

Druids of Etheria

Faye Valentine

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The story so far...

After the death of her grams, Celeste inherits a house, a small fortune, some fanciful costumes and the contents of a safety deposit box. Following her grandmother's wishes, she waited until arriving at her new home to open the intricately carved box she removed from the bank. Inside, she found an ancient tome and a letter from her grandmother telling her the truth of Etheria – a fantastical world and center of every story she heard as a child.

After dressing in her favorite costume and securing a small pouch of coins to her belt, Celeste donned the ring contained in a compartment of the ancient tome and, after reciting the incantation, found herself travelling to another dimension...another world. When she came to her senses she realized she was on Etheria and the ring she had been bequeathed was talking to her, granting her a small bit of power.

With her knowledge of Etheria in hand, Celeste set out to find the Tower of Argus in the Ebon Weald – the one location her grandmother said she could find help. But with no idea where exactly she was, she had no choice but to follow the river until she found something recognizable. And thus her journey into a world of fantasy began. But all was not unicorns and rainbows. While her grandmother told stories of heroes sacrificing all for the good of the many, she failed to mention the things of nightmare lurking around every corner.

After spending a month being trained as a sex slave by a group of men known as the Gatherers, and thanks to the magical ring she now wore Celeste put on an awesome display of magical might that sent the slavers running – the walls of the Calbourne Stronghold crumbling around them. Having saved a young Nymph named Halia from certain death, they gathered what supplies they could and set out for the Ebon Weald and answers.

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Pregnant with a bastard child, Celeste enters the Fountain of Life with her salhane Halia and is transformed into a nymph – a creature of nature and magic. No longer possessing the power to return to earth, she vows to rid Etheria of the Gatherers if it's the last thing she does. But first, she has to give birth, train with the druids and learn all she can about the strange, harsh new world she now calls home all while running Etheria's first ever sex toy shop and protecting the nymphs she's come to care a great deal about.

Celeste lay in a small forest clearing, cuddled next to her salhane Halia. Slowly caressing her swollen belly, she stared up at the night sky and wondered what lay ahead when she finally met the druids for training. It had been sixteen long months since her ordeal with the Gatherers and her forced impregnation and she still had four to go before her daughter was born. “Back on earth women carry their babies for only nine months,” she said, turning to look into Halia’s lavender eyes. Twenty months is insane.”

“It’s the same for humans here. But you’re no longer human, my love. You’re nymph now and that means carrying your young for twenty months. Don’t worry, you’ll get used to it eventually.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning it’ll become easier the more children you have.”

“More? I didn’t ask for this one,” Celeste said with cold bitterness.”

“Neither of us did,” Halia said, rubbing her own belly. “But the Goddesses have bestowed upon us the greatest gift possible and we should be thankful.”

“I’m sorry. You’re right, having a child is a great gift. Back on earth I would have waited a few more years, but I’ve always wanted at least two or three. I would have met and fallen in love with a man, gotten married and lived happily ever after.” Sighing, Celeste looked down at her belly. “This is a child conceived of brutality and rape, but you have my vow that will never diminish my love for her. I just wish I was strong enough at the time to prevent what those monsters did to us.”

“It’s all in the past now and only bad things can come of constantly thinking about it,” Halia said as she gently kissed her lover’s belly. “How soon after giving birth will you leave for the druids?”

“I guess that all depends on how long the training will take.”

“Druid training is not an easy path, the Fifth Sister, Aravae said in Celeste’s mind. “It will take months to learn even the most basic of incantations and years to master them. I’m afraid once you begin you will not be seeing your daughter until she’s a grown woman.”

“That’s unacceptable. I cannot abandon my only child like that, never knowing what became of her mother. If what you say is true then I will not be trained by the druids.”

“But you must,” the Second Sister, Sarya cut in. “You took a vow that must be fulfilled above all else.”

“I have not forgotten my vow. But I will never walk away from my responsibilities as a mother.”

“You would put one child above the needs of millions?”

“Without hesitation. And if you think for a second that you can persuade me otherwise then you’re not worthy to be worn on my finger.”

“I am Sarya, Second Sister and wisest of them all. I see what was, what is, and all that ever will be and I tell you this now. Had you abandoned your child in the search of power you would have brought shame upon yourself and ruin upon the very ones you love. You truly are worthy to possess my wisdom.”

“Um, okay, care to explain what just happened?”

“It was a test,” Aravae answered. “And you have passed. A child is the most precious of gifts and to walk away from one no matter the reason is a sign of heartlessness that can never be

forgiven. You will remain here in the Ebon Weald until she is old enough to understand what it is you are destined to do. Your vow can wait."

"But what of the Gatherers? Emperor Elion? Every day I do nothing is another day more women are kidnapped. Tortured. Turned into sex slaves to be sold at market like pieces of meat. How can I be expected to sit idly by and do nothing for the next ten or twenty years?"

"So you would walk away from motherhood?"

"That's not what I'm saying at all. But there has to be something else I can do that will bring me home every night."

"You do not possess relocation magic powerful enough for that," Sarya said. "No, you will remain in the Weald and under the protection of the Goddesses. You will continue selling your toys and aiding your fellow nymphs until your daughter comes of age. I have foreseen it as the only possible future."

"Celeste? Celeste?" Halia said, her voice growing more concerned by the second. "Are you in there? Hello? Anyone home?"

"Hmm? What?" Celeste said, looking up at her lover's hand waving in front of her face.

"What happened? You just sort of blanked out there for a few minutes. Is everything alright?"

"Yeah, I'm...I'm okay. Sorry, I must have been really deep in thought. I've decided I'll remain here with you and Silvia until she is of age. I want a life with my salhane and my daughter before I go off saving the world."

"And what should happen if you become with child again in the process? As you well know, nymphs are incredibly sexual and fertile creatures and you cannot resist the call to motherhood forever."

"I guess it makes sense now why I see so many with child."

"Nymphs are constantly ovulating, my love. All it takes is for one male, one time, for the process to begin. And as soon as the child is born we are ready. It is how we are able to maintain our population size when so many are taken."

"So, you're saying that I can become pregnant again immediately after giving birth?"

"Correct."

"And all it takes is one man finishing off inside of me once to do it?"

"Right again."

"So then I was impregnated on the second night of my arrival when the Gatherers raped me at the river bank?"

"Yes."

"Then I am not sixteen months pregnant, Halia. I'm seventeen. Is there anything in this world to prevent pregnancy?"

"Why would you want to do that?" Halia asked, her face a mask of shocked disbelief.

"I'm going to spend my considerable life fighting to make this a better world. I cannot stop for twenty years at a time while giving birth and raising another child. I need a way to suppress my sexual urges."

"I know of no such things. No nymph has ever even considered it. We are creatures of magic and sex, my love. And to go without for too long will have dire consequences."

"What your salhane says is true, Aravae said. "You can no more give up sex than you can breathing. To do so will lead to your slow, agonizing death. And no, the use of your sex toys will not prolong the inevitable for long. You need to mate with a man at least once a year or you will become sick. And the longer you go, the sicker you will become."

"It would've been nice to have all of this explained to me before I became a nymph."

"Would it have changed your mind?"

"No, but it would have been nice to fully understand what it was I was getting myself into. I guess that explains why the nymphs constantly risked their lives to leave the Ebon Weald for mating. Good thing I thought of those room."

"Good thing indeed, Sarya agreed. "Your ingenuity saved countless lives and thanks to you we may even see a positive population growth for the first time in nearly a century."

"I've been a nymph for seventeen months and I still have so much to learn," Celeste sighed. "Why don't you tell me everything about our people? I need to know every nuance no matter how insignificant you may think it is."

"Will you tell me why you keep blanking out from time to time?" Halia asked. "Don't give me that look. You do it all the time and it's not daydreaming. What's going on with you, my love?"

"You may tell her," Sarya said.

"I thought it was unwise to tell others about you?"

"Normally yes, but your Salhane can be trusted with the truth. She will keep our secret for as long as she can."

"For as long as she can? Why does that sound like she's going to tell someone eventually?"

"Because she will. But the outcome is far preferable to what will happen if you never tell her at all. Now is the time, Celeste of the Ebon Weald. Tell your Salhane of whom you possess."

"THERE! You just did it again. Please tell me what's wrong. Should I fetch the healers to examine you?"

"No. Honestly, my love, I am in perfect health." Sitting up, Celeste showed Halia her right hand. "These are no mere trinkets, my love. I was advised to never tell a soul about them, but that has been amended slightly. Have you ever heard the tale of the Seven Sisters?"

"Of course. It's a favorite bedtime tale mothers tell their...BY THE GODDESSES! Are you saying...two of them? How?"

"The first, or in this case fifth – a Sister names Aravae, I inherited from my grams and it is what brought me to this world. And I took Sarya, the Second Sister, from a Gatherers' finger the night I rescued you and the others when the town was raided. I am trusting you with this secret, my love. You can never mention it to anyone for as long as you live."

"You have my word I will never speak of it to anyone. WOW! I can't believe you have two of the Sisters. One is miraculous enough, but two? That's almost unheard of."

"Almost? Has there been another who had two of them?"

"Have you never heard the story of Cnassea and the Six Sisters?"

"No, I don't think grams ever told me that one before."

"It doesn't surprise me. Not being from this world, she may not have known it herself. Cnassea was a Zrigg scribe and some would say the leading authority on the Seven Sisters. She was a wise and caring woman and unlike others of her kind, she could tolerate the sun without ill-effect. Legend goes, Cnassea scoured all of Etheria looking for any and all traces of the Sisters, but could only ever find two. There are differing opinions on which two, but that's not really important to the story."

"When it was discovered the Elder Goddesses scattered the Sisters across the multiverse, Cnassea never lost her determination to be the first to possess them all. Learning the ways of magic from the Warlock Kyrene..."

“Him I’ve heard of. Grams said he was a cruel, heartless tyrant who terrorized the five kingdoms for nearly a millennia before great heroes finally ended his life.”

“That’s the one. Kyrene taught Cnassea how to harness the power of the Wellspring – to control the very elements themselves, but not without a price. The horrible things she did is a story in and of itself which I will not go into here. Suffice it to say, she gained the ability to travel the multiverse and I cannot name a single person who was sad to see her go. As legend has it, however, she returned nearly five centuries later wearing six of the Seven Sisters. It is said she destroyed the fifth for she did not agree with her ways, but if you’re wearing her now then that part of the tale must be false.”

“Nothing can destroy the Seven Sisters, Aravae said. “I know of whom your salhane speaks and Cnassea cast me away not because we did not get along, but because of who and what I am.”

“And that would be?”

“I am the cornerstone that binds the Seven together. I am rationality personified. I also hold another secret, one which she discovered before I was able to implement it.”

“And that would be?”

“I am forbidden from ever speaking of it. And before you seek to ask Sarya she does not know. In fact, none of my fellow Sisters know my true purpose and we’ll leave it at that.”

“Sorry about that,” Celeste said. “According to Aravae, Cnassea discovered some deep, dark secret about her that made her cast the ring away. That’s why she only ever wore six of them. And no, she did not tell me what that secret was. So, how did the story end?”

“It was believed that during her travels to other worlds, Cnassea somehow managed to absorb all the power of the Wellspring. And while this seems outlandish, when she returned to Etheria no warlock was capable of using magic. She ruled the entire world, crushing the people under an iron fist that makes Emperor Elion look childish in comparison. But eventually, a group of heroes rose up against her and after a long, blood war she fell. And getting back to the warlocks, upon her death, their magic returned. As for the Six Sisters, they were once again scattered throughout the multiverse.”

“That’s an incredibly abbreviated version of history,” Sarya said “but it’s mostly what happened.”

“So, was it wearing six of you that drove her mad with power, or something else?”

“No, the warlock Kyrene turned her into the monster she became. She was strong of will – stronger than any we have ever seen before and, unfortunately, without Aravae there to bind us together we were powerless to stop her.”