’t anyone explain truebonding to you?” He opened a bottle of wine and poured.

*He didn’t say no.* She took heart in that. “Yes, my lord.”

“Then you know that we can’t be.”

“Why can’t you be my truemate?” She knew she was repeating herself, knew she was making him angry, but she struggled to find the truth. She *knew* they were destined to be together.

He shook his head, downing his drink. “It doesn’t happen the first time.”

“Why not?”

“It never has.”

She ignored the cold thrill that threatened her heart. “Never?”

“Not that I know of.” Pacing again. The sweet, round mounds of his bottom peeking through the silver white of his hair, his cock swinging before him, both thoroughly distracting her.

“*Can’t* it happen the first time?”

“No.”

She frowned again. He didn’t sound sure. But she hesitated to press him.

She felt the tears coming. There was nothing to do to stop them, though she tried. There was a very real possibility that she would be separated from Krael. When she *knew* he was her match. Her true mate. Her people didn't share the label, but she knew the concept. She had seen soul-mating within her own family, between her own parents. She knew love could and did happen instantly. Why couldn't Krael believe her?

Staring at her knees, she gave up the fight and let the tears rain down her cheeks, dripping onto her breasts.

"Suza." His voice was stern. She didn't look up. Couldn't bear the sight.

When his gleaming dark thighs came into view, the tears came harder. His hand caught her shoulders, and she went limply into his embrace.

"Don't cry."

That prompted the sobs. Miserable, she wrapped her arms as far as she could about his brawny torso, buried her face against his neck.

"I only want you."

"Now. I'm the only one you've known."

"I don't need a comparison to know!"

He grunted, sitting back in the pillows.

She sniffed. He grabbed up a corner of one blanket, and she used it to wipe her eyes and nose, carefully balling it up and tossing it to the side. She remained within his embrace, at home like she'd never been before.

She pressed her lips just above his nipple. *I love you*, she thought. Swiping her tongue over his nipple, she thrilled at the way his body jerked. *I do love you*, she insisted silently, closing her lips about the hard little nub and sucking. His hands bunched in her hair, one of them trailing down to cup her buttocks. Her own hair was silk against her back, but it wasn't the silk she wanted to feel. She pulled back to readjust until she was straddling him. As he

slouched, her pussy was pressed to the hard ridges on his abdomen. She shoved her hands in the hair to either side of his face and pulled him into a kiss.

He was *hers!* She'd never felt so possessive about anything before, but this she knew.

"Fuck me. Please!" she begged, lips still pressed to his, sharing his breath. "Take me, any way you want me."

"Mmm," he rumbled, the vibrations tantalizing her pussy. "You fuck me."

Her attack had lowered him in the pillows until he lay near prone. His cock lightly tapped her ass. Eagerly, she wiggled back until the head prodded her dripping opening. She lowered her hand to position him, then abruptly slammed her whole body back to impale herself.

He hissed, fingers digging into her hips. "Yes!" she shouted, clutching her hands on his chest, scratching him. She lifted, then dropped, crying out when his length bumped her womb, but she loved it! Wild, she writhed atop him.

When it came, her climax clenched her entire body, so violent that it took Krael by surprise and wrenched away his control. Her quivering body sucked him dry, then continued to clutch him inside.

## Chapter Twelve

Suzana plucked the harp lightly, producing a sweet, haunting lullaby that she accompanied with loving words. The ballad was a favorite among her people, a traditional song sung by a maid to her true love.

Suzana's true love lay back among the pillows of their bed, his eyes closed and big hands folded sedately over his muscled abdomen. His lush white hair spanned the bed about him, a silken blanket among the other blankets. Suzana watched him carefully, waiting to see if he recognized the intent of her words. She'd consciously chosen the commonspeak version of the ballad to sing, wanting him to hear the love in her voice.

She used only a touch of her empathetic powers, just letting them flow lightly over him. Calm him. Warm his blood a touch. Judging by the calm look on his face and the half-erect state of his cock, she decided she was doing well.

The words of the ballad ended, followed soon by the last few strains of the music. She remained still at her corner of the bed, watching him intently.

His eyelids lifted halfway. "Did you place a spell on me?" he asked calmly.

"No, my lord."



He quirked a snowy brow. She lowered her gaze a bit. "It's not really a spell, my lord. I only sought to calm you."

"Was I not calm?" His voice was far too sedate for her liking.

She swallowed. "I'm sorry, my lord."

"What have you to be sorry about?"

She raised her gaze to his, heart rate kicking up a notch. What was he thinking? "I ..."

He tilted his head to the side. "You weren't trying to make me love you?"

A lump clogged her throat. It took two tries to swallow it away so she could speak. "I would not do that, my lord. I *cannot*. It's not in my power." She met his gaze full-on and said bravely, "Though I wish that I could."

His face fell, and for one brief second she thought she saw pain. But then the calm mask was back.

She watched silently as he rose from the bed. He crossed the room to one of the tables. Her heart leapt to her throat when she saw him pick up the whip. Not the flogger, the whip.

He turned, his blue eyes smoldering. "Get up."

"My lord, please. I didn't ..."

"Get up."

She scrambled to obey. After carefully setting her harp on the floor, she planted her feet on the rug beside the bed, pressing her back against one of the solid posts at the corner of the mattress. Krael tossed the whip on the blankets, then stood before her. His cock now stood at attention, but he ignored it.

"Turn around."

She did.

"Gather your hair in front of you."

Hastily, she reached back to pull all of her nearly knee-length hair over one shoulder so that it draped before her.

“Put your arms up and grasp the pole.”

She obeyed, trembling. He stepped into her, pressing that cock against her back as he reached up to tie her hands to the post. He must have picked up the leather strap when he picked up the whip. Shaking, she pressed her forehead to the post as he stepped away. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him take the whip from its nest among the blankets.

She jumped when he nudged the small of her back. As he dragged up, she realized it was the first part of the whip, the stiff piece just off the handle, with which he caressed her skin. The leather smoothed up her spine, over her bare shoulder. He stepped in and pushed it under her chin, using the taut curve to lift her chin and turn her head up and back so she could see him.

“I can’t have you, Suzana,” he said, voice flat, at odds with the fire in his eyes. “Know that. Not forever and not for my own. Not if you don’t carry my child.”

When she opened her mouth to protest, he shoved the whip at her, just enough to close her jaw. Some of the fire leaked from his eyes, causing his brow to furrow slightly and his nostrils to flare.

“I don’t want you to hope for something that can’t happen.”

Tears welled in her eyes, and he used his free thumb to smear them away.

“The *rhaeja* himself has declared that he will be your next lover. And what the *rhaeja* wants, the *rhaeja* usually gets.”

Was that it, then? Was that why he denied even the possibility that they could be true mates? Because Rhae’s chosen had declared he wanted her?

“The *rhaeja* enjoys pain, Suzana,” he said in that dark molasses voice. The whip left her chin to slide back down her back. “As do I. I’ve prepared many women for him.” He leaned in toward her ear. “I like it.”

Despite her distress, she squirmed. The whip, like the flogger, began to seem like an extension of his hand. Another part of him to touch her with.

She gasped when he nipped at the bare side of her neck. "I want to watch you dance." His free hand closed over one cheek of her bottom, squeezing. "I want to mark your ass and your back. My marks!"

She cried out at the vehemence in his voice, still so close to her ear. That hand slid between her thighs from behind, finding her wet center.

"I'm going to mark you, Suzana." Her pussy clenched around his invading fingers. "I'm going to mark you, and I'm going to fuck you, and I'm going to *make* you my own, if only for a time."

She cried out, completely in agreement with all but the last of his statement. She pushed against his fingers, struggling against the strap that bound her to the bed.

He took her mouth, shoving a harsh tongue into her willing mouth as he drove his fingers deep into her channel. She writhed, aching to get more of him, frustrated that she couldn't.

Then he was gone, her ragged cry following him. She heard the swish of the whip. Knew what it meant. Knew it would hurt. Why did that make her hotter?!

"Scream, Suzana." The whip cracked, not on her flesh but in the air somewhere behind her. "I want to hear you scream."

*Thwack!*

She screamed. Even before the burning pain blossomed on her right buttock. She screamed for him. At him. Anything for him.

"Yes!" *Shtack!*

Another scream. *Lir, that hurt!* She pressed the bedpost between her breasts, wrapping her arms as best she could around the sturdy post. Using it as a lifeline as her world centered on the exploding pain in her back.



In rapid succession, the whip laid into her back and buttocks. Tears streamed down her face, into her screaming mouth. She danced like he'd said she would, unable to remain still. She writhed for him, knowing he watched. She took every lash, absorbing the pain as best she could as she gloried that he branded her as his very own.

*His own!* Even through the pain, the very thought flushed her sex.

The *swish-crack* stopped. Suzana clutched the bedpost, sobbing. Her back and buttocks were one solid flame.

Strong hands quickly released the thong securing her hands, but she continued to clutch the post. Her death grip was all that kept her from melting into a puddle of agony on the rug. The same hands picked her up bodily, forcing her to release the post. She fell face-first into the blankets, her legs dangling over the edge of the bed. She screamed when Krael covered her with his body, pressing his chest into the burn on her back, his belly crushing her buttocks.

"Mine!" She heard him even though he growled.

"Yours," she cried, alive with the need for him to take her, to complete the possession. Her very womb wept for him.

Her legs parted and he shoved home. She shrieked, unable to distinguish between the white-hot flames searing her back and the succulent torch of his cock sliding into the clutching depth of her body.

"Krael!" she screamed, slamming back into him with all her might.

He shoved hard, his huge cock stretching her, the hurt from within blending with the hurt from without until she couldn't tell pain from pleasure, agony from ecstasy. Her orgasm exploded as fiery magma, bursting from her soul to ooze icy hot from every last inch of her.

Krael was seconds behind her, clutching her tight as he filled her to overflowing with wave after wave of liquid love.

She blinked to semi-consciousness as he held her, the oil from his chest smeared into the welts on her back. “I love you, Suzana,” he murmured.

## Chapter Thirteen

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Why?”

Suzana lay on her belly, her cheek nestled in a soft pillow. Krael sat beside her, within her sight, tenderly rubbing salve into the welts on her back.

She didn’t question the whipping. After it was done, she’d known somehow that it was necessary. For him. To truly have her, he had to mark her. It was a sign of ownership. She would gladly endure it again if and when he felt the need. She was astounded to have actually *enjoyed* it on some level. And the warmth in his eyes kindled a spreading warmth that tingled throughout her body.

But that was not her question. “I don’t understand. Doesn’t love mean you are truemates?”

His beautiful eyes watched his hand on her back. The other hand lay on his thigh, holding a small bowl of the salve that smelled of eucalyptus.

“Usually. But not always.”

“No?”

He shook his head. “I’ve seen truemated couples who aren’t in love.”

“How awful.”

He shrugged. “They learn to cope. Most times they develop a relationship with others, either separately or together.”

“What does that mean?”

He smiled. “She may find another man to be with during the times she’s not in heat. Or she may find a woman.”

“A woman?”

That produced a chuckle. “Have you never heard of such a relationship?”

In truth, she had, but she had never witnessed it. She didn’t quite believe that such a thing could last. After all, what did they do? Now that she knew sex, she couldn’t imagine it not involving a man and his cock.

Her eyes drifted to Krael’s cock, watching it nudge slightly as he moved, loving how it seemed to snuggle up against his balls.

She shut her eyes as the urge to cry tried to take her. “I can’t live without you, Krael.”

He sighed softly. Leaning forward, he placed the salve on the table beside the bed. He remained seated beside her, seemingly unable to take his eyes from the marks on her back. She watched him, and her heart swelled. The love, the possessiveness, was now easy to read, even in his stern face.

Slowly, she drew to her knees. He watched, bemused, as she crawled before him. His hands readily aided her when she eased herself onto his lap, straddling him. She winced when his hands squeezed the marks on her buttocks as he snuggled her against him. She wrapped her arms about his neck, digging her fingers into the hair at the nape of his neck.

“I don’t want anyone but you.”

“I don’t want to give you up,” he admitted, voice low.

“Truly?”



“Truly.”

“Kill me.”

He stiffened. “*What?*”

“I won’t live in some other man’s embrace. I won’t be truemated to a man who doesn’t hold my heart.”

“Suza ...”

“Kill me.”

“And if you’re pregnant?”

He admitted the possibility! She swallowed. “After the test. If I’m not pregnant, kill me.”

He scowled, the content of their conversation truly hitting him. “You’re talking insanity.”

“No, my lord. I am yours. I know this with every part of my being. My heart and body are yours to use or abuse as you will. I cannot be with another. Especially the *rhaeja*. I do not wish to become like that woman who was with him the night of the contest.”

Krael’s eyes widened slightly. Did he think she hadn’t noticed? Did he think her too stupid to put two and two together?

“And I will not be handed to man after man when I know I am yours.”

Krael stared in horrified fascination at the woman curled in his lap. She was absolutely serious, of that he had no doubt. Utter conviction shone in those violet eyes. There were no tears. No protestations. He had been the subject of desire before, had lived through the wiles of women who wailed and moaned to get their way. This was not the case with Suzana. Dry-eyed, she simply asked him to end her life if she could not be his.

And damned if a large piece of his soul didn't sing for it! Yes! She was right. If she couldn't be his, she would be no one's.

She leaned in to kiss the hard muscle just above his nipple. Pressed her lips there to taste the pounding of his heart. "I love you, my one and only lord." He shuddered.

He smoothed his hand in her hair, holding her face to his chest. "And I love you," he murmured, astounded by how easily the words spilled from his lips.

"Then, if I can't be yours, kill me."

His snarl returned. Gripping her hair, he snapped her head back to meet her shining gaze. "Because I love you, you ask me to take your life?"

"Among my people, it's a matter of honor. A man's love is his own. He would never allow her to be sullied by another man."

"So he would kill her?"

"Yes."

He grimaced. "Your people sound overdramatic and suicidal."

Hurt, she tried to push back from him, pulled up short when he refused to relinquish his hold on her hair. "Love is sacred," she said, voice laced with anger she had not yet shown him. On her, it looked odd. Out of place. "Without it, life has no meaning. I've had everything ripped away from me. My home, my family, my freedom. Now you've taken my heart. If you deny me, if I'm not yours, I *have* nothing to live for."

He caught her up against him despite her struggles to escape. He dug his hands into her buttocks, purposely reminding her of his marks. She subsided, sullen. "Shhh. I insulted your people. For that, I'm sorry."

"Only for that?" she muttered against his chest.

"Suzana, you can't ask me to kill you. It's not our way."

"Is it your way to pass me to a man who will make me into a blank-eyed sex slave?"

He pulled back, shocked. She speared him with her gaze.

“It’s true, isn’t it? He did that to her.”

He could only frown. Certainly he couldn’t deny it.

“Could you give me over to him? To that? My lord?”

Staring into her beautiful round face, he saw the truth of her words. What kind of man would he be if he handed her into that?

Slowly, he nodded. “No. I can’t. I won’t.” He pulled her against his chest again, and this time she didn’t resist. “I won’t let you go, Suzana. Even if you’re not mine, I’ll kill you before I see you taken away from me.”

## Chapter Fourteen

Suzana lay within the warm, tiny world created by the bed beneath her and the man above her. Krael's whole body surrounded her, his thighs folded beneath hers, his elbows braced to either side of her. His hair completely shrouded them from anything outside their two joined bodies. Slowly, his hips rolled back and forth, tunneling his cock deep within her, then withdrawing slowly so she could feel every ridge and bump on the way out. His hands supported her shoulders, wrapped around them from beneath to brace her. She pressed her forehead to his chest, breathing heavily around the pain in her heart.

Even as her body climbed toward climax, a part of her counted every passing moment. It was day nine, and sometime soon they would come to test her. Sometime soon, they might try to take her away from Krael.

She could not let that happen. She had decided days ago, not long after his heartfelt promise to her, that she would devise a way to take her own life. Just in case he failed her. She wasn't stupid. She knew he might balk. Even among her own people, where such practice was accepted, it was often difficult for the loved one to complete the actual act. She had yet to decide between hanging herself with one of the thick cords that tied back the

curtains on the window, or throwing herself headfirst from the same window. But she was sure either one would do.

“Suza,” Krael groaned, his lips pressed to the top of her head.

Such ragged emotion. Shutting her eyes hard against impending tears, Suzana reached down to clutch both muscular cheeks of Krael’s ass, pulling him closer, demanding more of him even though he already filled her to the brim and beyond. He picked up the pace, stroking faster to spike her arousal. She squirmed, glorying in the way his big body trembled, how his breath caught when she twisted and managed to squeeze him just a bit harder.

“Krael,” she moaned, released into her climax.

“Goddess,” he cursed, joining her.

Neither orgasm was the explosive release she’d come to expect. She didn’t scream; it didn’t hurt. But the heady warmth and spreading ecstasy opened the floodgates of her emotions. She could no longer deny the sobs that threatened. Mortified, she subsided from shakes of pleasure to body-wracking sobs.

Krael pressed his lips to her forehead, his hands clutching her shoulders. “Suzana, don’t cry.”

She tried. But she couldn’t stop. Desperately, she clung to him, her arms wrapped about his middle as far as she was able. When he tried gently to pull her away, she clutched harder.

“I love you,” she breathed, uttering the words for the first time in days.

“Suzana ...” he began, voice stern.

But he was cut off by the sound of the door opening. Suzana didn’t look. She didn’t want to. She didn’t want to see the man who would come to remove her from Krael. She clung like a baby monkey when Krael pushed to kneel and face the newcomers.

“Oh, you have marked her! How very nice.”

She froze. The *rhaeja*?

“My lord.” Krael’s voice rumbled through her skin. “I’m honored by your presence.”

“I’m sure you are. Have you trained *my* little mage well?”

Suzana let him unlock her arms from his waist, knowing she was embarrassing him. She didn’t want to cause him grief, but neither did she want to be away from the touch of his skin. She clutched his hand when he would have removed it.

“I have, my lord.”

She peeked through her heavy fall of hair toward the door. The *rhaeja* stood, thankfully clothed in a pure white robe, just inside the doorway. She was relieved to see that Radin was also present, standing in the doorway itself.

“She’s needy, isn’t she?” Valanth observed.

Krael failed to answer.

Suzana watched the white robe blend with Valanth’s loose white hair as he approached the bed. “Very well. Let’s get this over with.”

“My lord, are you testing her?”

“Yes.”

“Again, my lord,” said Radin, stepping into the room, “I must protest. A third party should test her.”

“Do you doubt my word, *boy?*” Valanth snarled, rounding on Radin.

“No, my lord, but think how it will look. Everyone knows you’ve declared Suzana for yourself. Shouldn’t someone else test her?”

Valanth’s glare narrowed. “Could it be that you just want to taste my little mage?”

Radin smiled cheekily. “Do you blame me, my lord?”

Taste? What did they mean? Suzana watched the exchange with a bleeding heart, not really wanting either man to touch her. As they argued, Krael tugged her toward him. She went willingly and allowed him to arrange her between his spread legs, her marked back to his chest. He scooted forward until both of their legs draped over the side of the bed. With

one arm wrapped about her middle, he settled the other with his big hand at the base of her neck. It took a slight squeeze that barely threatened her breath for her to realize. He'd put her in a position where he could throttle her. Or, just by raising the other hand, snap her neck like a twig. She closed her eyes. He intended to keep his promise!

Krael watched the bickering sorcerers warily. He was thankful for Radin's presence. Without, Krael had no doubts Valanth would simply take Suzana without bothering to test her. But Krael needed that test. It was the one tiny ray of hope that might keep both he and Suzana alive.

But he didn't count on it. As soon as she was pronounced not pregnant, he'd snap her neck. The moment he did, his life was forfeit. Not only would Valanth be enraged that Krael denied him his "little mage," but the deliberate taking of a potentially fertile female's life was cause for death. Valanth was the only known exception to this rule, and that was only because no one could prove he'd killed his truemate or any of the others.

Rhon now stood in the doorway, the boy's eyes wide in surprise. Krael guessed that it was more the boy's presence than anything else that caused Valanth to subside. "Oh, very well." Valanth spread a hand toward Krael and Suza, eyes glued on Radin. "Test her."

Radin smiled, that mischievous grin that won him so many friends. "With pleasure, my lord."

Suzana squirmed, and Krael bent his head to her ear. "Radin is going to taste that sweet cunt of yours, Suza," he murmured. "Spread your legs for him."

She complied, despite the unsure frown on her lips.

Radin knelt, smiling up at Suza. Something he saw made the smile falter slightly, and Radin darted a glance at Krael. Krael gave him nothing. Without Valanth's hovering presence, he might have said something. But, then again, maybe not. Radin would no more approve of Krael's plan than anyone else. He might, in fact, be less understanding.

Radin's gaze narrowed, but as Valanth's presence kept Krael quiet, so, too, it kept Radin's thoughts within his head. With visible effort, he regained his smile, aiming it at Suza. "Be at ease, Suzana." His hands slid over her bare thighs, fingers dipping between to graze her moist pussy.

Krael would be helpful. Perhaps, in doing so, Rhae would bless him with a miracle. He rubbed his cheek against the satin of Suzana's hair, lifting his hand from her belly to her breast to playfully tweak a nipple.

"Get on with it!" Valanth snapped, causing all three of them to jump.

"Yes, my lord," said Radin, almost a sigh but not quite. Crouching down, he bent until his lips grazed the curly hair guarding her mound. Inhaling deeply, he nuzzled further. His lips parted, and his tongue extended to search out her clit. He did not seem to mind one bit that she was still moist with Krael's come.

Suzana shuddered, her body sinking deeper into Krael's embrace as Radin pressed forward, sealing his lips over the apex of her sex so he could suck her into his mouth.

"Let him taste you, Suza," Krael murmured, nuzzling her ear. "I want to see his face all wet from your come. I want him to taste what I've tasted."

She moaned, writhing. He tightened the hand he kept at her neck, reminding her of his promise. His promise that she was his and no one else's, even if he did share her for a brief time. Her hand crawled up over her head, into his hair. She took a healthy handful, bracing herself with it as she ground her body toward Radin.

"Look at him, Suza," he commanded, taking his hand from her breast to sink his fingers into Radin's hair. He pulled some of the silk over Radin's shoulder, letting it dribble over her hip. Radin glanced up but didn't protest the move, adjusting his arm below Suzana's thigh to make more room for Krael's plans with his hair. "Shove your tongue into her, Radin. That's what she wants."





Instantly, Radin complied, and instantly Suzana shattered. Radin held her hips, securing his mouth on her sex. Krael's grip tightened on Radin's head, pressing the man even closer.

"He's not done," Krael told her when he knew she heard him again. "He'll make you come again, lapping up that sweet honey that only you taste like."

She bit her lip, and again he squeezed her throat. The reminder sent her over the edge again, and she yanked hard on his hair, the pain nearly bringing tears to his eyes. He growled, bending to bite her neck, knowing she loved both the sound and the action.

Suzana couldn't catch her breath. Couldn't find her sanity. Her body writhed between the two men, orgasms bouncing between them in one long, unfathomable stream. Each time she thought she'd had enough, Krael would growl, or tell Radin what to do to her, or he'd squeeze that hand on her throat to remind her that he had her life in his hands. Tears streamed from her blind eyes as she pushed into Radin's talented tongue.

With one last agonized quake, her body dropped. Radin continued to lick and suck, and Krael continued to croon, but she was spent. It felt good, but she could simply no longer respond.

She struggled to open bleary eyes as Radin sat back. His face did, indeed, glisten with her juices. He raised one elegant hand to wipe his chin and cheeks clean, languorously licking his palms afterward.

Smug, he turned a grin to Krael. "Did you want to be a father, my friend?"

Beneath her, Krael froze. The hand at her neck tightened, just enough to threaten the breath that she held in shock.

"*What?*" This from Valanth, whose presence she had all but forgotten. He loomed behind Radin, who turned on his knees to face him.

"It's true, my lord. She's pregnant."

“What?” It was her turn to demand, although in a far more quiet and feeble manner. But Radin heard. He turned to her. “Yes, lady,” he said, his voice soft, his gaze warm. “It seems you’ve done what no other woman has and found your truemate in your first nine days.”

She stared, so shocked that she didn’t cringe when Valanth swooped over her. None of them realized his intent until three of his fingers were buried deep in her pussy. She cried out, flinching before she could stop herself. Angrily, he twisted, ignoring Radin’s shocked protest. Almost as quickly as he was in, Valanth pulled his fingers out and stuck them in his mouth. They watched him roll her taste on his tongue.

“Impossible,” he muttered, withdrawing them. “No woman finds her truemate the first time. Even less so a virgin.”

No one said anything. Valanth stared hungrily at Suzana, his orange gaze raking her still-heaving breasts, curved belly, and the wet hair guarding her sex. He snarled slightly, then lifted that gaze to Krael.

“I congratulate you, Captain,” he said, voice dangerously blank. “I suggest you take good care of her.”

Suzana held her breath as he twirled, then stalked out, nearly running over Rhon in the process.

Only when he was gone did Radin stand. For a moment, he stared down at Suzana and Krael, who still remained frozen in shock. “Would you really have killed her, Krael?” he asked softly.

Krael’s hand transferred instantly from her neck to her far shoulder, pressing her tighter against his chest. Softly, he growled.

Radin met her gaze briefly, then again looked to Krael. Shortly, he nodded. “It would seem to be a moot point.” His grin returned. “Allow me to add my congratulations.” He bowed and turned to go.

“Radin.” Krael’s voice stopped him at the door. The sorcerer turned, his earrings glinting in the firelight. “It’s true, isn’t it?”

Radin’s jaw dropped, even if a slight smile remained. “Are you implying that I might lie about such a thing?”

Suzana froze. Such a thought hadn’t occurred to her.

“Yes.” Obviously, it had to Krael.

“And how do you propose I planned to get away with that? Within a cycle he’d know if she wasn’t pregnant.”

Krael’s breath-crushing hold on her relented slightly. “So it *is* true?”

Radin rolled his eyes, waving a disgusted hand at them. “Suzana, I pity you the thick-headed lout you’ve bonded with.” He grinned at her. “I hope he’s worth it.”

It finally all dawned on Suzana. It was over. She was Krael’s. If she understood correctly, in the eyes of their society and in the judgment of their goddess, she and Krael were the same as married. More so. And she was pregnant! In due time, she would give birth to Krael’s son.

A grin split her face, and she clutched Krael’s hand where it lay on her shoulder. “He is,” she assured the smirking sorcerer. “He most definitely is.”

 THE END 

## Jet Mykles

An ardent fan of fantasy and science fiction sagas, Jet prefers to live in a world of imagination where dragons are real, elves are commonplace, vampires are just people with special diets and lycantropes live next door. In her own mind, she's the spunky heroine who gets the best of everyone and always attracts the lean, muscular lads. She aids this fantasy with visuals created through her other obsession: 3D graphic art. In this area, as in writing, Jet's self-taught and thoroughly entranced, and now regularly uses this art to illustrate her stories or her stories to expand upon her art. It was through a series of images posted to the erotic art website Renderotika and encouragement from the fabulous Angela Knight that she finished and submitted a story to Loose Id.

In real life, Jet lives in southern California with her boyfriend of nine years, his daughter and father and nine cats. She has a bachelor's degree in acting, but her loathing of auditions has kept her out of the limelight. So she turned to computers and currently works in product management for a software company, because even in real life, she can't help but want to create something out of nothing.

You can find Jet on the Web at <http://www.computerotika.com>.

\* \* \* \* \*