

A morous Passageways



The Seven
Wonders
of the
Ancient
World

STATUE OF
ZEUS
THROUGH
TIME

Foreword by
Ciar Cullen

B. L. Foxxe

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Amorous Passageways - The Statue of Zeus at
Olympia

Statue of Zeus Through Time

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FORWARD: THE ORIGINS OF THE WONDERS

BY CIAR CULLEN

Psychology, the occult and numerology aside, we can possibly blame the ancient Greek mathematician Pythagoras for some of this affinity for things in quantities of seven, the prime number he favored and considered 'not too big and not too small'. The number was firmly established in Greek literature by the time the historian Herodotus (484 BC-425 BC) listed seven great ancient 'sites' in his *magnum opus*. (Some scholars attribute this list to a mechanic named Philo of Byzantium.).

So what's so wonderful about these wonders? Did they all really exist? Who built them, and why? For one thing, all seven wonders are big—really big by ancient standards—and opulent, each requiring years, even decades of labor and unfathomable financial resources. Thus they represent the pinnacle of human achievement at the time Herodotus listed them.

Two are tombs, two are statues of gods, one is a temple, one a lighthouse and finally, a fantastic garden. Two are in Egypt, two in modern Turkey, two in Greece, and one in modern Iraq. Ironically, the oldest of the wonders—the Great Pyramid of Giza—is the sole survivor of the ages. But researchers have

unearthed fairly convincing evidence for the rest of the structures either in ancient literature or through archaeological investigations. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon remain the most shrouded in mystery.

One interesting note: the oldest, the Great Pyramid, was already about two thousand years old when the next oldest (likely the Temple of Artemis) was erected, and already nearly three thousand years old at the birth of Christ. The Pharos Lighthouse was constructed not much longer ago than two thousand years. The wonder, magnificence, mystery and sheer romance of these great works of art and architecture increase with each passing century.

Within this series are seven tales of love and wonder. Perhaps by reading these stories you'll now be able to remember the names of the wonders, and become a believer in the magical power of the number seven. If you still have trouble, try this visualization: You are an ancient sailor, traveling the Mediterranean. You spot a lighthouse (1) and head for port. You steer your ship between the legs of the great Colossus of Rhodes (2). You disembark and head down the paved road. You are flanked by two tombs—a great mausoleum on the left (3) and a huge pyramid (4) on the right. You proceed up the hill and encounter two gods. On the left, Artemis (5) resides in her temple. On your right is a massive enthroned Zeus in his temple (6). You rest from your long hike under a flowering fig tree in the luxurious gardens of Babylon (7), where you await the arrival of your true love.

THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD - THE STATUE OF ZEUS AT OLYMPIA

Started around 440 BC and reputedly taking eight years to build, the sculptor Pheidias constructed a gold and ivory masterpiece for the interior of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, on the West coast of Greece. Although nothing remains of the work, and very little of the temple, the statue is well documented by contemporary and later writers. At forty feet high, the seated King of the Gods would have been awe-inspiring, holding a statue of Victory in one hand and a heavily ornamented scepter in the other. Archaeologists unearthed what they believe to be Pheidias' workshop, containing tools and molds for the construction. Legend holds that the Roman emperor Caligula tried to move the work to Rome, but the scaffolding collapsed. The Temple was closed in 391 by a Christian Emperor, and although the statue survived earthquakes, fires, landslides and Christianity, it eventually succumbed to a fire in Constantinople, its final home.

DEDICATION:

This goes out to all the published authors, and great friends who've supported me in my first attempts at creating a story. This also goes to my paternal and maternal grandmothers whose names I combined to create this name. In respect to all who are aspiring writers...If I can do this, after several years of steady writing, so can you. Don't give up!



CHAPTER ONE

ANCIENT CURSED TEMPLES, ROANOKE, 2074

Sinati slowly walked to the entrance where the abandoned temples lay in ruins. With painful sorrow, she clenched her teeth as anger coursed through her body. After carefully looking around, she bowed her head respectfully to the ancient ancestral spirits haunting the shrines within. Sometimes, especially now, she hated being tied to the religious Grecian objects as a priestess and part-time seer. She carried out her duties faithfully to Athene and Zeus, though she rarely heard from them anymore.

She disliked being summoned to this place where nothing lived without the clime wreaking havoc on mind, body, and soul, especially the soul. Her eyes flickered around the damp; mildewing buildings that she knew shouldn't be underground at all. Here it would decay slowly but surely, while up above it was dry and warm year round. She didn't like the sensation that the articles within were to be used for subversive reasons.

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She wouldn't serve anyone who killed for pleasure, and yet she knew it was something others did anyway. Feeling expectancy and if she wasn't mistaken, surprise, Sinati murmured a greeting to Athene, the weaver, and Zeus for justice, and sketched a sigil into the air. With a flick of her wrist, she spread a small silk kerchief that she burnt as a sacrifice to the deities. She heard laughter at her gesture and scowled with anger. Her senses alerted her to the fact that her enemies were waiting for her to make a mistake. Sinati got the definite feeling that others were testing her as far as loyalties were concerned, and the realization angered her.

Her head whipped around when she saw the dark shadows ripple with movement not caused by drafts. Resembling the shadows they lived in, Sinati spotted the men; they released barks of laughter that floated cruelly through the air. Observing them, Sinati realized that they didn't know what the gesture meant. She then caught on that the leader, floating toward the whitened walls, knew her weakness.

With adrenaline racing through her veins, Sinati recognized him immediately. She scanned his peripheral thoughts. Her options were limited. Now Sinati knew he despised the fact that if he killed her, he'd wind up someplace far more hellish. Her eyebrow rose as she observed him.

* * * *

Shadows danced along the walls while a standoff

occurred. The players were still as they stared at reflections that played along the walls. There were others who watched and observed the actions.

Staying a safe distance away from her, Caedion and his minions released barks of laughter as they watched their prey with hooded eyes. He knew she was aware of his presence, and hated him with a passion. His lips curved cruelly when he saw her stillness. "Yes, we know you aren't stupid, Sinati, far from it. You make sure you can travel anywhere you please."

Caedion savored the fact that she was wary of him. It showed intelligence on her part. He despised Scythians, for they possessed far more power than he did. "No matter if you travel solo or with companions." His contempt filled the shrine when he mentioned the last.

Caedion watched as Sinati rubbed her forehead with her wrist. She said nothing in response to his words. Caedion smiled when he caught the small shiver that wracked her body. At that point, Caedion knew she was thinking about it and why he was there. A smile curled his lips as he caught fleeting thoughts. His tone was oily and sanctimonious, not to mention filled with vitriol. She wasn't the only one who could do the mind-reading trick.

"What do you want, Caedion?"

Unconsciously, Caedion grimaced when he realized what she was thinking. Sinati suspected it was the usual. She was aware that he was notorious for being damned picky about what he wanted from

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her. Well, she did have a point, he conceded. He floated away as he considered what ramifications might be. The wrong phrase given could be found in their answer to each other's ripostes. They held long-standing grudges, though that time Caedion didn't fault her. He shot her a stare and turned his mind to a problem that concerned him more. This time, Caedion deliberately let her view his thoughts clearly.

* * * *

Shadows, shades, ghosts, spooks, what have you danced in agitation as time became of essence. Their unspoken warnings were unheeded with all the tense emotions thickening the air. The spirits eased away and the shadows became still, completely so. None moved independently any longer without the help of flickering torch lights. The change surprised the two combatants into stopping their internal monologues. Sinati looked around in puzzlement.

For a brief moment, Sinati wondered, hearing a drift of thoughts that were both fleeting and spooky.

No, this time he didn't want her precious soul. However, he would prey upon her later for that bit...

Her eyes narrowed and she knew the emotional vampire thought he held something over his head. She barely concealed a snarl when she realized what he wanted to do. Idiot, she thought with disgust. Sinati heard soft mental laughter surrounding her and realized she wasn't the only one – Caedion's minions, for that matter – who listened to the conversation.

Caedion's head whipped around as he searched for the cause of her shifting moods. He refocused on her with a scowl. "I don't want your soul – this time," he paused. "I merely want access to a time portal."

A heavy, expectant silence settled between them when she digested his words. Her eyebrows rose when she noticed the stylized figures in the murals beginning to waver and snapped her attention back to the wraith. Sinati barely suppressed a snort. Well, that's a switch, she thought with some surprise. She wasn't relieved, though; she couldn't figure out how he came up with the notion that she controlled portals. "Why should I give it to you?" Even her blood relatives knew she didn't control those things; they were far beyond what she mastered.

* * * *

Once again shadows rippled, this time causing a murmur from his minions. They were a superstitious lot. Disgusted, he made a waving motion with his hand and the rippling subsided. Still, he kept an eye on the different figures. His fascination with two of them was what led to his discovery of her weaknesses. With that in mind, Caedion watched her gaze flitting around the walls.

"I know where your friends hide. I know the key that will kill them all without touching them." Caedion folded his arms over his robed chest, staying right where he was. He knew she thought of him as a wraith and in some respects, he was. He didn't like

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being a dispossessed spirit and wanted to become solid once more.

Caedion watched Sinati consider his words. He became aware of a subtle, gleaming, otherworldly light that infused the underground shrine. Furious, Caedion noticed how it slowly highlighted the enemies who skulked about. Being forced to move again did not make him at all happy. Still, it was an interesting experience watching Sinati in action.

He noted that her wariness caused Sinati to become more careful. She used the signals as guides for locating her tormentor. Annoyed, he shifted position once again, staying out of her sight. Caedion relaxed against a statue while Sinati studied the walls, searching for any slight movement that would reveal his location. Caedion became bored and shifted his stance, thus letting her finally catch where he stood, though it was difficult. Sinati had learned from past skirmishes that he could merge with anything as long as it was a pale grey or white hue.

"I know you're lying, since they didn't split up like you wanted them to." His eyebrows arched when he caught her brief surprise. He smiled as he learned exactly what happened. They had split up, but for more reasons than he conceived in his strange, convoluted mind. She wanted to throw him off their scent for as long as she could. Too bad for her that wouldn't happen so easily, he thought sourly.

Disturbed with the strange light slowly coming into the chamber, he shifted closer to the lighter walls, then shrugged. Stunned at her words, Caedion roared

with laughter of mixed hostility and amusement. He walked towards her after that, but stopped short of being within strangling distance. Caedion knew what she was capable of. He didn't care to find himself hanging somewhere too far from landing safely without multiple broken bones.

"Do you take me for a fool, you stupid, self-serving bitch?" As he spoke, Caedion twisted his body, throwing himself to the ground. His men came out of hiding spots, attacking the arachnidian woman.

* * * *

More diffused lighting invaded the cavernous chamber. It surrounded all the statues. The pale light highlighted three or four that momentarily glowed with an inner power.

Waiting patiently, the priestess stood, letting the warmth of the god and goddess enfold her. She didn't know what else to do other than hope she wouldn't miss her targets.

Sinati watched him calmly, with a sardonic smile. As she observed his actions, she realized he didn't know she could move about freely within the walls. It was allowed, since she had the acceptance from the gods who inhabited the spirit of the shrine.

She whirled, at the last moment brandishing her shiny black fingernails that extended an extra three inches. From their tips, threads of rough silk spun and formed an extremely nasty stinger-filled web. The lackey ended up cocooned in a strangling web that

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hung from the highest point on a temple.

There were shrieks from pain-wracked men that were no longer viable. Within seconds, the sounds stopped and the cocoons hung limply, swaying in breezes that began flowing into the violated confines.

Caedion's jaw was slack from shock as he witnessed her split-second reactions in fighting the deployed attackers. "You are an unholy menace." His eyes snapped with anger. "You stole my son."

Sinati gazed upward and her lips thinned when she saw similar cocoons spun in close proximity where he wound up. She flinched; it meant her spider kin were no longer in residence. "You were saying?" Sinati switched her gaze from the outside back down to Caedion.

* * * *

The darker shadows were becoming thinner by the minute. As they shrank, there were less hiding areas available. Even railing at her, Caedion tracked her reactions and didn't miss the flicker of pain in her gaze, or her less than patient reaction to his words. "You have the gall to free my prisoners, half of which died after leaving." Caedion paused, eyes searching her emotionless face. "Yet you persist in believing you do the right thing when you are a worse abomination than I."

He stared at the left side of her face, where black lines twined into an intricate web pattern, completely obscuring an entire half of her face. His eyes shifted

toward the unmarred half of her face, a dark golden tan. When he looked at the other half, he realized abruptly that an odd tattoo overlaid the spider web mark she'd been born with.

He disliked her large blackish-gold eyes staring at him so intently. Long, blue-black hair waved around her face and androgynous form. She was dressed in flowing black silks with no other color in them. His eyes widened with outrage when he realized she wasn't dressed properly. "Where are your ceremonial robes?"

He could tell that Sinati was getting tired of his clinical appraisal, and was pleased that she was aware of her limitations and disfiguration.

"You didn't specify, Caedion." She smiled thinly. "You should know by now that I take orders literally." She paused, arching an eyebrow at him. Her tone became somewhat frosty in warning. "That I don't bother with extras when they are not specified in the summoning."

There were disturbances in the air that made the two combatants eye each other warily. Still, he was cautious, and so Caedion backed away from her. She was completely crazed, in his opinion. "Why did you have to chose Druid to be your lover?" Caedion glared at Sinati.

Heavy silence hung expectantly. There were also tangible emotions of disapproval, disbelief and finally hostility all aimed at the female. Instantly, warmth receded from her bones, and the woman was left defenseless for that timeless period in seconds.

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Sinati chose not to heed the desertion when she listened to his words. Her brows drew together in shock. Druid, a Myrian earth healer, her lover? she thought with a somber demeanor. Now that would be one for the record. Sinati carefully studied the area with interest, noting the differences from moments before.

Where did Caedion learn that bit of information? She was puzzled. Who the hell did he think he was kidding? Druid didn't view her that way, not in the seven years they'd traveled together. Sinati blinked at him with disbelief, choosing to ignore his last statement completely. She snarled, "Next time specify, or do fucking without."

Sinati flinched slightly as she noticed strange reactions to her words. There were other odd rumblings that resounded in the room as she spoke harshly. Cracks appeared in the walls around the stylized figures. Sinati didn't like the situation and caught the moment when Caedion realized he'd been tricked.

"Salinda, Rokinda, send her to the past earth and don't let her come back until she gives me what I want." His eyes glared balefully. "Exactly forty-three years into the past."

More wisps circled in the air surrounding her. The rest floated toward the commanding man, but drew away as though repelled. Nevertheless, they

continued circling around him. Sinati didn't show a reaction other than to stare at him with disgust. She eyed him silently, shrugged with exasperation, then asked what was paramount on her mind. "Hell, why not kill me now? You've killed the rest of my people." She snorted.

Her gaze roved over him with more than a little contempt. Wispy white hair floated around a skull-like face, with but a very thin covering of white casing. His eyes were burning white coals with pale streaks of blue. Nothing about him was real; he was a mere husk of the man that he had been. Not even his movements showed he'd been a human at one point. Now he floated as though he were only a remnant of a spirit. Sinati grimaced inwardly, because he was still very strong physically. Once he'd looked very different. Her lips thinned while she stared at Caedion.

His eyes became downright hostile. She eyed him challengingly, folding her arms over her chest. Sinati was not in a good mood at all. Someone out there besides herself was causing trouble, and it was only egging him on.

"Send assassins after her ancestors into the ancient past, as far back as needed."

Gazing around the large area, Sinati tried to figure how she'd missed seeing it the first time. It was a terrifyingly beautiful sight sitting off to one side. When she realized what it was, her chest seized up and she felt as though she were blasted with shock. Distantly, Sinati heard a murmured incantation, but

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ignored it in favor of staring at the statue.

Caedion merely gestured at the object, smiling with a coldness that bothered her. "Do you know who that is supposed to be?" Her confirmation would acknowledge her blood relationship to Arachne.

The magnificent piece of statuary dazzled the eyes as light surrounded it, the torchlights flickering out as other sources took its place. It was beautiful, and instinctively she knew what it was a rendition of. After a few seconds, puzzled, Sinati shifted her gaze back to Caedion. "It's Zeus, of the Roman Greco Pantheon. What is the point of all this?" she said disdainfully.

Caedion scowled at Sinati's response. "Why the attitude, Sinati?" Caedion's eyes narrowed.

Sinati looked at him with annoyance. "It's personal." She folded her arms over her chest. Sinati kept an eye on the statue, noting its lifelike appearance even if the proportions were completely unrealistic. She realized she should have paid more attention to the dreams that she'd had in the past. Some of them were rather strange and weird, but now she wondered what would happen next.

"Why do you need my confirmation of what that is? It's the statue of Zeus that was supposedly destroyed. Obviously, though, it wasn't." She wasn't going to ask how it ended up there. She was pretty sure he must have moved it; knowing Caedion, anything was possible.

He threw an object at her. Sinati grunted as she avoided it, knowing she'd made a mistake when she

got too close to Caedion at an angle where she couldn't hit him with anything and not injure herself. Too late, she divined what he was up to. "I can't handle those portals."

Acting swiftly, Caedion cut her arm, watching the orange-red blood fall. She yelped in pain. Damn, that hurt, she thought, and knew with certainty that he was going to try gaining godhood.

* * * *

He nodded with satisfaction when the droplet of blood splashed into a small black area at his feet. He held up the obsidian blade he'd used to cut her. A little disappointed that it had been so easy to catch her off-balance, Caedion shrugged. He wiped it off on the black stone, in the left section. Observing the reactions of the chemicals, Caedion realized that for the left angle, he would need a different kind of blood. As for the right north angle... He studied the chemical mixing with the blood and smiled in satisfaction. It was combining just fine. She really didn't know what her heritage was after all. It was a good thing to know for the future.

"See you in Tartarus, bitch." He watched the last obstacle that lay between him and his dominion of the wild untamed lands disappear through the portal—a shining, hexagonal pointed object shimmering with power—that opened up.

"Freone." Caedion watched a flowing shadow pop out at his call. His brows drew into a menacing frown

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when he saw the shaking begin. "Fine, change." He crossed his arms over his chest.

Freone shook and black dust puffed around his body. He met Caedion's disgusted stare with a cold one of his own. "She is trapped, sir, as you requested."

Caedion's gaze narrowed at the subtle insult. So he and the rest were beginning to regain their courage, were they? "She is dead?" He needed to be sure.

Freone's back stiffened. "Those were not within the original orders, sir." His voice was smooth. "All we were to do was bind her so that she would slowly drown within the seas' waters." Freone met Caedion's gaze full on. "There was nothing about killing her instantly." He drew up in warning.

Caedion's face twisted with revulsion when Freone's extra limbs appeared and began creating a web. "This is what was done."

Caedion stared at the sight with contempt. "I need visual proof of actual action," he snapped.

"You'll have to go to your snake woman for that, then." Freone replied. He reformed, becoming merely a shadow once more. "We did our part of the bargain, Caedion, now you honor yours."

Caedion laughed harshly. "Why should I do such a thing? You Scythians are too powerful as is." He shook his head. "No, I regret to say that I made other arrangements." With a swift slash, he struck off Freone's head. The blood washed over the black square, and the second white portal opened. Caedion heard a dim roar that dimmed his sight, deafened his

hearing and muted all surrounding landmarks.

When it was over, Caedion chuckled darkly. "Come, Shaine, they are gone." He watched as his younger son stepped forward. His face was pale and frightened at what he witnessed. "You see what will happen to you and the other rebels, should you chose to join their cause. Already Sinati is gone. I need Druid," he sneered at the chosen name of his oldest son, "for the rest of the incantation." His narrowed gaze fastened on Shaine.

"You will do this, or forfeit your life now. I have other offspring I know I can count on. Do you possess such knowledge of having blood to pass on?

Shaine shook his head. "No, father, I do not." He stood tall and unwavering. "Nor do I have any interest in following their footsteps." Shaine frowned, eyeing his father warily. "Was that genocide necessary?"

Caedion just looked at him. "Believe what you want, but never question my decisions." He struck the younger man. "Now get back to your brother and lead him to the meeting place." With that Caedion created a third portal, the only one that was open now. He watched Shaine step through it with a disgusted grunt.

That one was a coward, all right. It was a good thing he'd caught him before he'd warned the Scythians of his little plot to get rid of their ruling bloodline. Otherwise they would have saved that stupid female, Sinati, rather than let her die as a sacrifice to keep their lives eternal. Caedion shrugged.

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Too bad they didn't realize they'd been sent to a dying planet and their time would soon end in death and starvation anyway. As for those damned rebels, the scientists would get them sooner than they expected.

His eyes chilled. Just as well, because some of their genes were just what those good men and women needed to promote their next experiments.

Caedion shrugged. Now he would bring Mazurka out of her deep hibernation. Caedion didn't like the notion but knew it had to be done, simply because she had skills he didn't. At least now he just needed her for those, rather than offspring.

CHAPTER TWO

WOODS OF OTTAWA, 2074

Time was running short for the villains, for there were others who sought to bring them down and could, without the spider people. However, that loss was one that needed to be mourned later. There was still hope; that Caedion well knew. He hated the fact that his full-blood son chose to throw in his lot with the rebels.

His eyes narrowed as he spotted his other companion slinking through the night, weaving a sinuous trail in the moonlight. His mood was derisive when he stared at the woman. She had no memory of what she once was and didn't know who they were after.

In the meantime, it would suffice that soon enough he would have to tell her the truth, but he thought he would make her squirm first. It was a satisfying thought with his minor victory behind him.

His felt his features twist into a vicious mask when he heard voices, and saw Mazurka start and freeze.

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Her head turned briefly toward him and he could hear a faint hissing sound. How he ever believed her to be a beautiful female, he didn't know. With a sigh, he shrugged. He'd done the right thing in using her to create his sons. Not that all of them had turned out like he'd planned. However, he would use their weaknesses against them. It was the only way he could see getting them back to where they belonged.

Now he just needed to find a way to make sure to trap the one he wanted most. Druid, Caedion's oldest, most rebellious son. Druid, who disappointed him most, infuriating him because of his dislike for anarchy.

The soft hissing alerted him and he glanced at Mazurka. "Go now, my dear, and strike terror into their souls." His smile was cold as she streaked into the clearing where his oldest and youngest sons crouched.

Watching the ensuing mayhem as he sent off his other minions to continue the havoc, Caedion found it ironic that his youngest son would do anything he wanted, because he was a powerless imbecile. On the other hand, his oldest son, who held more power than he could master in a lifetime, refused to have anything to do with him.

Turning his attention back to what he was planning. Caedion clenched his teeth, knowing that he might well be making the most disastrous mistake so far. However, it was a necessary risk.

Closing his eyes, he thought about how the snake woman had once been beautiful. He grimaced,

thinking about the changes he'd performed on her. None of them worked out like Caedion originally planned. The mother of his two sons. The ones that lived to this age, at least. She'd turned from a beautiful consort to a horrible monster rivaling the original Medusa. His lips tightened when he realized he was being a fool when action should be made.

Turning his head, he frowned when he spotted other figures in the woods. Why would they be there? He thought angrily. His eyes widened. He'd made a dangerous mistake. Despite what he'd led Sinati to believe...not all of her kin were dead. As Caedion observed the strangeness of their movements, his skin chilled.

These ones were most unnatural indeed; they had extra limbs and were using them with great agility. It made him sick to his stomach. When they stopped, not coming nearer to him, Caedion saw the leader drop down to approach him before ending it, fifty feet away.

"She is gone, Lord Wraith." He spoke in sonorous tones.

Observing him uneasily, Caedion was wary. He sensed a difference about them. Something wasn't sitting right with this situation. At least the Scythians were gone. He knew this branch; the Myrians had wanted them gone for centuries. Curiosity hadn't netted him any information. There was no record of what started that particular split. Suspicious about that lack of knowledge, written or oral, Caedion grunted in disgust. At least Mazurka would do what

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no one else could, get close enough to strike at Druid. He needed to make sure that Druid was hurt badly enough that he was near powerless, but not so fatally that he couldn't open another portal.

Caedion grunted and moved so that he could observe through the water mirror. Fortunately for him, there were enough natural elements that spied for him willingly. Now to deal with the other rebels. All, he noted, were filled with abilities that they refused to use for anything but helping others. None of them would kill unless defending themselves. His eyes gleamed with amusement, knowing he could easily do much damage with that knowledge. In his employ, there were traitor rebels who could alter their appearance. He smiled faintly. Not much, but enough to mimic others. What was also a plus was that they could also assume temporary abilities and wreak much havoc on those who sheltered them once.

He glanced up briefly when he spotted Mazurka back in the cavern and glared. "What are you doing here, Mazurka?" His snarl made her glare back.

"You might want to check that scryer of yours." She snarled at him. "It isn't working like it should."

Caedion's gaze became sharp and steely when he approached her. "Remember that I can always use you as a replacement." His tone was silky.

Mazurka snorted in response. "Not really, Caedion." She inspected him. "I no longer have that original bloodline. It was removed when you made me this thing." She waved a hand to her body, both snake and human. Mazurka folded her arms beneath

her breasts. "Take heed and remember this. I am not that woman you seduced so long ago to breed those sons and daughters of yours." She frowned at his puzzled expression. "You don't remember your daughters?"

Caedion puzzled over her words, remembering the beautiful Norse woman he'd taken for a third bride. She'd been a mix of Spaniard and Norse, a combination he hadn't really liked. However, the potential gifts she'd held was what he'd wanted from her. "Daughters, you say?" Caedion did remember finally. "They were murdered, I believe." He'd seen to that himself.

Mazurka hissed angrily at him. Her eyes were icy cold with fury. "Do not mistake me for a fool, I know they are alive." Mazurka smiled icily at him. "Don't expect me to tell you because I don't know where they are." She scowled at the wraith looming over her. "Give it a rest, Caedion. All knowledge will come to you in good time." She paused. "Besides, my past was concealed from you." Mazurka shrugged, scowling at him.

"Quite frankly, I don't care." Caedion gave her a dirty look. "As I recall, I gave you specific orders. Go back and kill Druid," he snapped with extreme irritation.

Mazurka faced him with a cold stare. "What if you sent the wrong one?" She smiled sweetly at him.

Caedion scanned her mind, watching her wince when he grabbed a part of her untamed intellect. "Believe me when I say you don't want to cross me

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right now." His voice was a dangerous growl. "I may have sent out the wrong one, but I can be assured you will deal with that one, won't you?"

Mazurka swallowed, the pain in her mind almost too overbearing. She shuddered in response to his punishing, crushing hold. "Yes, I will, master."

Caedion made a twisting motion with his hand and watched her eyes go opaque. He saw what she truly was and snarled beneath his breath. Yes, he hadn't been wrong. This was one of their spies. With a cold smile of anticipation, he pulled the obsidian knife from the stone and put it against her throat. "If you try playing mind games with me again, like you did just now, say goodbye to all of your family." He paused. "Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sir." Mazurka replied.

"Good. Now get out of my sight." Caedion watched as she fled through the portal. He was satisfied that she wouldn't try betraying him again. His smile was grim. Now to make sure she never turned against him again. "Diran, Rogan, exterminate these beings." He put the images of the family members into their minds. The snake-hunters then slid through a crack that led straight to the fake Mazurka's burrow, where her family slept, unsuspecting of their fate.

* * * *

Night descended upon two figures sitting in a dense forest. Druid crouched morosely in front of a small,

crackling fire, the only sound that could be heard. He contemplated the dancing bright flames.

"How long has it been since Sinati disappeared, Druid?" His young companion studied the fire intently.

"You know as well as I do, Shaine." Druid was tired of the fruitless searching. It was past time to find his woman and reclaim her. Not to mention the fact that it was long past time that she found out what his feelings were for her.

Shaine rolled his eyes at Druid's less than informative response. "She's not in Peoria, or anywhere close?"

Druid looked at the quiet young whip that sat across from him. He scowled at him in warning; his demeanor disapproving. Shaine smoked a pipe. The result was though it was fragrant, the smoke swirled around his head, barely dissipating in the air before it reached the branches. Druid didn't like the smoke, and Shaine knew it. Then again, his half-brother knew most everything about his dislikes.

"You're going to rot out your teeth doing that, Shaine."

Shaine shrugged. "Done that already, these are fake teeth." His smile was downright deadly, but he didn't add on further. "Since when did you know she was no longer in this place?"

Druid sighed. "A week, maybe more, I'm not quite certain, but she's landed somewhere I can't find a place to enter." It frustrated him because he knew where many portals were located. Usually in cliffs,

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and they didn't have to be any particular size, either. They would activate for certain people only. He knew Sinati wasn't one of the ones, unless of course he counted the desecrated temples in Roanoke. He wished he'd warned her about those.

"Ah, I see." Shaine studied his pipe. Finally, he rubbed his jaw. "We'll have to go to the cursed temples. Isn't that where you said she'd be after being summoned?"

Before Druid could answer, a figure streaked through the campsite, knocking out the fire.

Shaine blinked with horrified shock. He froze for a split second as he looked around, finally coming to his senses and barely avoiding being killed when a snake rose out of the darkness.

Druid dove into the ground, peering upward into the darkness. He rose back upward and anger burned through him as he observed flashes of light and destroyed trees among other things that would no longer live. The wanton destruction was typical of his father and his minions. They could never leave anything alone without destroying the natural beauty of the place.

Sensing hostile vibrations, new ones, Druid met his brother's eyes, reading the emotion and turbulence that roared through him. He knew he could not depend on his youngest brother, and it hurt to realize it. Druid concealed his misgivings, however and looked around the glen with caution.

It didn't occur to him to leave his brother alone. Family loyalty was still something he believed in and

cherished. With that in mind, he broke cover to get his brother out of danger. There were shouts when Druid was spotted in his natural state, but he was already slipping away. He stopped, though, and stared at Shaine, even as he wondered why he bothered to do so.

Druid grabbed his brother's arm, pointed and began moving again. It didn't matter that he felt betrayed; he didn't want his brother killed out of sheer stupidity. He quite frankly didn't want his death on his conscience.

Druid watched as Shaine stared at him as though he'd gained two heads and a cloven tail. At that point, Druid knew Shaine didn't want anything to do with him. He also knew, watching the thoughts chasing across his face, the moment when Shaine nearly shouted where he was located. Druid forced Shaine to meet his eyes and he rethought it quickly enough. Druid knew why; his brother wanted to see if he could pry out more information from him.

When Shaine hesitated too long, Druid glowered at him with disgust. "You fool, don't you remember what happened in the past?" His snarl shook his brother up.

"What are you talking about?" Shaine looked bewildered.

"You're an idiot." Druid broke off when whooshing noises passed around him. He glared at Shaine with aggravation. "Arrows, you nitwit, they're shooting Caedion's favorite poison at us. They can't tell the difference between the two of us. Not now, at

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least.”

Druid wasn't surprised when at the moment the small arrows began flying, Shaine followed willingly as he took off. He literally felt the moment when Shaine's skepticism ended.

When one nearly pierced him between the eyes.

Shaine jumped when Druid appeared, passing an arm that was distinctly transparent between them. “What did you just do?”

Druid wasn't in the mood to deal with his brother's bad habit of stopping and having a conversation in the middle of a firefight. Considering the timing, he did understand why others were caught in the past. “Don't bother me with stupid questions, you moron, just move.” Glancing around, Druid began running again, not waiting for an answer.

Panting, and out of breath, Shaine cursed. “Why am I getting this nasty feeling that we're running out of time?” He zigzagged through the woods. When his breath was knocked out of him, he fell onto the ground, unable to move. Druid grabbed him, pulled him to his feet, swearing violently under his breath, and dragged him under the earth.

Peering upward, Druid watched the attackers spread out, milling around in confusion. “Because we are in danger, Shaine. In case you haven't noticed, we're being attacked.” He responded without giving his brother warning of his intentions. At the moment, Druid was merely operating in emergency mode. Later, no doubt, he would rue the moment that his brother was exposed to his uncanny abilities.

As soon as the attackers were gone, they came up for air. Druid and Shaine ran for the nearest Cliffside portal they could reach. They didn't know where it would end up and didn't care. Druid reached a portal, but stopped when he heard a strange noise. He sensed movement, stopped, dodged and circled around his target. There were serpents circling the entire area. Druid heard a familiar hissing that surrounded him and grimaced. Vipers, he hated those things.

Shaine used the moment of confusion to his advantage. He vanished.

Druid caught movement as soon as Shaine was gone, and was angered when he recognized a familiar figure heading in his general location. Mazurka! He could feel her headed where he hovered by an object. Druid grimaced when he sensed her pleasure, then fury when catching sight of him. Apparently he wasn't expected.

"You always did enjoy loving the wrong woman, Druid." Mazurka looked for him.

Mazurka was in the mood to taunt him, Druid realized with irritation. For a moment he didn't understand why Shaine wasn't coming into the mix. Watching her, Druid divined that Mazurka had plans for Shaine. He clearly wasn't the only one to go against Caedion. Well, that was interesting. A double-cross, eh? Druid knew Mazurka too well; she held no liking for traitors.

"Oh, it is you, Mazurka. I thought I recognized the hissing." Druid didn't look at her. He was wary of her

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vipers, specifically the loose ones unattached to her body. "What have I done now?" Not that he really wanted to know. However Druid knew it would annoy the hell out of her. He wondered who bothered to reincarnate his mother—or if she'd ever died, for that matter.

Mazurka slithered around, trying to locate him. She cursed when she realized he'd gone to ground. "That bitch of yours is going to die." Her venomous words sliced through the air. "Caedion won't let her get away from him, no matter where she hides."

Not bothering to conceal his sense of foreboding, Druid didn't know what to make of that and ignored her words. He knew Sinati was gone. However, Druid felt pulses encircling him when he drew nearer a portal. How to open it before she noticed, much less dragged along whomever else accompanied her. "What the hell do you see in Caedion, anyway?" He spoke to distract her, but made sure his voice pitched well away from his current location.

He searched for the portal with his senses, not his eyes. "Man was never much more than a braggart. He gained followers, but they left him damned quick after others realized he talked a smooth setup, but didn't do jack to bring it into reality." Druid knew Caedion was around and watched them.

"You're a fool, bucking my intent to take you into my household once more. Why do you persist in making me kill your so-called friends?" Caedion perched out of sight, hiding in a select area of trees that he hadn't destroyed, where none of them could

get at him.

He wanted to make sure Druid was driven through the portal and locked out permanently. Druid rolled his eyes. Yes, Caedion was in full tyrannical mode. How much worse can things get? he wondered in complete exasperation. Druid hoped Sinati wasn't in too much trouble. Otherwise he'd beat her little ass just for leaving him alone.

Druid shook his head, not bothering to answer. If he could find a place where royalty weren't treated like scum he'd be real happy, but knew it wouldn't happen. No matter where he went, he was feared simply because of what he was. He paused, his head tilting when he felt the presence of two portals.

Druid recognized which one he didn't intend going through, especially when he realized what controlled it. No way was he going into something Mazurka pulled up. The deities only knew what it was strewn with.

Instead, Druid dove for the other portal. It was filled with positive ancient energies that called to him. He didn't know where he'd end up, but knew he needed to make a decision fast. The portal became a black oval that was entirely cloudy, with no clue as to where it led. Perfect for his needs as far as distractions went, Druid figured.

Turning his head, he whistled down creatures who waited in the trees. They whistled back at him, and he smiled observing the fact that the nymphs and dryads were in their element. They disliked his father and mother, Druid knew, but he wasn't sure what the two

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had done to them, or were planning for the future.

The dryads and nymphs weren't talking to him outright, merely using imagery as communication, though it wasn't always easy to interpret what ended up in his mind. The creatures fluttered away, but not after showing him an alien landscape that was filled with seas, both salt and fresh.

That's when Druid knew it was connected to him in some way. With a sigh, he waved them away with carefully worded requests. When they vanished with farewell sounds he breathed a soundless sigh of relief. Now he knew that they would hunt Caedion and Mazurka. Once finished, Druid vanished into the maw of a portal that opened for him. He hoped he'd closed it swiftly. Then he felt the substance he'd ended up in and swore viciously. *Saltwater, dammit!* He hated liquid unless he could manipulate it.

With a muffled groan, he felt his essence dissipating into the harsh liquid. He lost consciousness and felt the darkness overtake him. Fleeting thoughts rippled through his mind, incoherent and unaware of his altering appearance.

* * * *

Seeing his son's distress, Caedion chuckled chillingly. "Yes, it is saltwater." He waved one taloned finger and the portal snapped shut, throwing him into the ocean. Caedion regarded the creatures coming toward him with utter distaste. With a thought, he destroyed them before they got to him or Mazurka.

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Eying her with complete disgust, Caedion forced all her repressed memories to return. His smile was evil when he saw the pain she was in as she clutched her head and stumbled through a different portal. Her scream of anguish didn't even pierce his consciousness. It was the price for her failure.

Then he turned his attention to where his remaining son lay. His nose flared in distaste, but he couldn't touch him. Somehow Shaine had landed in a different portal, the one he'd intended for himself. Broodingly, Caedion observed him being pulled into a boat and towed away. With disgust, he stepped through the portal, looking around the small abandoned island with thoughtful interest. There he saw possibilities abounding.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### COAST OF TURKEY, 2030

The blue sky was brassy and glaring harshly onto the waters of the ancient sea below it. There were scavengers searching for any signs of relics, human or otherwise. An extremely high price was placed upon them, and those who found such items were rewarded handsomely for their finds.

However, two men who were paired together were not in it for the profit, but merely sent together in hopes of killing each other off. Their master was insistent that they either work together or not come back at all. Both looked at this latest fracas as a possible way of leaving each to his devices; in other words, starting a new life elsewhere.

The two men were hostile towards each other and rarely if ever got along. The older preferred swimming since it was one of the few things that kept his younger companion from following him unless it was for a specific reason. That day, the older man sensed a storm coming on, though he could see

nothing from where he was perched. He sighed as he scanned the area.

"Druid, there's something in the waters below you."

A shout came from the sail and he scowled at his companion. "What?" His snap didn't faze the younger man.

"There is something floating just beneath the waves," the response came faintly. "Knowing your talent, you should go down there and see if anything is alive in it."

"Why should I bother?" Druid bit out, knowing full well he didn't belong in this era. His form was disguised to match those who surrounded him, but he couldn't change his feelings.

"Just do it, or should I report this to our master?" Kyriakas smirked down at him.

His so-called companion made him think of his traitorous younger half-brother Shaine more often than not. Certainly some of his mannerisms were strikingly reminiscent of him. Druid grunted in disgust. "Fine, then, but go closer to the shallow waters. There might be something worth fishing out of the waters this time. Though I imagine you would want the credit as always."

He dove into the sea without another word. Druid caught his disgusted curse. Kyriakas did what he was told grudgingly. Druid felt the vitriolic glare that he cast at his back. He knew that Kyriakas would take the chance to search his cabin. The man was downright vindictive, and would leave traces of his

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activities just for the hell of it.

Kyriakas would see it as a way to get on his nerves. He was right, but he viewed it as a test of his forbearance and knack for dealing with devilish knaves who didn't know any better. It was yet another way to survive this stupid and futile journey. Kyriakas was only doing this to get back on Zeus' better side. Personally, he didn't give a good damn either way.

After getting onto the dry land for a short period of time, he sighed and surveyed the area. Finally, he reluctantly headed back to the sea. Druid grunted when he splashed into the water. It wasn't the first time he'd landed in it, but figured this time it was for good reason. A woman floating, tied up and bound in cloth, of all things. To him it looked like she was prepared for some kind of execution.

He looked around, trying to find some sign of an abandoned ship. Nothing in sight, which was just his luck as usual. He turned back to what he'd found. "Well, well, well, what have we found?" Druid rubbed the back of his head.

When no Kyriakas appeared, Druid knew he hadn't heard the call. He rolled his eyes and shrugged, secure in the knowledge that there was plenty to be found. There just was nothing that was worth blabbing about to their master. Druid knew the moment when irritation got the better of him. He watched as Kyriakas returned to the deck and scanned the area. He was worried, briefly, when he couldn't find his erstwhile partner.



Druid knew there was no way that Kyriakas would allow him to get the better of him. When it came to finding something worth a good deal of money. Finally, Druid waited until Kyriakas saw him, watching him with assessing eyes as he dove into the water. The man was a strong swimmer, heading towards the small spit of land where Druid had dragged the object.

\* \* \* \*

Several days had passed in an agony of numbing limbs and going into a state of breaking down. It never occurred to her to call out to the gods themselves. As far as she was aware, they'd tried to warn her and she hadn't listened. This was her punishment, and now she would simply have to figure out a way of escaping. So far, though, she hadn't managed to do anything of the sort, remaining unconscious more often than not.

Her mind was foggy on details, but Sinati thought she'd seen beings that looked a heck of a lot like her. That didn't make sense, because she'd seen the last of her kind hanging in their death cocoons. Still, the weaving style was the same as hers. It bothered her, but she couldn't fathom why any of her people would throw in their lot with Caedion. That bastard would pay for whatever he'd done to make them believe he would give them eternal power and life.

Sinati floated in the water as she had for the past four days. Not the greatest way of getting around, but

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she'd been bound in some agonizing way that hurt like hell. Her arms and legs were rendered useless, and she'd look like a damned skeleton if she didn't get fed soon, but at least she wouldn't have to worry about dehydration yet. That would only happen when a full week was reached.

Silently, she counted how many days of searing heat she remembered and sighed. It did no good for her to obsess about it. Then she heard an odd sound and tried struggling before she gave up, knowing it was useless. In addition to being inside some cocoon of silk that she knew she hadn't woven, she was blindfolded and gagged, both of which she thought were overkill.

Still, she thought it wouldn't hurt if she could figure out a way of releasing herself from her current situation. Sinati sighed when she thought of all the things she could do if her hands and feet were free. Her eyes narrowed when she realized that her options weren't as limited as she believed originally. With that realization in mind, Sinati began using her nails to slice through the cloth that bound her hands and fingers separately.

A muffled voice spoke, and she was thrown off her mission. Sinati flinched when she thought she recognized the voice. Druid? she wondered, hoping it was him and not some other scumbag. Mentally she grimaced, remembering what happened in the past. Fortunately for her, most of the watercraft that traveled the Aegean Sea didn't notice a strange dark bundle bobbing about right beneath the surface of the

waters. Sinati didn't know why, and didn't think she could stand the confinement for much longer.

She didn't trust her good luck and continued to slice through the layers of cloth. She knew that sooner or later she'd get free and then she'd be able to figure out where the hell she was. In the meantime, though, she knew she had to work fast. Whatever managed to get hold of her captive cloth would soon be able to view her more clearly.

With that in mind, Sinati began working on her bonds and soon felt a loosening that signaled her success. She knew that soon it would bring on some horrible pain when she regained feeling in her extremities, but she didn't care about that, either.

\* \* \* \*

Surprised that there was still life within the bundle of cloth, Druid frowned as he watched the struggling from within increase with the sound of his voice becoming clearer. Not willing to let this go without some further exploration, he carefully pulled the floating sack toward a small spit of land. Druid frowned as he determined that it was a female inside of it. The material rang bells in his mind, but he was too tired to believe what his instincts were telling him for the moment.

His ears identified a definite feminine presence when he heard a mumbled curse. Druid listened as she grunted, the cloth tearing inside as she pulled away at it. This female was damned determined to get

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free of her bindings. He tried visualizing what she was doing and noticed there was swiftly loosening cloth around her hands.

Carefully, she reached for the gag, pulling it away from her mouth. Druid caught the consciousness of the female. She was pissed, and he was reassured. It meant she was a fighter, and she needed to be for a while.

Druid winced when she made a disconcerting discovery. Ouch, he thought with wryness. This female was caught in a strange contraption, one she knew well; a strangling web. When she realized it, she froze, cussing whoever had done this to her. No doubt her situation was the result of a distant blood relation who held a grudge against her for whatever reason.

Druid cursed angrily beneath his breath and glowered when he heard a voice behind him. He didn't like the fact that all movement had ceased once he reached the bundle of silk. Silently he towed it to the island and knelt by the limp sack. Fervently he hoped that whoever was in it wasn't dead from asphyxiation.

"Did you find anything worth salvaging, Druid?" Kyriakas' voice grated unpleasantly on their ears.

Druid silently cursed beneath his breath. He felt his burden wiggling furiously in his arms. Within his mind, he hissed furiously at her to stop. Out of Kyriakas' sight, he lightly swatted the bundle.

Silently hoping against hope that she'd be freed soon, the woman shuddered. Sensing her hope, Druid

rolled his eyes. She thought he was someone familiar? Oh, great, not the mistaken identity thing again.

Druid nearly cursed when he realized someone had joined them. He gritted his teeth, his arms closing protectively around the woman in his arms. He wasn't about to let Kyriakas know what he was up to. "Yes, Kyriakas, I did find something." His tone was less than polite. "However, I haven't yet managed to free her from this nasty thing." He didn't bother to warn him about the smell; he would find out soon enough.

Hearing the condescending words, the woman grimaced in disgust. *Chauvinistic males*. Druid swatted her again when she would have done something stupid in his mind. When she dragged her tongue against her lips, she found a stray string.

Druid sighed, realizing she wasn't about to stop trying to get free of her current captive state. He could feel when her teeth bared in a merciless grin. Druid knew she would cause trouble the moment she freed herself. Hopefully she would be able to escape on her own. There was only so much one man could do.

Druid knew the moment when boredom got the better of Kyriakas. He knew without a doubt that it was only because the outing had netted absolutely nothing worth bragging about that Kyriakas joined him. From the corner of his eye, Druid watched Kyriakas treading water, rubbed his face as he moved to an area where he could get onto the sand.

Kyriakas shrugged off the remaining water from his upper body and watched the limp figure with

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narrowed eyes. Druid knew Kyriakas could tell when a woman was playing possum. Rage snapped within him.

"She's awake, though I can't tell if she's understanding us or not." Kyriakas prodded her side sharply with his spear he kept at his side at all times.

*Ouch, that frickin hurt. What the hell did he nick me with, anyway?*

Druid winced when she made a movement at that point. He heard her thought and observation. He didn't blame her one bit.

Feeling the movement, Druid knew she didn't care that it indicated she was aware and somewhat conscious. He thought it odd that the stinging was twice as bad in his side. Well, at least it made her realize she was alive, he thought. Druid turned his attention to the situation at hand. He was marginally relieved that she didn't believe she was not in some part of Tartarus. Druid silently cursed when a soft sound escaped her. He ran his tongue over his lower lip when he felt her bite her lip hard.

With a snarl, Druid knocked the spear away from her. Scrutinizing her body closely, he ached, realizing the gash was several inches long. *Damned idiot, didn't he realize that this was not a bright thing to do?* His teeth clenched with anger but he concealed it, despite his growl. "Why'd you cut her, asshole?" Muttering inaudibly, Druid hauled her back toward the small boat they claimed for a home away from home.

He didn't care that she was hurt as long as she still lived. Now he knew there was some hope at last that

others had survived Caedion's last attempt at killing them all off. Now to try and find a way to get her health back up to par before she tried to escape his hold at the moment.

At least that much of Caedion's prediction hadn't come to pass. *Could it be she was sent somewhere, like back to where he originally intended?* Wouldn't that be ironic, for she could move about in that century much easier and listen to what else they spoke.

Unrepentant, Kyriakas shrugged, watching him with cold amusement. Kyriakas could care less and his expression indicated it. "I wanted to make sure she wasn't some weird-ass alien from a different dimension. She's got red blood and seems to be wealthy; her clothes are pure silk." He eyed the woman speculatively as he considered what else could be done.

Druid glared at him. "She is not leaving my custody until I find out where she came from." His tone was flat and final. He was also aware that now Kyriakas would likely try something with her the first moment he was left alone. Now it was imperative that he get her somewhere safe.

He nearly cursed when he realized that Sinati wondered the same thing.

\* \* \* \*

*If it is Druid, how did he end up with this rattlesnake?* Sinati hoped he would release her soon; she needed to bathe, and then some. Her eyes were dry and strained

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from being unable to see anything.

Discomfort bit into her side as Sinati inventoried her wounds and shifted again. She deliberately rustled the fabric while pain wrenched through her system. Sinati nearly passed out when she remembered just how painfully bound her arms and legs were. She figured she was lucky nothing was looped around her neck.

\* \* \* \*

Druid arched an eyebrow at him with an cool, irritated stare. "Ya don't say?" He carefully cradled her in his arms. Checking out the body in the silk cocoon, Druid realized with a start what the woman was. Shielding her from Kyriakas' gaze, Druid looked closer at the blood and saw traces of orange. Yes, it was Sinati, and he hoped she would understand why he treated her as though she were a complete stranger. He wanted to keep her safe from Kyriakas' attentions. Otherwise the man would rape her at the first moment. It was his way of dominating women into a docile nature before being sold somewhere.

Druid wasn't about to let that happen to Sinati. There was too much at stake, plus he still wasn't sure how they'd ended up in this century of Earth. It was in the past, and yet wasn't the same past he remembered. The notion gave him a chill and awareness entered his perception. He was in the present, the same as he and Sinati. What were his intentions, and did he know that she was still alive?



Druid nearly cursed aloud at the thought.

He hoped not, though it would explain why he and Kyriakas were always assigned to the same scavenger quests. Kyriakas was their boss's spy. Though why he thought Kyriakas would do anything right was anyone's guess. He tried conveying his worries to Sinati, even though his conjectures were fractured and a little hazy, to say the least.

He knew the moment that Sinati comprehended what he was doing. Druid watched as her eyes narrowed. His eyes ran over her face carefully and rested on her mouth. With a blink of her eyes, Sinati ran her tongue over her lips beneath the gag. Druid inclined his head slightly, catching when she remembered the failsafe to get out of her predicament. She'd forgotten about the string. Druid knew she could drag it between her teeth if she had patience. Satisfied with that discovery, Druid felt Sinati settle down and become quiescent once more.

Druid shot Kyriakas a sardonic glare. He could understand the man's line of thought almost too well. He wasn't about to take her to Kyriakas' bossman. He hated the creep, and figured it had to do with his similarity to Caedion. "We take her back to Greece and let the authorities deal with her." Druid arched an eyebrow when Kyriakas made a disgusted sound. "I think she's Greek by birth, if not something similar to it, Kyriakas."

Druid was amused when Kyriakas shot him a jaundiced stare. He knew Kyriakas was testing him. Druid observed when he cocked his head and eyed

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the bundle of silk. He had a hell of a time not laughing when Kyriakas got upwind and became aware of a faint stench emanating from it.

Druid could hear Kyriakas' baffled wondering. He watched him shrug it off as inconsequential. Druid could tell when Kyriakas grabbed the opportunity to annoy him as usual.

Druid idly wondered how much longer Kyriakas could keep from gagging, because the smell was worsening. His gaze was innocent when Kyriakas tried pinning him with a sharp gaze. Druid turned away to look back at the still-bound female.

Druid grinned when he noticed that Sinati didn't bother to snort at that. He approved of her decision when she saved her strength. She wanted—no, needed—the reassurance that she could escape. He frowned when he realized that her limbs were beyond numb to the point of uselessness. Druid dismissed it, since he knew there were other ways she could get around.

"When, where, and how?" Kyriakas asked. "We could get good money selling her to the Middle Eastern Arabs." His eyes glittered at Druid. "She'll need a bath, though."

Druid bristled at his suggestion. He didn't want to go through that again. Especially not now, since he knew she was listening to them. "No, not to the Arabs," He growled, "and I'm not selling her to any of those other slave-holding countries." Druid pinned Kyriakas with a disgusted glare. "You know how I feel about them."

Kyriakas taunted him though he regretted it immediately. "Yeah, I do, though I find it difficult to believe it, considering what you grew up as."

Druid didn't answer him verbally. He swung a fist that he watched Kyriakas duck easily. He immediately kicked him in the gut, grunting when he got him with a blow across the face. Druid retaliated by knocking him to his knees as he kicked Kyriakas' left leg from beneath him.

Ignoring the muffled groans of pain, he turned his attention to Sinati. He felt her shiver beneath his carefully searching hands and bite back a groan when she realized he was massaging her limbs.

*Ouch, that hurt.* Druid frowned. She'd opened her eyes briefly. He watched her close them. Druid knew she was trying not to make any unnecessary sound, though what he was doing hurt like hell. Druid was glad when she concentrated on getting her strength back, plotting what she'd do if she got her hands on that second smirking bastard.

Druid returned his attention back to Kyriakas just in time. Watching him, he held something in his hands that gave him an unfair advantage in Kyriakas' view. Druid wasn't surprised when he pulled a knife on him. No doubt Kyriakas was upset when he found that Druid was able to dodge him. They fought each other some more before Druid threw him over the side of the ship. "Cool off, Kyriakas."

Sulking, Kyriakas grumbled, "Why do you feel the need to be a good schmuck now?" He pulled his body back onto the ship. *Score one for him, it meant they were*

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*going to Greece whether he wanted to or not. Drying himself off, Kyriakas noted where he put the woman.*

Druid heard Kyriakas' sulky thoughts and rolled his eyes.

"She reminds me of a myth I heard, a legend of a weaver woman."

Druid growled at him while he worked on her sore body, wincing at the sight of the wound and her pasty skin. He kept the sight covered as much as possible. He would get her cleaned up as soon as he could.

Druid felt the man's thoughts buzzing again. He grimaced in aggravation. Shoving him when he would have looked over his shoulder, Druid waited for him to take a stab at finding her identity. Trying with legends would keep him busy for at least a half hour, he hoped.

"Arachne?" Kyriakas sounded puzzled. He tried peering over Druid's shoulder and was roughly nudged away.

Kyriakas was scowling while he tended his wounds. Druid grinned evilly, because the man was extremely vain about having no scars that showed on the outside. Druid couldn't say the same and didn't care to. At least it would occupy him for some time because his type of wounds were very likely to leave lasting reminders. It was definitely one way of getting to Kyriakas' vanity.

Druid glowered at Kyriakas over his shoulder before he returned to dealing with Sinati's wounds. "No, and I'm not saying where I got the information." He tenderly stroked the skin that looked flaky to his

eyes. Druid realized he should get some fluids into her, and soon. Regular solid food wasn't an option at this point.

His lips twisted when he stared at her, but she merely smiled at him and went back to plotting against Kyriakas. Just killing him would be too nice, she determined. She suspected that Druid held similar feelings and decided she'd stop being impatient for once and let her rescuer deal with the problem. Druid grinned when he heard Sinati's mental commentary on Kyriakas.

Mentally growling curses, Sinati tugged on the string, loosening her bonds. The silk shifted around her, reshaping the length and width. She stopped mid-tug at a warning squeeze from Druid.

"I just need to get her to Greece, close to where Olympus is. We can dump her there to fend for herself. God knows, if she's good with her hands and any kind of home craft, she could set herself up as a silk trader." Druid emphasized several key words he knew Sinati would recognize and hopefully reassure her while the rest of his words wouldn't.

Druid soundlessly removed the gag and the hooded section of the cocoon; he didn't like the fact that someone used her least favorite type of webbing on her. This smacked of filial interference, and he wanted to murder whoever trapped her like this. Carefully he peered at her face because his shadow kept him from seeing her clearly.

Druid's hands, moving so carefully and deliberately, caught Kyriakas' attention and his eyes

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narrowed. Idly, he leaned against a wall. "Tell me you're not falling in lust with that weird female. Hell, she doesn't have any curves to speak of."

Druid stilled his actions to observe him. "Unlike you, Kyriakas, I don't have quite as many aversions to lack of quantity when it comes to the female form. The good thing about her thinness is that she'll be easier to carry." Druid looked down into Sinati's eyes as he removed the blindfold from them. Irate black orbs snapped at him with fury before they shut. "Nor am I in lust or love with the woman. I don't even know what her face looks like."

He radiated warmth, heat and desire toward her. Druid realized that they were not feelings she was used to. He caught the faint smile that curled her lips. He knew she hoped they would be able to do something about the problem. Druid felt her surprise when he caressed her like that. It was his way of assuring himself that she was alive. His lips twitched when he caught another of her thoughts.

*Well, a girl could hope, couldn't she?*

Druid's nose flared and scrunched up. The stench was worse than he expected.

"Well, remove the covering, man, sheesh. Otherwise she might die from suffocation." Kyriakas sounded concerned for the first time since he looked at her. "Or are you afraid she'll bite you?" Again he tried peering over Druid's shoulder, only to be muscled away again when he glared at him warningly.

"No, I'm not afraid of being bitten." Druid rolled

his eyes in response. "I'd rather not remove the cover. Think of the stench, Kyriakas." He sensed the other man's revulsion when the smell became worse. "We should leave now."

Druid felt Sinati suck in a breath when she felt herself lifted off the deck. He winced; he understood she was in severe pain. Well, Druid hoped she would stay as still as possible. She made a muffled noise of protest. He realized the gag was still entrenched firmly in her mouth.

He knew she hated being crammed into small areas. They drove her nuts and reminded her of when she was caught in cages after experiments were performed on her.

He picked her up and placed her in his stateroom. He murmured, "I'll get you cleaned up as soon as possible, but he's suspicious, Sin." Discontented with her weakness, Sinati grumbled softly but remained still when he immersed her in a tub filled with water. "Don't move, just let it cleanse your body. The silk will also be cleaned at the same time."

Satisfied that she was taken care of for the moment, Druid returned to the top of the ship. He found his less than friendly partner waiting for him. He ignored him in favor of cleaning up the deck.

Kyriakas stared at him with a brooding gaze. "Who is she?" He wanted to know.

Druid eyed him. "None of your business." His tone was rough and hostile. Druid wasn't about to do anything that would put his woman in danger. He knew what he suspected to be true now. Kyriakas *was*

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Shaine, and he wasn't about to trust him with anything.

With that fact in mind, it only led to the conclusion that their master was none other than a man whom he despised, Caedion. His teeth clenched with fury. "She is merely a refugee from one of the other countries who was caught. She will be able to survive on her own when we reach the abandoned isle."

\* \* \* \*

It took them two days, but they finally reached a deserted part of the Greek isle. There the two men dumped the woman off rather abruptly.

Druid didn't like what he was forced to do, and it bit deeply into his heart. Stiffening his back, he rowed a separate boat back to the ship. When he knew Kyriakas didn't see him, he glanced back covertly once or twice.

Kyriakas was both pleased and relieved to be rid of the reason of why the ship stank so horribly. Not to mention having a woman on board that was a mystery. Kyriakas thought she was a nuisance and didn't want to put up with the idea of her any longer. He was angered about the fact that he'd been banned from viewing her. However, Kyriakas let his silence speak for himself. Kyriakas didn't look back when he made his way on the cutter to the ship.

But Druid looked back at the squirming bundle of cloth and winced. He hated leaving her that way, but knew it was for the best. His lips tightened as his



shoulders slumped. Druid raked a hand through his hair while he considered what else needed to be done. He hadn't been able to talk to Sinati at all; she'd gotten a fever while on board.

"Cheer up, Druid." Kyriakas muttered. "At least you know she's still alive." He knew he would find no comfort in his words, but continued pushing anyway. "Besides, ole Zeus wouldn't have wanted you interfering in his plans anyway."

Eyeing him with disdain and remembering the so-called plans, Druid snorted in response. "You think I'm doing this for him?" He glanced at his erstwhile partner. "We both know what would happen if I were discovered to not be dead." His cynical response made Kyriakas grin.

The plans that Kyriakas referred to made Druid nearly gag. It also made him think there was more going on than met the eye. In fact, he was beginning to wonder if the so-called Zeus was really a dethroned god, or an idiot trying to become one. It made more sense, and probably linked to his shrouded memories that were beginning to return. Not so, anything else that might help him though. In time, Druid hoped that he would regain everything that he'd lost since his immersion into the saltwater. He frowned when he thought he heard mocking laughter and words regarding water.

Tilting his head slightly, Druid paused momentarily, hoping for more, but it escaped him. He clenched his teeth and resumed speculating about what he could possibly do something about. Like

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shattering Zeus' plans for total rule. He was most displeased with that thought.

Though it did make macabre sense. All that they'd been searching for were young men and women who'd either been found in the sea, or prisoners dumped from wealthy men and women who'd tired of them for one reason or another. So far, Druid managed to free them and keep their presence from discovery. Though from what he could tell, more than half of them were recaptured and put back into 'Zeus's' hands. With a sigh, Druid hoped he could keep Sinati from that nasty possibility.

Kyriakas shrugged. "True, but what fun we have, being able to slip from coast to coast as runners to evade those aggravating blockades." He smiled. "Of course, I didn't have a family."

"That wasn't threatened by the old bastard." Druid didn't dare look at Kyriakas. His lips twitched when he saw a distant figure rise from the sands. *Good, she'd managed to get free and was no doubt glad to see the last of him.* "He didn't keep his word. I found them, or rather what was left of them, after a set of furies were unleashed on them." He spoke the words he'd memorized when first meeting Kyriakas. At the time, he hadn't thought twice. Now he wondered why it seemed not surprising in his mind. Druid wondered idly what other memories were coming back from his long buried past. Memories he'd submerged after being disowned.

Kyriakas was stunned. "Why would he break his word like that?"

Druid laughed harshly. "Why should he care? It was to keep something else from being set in motion. I don't know what, and quite frankly don't care. I have nothing to live for now, and he's been aware of it. So to keep me from breaking any more of the rules that would let me die, he's found ways to avoid letting me go to whatever destiny the Fates have in store for me."

Kyriakas looked at him. "Why are you this way?"

Druid shrugged when he felt Kyriakas' gaze on him and cast him a dark glare. "You wouldn't know, Kyriakas, if you were never a father, husband, grandfather, son, brother...I could go on, but why bother? We've been through this before." He glanced at the clouds in the distance and dropped something into the waters. Humming inaudibly beneath his breath, Druid began calling the weather and forming a bad storm.

Watching him, Kyriakas apparently didn't like that response one bit and his anger flared into the air, but was never unleashed. "Squall!" He automatically corrected their course. "Where the devil did that come up from?" Kyriakas frowned and watched Druid with a puzzled, disbelieving gaze. "Tell me you aren't really going to go back, it's too far."

Shouldering the equipment along with other supplies, Druid tossed him a sardonic stare. "Forgive me for saying I don't want to know what your opinion is." His gaze raked hostilely over Kyriakas and the dark man scowled in disgust at his expression of affront. "Go find another partner who is as much of

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a degenerate as you are.” He dove off the side of the ship.

Kyriakas cursed as he fought the winds seeking to break his ship in half. *Blast you, gods, 'tis not me who is crazy! If you want a life, go after Druid, the suicidal one!* He watched the man swimming through the waves. Fury rose in Kyriakas’ body, swarming his eyes with a red haze. No, he was going to make sure that he didn’t get back to the island.

Druid turned back to stare at Kyriakas grimly, knowing he was seeing him in truth. A dead man walking, aye, that is what he was. However, Druid had a date with destiny that he wasn’t about to miss. No matter what dirty tricks the gods pulled to keep him from returning to where his woman was trapped.

He frowned when he watched the waves rising and his hair rose on his skin when he detected movement out there. He knew what it meant and shook his head. Foolish Kyriakas was going to lose his life one day battling bad weather. Druid knew why he was still at sea rather than safe on shore; he was geared to follow him around and keep him alive. He shook his head and returned his attention back to getting ashore.

## CHAPTER FOUR

After cursing repeatedly and slicing through the fabric, Sinati finally tore free of her imprisoning cocoon. For once, she was glad of the sharp nails she was born with. Cautiously, she walked along the rock-filled sandy beach. Frowning, she watched the storm closing in and glancing around, she saw ruins that were perfect for sheltering purposes.

For now, she needed to make a net and catch food for the night. With that in mind, Sinati swiftly wove and cast her net to cover five feet of seawater. Afterwards, she headed over to the caverns. Once there she surveyed the prospective sites. After scouting them thoroughly, she chose the one that was the cleanest—and ironically, smallest—for overnight shelter.

She smiled with satisfaction and began work to make it more livable, which wasn't that hard for her. Carefully, Sinati checked around once more. After she discovered there was some insect life, they swiftly departed once she chased them out. Resembling a true spider really did make things easier, especially

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when it was obvious they didn't want to become food for a meaner predator than she. Scanning the place, she flinched slightly, thinking of what she'd once been used to. This wasn't as bad as other places, though. It would do fine for now.

Canting her head toward the ceiling that she couldn't really get a good image of, Sinati frowned, studying the walls. Slowly she became aware that it was unusually large for a small cavern. What had it been originally? Curious and nosy, Sinati scouted around before finding indentations that were almost the length of her figure lying prone. Baffled, she crouched down next to the indent and put her fingers lightly on the side.

Jerking her hand away from it, Sinati winced when she was zapped with a need to weave a tapestry. She hated it when that happened. Still, fighting the urge was useless, and there would hopefully be plenty of time, since the sunlight was still bright. Using that knowledge, Sinati began weaving, losing all outward signs of awareness. She paused occasionally to check her net, bringing back the caught creatures.

Several hours later, though the sun still hung midway between the rapidly darkening sky, and the brilliantly lit waters, Sinati made some small rolls of cloth to use for bedding. Then she did what she could to fancy the place up a wee bit, though she didn't really think it would matter. Finally, she began to prepare a meal with her scavenged items.

Who would actually find this place useful, she didn't know. From what Sinati could tell, it was long

abandoned. The only good thing about it was that it wasn't something others could view with ease and that comforted her a bit. The aura of timelessness Sinati felt there, she admired. It struck her why it seemed familiar and winced. Most likely it was a shrine of some kind. No doubt she violated it with her very presence.

For a moment she considered that fact, and then shrugged. Too damn bad, at least Sinati knew she would be able to stay the night there. She paused when she thought she heard a shout and listened carefully. Yes, Sinati heard it again, and her amicable mood faded. Who would be out there when the horrible weather was making to be a deadly storm?

With a shrug, she went out to retrieve her net. She nearly shrieked with fright when she realized what she'd trapped in it.

\* \* \* \*

Druid was furious when he rammed into something delicate, silken and so tough he couldn't cut through it. He remained still, after shouting twice to be heard. Druid kept from thrashing about though it was something he wanted to do instinctively. However he knew it would be disastrous to do so.

Druid suspected there were other reasons but he didn't want to find out right then. Instead, he concentrated on becoming fully back to normal and hoped that whoever cast the damn net would free him from it. Otherwise he'd become waterlogged, and

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he really didn't like it when that happened. Bad enough that he'd not tended his wounds while still dry, hopefully the burn wouldn't become too bad before he got out of the water.

Druid knew he hadn't been submerged for that long in human form. His eyes searched the shore while he shouted intermittently and fought to keep his head above water. Druid nearly drowned twice when he spotted a figure running toward him from the caverns. He closed his eyes in shock and fury when he realized who set the damn trap.

Man, he hated it when he got stuck in embarrassing situations like this. With an irate sigh, Druid waited patiently for her to get to his side. Later, he would likely remember it as a funny tale. Now, though he just hoped he wouldn't die from too much water entering his bloodstream, especially salt water. He grimaced at the logy feeling he gained whenever the stuff got into him, and wondered why saltwater affected him the way it did.

"You." Exasperated, Druid glared at Sinati with mingled irritation and lust. "I might have known that you were the net weaver."

For a moment he lay on the ground as he regained his strength, watching her with mingled respect and appreciation as she pulled in the net, fighting the waves that would drag them all back into the depths of the sea.

With swift tugs of particular strings, Sinati loosened the net, freeing him. "You really pissed someone off out there," she murmured.



“Yes, I did, then again I always do. This time I think it was Zeus.” Druid played along with her while he waited for his muscles to relax so that he could get to his feet.

“No, it was the god that controls the seas, Poseidon. You were lucky he didn’t get you.” Sinati cast a jaundiced eye towards the ocean. “We’d better get moving. The cavern I picked won’t get flooded. You can walk?” Sinati bit her lip.

Scowling at her, Druid growled something beneath his breath and responded politely. “Yes, I can walk.” His gaze was ironic as he realized she was teasing him. “Thank you for offering to cart me around, though.”

Druid watched her hide a smile behind one of the veils that partially concealed her features, and finally got to his feet. “Please do lead the way.” He watched the silken, fluttering cloth wrapped around her body concealing and revealing her curves. Druid thought it was surprising that she could wear such garments and still walk easily.

Sinati ignored his appraisal for the moment.

“I take it you’re prepared to bed down for some time in here?” Somehow Druid was not surprised. It smacked of her usual tendency, since she could hang just about anything from the different corners.

“Yes, it’s how I was trained to live.”

“Good, otherwise you won’t survive what the gods have planned around here.” Druid swiped an arm over his face and grimaced when the salt burned into his skin deeper than before.

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She shrugged, as if wondering when he'd get to the point of his chatter.

He was sopping wet, while she, on the other hand, was bone dry. Sinati frowned at him. "Come to the fire." She headed for the small fire she started earlier.

Druid felt a strange prickling at the back of his neck when he stared at the dazzling tapestry on the wall. "Is this the legendary statue of Zeus?" He was thinking of Kyriakas' so-called boss and the fact that he'd never met him. Talked to him through a commlink, yes, but actually saw him? Nope.

"Well, yeah, what it originally looked like." She was watching him as he examined it. Hearing the note of unease in her voice, Druid turned and stared at her and noticed her eyes glittering warily at him. "Why do you wear the veils?" He approached her with a puzzled frown.

"I chose to wear them out of habit." Sinati answered his question testily. She paused, checking on the food.

Druid sniffed appreciatively. "What can I help you with?"

"You can place the pieces of rock onto the fire. They'll heat up a wee bit and we can use them for dishes." Sinati smiled at him, but still kept out of his reach.

A smile curled his lips when he observed her graceful movements. Druid realized he rattled her more than she wanted to admit. "So where did you vanish from? Sinati, that I couldn't find you back in our world?" Druid observed her when she paused her

actions at his question. He grinned at the look on her face.

Before she could answer, Druid frowned as his body stiffened. His head canted to the left as he listened.

He leaned over, kissed Sinati full on the lips and muttered. "I'll be back. We haven't finished talking and I think we need to clear the air."

Sinati blinked and kissed him back just as hard, savoring his taste. He dragged her into a corner and pulled her arms around his neck.

Sinati gave him a questioning stare. He didn't want to let go. Sinati shivered when his hands roamed over her body.

Druid stared at his body with relief, his dark ebony moss-hued skin having returned to normal. He looked at Sinati, then kissed her neck with nipping teeth. "I hate to end this, but I really do need to find out what those voices are all about."



### CHAPTER FIVE

Needing the darkness as a refuge to disguise his discomfort and movements, Druid roamed through the corridors. Distantly, he could feel Sinati's worry and the fact that she seemed shocked at his advances. Amusement flickered for a moment because he knew why he'd concealed his feelings for her for so long.

Now, however, he did have a reason for letting her see them. He only hoped she would accept them, and him as well. He grimaced when he heard the pulsing rain and waves. Indeed, the deities were furious with him. He wondered idly how angry they'd become if they realized that he'd been a pawn in Caedion's schemes.

Never mess with deities or their powers, he thought with sardonic amusement. They will come back on the person with a vengeance. He shook his head and sighed soundlessly. Now to get back to business, and then to Sinati. Druid glanced around with puzzlement. He retraced his steps before stopping once more. Druid closed his eyes for a

moment and waited for something to come to his hearing.

Remembering why he'd come out into the blasted storm, Druid searched silently, carefully for any sound that would lead him to who was speaking. He let the water flow over his body and followed signals that would lead him to his quarry. The cleansing rain washed his body free of saltwater and he felt much better.

So lost in the sensation of fresh water, Druid nearly missed the area where he'd hear his quarry. He crouched briefly when he heard voices speaking louder than before. Druid was concerned, because they were dangerously close to where he and Sinati were located. Moving to a small mound of rocks, he crouched, listening to the conversation.

\* \* \* \*

Caedion surveyed the man he called Kyriakas. To bad he'd been forced to make his other son all but mindless in order to force him to his will. He'd proven to be rather stubborn in the end, when he'd learned about the statue and its properties as a portal. "So you know where they hide, Kyriakas?"

Kyriakas stood still before the man who was his boss, staring at him with cold eyes. "Yes, Zeus, I know where they lay hidden." The sneer in the second voice was downright palpable. "Sharing carnal knowledge, no doubt."

Caedion ignored that. He'd suspected it all along,

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and didn't care for it to be thrown into his face more than necessary. "You'd better be telling the truth, Kyriakas."

The man folded his arms over his chest. "I am, Zeus. The excavation workers will be gone by morning," Kyriakas assured him. "The shrines and their precious contents will be restored to perfection."

He was being deliberately obtuse, Caedion noticed. For a moment he saw a reflection in Kyriakas' eyes of his own that blazed white hellfire rage. He was pleased to note that Kyriakas ignored what he'd seen. The man finally learned what not to transmit to his master.

Caedion continued to question his son. He wasn't satisfied with what he was told. "What about the other task I set you?"

"Other task?" Kyriakas sounded confused.

Caedion threw his arms into the air, his irritation showing not for the first time that night. "Finding the two who escaped, you fool! Neither of them was supposed to survive that storm." The bellow echoed around the rocks.

"They've gone to ground. You didn't really think it would be that easy to capture them, Zeus?" Kyriakas sounded disdainful. "They are veterans, as I have warned you before."

Caedion whirled around when he thought he heard some sound or movement. He flashed a small light, trying to find any opening he might have missed. "Go find them." Caedion's eyes clashed with Kyriakas. "Make sure you stake out their hiding place

and find that tapestry!"

For a moment Caedion wondered if he would rebel. Then Kyriakas glared, but did what he was told. Caedion tracked Kyriakas and saw that he headed right to where he'd find Druid at least. Caedion knew the moment when upon reaching the cavern, Kyriakas realized he was too late to catch them unaware. Through Kyriakas, Caedion listened carefully. Enraged, Caedion knew he heard sounds that he recognized. They knew he must have interrupted something. Good, Caedion thought sarcastically, maybe Kyriakas will actually get two for one instead of none. For once.

\* \* \* \*

Druid flinched when he recognized the voice. Kyriakas would pay for this, he vowed and kept listening, since he didn't know when he would get the chance.

Druid's nose flared in disgust. Obsequious worm, he thought with distaste. His eyes narrowed when he looked at Zeus. Hell, that wasn't Zeus, that was Caedion. His fists clenched with anger and Druid cursed mentally. He sent a call for the real god to please appear at some point and dispense with a few misconceptions.

Druid's lips thinned when he eased back when a sharp light shafted through the small opening he crouched in moments ago. They were not going to get to him or Sinati that easily. Every single thing that

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they'd spoken of smacked of some kind of nasty trap to Druid.

He shook his head and moved with soundless footsteps back to the caverns. He returned to the cavern without waiting to hear more. Once inside, Druid found Sinati resting, but not asleep. He knelt at her side. "Sinati."

Druid shook her carefully and Sinati woke out of the light doze she'd fallen into.

Pushing hair out of her eyes, she eyed him with displeasure. "What?" she grouched at Druid as she sat up. She waited for what he would say; his return had nothing to do with interest in carnality.

Amused at her response, Druid ignored her reaction. That was typical of this woman. "We need to find a new place. Ours is going to soon be found." As he spoke, Druid pulled on her outstretched hands and she stood up. He tilted her head, studying her soberly with worried eyes.

"What is it?" Sinati looked at him with concern.

"The statue is the key, Sinati." Druid stroked her cheek as he drew her to his body. He held her close, needing the contact. He was glad she didn't struggle, though she seemed confused. "I fear our enemies have found us, but I don't think they've located our position yet."

When she looked at him with suspicion, he sighed. "I overheard a conversation and came back here." He became impatient when she didn't say anything. "Talk to me, dammit!"

Eyeing him, Sinati considered his words. He



sensed she wasn't surprised. For some reason she'd felt something strange going on the moment she finished the damned piece of silk. "What is there to say, Druid?"

"Could you at least give me some idea of what you feel?" Druid tapped a foot on the rock.

"I love you, and always have." She sat up fully, not bothering to disguise the fact that she slept in the nude.

Dropping down next to her, Druid stared at her with unblinking eyes. "I am glad, Sinati." His tone was succinct, and he pulled her against him. She resisted him for a few seconds, then moaned. He smiled against her forehead when he felt her sniff against his chest.

"We're together, Sinati, once again." He cupped her face. "Remember that no matter what happens." He rubbed his nose against hers and made her laugh. Druid kissed her deeply, feeling her wrap her arms around his waist. "We have much to explore and discuss, I think."

Looking at him, Sinati arched an eyebrow. "Let's do something about our state of mind first." She rubbed her body against him.

Admiration rustled through him. He smiled at her. His hands roamed over her body, appreciating her leanness. "I love a woman with muscles and strength." He felt her muffled laughter when he ran his fingers over her ticklish areas.

"What, you aren't into voluptuous women?" Sinati sounded skeptical.

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“Not to my taste.” He nuzzled her shoulder, stringing kisses along her neck and slowly worked his way down her body. Druid realized she didn’t wear any covering, and grinned. “You were hopeful?”

Sinati shrugged. “Yes.” She flushed beneath his appraisal.

“Good.” Druid made her gasp in shock when he slid a finger into her moist entrance. He was pleased until he heard a rock drop to the floor. His body stilled and he felt Sinati freeze beneath him. What a hell of a time for them to be interrupted, he thought with a murderous scowl.

“Go,” His eyes clashed with her wide, frightened ones. “I will meet you at the other ruins on the other path.” When she nodded, there was suppressed fury in her gaze, but she did what he ordered her to do. Druid winced, watching her leave. He knew he’d pay for keeping her from the confrontation. He heard her soft rustling and waited till he knew he was alone. Then Druid rose to his feet, silently creeping from where he’d lain with her for too short a time.

\* \* \* \*

Fury rode Kyriakas when he heard the sounds and abandoning his former plan, he called out. “I see you haven’t lost your charm with women. Too bad you won’t live long enough to consummate the relationship.” The man’s rage was halted when he faced Druid’s general location.

Druid didn’t react; instead, he stilled, waiting for

what would be said next.

"Why did you think you could escape Zeus so swiftly?" Kyriakas searched for his quarry while his eyes scanned the darkness. He needed to find the tapestry Zeus claimed was in the cavern. It was the only way back, or so Zeus believed.

Druid snorted. "If I believed everything he said, I wouldn't be reunited with my woman."

Kyriakas' head snapped toward the movement. His eyes narrowed, and he moved in. "You're a fool."

"You're even worse of one, Shaine." Druid avoided the slash of the knife whistling past his ear. "Believing what he spews." His words were mocking. "The man is Caedion, I'd recognize his voice anywhere." Without looking around, Druid took off.

Kyriakas was shocked into stillness. Caedion? Why did the name sound familiar? Before he could speculate, he was knocked over the head and sucked into a whirlpool of darkness.

\* \* \* \*

He moved toward where the tapestry was and removed it. He knew Sinati must have taken half of it already. Druid regretted the need for cutting it like that, but she'd pointed out how long it was. He knew neither of them would have been able to carry it together. In fact toward the end of the discussion they'd briefly had, she'd been the one to suggest creating two halves, though it had hurt her to do so. His half was rolled to one side, where it wasn't

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visible, though a piece of it was still moving in the currents. It seemed to be concealing itself, and that baffled him a bit.

Turning his head, Druid could hear the wind lightly rippling the fabric, though it made no sound.

## CHAPTER SIX

Breathing hard, Druid located the ruin and a half smile curled his lips. "Sinati."

"What happened back there?" Relief shot through her.

Druid shrugged his shoulders. "Some answers were gained, but more questions were raised."

Her eyebrows rising, she watched Druid with confusion. He was not the man she'd known before. He'd changed since the last time they'd been together in the other land. She could feel him building up to something. Sinati didn't know if it was a good thing or bad. "What are you up to now?" she noticed he wasn't at all happy at the moment not to mention annoyed.

Druid's eyebrows lowered into a single bar and stared at Sinati, but she stood firm.

"A trap." He turned back to what he was doing. "Where is the other half of the tapestry?"

As Sinati watched him, she hoped his plan worked. They had enough crap to deal with. "Here." She held it out to him.

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Smiling, Druid took it after brushing a kiss across her half-parted lips.

Flushing, Sinati smiled involuntarily, watching his movements with knowledge that he was one fine man. She brushed off her silly, irrelevant thoughts and focused on what bothered her most at the moment. "Please, tell me what is going on? I know something else happened, Druid, don't keep me in the dark."

"I can't tell you much, Sinati," Druid sighed and looked at her.

From his expression of worry, she knew she wasn't going to like what he had to relate.

Druid closed his eyes and rubbed his forehead. "There are some seriously messed-up folks running around out there."

She watched his lips thin and anger etch its way into his forehead.

Druid opened his eyes again and glanced at her. "Kyriakas is Shaine, and Caedion is pretending to be Zeus." He rubbed his arms with his hands. "I don't know why he is doing this. I suspect though that he's realized that neither of us is dead." He scowled briefly. "Though why we are important to his plans, I don't know."

Her lips flattened at his response; she watched him working. Sinati silently bound the halves to make a whole. Nothing showed that it was ever separated and she studied the tapestry with a sigh. It covered an entire wall. She'd made sure it mimicked everything that she originally saw before. She didn't like what

she sensed from him. "Am I going to have to pretend not to know you?" When he flinched, she rolled her eyes. "That doesn't seem like a good idea, Druid."

Sinati didn't want to be separated from him any more than necessary. It seemed like a stupid risk. There were holes in both of their memories, sure, but why was he acting like this? She kept him from seeing her face while thoughts ran rampant in her head.

Turning his head to consider an angle, Druid looked at her. "I know, but it's the only thing I can think of at the moment." His face tightened as he spoke. "There are still memories that aren't back yet, Sin, and whatever they are won't show up until the last minute."

Shaking her head, she finally understood what he was saying. Druid didn't remember what their past relationship was like. She was shaken and glad at the same time. It meant that she wouldn't have to feel like she was pressuring him to do something she didn't want to do. That, of course, meant retreating from him behind very old shields. Not something she enjoyed doing. However, it was necessary. Plus, she didn't want to get hurt by rejection, and that would happen whether he meant it or not.

She knew he wasn't going to back down. Sinati shook her head, but let the matter drop after one last token protest. There was a reason why she wasn't a leader of any kind of band; she didn't have the heart to argue with him. "Fine, all right, so we pretend to be strangers. When do you think he's going to strike?"

"Tomorrow, we'd best get what sleep that we can."

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Druid ran a hand through his hair. "I have a feeling that somehow Caedion planted some kind of device to make the tapestry a portal." He looked at her with a wry twist of his lips. "We'll have to be careful with what we do unless we want to wind up in a different time period."

Sinati listened and rubbed her forehead. "No way am I going to fall for that." She grumbled in disbelief. "I won't go anywhere unless I'm at your side." At least his plan was fairly simple to work with.

When he eyed her with a questioning glance, she bit her lip.

Recalling the vow of not wanting to be hurt, she eyed him thoughtfully. Making up her mind, she shrugged and muttered. "I figure we have a fleeting chance in hell of making it succeed." Sinati watched him for a moment, and pounced the moment his shoulders slumped. His startled, muffled laughter was cut off when she pulled him to where she'd made a pallet. "Now we finish what we started earlier."

\* \* \* \*

It was becoming hotter as the day began, and it wasn't even noon yet. They'd moved the tapestry to a different location, at her insistence. Sweat rolled down their backs, but they were satisfied with what they'd managed to accomplish. There was a niggling sensation of something left undone, but neither could figure out what it was. Still, they were pleased with what they had planned.



Druid studied the new place, and realized she'd made a good point. It hadn't occurred to him that putting it into a different place other than the cavern would shake things up for whoever arrived.

Sinati was nervous, and she admitted it silently. What sounded like a good idea last night, she realized belatedly, looked downright stupid this morning and now afternoon. She spoke her thoughts out loud to Druid. "I never trusted the man, and now I realize why."

He looked at her questioningly.

"He seemed shady, seedy, and unreliable at best, downright snaky at worse."

Druid merely rolled his eyes. "We can discuss the success or failure later."

She saw that his eyes were filled with gallows humor. She stepped into his embrace, and he kissed her goodbye. Sinati knew he was making sure she wouldn't forget him for the short time he'd be out of reach. Shaking her head, Sinati began walking to the temporary site where some archaeologists were set up.

She grimaced at their position. Hopefully no one would notice them roaming around. If there was one thing Sinati hated about skirmishes that occurred between her, Druid and Caedion, it was the civilian casualties. Her shoulders hunched and she finally made her way to where she needed to be.

Sinati stood staring at the remains where a temple and a statue once stood. Where the foot of a mountain that led to Olympus was rumored to be located. She

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snorted softly as she shifted from one foot to another. Sinati glanced around wondering at the quiet stillness of the place. Bored, she wandered around the area realizing it was turned into an excavation site.

She decided she might as well find something to do and knew soon afterwards that someone was watching her movements. She ignored the disturbing sensation and focused on other thoughts, like how she was going to get through this latest event.

Sinati rubbed at her forehead, wondering why she had a headache, then ignored it. After scrambling around for a bit, she discovered the workshop that was unearthed. She stopped to look at it and considered climbing into the ruins.

"It's not often we have stray females snooping around tapestries of statues depicting ancient gods." Kyriakas' lips curled into a disgusted sneer as he raked his gaze over her body.

Sinati's eyes narrowed when she realized what he was doing. So they were both going to pretend they didn't recognize each other? She didn't think so, and acknowledged that she wasn't to play games. She wasn't in the mood for this creep acting like a condescending asshole.

In Sinati's present mood, it didn't matter that this guy was sort of cute. He possessed slightly shaggy reddish-blond hair that hung below his shoulders reaching to the middle of his back. It framed dark-grey storm-cloud eyes and dark, tanned skin. "Listen, Mister, I don't really care, all right?" Sinati noticed that her grumble amused him, which she found

annoying. "I'm just a tourist prowling around. Good day." As soon as she spoke, Sinati heard a noise that made the hair on the back of her neck rise on end. "Gotta go."

"Look out!" He gawked at the sight of a strange-looking woman coming out of the tapestry. Kyriakas risked a glance behind him and his eyes widened when he saw the glowing nimbus surrounding an ethereal-looking old man. He grabbed the woman and kissed her, holding tight.

Sinati growled when Kyriakas had the nerve to try to kiss her. Unfortunately she couldn't break his hold, at least not at the moment. She was more worried about the one woman she'd seen slithering around earlier.

She pulled away once his hold on her loosened. Sinati was more than a little worried. Yeah, she knew some folks would be showing up, but who the hell were these intruders? She flexed her fingers and crouched away from Kyriakas. She frowned slightly, watching carefully. Her eyes narrowed when she saw something really strange going on.

She took off running. Kyriakas cursed and chased after her. "Don't go to the right, Sinati!"

Sinati stared at him over her shoulder. "Like you'd really care." Her response was a breathless snap. Dang, he's persistent, she thought in annoyance. Sure, I shouldn't. However, she did what he suggested, since he'd panicked and called her real name. Sinati nearly reached the pathway heading toward the cliffside when she heard a shout behind her.

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What now? she wondered warily. Sinati didn't heed the yell. Instead, she chose to run over the side of the cliff.

Yeah, yeah, she thought with a curled lip, too stupid to live, right? Bullshit. Eyeing the different shattered columns and the way the tapestry was slowly taking on a life of its own, Sinati threw her arms out and let fly with strands from her fingers.

The silken strands curled around other columns, and she swung upward. Her body sailed out of reach of the man and whatever he'd spotted. Landing on a column, Sinati stared over her shoulder, smiling coldly. "Don't bother grabbing my ass, Sir Zeus, it won't happen."

"Zeus, *my* ass." Kyriakas growled in disgust, propping his hands on his hips when he stared up at the woman. He nearly jumped out of his skin when he heard a hollow-sounding voice behind him.

Something slithered from the chest, moving downward through the stone, and it didn't give Sinati a good feeling. The creature glared at them, its eyes a baleful hellish red-black. It surveyed their positions and its teeth gleamed gleefully when watching the man. The last time she'd seen something like that...

"Kyriakas, when I say jump, do it." Sinati cast net-like webbing from her fingers into the air. "Now, *jump*." She followed her own command, leaping into the air easily.

Kyriakas cast Sinati a wary stare. He did as she suggested because he didn't have any other choice. As he jumped into the air, the webbing wrapped

lightly around his waist. He grabbed onto the powerful, slender strands as they sent him flying over the ocean.

When Kyriakas began inevitably swinging back towards it, he muttered a curse.

\* \* \* \*

The stone goblin shrieked with fury when the man swung out of his reach. In simple terms, Scepter had been promised a meal. Now at the site of the promised meal, Scepter wanted the first human he laid hands on. Roaring once more, expressing unmistakable hunger and anger the creature was on the move. Scepter started shambling toward the human stupid enough to bind himself to solid stone with thread. All thread could be broken, and it would be soon.

Batting at anything stopping his passage, another roar was let loose. Once again, the creature slashed out with his taloned hands, trying to grab Kyriakas. The master had told him he could eat whatever he'd grabbed. Scepter was just doing what his nature – and his master – commanded.

\* \* \* \*

"Oh, no, you don't, you filthy cur." Sinati wasn't about to let Scepter get its hands on Kyriakas. He'd really be up shit creek without a paddle. When Scepter tried nabbing Kyriakas, the stone creature got

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a face full of web instead that tied, knotting into different kinds of patterns.

She hated the stone goblin that once was a good friend of hers. He'd turned traitor, though, the first moment it looked like Caedion would win the war. She hadn't known that he would become a permanent goblin. She wondered what else would happen in terms of old friends turned enemies. That did hurt her.

Sinati kept her eye on Kyriakas. "Don't collapse now, Kyriakas. Just go finish what your idiot master started."

\* \* \* \*

The words echoed in his mind, shaking him from his long doze. Zeus stared irately at the mortals who awakened him from his sleep. He really didn't want to dispense justice Olympian style right then. Instead, Zeus watched the antics below and let the battle play out between the combatants. It was his way of figuring out what was happening without directly getting involved. He would only do that when it became obvious who was courageous, who was cowardly, and who was simply a set of misguided morons. He was betting on the majority of all participants being the latter.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

With a sigh, he waited to see what the next one would do. The man looked around, then vanished into the ground. Distracted, Kyriakas nearly missed the creature coming from the outstretched hand of the bent statue. He dodged the female, though she nearly got him with the snakes coiled around her body. "What the hell are you supposed to be? A reincarnation of Medusa?"

The creature sneered as her snakes struck out at him. "No, but you're going to die for your insolence, you stupid man."

Kyriakas swayed out of reach, dodging the hissing vipers. His eyes narrowed when he examined her closely. He smiled dangerously. "Sinati, toss me one of your webs. Strangler." He watched the Medusa look-alike turn grayish white with horror. Kyriakas knew that he'd worked with Sinati before. How else could he have known what kind of webs she could summon at will?

Sinati eyed Mazurka without friendliness. "Get out of the way, Kyriakas." She swung downwards.

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He spotted Sinati coming from an impossible angle of trajectory. Kyriakas ran out of reach of the snakes. He leaped into the air, feeling a snap of something that freed him from the powerful silken threads. Kyriakas spread his arms, letting the elements carry him, and began glowing like a torch.

Sinati effectively tangled the now screaming creature into the strangling web. "If you continue struggling, you'll only embed the vipers' poisonous fangs into your body." She was emotionless, a killer meting out justice. "You should never have come after me, Mazurka."

The woman laughed harshly. "I no longer am what I once was, Sinati, and nor will you be once the scientists find you again." She sneered. "They're coming for you, and those scumbags helping you."

Her taunt was cut off as Kyriakas dropped down. He scooped up the web roll with its struggling victim, who immediately stilled. "Pleasant trip." He mocked knowing it was going to be anything but. He silently watched the bundle drop beneath the water. He turned to Sinati. "What the hell was I?"

\* \* \* \*

Sinati merely glanced at him dismissively. "A Seer, or something else." All she did was concentrate on tripping all the rest up. Otherwise they were going to find themselves in worse trouble later on. It was all in the tapestry, and had Kyriakas looked at it more closely, he would have recognized himself in there. It



was a picture of the past, the present and the future.

She knew what he used to be. No doubt he'd had another name as well. What others had been tricked by that creep he worked with? There seemed to be more than a few who were now completely on the wrong side of the fight.

\* \* \* \*

Scowling after her, Kyriakas didn't like her evasive reply. He had to get to the tapestry; it was nagging at his consciousness. Maybe if they all saw it, or the key people, there would be a way to salvage this mess. Not right now, though. Kyriakas was more interested in staying alive.

He knew she hid important information from him. Hearing a noise, Kyriakas turned, watching a man rise from the ground. The newcomer was clad in a dark green, hooded ground-length cloak. "What are you known as?"

"Druid." Druid glowered at him. "You have no idea of what is going on, do you...Shaine?"

Not understanding the name that was spoken, Kyriakas rubbed his forehead. "Chatty crew, we aren't." He blew out a breath. "All right, how are we going to get out of here?"

Glancing around at the fighting creatures that were slowly surrounding the trio, Druid frowned at Sinati and Kyriakas. "What is this about scientists?"

She heaved a sigh of exasperation. "Because there are more lying in wait for us. I suspect this is some

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kind of test being administered through Zeus' mistaken notion that we're destined for each other."

"Scientists?" Sinati cocked her head at Shaine. "What kind?"

Ignoring them for a brief moment, Kyriakas stared over his shoulder at the statue, wondering if it really was Zeus and not this man leading them.

The statue stared at him with definite disapproval and he rose to his feet. He shrank down, disappearing into the soil.

Sinati shrugged and rubbed at one eye. "Yell for that idiot who threatened you with a life of eternal torture in Tartarus and ask him." She glanced sideways at Druid, who wasn't smiling when he looked from her to Kyriakas. "I can't answer that question, Druid, until later."

Kyriakas glanced back at Druid and Sinati, a sense of jealousy brushing him briefly. He squashed it down, knowing they were strong together. A scraping sound of metal shocked him into moving off to one side.

There was a soft screech of anger and hatred, and a whoosh of a blade striking towards his head. Reacting swiftly, Kyriakas stiffened and whirled, striking out when something lunged at him. He battled with the veiled figure, fighting his inner demons.

Kyriakas stared at the creature with fascination. She looked like a cross between a feline and an elf. What the hell was she attacking him for?

The creature sneered at him. "I cannot believe that you do not recognize me, Shaine." The contempt in

her voice was searing. "I am Alloy."

Huh? Kyriakas frowned at her usage of his surname. "I know of no Alloy," he snapped, though he nearly fell when she tripped him. That's when he saw that Scepter nearly got hold of him. The fall jolted some memories from a blankness that he hadn't noticed before.

Blinking and frowning, Kyriakas ignored the haziness of his gaze and began fighting back at whatever attacked him. The hell with this. If he couldn't tell who was good or evil, what good was it following a faceless entity that didn't possess jack squat in the way of true knowledge anyway?

\* \* \* \*

She spotted a flash of light and zipped away before a bolt hit where she'd been crouching on a stone. When she heard a curse, she grinned evilly. "Serves you right, Zeus."

Sinati watched him, alert to any other pranks he might play on her or anyone else.

Hearing a cessation in the battle above, it was clear that something happened. However, when Caedion hove into sight, he was furious. No one was dead except for his handpicked assassins. "Come down here off the stone. You look ridiculous."

Sinati's arched her eyebrows at him. She was uneasy when she considered his words and shrugged. She landed lightly on her feet, prepared to run if he tried anything again.

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Caedion stared at the three of them. "You've done well." His eyes were thoughtful. "You've passed my tests. Unfortunately, the portal to your world is sealed shut." He shrugged; his smile was beatific and evil, and Sinati paled. "It won't open again until a later time. For now, though, come with me, and I'll introduce you to the last member you've yet to meet."

Sinati was getting a very bad feeling but there wasn't anything else she could do but follow. With a shrug she did so, and found Druid and Kyriakas flanking her. "Might I be able to ask what you're up to?" Her question did sound a tad hostile, she acknowledged, but she didn't want to go in blind to whatever kind of scheme he devised.

Caedion cast her a hostile stare. "No."

*Well, that was definite.* Sinati sighed, wondering what else would happen. She knew they were close to finding different realities set in one place. Sinati could feel the sizzling sensation of magic corralled, fighting and wild for release.

She figured it would be interesting to set eyes on what this guy wanted them to view. Sinati felt an arm curl around her shoulders comfortably. She glanced around in surprise, then relief. It was Druid, and Sinati rested her head against his shoulder.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

Zeus was downright bored, tapping his fingers on the armrest of his throne. "Serves me right, hell, little brat!" He was amused at her temerity, though.

Zeus studied the man who dared impersonate him. His eyes narrowed in fury when he realized that the green-skinned man didn't believe him, nor the spidery female either.

He paralyzed Sinati and Druid. It was time to deal with this strange man who pretended to be him. He'd get rid of the offspring while he was at it.

\* \* \* \*

Well, this was a fine how do you do, she thought with rancor. Sinati let out a screech of fury that made Druid wince.

"Zeus, you bastard, let us go!" Sinati struggled vainly to get loose of his hold. She was startled when they were thrown into another room.

There was mocking laughter when Zeus released them. "Get your attraction to each other out of your

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system. Then I'll allow you to go free." He informed them testily. Then the god turned his attention back to the other combatants.

True to his word, he concealed all exits and entrances so they wouldn't be able to escape until he was ready for them to reappear.

After searching around, they discovered there was no way out.

Druid laughed softly, his eyebrows slanting wickedly from their high arch. "I take it this wasn't what you'd expected, Sin?" His smile was downright devious when he circled her. He taunted her easily with light, teasing touching.

Sinati stood still while he circled her. She shivered, watching him with barely veiled anticipation. *A teasing Druid, who woulda thunk it?* His eyebrows weren't the only ones arched when she looked him up and down.

"What are you up to now?" She watched him warily. "If I didn't know any better, I'd have said someone drugged you." Her words pierced his teasing mood and she regretted them the moment they escaped her mouth.

He blinked at her, his cheeks staining a darker color than the ebony that was his natural skin tone. "You're right, of course, I am a fool." He shrugged, not concealing his dismay. Druid surveyed the area. "Did it occur to you that perhaps Zeus and the others wanted us separated from the rest for a reason?"

Sinati thought for a moment and shrugged. "Copulation?" Her eyes traveled over his strong

body, lingering in different areas that caught her attention. She pointedly let her eyes rest on his straining robe.

When he eyed her with confusion, she gestured around, though she felt a tad uncomfortable. "Honestly, can you really see the two of us...?" It wasn't a subject she broached easily.

Druid gazed around, smiling at her. "Yes." He shrugged his shoulders. "For many years, as a matter of fact." He clasped her hands, tension tightening his muscles.

Knowing Druid, Sinati figured there was a reason for his reticence and altering moods. "What about you?" Her gaze was inquiring when looking at him.

She looked at him somberly, wondering if they were doing the right thing. He kissed her, cutting off further protest. *Mmm, it felt so good.* She let her lips open to his questing tongue as it nudged against her teeth. She stopped cold when she felt the incisors extend hungrily. She felt his tongue circling them, teasing the sharp lengths. Sinati felt him smile when she groaned. He kissed her harder while he unwound the myriad scarves from around her body.

She heard him speak and for a moment, didn't register what he said. She turned a dull red. "Yes, there are some things I don't change." She realized how out of place she must seem in the dark gray and black mixed scarves that made up the majority of her clothing.

Druid looked at her body, revealed by his actions. His voice was downright husky when he spoke. "I'm

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glad you haven't stopped wearing dark grey and black, Sin. I was afraid you might, since having come to this strange place."

They looked at each other, and he smiled at her before finishing with the upper half that included the one around her face. He kissed her features all over, lowering her to the bed.

Sinati was momentarily uncomfortable with his intense interest in the half-covering web on her face. "Why do you and others have such a fascination with my birthmark?" she eyed him in annoyance.

When he merely shook his head at her, she knew he was up to something. His hands distracted her when they cupped her breasts. It wasn't often when she was taken off-guard, but he was the only one who could do that to her. She moaned when his lips traveled down her neck. She shifted beneath him her hands roaming over his back and she tugged at his cloak, removing it.

Sinati smiled at the sight of his powerful musculature. His white eyes regarded her with approval. She continued running her hands over him and discovered a surprise or two. His chest hair was a fine golden-brown, and he grinned at her expression.

"I'm not completely changed yet, Sin."

She listened to his words while she watched what he did with his hands. They were so powerful and yet strangely slender. But they were extremely strong and he knew where to touch her, bringing Sinati to sharp arousal. She was gasping from need as he leaned over her. His pants were tented, and she knew they were



very loose and roomy.

Her eyebrows arched teasingly at him and he grinned, flashing sharp teeth of his own. Sinati didn't say anything. She tugged at the concealed drawstring that dropped his pants. That's when she found the other surprise. He wasn't entirely black, just from the hips upward. She was confused, but decided she would ask questions later. Then she changed her mind. "What happened?" She poked at his side.

Druid winced at her action. "I don't know. It happened during the immersion into the seawater and just now when we were torn from the battle."

Sinati frowned at him. "What does it mean when one's body is different colors, and not because of being able to go through walls and things like that?" The puzzle bothered her because the answer was nagging at her mind.

He shrugged fluidly. His eyes went flat and somber, then he spoke slowly. "It means that there were others that clumped into me before I was reborn." The harsh reality hit him and his shoulders slumped wearily. "We are talking, why?" He regarded her silently.

Sinati frowned when she realized that they weren't addressing the real issue. "It also means infertility, doesn't it?" She moved closer to him, watching his body stiffen and retreat but only one step. She tossed her hair back and placed her hands on his chest.

Druid stared at her silently, his eyebrows raised in question. "Yes, it does." His voice was soft and tired. "It also means that I've been carrying DNA other than

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my own this entire time.”

Sinati rested her head. “We certainly are a pair.” Her tone was wry. “You aren’t the only one who is sterile, you know.” Her nose nudged against his neck.

Druid rolled his eyes in response since it had been a sore issue between them for some time. “Like I’ve said in the past, it can probably be reversed.”

Sinati’s expression turned skeptical. “Right. Let’s just get used to this situation first, hmm?”

Druid frowned at her, but he shrugged and pulled her tightly to his chest. He kissed her hard and she moaned into his mouth. He smiled with satisfaction, something she felt, he knew.

Wanting some retaliation for his smug satisfaction, Sinati dug her fingernails into his chest and fortunately for him, they weren’t sharp. Of late, she preferred trimming them to blunt the edges. Otherwise they would be razor-edged, and she didn’t like the idea of cutting him. Though knowing how he worked, Sinati wondered about his notions regarding bloodletting.

Considering the situation, Sinati wasn’t going to ask. She gasped after he’d sent her flying over a peak. She could feel his hands on her sweat-dampened flesh and flushed when they danced over the sensitive areas again. They were already rousing her eager body for more. Sinati groaned, not sure she could handle what else he’d put her through.

Druid nuzzled Sinati’s legs, pushing them apart as he settled between them.

Before he asked, she looked at him. “No one else,

Druid. I couldn't stand their touch." She looked away for a moment, even as he unwrapped her lower body of the trailing scarves. "Not even with..." She hesitated, biting her lip.

"Not with Kyriakas?" Druid was not surprised. Kyriakas did not seem her type, not when he was someone else they knew in past times, before he'd died. When she shrugged, looking chagrined, he smiled, caressing her body. Druid bent his head to her center and scented her moist liquid as it flowed towards him. "I didn't think anything happened, Sin." Her gasp was music to his ears as he pleased her.

She bucked silently, protesting his unexpected actions, but he didn't heed it. He merely kissed her more thoroughly. He dipped his tongue to sample her juices as they rose to his attentions. His tongue swirled around her clitoris, and at last she screamed his name. Druid smiled at her.

Then Sinati's ears picked up a sharp scream. In an instant they were both clothed, cursing the fact that they'd been set up. They ran out an exit that opened up rather conveniently, not sure what they'd find once they reached the main room.

They stopped in horrified shock when they found Kyriakas and the woman, Alloy, surrounded. Sinati recognized them and regretfully kissed good-bye any chance for intimacy. Druid seemed equally unhappy, since he finally knew for certain who Kyriakas was. His eyes narrowed with the need for vengeance as a result. With shrieks of berserker rage, they charged

## STATUE OF ZEUS THROUGH TIME

the attackers.

“Dammit!” Sinati glowered at him warily.

\* \* \* \*

Kyriakas was pleased when he saw Sinati and Druid appear. He knew what they were tricked into doing. Kyriakas couldn't feel any anger in his heart. He crouched, sensing the woman at his back doing the same thing. They attacked the creatures closest to them.

The attackers were crafty, nothing like what Kyriakas ever saw before. He cautiously parried three of them. Finally he sent them flying with his bo-staff. Turning his attention to the next set of attackers, Kyriakas used a set of bolas to take care of them. He didn't glance at his companion. They still had yet to deal with their separation, and Kyriakas wasn't in the mood to listen to her bitch at him.

\* \* \* \*

Joining the battle, though not without some wariness, Sinati noticed the atmosphere between Kyriakas and the woman. She briefly wondered what crawled up Kyriakas' ass and decided she didn't want to know. Sinati glanced at Druid, wondering if he recognized the female. Apparently he did, though she was suspicious of the woman.

With equally disgusted expressions, Sinati and Druid attacked their opponents. The battle had lasted

for all but three seconds when an enraged roar echoed through the halls around them. Wincing with pain, Druid and Sinati dropped their weapons and hit the ground. They didn't look around.

\* \* \* \*

"Who dares fight in my shrine?" Zeus' voice boomed with fury as he stepped out of the tapestry that the beautiful arachnidian wove for the building. "You." He pointed at Kyriakas. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

Kyriakas glared in response. "Nothing," he spat. "I did nothing but obey your orders!"

Zeus eyed him disdainfully. "Oh, so you are the sprout of that fool who tried to summon my spirit to his bidding, hmm?" He banished Kyriakas and the woman at his side. "I'll deal with you two later."

Zeus turned his attention to Sinati and Druid, who were eyeing him with baffled, wary expressions. He stared at Sinati. "You were the one who wove this?" He touched the material carefully, skimming his fingers over the material.

"Yes." Sinati eyed him cautiously.

"If you were given one wish, what would it be?" Zeus held up a warning hand when she would have spoke. "Chose wisely, young miss." He glanced at Druid, whose lips were clamped shut, while he regarded them with narrowed eyes. "You are next."

Sinati was silent. "I want to be with Druid, no matter what happens in the future." She held onto

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him tightly.

Not being brash or stupid, Druid didn't speak. Instead, he smiled at Zeus. Silently he looped his arms around Sinati's waist. He let his feelings show visibly as he snuggled her into his chest.

Watching the couple, Zeus nodded with curious satisfaction. "You want the same?" He eyeballed Druid with consideration.

"Yes." Druid wrapped his arms around Sinati's waist more tightly.

"Very well, then, but I hope you know what you're getting into." Zeus' tone was dry with some amusement.

The next second they found themselves in a plush room, discomfited to realize neither was clad in any clothing.

"You'll discover that you've been wed." Zeus informed them brusquely. "Enjoy your bridal night while you can. I assure you, the others will seek you once more. This time I hope you don't ruin your chance together." He faded away.

Sinati and Druid looked at each other and laughed, tumbling to the sheets that floated around them. They rolled around, tickling and wordlessly running their hands over each other. Druid growled as she found a sensitive spot and he closed his teeth gently over one ear. He rolled Sinati to her back, smiling at her slightly startled expression. His gaze was intent upon her features while he held her still. He moved so that he was traveling downward toward her waist. He felt her moan while she gently twisted against him. Her

legs slowly rubbed against him and he reveled in their tensile strength.

As he watched her from his lower position, her eyes remained watchful on him. He knew she was a little nervous and a lot cautious. They hadn't much time to understand what happened between them. His eyebrows lifted at her in question and she imperceptibly inclined her head in understanding.

When his lips touched the silky skin on her hips, Druid discovered rough patches that were well hidden but definitely there. He ignored the strangeness and moved on. He felt her relax when he nuzzled her junction. He blew into her, and she lifted up into his mouth. Smiling against her, he slid his tongue within her clitoris and slid against the inner walls, seeking out the most sensitive bundle of nerves that he could find.

Her shriek and bucking against him told Druid he was in the right spot. Withdrawing his tongue, he kissed his way back up her body. Her hands explored his body, roaming with intent that he encouraged with a soft growl against her nipple. Druid felt her jump, and laughed softly. He caught the gleam in her eye, returning it with interest.

They rolled with each other once more and she was on top. He held her against him while her legs coiled around his hips. Druid's eyebrows rose when she rose up and dropped down, enclosing him completely within her warmth. He groaned deeply and felt her shake against him.

"I hope that meant you are enjoying yourself." She

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teased him.

Druid grinned at her. "Oh, but I am, Sinati. I intend to discover all the secrets of your lithe body." He spoke with confidence.

Druid watched her digest his words and nearly laughed at her. Sinati caught his amusement when he waited for her reaction. She didn't actually say anything, instead, clenching her inner muscles around him. He bit off a sharp cry that sounded closer to a howl. Her eyes glinted with intent when she stared down at him. She leaned closer to him while moving now, rhythmically, keeping him guessing. Druid thought he was going to die from the pleasure, and as they reached the pinnacle, he felt her gasping and sensed her faltering. He increased the pressure and rhythm when she would have stopped.

Druid nipped her lip, biting it and she sank her teeth into his neck. His eyes widened slightly when they climaxed together at the same time.

"Be careful, you do remember the warning about the spider and what she does to her mate?"

Druid smiled slightly. He shifted within her and watched her eyes flutter. "Yes, but this spider's mate is willing to take the risk."

He felt his teeth beginning to elongate. Druid grinned at her start. "What you think that you are the only one who has that particular change during mating?" His soft taunt made her try sitting back. His hands held her securely when he lightly sank his teeth into her neck. Both of them were transfixed from the ecstasy that burned through their bodies. They felt as



though they were flung clear to another level of their spirits. Druid didn't look around as he held her. He felt himself merging with Sinati and watched her reaction with slight unease. She met his eyes and smiled, reassuring him, and they merged as one more wave broke over them. They slowly fell into a deep sleep.

\* \* \* \*

Zeus glared at the creatures standing before him bound in chains. None of them looked repentant and that truly angered him. He tapped his fingers against his throne while he regarded them sternly. "You do realize why you are here?" His inquiry was met with blank gazes. He sighed with disgust. "No?"

It bothered him that none of them were aware that they had committed some serious crimes. One of the woman grunted, but said nothing to him. Zeus stared at her, suspicion dawning in his mind. "The real ones escaped, I take it?" He was furious as he studied them more carefully.

Zeus focused on the wraith, who couldn't escape. Though the male was doing his best to do so. He looked downright furious. There was true evil in this one, and for once, Zeus feared for the lives of the rest, though he rarely cared about mortals. Finally, he decided that he needed to interfere. He heard a cleared throat and glanced to his left.

It was Athena who stared at the rest with a harsh gaze. "There are other pantheons who are demanding

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that they get a blood price from them. Especially him." She pointed at the one named Caedion. However, Athena didn't actually give his name.

Zeus nodded thoughtfully. "So he has created many problems elsewhere?"

Athena shot him an assessing gaze. She turned her attention back to the wraith, who glared at them with burning hatred. Madness gleamed in his eyes. "Yes, he has. He is wanted for the attempted murder of several god and goddess-born children." Crossing her arms, Athena was cold and merciless while she regarded the male in question. "They will take care of him."

Zeus inclined his head in understanding. The creature instantly vanished. He turned his attention to the others.

They blinked as though coming out of a daze. Their fear thickened when he realized they didn't know where they were. None of them spoke and knelt before him. Their chains rattled, but he realized that none of them expected to live. He glanced at Athena who studied them as well.

"Let them live, they remember their crimes committed in the name that that thing used." She pronounced. "In fact, send all of them to the world they were originally taken from."

Zeus frowned when she spoke. "It wasn't a different world, Athena." He was annoyed. "Merely another timeline." When Athena only shrugged, he stared at her with irritation. "What is going on, Athena?"

Again she shrugged. "It isn't finished back there. They all need to go back." She emphasized the word *all* by glancing at the chamber where the lovers were enjoying a much-needed sleep. They would need it for the rough times to come ahead.

Zeus sighed in disgust. He'd hoped to avoid that. They would have made some interesting playthings for a while. "So what has changed?"

Athena shook her head. "Time accelerated while they were gone and he was left to do what he wished." Her lips thinned. "However, with the destruction of his various *portals*," she spat the last word, "his spells broke and the Scythians and Myrians were returned."

She closed her eyes for a moment. "However, those who wield magic and other talents are rapidly being rounded up." Athena opened her eyes. "The rebels are becoming desperate. They need Druid and Sinati back. If those two don't return, soon those native races will break into an all-out war."

Zeus frowned. "The Scythians and Myrians?" He was annoyed when he considered the implications. Druid was the last of the Myrians, and Sinati was the last of the Scythians.

Athena shrugged yet again, knowing that Zeus would go beyond his selfishness in keeping the weaver and earth healer in the Olympian realm.

Realizing what she was leading him to understand, Zeus sighed in disgust. "They are waking once more, and not in the middle of talking, they will go back." He conceded with an irate sigh shot at his favorite

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daughter.

Athena nodded, pleased with his dispensing of justice. "And them?" She pointed to the rest of the prisoners.

"They will be sent back when the imposters are murdered." Zeus shrugged. "Either that, or the Fates will deal with them." Clearly, he didn't care.

Not at all content with his solution to the very serious problem in front of them, Athena narrowed her eyes at him.

He rolled his eyes and sent the prisoners into a deep sleep. "Satisfied?" His tone was irascible when he put them into transparent cases. "They'll be released once the rest are dealt with."

Athena inclined her head when she acknowledged that she'd pushed him far enough. "Fine with me." She disappeared without another word.

\* \* \* \*

Sunlight was drifting into windows not present before. Warmth surrounded the sleepy, blissful couple who weren't yet willing to wake up just yet. Neither wanted to face reality. Instead, they cuddled closer to each other and relished the heat of each other's bodies, knowing in some corner of their minds that it would end sooner or later. They just wanted to keep the 'later' a bit more later.

Satisfied and content, Druid snuggled against Sinati's breasts, his arms wrapping around her shimmying body. She was reaching for his arms, but

stopped when his lips moved downward. He slowly dropped his attention lower, to the rougher skin he'd felt earlier. Waiting for her to react, he began interspersing kisses on the rougher areas between the softness that was surprisingly less sensitive. Druid looked closer at them, puzzled, but decided he didn't really need to know what those meant. Hoping for a reaction other than a sleepy mumble, he ran his fingers across them. Feeling her hiss softly in slight annoyance, he refused to stop when he felt her tense.

When she stiffened, however, he looked up at her with concern, and saw her bite her lip. "What is it, love?" His voice was soft and concerned.

Biting her lip a second time, Sinati looked uncomfortable. "I'm just very sensitive there, Druid, and I don't know why my skin is flaking like that."

She didn't like it one bit, either, it showed, to him, that something was wrong with her. Thinking over that puzzle, Druid frowned slightly. "This has happened before?" An uneasy sensation floated through him.

"Yes." She looked uncomfortable. "When I was bound by my own kind." She bit her lip again.

Tired of her doing that—she would bite it raw, otherwise—Druid nipped her lip in warning and she growled at him.

Irritated at his dictatorial actions, Sinati became annoyed. She flipped him with a lift of her hips, taking him by surprise.

The breath knocked out of him, Druid grunted when they switched positions. Leaning on his elbows

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and forearms, he looked down at her with surprise.

Sinati stared up at him. "I don't wish to speak more on it. The subject is a painful one, Druid." Then she settled the debate when she cupped him in her hands. She smiled at his indrawn breath, slowly sliding her tongue around his hard cock and moving upward before taking him deep in her throat. As he groaned, Sinati took him deeper. Her eyes widened when she felt his fingers dipping into her moist center. She squirmed against him and finally let loose when she nearly choked.

Glaring at him, Sinati tried to catch him again, but found her hands trapped in his grasp while he slid into her. They lay still and stared deeply into each other's eyes. They sighed and began moving into a faster rhythm as their passion rose higher and higher as their bond strengthened with their love for the other. Once again sleepiness followed, though this was a deeper and stronger one. Neither could fight it, and they let it overtake their senses.

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Zeus regretfully watched them for a moment. Then he made a motion with one hand and let them fall from the warm comfort of the chamber. There they would descend into cold reality once more. Back into a life that would be a lot more different. For they were nothing but myth and legend, two hundred years having passed since they'd last left Terra Firma of their particular time line.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**B**.L. Foxxe was born in California and lived there for most of her twenty-eight years. She moved to Newport News, Va. for a new start and to see how successful she could become as a novelist. She also plans to continue her education at a local tech school. B.L. Foxxe hopes to write more books in the future that will be enjoyed by all. In her spare time she also draws, reads lots of other books, and finds new, interesting friends. She loves the three cats, Blu, Rhamses and Buffy, who hang around bugging her at inconvenient times.