

Unexpected Trio

Maran hadn't been to town in three days, largely because Denora seemed so large, so ungainly, that it really was only a matter of days, maybe only candlemarks now, before she gave birth. Before, he would have already had her at the Jirellian Temple, where a host of priestesses could tend her in the most difficult times. She seemed bigger, more awkward, than she'd seemed with Caldor, or even with Hela and Iera. While Wystyl's magic only detected one life within his wife, Maran knew that there was still a chance for more. Not even Jirellian healers could be right the entire time, and Wystyl, having borne three of her own, said that Denora was likely going to surprise them, somehow.

Largo had kept up the work on the farm, and, consequently, there was no lack of food or milk during those days that Maran stayed home. If anything, Maran was sent out into the field with their son, just to keep him from fretting Denora too greatly, while she was at her most vulnerable. And she was certainly that. Almost the only thing that had eased Maran's mind at all in this crucial final moon, was the fact that he'd been told, by both his father and his twin, that there was now absolutely no danger from Redel, the assassin that the kri'l'dga had sent after Maskar and Virea. No, that man, his twin's illegitimate son, now bore a soulsword, and had proven his dedication to his new calling.

There was a cry, dual-toned, which meant that it was clearly Denora's, since Wystyl did not naturally make those sounds. She had gained some of Largo's gifts, but her nature superseded them, in some ways. That was Denora's cry, and it meant that the time had come. Maran only stopped at the rain-barrel outside long enough to wash his hands off before entering the house, knowing that Largo would be waiting outside, but near enough to hear instructions if there was difficulty with this birth.

Maran moved to help Denora up, noting that her usually sallow coloration had gone a bit pale. But Denora wanted to stand, because it was easier for her, in the long-run. And that meant that Maran would be holding her, helping her to keep position while things happened. With one hand, he brushed her damp blonde hair from her face and told her to lean against him, even as Wystyl helped Denora tie up her skirts. A bucket of water lay nearby, probably already warmed. If it wasn't, then Wystyl would be able to toss a crystal into it, and Maran could heat it with a few notes. It was just as fast as any other kind of magic, and easier on him, overall.

"Denora, try to relax," he crooned, his arms around her, but where they would not press in on her bulging belly. This was the part that could, in fact, take candlemarks, though perhaps with Wystyl's familiarity with Jirellian magics, and Denora's surprising tolerance of the elvara who their son had wed, they might be able to get it done sooner. He knew that it had happened suddenly with Uhbara, but none of the other births were quite that easy.

Wystyl was on her knees, probing with her hands in places that Maran couldn't see. Which was just as well. He knew from experience that he really did not want to see what was going on. Feeling the pain and suffering she was going through was enough as is. He didn't need to see the blood and fluids, or know how badly it might tear for Denora to deliver his child.

Denora pressed against him, taking heaving breaths. She seemed to hear him, but, then again, they'd known each other so long that that wasn't much of a surprise. She knew that he wouldn't leave her, not in this state. He may not have been present at the birth of their eldest, but it had largely been because neither of them had anticipated when it would be. He hadn't missed a one since.

“Denora, Mother,” Wystyl spoke softly, “Brace thyself, the child comes quickly, and we do not want thee to fall as it does.” Denora didn’t seem to respond, but Maran shifted his weight so that he could keep her standing. Even with her as ungainly as she was, he was more than strong enough to carry her, if he’d needed to. He just hoped that the furthest he would need to would be to their bed afterward, where she would recover.

Denora cried out, and Maran could feel something move. “Just a little bit longer, dear,” he whispered, helping to steady her. “You’re strong enough to do this. I promise you that.”

Wystyl moved forward, and seemed to catch something. But then she was calling to Largo. Her words didn’t seem to make sense to Maran, until his son was rushing inside. They had been calls for the Earthmother’s gift. There was something wrong with the child.

Wystyl handed the small form to Largo, who seemed to be almost glowing with greenish light, but Wystyl did not back up and aid him. Instead, she reached below, again. So, Maran’s guess was right, with how big Denora had seemed. There was yet another child in her. He barely whispered to his wife to keep moving, to keep pushing. “Largo’s doing what he can for the child, but there is another.”

Wystyl shook her head, looking up, “There are two others, and one of those is weak, like the one Largo nurtures. If we can save them, we will, but this will be difficult. It is not often that so many are born naturally. Magics can do it, sometimes, but not often.”

Two others! There had been three children in Denora, and two much weaker than the third. That would be a miracle indeed, if they all survived. Even with Denora’s powerful gifts, it might be too much for her to move around for days afterward, and she’d have difficulty with getting milk for all three. It made him all the more glad that they had Wystyl there. She could help, in many ways.

There was a cry, this one not Denora’s, but that of an infant. Either Largo had done something powerful, and saved the one he held, or the second was down, but Maran was himself too afraid to look. All his hopes and his strength he fed into Denora, trying to give her anything she might need to get these children born. “Denora, keep up the strength. It’s going to be difficult, but you can do it. You can get through this.”

Wystyl set something down, wrapped in a bloody blanket. So there was only one left. As Denora’s legs began to buckle, Maran braced her tighter, bringing one hand down to help her continue pushing. It was the best thing he could think to do. “Just a little longer, dear. You have already borne two of the three. I imagine we’re going to be rather busy for a while, with more than we expected.”

Then he felt the stomach slide, loosening with the removal of the load it bore. He held onto her, willing whatever strength he had back into her, to give her the ability to hold on. “It’s just the afterbirth now, Denora. Keep breathing. You’ll be able to rest soon.”

Largo was on his knees, his hands on one of the other babies. He wasn’t looking at his mother, just trying to keep feeding energy into his youngest siblings. But, after a moment, he glanced at his father. “Very gently, lift her and take her to bed. I don’t trust her to be able to walk that far. Get her resting. We’ll see what we can do about the children.”

Maran didn't hesitate. He shifted his weight just a bit, and got an arm under Denora's legs, then backed out from where he'd been standing, doing his best to watch the floor so that he didn't trip over anything. Right now, with so many fragile bodies present, that would be a danger.

He pushed the door open without much effort, and laid her on top of their bed, not even pulling away the covers. For now, that was less important. He let her head rest on the pillow, and then, ever so gently, untied the knots that had held her skirt up. He didn't look below it, only lowered it to conceal her, and then moved up to kiss Denora gently upon the forehead.

"The children," Denora managed, clearly not only exhausted, but still very much in pain.

"Largo and Wystyl are doing what they can. They'll be brought in once they are sure that they're strong enough to survive. You know," he chuckled softly, "you are still impressive. Three children in one birth. Even if we lose one, or even two, I can handle that. Life doesn't always work out. But I think your strength will be in them, as well. You're a survivor, and I bet your children are too."

He stayed with her. If Wystyl and Largo needed him, they would call him. Right now, Maran knew that his first duty was to his wife. Against all odds, she'd been carrying a trio of children, and had delivered them in the Steppe way, standing up. They would all be named by Wystyl, or at least all of the ones that survived. That also was Steppe tradition. Maran was breaking that, to an extent, by showing his concern for Denora. He guessed that she agreed with that, because she didn't argue with him, and seemed to smile a bit as she lapsed off into exhaustion. She had earned that exhaustion.

It was maybe a half-candlemark before the door to the room opened, and Wystyl and Largo came in, carrying blanket-wrapped bundles. "They live, all of them, though they will need extra care for a time. And Mother will be pleased," Wystyl spoke softly, "there are two sons, though one weaker than another. The third is a daughter."

Denora's eyes opened, and Maran could see the light in them. "Well, Dear," he commented quietly, "You have succeeded in more than you thought. Are you strong enough to hold them, one at a time? I'm sure that Wystyl has some plan on how to make sure that there is enough milk for all."

Wystyl moved over, offering the bundle she carried to her mother-in-law. "This is Callum, and he is the strongest of your boys." Largo moved to stand beside his father, even as Denora held the small form up to her chest. Maran took a moment to rearrange the pillows so that she could hold him properly and nurse, and then took the first of the bundles that his son held. "And this is?"

Wystyl took a look at the tiny head, as if observing for marks. "That is thy daughter, Miana. Thy other son Largo still holds, Deskal. I would like to have a proper healer called, for there is still danger here. I would have Denora watched, by someone who knows healing better than I do, and see if any more can be done to strengthen the smallest, Miana and Deskal." Maran nodded, and carefully accepted his other son into his arms.

"Largo, if you could go. I'll stay here with Denora, because I don't think she will want me to leave. I think Denora will accept a healer, though it may wound her pride a little. Between us, your mother, Wystyl, and myself should be able to keep these young ones alive long enough for you to get someone from the Risen One's temple."

Maran looked down at Denora, getting Callum to suckle, and couldn't help but feel extreme pride in her, even as their oldest son went to get a proper healer. But he'd done the hard part, keeping the children alive this long, when they had seemed so faint and weak when they were born. Largo was a wonder, and Maran knew he could trust him.

Wystyl moved to gently lift the skirt again, this time with a rag and some warm water, sponging the blood away from where it lay drying. Maran wouldn't have thought of that, didn't think of it, when he'd had the opportunity. For this, he was grateful to his son's wife. For this, and for the fact that she'd helped the trio to continue life.

Denora had really outdone herself, this time, Maran mused. She had three children, though none of them as big or healthy as their older siblings had been. But food, rest, and healing could bring them through, he was certain. "You know," he commented quietly, "I do love you, Denora, even without these miracles you bring me. And I'll continue to love you, for centuries to come."

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