

A Surprise Announcement

Maran had been thinking, over the past day or so, about the opportunities that seemed to have been opening. He'd learned of a possible kee-ali-dahr site, one that could hold some very interesting relics, if it could be opened, and thought that perhaps it was time to get Denora out of the house and helping him recover artifacts. It's what he'd intended, a long time ago, before their family had kept him at home, raising five children of his own, and a nephew, and later helping with grandchildren. For all that Maran had more than a hundred and fifty years to his name, he was young enough, due to the powerful kee-ali-dahlri heritage. If he looked solidly in his thirties, it was because Denora insisted on making sure he ate heartily, and he'd gained a bit of a pouch as a result. But it wasn't something that would slow him down, not really.

Denora seemed to have a wistful smile on her face, a rather odd expression from someone who did not feel comfortable showing her feelings. She pattered around the kitchen, though Largo and Wystyl had largely taken the cooking duties away from her. That was with good reason, as her method of cooking tended to create very bland food. But, despite her not cooking much, she kept herself busy, and Maran was pleased to see that she seemed honestly happy, even if he didn't know why.

Settling himself on the bench near her, he spoke softly, hoping not to upset her concentration. "Denora, something's come up, a possible trip for us. There is reason to believe that there's a kee-ali-dahr ruin up in the Ljort, and we have reason to believe that there might be something dangerous there. It would be a fairly easy trip up there, about a tenday, perhaps, to get to the site. And Telin and Beauty would likely be going with us."

Denora looked up instantly, and, much to his surprise, Maran recognized fear in those eyes that met his. He hadn't seen her fearful in more than a century. He wasn't sure what could have caused that fear now, especially with the fact that the ruin was so close and that they would have aid down there.

"Maran," Denora managed to find words after a moment, "I cannot go, and I wish you to stay here."

Cannot go? And she's actually asking me to stay here? "Denora, what's wrong?" Maran couldn't make sense of this sudden response, a response that made little logic, even with what he'd learned of his wife's perspective. "Why don't you think you can go, and why don't you want me to?"

She stood up and moved over to him, then picked up his hands, resting them on her belly. He realized, almost without understanding, that she'd put on a touch of weight recently, something that smoothed out those sometimes severe lines of hers. But he didn't understand, not just yet.

"Herbs have failed. I know this was not your intention, but we await another child." Her words were simple, direct, and, well, shocking. It had been more than a century since their last child had been born. And now, well, she was saying that she was pregnant? That whatever it was that she did to keep herself from conceiving had failed her?

Maran rose in a rush, not letting his hands drop from her, but sliding around to wrap her closely in his arms. "Denora, that's not something I was expecting, but, well, we'll deal with it. I had no idea that you might conceive now, though, well, you are still much the same as you were when I married you,

all those years ago. I knew it wasn't impossible for you to conceive again, but I hadn't given it any thought in many years, not since before we found Largo again."

She stood there, in his arms, and he saw her look down. It was as if she were sorry for something. "Maran, I know you did not wish others, that you felt you had raised enough. I failed to keep the child from coming."

Maran brought a hand up to her head, pulling her against him tightly. "Denora, it doesn't matter what I felt, what I wanted. You're carrying another of my children, and I couldn't be more happy to be here, holding you in my arms. Especially with what I've seen with Rhiann and Caldor, I realize that I'm much happier with you, with your sense of permanence in an impermanent world, with how you are never anything less than what I need. Under the circumstances, I agree with what you said, and what you wanted. I'm not going to the Ljort, and neither are you. We'll be taking care of each other here, and I'll see what I can do to make things more comfortable for you. It's not like you don't deserve everything I can give you at all."

There were tears in her eyes, and he knew that he needed to make this better, in more than just words. He reached out and brought her chin to his face, and began to kiss her, with much more passion and love than their first kiss had had. But that first kiss had been intended only to transfer languages. Denora had decided, if not right then, then within only candlemarks afterward, that she wanted Maran, and that she would make sure that he chose her. It wasn't really a choice, when it came down to it. There was a life-debt involved, but it was something that Maran himself had not been happy with at first. Now, seeing her ask for his presence, his care, he knew that he couldn't have married a woman better for him than she was.

As he let go of her head, just kept her pressed up against him, he couldn't help but feel a warm cozy feeling from what he was doing. "Denora, I told you before, I do love you. I want you to be happy and safe, and, honestly, I don't mind that I'll be raising another child or two, for twins do run in our family. I want you to know that you aren't disappointing me, that you belong very much right here, in my arms, and that I've never wanted anyone like I do you. You complete me, even with that silence you show so often."

He heard the door open behind him, and the familiar clomp of Largo's boots. "Son, I think we may be in for a celebration," he commented, still not letting Denora go. "It seems that the Calasti family is growing still, and sometimes in unexpected ways."

There was a sharp breath indrawn from where Largo stood, "Mother's carrying? After all of these years?"

Maran nodded, smoothing down Denora's hair. "It's not like she's aged physically almost at all in those intervening years. I'm not surprised that she's fertile, more amused that it chose this time to happen. She's been using herbs, according to what she'd just said."

Largo moved around, laughing, "It looks like this is indeed cause for celebration. Though, I do have a suggestion for you, Father, something that might make things a little easier this time. I know why there weren't any children for a long time, between my birth and the twins'. You didn't want to force her where she wasn't comfortable, for bearing a child. Well, we may have a different solution to that. What with Wystyl living here with us. And I'm usually at hand, if she needs help. It would be a bit

awkward, but I doubt Mother would need that help, and she could bear here at home, where she feels safer.”

Maran stopped, letting Denora go, then contemplated the situation a moment. “You’re right. Wystyl is one of Jirel’s priestesses, and has attended many births over the years. She’s quite capable of taking care of your mother when it comes time. And, well, even if you aren’t helping directly, you might be needed to run for help, if there are troubles. It wouldn’t be that much different from a temple birth, except, well, where her feelings are concerned. Denora, would that please you? To give birth here, where you originally bore Uhbara?”

There was a surprised look on Denora’s face, and then Maran thought he detected a trace of tears. That meant something. He stood, looking at her, with a warm smile on his face, until she answered. “It would be more comfortable here.”

Maran nodded. “Then that’s what we’ll do. It does make sense that Wystyl tend you. I think she’d be more than happy to help with that. And, Denora dear, I’m not unhappy, not at all. It was a surprise, but certainly not unwelcome.”

As Largo moved past him, Maran realized that this was what he’d always liked most, times with his family, feeling like his actions had purpose. Perhaps that was rather like Caldor was, preferring to have someone to care for, someone to protect. Maran hadn’t realized that this was what he wanted, but, well, it fit well. While it meant he wouldn’t be adventuring anytime soon, it meant that he would be able to open his heart to yet another child or children, and find the peace he’d had raising the ones he did have. And this time, well, maybe he’d have both the confidence and sense to avoid the mistakes that had plagued his previous attempts at parenting.