

NORTH
EMBLEM

CHERRY SENIEL

North Emblem

(Book One of the Relic Series)

A Novel

By

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North Emblem

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DEDICATION

For my family and friends who never stop believing in me. You are my life vest.

For my son, Christian.

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PROLOGUE

Murdo and Ingrid

Twenty years before.

Murdo winced in pain. Blood spilled from his wrist as he struggled to free himself from the chain locked in his arms and feet. But he can't move an inch. It was useless. They secured a no-escape capture. He gritted his teeth to stay awake—whipped by a thick branch of a tree, his legs were jelly. But he forced to support him and stand straight. He looked into the eyes of the people who betrayed him. The Chief of the Aplon tribe cannot love a Samardian. The Shaman forbids their union. But he can never dictate his heart. He loves Ingrid and his love remains no matter what. And the child in her womb—the most precious gift he never imagined he can have. He doesn't care if it will cost his life, but Ingrid will deliver his child. And she will raise and nurture him. He would make it in this world. His mother will teach him the right values of being a good leader. The tribe will lament the day of his birth. She must hide him and take him to another place where there's no judgment, no pain.

"My Ingrid, how can the world be so cruel to us and to our love?" He whispered, looking straight to where she stood—hands bounded, writhing in pain.

Eagle-eyed Chief—his people called him by that name. At that moment, his ability was being taken away from him by the works of the Shamans. But his vision was clear enough to trace the tears that run through her cheeks. It pierced his heart. His whole world shattered seeing her that way—hands bounded, resting them on her growing belly to protect their child. But he must not submit himself to total defeat—some intervention can summon hope. She will make it and his son. He will have to make it happen. And he left his faith to Wendaka, his most trusted friend—they grew up together in the village. She promised him their escape. He believed her words. There's nothing he can do but to wait. And Wendaka will fulfill that promise—he hoped she won't fail him.

He heard the growing laughter of his people. The warriors mocked him except Menewa, his most loyal warrior. Brave and fearless, but at that moment, she cried in silence and rested her hand on her left chest while she bowed her head—that's how they showed respect to the leader of the tribe. But another warrior has beaten her hard, collapsing her body to the ground. When they learned that he lost his abilities, they disregarded him. His warriors can't come near him. Elefar, his uncle, made it clear by setting an example. He executed a warrior in front of them whose only crime was serving his chief a cup of water. But how can they do this to their leader—the one who stood up for them and ensured their safety at all times? Loving Ingrid lost his ability to command the spirit and invoke the forces of elemental. But it wasn't taken naturally. The Shamans took it away from him by force. And they dishonored him—he was useless. He is the son of his father and mother—their blood runs through his veins. Being the leader of the tribe was his birthright. There was no point to justify. Hatred stained their hearts.

He spat the blood from the open wound of his lower lip. The taste of rusting iron reminded him that the pain was real and not a dream. He condemned his people's judgment. Do they think he will still be the same after killing Ingrid and his unborn son? He would hate his roots. Better to end his life—it will give him peace. They may have stripped off everything he owns, but he won't kneel to his uncle—the traitor of their tribe. True, the spirit of the forest took hold on him

from the day of his birth, it was his destiny to fall in love with a Samardian and bear a child with her—he has a strong hold on that. But Elefar poisoned the minds of his people. He planted a fear of revenge from the spirit. Follow or die—that was the only options. In his case, Ingrid and her unborn must die right before his eyes. They will cut her stomach open to kill the child inside her and take the mother's life in the process—an inhuman judgment. But the majority agreed. They passed on the verdict. No chance for a tribunal argument. She needs to die. For the first time, the fear of death shattered his soul. He was always a fearless leader, calculating his advance to defeat the enemy. But at that moment, it was the opposite of what they think about him—he doesn't know what to believe anymore. Was he still the same man as before or a man with a soul broken? He sunk to his knees and felt the roughness of the ground. He looked up, hoping for spirit's intervention.

And he can't help it. In his agony and rage, he screamed to the sky. He defied his duty and followed his heart, but it doesn't mean that he deserted his people. But like the rest of them, he is a human who longed for freedom to choose what to do in his life, including choosing his bride. There would be no need to hide and no need to pretend. His duty deprived Ingrid and his son with what they've deserved. But gossips spread like a hawk's wing in the village. The next morning he woke up—numb like a vegetable. They betrayed him. That wine he drank from the night before has relieved his abilities. It was painstakingly maneuvered. The Shamans took over—too eager to pass their judgment. It was all from Elefar's command. He cried in vain, asking not to implicate Ingrid. She was innocent. But they pretended to hear nothing about his plea. Instead, they let the people decide their fate. But their mind were brainwashed. They have agreed to one judgment—Ingrid's death. His unborn son included. He clenched his fist and cried his pain.

Ingrid looked into the eyes of the people who judged them without remorse. Hands chained, she stood with pride and dignity intact. There's nothing to be ashamed of loving the Chief. Just because she was a Samardian, she must defy what her heart beats. She is also a human who fell in love with a man who captured her soul. But to them, it was an irrevocable crime punishable by death. Murdo belonged to the spirit—that's what the tribe members believed in. They wanted for a leader with power and control. Now it's gone. The spirit took it from his body—Elefar claimed it openly. And it was because of her. They can't have an ordinary man for a leader. Murdo must take it back from the spirits. Her death was the key.

Many Samardians leave their land because of their unique abilities—threatened by many who don't want them to be in their village. Ingrid was one of them—ousted from her own land when she was seven. That was when she absorbed the ability of their Shaman. She reasoned it was an accident, but they didn't believe her. Her father secured her way out from the village and sent her to Aplon. Since then, Murdo's father has raised her like his own. People in the tribe accepted her and love her like their own kind. The spirits blessed her. Murdo loved her more than a sister. And she shared the same feeling. They were soulmates. She shouldn't let this happen to him. If they want to punish them for what they did, it should be her—not her child and not the man she loves.

She lowered her gaze, trying to hide her despair. His pain pierced her heart, but she doesn't want him to worry. Death won't stop her from loving him. But reality bites hard—the child in her womb will die with her. Mankind's cruelty can be immeasurable. How could they hurt an innocent soul? Tears fell from her eyes. Her lips tasted the bitterness of her child's fate. No

amount of comfort can mend the feelings of a mother. The life of her son was in the critical situation. She will never hear his first cry. Tired of her all night crying, she closed her eyes and pray to the spirits. She was heavily pregnant. It was a matter of days to give birth.

Oh Spirits, please have mercy. Spare the life of my child.

"Elijah, I won't let you go until my last breath," she whispered, massaging her tummy by her chained hands.

She knew it was a boy who will carry the name of his father and will be the heir to rule Aplon—the tribe that dwells in the hidden valley of the north. They were far from the knowledge of the modern world—kept hidden for many years to protect their culture and beliefs. They were the direct descendants of the early tribes.

Tears welled in her eyes as she looked at him, struggling to set himself free so he can defend her and their son.

"It's okay." She assured him. "I love you until death..." If death was the only way to continue her love for him, then she was ready to face her fate. But she begged for the life of her son—innocent and pure. She knew Murdo has a plan, but hope was leaving her. There was no escape from the wrath of their judgment. But Murdo insisted that there's still hope. He ordered Wendaka in secret to make a potion using the forbidden transcripts of Bylo, a tribe ousted from their land decades ago because of their absurd practices and beliefs. She stored it inside two small vials—one for him and one for Ingrid. She gave it to them earlier when guards allowed her to bring foods and water to their cells. But if the potion can set them free why they must drink it before execution? Why can't they drink right then the moment they got it? It wasn't right. It brewed her suspicion.

But Murdo was so desperate. He tried everything to secure their escape. For a father—who doesn't? Every father seeks protection for his children—to secure their safety. But the pain of the mother for her child was boundless—nothing compares.

"Wendaka, I hope what you've told us was true," she whispered, looking straight at Wendaka's direction.

The potion inside the vial will seek redemption. Murdo will take back all of his abilities, but it will be a matter of a few hours, perhaps just enough time to secure their escape. But it will happen if Ingrid will also drink it, allowing her vulnerability, surrendering whatever unfathomable abilities she bears. But what about the life growing inside her? What would he become if she will submit to that idea? She knew nothing can change Murdo's mind at that moment. It was a desperation of a father to save his family. She must trust him. But her inner voice tried to stop her from believing the power it promised. Despite her warning, not to take that bait, his decision was final. He trusted Wendaka and so, he will drink it, submitting to her promise. It will make him regain his abilities. He urged Ingrid to do the same—it was their desperate measure. Wendaka would never hurt Ingrid nor her son in her womb. Everything will be okay.

Tears fell on Ingrid's cheek as the drum of judgment echoed in the forest. The guards freed her hands from the chain—honoring her one last request. The Chiefs of the other tribes, the West, the East and the South have come a long way to witness the fate of Murdo, Chief of the North tribe. They want to witness his repentance and the surrender of his spirit so he can reclaim his position as the mighty leader of Aplon tribe. He must sacrifice the life of Ingrid and her unborn and offer their souls to their deity. But is it right to kill an innocent soul? The son of their ruler? She felt disgusted with their beliefs. They all cheered as if they find amusement on their final verdict.

The ritual started. The Shamans from the other tribes summoned the spirit of their great ancestors, offering her and her unborn to their deity—an offer so the spirit will forgive Murdo from his mischief. Sacrificing the life of his son will make him regain his abilities—that was the condition of the Shamans when they performed the ritual on him. It sought forgiveness from the spirits and everything will be back to normal. The people of the tribe held that belief, fuelling their demands to place the execution right on. Their leader will take back his powers—such a stupid, orthodox claim.

She knew it was time. Murdo shouted, "Now Ingrid—drink it!" He grabbed the small vial from where he kept it hidden and drink its content at one shot. She followed the same. She finished it half when Murdo shouted in agony, voice choking as if something has blocked his air passage. His feet trembled and knees rooted on the ground—he begged for an air to breathe. She was right with her suspicion. What Wendaka gave them was a poison. He looked at her with an accusation on his face. He gathered his last strength and looked at Ingrid one last time—pleading for her forgiveness. And he collapsed on the ground, lifeless. Everyone looked at him—eyes wide-opened, assessing what has just happened.

"No!" Wendaka shouted, witnessing the death of Murdo. "Something went wrong, it wasn't a poison. I swear to the spirits."

Ingrid's eyes widened in horror. Her body trembled, feeling pain in her stomach. "No," she whispered, fearing for the life of her son. "Wendaka, what did you do?" She wanted to scream her anger, but no voice came out. She froze and stared at her.

"I swear Ingrid, it wasn't my doing," Wendaka said, begging her to believe her. "I swear, it wasn't me."

"You—murderer," Elefar shouted, pointing his index finger at Wendaka. "You killed the Chief—you must die. Lock her inside and be sure she would never escape. The spirit will decide the way of her death."

Menewa, volunteered and took her away from the crowd. But Elefar's eyes were watchful and commanded Semone, his warrior, to escort them. Wendaka doesn't want to leave the lifeless body of Murdo. What has she done? She cried out loud as Semone held her wrist and dragged her away from the crowd. Menewa couldn't do anything but followed where his lead.

Meanwhile, to calm the people who witnessed the death of their leader, the Shamans explained. What happened was their deity's judgment. She punished Murdo. That was his fate. The deity has conveyed her message to never defy her or suffer the same consequences—a defenseless death. His betrayal forced their deity to punish him.

The people believed the Shaman. There's one thing left—Ingrid and her unborn must die too. All of them raised their right hand, palm facing the sky. They chanted their words seeking forgiveness from their deity.

Ingrid stood up in shock and planned her escape. She knew it was suicidal, but she must take the chance. With all the strength left in her body, she stormed towards the edge of a fifty-foot waterfall. She didn't mind the sharp edges of the stone hit by her feet. It was a fifty-fifty chance of survival, but they will kill her anyway—it's better trying than nothing. She took a deep breath and wrapped her arms around her belly, protecting the life inside of her.

"Be strong my baby," she whispered. "We will make it."

And then she jumped. It was too late for the warriors to stop her. The rummaging current of the water swallowed her whole being, concealing her visibility. She was nowhere. The tribe members checked any sign of life in the water but found none. They presumed she was dead. They raised their weapons in the air and cheered for victory. Her death was their salvation.

People of Aplon cheered and celebrated their freedom. But who will lead them—they have forgotten Murdo's death.

-END OF PROLOGUE-

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