

## Chapter One

It was a beautiful day the sun was warm as it shone down across her face. His handsome face and deep blue eyes were all she could see as she lay down in the grass beside the stream that flowed near the spot where he had first kissed her. It seemed like a lifetime ago. As Katelynn lay there she thought about how they had first met. It was the festival of Mid Summer's Eve.

He was a stranger in her village. Just passing though is what he had told her father. He was on a journey to find a rare plant called thistle mint that grew in the highlands to the north. The healing power of this plant's roots would save his homeland from a sickness. The likes of one, no one of that time had seen before. But most believed it to be a curse from the evil Lord Drasken of that land from where he came.

Katelynn had come into the room as her father and the stranger sat talking. She had noticed him right away not only because he was a stranger, but also his silhouette from the hearth made him seem to have a glow about him. Her father had introduced him as Bryon the son of Stephen Chief of the village of Dunkeld. Katelynn's father Richard being the Chief of their village Glen Roy was with whom Bryon needed to speak. For it was through these lands he must travel to get to the Highlands where the plant grew.

"Please excuse me father," she said, "I came to see if you would like some wine."

"Aye" said Richard, "That might satisfy this thirst." Then he looked towards Bryon and asked "And you Bryon would you care to share in a drink of wine with me?"

Bryon looked up at Katelynn and smiled, "I would be honored sir."

As he started to look away he could not help but stare at the vision of beauty standing before him. Her hair was red as the flames of a roaring fire, her eyes as green as any emerald he had ever seen. Her skin looked so smooth and milky white. He immediately thought how it would feel to touch the softness of her skin and began to feel a stirring in his loins. She could feel his eyes upon her as she turned away to retrieve the flask of wine for them. She did not want Bryon or her father see her blushing. She could feel his eyes still watching her as she walked away.

That night as the people of the Glen Roy gathered around the communal bonfire, Richard spoke to them of things that Bryon had told him. He spoke of the sickness that was in Bryon's homeland of Dunkeld. The villagers began to whisper and grumble amongst themselves. Wondering if the stranger had brought the sickness with him to their village. Father told them how Lord Drasken had come to Bryon's village and demanded they give up their lands and Dunkeld and to swear loyalty to him but when Bryon's father refused. Lord Drasken said Dunkeld would be cursed with a sickness. That the people of Dunkeld would beg for him to take their lands so that he may take away the curse and their sons and daughters might live.

As Richard sat down Bryon stood up and said, "I have asked Richard if I may travel through these lands to get to the highlands where a plant called thistle mint grows that could help my people. I also have asked if I could employ a guide, for I am not familiar with this part of the world and I would pay handsomely for such a guide."

The villagers sat around and talked amongst themselves for a while.

Then Eric a young lad stood and said, "I will guide you to the Highlands for what you seek."

Eric had other reasons for wanting to go on this journey with Bryon. He thought if he did

this then Katelynn's father would know he was worthy to ask for Katelynn to be his wife. For he had loved Katelynn since they were children. Even though he had never let her know his true feelings.

As the festivities begun Bryon began to realize that the people of Glen Roy was a lot different than where he called home. Their customs of celebrating this night for one, but everything was so magical. The storytelling, the songs, the dancing and feasting. He had never seen anything like it before. They celebrated in his lands this day also but not the same as these people of the Northern Lands. It was as if they were part of the magic all around them.

He had heard tell of the people in these lands. That they were born with the magic in them and as he watched he began to wonder if the beautiful daughter of his host had put some magic to use for herself, for he could not quit looking at her and when she danced he felt a stir in his loins again. Katelynn saw he was watching her and began to make her movements more elaborate. She found herself trying to entice the young man to watch her. But they were not the only ones who noticed the way they were looking at each other. Eric noticed as well and he became very enraged.

“How dare this stranger come among them and try to steal the heart of his love,” Eric thought. As Eric watched he knew he would have to fight for Katelynn's love.

The festivities went on till very late. With the children tucked away in bed. And the elders of the village all slowly making their way as well, the younger ones stayed a little while longer to listen to Bryon tell of his homeland and how things are there. To Katelynn it sounded all so beautiful. The women of the courts in their finery and jewels. She could not even imagine what a silk dress was. But she knew it must be beautiful from the way Bryon's eyes lit up when he spoke of them.

That night as Katelynn lay awake on her cot she kept thinking of Bryon. She could not close her eyes without seeing his handsome face and his deep blue eyes. As she drifted off to sleep she was thinking of all the things he had spoke of. And she dreamed of them. But her dreams were not of all the beautiful things he spoke of there was something clouding them. She saw the evil Lord Drasken overlooking her people's lands, with lust in his eyes. Why was he here she thought. We have nothing that he wants. But if she had known what she had seen in her dreams was of things to come. She would have spoken to her father of them.

Katelynn was not the only one who was having a hard time going to sleep that night. Eric was lying on his cot trying to think of a way to keep Katelynn and Bryon from seeing too much of each other before it could be arranged for them to leave. But Eric knew that would be impossible. It was a small village and there were a lot of preparations to do before they could embark upon their journey. It was a four-day journey to the highlands where the thistle mint grew if weather permitted. They would be able to ride most of the way. But the last part of the journey they would have to walk the horses. Eric now wished he had not said he would guide the stranger to the Highlands. But he had and now he must find a way to keep Bryon from wanting to come back here after he had saved his homeland.

## Chapter Two

The next morning the village was a buzz with all the things the stranger named Bryon had told them. Even the ones that were doing most of the grumbling the night before, seemed to be enchanted with the words of his lands to the south. As Katelynn and her mother Christine was preparing the morning meal, Richard and Bryon came in from a morning walk. Bryon asked if there was a stream nearby so he could wash before the meal was served. Richard showed him the direction in which to go and off he went.

Katelynn trying not to sound too interested said, “Do you think he will be all right? He does not know the forest in this area.”

Richard let out a little chuckle and said, “My daughter if you are afraid he will get lost maybe you had better show him the way.”

Christine could not help but notice how her daughter's eyes lit up. And this worried her. She knew her daughter was infatuated with the stranger amongst them and was not sure what to say. Christine also knew her daughter was about to get her heart broke for this could never be. Eric had already talked to Katelynn's mother about his plans to ask for Katelynn's hand. She knew that nothing good would come from Richard tempting his daughter in such a way. Katelynn asked if she could go make sure he had found the stream all right and her father had told her that she could go.

As she walked to the stream someone else noticed she was going the same way as Bryon had. Eric followed Katelynn far enough behind so she would not know he was there. When she reached the stream she saw Bryon bent over the stream scooping handfuls of water over his face. His shirt was off and she could see his tanned muscular arms and back. As she stood there and looked at him she felt she would never see another man as handsome as this. As she started to speak to him he turned and saw her standing there.

When she tried to speak she was unable too. Then she gained her composure and said, “My mother has a root we use for washing with. She would have gave you some if you would have asked.”

That was a stupid thing to say she thought to herself.

He was having just as hard of a time talking as well. The way the morning sun shone on her hair made it look even redder than the night before with the firelight making it look as if it was dancing. He felt the stir in his loins again. He wanted to grab her and kiss her and rub his hands over her smooth skin. But he knew if he were to do that he would not be able to stop himself from going further. She was not just a scullery maid or some whore from the brothel she was different.

He turned away and asked angrily, "What are you doing here?"

Katelynn was confused she had saw the way he looked at her. Why was he angry with her for being here? Was she not good enough for him? Then she remembered the way he had spoken of the women of his lands and how beautiful they must be in their fine clothes and such. She turned and ran back towards the village with tears stinging her eyes. Eric was far enough back that they had not seen him but he heard their exchange of words and smiled he knew the stranger was not interested in Katelynn for any thing other than to look upon as she was a very beautiful woman. But Eric wanted to be sure that it was nothing more.

As Katelynn walked into the hut she tried to hide what was left of the tears, she could still fill the sting in her eyes. But why should this stranger upset her so. She knew nothing about him and how could she think he would be interested in someone below his station. But she was the daughter of the village chief. Her hurt now began to swell into anger. She walked towards the hearth where her mother was finishing up the morning meal. Christine knew her daughter well. She could tell she had been crying and by the look on Katelynn's face she knew her daughter was hurt and confused. But what could have happened at the stream to cause this? Had Bryon said something or done something to cause such a change in her daughter and if so what could it have been?

Christine asked, "Did Bryon find the stream okay? The morning meal is ready. Is he going to be along soon?"

Katelynn answered, "He will be here, he was finishing up when I got there." Katelynn did not want to be there when he returned. She did not know if she could sit across the table from him and look upon his face. She hurried and finished her meal and told her mother and father she was going to the other side of the forest to gather some of the early berries. Her father had not taken notice of Katelynn's change of mood. But the change in her daughter deeply concerned Christine.

After Katelynn left, Bryon sat beside the stream and thought about how he had spoken to her. He knew he had sounded very angry and now felt sorry for it. There was no reason for him to have reacted that way but he was afraid she would see in his eyes what he felt. He had never been good at concealing the way he felt, his father had told him many times it would be his downfall if he should ever be on a battlefield and his mother told him it was a blessing because then the woman he falls in love with would know that it truly loved her. He sat there for along time just looking into the water as if the reflection of himself would give him an answer. He would not go back to the hut right now. He would sit here and wait awhile. Maybe Katelynn had chores to do and by the time he got there she would be gone.

Eric sat and watched him for a while and wondered why he was not going back to the village. Maybe he had not heard all of their conversation. Maybe they had made an arrangement to meet back here after Katelynn had finished her morning chores. Eric decided to wait in hiding for a while. As he sat there he thought about the journey ahead of them. He could make sure Bryon never returned from the Highlands. After all the lands were in unrest and there were bandits along the road as well. And no one would ever suspect any different, but then again Bryon would not be able to return with the thistle mint root to help his people and Eric was not sure he could face the fact he would be the one responsible for their deaths. Soon Eric grew very hungry he had not had his morning meal yet and decided that Katelynn would not be returning. As he turned to leave he took one last look. Bryon was still sitting beside the stream looking into the water.

After awhile Bryon lay back and stared at the sky. He wanted to take it all back but he

knew he could not. As he lay there he began to doze and dream. He dreamed of his homeland and all that was happening there. His dreams were filled with the sight of his people being ravaged by the sickness. The villages were plundered and burned to the ground. He saw Lord Drasken's army marching thru his homeland as if in triumph. Bryon woke with a start for his dreams had disturbed him deeply. Bryon knew he must hurry if he was to save Dunkeld from Lord Drasken and this cursed sickness.

He rose to his feet and decided to take a walk through the forest. He heard movement and began to walk very slowly towards where he thought the noise had come from as not to alert who or what it was. Could Lord Drasken know of his father's plan to send him to the highlands to try and find the rare thistle mint? He crouched down behind the ferns that grew in the forest and watched. It was not long until he saw what he had heard. It was Katelynn she was picking berries that looked like they were just ripening. He rose from his hiding place and she was startled when she saw him she believed he had already went back and was having his morning meal.

He walked over to her "Katelynn," he said "I hope you can forgive me for my rudeness, when you came to the stream."

He still could not be honest with her and tell her why. "I was just surprised to see you there." He began "I should have thanked you for your kindness. Would it be alright if I walked with you?"

Katelynn was so surprised by his words she could find no words to say. Bryon turned to walk away knowing he had lost his chance to get to know this beautiful woman standing in front of him.

Then she said, "Please do not go away. Yes, I would like the company. I am gathering berries. The ones that are first of the season are so very sweet."

As he turned she saw he was smiling. His smile made her forget all the anger she had felt that morning by the stream. They continued through the forest and came to the edge of the forest where the berries grew abundantly. Soon the basket Katelynn had brought was filled with the sweet berries and they started back to the village. They had talked of many things, the journey, his homeland, his family and the all the dangers that being on the road could bring.

Then she asked him, "Why is it that you have not gotten this sickness that is in your homeland?"

He looked at her and replied, "I can not answer that for I do not know. It is a mystery even to our court physician. I have been in the villages where it is the worst, trying to help my people and it has not yet come upon me."

They came to the stream where he had spent his morning. They were both very thirsty from their walk and all the talking they had been doing. They sat down and both drank of the water. As they cupped their hands to drink the cool water, their shoulders brushed together. They turned and looked into each other's eyes. He could not let another chance escape him. He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her. Katelynn was so surprised she pulled away.

"I am sorry," he told her, "But I have wanted to kiss you from the first moment I saw you. I will never do it again please forgive me."

Katelynn reached out and touched his cheek and answered "I did not jump because I did not want you to kiss me I was just surprised."

He then put his arms around her and kissed her again. They lay there beside the stream for a long while. Embraced in each other's arms Katelynn wanted this moment to never end. But it was getting late and she knew if they did not return soon her father and mother would be getting worried.

“We should be getting back.” Bryon said as he turned and kissed her one last time. “ I have a lot to do before Eric and I leave.”

Oh how she hated to hear him say he would be leaving but she knew this was what must be and she could not stand in his way.

As they walked back to the village she asked him more questions. Did he have any brothers, what was his mother’s name, was her eyes blue like his? And he answered her willingly He felt he could talk to her about everything. He had never been around a woman he could talk so freely to. He asked her questions also mostly about her people their customs and the surrounding lands. Were the highlanders friendly to strangers when traveling through their lands? How far into the highlands would he have to travel to find this plant? Most of his questions she could answer, but some she could not. If he wanted the answer to these questions she told him, he would have to ask her father he would know she was sure.

Eric saw them walk out of the forest and into the clearing. He seen them holding hands and the way she looked at Bryon would never be the way she would look at him. Not as long as Bryon was alive. So he began to plot a plan to get this stranger out his way. He would be the one there to comfort her. And then he would do everything he could to make her fall in love with him and look at him the same way

As they walked into the hut Christine saw the look in her daughter’s eyes and knew that all her fears where real. What ever had happened that morning was now part of their past. And what had happened while Katelynn had been out picking berries was now their future.

## Chapter Three

After the morning meal Katelynn and Bryon walked to the stream. They lay there and listened to the water flow over the rocks in the stream. As they looked into the sky they spoke of their past what each wanted for their people and what they wanted for their own futures. He told her when he returned to his homeland with the root of the thistle mint. And he was sure the unrest there was over and Lord Drasken had been defeated he would return for her. She was not quite sure how to respond to this she had never thought about leaving Glen Roy. As he embraced her and their lips met she forgot all but what was then and now.

He told her they would be leaving the next morning. That Eric had said he needed a couple of days to finish getting things in order so he would be able to be away for a while. But Eric had things in order he was meeting with some Highlanders that were rouges and would do anything for the right price. He had hired them to go to Galloway in the Lowlands of the south. To find Lord Drasken and to tell him of Bryon's journey and what he was doing. Eric knew if all that Bryon had told them to be true that Lord Drasken would want him stopped. And then Bryon would be out of the way and Eric would have Katelynn as his wife.

Christine watched as her daughter and Bryon came out of the forest from the direction of the stream. She was afraid for her daughter. She knew that only heart ache lay ahead for her. That this stranger was filling her head with foolish notions. And that Katelynn had to stay here in Glen Roy.

This was her destiny Christine had been told this the day Katelynn was born. She was to rule over these lands and bring back peace after a time of unrest in these lands. Christine had never told anyone what the Druid High Priest from her village of Glen More had told her that day. Because he had fore told of a time when brother would rise against brother and how from the south would come a man that was not a man but a demon. She knew this man could not be

Bryon for she was a woman of seeing also and knew he was not the man she needed to fear.

Katelynn was not aware of the powers she had for they had not yet awakened but Christine knew it would not be this way for long. For she had seen the man Bryon called Lord Drasken in her dreams. And she knew it was time for her to start preparing Katelynn for things to come. She would have to help awaken the power that lay within her. She thought Katelynn was already starting to feel this power. Katelynn had told her some of the things she had seen in her mind, her dreams and her feelings.

She would have to take Katelynn to her people's village in the highlands. So she could learn their ways and customs. Christine had not been there since her father William Chief of the Highlands had banished her from her village for leaving with Richard. He was a Celt and she a Druid. But Christine's mother Margaret had been there when Katelynn was born and had brought the High Priest.

For the blood of the Druids ran strong in Christine's people. And Katelynn was born with the gift of far seeing. Katelynn also had the gift of knowing what plants, flowers, roots and bark to use and to mix to heal. She had not been taught this she just knew. And she had been chosen to lead the people of this land through the times ahead. And she would triumph, the High Priest had never said this but Christine knew her daughter.

Her will was so strong she would fight to the death rather than give up. The highlanders would gather their forces to rally for her as well. And with all that Christine knew, it would darken her moods for a long time to come. It would be some time before Katelynn would be ready to face such an enemy. She need not worry about this now, but she must prepare for what ultimately what would have to be done.

Richard noticed the change in his wife's mood and wondered what could have turned her mood so sour. He then looked out the door and saw Katelynn and Bryon walking to the hut. Could this have been the reason? Did Christine disapprove of this young man? He recalled a time when he was the stranger in a strange land and how he had fallen so deeply in love with Christine and she with him. How she had to leave her village to be with him. And of her father's anger at her for this, because he was an outlander not of their tribe. Could it be after all these years she was realizing what she had given up and did not want her daughter to have to leave her people to go to a land that was strange and far away. Or had Christine kept hidden all these years the sadness of leaving her village and as the years had passed regretted it more. He would have to wait and see but could only hope he had not disappointed Christine. And that she still loved him as she had all those years ago.

Richard remembered well the first time he had seen Christine it was as he lay on the floor of her father's hut. He could only remember what had happened moments before the rush of water came down the mountain and knocked him down hitting his head on a large rock. Christine and some of the women from her village were out gathering roots. They had heard him yell as he fell. They had all ran to see what had happened. Christine had told him the flash flood had already slowed to a trickle when they had found him. There must have been something up stream that had caught and caused a dam. And when it released this had caused the flash flood. It was late spring and the snow was melting fast further up in the mountains.

He had a bad cut on his head and had been unconscious for quite some time. Christine had taken care of him and as the days passed he began to fall in love with her. He was up and moving around after almost a week, but was still not well enough to travel. And when he was well enough to travel he had asked her to go with him. Christine had left her village and family to be with him. And now he was afraid their daughter was thinking of doing the same.

## Chapter Four

Lord Drasken sat at the table where he, his advisors and sorcerers gathered to plan in what manner they should use to bring Stephen down. So that all his people will see that Drasken is the Lord of all the land and his laws is what they will follow.

Drasken heard the guards talking to someone outside of the gates.

He went to the window and called out to the guard, “What is going on there?”

The guard answered and said, “There is a man outside the gate says he brings you news from the North of Stephen’s son Bryon.”

“Let him in you fool,” shouted Drasken. He turns back to the table and says, “Why would Bryon be traveling north? Would he be going there to gain support from the people of the north? We must do something about this right away.”

The guards escorted the young man into the chambers were Lord Drasken was. The man tells him all that Eric had said to him about the journey where they were going and what they were going after. He told Lord Drasken when Eric and Bryon would be leaving for the highlands to find the thistle mint that grows only in that area. And about how long of a ride it would be to get caught up with them. He told Drasken that Eric had said he would try and hold them up for one more day. To give him time to catch up to them.

Lord Drasken looked at the man and asked, “Are you one of these people?”

The man answered and said, “I am from further north of the village. The village where he is staying is under the rule of a man called Richard. The village is called Glen Roy.”

Lord Drasken thought for a moment longer and said to one of his guards, “Have my horse readied for a long journey. I will need two men to ride with me. Pick the best for tracking. I want them to understand we will be scouting the land and want to go as unnoticed as possible. I do not want Bryon or this Richard to have any idea why we are there.”

He turns back to the man who brought him this news and says, “My guard will take you to a room for rest and so that you may eat and have drink. You have came a long way, when you

have been fed and rested I will travel back to this place with you.” The man left the room with the guard.

Lord Drasken had a lot to think about now. He ordered the room cleared. He had to make a plan. He had to think of a way to go about the countryside unnoticed. He wanted to see what Bryon was up to. Was he really there to find this plant or was it just a cover for his true reasons. Were the lands to the north a place that maybe he should be interested in also? He would have to make this journey. And take care of any threat that could come from Bryon being there.

There was a knock at the door and two men walked in with the guard he had sent to get them. He told them why they were sent for and what they would be doing. He told them to make sure they were armed. But nothing that looked like they were more than merchants. He was coming up with a plan as he spoke and told them to go prepare to leave by morning light.

Drasken sat down at the table where they had all been not so long ago talking about what to do about Stephen and now he had to deal with his son as well. He thought back to when the people of this land had rose up against his father. How he had seen his father killed before his eyes. He had sworn then that he would avenge his father’s death. He would take back all that was taken from him.

As he sat there he wondered if the dreams he had been haunted by, was not of this place? A place he had never seen and a woman with hair as red as fire and eyes of emerald green. She was so beautiful in his dreams but he always had a feeling of foreboding when he awoke from these dreams. Was she the woman that had been foretold to his father all those years ago? Was she the one who would rule beside him? Or was she the woman that would defeat him. He was now anxious to set out and find this place that haunted his dreams. He walked over to the window and looked out. The sun was setting and the land looked so beautiful. The rays reflecting off the water that surround the castle looked as if they were dancing. He saw the beauty in this as he did in all of nature’s beauty but he was driven by revenge and anger. He hated the people for what they had done and now he Lord Charles Drasken would have his revenge.

Drasken began to get ready for the journey. He did not believe they would have any problems along the road but wanted to be prepared if there was. As he got ready to lie down for the night he kept thinking about the woman in his dreams. As he drifted off he began to dream of her. She was standing beside him over looking the valley that haunted his dreams as well. How beautiful she looked with the wind blowing her hair back. But he felt as though she was not happy being there as if she was being forced to stand there and look. He awoke and found he was so soaked in sweat. Why did this woman haunt his dreams? Who was she?

The next morning they were on the road before the first cock’s crow. There was not much talking between the parties. They all had other things on their mind. At mid day they stopped on the roadside and had a meal of dried venison and a couple of sweet cakes. Lord Drasken knew they would have to hunt for most of their food for they had only packed traveling food. A few pieces of dried venison and some sweet cakes was all they had brought with them. If this was to go as planned they needed to act the part and not raise any suspicion.

When he asked the man who had brought him the message from Eric why had Eric sent him to tell him of this.

The man replied, “My lord, I know not why. He only asked that I be very secretive about where I was going and why. He told me to show you to the path into the forest. And that you would have no trouble in following them.”

“How many men are they taking with them?” asked Drasken.

“Only Bryon and himself My Lord,” answered the man.

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