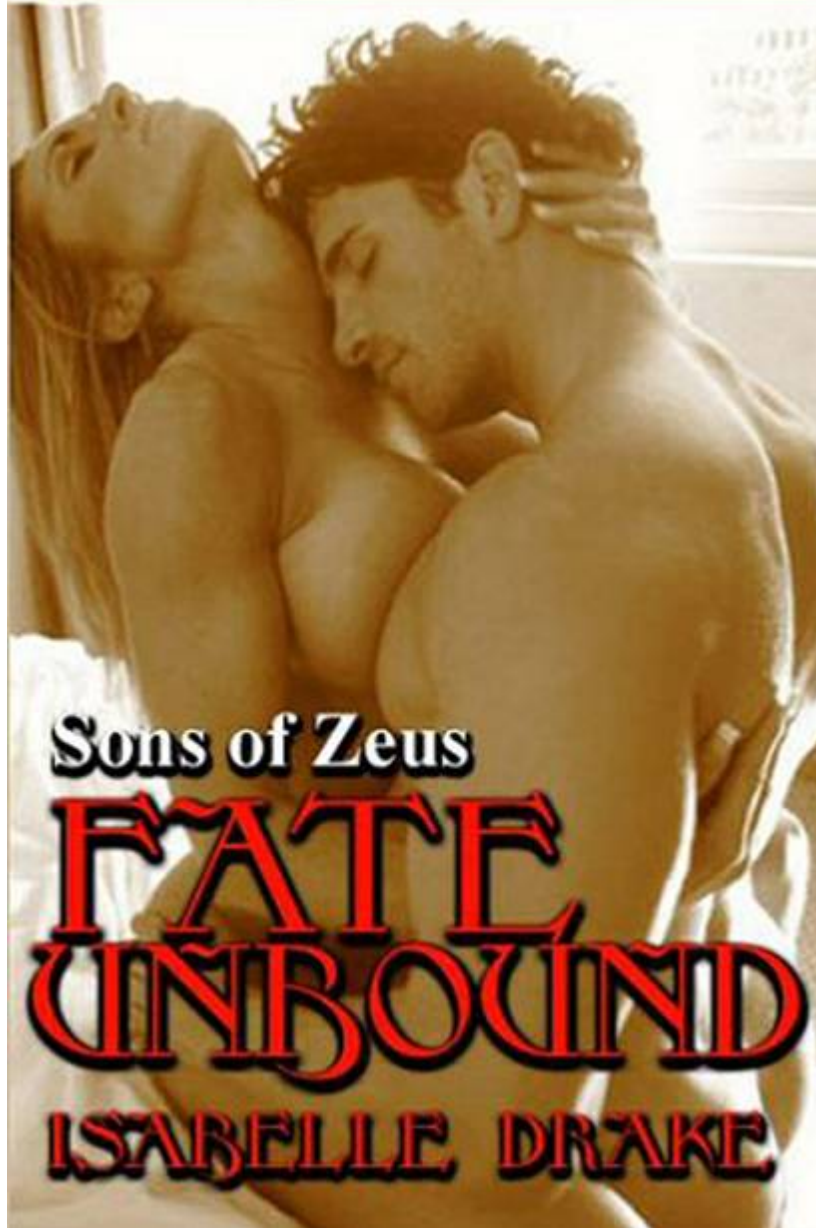


VENUS PRESS



SONS OF ZEUS

FATE UNBOUND

BY

ISABELLE DRAKE

Venus Press LLC

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, places, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

FATE UNBOUND

Copyright© 2006 by Isabelle Drake

ISBN: 1-59836-293-3

Cover Art © 2006 by D.L. Taylor

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form without permission, except as provided by the U.S. Copyright Law. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

For information, you can find us on the web at

www.VenusPress.com

Dedication:

For L.M. Thanks for being you.

Chapter One

“The Fates have been cruel, casting me from my beloved Greece.” Adrian tossed the chisel in his weary, calloused hand and it skidded to a stop by the table under the expansive window offering a glimpse of the private courtyard swimming pool and a glittering view LA’s neon lights. “Sending me to this modern world where I am nothing, no one, I--”

“Not even your true father, Zeus himself, can deny The Fates.” Linus reminded him, trying as he had many times over the past several weeks to remind Adrian that he had no control over his predicament.

“Curse The Fates and curse--”

“Don’t. Have patience.” His friend’s tone was sharp, but softened as he continued. “You will regret those words later, when you get the acknowledgement you crave.”

Running his fingertips over rough edges of marble that would eventually be two lovers, Adrian scoffed. “Patience?”

Linus set down the brown leather chest he’d just carried in. “Let me remind you, *you* sought your future from The Oracle. Besides you will be getting what you want-- if you only follow the--”

Adrian’s hand stilled where the woman’s waist would be. “It’s a trick. Commanding me to not seek the touch of a woman, then placing me here, where *she* is.”

“And what would you do if you could touch her?” Linus asked. “Seek vengeance?”

Gliding his hand lower, he flattened his palm across the area where the lover’s bodies would merge and then pressed hard. There was no room for gentleness when it came to the unfinished business between

him and his former lover, Taryn.

He turned away so that his friend would not see that cruel truth on his face, but the concealment came too late.

“What good what such an act do? It certainly would not help you achieve what you claim to want. Single-minded revenge does not suit a God—or even a half God. Perhaps the Fates know you better than you know yourself.”

Adrian backed away from the mass of half-shaped marble, stepped down from the wooden platform filling the center of the space he’d made into a studio and turned to gaze across the new series sketches he’d started that afternoon.

He admired the outline of the naked woman with her full breasts then scowled as his eyes were drawn reluctantly to the unusually large cock of the man poised above her. Had that been *him* only a breath away from Taryn, he would have been already been buried in her sweet cunt. In two thrusts he could have had her writhing, begging and...

Enough!

Disgusted that he, a son of the great Zeus, would bother to compare himself to a simple mortal man, he spun and paced across the dust-covered floor of the room he hadn’t left in days. “What good can come of this isolation? Am I a child that I need to be torn away from the home I love and belong in to learn some... some... *lesson* ?”

“The isolation is of your own doing. There is nothing in the dictate of the Oracle that keeps you within these walls.”

Adrian’s answer was quick. “What is the point of leaving?”

His companion’s reply was silence, the type of silence one man offers another when he is holding back words better left unsaid. Finally, Linus found something that might offer comfort. “*She* hasn’t seen you...yet. Perhaps you will accomplish what you must, and then can return home with your cherished pride still intact.”

The light sarcasm of Linus’s words went unnoticed. Adrian was strutting again, trying to avoid the table by the window where few rays of moonlight that managed to cut through the skyline skimmed across the drawings. Pages and pages of the sweet Taryn, naked and exposed, submissive yet still in control, demanding that the man mounting her please her before himself.

Linus unlocked the chest and lifted the top. “You could have requested I send her away when she came about the job.”

Adrian had reminded himself that many times, but knew provided with the opportunity he would make the same choice again. Taryn was out of his life, but she would never be out of his blood—or heart.

Turning away, Linus began putting away clothing Adrian had insisted he bring over from the small apartment they’d been given upon arriving. “Do not think so little of yourself. She is here too, also torn from home, working as you are.” He paused, watching to catch Adrian’s gaze before continuing, “Working for *you* . The Fates make no mistakes. There must be a rea--”

“There were not enough men in Greece for her to charm into her bed, that is the reason.. She had come here to fuck every man who crosses her path.”

“Rumors,” he muttered, reaching into the chest for another pile of clothing, “don’t listen.”

“I have seen it with my own eyes. In Greece--and here.”

“Here, you have seen what you yourself have asked of her.”

“I only told her to go through the motions of sex.” Frustration filled his voice as he thought about both Taryn and his predicament with the Fates. “The job does not require that she enjoy it.”

It was Linus’s turn to scoff, “If you are thinking a woman like Taryn would allow herself to be mounted and used like some common slave, you *do* have a lesson to learn.”

Chapter Two

After paying the fee to enter On the Rocks, an exclusive Hollywood club her new friend, Kate, had given her an invitation to, Taryn shouldered through the unruly, weekend crowd, sliding easily between two slim brunettes wearing skin tight dresses. The women cast her sharp glances, but accustomed to such hostile looks, she tipped her head away and scanned the masses of the city she’d been sent to be part of. Three weeks in L.A. and although she’d acclimated herself to many things, she still balked at the notion that she needed to learn a lesson.

Still, day by day she adjusted. And thanks to the recent employment she’d found, one could even say that she was thriving. She wondered, not for the first time, if her sisters would be delighted to know she had been reduced to using her legendary beauty to earn money--instead of using it to seduce every man in her path, arrogantly adding to her ever-growing list of conquests as she did so.

The sense of confidence she enjoyed as a result of being able to care for herself had little effect on her level of frustration. The things she had been required to do since arriving...never would she have been able to predict such degradation.

Moving with the heavy music, Taryn made her way past a crowd of college boys clustered around a television hanging from the wall. Their shouts were barely audible over the thunderous beats blasting from huge speakers surrounding the lighted dance floor. She glanced at the group, but quickly moved on, intent on two things: getting a glass of wine and find a secluded spot to wait the twenty-five minutes until Kate would arrive.

Thankfully, wine hadn't changed over the centuries, so the man distributing the drinks would be able to provide her with a satisfying carafe.

Except for their odd clothing, the people were similar to those she had left behind. Men drank, shouted, and vied for the attention of the women. Women laughed, pretended to ignore the men, yet at the same time arranged themselves in welcoming pairs or even wandered off alone.

But there were no men she wanted to attract. None of them looked as though they could protect her, very few even looked as though they'd be able to swing a sword higher than she.

Across the room, a narrow shouldered man in a plaid shirt grinned, as he tried to catch her eye. Abruptly, before he might think she had an interest in him, she turned away and worked herself closer to the man serving drinks, but connected with yet another pair of curious eyes.

Her gaze fell, skimming across a squat man, with hands so square and stout he looked as though he plowed fields from dawn until dusk. Again, knowing that if she gave him even a glimmer of hope she would pay the hefty price, she broke the brief contact by shifting in another direction.

What use did she have for such men? What did they have to offer her?

Nothing.

Before being cast away, she'd cherished her large breasts and glossy blonde hair, thought her taut ass and firm legs made her better than the women around her. But now, after endless submissions to every male who fancied her, and tired of being groped awkwardly and rammed into by men who thought she should thank them for fucking her, she almost wished she possessed an ordinary body.

That was the point though, wasn't it? Her reason for being cast away from her beautiful home and forced to live in this place.

Ever since her arrival, she had followed the Oracle's horrid decree: she must not approach a man and request he make love to her, yet she must submit to all men who made the request of her. After spreading her legs countless times over the past days, she was starting to ponder--what if she didn't allow herself to be mounted by all who wish to use her body?

Each forced coupling served as a reminder of what she had thrown away, a man who—

No.

Thoughts of him were too difficult.

Painful.

There was no way to know what she had given up by conceitedly rejecting Adrian's confession of love, she only knew what would not happen if she ignored the dictate—she would not return to Greece.

Aside from losing Adrian, she could think of nothing worse than being kept from her beloved home and family. She even longed to see her sisters, though they had tricked her into seeking her fate from The Oracle. But she accepted now, they had not known of the cruel dictate and what it would demand of her.

The sexual tension in the overcrowded room was starting to make her think she'd soon be put to the test.

Again.

"I'd remember you if I'd see you here before."

The man, not much more than a boy really, was swaying as he leaned back, trying to get a look at her ass. Brown hair hung across his face, hiding one of a pair of bright blue eyes. His jaw was pleasantly square, his skin nicely tanned and contrasting well with the casual, soft brown sweater clinging to his lean muscles. Denim pants hung low on his hips, showing off a small slice of his strong midsection.

He certainly wasn't puny, or unattractive, but he wasn't up to Taryn's usual standards either. He had no sword, or markings of battle, and his face was fresh with the enthusiasm of youth.

She preferred her men strong and experienced. Vigorous. Capable. In Kate's words--edgy.

But, she reflected ruefully, always getting what she wanted was the problem.

Or had been.

The newcomer set his hand on her waist, gripping it firmly, and leaned in. The bristled shadow of his facial hair brushed across her cheek as he spoke, his hot breath blowing across her neck. "I come here all the time. Want me to show you around?"

She shook her head, easily meeting his gaze because he wasn't more than a few inches taller than she was. "I'm meeting someone."

Still holding her waist, he angled back, his gaze darting across the mass of people before coming back to her. "Another girl?"

Girl?

Did she look like an unripe, inexperienced *girl* ?

Taryn straightened, looking down her nose at him, but because his attention had dropped to the swells of her breasts her disdain went unnoticed.

She set her hand on his to pull it away, but he gripped hers tightly and smiled, his vivid gaze coming back to her face. His grin was sweet, his azure eyes glowing brightly under the shaggy locks falling across his forehead.

A mature man would've been subtle, and realized the importance of anticipation. This boy's inexperience was well balanced by drunken confidence. "We can wait for her," he replied, stretching over to the bar to discard his empty beer bottle, intentionally letting his arm brush across the side of her breast. "Then I'll show you both around." Moving his gaze to the dusting of glitter she skimmed between her breasts, he added, "This is a big place, you need to know where to go to get what you want."

He seemed harmless enough, but Taryn wanted to end things quickly, before he made the offer she was forbidden to refuse.

She wiggled out of his grasp and took two steps back, seeking some much needed distance between them, but was forced to stop when she bumped into the back of a bar stool. “No. Thank you,” she said loudly enough to be heard over the music.

Bolstered by drink, he followed her, advancing until the bulge of his steady cock pressed into her stomach. The thin fabric of her blue dress shifted, exposing more of her right breast.

“Let’s stay and wait for her.” He grinned, noticing that when he pressed harder into her, her dress slid down, exposing more skin. “I can handle you both,” he added, working his way closer, letting her feel the growing strength of his arousal.

Not Kate.

After all she’d been through, to finally meet a woman she could call a friend, Taryn did not want to drag Kate into her irresolvable situation. If she did, the friendship would surely be over, and Taryn would be back to enduring the empty days of loneliness that had plagued her ever since arriving in L.A..

She needed to handle this situation on her own, and the sooner she took control of things the better.

“You don’t think I can handle both of you?” he asked, rubbing his bulge against her crotch as he placed his palms, one on each side of her, on the bar.

The unavoidable heat of his body flowed across hers. “I don’t think we should wait for her.”

Disappointment flickered across his face, but then he grinned as her meaning made its way into his lust drunk brain. “Yeah. I get it. I’ll show you around and—and...” He dropped back, took her hand, tugging her through the crowd.

Pausing only long enough to point to a door by the main entrance, he shouted, “You get to the second floor by going through that door right there,” then he took off, pulling her along.

“There’s the coat room,” he yelled over his shoulder as he weaved through the crowd. The swirling mass of people thinned as they pressed further into the interior of the pulsing club. At the edge of the crowd, he led her down a mirrored stairway that grew dimmer as they descended the carpeted steps.

At the lower landing, he stumbled, his fight for confidence obvious as his gaze scanned the lights gleaming above each of the doors. The bulbs above all the doors--except one--were illuminated.

He weaved, his gaze lingering on the door under the dark orb.

If she broke away now...

“You want to do it, right?” He slid his arm around her, dropping his hand down to curve his strong fingers around her ass as he leaned into her. “I have... protection. That okay with you?”

Men fought down here? “Protection?”

He stumbled as he pressed into her again. “A rubber.”

Oh, modern protection, of course. But she didn’t need that. The Oracle had assured her she wouldn’t

conceive a child until she coupled with the man who would be her life-long companion--her future husband.

Could she still back out? He hadn't come right out and--

"Let's do it."

Too late.

Still holding her hand, he kicked open the door below the dark bulb and yanked her into the room. Music rolled from speakers tucked in the corners and lights flickered, casting a rainbow of pastel colors to skim across the mirrored walls. The only furnishing in the room was a row of ascending platforms covered with pink carpet. She turned, catching his quick motions as he latched the door and noticing that the wall that bordered the hall was a plate of smoky glass.

A room for sex.

She'd made use of such places before. In Greece they'd had attendants and other luxurious appointments such as scented oils and velvet covered pillows. But in the modern world, seduction and sensuality were replaced by instant gratification.

The youth grinned as he tipped his head toward the smoky glass wall. "It's mirrored on the other side--we can see them, but they can't see us." He lumbered closer to the glass, pointing to a massive man and woman moving down the hall, their glazed eyes darting from one door to the next.

"Guess they'll have to wait," he said, chuckling as he fixed his attention on the lusty raven-haired woman.

Accepting that she couldn't back out, Taryn slid glide her gaze across her young companion's body, assessing what kind of lover he might be.

Inexperienced, yes.

But also eager and curious.

Might he surprise her, provide a release for the tension that swirled inside her? It had been so long since she'd know the feel of a real man. Unbearably long.

Perhaps this raw youth was what she needed. Perhaps he would be the one who made up for what had been lacking in each of the new world men who had pounded into her. The first flickers of want lighted in her stomach, and she breathed deeply, arching her back, welcoming the sweet sensation.

Inexperienced as he was, even he noticed the change in her. Stepping forward, he wrapped his hard, lean arms around her shoulders, looked into her eyes, but didn't press his mouth to hers.

Was it absence of knowledge or lack confidence that kept him from proceeding?

But there was an upside to his hesitation. It gave Taryn the opportunity to take control, something she was good at and enjoyed immensely. Thankfully, The Oracle hadn't forbidden her to *do that* .

Lifting her chin to look directly into his light eyes, she parted her lips. "I know what I want, do you?"

He blinked, but to his credit came back quickly. “Yeah.”

“Then what are you waiting for?” She swayed forward, arching her back and letting her nipples brush across the soft weave of his sweater. “Are you... slow?”

“Hell no.” He unzipped his pants and shoved his briefs aside, the full shaft of his cock thrust forward, hard, and ready. “Does that look slow to you?”

His enthusiasm was delightful. “No, I don’t suppose so.” Lightly caressing the tip of his penis, she licked her lips. “But there’s only one way to find out if you have what it takes.”

Forcing his tight shaft into her palm, he replied, “I’ve got it. Whatever you want, just take a look.”

“Looks can be deceiving,” she replied, holding the inward smile off her face and pretending to consider her options as she circled the smooth head with her fingers.

The youth reached down to grip his rod, stroking the length of his shaft with long, hard motions while she continued her gentle caress of his tip. Panting, he let go and lurched forward, his hips jerking, forcing more of his pulsing heat into her hands.

Obviously, her challenge was affecting him as intended.

Again she held in her grin as she lowered her hand, smiling leisurely as his tight cock bobbed helplessly.

Glad to have the opportunity to show off her magnificent body, she lifted the hem of her dress, gliding the midnight blue silk up and over her head. With a flick of her wrist, she cast the fabric aside. She expected the open-mouth gape of appreciation, but she still relished the power it gave her.

Raising her hands to cup her breasts, she licked her bottom lip with a languid sweep of her tongue. “I guess now’s the time to find out whether you’re slow or not,” she murmured, pivoting on her heels and gliding her hands down her body and across her ass cheeks. When she stepped toward the stack of platforms, she spotted the couple still in the hallway. Apparently, waiting for an available room hadn’t been an issue.

The woman’s head was angled back, her jet black hair cascading across her bare shoulders while her well-muscled companion pulled her blouse open and buried his face between her tits, hungrily running his tongue across the tight peaks of her nipples. The man’s capable hands blurred as he grabbed at her black skirt. As soon as he had it out of his way, he fumbled with his own pants, releasing his jutting cock quickly, then impaling the woman completely with one long thrust that instantly had her bucking back even as she struggled to stand.

Taryn’s increasing enthusiasm for her own situation was matched by a sudden impatience for release. Wiggling her ass, she turned and eyed his throbbing dick. “You said you weren’t slow...”

Dropping his hands to stroke himself, he stumbled forward.

So that she could enjoy the tantalizing view through the grey glass, she set her palms on the top platform and widened her stance as she offered her bare buttocks.

He came up behind her, the firm tip of his penis probing briefly before he slid into her, holding her ass firmly with both hands as he pumped into her with strong, deep strokes.

“Yeah,” he murmured hotly into her ear, “I like to watch, too.”

Taryn kept her eyes open, the lustful couple in the hall filling her vision as the youth behind her worked past his awkwardness and found his rhythm. Each time he pulled back, she braced herself, welcoming the strong pounding of his thick rod.

Beyond the glass, the breasts of the woman bounced with each thrust of her lover. The man did the best he could to lick the dark tips, but she kept squirming and wiggling as he drove into her. Soon, she was gasping for breath and clawing at his back. A satisfied grin split across his face as she threw her head back and gave herself over to what must have been vicious climax.

Lucky woman.

Hungry for a similar release, Taryn spread her legs a step wider, swinging back each time he swung forward.

He responded by squeezing her ass cheeks, pushing deeper. “You’re hot fuck, aren’t you?”

“I don’t care what you think, I only care what you do. Shut up and--”

The stranger’s release came suddenly and finished quickly. Seconds after the last burst of liquid heat, he was backing away, leaving Taryn’s cunt hot and aching.

Frustration and impatience wrapped around her, an unwelcome cloak of irritation.

Was there no man in this wretched place who knew how to love a woman?

She could bring pleasure to herself, but watching the young stranger adjust his clothing, somehow deflated the excitement that had only seconds ago been building inside her. Suddenly, the bother of massaging her clit didn’t seem worth the effort.

Disregarding the man’s presence, she strode over to capture her dress and slide it over her head. The cool fabric skimmed over her, delicately caressing and offering the comfort she’d needed after interludes with strangers before coming to L.A. It seemed that need for reassurance increased with each required tryst.

Why should this one be so?

Was it something to do with the men?

She spun on her heels, he was ducking out the door.

It wasn’t. She cared not if she ever saw him--or any of the others--again.

After running her fingers through her hair, and adjusting the neckline of her dress, Taryn exited the room, hurried up the mirrored stairway, and headed back to the bar.

Kate was a welcome sight, and she embraced the tall redhead, offering her a genuine smile.

“Hey,” Kate shouted over the music. “Want something to drink?”

“Please,” she replied, “Wine, red. Anything red.”

Kate laughed, “Rough night already?”

She couldn’t answer that without telling the whole unfortunate mess, so she simply shook her head.

“Tell you what,” the other woman ordered the drinks then came back to Taryn, “After he brings the wine, let’s go upstairs.”

As soon as they were settled into a quiet love seat, Kate held up the cell phone that constantly interrupted her life. “Dish. Tell me what’s got you all ruffled, quick, before they call me back into work.”

“It’s nothing.”

“Oh please. We haven’t been friends that long, but even I can see you’re out of it.”

Taryn rolled the wine glass stem between her fingers, not finding words for the unfamiliar mix of emotions tormenting her heart. It wasn’t that she’d never had sex with a stranger, she’d certainly done that enough times, probably more than any other woman she knew, but... “Honestly,” she caught Kate’s gaze, “I don’t know what’s bugging me.”

“Guy trouble?”

“Hardly. I don’t have a *guy*.” The only man she longed for was centuries away, and had been out of reach even before she’d been sent away.

Kate laughed, her green eyes flickering in the dim light. “That’s the problem then.”

Taryn rolled her eyes, but smiled.

“Have you seen the coffee shop hottie across? He might be just the thing you need, somebody to take your mind off things for a night or two.”

The coffee shop across the street from the downtown apartment building they both lived in was well known for employing sexy baristas, but another hot young thing was definitely not what she wanted.

Taryn took a sip of the wine, thoughtful, but appreciating Kate’s sincerity. Before arriving in the modern city she had spent her nights seeking new sources of gratification, but now that she had arrived in a city well known for providing every possible source of pleasure, she wanted none of it.

“Enough about me,” she murmured after swallowing. “What’s new with you?”

“All right, I get it. But one of these days I’m going to get you to open up and tell me at least something about you and your past. You can’t keep it a secret forever, you know.”

Taryn shook her head, grinning outwardly, while inside her heart ached.

Chapter Three

Monday morning, the annoying plague of emotions that had been clinging to Taryn ever since her encounter with that overgrown boy, kept her moving, restlessly wandering from one task to the next. She almost welcomed the constant movement, sitting still only provided an opportunity for her to dwell on her own ridiculous melancholy. She left her apartment early, heading across the street to indulge in one of the few joys of the modern world: coffee.

As usual, the shop across the street was crowded, and she slipped into line without giving the wait another thought. The conversations blended together, creating a low buzz, while the sights and smells which were becoming more familiar with each passing day tried to offer solace to her restless heart.

Yet there was a presence in the air that quickened her blood and aroused her senses.

“Hey, you’re up early. I thought you didn’t have to be at that mysterious job you can’t tell me about until later.”

Kate slid through the crowd, a travel mug in one well-manicured hand, cell phone in the other.

At the sight of her friend, a smile curved Taryn’s mouth. “I couldn’t sleep.”

“Judging from that expression on your face, you haven’t looked behind the counter.”

“No, really, I don’t need--” Taryn’s protest was left hanging in the air as a pair of familiar shoulders shifted into her view. Dressed in a loose white shirt, he could be a man from her homeland.

Kate leaned in to whisper, “That blonde hair, those green eyes...yum. He’s good enough to eat. I know he doesn’t look all that smart, but who cares, I bet...”

Her friend rambled on about the guy behind the counter, but the man Taryn was looking at was the one speaking to the barista. The sway of his expressive arms, the way his head dipped side to side as he talked...

Then, he turned, and she relaxed.

Of course. It was the man who’d hired her for the modeling job, the sculptor’s assistant. Wondering what type of man worked for an artist so eccentric he insisted on remaining behind a screen while his models posed, Taryn watched his fluid movements. When he pointed to a man standing near the door, Taryn automatically followed the gesture with her gaze.

She swayed at the sight before her.

Electricity shot up her spine, igniting pulses of shock that nearly stopped the pulsing of her blood.

It could not be.

Adrian?

Impossible.

The clothing of the man was modern, but that barely restrained power, that something different that sets one man apart from the others...

The Gods must be playing tricks on her, it wasn't possible.

She pulled her gaze away from him and glanced at the assistant. Could he be a man from Greece as well?

Upon her second look at the man by the door, she was certain of the truth. Adrian. Right there, all she had to do was--

Waves of shock rolled through her body, giving life to frustration and regret. Even if the dictate did not forbid her from approaching Adrian, the memory of her own mocking words would have held her back.

"He's a hot one, huh?"

"Yeah, he sure is." But Taryn wasn't talking about the sweet thing behind the counter.

"Let me get this straight. You're going to pay me to pose naked with some chick while you draw pictures of us. Have I got it?"

"Yes." Adrian gave Cutter, the man from the coffee shop, another head to toe assessment. Linus had selected well, he was perfect--physically--however, his personality left much to be desired. "I need one male and one female model to pose together. My client specifically requested a series of sensual statues for his garden, so the poses will be sexual in nature. I suspect you will be a good match for the female model I've been using, as long as you will be able to...perform."

"You want me *to do it*?"

Adrian resisted the urge to knock the man out. One swing would have him out for hours. But then he'd have to send Linus onto the streets again, looking for another physically perfect male to pose with Taryn. "Intercourse is not required. I only need you to follow the directions my assistant, Linus, gives."

"What happened to the last model dude?"

"The flu. I can't wait for him to get well and the client wants the work completed immediately. For a wedding."

"He wants fuck statues for a wedding?"

“What he wants the work for is not my concern.”

The man shoved his hands into his pockets, pulling his pants further down on his hips. “What does the model chick look like?”

“Is that an issue?” Adrian moved back to the table covered with drawings. “Are you agreeing to the work?” he asked, without looking up.

“For the money you’re offering I’d fuck --”

“You only need to *pose* . As requested.” He caught the man’s attention with a sharp glance. “Is that clear?”

“Sure, yeah man. I got it.” He shrugged. “This morning, at the coffee shop, that dude said something about an audition?”

“That’s right. I simply need to be certain of your physical qualities before I can offer you employment.”

“Well, you let me see the cash, I’ll strip.”

Adrian lifted the lid of the wooden chest on the corner of his desk, pulled out several bills, held them out.

Once the man stuffed the bills into his wallet, he kicked off his sandals, and wasted no time peeling off the skin-tight, black T-shirt and low riding, faded jeans.

“Good enough?” the man asked, setting his hands on his bare waist and taking in Adrian’s quirked eyebrows.

“No underclothes?”

Shifting, then running his hands through his shaggy sun-bleached locks, he grinned. “Waste of time.”

He had a lithe, lean body, most likely capable of being strong, yet flexible. No doubt attributes he made use of frequently. Adrian refused to be one to assure the man of his physical perfection, so he offered as little as possible. “My assistant knows what type of man my client seeks. You are such a man.”

“Yeah, the dude also said you wanted me to start today.”

“Correct. The female model is already in the studio.”

“That’s the room at the end of the hall, right? We work for two hours, right? I’ve got someplace to go after that.”

“Yes. Two hours today and each day after that until the statues are finished.” Adrian paused, hating that he had to reveal even the smallest piece of his personal anguish to this stranger, swallowed and forced himself to add, “There is something you need to know.”

“Yeah?”

“The woman you are to pose with, she is to know nothing of my identity. Should you reveal it--”

“Whatever dude.” The man smirked. “You pay, I’ll stay—and keep my mouth shut. No problem.”

“I will remain behind the screen. My assistant, Linus, will be available should you, or the woman, require anything. He receives instructions from me and then will pass them on to you and the woman. Any questions?”

“Nope. I got it.” Without bothering to conceal himself, the man swept up his clothing and sauntered toward the doorway. “Hey,” he said, pausing before moving out into the hall. “I got a question.”

Adrian looked up from the tools he’d been gathering.

“Okay if I swim in that pool?”

Annoyance was not a sufficient reason to deny the request. “The pool is mine, but yes, you may use of it as long as you are discreet.”

“Sweet,” he replied. “With that funky tile, fruit trees, and other decorative crap, it looks like the set from some 1950’s porn flick.”

The swift envy for the other man’s sexual freedom did not catch Adrian by surprise. He’d become accustomed to the constant hunger, the endless ache for release. The days of drawing Taryn’s most intimate curves had left him with such a restless longing that not even Linus, a true athlete, could keep up with him on his midnights runs.

His loins ached for her lush body, yet his heart would never accept a woman unless she was completely loyal and true. A woman for him alone. And Taryn had made it clear to him—in her own words—that when she could have any man, any time she desired, she would never settle for only one man. She would never settle for him.

Chapter Four

The gentle reggae beat coming from the straw covered concession stand, drowned out the rustle of the men approaching Taryn until they were nearly upon her. She lifted herself onto her elbows, peeking over the top of her wide sunglasses. Two men in park uniforms, one tall blonde, one dark, wide-shouldered and powerful, sauntered up, taking their time reaching the secluded spot on the beach where she had stretched out.

The well-built man hung back, inhaling deeply on a cigarette, his chocolate gaze drifting from the hot pink

triangle top she'd cast aside to her almost naked body. The blonde dropped to his knees, scattering grains of sand onto Taryn's calves which stuck to the sleek coconut scented oil she'd spread across her skin only moments ago.

"This late in the day, the topless section of the beach is over that way," he said flatly, tipping his head to the side and holding up the palm-sized staff ID hanging around his neck. "This area is closed."

Taryn continued to look over the top of her sunglasses, noticing the unwavering line of his mouth and the steady way he avoided looking at her glistening breasts.

After spending two hours afternoon in Adrian's studio, posing naked with that new model, Kate's barista hottie, while Adrian sketched them had left her body thrumming and heated, so hungry for sex that she felt sure every one around her must feel the same way.

Anxious and unsatisfied.

Ready.

Yet this man looked as though he was completely unaware of his cock. Taryn shifted her hips, swinging away from them both, digging her bright coral toenails into the sand and making a show of ignoring them.

The other man moved into her line of vision, his deep brown skin glowing in the sunlight, dreads skimming his wide shoulders. "You waiting for someone, some guy who--"

"This section of the beach is closed," the blonde cut in, his sharp tone making it obvious he took his job of maintaining park order seriously.

"I understand," she replied lightly, not wanting to gather her things and move to the crowded public area, dotted with horny men. "I'll stay out of sight."

"But you're not going to move?" the blonde barked.

Taryn smoothed the edges of her tanning mat, the picture of gentle innocence as she looked past him to catch the gaze of the man whom she hoped to convince to ignore her rule breaking. "I like it here."

The dark man's eyes flickered as one corner of his mouth lifted. "I'm starting to like it here, too," he replied, mistaking her pleading gaze for lust.

"Henri..." the blonde scooted back, resting his ass on his heels. "I'll take care of this, if you don't mind."

The dark man took one last drag of his cigarette, tossed the butt into the wind, then ducked under the wild branches blocking Taryn from the rest of the beach. "I do mind."

The man at her feet scowled, "Really, the last time--," He dropped his words when he noticed the intimidating stance of his co-worker.

For the first time since the two had arrived, Taryn was truly intrigued. Relishing the sparks of conflict heating the air, she rolled back, letting her nipples peak upward and welcoming the cocky display unfolding before her.

The blonde jerked his gaze away from Henri to finally take a real look at her well-rounded breasts and smooth stomach before staring hard at the tight juncture between her legs, an area barely covered by a scrap of pink. Gaze lingering on her thighs, he rose and backed away. "I don't think--"

"That's your problem man," Henri crossed over, pushing the blonde away with a movement so easy it could have been a lazy stretch, "All you do is *think*. Me, I know thinking just gets in the way."

He took another step forward, ran his tongue across his full lips, and spoke to Taryn. "Spread your legs baby, I'm going to make you beg for sweet mercy."

She had never been one to let others push her around, and she wasn't about to start now, simply because the insufferable Fates sought to keep her squirming within their grip. She could show them that her punishments had no effect upon her. Regardless of the man who slid into her, she was the mistress of her own body.

So, as she had with the boy at the club, she welcomed the chance for release.

"Is he going to watch?" she asked, sliding her gaze to the sulking blonde and making it clear their coupling required that he leave.

Henri glanced over his shoulder as he began fumbling with the tan web belt strapped around his uniform shorts. "This section of the beach is closed." His words were accompanied by a deep laugh. "So, if you don't mind," he yanked down his zipper, "I'll take things from here."

"Whatever man," the blonde replied, stepping quickly as he fell away. "But this one is all you. Don't expect me to help you if..."

The last of his words were stolen by the wind and music as he marched toward the masses stretched across the designated topless section of the beach.

Taryn might have felt pity for him, but she had the feeling he wouldn't have wanted to watch even if he'd been invited. Some men just don't know how to be men, she mused, tugging on the ties of her suit bottom.

But that wasn't her concern.

Sex had always been Taryn's chosen method for running from conflict, chasing that elusive something else her pastime.

It could serve her well again.

One little pull on each bow and the suit came free, but she didn't lift her hips to remove it, instead she curved her arms above her head, silently letting him know it was time to get to work impressing her. Completely naked under the midday sun, she eased her knees apart, stretched her arms farther above her head, arching her back until her ribcage was off the ground.

Still smiling, he wasted no time dropping his shorts and black boxer briefs, exposing a pulsing cock so stiff it jutted firmly away from his body. "See," he murmured, gliding his palm along the underside of his thick rod, "No lies here baby. Just a big hot dick that's ready for your tight pussy."

Leaving his park ranger shirt on, he knelt between her legs and touched the thin piece of material lying

across her mound. "You taste as sweet as you look?" he asked, stroking the tight curls covering her nether lips.

"Please us both and find out."

"You want me to lick your little cunt?"

She nodded, feeling her blood quicken and her center swirl with liquid heat.

"Say it baby, I'll do it. And whatever else you want."

His request was more playful plea than command, so she spoke, giving him the words he wanted, then lowered one hand to spread her lips for him. "Lick my clit, and if I like it, I'll let you put your dick in me."

Chuckling as he knelt lower, he slid his warm tongue out and licked her nub, slow and steady. The quick, gentle rhythm fulfilled his promise.

Mere seconds later, Taryn was squirming against vivid images and heated memories of Adrian.

Don't think of him...

But with each hungry lick, the strong hold she'd always had on her emotions frayed until the edges of her control came completely undone. Fighting the memory of the last time Adrian touched her, Taryn spread her legs and pressed against the stranger's ravenous mouth, encouraging him to take more. As though if she gave away enough of herself, there would be nothing left inside her to ache for Adrian.

Instead of following her unspoken request, the man lifted his hot mouth from her swollen, dripping pussy. "Easy there, I'm just getting you wet, so we can both enjoy the ride."

But she barely heard him. She was too far into her memories, wishing it was Adrian. If it were Adrian licking her, she would pull away, then position her mouth on his deft rod, sucking, and stroking until the pleasure she offered washed away her dreadful, final words.

Struggling against the wretched emotions, Taryn dropped her head back and spread her legs. "Hurry up," she said, trying to sound strong and in control, but even to herself she sounded dazed. "What are you wait--"

With one strong forward motion, he filled her to the hilt, then drew completely back, positioning his smooth tip at her opening. He chuckled, loving the way she stroked his male ego by wiggling beneath him, silently begging for more. Satisfied that she was aching for his stroke, he rammed his rod in with a hard pounding rhythm that shook her whole body.

Taryn wanted more. His punishing thrusts weren't nearly enough to shatter her thoughts of Adrian..

It was then that she realized--she could be fucked but a hundred men, a thousand different ways, and it would never be enough. Not until it was Adrian pounding into her, making her his. Claiming her...branding her...

Don't think of him... take what you can get...

Taryn lifted her legs, wrapping them around the man's well-muscled back, and matched him thrust for thrust, urgently bringing on the first curls of climax. The waves of fire spread quickly, swallowing her whole, pulling her deep into painful pleasure. On the heels of her second orgasm, his hot juices spilled out, he moaned, and impaled her three final times.

"Damn," he groaned, once his breathing slowed enough to speak. "You are one fine piece of ass."

He chuckled, reaching out to pinch her left nipple. "But I'm not even goin' to bother asking for your digits." He fell back on his haunches, grabbing his shorts and briefs, then rising to tug them on, his motions efficient yet relaxed. He took a last look at her naked body, still glistening from his sex. "I can always tell when a woman's got another man on her mind." He winked and strolled off, leaving Taryn imprisoned by the wild longing for which there was only one release.

Kate set down her bottled water, unhooked her halter-style bikini top, tossed it onto the sand, and flopped on the beach mat she'd unrolled. "You're sure you don't want that hottie barista for yourself?"

Taryn swept her hair from her eyes and squinted over at her friend. Not even twenty minutes had past since the dark man had pounded into her, and still she was hot and wet, ready for sex, restless. But restless for only one man. "I'm sure." Offering a slanted smile, she added, "Really. He's all yours."

"Okay... if you say so. But you kind of had a look in your eyes, if you know what I mean."

Adrian. So near... but out of reach. Forever. "He reminded me of someone, that's all."

"Lucky you." Kate chuckled lightly, "But since you're sure..."

The electricity in the other woman's tone struck a cord in Taryn, she took a closer look at the other woman's flushed face. "You already did it, didn't you?"

"This morning around eleven, I went back to get a coffee on my break, he was just getting off work, so we went out to his car..." Kate giggled. "We only had time to do it once because he had to go to some interview for a modeling job working with a sculptor."

As she lamented having only fucked him once, Kate shook her head and pouted as though she were a child who'd missed out on her favorite game. The laughter that drifted out of Taryn was so natural, so welcome, she embraced it completely, relishing one of the many light-hearted moments she experienced with her new companion. The experience of having a female friend was still so new, at times like this, the pleasure she experienced caught her unaware.

Kate lifted her palms, interrupting Taryn's mirth, "His personality is... well, maybe you'll get to talk to him and see what I mean... but that *body*." She rolled her eyes, "And his dick," she flipped onto her back, slipping her hair away from her shoulders, purring as she stretched her long legs.

Kate continued on, describing the strong thick curve of Cutter's thighs and how his ass flexed when he walked. Of course Taryn didn't need the descriptive detail to imagine each bend of him. She had been lying beneath him for two hours that afternoon, acting the part of a woman desirous of his touch.

Although she agreed, his physique held a great deal of appeal, knowing that Adrian stood on the other side of that screen...

Why?

What possible reason could there be for their paths to cross?

Other than to throw her own foolishnesses and vanity in her face while the Gods laughed, she could think of nothing.

Why didn't Adrian make himself known?

Did he enjoy watching her degrade herself by using her body put money in her purse instead of using it to possess whomever she desired?

Several minutes later, Kate's tryst account ended as she finished with, "He left me a voice mail, asking me to meet him at some pool over by that old warehouse tonight."

But Taryn wasn't listening any longer, Kate's vivid description had stirred her imagination. Instead of visualizing Kate and Cutter, her mind was filled with images of her and Adrian. Visions of their past mingled with her ever present desire. He could take her any way he wanted, and she would be willing.

If only she could go to him, explain. Show him how she longed for him... but to violate the dictate...

Pictures of her beautiful home flashed through her mind.

Her mother...her father...

Her sisters--even though they had tricked her, sent her to The Oracle shame her, she'd had plenty of time to think and realize they'd had their reasons for deceiving her.

Yet worse than remembering her beautiful homeland and beloved family was recalling her own arrogant declaration to Adrian that she could have all them men she wanted, why should she settle for only him? He too had had a declaration. He would never again come to her.

One of the things she admired about him the most, Adrian was a man of his word. So even though he was in L.A., he would not seek her out, of that she was certain.

"So you think its okay to accept a fuck date via voice mail?"

Dodging frustration, Taryn snapped out of her musings, turned to Kate, and inwardly questioning her own worthiness to advise another, responded, "You don't need my approval."

Kate laughed. "I know. You just tell me if you want the details tonight, right after I finish with him, or in the morning, over coffee."

"The morning will be soon enough."

Kate lifted an eyebrow, grinning. "I've been daydreaming about round two all morning," Kate murmured, smoothing her palms across her flat stomach, her nipples dark and warm under the late afternoon heat of the California sun. Softly, she began planning her evening exploits, and again her words faded into the back of Taryn's mind.

Adrian.

Her first lover, the one man who had treated her sweetly without demanding she give in to his every request. She'd been too arrogant to appreciate his honesty, his true devotion. She'd only cared about the power she had over men, the way she could make all the other women so fierce with jealousy, they despised her as much as they longed to possess her flawless beauty.

If only she could have him one last time, maybe he would forgive her for the way she had treated him, taunting him with the many men whom she'd taken freely to her bed.

Her stomach tightened with awareness. The shape of what the Fates had in mind for her was gradually beginning to form in her mind. She was getting what she deserved, she knew, but that didn't stop her from considering ways to change the course of events and get what she wanted.

Chapter Five

Slightly after midnight, Taryn paused beneath the blinking crosswalk, waiting for the typical late night stream of restless city traffic to thin. The windows of Adrian's studio were dark, as she expected. It would be hours before he returned from his usual midnight run.

She wasn't going to him--she sought solitude in his space, so her actions didn't go against the dictate.

Not all of her freedoms had been taken, only one.

But there was more to life than freedom and pride. There was respect. Love.

And humility. Qualities she was only now beginning to appreciate.

If only she had understood sooner. Things could have been so much different.

Leaving the last of her doubts behind, she stepped from the curb, crossed the street.

The courtyard gate swung on silent hinges, willingly granting her access to Adrian's world. She passed the pool, then moved through the narrow hallway that led to his studio. Once reaching it, she stalled, listening to the silence and breathing Adrian's heady scent.

Neon light and moonbeams streaked across the walls. The floors, the table, the tools--everything was covered with a thin layer of dust from the marble slab Adrian had been shaping, preparing for his visionary touch.

Stepping further into the expansive room, she caught a glimpse of a jumbled stack of large paper sheets.

She scattered the pages across the drawing table. The first was a rough outline of her arched body, with Cutter standing behind, cupping her breasts and sliding his knee between her thighs. In the next, she was lying on her side, twisted, exposing the deep clef of her hips. Cutter knelt beside her, his stiff rod jutting forward, anxious to drive deep.

She flipped through the rest. Lying, sitting, standing, she and Cutter had been in nearly every sexual pose possible for a man and woman. The positions were sensual, but there was no passion in their eyes.

Coupling without love.

The motions of sex, the constant search for pleasure, only to be let down again and again. That was the life awaiting her, the one the Fates had designed.

Resentment swelled in her throat, making her fall away from the images swimming before her.

Wasn't there another mortal they could amuse themselves with? Was she so horrible she deserved this punishment?

Enough with the self-pity, she scolded herself, turning her back on the drawings that could have been of her and any one of many other men. Adrian would never want her again, but that didn't quell her longing for him. Somehow she would find satisfaction in being near him without touching him or even seeing his face..

Leaving the drawings behind, she stepped to the window, taking in the beauty of the moon and ignoring the ever present smog and garish lights. Directly in front of her, the water of the pool glimmered, calm and refreshing.

From their time together, Taryn knew Adrian often ran all night. There was nothing to prevent her from washing away her regrets. Should he return, she would simply slip out unnoticed.

She crossed to the dressing divider positioned across from the mesh screen Adrian stood behind while sketching. After shedding her dress and setting her sandals beside the chair, she slipped into the red silk dressing robe she kept at the studio for the few breaks they were given. The smooth fabric hugged her arms and skimmed across her nipples, making them tighten and peak as she walked across the room.

The soft crack of the wooden platform beneath her feet ended when she stopped in front of the huge slab of marble that would eventually be shaped into her likeness. There were no flickers of pride skimming through her heart, only shame that she had squandered her gift of beauty, something she should have saved for the one man who would commitment himself to her forever.

Hopefully she would never see the creation of herself that would mock her, remind her of her own folly.

Outside, Taryn paused by the edge of the pool, turning slightly to let the thin night breeze skim across her skin.

Adrian.

Hidden in the shadows, drying off with a thick white towel.

Startled, she stumbled back, her gaze still upon him. The curve of his sculpted, bare chest pressed into the palm fronds, giving her enough of a glimpse at his naked body to send her blood racing.

His face was turned from her, his expression plain. He was unaware that she had seen him.

If she did approach him, what words would he have for her?

She winced. Only what she deserved.

What words would she have for him?

The truth?

That she longed for him with a fierce passion that frightened her so that her own fears had sent her chasing every man she could conquer, even going as far as stealing other women's men, just to prove she could?

That she had been submitting to nameless men for months, allowing them to use her and toss her aside the way she had done to others countless times?

And the most disturbing truth, that she loved him still and realized now that she always would.

Anger flickered in her chest and took hold. First, the rage was directed at the Fates for their cruelty, but quickly she accepted that she had done this to herself. The Fates had merely arranged for her to see the ugly side of her beauty.

No matter how sexually satisfying, mindless matings would never fulfill her, make her whole the way Adrian had at one time.

Before she had been a fool and thrown it all away.

For pride.

Vanity.

Before she understood that one could not be truly whole alone.

She stepped forward and lowered her foot, swirling her toes in the water.

If they were together again, would Adrian take her quickly? Pounding his hot, hard cock between her legs with a fast, steady rhythm?

Or slowly? Stroking gently until she begged for release...

She gritted her teeth against the frustration pounding through her veins, trying to stop wanting, but she was a mere human and incapable to supreme acts of strength.

Step out Adrian, come to me...

The breeze blew, flattening her red silk robe across her tight nipples. She turned slightly, angling herself

toward Adrian and letting the night wind pull the fabric over her shoulders and lower, revealing the rounded swell of her right breast.

No man had ever been unaffected by her legendary beauty—but Adrian wasn't just any man. He wasn't like any other man she had ever known. Or ever would know.

She descended the first step, watching the liquid motion of the water as it rippled like elusive waves of pleasure. Lapping gently, it rolled over the aqua tiled edge, making it glisten.

Other than the gentle splash, and the constant hum of cars, silence pressed in. He had seen and chosen to remain apart.

For the first time, Taryn knew desperation, and it frightened her. The unfamiliar swirling tension in the pit of her stomach, the heaviness in her heart as though beating was too much effort.

Instinctively, she realized she was desperate the way a woman is when everything she wants has slipped through her fingers.

There had to be a way she and Adrian could--

She wouldn't give up, because to do so... would be...

Unthinkable.

Unbearable.

She wasn't permitted to approach Adrian, but she could use what the Gods had blessed her with to lure him. Perhaps he would come to her again.

It was a tiny possibility, the smallest chance she could change her destiny. There was nothing to lose but her pride. More and more she was realizing that pride came at too high a cost.

Arching back, she loosened the thin sash looped around her waist and descended. The water rippled, sending tiny waves across the glassy surface. The edges of her robe twisted and spun, then pulled apart to expose her flushed, bare skin when she strode forward, crossing to the corner of the pool where Adrian hid.

She halted, a short distance from the edge, cupped her heavy breasts. Lost in her own lonely desire for the man she once called her lover, she closed her eyes. Using her fingertips, she caressed the soft underside, then lifting higher, pinched her nipples. Delicious fire flickered between her legs, but she didn't want to be alone. She wanted him.

Ached for him.

If only my hands were yours...

I'd do whatever you wanted...

"The chick I was supposed to meet here got called in to work, but you look like you'd like some company."

Taryn knew the voice didn't belong to Adrian, just as she knew she'd soon be yielding to another unfulfilling fuck.

How many more would there be?

The earlier flames of anger ignited, burning away all rational thoughts, leaving her with only raw, painful emotions. Sensations she wanted to deny.

At least there was something in this encounter for her—or rather something for Adrian—a show he'd not soon forget.

Before peeling the soaking robe from her damp, naked body, she glanced over to be sure Adrian remained tucked away. Satisfied he wasn't watching, she pranced forward, letting her breasts bounce nicely, straight into the arms of another man.

The moon had rolled over the clouds, shadowing the man's face, but his movements echoed in her mind.

Cutter.

For a heartbeat she faltered, before frustration and dread propelled her forward.

Adrian sucked in sharp breath, grinding his teeth as the model cupped Taryn's lush breasts. A true son of Zeus would not be forced to stand by and watch the woman he desired be taken by another man. Yet, there he was, hiding in the shadows like some slave spying on his mater. His shaft was tight and painfully ready, he dropped the towel to squeeze his engorged flesh.

Shame and desire engulfed him, a painfully heavy combination.

Curse The Oracle.

He had never been one to stand back, waiting for what he wanted to come to him. His entire life could pass by, and he could still be begging for the acknowledgement that would prove he was a God's son, a man worthy of a woman like Taryn. Without the recognition as a true son of Zeus, he had nothing more than himself.

That had not been enough then, it would not be enough now.

Despite his inner rage, Adrian could not wrench his gaze away, nor could he still the jerking motions of his hand as his fingers squeezed his desperate cock. After pushing her up against the side of the pool, Cutter leaned down, whispering in Taryn's ear. She tipped her head back, smiling, but the warm, throaty laugh that rumbled out of her chest didn't ring true.

Adrian angled forward, focusing on the curve of her mouth. A stranger wouldn't know, but he did. Her smile was forced, awkward. Yet, she made no move to push the man away.

He dropped his hand, looked closer, questioning.

Why would she accept a partner she didn't desire?

The Fates.

He wasn't the only one whose life they were toying with.

Taryn loved her homeland. There she had everything she desired, she never would have left willingly.

Adrian's gaze drifted away from the pool. Taryn was proud, and wouldn't want him peering at her from the shadows while she wrestled with her private dilemma, whatever it was. Besides, there was nothing he could do for her. She had made it clear that their lives were to take separate paths.

After waiting until they had both turned from him, Adrian crossed along the edge of the pool and passed through the gate.

Even though the man was doing his best to capture all of her attention, the swing of the gate caught Taryn's eye.

Adrian had left.

In the moments since she'd approached the barista, she anger had faded, now she understood. There was no reason for Adrian to watch her perform. Their lives were no longer intertwined, she wasn't part of two. She was one.

For now--and for all eternity.

She also understood; that without Adrian, it didn't matter where she was.

"Hey, what the hell," Cutter sputtered when Taryn shoved him away. "I thought you wanted it."

Striding through the water to retrieve her robe, she replied, "I changed my mind."

And there's no going back.

Not on this decision.

Chapter Six

"The Fates are done toying with me, but that is all." Taryn pushed away from her sister to stand at the

open balcony door, the salty evening air of her beloved homeland grazing her cheek, sending tendrils of hair scattering. "It was all for nothing, don't you see?"

Her sister glided forward, a babbling baby resting on her hip. "But you said--"

"I know what I said, but what benefit is learning friendship, humility, and what it is to be in love when your life is so empty there is no opportunity to put those lessons to use?"

Taryn took a step forward, the soles of her bare feet welcoming the cool outdoor tiles. On the horizon the last rays of the sun were pulling away, bringing on another stretch of lonely, empty hours. "I am home, but alone and--"

"You will have no trouble finding male companionship."

Casting a glance at her sister who was cooing to the sweet faced little one gazing up at her with adoring eyes, Taryn moved forward, still talking, mostly to alleviate the tension that had clung to her night and day, even since she had been brought home weeks ago. "Not any man will do. I didn't know love, but now, even though I have not again known the embrace of his arms, the taste of his mouth, I know love. I know--"

"You know what you want?"

Adrian.

Taryn's heart soared as he swung himself over the balcony railing, but then truth pressed in and the smile fell from her mouth.

He grinned at her distress, reaching out and pulling her into his arms. "Surprised?"

"You--you are--"

"Back home. Where I am to stay." He lifted her chin and kissed her lightly on the lips. "Unless, of course, I make another visit to the Oracle."

Still reeling from shock, Taryn blinked.

"I arrived home yesterday." The crooked smile on his mouth grew wider. "The Fates have done us right, wouldn't you agree?"

"At the pool, I was with Cutter--"

"You did not desire him, I know. I was inside, watching from the window when I saw you push him away." Still holding her close, Adrian cast his gaze across the rolling valley below Taryn's mountainside home. "It was then that I first realized only by accepting and learning to control my human side--that part of me which rages with impatience--would I truly be worthy of the acknowledgement I seek."

Touched by his words, Taryn flattened her palms across his strong, warm chest. It was too soon to speak of their turbulent past, yet for the first time since she had pushed Adrian out of her life, she knew that she would again be his.

"I spoke with Zeus's messenger this morning."

Taryn's eyes widened. "Does this mean--"

"My true father has requested my presence, I am on my way to him." Adrian's dark eyes focused on her face, intent and demanding. "Upon my return, I will inform you of your new—permanent—living arrangements."

"Is it a dictate that you have for me?" Taryn asked, lightly.

"Absolutely. But mine does not come from the Oracle. Mine comes from a son of Zeus."

About the Author

Thrill-seeking risk takers, heroes with a dark past, sexy locales, untamed women! Isabelle Drake writes stories featuring men and women who aren't afraid to go after what they want. An avid traveler, she'll go just about anywhere—at least once—to meet people and get story ideas.

About this Title

This eBook was created using ReaderWorks®Publisher 2.0, produced by OverDrive, Inc.

For more information about ReaderWorks, please visit us on the Web at
www.overdrive.com/readerworks