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Chapter One

Lana trudged through the depths of the ancient forest, her pack growing heavier with each step. Dragons had claimed these woods, and the mountains beyond them, for as long as anyone could remember. Legends told of the dragons defending their borders without mercy, and she was over a day's hike into the woods.

Lana chose reason over fear. No dragons had been seen in her lifetime; and rare, valuable herbs grew throughout Ashen Forest. She had been venturing within since she'd been a farm girl on the edge of the vast forest, growing bolder with each expedition. Strange things might indeed roam the trees, but aside from the expected woodland creatures Lana had never seen more than shadows in the corner of her eye, nor heard more than rustling in the night.

The woods had become like a second home, one she had all to herself. She never took more than she needed and was careful to leave no permanent mark of her passing. Somehow the massive, ancient trees seemed to welcome her. Perhaps one day she would venture too deep, become too bold, but that day had yet to arrive.

By mid-morning, Lana would reach her destination: a clear pool fed by a waterfall, where she had gathered the precious herb once before. It was farther out than she preferred to go, by a good measure, but these were desperate times. A sickness was spreading through the Village of Eddleton, and dragon bane could be the difference between life and death for many of her friends and neighbors.

The herb's healing properties were amazing, with a euphoric side-effect that only increased its value. It was a rare aquatic plant, growing only in the sandy bottoms of certain mountain springs, and she couldn't go home without it.

Lana was a healer and midwife, like the woman who had raised her, sharing duties with Maya in their village of a few hundred. Midwives were not expected to marry, which suited her. Her parents had died when she was a child, and without a mother urg-

ing her to find a husband there was no down-side to entertaining herself with whoever struck her fancy.

Not that promiscuity was frowned upon, but Lana didn't fancy herself a baby dispenser and mothers want grandchildren. She lived on the frontier of an average kingdom, far from polite society, where sex was more of a game to be played than a reason for doubt and jealousy. The pickings were slim in Eddleton, but a worthy merchant or trader would pass through now and again. She always had Darus, a childhood friend who'd been a casual lover for years. Minor potions could prevent pregnancy, and to Lana anything was better than being the breeding cow of some farmer or blacksmith.

Lana heard the waterfall in the distance, speeding up with a second wind. The pool was as breathtaking as she remembered, a hundred feet across and fed by a spring flowing from a huge crack in the sheer cliff above. She dropped her pack on the shore and sat for a moment, bracing herself for the cold swim ahead. She took off her boots and breeches, letting down her fiery hair, catching sight of what looked like a pile of gear on the opposite shore. Her heart skipped a beat when a man burst from beneath the water with a handful of leafy, purple plants. Lana stood frozen in disbelief. In the middle of the wilderness, where she'd never seen another living soul, someone had beaten her to the dragon bane when she needed it most. She didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

The man swam towards his gear, getting out of the water and laying the plants out to dry on a rock warmed by the sun. Lana stood silent and unnoticed, enjoying the view. Even at a distance her eyes caught the sunlight playing across his body, highlighting every ripple of flesh, allowing his thick cock to gleam in the sun. Perhaps this wouldn't be a wasted trip, after all.

He noticed her as he turned and dove back in, swimming toward her. Lana was mesmerized as he cut through the water. Soon the man stood just off shore in water to his waist, matted dark hair showing a hint of curl, with a cockeyed smile that melted her. Lana was struck with the fact that she stood there wearing nothing but a tunic that barely reached mid-thigh.

He grinned. "Here to poach my garden again?"

She folded her arms. “*Your* garden? As far as I can see, this is open forest. Unless I’ve got my facts mixed up, only dragons claim these woods, and you seem a bit short on wings and scales.”

He laughed. “Ah, then you challenge my claim. Well then, I suppose it’s everyone for themselves. There’s more down there, but you’ll have to beat me to it.”

“Very well,” she replied. “Just turn around so I can finish undressing.”

“And if I don’t?”

Lana met his playful gaze, feeling a twinge between her legs, saying, “Then I’ll wonder if I can trust you to be a gentleman once I’m in the water.”

Stroking his chin, he said, “Hmm, I suppose that does present you with a choice to make. Still, the water is lovely. And who would expect to find a gentleman out here in the wilderness?” He made no move to turn away, daring her with his eyes.

Lana tested the water with a toe, shocked to find it as warm as a bath, wondering why she hadn’t noticed the steam rising from it earlier. The young healer decided she’d come too far to leave without her prize, and there were far worse things than a naked swim with a handsome stranger. Lana stripped off her loose tunic, revealing a toned body and a pair of firm breasts. She held his gaze, wading into the water to meet him, nipples constricting as she got a closer look.

If he wanted a race, he’d get one. She dove past him with a smirk and swam toward the falls, source of the turbulent water the plants required to thrive. It took a few dives to gather the dragon bane, and Lana grew more playful each time. The clear water gave her a shameless look at her rival, and she was more than a little distracted. Lana was tempted to throw herself at him without so much as exchanging names, a thought that was brazen even for her.

He laid the plants out to dry and rejoined her in the water, saying, “That’s four to you and six to me, I believe.” Four plants wouldn’t treat half the sick, but she had other needs to attend at the moment.

Lana took a handful of his cock, asking, "Is there anything I can do to thank the mysterious stranger for sharing?"

"That's not very ladylike," he said.

She responded with a kiss, feeling his cock begin to stiffen in her hand. It was big, maybe too big, but she wasn't one to turn from a challenge. With a smile, she said, "A lady would have stayed on shore in the first place."

A broad grin split his face as he beckoned her towards the falls, swimming away. The water was near scalding, steam bellowing out where cool mist should be spraying. Every nerve in her flesh was alive, screaming for his touch. Lana followed him through the curtain of water, secluded from the world around them, where he lifted her to sit on a rock ledge at the water line. Tired of waiting, she locked her ankles behind his back; squeezing him in a passionate embrace. For a long moment they tasted each other, his hands exploring her responsive flesh.

He teased an earlobe with his teeth, caressing her swollen mound with his fingers. "Is this what you had in mind?" he asked.

"Almost." Lana grinned, leaning back on her hands. He sank into the water, kissing a meandering path down her body, rewarded with sighs and whimpers along the way. She felt lips on her thigh, a finger teasing her clit, and his eager tongue parting her labia. Lana moaned, bucking her hips, grinding herself into him, as the beat of her pounding heart grew louder than the water crashing around them. He slipped a finger inside her, then another, twisting them while his tongue abused her clit. His mouth played rough, and she loved it.

Lana's breathing became ragged and her moans grew louder. She wove a hand through his hair, squealing when a third finger disappeared between her slippery lips. The stretching sensation pushed her over the edge, and her own cries of climax drowned out the falls. She collapsed against the rock as waves of pleasure washed over her; half-senseless, half-desperate for more. He stood between her legs, toying with her nipples while the last convulsions subsided.

He took Lana's hands, pulling her into another embrace. She stroked the hard cock pressing into her belly, marveling at its girth, still wondering what it would do to her pussy but eager to find out. She rested back on the cliff, guiding his shaft toward the tight hole his fingers had stretched, but he resisted.

Lana shot him a confused glance, but the light in his eyes said he was teasing. She asked, "What do I have to do, beg for it?" His response was a slow, deliberate nod. She was willing to play his game. Lana batted her eyes, pleading for his cock. She clenched her teeth, bracing herself to take the pain she knew was coming. Lana grunted, and thrashed, feeling as if she was being split in two while he forced his way inside her. Short, gentle strokes soon had her squealing.

He picked her up, still impaled on his cock, carrying her into the falls. Hot water cascaded over them like liquid fire, splashing her pussy with each thrust, sending her mind reeling into the ether. Lana felt herself stretched to the limit in a tempest of pain and pleasure. She buried her head in his chest, reveling in the strong hands under her ass as she bounced on his cock, wishing the moment would never end. Time and again she came, each orgasm squeezing him tighter, until the pain was just a memory.

"Please fill me," she begged.

"Come for me one more time," he said. "I'll join you." Lana felt another climax building, as if on his command. Their eyes met as he exploded inside her, the fire in his gaze launching her into another powerful orgasm. Lana threw her arms around him, holding tight, waiting for the aftershocks to fade. She stirred when he carried her out of the falls, realizing she'd passed out for a moment. He set her back on the ledge, pulling out as her body shook one last time.

Lana was giggling, with a glassy-eyed grin, while he covered her face and chest in kisses. He said, "For the record, I consider myself thoroughly thanked."

They shared a laugh and she asked, "So, when do I get to know your name?"

"The instant you tell me yours."

“Lana, of Eddleton.”

“Alaron, of Ashen Forest,” he replied.

The mystery deepened. Did he live out here in the woods? Before she could ask, Alaron invited her to join him for a meal. They swam back to shore; sharing a naked lunch of wine, smoked meat, fruit and cheese while they waited for the dragon bane to dry. They talked about the forest, and how she came to find the pool in the first place. Alaron cultivated the herb, and had meant it when he said ‘his garden,’ though he was evasive regarding why. She assumed he sold it or used it himself, choosing not to press the issue.

Lana spent the entire time distracted, her gaze wandering to his cock every time she felt an ache between her legs. She wasn’t looking forward to the hike in front of her, but had no regrets. Alaron was charming, attractive and brilliant. If Lana had her way she’d be getting a chance to get used to the size of that cock, daring to hope she might have found someone to share her forest, but now she was forced to test his generosity. Four plants were nowhere near what she needed, and it was time to divide the spoils.

Lana said, “I must ask you for a favor, but I’m afraid I’ll seem greedy.”

“Ask.” He winked. “I somehow find myself in a generous mood.”

Lana explained the plight of her village, and that she’d need almost all of what they’d harvested for a chance at healing them. A gentle expression came over Alaron as he gave her a soft kiss. “Thank you,” he said.

“For what?”

“For fucking before negotiating. It’s a sign of good character.” Lana laughed, swatting at him, stressing that she was serious. He said, “I have plenty, you’re welcome to everything save one plant. How are you preparing the herb?”

Alaron shook his head while she explained, saying, “No, no... make a tea, one leaf per dose and only a single dose per person. If you come across any teela berries on your way home, add two per dose after crushing them. When mixed with dragon bane, the berries allow sleep through the bulk of the hallucinations.”

Lana asked, “So, you’re an herbalist?” She’d always heard that mixing dragon bane with anything was dangerous, but Alaron spoke like a master.

He smiled, saying, “Just something of an expert on the plants of Ashen Forest, and dragon bane in particular. I’d be happy to teach you a few of its secrets, if you can manage to meet me here for the next full moon. There is a price, however, for the plants and the lessons. You must never speak of me, or anything I show you, to anyone in the outside world. Though the creatures of the forest seem to see no threat in you, it’s very unlikely that others would share the same fortune.”

Lana jumped at the invitation, promising to return and to keep his secret. The morning had become afternoon, and she needed to get moving in order to make it home by the following night. She was desperate to stay just a few more hours, but the sick were getting sicker. Alaron dressed, walking Lana back to her gear. Before hiking out they shared one last embrace. Lana asked, “So, you *promise* to make a return trip worth my while?”

Taking a handful of her hair, Alaron turned her head to the side, tugging on her ear with his teeth. A chill went down Lana’s spine as she felt herself getting wet again. “I promise,” he whispered, making his way off into the woods. Lana paused before heading out, remembering to fill her water skin. She recoiled in shock when she touched the frigid water in the pool.

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About the Author

J.V. Altharas is a veteran entertainer with a filthy, filthy mind. He is an accomplished stage and studio vocalist exploring the realm of erotic audio books after returning his full attention to a life-long love affair with fantasy fiction.

Current projects include a free erotica website (with text and audio) at TwistedErotica.com and several upcoming erotic audio pieces for Ravenous Romance. J.V. is also a sex-positive activist and host of the five-star-rated, gleefully explicit, brutally blunt sex-education podcast [Ending the Sexual Dark Age](#).

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