

# **Breeding an Army**

**Faye Valentine**

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Staring up at the night sky, her mind torn between two worlds, Celeste thought about what she would tell her mother when she finally returned to earth. It all happened so quickly she could hardly believe twenty years had passed and her eldest daughter was as old as she was when she first donned the magical ring they bore her to the fantastical world of Etheria.

*“So, how does this work?”* She asked the three rings on her right hand. *“How do I get back to earth from here? Will I still look like a nymph when I get back or will I revert to human form? Will I still have my magic?”*

*“As long as you wear the three of us you will retain all of the magic you’ve learned on this world,”* Ilyana – the First Sister answered. *“And you will still look like you do now unless you change your appearance with magic.”*

*“Bear in mind that if you remove one of us you’ll grow sick and eventually die as nymphs are not native to your world,”* Sarya – the Second Sister added.

*“To get back to earth simply think of your universe. Focus in on your galaxy and the solar system within it. See yourself moving through the vastness of space between planets until you see your earth. As you draw closer think of the continent, city and neighborhood and then see yourself standing in your house,”* Aravae – the Fifth Sister explained. *“If you do it correctly you’ll arrive at the exact spot and time you first left from.”*

*“But know that time here on Etheria will continue to pass,”* Sarya continued. *“If you spend a day, week, month or year on earth, the equivalent amount of time will pass here.”*

*“Can I bring someone back with me?”*

*“The only way to do that is to remove one of us,”* Aravae answered. *“If you act quickly you can do it without growing too sick, but know that in order to remain on Etheria they must keep whichever one of us you give them.”*

*“That doesn’t make any sense at all. My grandmother is here and she no longer possesses one of the rings.”*

*“Your grandmother and a few others are a special case. She was brought here by the power of the goddesses only after she died,”* Ilyana explained. *“The only way for them to remain without the rings is for the goddesses to grant them the same favor, or for them to go through the ritual and become nymph like you.”*

*“I see. I need to talk to my wife and daughters and then I’ll be ready.”*

*“There’s no hurry, Celeste,”* Aravae said. *“Remember, you will return to the exact moment you left so it’ll be as if no time at all has passed for them.”*

*“How is that possible? Are you telling me that the entire universe just stops because I’m not there?”*

*“No, time passes normally, but you will always return to the point you left when returning home.”*

*“So, twenty years have passed on earth? I’ve been gone for two decades and everyone thinks I’m dead because they have no idea I’ve been in another universe?”*

*“But that won’t be the case when you go home.”*

*“This is a freaking nightmare. Why didn’t you tell me this before? Why didn’t my grandmother? What right do I have of going back and erasing the last twenty years of everyone’s life as if none of it mattered? Who knows what impact my return would have on history?”*

*“I know,”* Sarya answered. *“As the Sister of wisdom and knowledge I know all there is, was and ever will be across all of the cosmos and while your existence is paramount to the*

*continued existence of Etheria, you would have had no meaningful impact had you spent the entirety of your life on earth. And if you go home now, erase everything everyone has done these last twenty years it would only have minimal effect on those you love and care about.”*

*“Are you saying they don’t miss me? They don’t care that I’m dead?”*

*“No, that’s not what I’m saying at all. I’m saying there will be little to no effect on their lives should you go home.”*

*“Geeze, way to make a nymph feel important.”*

*“You are incredibly important, Celeste. Probably the single most important being to ever grace our oppressed planet. I cannot divulge too much, but what I can say is that there’s a darkness coming the likes of which this world hasn’t seen in eons and you’re the only one that can stop it.”*

*“Why? You know, I’ve never liked that sort of crap in movies and books. Like the other seven billion people have no choice but to stand there and do nothing while their lives and world are destroyed around them. But I’ll bite. Go on, what makes me so damn important I’m the only one capable of ending this darkness?”*

*“I cannot tell you the future, but I can say that it has to do with your unique ability to use all five druid orders. Trust me when I say no one has ever been, or ever will be born again with the abilities you possess so if you fail this would will be plunged into a chaos it will never recover from.”*

*“So, no pressure then? When is all of this going to happen?”*

*“I cannot say.”*

*“Cannot, or won’t?”*

*“Both. I will divulge what I can when it is prudent to do so and you’re just going to have to live with that.”*

Getting up off the ground, Celeste stretched her arms out to the sides and then over her head, arching her back as she cracked her neck. Without another word to the three magical rings, she cast a spell of relocation and was instantly transported from the small clearing deep in the Ebon Weald and into the living room of her home in the Sanguine Grove to the surprise of her wife, three daughters and the powerful artifacts she wore on her fingers.

“WHOA! Where did you come from?” Daleira – her eldest, asked. “Were you invisible or something?”

“That’s an excellent question,” Aravae said in Celeste’s mind. “How is it possible for you to teleport inside of the protective field?”

*“You tell me. I just thought of home when I cast the incantation and here I am.”*

*“The goddesses have rendered all relocation magics unable to penetrate the field. The only possible way is if they’ve granted you some sort of special access.”*

*“Mom? Are you in there?”*

“Hmm? Oh, sorry, I was just thinking. Sure, I was invisible. Let’s go with that. I’m glad you’re all here. I’ve decided that it’s time for me to return to earth for...”

“You’re leaving us?” her thirteen year old daughter Marina asked as her bright pink eyes went wide as tears formed in the corners.

“What? No, of course not. I would never, ever leave any of you, but I had a life on another planet once and now that I possess the power to return I need to go back and settle my affairs there once and for all so that I am not longer divided between worlds.”

“How long will you be gone, salhane?” Halia asked.

“I honestly don’t know. It all depends on how everyone takes the news that they’ll never see me again.”

“Wait, you’re going to give up your life there for the one you have here?” Daleira asked. “If you can travel between universes then why would you do that?”

“I have no choice. Had I remained human I could have lived on both worlds, but I am nymph now and our kind cannot survive on earth for long without very special and powerful magics that only exist here.”

“I’m sorry,” Halia apologized. “You became nymph because of me and now...”

“I’m the happiest nymph to ever have lived,” Celeste cut her salhane off. “I did it to spend the rest of my life with the woman I love and I do not regret it for a second. I have a beautiful wife, five amazing daughters and a life I wouldn’t change for anything. What more could a woman ask for?”

“When are you leaving?”

“As soon as possible.” Turning to her eldest daughter, Celeste hook her by the hand. “I am trusting you to keep everyone safe while I’m gone. Can you do that for me?”

“Of course, mom.”

“Thank you. I’m going now. I promise to return as quickly as I can, but it might be a few weeks. Until then stay safe and don’t leave the Grove for anything. That goes for all of you.”