

THE DEAD FOREST

By Karen Mandeville

Triskelion Publishing, 2005

Reviewed by :: Crystal Jordan

An e-book

Rebecca's father, Phillip, promises her in marriage to an evil shape-shifter when his farm falls on hard times. He has until her sixteenth birthday to repay the debt or his daughter will be lost to him forever in the Dead Forest. At twelve, Rebecca is lured into the forest and part of her soul never makes it out again. The trauma of the Dead Forest leaves Rebecca without speech for years and leaves Phillip more fanatically determined than ever that she never go near the forest again, and that she not find out about his deal.

Cedric is the first person to befriend the mute Rebecca and he falls obsessively in love with her. But Cedric hides a dark secret – his father, Rutherford, sent him to spy on his future wife. Now Cedric must decide if he can endure watching his beloved Rebecca marry his father.

Unaware of Phillip, Cedric, or Rutherford's machinations, Rebecca finds love and passion with fellow artist Johannes. But, the residents of the Dead Forest want Rebecca too much to allow her to slip away. Nothing will keep Rutherford from claiming what belongs to him. To rid themselves of competition, Rutherford and Cedric plan an unfortunate end for Johannes; one where he wanders eternally as a soulless spirit trapped in the Dead Forest. Rebecca is given a choice about the direction of her own future happiness – live with Rutherford or die with Johannes.

Surprisingly, *The Dead Forest* has little historical accuracy for a novel set on a farm in the fourteenth century, especially in regard to Rebecca's ability to read and paint. While the premise of this story is interesting and unusual, the delivery falls somewhat flat as the first half of the 432 page novel is weighed down with minutiae about Rebecca's dreams versus Rebecca's reality. Fortunately, the second half flies by in grippingly suspenseful plot and tightly written narrative. Ms. Mandeville leaves her readers with more questions than answers and one can only hope that a sequel will explain what finally happens to the unlucky Rebecca.

3 ½ Kisses