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**Moving Atlantis**  
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*An ancient world on the brink of civil war  
...and a woman on the brink of self-discovery.*

## **Moving Atlantis**

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When Magda Marks finds a strange golden sphere while diving off the coast of Bimini, she knows she's found something incredible. Unfortunately others want this artifact as well, including her manipulative ex, two assassins and Lorricks, a strange man who claims to be a Faerie warrior from Atlantis.

When Lorricks steals the sphere Magda's determined to get it back even if it means trailing him into the heart of the Bermuda Triangle. What she finds there will lead her to her destiny and change her life forever.

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# Moving Atlantis

*Jennie Andrus*

## Dedication

For Chris, who thought this was a great story idea...until I mentioned the faeries.

## Prologue

In the shadows of the stone circle, they met as dawn's light pierced the fog and lit the world on fire. The dark haired woman with her simple black and silver gown paced on one side of the keystone while the tall blond warrior dressed in worn leather armor stood, his powerful arms crossed over his chest in apparent boredom.

"He's late," the woman complained, glaring at the mocking expression on the warrior's face.

"Relax, Lihbaerda, you know he's only a child."

"And I'm a queen! I shouldn't be summoned like a serf."

The man grinned again, his silver eyes flashing in the growing light. "You always were a spoiled bitch, Lihb."

Lihbaerda sighed and leaned one slender hip against the keystone. "What happened to us, Ahrken?"

Ahrken frowned and turned away. "People change." His voice was soft, barely a whisper, and in it she heard regret and guilt.

The air around them began to shimmer a silvery blue, putting an end to the conversation. The light pulsed then burst, revealing a small boy with black hair and silver eyes. He looked no more than five years old. His toothy grin flashed cheekily at the obvious tension between the man and the woman.

"You sent for us?" Ahrken drawled. He might have resented being summoned, for he was a king, but Ahrken paid little attention to the trappings associated with his rank.

"I've had a vision," the boy announced, and his grin grew wider on his pudgy face.

"Great, glad to hear it. Can I go back to bed now?" Lihbaerda snarled.

The child cast her a mulish glare but continued to speak. When he stopped, the queen's sneer had turned to open-mouthed shock and her skin had paled.

"Are you sure?" Ahrken asked. He'd abandoned his casual pose and now stood tense and fearful.

"Yes. Both our world and the human world will come to the brink of destruction and only one can stop it. A half-blood child."

"But humans and faerie can't create children together. It would take more magic than any one of us has."

"My sister has volunteered to be the vessel. Between the two of us we'll make it work."

"Your sister's always had a soft spot for human men." Lihbaerda sniffed delicately.

The boy shrugged and stared dreamily into the lifting fog. "She'll make her own sacrifices, for her destiny is to die in childbirth a thousand times, bearing sons she'll never hold until a daughter is born."

"She'll die a thousand times? Why would she volunteer for this task?"

Suddenly the cherubic face turned harsh and stern. "Amanii knows her duty. There will be hundreds of years of strife and it all falls on the shoulders of our king and queen. If you'd settled your differences this would never have come to pass."

Lihbaerda cast a quick glance at Ahrken. Their gazes met and for one sweet moment love shone on each of their faces before bitterness and mistrust slammed the door and they turned away from each other and disappeared.

“So be it. You’ve made your choice.” And the boy disappeared into a swirl of light.



## Chapter One

The world was silent. Sunlight flickered on the ripples of sand, highlighting each individual grain as it reflected the light like a million specks of gold. Magda allowed herself only a moment to enjoy the tranquility, knowing her partner expected her to surface any moment now. Grant was not a patient man.

There was little to see here, just miles of rippled sand with the occasional rock or clump of seaweed waving in the gentle current. Her research suggested there might be part of a Spanish galleon in the area, and tomorrow she'd set about the process of searching for her remains. Today though, she was diving for pleasure.

The pouch at her hip contained a few possible treasures. She'd have to get through the sediment to know for sure, but they could very well be coins or buttons—or they could be nothing more than lumps of rock. That was what made diving for treasure so much fun.

A glint of light caught her eye and she turned. Magda would have shrugged it off as another trick of the shimmering sands but something drew her toward the clump of boulders. She glanced at her watch and winced. Grant would skin her alive for taking longer than the allotted time, but she kicked her legs, felt the swim fins propel her forward toward the rocks.

Again the light glinted, sharp and bright and much larger than a mere speck of sand. Her heart thudded with excitement. Magda kicked

harder, her eyes focused. When she reached the rocks, she didn't see anything of interest and she frowned. Sand filled a small cup of space between the circle of stones, a perfect circle of rocks with a hollow center, almost like a campfire ring.

The current drifted around her, carrying fine bits of sand and particulate. As she watched, the sand in the middle of the ring of stones shifted in tiny surges. Ignoring the tug on her line, she watched, fascinated as the sand parted for a moment and the object hidden beneath it reflected the sunlight.

Gold! And whatever it was, it was at least the size of her fist!

With trembling hands she swatted sand away, clouding the water around her as she uncovered her treasure. She felt another tug at the line and found the wits to tug it, signaling to Grant that she was fine, but she couldn't take her eyes off the object nestled in a bed of stone.

Another tug, this one more insistent. She could picture Grant's irritated scowl as he stood by the railing, scanning the expanse of ocean for some sign of her surfacing. She wasn't sure that even a treasure like this would appease him once he got into a temper. She'd wanted to take pictures, document the location but instead she scooped up her find, tucked it into the bag at her hip and began swimming slowly upward.

A cool breeze caressed her cheek as her head broke the surface and she grinned, pulling the off her mask and mouthpiece.

"What the hell were you doing down there?" Grant demanded, his voice gravelly.

Magda grinned wider and kicked her legs, casually propelling herself toward the *Snarling Catfish*. "Finding treasure."

Grant snorted and crossed his scrawny arms over his chest. "You were supposed to be getting a feel for the area, not hunting for treasure."

"I know, but it was just sitting there waiting to be found. What would you have done?"

A thin smile threatened to crack the stern set of his lips. "I'd've grabbed it, you're right. Now get that skinny butt of yours on board so I can see the clump of rock that kept you down there ten minutes past our agreed time limit."

Normally she'd comment about his stick-like body, but she was in too good a mood. When she reached the metal rungs, Grant helped her up. She didn't really need his help, but it was one of the few friendly things he ever did. He really was a miserable old bastard, but he knew the area and he'd been a friend of her father so she tolerated him.

Still grinning, she slipped the bag off her shoulder and handed it to him, then watched his face as he pulled out the object that she'd found.

For once in his life he was speechless and she almost laughed. Instead she stepped closer and examined the golden sphere that fit neatly in her partner's hand.

"I don't recognize the writing. Where do you suppose it came from?"

Magda shrugged and took it from him, bringing it closer to her face to get a better look. "It looks almost like the writing on a J.R.R. Tolkien book."

"Who?"

"Christ, Grant, have you been living in a vacuum?"

"Never had much use for books."

Magda rolled her eyes and continued her examination of the sphere. Whatever it was, it had several smooth curved indents that perfectly fit her fingers and a deep circular hole about the width of a dime. She let her finger slide over the engravings and saw that her fingers fit the curved indents perfectly. Suddenly the sphere flared with light and she

jumped. The golden globe slipped from her hands, clattering to the decking as the strange light faded as quickly as it had appeared.

“What the hell’s wrong with you, girl? It’s just the sun reflecting off it. If you damaged it, the loss is coming out of your share of the profits.”

Magda drew in a deep breath, knowing he had to be right, but she’d swear she’d heard a humming sound when she’d touched those indents. The hair on her arms had stood on end, and her fingertips had that numb feeling she usually got when working with power tools. “I wonder what it’s for. It looks like its part of something bigger. I’ve never seen anything like it though.”

“Well, you get your pointy nose into those books you love so much and figure it out, and when it makes us rich, I’ll even let you keep sixty-percent of the profit.”



Magda stretched and marveled, as she did every year on her first night at sea, that she was here. With the sun setting off the port bow, and a frosty drink in her hand, life couldn’t get much better.

Grant had set his chair down on the lower deck where he was checking diving equipment, but Magda had chosen to relax for a few hours before turning in. In general she chose to avoid spending time with her partner whenever possible, so she’d set her lounge chair up on the cabin roof where she could enjoy a three hundred and sixty degree view. To one side she could see the sunset behind the lights of Bimini and to the other, the endless expanse of water flashing like fire as the dying sun reflected off the gently rolling waves.

She’d spent the afternoon searching through her texts and had even done a brief internet search but hadn’t found anything resembling the

strange writing on the sphere. Oh, she'd figure it out eventually, so she wasn't worried. Nothing was going to worry her on this fabulous night, not when she was so content with her life.

A soft breeze blew, carrying the invigorating scent of tropical flowers to mingle with the normal sea scents. They were anchored close enough to Bimini to catch faint hints every now and then, but for the most part the night air was tangy with salt and the fresh paint from Grant's recent repairs to *The Snarling Catfish*.

If only she could do this all year round. Bills sucked.

As she let her gaze drift across the red and orange shimmer of water, she thought about how close they were to the Bermuda triangle. She snickered. *Bermuda triangle, my ass*. She was a historian, and she'd done extensive study of the area and its myths and legends, but she'd never found anything that could convince her that there really was a triangle of ocean that could do all the things people claimed.

Ships disappeared all the time, airplanes crashed. Maybe the area had more than its fair share of such incidents, but it'd be a cold day in hell before she believed some of the ludicrous theories being touted—alien abduction, space-time vortexes, magnetic aberrations or her personal favorite, gas. It made for some entertaining reading, but she didn't believe a word of it.

Nor did she believe the theories that the lost city of Atlantis lay somewhere under the water here.

Magda rolled her eyes, wriggled her hips deeper into the plush cushion on her lounge chair and sipped her drink. There were a lot of crackpots in the world, that's for sure.

In the distance, she saw a sailboat riding the gentle breeze. Obviously there was more wind out there, because the *Catfish* was barely moving

on the gentle waves, and Magda's short cropped auburn hair lay still and unmoving.

With a contented sigh, she settled back and closed her eyes, enjoying the calm night.

"What the fuck!"

Leave it to Grant to ruin the mood. Knowing him, he'd found a piece of equipment in the wrong spot and knowing him, he'd blame her for it. Everything was her fault, simply because she was younger and—gasp—a woman.

"What's wrong?" she called down, loath to climb from her comfortable perch.

"Boat coming up on us, fast. You'd better get down here."

Magda sighed and threw her legs over the edge of the chair. Scanning the glowing darkness, she saw only the sailboat she'd noted earlier, and it did indeed seem to be coming right for them.

As quickly as she could, she climbed down the ladder, cursing the rubber flip-flops that made it an awkward endeavor.

"Probably a couple of kids who don't know what they're doing on a sail boat," she said, but her gut clenched with fear. The boat was going too fast for the limited breeze. She'd have said eerily fast if she was the sort who believed in that kind of thing.

"Idiot kids," Grant muttered. "Gonna kill someone."

"You haul anchor, just in case, I'll try blinking our spot light to let them know we're here." The deck of the *Catfish* was slippery under her flip-flops and she cursed, making a vow to toss the damned things overboard as soon as this crisis passed.

Magda ran to the bridge and flicked the switch on and off several times and, for good measure, hammered on the horn with the heel of her

hand. She knew the sound would carry over the water easily and should deter the captain of the sailboat.

“Lay on the horn again. She’s not turning!” Grant’s voice held a touch of panic, and she’d never known him to show any emotion except anger or disgust. Magda’s gut clenched again hearing it now.

She pressed on the horn again and flickered the lights, but looking out the window she could see that the boat hadn’t altered course at all. “Do you think they’ve taken damage and can’t steer?” she called.

“It’s possible. Better start the engine and get us the hell out of here.”

She complied, her fingers shaking on the controls. With a muffled roar, the engine sprang to life and she slammed the accelerator all the way to full.

“Dammit, girl! You tryin’ to knock me overboard?”

“No, you miserable old bastard, I’m trying to save your boat,” Magda muttered, easing off on the throttle a touch. When this was over, she didn’t want Grant up her ass about mistreating the engines.

“Stupid punk-ass kids. You can cut the engines, they’ve taken off towards shore.”

Magda stopped the boat and shut it down. Her heart thudded painfully as the adrenaline rush left her. She took a moment to catch her breath and to let her hands stop shaking.

“You all right?” Grant’s voice was rough with grudging concern.

“Of course. Any damage?”

“One of the tanks broke a valve when you jumped the accelerator. You’ll have to run into town in the morning to get it fixed.”

Magda cursed. The diving season was short enough without losing days for equipment repairs before she’d really even had the chance to start. “I guess I can do some research at the library while I’m waiting.”

“You do whatever you gotta do. And you can take the repair costs out of your share of the profits.”

Magda snorted. Typical Grant, bickering over every penny of the take. It didn't matter to her, she made more money from the sale of her books than from selling their finds. For her, diving itself was the reward.

Grant grunted what for him passed as goodnight and disappeared down to his cabin. Magda locked up the engines and went back out onto the deck. Moonlight glinted off the nearly flat water. The air was still and calm. With a smile she let her eyes scan the vast emptiness of the horizon before making her way to her cabin where she swung into her hammock and let herself dream of the discoveries waiting beneath the gentle waves.



## Chapter Two

The morning air was damp and fragrant. Magda sat in the small powerboat, one hand on the tiller and the other trailing over the side in the warm water. Her chin length hair whipped around her face as the little boat sped toward Bimini.

As usual she headed toward the Blue Water Resort where her father had come to fish for swordfish and barracuda with his friends. The smiling face that greeted her at the pier was familiar. One of the long time employees of the resort, Marcus had known her for years. Only a few years younger than him, she'd spent her teenage years in the throes of first love as she'd watched him work the docks, his strong young back shiny with sweat.

"Didn't expect to see you for a few days at least. What's wrong, Grant giving you a hard time already?"

"When isn't he? We had some trouble last night. Bunch of kids in a little sailboat almost rammed us. Broke a valve on a tank when we were getting out of the way."

Marcus frowned. "Strange. I'll keep an eye out for them, see if I can set them straight."

"Thanks." Magda tossed her backpack and the tank onto the pier and accepted Marcus's extended hand. He grinned at her, and her heart did a little flip flop. Even knowing they'd never be more than friends, she couldn't help feeling the little tingle when he smiled at her like that.

“Oh, Magda. Thought you should know, Oliver’s here for a few weeks. I didn’t tell him you’d be around, but I get the feeling he already knows.”

The usual wave of nausea hit her at his name. Oliver, her ex-mentor and ex-lover, was an independently wealthy sportsman who’d taught her how to dive when she’d been an impressionable eighteen year-old.

“Damn. Don’t tell him I’m here. He’ll find me eventually but I’d like to put it off as long as possible.”

Marcus nodded, another grin splitting his face, this time accompanied by a conspiratorial wink. Magda scooped up her gear and hurried off the pier. She kept her head down and wished she’d remembered to bring a hat. The last person she wanted to see was Oliver—the thieving bastard.

It wasn’t a long walk to the dive shop but the tank made the trek awkward, and the itchy feeling she associated with being watched made it seem interminable. Logically she knew she had nothing to worry about. Oliver was nothing if not a creature of habit, and his habit generally kept him up late at night and ensured he’d be sick as a dog most mornings. At ten after nine on a Monday morning, she knew there was little chance that he’d be out of bed.

After dropping of the tank, she walked half a block to the run-down building where Mills Books was housed. Inside the building was dark and crowded with shelves that overflowed with both the hottest new paperbacks and the most obscure local histories. Hallee Mills, the owner, was a retired university history professor and had been partially responsible for Magda’s own career choice.

“Hello, doll. I wondered when you’d be stopping in.” Hallee’s silver hair flowed past her shoulders and down to her waist in thick curls. Her green eyes twinkled in the light of a small table lamp.

“Hi, Hallee. Tourists driving you nuts yet?” Magda always asked her that, and Hallee always laughed.

“That snake ex of yours was in yesterday asking about you.”

“Marcus told me he’s around.”

“You make sure you keep your finds to yourself this time, okay, honey?”

“Don’t worry, Hallee, I learned my lesson the hard way.” And she had. No blue-eyed Adonis would get the drop on her again. She’d sworn off men, as sad as that was to admit.

Magda made her way to the back of the store, past the biographies, cookbooks and fiction to a shelf full of thick hardcovers. The books in the section reflected Hallee’s personal taste for history, and it was here that Magda turned when she needed information. She spotted the neat display of books by Magdalina De Marktos, and grinned. The glossy covers held the images of stately ships in their prime, ships that now lay at the bottom of the ocean.

The name Magdalina De Marktos had been chosen by her editor, since Magda Marks didn’t have the old world richness that they thought best fit the style and content of her books. Magda had insisted on using a pen name; it was enough that her words filled the pages, her research fleshed out the tales and her imagination brought the history to life. She hadn’t set out to write books that appealed to the masses, though nobody believed that. She’d wanted to write accurate historical memoirs of the passengers and crew, but apparently she had a flair for telling a tale. Now her books were best sellers and she made enough money to keep financing these diving trips without having to dip into her trust fund.

With a sigh, she pulled her mind back to the current project, and within minutes she was settled on the floor with a pile of thick books surrounding her.

With her notebook in her lap, Magda set about searching for information on the strange golden sphere she'd found. It soon became evident that whatever the sphere was, it didn't have roots in the Bahamas or any of the nearby islands. Nothing in any of the local histories held anything that remotely matched the odd looking squiggles that were engraved on the artifact.

"Okay, you," she mumbled, nibbling the end of her pen, "where do you come from?"

An hour later she'd just about given up. There was nothing anywhere in these books that resembled those glyphs. Her butt was numb, her back cramping and her stomach was beginning to growl.

The urge to pull the sphere out of her backpack pressed on her like an addiction, but she resisted. Oliver, curse his perfect blond curls, could come through that door any second. He knew all her favorite haunts and it would be just her luck to have him come in just as she was examining a new find. Still, a quick look wouldn't hurt.

With a quick glance over her shoulder, Magda pulled the golden sphere out of her bag. The fluorescent lights overhead glinted harshly off the surface. As quickly as possible, she sketched out a few lines of the symbols.

After another look towards the front of the store, Magda reached for her bag again. Her gaze settled on the three indents. Her fingertips itched to touch them, to prove that the flash of light she'd seen yesterday had been nothing more than the sunlight reflecting off the shiny surface. Her heart thudded painfully against her ribs.

“This is stupid,” she muttered and pressed her fingers into the spaces.

The sphere erupted with light. A low-grade hum sounded, like the constant buzz of a fluorescent light only louder and more pleasing to the ear. With a strangled gasp, she thrust the globe into her bag and drew in a deep breath.

It had been no trick of the sun. Whatever that thing was, it wasn't natural.

Her logical mind refused to accept that it could be otherworldly. With the humming sound gone and her hair settling back against her skin, she began to think more clearly. No, it had to be some electro-magnetic reaction. That certainly made more sense than an alien or magical artifact. It probably wasn't even that old, probably some new military device, after all it didn't show the kind of wear one expected to find after being in the sea for hundreds of years.

The thought depressed her even as it satisfied her need for logic. She wanted this object to be more than some modern military gizmo.

With a sigh, she put the books back on the shelves and dusted off her shorts. As she slid the straps of her bag back over her shoulder, her gaze fell to the shelf of books on mythology. Hallee usually kept a good stock of Caribbean legends for the tourists and, of course, several books on the local Atlantis theories.

“A big load of hooey if you ask me,” she said, shifting her bag to make it more comfortable.

“Did you say something, hon?” Hallee called out from the front of the store.

“Just commenting on the ridiculousness of Atlantis being just off the shore here.”

Hallee laughed. "I know, but the tourists like to believe they'll find the lost continent. If they want to waste their time and money on it, well, it's putting dinner on my table, isn't it?"

Magda laughed and turned to join Hallee at the front, wondering if she should risk showing her friend the sphere. Hallee had more experience with historical writings than Magda was herself.

Her gaze went back to the books on mythology and settled on a thick brown spine with the word Atlantis in faded gold letters. Along the top of the spine were three symbols. Magda's heart jumped and her stomach fluttered. Those symbols were on the sphere. She lifted her hand to pull down the book, then hesitated. Did she really believe she'd found a relic of ancient Atlantis? Of course not, but that didn't mean she couldn't take a quick look. After all, proper research covered all the bases. Without solid proof to the contrary, there would always be some fanatic who would swear that what she'd found did indeed belong to the lost continent.

With a guilty look towards the front counter, she pulled the heavy book off the shelf. The cover looked like aged brown leather with a series of gold squiggles that she recognized from her examination of the sphere.

The bells over the front door jingled, making Magda jump, but her attention remained riveted on the symbols. Her fingers traced the now familiar shapes and she noted that there was nothing on the cover to indicate the author. The hair on the back of her neck stood on end and goose bumps rippled her arms. With trembling fingers, she flipped the book open.

"My, my! Don't tell me the famous Magdalena De Marktos is going to go searching for the lost continent!"

She slammed the book closed, wishing she dared slam it into his perfect nose. "Oliver." She greeted him, her voice sharp and cold.

“Did you miss me, darlin’?”

“About as much as I miss crabs. I never thanked you properly for that, did I?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Magda gritted her teeth at the smug humor in his voice. “What do you want, Oliver?”

“I don’t think the back of a dingy bookstore is quite the right place for what I want, darlin’.”

“Leave me alone, Oliver. I’m not a dumb-ass kid anymore. I know what you’re really after.”

“Now, don’t be upset about that. It was years ago and I dedicated that book to you.”

“Oh, and did I ever properly thank you for that? ‘Dedicated to Magda, a woman who’s not afraid to dive deep and work hard to make me happy. Thanks for all the long hot nights.’ You could have saved yourself the time and said thanks to Magda the whore.”

“Maggie, honey, you know I never thought of you that way. You’re a smart kid.”

“You obviously thought so if you felt it necessary to steal my research.”

“You know no publisher would have taken you seriously. You don’t have the right image for the publisher to market you successfully.”

“Oliver, you really are an idiot. My books are on the bestseller lists while yours wallow in obscurity. I may not look like the poster child for tropical adventurer but I’m damned good at what I do. Stay the hell away from me and my search site.”

“You’re such a bitch. Together we could make millions. With my face and your brain we’d be famous.”

"I don't want to be famous, now get out before I get Hallee to call the police."

His handsome face hardened and he spun around, stalked out of the store. Magda caught Hallee's eye and they shared a short conspiratorial wink before Magda turned back to the heavy book she'd hugged to her chest in an attempt to hide it from Oliver.

She drew in a deep breath and flipped open the cover of the book. Again the doorbells jangled and Magda cursed, clutching the book tightly and prepared to do some serious damage to Oliver's arrogant chin.

Something crashed, glass broke and Hallee screamed.

"Hallee?" Magda called, sprinting around the shelves to the counter where her friend had been sitting.

Two men in long black coats stood with long daggers gripped in their hands. Magda skidded to a stop, her eyes wide.

"We don't have time to search the whole store. Kill the witness and lock the doors," one instructed. His accent was strange and she couldn't quite place it.

"Who are you?" she asked.

They didn't answer. The one who'd spoken moved to the front door and turned the closed sign out. The other advanced towards Magda, his dagger raised. She saw a drop of blood slowly slide the length of the silver and realized that he'd already killed someone. Hallee.

Magda had taken self-defense courses. Part of her self-inflicted therapy had included taking both karate and jujitsu. But it had all been symbolic. She'd never imagined she'd need to actually use those skills to defend herself. These men were tall, broad shouldered and clearly had no problem killing anyone who stood in their way. She didn't have a hope in hell of actually beating them.



The dagger swiped and she dodged it easily. He'd aimed for her throat, a quick but messy kill, and she knew that these men had no fear of being caught afterwards. Cold fear clutched her stomach and she staggered backwards away from another swipe of that lethal blade.

Her gaze stayed on the dagger, though every martial arts film she'd ever seen had insisted that you should watch the opponent's eyes. He swiped again and Magda risked a quick peek, then wished she hadn't. His eyes were silver, like pools of molten steel and entirely not human.

*Contact lenses*, she told herself as she continued to back away. Her shoulder blades bumped up against a bookshelf and she caught the gleam of triumph in those spooky eyes. *Fuck this*, she thought and lunged forward, smashing the thick brown book against his face just as she'd imagined herself doing to Oliver.

He staggered back, his nose gushing blood, and she retreated around the side of the shelf to catch her breath and consider her next move. There was no back door and the only way out was blocked. She was seriously screwed and mentally slapped herself for all the times she'd dreamed of being like Indiana Jones.

"What are you doing? Just kill the bitch so we can get out of here."

"She fucking broke my nose!"

"The queen will kill you herself if you mess up this chance! We've waited hundreds of years and no puny female is going to stand in our way!"

Footsteps echoed on the wooden floorboards. Magda held her breath as they came closer. She knew she had only two choices, die like a coward sitting on the floor or do her damndest to take at least one of them down with her.

She'd survived Oliver's fucked up sexcapades, she could survive this.

Still clutching the book in her hand, she stepped out from behind the shelf and kicked him in the stomach. He barely grunted but his gaze was wary as he continued to stalk her.

“You can’t beat me, human.”

“I can try,” she said, suddenly feeling like she’d been thrown into a bad movie where the dialogue and the characters mouths didn’t synch up. She kicked again, high this time and connected with his elbow. He fumbled the dagger. Magda reached for it, but missed and the blade clattered to the floor and skittered under the bookcase.

Her opponent growled and leapt for her, his superior weight too much for her to withstand. She crashed to the floor, catching her right elbow on the corner of a shelf hard enough to numb her hand.

“Stupid human bitch,” the man snarled. Long fingers wrapped around her throat and as much as she struggled, she couldn’t pry them off. Her vision dimmed. Blood roared in her ears. Tiny pin pricks of light danced before her eyes as blackness began to over take her. She reached out blindly looking for anything that could be a weapon and felt her fingers slide over the cool slick blade of a knife. Her attempts to grasp it chased it farther away until finally, with one last desperate stretch, she felt the comforting weight settle against her palm. Her other hand clamped onto the smooth spine of the Atlantis book and she tried to raise it up to hit him in the face again, but couldn’t gather the strength.

With the last of her strength, she raised the dagger and brought it down across the man’s throat just as she finally slipped into unconsciousness.

## Chapter Three

Lorrick walked quickly past the familiar shops and faces of Alice Town. On any other day he'd have stopped to chat with the locals but today he had business to attend to.

The spark of magic had faded to a mere glint in his mind, but it was the first he'd felt the sharp tang of ancient power in several hundred years. His own frantic searches had led him all over the world and now he was about to be rewarded. Someone in Bimini had the key.

He quickened his pace, fear warring with hope as his sandals slapped on the cobblestone path. Finally, after all these years, he had his chance to correct the biggest mistake he'd made in a thousand years, if he could find the person who'd activated the ancient key before they disappeared.

His head was crammed with hundreds of questions. Where had it been found? How had a human activated it?

And not for the first time, he wished he could get a hold of the faerie soul that resided in the key, the soul that had closed itself off to Lorrick's magic the day he'd allowed Margaret to steal the most important object on Atlantis.

The fading glimmer of power was straight ahead of him, and he frowned. Hallee's bookstore? Could old Hallee have found it or one of her customers? Goddess help him if some nosey tourist had found the key and gotten it into their head to research its origins.

As he drew closer, he saw the closed sign turned out. His frown deepened. Hallee never closed the store during the day. In the ten years since she'd opened, he'd never known her to close up early. Worry for the old woman added speed to his steps.

When he was close enough to see through the large front window, he cursed. Damn the dark court and their efficiency! Even though he'd left the island as quickly as he could to avoid drawing attention to himself, they'd still beaten him here. It was always dangerous to sail out of the island's shields in broad daylight, and only a dire emergency like this would have forced him to be so careless. If the dark court got a hold of the key, the situation was about to become a whole lot more dire.

Uncaring of the attention it would draw, Lorrick kicked the door off its frame and dashed into the store. There was little doubt in his mind that Hallee's life was in danger, and if the dark assassins had decided they didn't need her, she'd likely already be dead.

He saw only one, with a long trench coat so obviously out of place in the tropical setting that Lorrick nearly laughed. Goddess, did they have no concept of camouflage? For a group so determined to keep humans from discovering the existence of the faerie, they made no effort to blend in at all.

Lorrick carried no weapon and saw right away his opponent did. The dark faerie turned, his silver eyes sharp with anticipation. Lorrick bit back a curse. It would have to be Ghar. Lorrick had made a lot of enemies over the centuries, but Ghar seemed to have made killing Lorrick his personal mission. Luckily, Ghar was young and far more cocky than skilled.

"Well, well. I wondered when you'd show up."

"Where is it?"

“Oh come now, Lorrick. You don’t actually think we’re on the same side now, do you? I’m surprised no one’s done you in for your part in this.”

“Everyone makes mistakes.”

“And most of us learn from them, especially when we’ve been around as long as you have.”

“Are you saying I’m old?”

“You ain’t no spring chicken.”

“Why do you dark court low-lives always sound like you just hopped off a hay wagon?”

Ghar’s eye’s narrowed and he snarled, raising the dagger high. “I’m going to enjoy killing you.”

A crash sounded from the back of the store and Lorrick cursed his own stupidity. Of course Ghar wouldn’t be here alone, and it sounded as though his partner had just run into some trouble. Ghar turned, a frown marring his dark features, and Lorrick took his chance. The closest thing to his hand was a hardcover copy of some recent bestseller. It spun across the room, clipping Ghar in the temple.

The dark court faerie stumbled and dropped his dagger. Lorrick lunged for it, plowing into Ghar and taking them both to the floor. It was no contest really. Ghar may have been young and agile, but he was no match for centuries of intense training. Within seconds, Ghar was dead and Lorrick was heading down the narrow aisle towards the back of the store.

He was expecting an ambush and possibly another human dead, but instead he found blood splattering the shiny covers of the books. Blood the color of faded roses with the sweet candy scent that could only be from a faerie.

The body of a dark court assassin lay face down in a pool of blood that was rapidly spreading over the scuffed wooden floorboards. He almost missed the body pinned to the floor beneath it.

“Shit.” He hoped it wasn’t Hallee, but he wasn’t going to be surprised to find her dead. The dark court had little use for humans, and Ghar and his partner would think nothing of simply eliminating the obstacles in their way.

The face was sprayed with blood and unrecognizable. The arm that he could see held the tone and suppleness of youth, a young girl from the looks of the size. Well, hell.

A finger twitched and Lorrick blinked. Was she still alive? He had to find the sphere, that was his first priority, but if the human was alive, he had to do what he could to save her.

With a sigh of regret for his favorite cargo shorts and shirt, he hefted the body off the girl and felt for a pulse. The fluttering beat was faint but steady.

There was no time to dally here. The local law enforcement would be along any minute to investigate the disturbance and he didn’t want to be caught here with three dead bodies. With a flick of his wrist, he sent the dark warriors out to sea then returned to his original task. He had to find the key and the faint humming he’d been tracking seemed to center on the unconscious girl lying before him.

With limited choices, he swore and scooped the girl up and flashed them back to the docks where his boat waited. With practiced efficiency, he stowed the girl in the compartment where he was supposed to keep lifejackets. No faerie needed a floatation device, so he never actually kept any there. If the coast guard ever stopped him, which they never would, it would be a simple matter to cast the illusion of a full array of the orange jackets. But for now, the space served well enough to hide an

unconscious body until he could get them to the relative safety of the ocean.

After casting off, he used a small stream of power to get the boat out from the pier then he readied the sails and added a burst of power to the feeble wind. Once he'd put some distance between them and the island, he engaged the magical version of an autopilot and lifted the lid on the storage compartment.

She hadn't moved, and only the slight rise and fall of her blood-encrusted tank top told him that she still lived. She was slight and looked no more than a teenager, a mere baby. Lorrick winced. He'd had little experience with modern humans at this age and he didn't look forward to her waking.

She had a book clutched tightly in one hand, a heavy volume now splattered with blood. Lorrick winced at the damage to what looked to be an old and expensive book. Curious, he swiped at the blood on the cover and cursed.

This girl had his journal, the one he'd carefully recorded all of his research on the key's disappearance and the history of Atlantis itself. He'd left this book in his desk, how in the name of the Goddess had it fallen into a mortal's hands?

## Chapter Four

Her neck ached with something that felt like the worst heartburn ever and a red-hot poker being rammed down her throat. Memories floated back, and her eyes flew open, looking for more threats.

Large hands pushed her down and she struggled against them. Silver eyes peered down at her. Silver eyes like the man she'd killed.

Oh, hell, she'd killed this guy's brother! They looked similar, sharp cheekbones, stubborn chins and those unusual silver eyes that could only be described as unnatural. This man's hair was curly and blond where the others had been straight and black as pitch, but the similarities were there.

"Settle down. I mean you no harm," he said, his voice lilting with that same strange accent.

"I don't believe you." Her voice croaked out through her damaged throat.

"I just saved your life."

Magda didn't know what to say to that. She'd been unconscious so she didn't know if that was true or not. Besides it hurt too much to talk.

"Where are you injured?"

She pointed to her throat and saw his silver eyes narrow as he wiped her throat with cool water. She supposed there was a lot of blood there, his brother's blood, but the instant the cool cloth pressed against her skin the pain began to disappear.



“Have a drink.” He held up what looked like a bottle encased in grubby leather with a beaded fringe running along the two sides. Magda pressed her lips together and refused to drink. “It’ll help with the pain.”

Again she shook her head. “Poison,” she croaked.

“What? Goddess above, you think I dragged out of there just to poison you? Are you sure you didn’t hit your head?”

Magda stubbornly kept her lips pressed together. He mumbled something that sounded like “humans were so fucking stubborn”. but obviously she’d misheard him. She watched him take a long drink, squirting the water into his mouth so she could see that he wasn’t just pretending to drink. His fascinating eyes never left her face, his look both annoyed and appraising. The tip of his tongue appeared between his parted lips and Magda had the strangest urge to lick her own lips.

“Satisfied?”

She glared at him and the sarcasm in his voice, then nodded and accepted the bottle. The water tasted so sweet that at first she thought it must be fruit juice of some sort, but it lacked any real flavor. Perhaps it was just extreme thirst that made it taste so good. The pain in her throat disappeared as if by magic and she knew that a mere drink of water shouldn’t have been enough, not after she’d nearly been strangled to death.

Finally she pushed the bottle away, saw the red crust on her hands and moaned. Now that the pain in her throat was gone, she could feel the tightness on her skin where it was caked with dried blood.

“Here, sit up.” He offered her a hand and pulled her up to sitting then helped her out of the storage space where she’d been lying.

“Thanks. Um, if you could just take me to my boat, I’d be grateful.”

“I can’t do that. It’s too dangerous.”

“What do you mean? You think the other one will come after me for killing his friend?” She didn’t ask if he was related to those two men. Though their appearances were similar except for the hair color, she didn’t think it wise to ask.

“No, Ghar is dead too, but others will come.”

“Nobody will know it was me. I’ll just stay on my boat and go about my business.”

He held up the thick brown book. “Business that has to do with this?”

Her heart thudded erratically. “How did you get that? Did you steal it from Hallee?”

“You were holding it when I carried you out of there, so technically you stole it, though it shouldn’t have been there in the first place.”

“Well, either way, it’s none of your business what I’m doing here.”

“It is if it involves this book.”

His tone was so dark and threatening that Magda instinctively scooted back. “I just picked up the book because of the symbols on the spine. I’m not interested in Atlantis.” She drawled out the name mockingly.

His eyes narrowed. “What about the symbols?”

“They looked familiar, that’s all.”

He nodded and she had the feeling he knew something she didn’t. “Who are you?” she asked, stepping back so she could sit on the bench running along the side of the boat.

“My name is Lorrick. I’m a researcher, of sorts.”

Magda’s eyes widened in surprise. He looked like no researcher she’d ever seen before. Even Oliver’s tall body and rugged handsomeness paled in comparison to this man. She’d have thought him a professional

athlete judging by his body, or a surf bum judging by his long hair and clothes.

“What kind of research?” she asked suspiciously.

“Oh, all kinds.” A seductive grin curled his lips, and her stomach flipped in response.

God, she hated mysterious men. Why did they always think it made them more appealing to women? Unfortunately in this case there was no denying his appeal, even in these uncertain circumstances. Magda sighed and looked down at herself. “Could we at least go to my boat and get me some clean clothes and warn my partner that there might be danger?”

His eyes narrowed again, but he nodded. “You’ll have to make it quick.”

Magda nodded and fell into silence. What kind of mess had she gotten herself into? She knew that there were still pirates, though they’d progressed from cutlasses and eye patches to guns and Ray Bans, but pirates wouldn’t try to rob a bookstore.

She watched Lorrick out of the corner of her eye as he piloted the small sailboat with practiced ease. The wind tugged at his blond curls and sent it dancing around his face. Christ, he was handsome. He looked like some exotic warrior-prince from a fantasy tale and God knew she had a weakness for a good warrior-prince.

She realized then that her backpack was still strapped to her back and reached around to squeeze the bottom of it. The solid lump of the golden sphere filled her palm and she sighed, then winced. *Way to go, dumbass. Why not advertise to a potential pirate that you’ve got something valuable in your bag.*

He watched her, those silver eyes settling on her with mild curiosity. His expression didn't change but somehow she knew he was aware of exactly what she was thinking.

He changed course and she realized she hadn't told him where her boat was. She stood up suddenly, eyeing him warily. "Where are you going?"

"To your boat."

"And how do you know where it is?"

He grinned, a sly cocky grin that sent her stomach fluttering despite her abundant dislike of men who had sly cocky grins. "Maybe I'm psychic."

Her mind swam with possibilities, of being followed to the bookstore by thieves bent on stealing her find, of spies' working for Oliver hoping to scoop her research. Jesus, that made a certain kind of sense. The bastard had seduced information out of her, wouldn't death threats be a logical step for him? Besides, hadn't her so-called-savior said he was interested in the book she'd accidentally stolen?

"You can tell Oliver that it's not going to work. I'm not going to fall for another one of his tricks, so you can just drop me off at my boat and then stay the hell away from me."

"I'm afraid I don't know any Oliver."

"Oh, please. Who else could have hired you steal from me?"

"I haven't stolen anything from you."

"Yet."

He hesitated before answering and she could see him weighing his options. "Your life is in danger, more than that I can not tell you. You'll have to trust me."

She snorted, crossed her arms over her bloodstained clothes and saw with some relief that they had reached *The Snarling Catfish*. It bobbed

softly on the gentle swells. A sudden sense of foreboding swept over her, though she couldn't see any damage to the boat. God help her if anyone had scuffed so much as the railing. Grant would have her ass in a sling if anything happened to that boat after all his work restoring her last year.

"Ahoy the Catfish." There was no answer and she frowned. Grant should have been there, should have given her shit for taking so long and not bringing back the skiff. "Ahoy, Grant!" she called again and again there was no response. Her blood chilled and she jumped the gap between the sailboat and Catfish. The deck dipped gently under her weight, but years of experience kept her from stumbling. "Grant! Where are you?"

There was no answer, and now she was very afraid that there never would be. She ran for the stairs and skidded to a stop at the telltale streaks of dried blood on the planks Grant had always kept so scrupulously clean. Part of her wanted to turn back, but she had nowhere to go and no way to get there. She was at sea, bobbing on the gentle waves that had always brought her peace. Now the sea was a trap every bit as confining as bars on a cage.

She had no choice; she had to follow the trail of blood. Grant could be alive. She could get him help. An inner voice told her it wasn't likely but she pushed that voice away, blocked it out with every stubborn bitch gene her father had claimed she'd gotten from his mother.

With trembling fingers, she pushed open the door to Grant's cabin. Her stomach heaved at the sight of blood splattered on the whitewashed walls. There was no doubt he was dead. Nobody could lose that much blood and still live.

Her knee's buckled and she had to grab the door jam for support. She would not collapse. She would not lose it, not again. Magda had

done her one allotted nervous breakdown and she'd sworn she'd never do it again.

Vomiting, though, was allowed.

She stumbled out of the cabin and grabbed the railing with trembling hands. Leaning over the side, she puked until her sides hurt and her throat began to burn as badly as it had after she'd been strangled.

"You should have waited for me." His hand fell on her shoulder as he spoke and she shrugged it off. He was part of this. Someway, somehow, he was responsible for Grant's death and, God, probably Hallee's too. She didn't even know if the older woman was alive or dead.

Grant was dead. Tears stung her eyes. How many times had she cursed the old man? Insulted him behind his back? Wished she could find another to partner her? She'd thought him a miserable bastard, but she knew deep down that it wasn't true. He was a friend, and he'd died because of her.

She reminded herself that she didn't know that. She didn't know for sure that she was the target, whether for her research or something she'd found. She needed answers before she let herself wallow in guilt, she'd learned that much from past experience. It had taken a lot of time to accept that what happened with Oliver hadn't been because she was stupid or that she'd brought it on herself. She wouldn't let herself go into that downward spiral again without evidence of her guilt. No, she needed answers, and there was only one person she knew who had them.

"Who are you? What the hell is going on?"

He watched her, silent and unreadable. He looked so calm, so unaffected by the scene behind her that she knew he'd seen death up close before today.

"Why did you kill an innocent old man?"

"I didn't kill your friend."

“You can’t tell me you aren’t somehow related to those men at the bookstore, and it’s too much of a coincidence to think that these are two separate incidents.”

“No, the two events are connected.”

“And connected to me.”

“Yes.”

She felt that niggling of guilt try to wiggle its way into her mind and brutally shoved it out. “I want answers.”

“I can’t give you all the answers you seek. Your life is already at risk, telling you everything would ensure a death sentence.”

Her blood chilled another degree at the flat certainty in his tone. Some men may have exaggerated the danger to impress or to scare, but he was being honest, at least in this.

“So what the hell do I do now? Spend the rest of my life barricaded in my apartment waiting for your friends to come kill me?”

She could see regret in his eyes, and resignation. “I don’t know, but if you want to live, you’ll come with me now.”

“Is that a threat?”

He sighed. “No. Come with me, I’ll answer whatever questions I can and then I’ll take you somewhere safe.”

Biting her lip, she thought over her options and realized she really didn’t have any. She cursed and turned to go into her cabin to pack up her things.

## Chapter Five

Lorrick was pretty sure he'd just made another one of those monumental mistakes that was bound to get him into trouble with the high court.

He paced the resort cabin—five steps up, five steps down—and wondered how the hell he managed to get himself into these situations. Who was he kidding? He knew damn well where the problem lay.

Women. Human woman. Every single mistake he'd made in his entire life could be traced back to a human woman. You'd think after twelve hundred years he'd have learned his lesson, but no.

The sound of the shower running in the next room drew his attention and he moaned, running his fingers through his hair. The girl, whose name he didn't even know yet, was in there cleaning the blood off her body. Actually, he'd figured out that she wasn't a kid like he'd first thought. She had to be in her mid twenties at least, though it was hard to tell with blood streaked on her face and her hair matted to her head. He dreaded seeing what she looked like and found himself hoping she was hideously ugly though his instincts told him that wouldn't be the case. Instinct told him that he was going to be in big trouble around her.

His gaze fell on the battered Roots bag on the floor. He frowned. He hadn't missed her panicked check of that bag when she'd first woken up on his boat. There was something in there that was important to her, that she was afraid had been lost or taken. All the evidence pointed to



her being the one who had found the key and he suspected that was what she had in her bag. He'd felt the key's fading magic up until he'd entered the bookstore before it had disappeared completely. Whoever had the key had still been there when he'd walked in.

He had to find that key. The fate of the island relied on it, and if snooping through the human's belongings was necessary, by the Gods and Goddesses he'd do it.

The sound of water battering the walls of the small shower stall continued. Lorrick sat on the edge of the bed, and with one eye on the bathroom door, reached down and picked up the bag. It was stuffed full and he knew he'd never be able to search it in time, not if he wanted to get everything back in before she came out.

Instead of emptying the bag, he gave it a few experimental squeezes. His heart raced at the feel of the hard round object at the bottom of the bag.

"What the hell are you doing?"

He nearly dropped the backpack in surprise, then nearly dropped it again a second later in astonishment when he looked up and saw her. She stood in the doorway, her short hair dripping water on sun-kissed shoulders. She held the soft white towel together, bunched in a fist between her breasts, but the edges had parted just enough to show a tantalizing glimpse of one smooth inner thigh.

Her face was pink and fresh from the hot water. Her full lips glistened from her shower like dew on a spring morning. She had sharp green eyes that sparked with outrage.

He was definitely in trouble.

"I was checking for weapons." The lie sounded lame, even to his ears and the narrowing of those fascinating green eyes told him she didn't buy it. "All right, I wasn't looking for weapons. Get dressed. I ordered some

food. We can discuss this when we've had something to eat and we're thinking more clearly."

He could see she was about to protest, but then she bit her bottom lip and her shoulders sagged. "You've had a shitty day. You almost died. I know it's a lot to deal with, but you have to trust that I'm not going to hurt you. I'll get you to a safe place."

She blinked away the moisture that had gathered in the corner of her eyes and he could tell she was trying really hard not to cry. Goddess help him if she lost it. He was a hardened warrior with hundreds of years experience under his belt, but a crying woman did him in every time.

The knock at the door was a welcome distraction and he quickly jumped up to answer it. His gaze had been drifting towards that tantalizing flash of thigh and he'd been waiting for it to part just the tiniest bit more to reveal things that he shouldn't even be thinking about. There was too much at stake for him to be getting distracted by a human woman—that's what had gotten him into trouble in the first place.

They sat at the small table and ate the spiced chicken and grilled vegetables without speaking a word. She'd changed into a pair of black shorts and a red top that looked like a hankie and offered a teasing side-view of her breasts when she moved. By the time the meal was over he was hard as a rock and hungry for more than just chicken and vegetables.

He could seduce her. She was already emotionally vulnerable, and she might be more willing to trust a lover. Intimacy would be a pleasurable way of breaching her defenses and getting her to confide in him. Unfortunately, there wasn't time for it, even if he could have lived with the guilt afterwards. He needed to get her out of here and find out what she knew before the dark court sent more agents after her.

“How many people have you killed?” Her voice was small and tight. She’d set her fork on the edge of her plate and was chewing on her bottom lip again.

He considered her question and answered carefully. “More than I care to remember. I take it that was a first for you?”

She nodded, her gaze meeting his for the first time since she’d walked out of the bathroom, dripping wet and flushed with rage. Now she looked haunted. “I keep telling myself it was self-defense. It helped for a while, but now—” She hesitated and went back to worrying her bottom lip.

“What’s your name?”

She jumped and then grinned weakly. “Magda Marks. Sorry, I never even thought to introduce myself.”

“Understandable given the circumstances. Look, I’m not good at this whole comforting thing, but if you—”

“No. I mean, I don’t need comforting. I just—”

Before he knew it she was out of her chair and straddling his hips. Her mouth pressed to his, desperate and demanding, her hands roamed over his chest, under his shirt and hovered near the waistband of his shorts.

“Goddess!” He pulled back. “What are you doing?”

“What does it look like? I’m jumping you.”

Magda’s body thrummed with desire. In the back of her mind, she knew what she was doing was crazy, knew that the frantic desire for intimacy was some post-traumatic stress thing, but she didn’t care. As cliché as it was, she needed some mind-blowing sex to push the images of the day out of her mind.

She nipped at his lips, at his chin, and spread her hands over his chest. God, he was built. Hard muscle rippled under her palms and she felt every ridge on his belly as her hands quested lower.

He wasn't responding, his hands hung at his sides, his fists clenched so tightly that his knuckles were white. She pulled back for a second to study his face. A muscle ticked in his jaw but his eyes were dark with desire.

"Please, Lorrick." Her lips brushed against his again, and she pressed herself against the bulge in his shorts.

He hesitated a moment before giving in with a suddenness that was both erotic and a little frightening. His lips were demanding and insistent, drawing out her tongue to dance with his. One hand cupped her bottom, pulling her hard against his erection and the other tugged on her top, ripping the strap off one side and pushing the fabric aside.

With a growl, he tore his lips from hers and drew one nipple into his mouth. Magda groaned and arched into his embrace.

He stood and she wrapped her legs around his hips as he carried her to the bed. Magda shivered with anticipation as he lay her on the comforter.

"We shouldn't do this. I'm going to get in so much trouble."

Magda wondered if he was married, but his mouth silenced any questions and fragmented her thoughts. Somehow, without breaking off the kiss, he stripped off her shorts. His hand glided up her thigh and the instant his fingers touched her damp flesh she screamed as the orgasm tore through her.

Her back arched, her body frantic for more contact. Lorrick didn't disappoint her, caressing her aching sex until she was sobbing with the power of her release.

The throbbing began to recede and she became aware of his erection pressing against her outer thigh. He made no move toward her, just watched her with a slight smile on his face, his silver eyes hooded.

“We shouldn’t do this.” A muscle ticked in his jaw and she realized he was holding himself back—being noble?

Magda laughed and rolled herself on top of him, pressing her lips to his in a kiss meant to scorch and entice. He moaned and gripped her bottom, pulling her against his hard length. Magda whimpered. He cursed, shoved her off and climbed off the bed.

“What—?” But she saw he was pulling off his shorts and unbuttoning his shirt. She nearly wept for joy; he wasn’t running away. God, he was beautiful. Never had she seen a more beautifully built man. When she’d dubbed him a warrior-prince, she hadn’t been wrong. Golden skin stretched over thick muscle that ripped with every move he made. When his shirt slid over his shoulders and pooled the floor, her mouth dried up and then flooded. Good lord, he was drool-worthy.

Magda came up on her knees on the bed and reached for him. Even now, with the evidence of his desire standing straight and proud between them, she saw him hesitate.

Beyond all reason, she knew she would never be satisfied if she didn’t have him. It was no longer about banishing painful memories, of losing herself in passion—this was about her and needing to feel every inch of that amazing body on top of hers. Or under hers, she wasn’t picky.

She licked her lips and slid off the bed. Slowly she circled him, her fingers playing lightly over his shoulder, down his spine, across one hip. She watched his muscles ripple, fascinated that she could make this powerful man tremble. Finally she stopped in front of him and brushed her breasts against him, felt his erection press against her stomach.

Lorrick threw her to the bed. His hands were everywhere as if he couldn't decide which part of her he wanted to touch. With one knee, he nudged her thighs apart and fell on her while his mouth feasted on one hard, aching nipple.

The tip of his cock nudged her entrance and she shifted her hips, reveling in the feeling of her swollen flesh sliding slickly against him.

"Now! Please, Lorrick, I can't wait anymore."

He lifted his head and for a moment she could swear she saw fear on his face again, before he grinned and lifted her hips.

He filled her in one thrust. Magda screamed as another orgasm burst, growing with every thrust like waves in a storm.

Lorrick growled against her throat and she felt him spasm inside her before he collapsed on her, panting heavily.

He rolled off of her, and she whimpered at the loss of his weight. "Shit. I'm so sorry. I usually have more finesse than that."

Magda blinked. "Finesse?"

"I haven't lost control like that since—I don't even remember."

Magda grinned and pushed herself up to her elbow. Did she dare think he'd lost control because of her? "Maybe you could show me the difference?" Her words shocked her and she winced. Had she become some kind of a hussy? This whole night had been a complete aberration for her.

Lorrick looked over at her and laughed. "You shouldn't blush. It's healthy for a woman to enjoy sex."

Maybe that was true, but Magda had emotional scars in that area. She hadn't enjoyed sex since before Oliver had messed with her—until now.

Lorrick made her feel whole, like a normal woman for the first time in years. She didn't want that to end. Pushing past her natural shyness,

she placed her hand on his stomach and smiled. “Not that I’m complaining about round one, but I’d really like to see this finesse of yours in action.”

## Chapter Six

She'd promised herself she'd have no regrets. She'd wanted mind-blowing sex and Lorrick had delivered it in spades. A spade flush might be an adequate term. Magda stretched on the stiff linen and smirked into the darkness. Nope, no regrets here.

Lorrick shifted beside her, his hard body brushed against hers and she smirked again. Funny, how something so primitive could make such a difference in a person's outlook. Her body felt heavy and floaty at the same time, a wonderful feeling really. Definitely a feeling she could get used to.

It wouldn't last, but for now she relished the distance it gave her. In the morning she'd deal with the rest of her life.

With a sigh, she let her eyes drift closed, felt her mind drift towards sleep.

The sound jerked her back. She didn't know if she'd been asleep or still slipping towards it, but the soft click pulled her back to awareness.

Again the soft click, then a creaking sound she recognized as the door opening. Someone was breaking into the cabin.

It was pitch black. Lorrick had drawn the curtains across the windows and no moonlight came through the open door. Footsteps approached the bed, slow and stealthy. Magda held her breath and rolled over to the edge of the mattress and then softly dropped to the floor.



She had no weapon, nothing but a blood-spattered book that she'd left on the bedside table. Lorrick hadn't moved.

Magda reached up and grabbed the book, wincing at the sound it made as the leather slid over the wooden table. If she could get the light on she might be able to surprise the intruder, but the switch was on the far side of the room, just inside the door.

Just as she was about to try wiggling under the bed, light flared and the door slammed shut with a startling bang. Magda jumped to her feet to find Lorrick kneeling on the bed and Oliver standing a few feet away, looking like a deer caught in someone's headlights. And he was clutching her backpack.

"Christ almighty!" He gasped and Magda realized that the light wasn't coming from the overhead bulb or the lamps next to the bed. A glowing ball cast blue-tinged light through the room. In that eerie glow, Lorrick's eyes shimmered with unnatural fire.

"What the hell is going on here?" Oliver's expression had shifted from shocked confusion to insulted rage.

"I think the better question would be what are you doing here." Lorrick's lyrical accent swept through the room like a force of nature. Magda felt her knees begin to tremble at the power behind his words.

Now Oliver looked dazed, his eyes stared straight forward as if he was daydreaming. "I'm looking for Magda's latest research notes." His voice was flat and reminded her of the hypnotist's show she'd gone to last year.

Her mind reeled. "You're admitting it? After all those years of denying that you stole my notes, now you're just flat out admitting that you broke in here to do it again?"

"Yes."

Magda spun to face Lorrick. "What did you do to him?"

"Just a little mind control."

“What the hell are you?” The bobbing ball of light—some sort of Jedi-mind-trick—and she realized now that he’d somehow managed to slam the door shut without leaving the bed. Telekinetic.

“You don’t really want to know.”

She realized he was right. She’d asked the question, but her brain was preparing itself to scoff at whatever he said. Fucking hell, was he reading her mind now too?

“Get out of my head! I damn well want to know what the hell is going on. You promised me answers last night and I believe we skipped right over that.”

“And that was your doing, as I recall.”

“So what if it was? I’m asking now, and I’m not going to jump you again so get on with it.”

He shrugged, his blond hair falling behind his shoulders and for the first time she realized he was naked. She was naked. Well, crap! She grabbed up her clothes and jammed her legs into the shorts, not caring that they were backwards. She couldn’t find her shirt.

“Well?”

“Sorry, I was distracted by the view.”

“You’ve seen every inch of that view tonight, so start spilling.”

“I believe I already did that as well.” A wicked smile curved his lips.

She couldn’t help it, her eyes dropped to his lap and saw that he was hard and ready for more action. Magda threw her hands in the air. “Jesus! You do realize we have an audience, right?”

“He’s asleep.”

Magda turned and saw that Oliver stood still as a statue, his eyes closed and he was snoring softly in the blue light.

“What the hell are you?”

“I’m a faerie.”

She snorted, but the look on his face was dead serious. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Sorry, I’ve never been much for practical jokes.”

“You don’t look anything like a faerie.”

He grinned at her, a very Han Solo type smirk that made her stomach tremble. “Sorry to disappoint you.”

“I don’t think disappointment is quite the right word. So you’re a faerie, and those other two guys—?”

“Dark court faeries.”

Magda ground her teeth in frustration. Was he going to make her drag the information out of him a word at a time? “So what do they want with me?”

His gaze drifted to her backpack and she suddenly she realized that he knew exactly what was in there. Bile rose in her throat and she wanted to scream at her own stupidity. He’d known all along that she had that golden sphere.

“You son of a bitch!” She threw herself at him, all her years of self-defense training flying out the window in a fit of blind rage. Oh, she still got in some good hits, one especially nice punch connected with his face and sent a stream of blood flying from his nose.

“What the hell is wrong with you?”

“You good for nothing thief! Sleeping your way to a treasure and then concocting some bullshit story about being a faerie. I suppose that thing is an important artifact for your people that you’ve been searching for throughout the centuries and now that it’s been found you can save the entire faerie world from certain doom.”

“Not the entire faerie world, but that about sums it up, yes.”

“Well, you can’t have it.”

“You think you can stop me? A skinny little mortal like you?”

She landed a kick to his stomach and watched with satisfaction as he doubled over and gasped for breath. “You bet your ass I can stop you.” Magda backed away from him and made her way to the phone, never letting him out of her sight. As quickly as she could she dialed the number posted on the phone and waited for the police dispatcher to answer.

He straightened and she saw the glint in his eyes that should have had her trembling with fear. Instead it made her pull her shoulders back and glare at him.

“You may have some moves, Magda, but I have a few thousand years’ more experience.”

“Oh yeah, like I believe that faerie crap.”

The phone beeped and the operator came on the line, her voice thick with an island accent.

“Yes I’d like to report a break in and attempted robbery.”

“Magda, don’t do this. You’ll only make yourself look stupid.”

She ignored him and gave the dispatcher her location then set the phone back in the cradle.

“Now we can just wait right here for the police to show up and you can tell them your little save-the-faerie-world fantasy.”

“Dammit, Magda, I didn’t want to have to do it this way.”

Before she could speak the light went out and she felt herself floating through the air, then she felt nothing as an unnatural darkness swept over her.

## Chapter Seven

Lorrick cursed all the way back to the docks. Moonlight lit the cobblestone path as he walked. Such a beautiful night and it had gone to hell faster than any night he could remember. He'd gone from a marathon of unbelievable sex with a beautiful woman to exposing his magic and stealing.

The streets were empty this early in the morning. The sun would be peeking over the horizon soon and the island would be teeming with tourists and sports fishermen ready to start their day. For now though he was alone, and so he judged it safe to let off a few magical sparks that would lead any dark court agents away from the hotel room where he'd left Magda sleeping.

The police would show up, though he used a bit of magic to ensure they would take their sweet time about it. He'd be well away before any of them came looking for him. He felt a twinge of guilt at leaving her almost naked with that other man. He didn't like the way Oliver had looked at her with a leer of sexual knowledge that told Lorrick all he needed to know about their relationship. They'd been lovers. It shouldn't bother him, but it did, which was why he'd given the human a larger dose of sleep spell than was strictly necessary. He'd also been a little more vicious in altering the man's memories of the night.

With a flick of his fingers, he sent some stones skittering across the road, shook the leaves on a few flowering shrubs and, just for fun,

opened a few windows in the homes he passed. If the dark court were keeping an eye out for magic, that should lead them away from the vulnerable humans.

Of course at some point, he'd have to come back and at least wipe the events from their memories. As long as they knew about the existence of the faerie, they would be considered a threat that the dark court would need to eliminate. Uptight bastards.

He made it to his boat without incident and was halfway to the hidden island before the sun began peeking over the horizon. Before noon he'd have fixed the terrible mistake that had cost him his position as light court champion and put his entire world at risk.

It had been nearly four hundred years since he'd made the mistake that had cost him everything. Lady Margaret Winter had seemed to be the very epitome of sweetness and innocence. She'd evidently been an accomplished actress as well. Lorrick felt his chest spasm painfully at the memory of her betrayal. He'd learned his lesson.

Yeah right. Obviously he needed a refresher course because he'd let another seemingly vulnerable woman seduce him and now knew first hand that Magda was anything but innocent. She'd been wild and aggressive, willing to show him exactly what she wanted. He shouldn't care; she was nothing to him after all. Instead, as the shimmering glory of Atlantis came into view, he found himself torn between mistrusting her and a sharp stab of lust at the thought of having her again.

It wouldn't happen. He wouldn't risk it.

With practiced ease, he maneuvered the small sailboat into the harbor and adjusted the tack until he felt the hull bump gently against the silver-wood pier.

Footsteps shook the narrow dock and Lorrick looked up to see the familiar faces of his friends Alarn and Cain. They were dressed in leather

armor with swords hanging from their belts. Lorrick felt his blood chill at the sight. “Lorrick, we were getting worried.” Alarn said, as he caught the mooring line tossed to him.

“You should know better than to worry about me.”

“The dark court has mobilized their army. They’re making their move,” Cain told him and Lorrick could see the worry in his eyes.

“Damn. We don’t have much time then.”

“No, two days at the most is what they’re telling us. Please tell me you got it.”

Lorrick nodded and tossed the battered backpack up to Cain who caught it easily. Lorrick watched as his friend fished through Magda’s clothes and he realized he should have left the clothing at the hotel for her.

“Goddess curse you, Lorrick, we’re preparing for battle and you were fucking a human!” Cain had pulled a pair of red panties from the bag. They were lacy and obviously not intended to cover more than the basics. He felt his blood pound at the thought of Magda wearing the little scrap.

“Don’t curse me, you prude. I had no intention of bedding her. She had the key and I had to soften her up a bit to get it.”

“And you took her clothes as a souvenir?” Alarn asked, grabbing the bag and fishing out a more bits of cloth, carelessly tossing them into the water.

“Of course not! Her ex burst in and I had to switch plans,” Lorrick snapped, grabbing the bag back before the area could become littered with scraps of satin and lace. Goddess, he was getting hard just thinking about her wearing them, peeling them off slowly, teasingly—Goddess!

Alarn blanched. “You used magic in front of them, didn’t you?”

“Just enough to knock them out so I could get away.” Goddess forgive him for telling so many lies to his friends, but he wasn’t about to tell them he’d actually told Magda what he was.

“You’d better hope the king doesn’t hear of this or you’ll be sent to the mines for sure.”

“He won’t find out. Let’s just get this over with. I’d just as soon avoid a full out war with those dark court bastards.” He slung Magda’s bag over his shoulder.

Lorrick saw the doubts on his friend’s faces, but he ignored them. Finally they nodded and followed him off the pier.

Goddess, it was good to be home. As much as he liked humans, he’d never found a place as beautiful as Atlantis. The entire city sparkled in the early morning sun, the blues and greens that dominated cast with a golden glow. Across bridges and under elaborately carved statues, he led the way to the heart of the city.

As they walked, he saw more evidence of the preparations for war. Sculptures that had long stood as mere decoration now revealed their original intent as dangerous weapons. More men in the traditional leather armor passed, their slender swords swaying with each step.

Lorrick lengthened his stride. Enough of his kind had died during past conflicts with the dark court and he wouldn’t lose more friends to the Dark Queen’s army. The backpack bounced against his side as he walked. The key lay nestled amongst Magda’s clothing, silent, as it had been for centuries.

“Will the damned thing even work?” Alarn’s question mirrored the nagging thought that Lorrick had been trying to ignore.

“I hope so. She has to realize the danger we’re in,” Lorrick said.

“Neither of you are old enough to remember Amanii. She was the most stubborn faerie ever born and I won’t be surprised if she refuses to



cooperate.” Cain’s voice was thin with worry and Lorrick cursed silently. It was his fault that Amanii’s soul stopped communicating with the living.

“The human activated it, otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to find her. I’m not worried,” he lied and ignored the look that passed between his two friends.

At last they passed under the sea gate, a magnificent working of magic and artistry that allowed the path to dip below sea level with the water forming a wall on either side. He’d seen the humans create things like this where they could observe the sea life, but in this case there was no solid barrier. If he wanted to he could stick his hand into the water and touch the colorful fish that hovered at its edge.

The path rose again until they were standing on the crest of a small hill where the bell tower rose from the thick green grass.

“Let’s get this over with,” he muttered and passed through the shimmering force field and into a room splashed with gold and silver. At the center of the round room stood the housing for the key, a low table of carved marble, and he walked directly to it.

“Maybe we should get one of the elders first,” Alarn suggested, running a hand through his honey colored hair.

“Not until we know it works.” Lorrick fished through the bag, ignoring the feel of Magda’s soft undergarments against his hand, and pulled out the golden sphere that had been the focus of the last four hundred years of his life.

With trembling fingers, he placed it gently into the housing, carefully lining up the slots on the key to the protrusions on the table. It clicked softly and he felt the air in the room shift subtly as if a breeze blew around him. Amanii was glad to be home.

Gently he placed his fingers on the smooth round indentations and waited for the room to fill with golden light.

Nothing happened.

“Shit. Maybe she’s still pissed at you, Lorrick. Let me try.”

Lorrick stepped aside and let Cain lay his hand over the key. Again nothing happened. Cold dread curled through his stomach as Alarn too took a turn and failed to coax Amanii to power up the key.

“What do we do now?” Alarn asked as he pulled his hand away.

“I’ll call the elders,” Cain offered and took a step toward the door.

“No. Wait.”

“Lorrick, we don’t have time. The elders will know what to do.”

“Magda activated the key.”

“So what?”

“Don’t be dense, Cain. It is obvious Amanii sensed something in her. How many humans do you think have held that key? How many do you think have placed their fingers into those spaces like we just did? I’m telling you, Magda is the only person who can power up the island.”

“You’ll never convince the elders to allow you to bring another human here.”

“Then you’d better sharpen your sword and prepare to meet the dark army because without her there’s no way we can move Atlantis to a safe location.”

His friends regarded him in silence, then nodded. “You’ll have to sneak her in. If the Elders find her here, they may just take a leaf out of the dark side’s book and execute her.”

“I’ll need your help keeping them distracted.”

“Lorrick, have you stopped to consider what it is about this woman that made Amanii chose her?”

Lorrick frowned. "If you're looking for some crap about her being pure of spirit or something I can't help you. I didn't get to know her that well."

"Well enough to get her pants off though?"

"Yeah, but I doubt Amanii picked her because she's a pistol in the sack."

"Well, whatever it is, I don't imagine it matters right now. I'll look into it while you're gone."

"You might want to have the healers standing by as well."

"What for?"

"Because she's going to be pissed as hell at me and she's not as defenseless as she looks."

## Chapter Eight

Magda opened her eyes and found herself reliving a nightmare.

The soft fall of blond hair, the perfectly sculpted eyebrows, and the shadow of stubble. How many mornings had she woken to that very image? But it had been years since the last time and her fogged mind couldn't quite place why she was here again.

Slowly she sat up and realized she had no shirt on and that she was in a strange room. Memories slowly arranged themselves, and with a growl, Magda jumped from the bed, screaming a string of curses that would make even Oliver blush if he were awake to hear it.

How could she be so stupid? She'd let herself fall into the same old trap, fell for a handsome face, a killer body and a smooth line.

At least this time the guy had only stolen from her. He'd left her self esteem intact—mostly.

Well, this time she wasn't going to bury herself in a hole and spend months berating herself. No, this time she would hunt the bastard down, make him suffer and take back her property. It didn't matter that she had no idea who he really was or where he might be. Somehow she'd find him and then he'd be sorry. Magda Marks wasn't going to take it lying down this time.

As she looked around the small room, she realized he'd taken her bag, with all of her clothes in it. The top that she'd been wearing last

night lay under the bed and with a curse she saw that one of the straps had been ripped off sometime during their lovemaking.

Scratch that. No way in hell she was going to call it lovemaking, not when the bastard had merely been softening her up so he could steal from her. They'd fucked, nothing more. Granted it had been amazing but that didn't matter. Magda viciously tamped down the desire that swept through her at the memory of Lorricks hands and mouth on her. She wasn't going to think about how wanton she'd been.

With no other choice, she tied the broken strap to the corner of the top and winced at how little it now covered. Not that it compared to the skimpy bikinis that she saw women wearing on the beach, but she still felt awkward as she shut the door to the resort cabin and made her way down the path to the beach. Her search had also turned up the strange leather bound book that she'd accidentally stolen the day before. Lorricks, if that was really his name, had seemed to recognize it and though she had no doubt he'd been slinging around a hefty helping of bull with his tale of faeries, something urged her to take the book with her. Either way, she could use it as a shield to hide the bits that her altered top no longer covered.

A few moments later, she saw a police car pull up to the cabin she'd just left and she winced. She'd forgotten that she'd called them last night. They'd taken their sweet time showing up, though she could be thankful that they hadn't walked in on her sleeping half naked.

If there were a God, Oliver would be rolling in shit before the day was over. She'd left her bloodstained clothes on the bathroom floor and there was no doubt that they'd find them. The tiny spurt of guilt she felt was quickly drowned out by a wave of satisfaction.

It took her most of the morning to get all of the things together that she needed, new clothes being at the top of the list. By lunchtime her

little runabout was full of bags and she felt like the cliché tourist. If anyone had bothered to look in those bags they'd see food, clothes, fishing harpoons and filet knives, navigation equipment and a stack of nice clean note pads. She had a weakness for notebooks and generally had one with her at all times. Thanks to Lorrick, she felt naked in more ways than one.

It wasn't safe to return to Grant's boat, and even if she'd been ready to face the carnage that was likely still there, she knew she couldn't go there. Instead she made her way out to sea and killed the engine so she could study the book.

From the first page it was obvious that this was no published book. Its pages were hand written in neat spiky script. Magda frowned as she read the first page and realized it was someone's journal. Lorrick's? Not likely as the first page was dated the fourth of May 1612.

There were hand drawn maps complete with latitude and longitude markings and Magda, whose curiosity was more keen than average, started up the motor again and with the help of the GPS system she'd bought, turned the boat around and aimed it towards the island shown on the map.

She didn't expect there to really be island there. The GPS map showed nothing but open water in the location indicated, but she had no other ideas. Besides, it might be interesting to pass over the place where the writer of this book stated Atlantis had been. Her stomach only twitched a little at the thought of going into the heart of the Bermuda Triangle.

Magda snorted at her own foolishness. The Bermuda Triangle was nothing but a myth.

Suddenly, with the little boat skimming over the waves and nothing but endless blue surrounding her, Magda wondered what the hell she

was doing. Even without the nebulous threat of disappearing in the triangle, she was way too far out to sea, alone and in a boat that was little more than a glorified dinghy, and for what? Did she really think she was going to find evidence of the lost continent of Atlantis? Even if it did exist, it would be buried beneath the waves and so covered in silt and sand that even diving would be a waste of time.

How had she managed to get this far without realizing it was ridiculous and extremely dangerous?

Something red caught her eye. Magda stared in shock at the red lace thong that floated past. Dear God, they looked just like one of hers.

Then, like a mirage in the desert, she saw it. Rising from the ocean like a dream, the island shone in the midday sun like a jewel. Never had she seen anything like it. Blue and green buildings too bright to be real, golden towers that looked too fragile to withstand the ocean winds. It had to be a hallucination.

She should turn back. Obviously she was delirious or something because nothing like what she was seeing could possibly exist.

She didn't turn back, couldn't. Her curiosity wouldn't let her pass up the opportunity to explore something so strange and new. Like a sleepwalker, she steered her boat closer until she could make out the details on the buildings, saw that they seemed to be made of some sort of blue-green substance that reminded her of the inside of a seashell, iridescent and shimmery.

Silver piers stretched out into the water like fingers and she saw several boats similar to Lorrick's docked there. A shiver of apprehension washed over her, and for the first time, she wondered if perhaps he might have been telling the truth.

There was no doubt in her mind that this was no normal island. Nothing like this could have gone uncharted, not with all the technology

that existed today. She'd never believed in magic, but with the proof of its existence slapping her in the face twice in one day, she was starting to question her convictions.

God help her, could she really have found Atlantis?

When she felt the soft bump of the hull against the pier she knew it wasn't just an illusion. And when a dozen men dressed in leather vests, armed with spears, swords and crossbows appeared she knew she was in serious trouble.

"Who are you?" one of the men demanded. He had the same strange eyes as Lorrick and the men from the bookstore. They all did, she saw.

"My name is Magda Marks," she said, but they weren't listening. Two men stepped into the boat and hauled her up to the pier then others stepped in to take her belongings. "What are you doing?" she asked when they began to drag her away from the water. She didn't struggle. It would have done no good to fight a group of men armed with sharp pointy objects who were all very big and very pissed off.

Her eyes darted everywhere trying to take in the wonder of her surroundings. It was more beautiful than anything she could have imagined, like a fantasy world come to life.

Suddenly she slipped into blackness. She was blind.

Panic consumed her and she jerked against the strong arms holding her. "What did you do to me?" Her voice was high and shrill with fear.

"It is not permanent," a gruff voice said close to her ear. She felt his breath on her cheek, warm and spicy. A shiver of apprehension passed over her and she felt goose bumps rise on her bare arms. There was no malice in his voice, but she felt certain that these men weren't going to let her go unharmed either.

She stumbled along, going in the direction they pulled her until she was pushed onto a hard bench and told to stay put. The sound of



footsteps moving around her told her she wasn't alone but other than that she had no idea where she was.

The scent of the air had changed from tangy sea salt to sweetly floral and she felt no breeze on her bare skin. This could mean they were inside, but in this strange place she wasn't about to take anything for granted.

Footsteps approached and Magda held her breath. Were they coming to let her go? Or was this an executioner? She remembered what Lorrick had said about the dark court assassins removing any threat to the faerie kingdom, and while she didn't entirely believe his story, she couldn't deny that what she'd wandered into was something beyond ordinary.

"What is your name?" The man's voice was low and melodic, accented with the same lilt she'd heard in Lorrick's voice.

"Magda Marks."

"How did you find this place?"

"I followed the map."

There was a scuffle and Magda heard the flutter of pages being turned.

"Goddess curse him, he actually let a map fall into a mortals hands!" the man said and she heard the unmistakable sound of a book being slammed shut.

"Lord Beloran, I don't think he intended for it to fall into a mortals hands. Lorrick has never taken his journal off the island before."

"Don't defend him, Cain. You know he has an unnatural preference for human women. His misplaced trust in humans is what got us into this mess in the first place, and now he's led another one to us."

"You don't know that! She could have stolen the book."

Magda jumped to her feet and was quickly pushed back down again. “I didn’t steal anything from him! He’s the thief! All I want is my things back and I promise I’ll leave this place and never come back.”

Silence followed her outburst. Her neck began to itch as though it waited for the proverbial axe to fall.

Someone ran in. Magda heard the clink of metal and knew it was more of the armed men, the rapid thud of boots on the floor.

“Lord Beloran. They’re here!”

The man who’d interrogated her, Lord Beloran, spoke several short words in a language she didn’t understand, though their intent was clear enough. He was cursing a blue streak and she couldn’t help but be impressed. Whatever language it was, it had a wonderful abundance of dirty words.

“Cain, take her to the caves. Keep her safe. Whatever you do, don’t let the dark army get her.”

“You—you aren’t going to kill me?”

He laughed softly. “We may not like humans knowing about us, but we don’t murder them either. Rest assured though, if the dark army knows you’re here, you will be executed before you can draw your next breath. They have no use for humans.”

## Chapter Nine

If he ever found the woman, he was going to skin her alive. He'd gone to the cabin to find it swarming with police. She hadn't been there and according to his friend, Officer Lang, she hadn't been there when they'd arrived either. They'd found her bloody clothes and had taken Oliver into custody and were preparing to charge him with murder.

Of course, without her body there was no evidence that she was even dead, but they had to assume by the amount of blood on those clothes that she was. Lorrick could have corrected them, could have gotten the poor man off the hook, but it would have meant revealing his own part in the situation and he didn't have the time to waste right now.

Oliver would have to sit tight in jail until the threat to Atlantis was over.

After that he'd wandered around Alice Town looking for her and he quickly learned that she'd been a busy little girl that morning. Several people reported seeing her running around loaded down with bags from several stores.

And she was holding a brown book.

Lorrick cursed his own stupidity. How had been so careless as to leave the journal in the hotel room? In his defense, he'd been more concerned with getting the key back to Atlantis, but he never should have been that negligent.

He placed the blame for it squarely on her shoulders. Her very sexy naked shoulders. What man alive could concentrate with a half naked woman lying there?

The damnable thing about it was that, he wasn't even particularly beautiful. Oh, she was pretty and had a tidy little body, but he'd bedded women more stunning in his life. Lots of women. Hell, he'd even managed to get the infamous Helen of Troy on her back before she'd gone on to topple armies and destroy nations. Cripes, what a cold fish she'd been.

And there he had his answer. It wasn't Magda's looks or her body that had leeched all good sense out of his mind last night. It had been the memories of their loving that had left him looking for his scattered wits.

A pistol in the sack didn't even come close to describing her.

He hadn't been sure what to do next so he headed back to the docks and sat in his boat waiting for inspiration to strike.

"You look like someone just kicked you in the ass," a familiar voice called.

"Not yet," he called back to the young man walking down the dock with a shopping bag in his hand. "What are you doing down here Marcus?"

"Got the morning off. Old Henley sent me to find someone who'd left a bag of groceries on the counter but she's moved her boat since yesterday so I thought I'd check here and see if I could find her."

"Well, I haven't seen anyone looking for a lost bag of groceries." Lorrick teased.

Marcus laughed and his black hair fell into his eyes. "Oh, I doubt Magda would even notice. Henley said she was so loaded down with stuff she wouldn't likely notice she'd lost one."

"Did you say Magda? Magda Marks?"

“Yeah, I didn’t know you knew her, though I shouldn’t be surprised. You seem to know everyone.”

“Oh, I know her all right. She’s got something of mine and I need to find her right away.”

“Well, Henley said he heard her mumbling about trailing some thieving bastard into mythology if that was what it took. Girl’s got a wicked temper these days ever since that prick Oliver messed with her. Used to be a sweet kid, you know?”

Oh, he understood all too well how a bad relationship could change a person. Hadn’t he stopped looking for love in a human’s arms?

“Tell you what, why don’t you give me her stuff and I’ll give it to her when I track her down? I’m bound to catch up to her sooner or later and you have a day off to enjoy. Go chase some hot tourist babes on the beach or something.”

Marcus laughed. “I guess someone ought to if you’re too busy to do it.” He handed down the bag and waved jauntily before sprinting down the dock to enjoy the rest of the day.

Lorrick cast off and maneuvered through the maze of boats anchored off shore.

The crazy women had sailed off into the triangle looking for Atlantis? Goddess, was she insane? Only those with faerie blood could find it without help. She may have the book, but without another faerie with her, she’d find nothing but open water.

Lorrick hoisted his sails and sent a small burst of power to increase the wind blowing against them. He had to catch up to her before she got herself hurt. Goddess help her if the dark court decided to attack when she was floating around out there.

The closer he got to home, the more his stomach began to burn. He'd felt that same level of anxiety only once in his lifetime. The day he'd had to inform the council of elders that the key was gone.

And he knew, long before the glittering spires came into view, that he was too late. The dark army had arrived.

Lorrick added his power to the wind, pushing the sailboat faster and faster until he feared the sails would rip from the force. It was like trying to navigate a hurricane, but a hurricane that he had created and that served only him.

By the time the hull bumped against the pier, he had pictured Magda's death a million times but she wasn't there. There was no sign of a boat anywhere near the island other than those that belonged to the faerie themselves.

He heaved a sigh of relief. She must have given up. Surely she'd turned around when she'd seen there was nothing here but open water.

Unless she'd already been caught.

Damn.

Lorrick leaped from the boat and sprinted into the midst of the battle. He had no sword, wore no armor, but he didn't care. He had been the champion of the light court for too many centuries to not jump into a battle when an extra arm was needed.

He swept through the enemy lines like a wave and bodies fell like saplings in his wake. From the first man he met, he stole a sword and from the next a shield. Dark though they may be, they could still be used to cut down the enemy.

"Lorrick!" the voice of Lord Beloran rose above the clash of sword on sword. Lorrick turned, saw the flutter of Beloran's standard flying a few hundred feet to his left and began slashing his way towards his commanding officer.

“Lorrick, you need to get to the caves. Cain has her there but I don’t know if the dark court has sensed her presence. You need to get her to safety.”

“What the hell are you talking about? There’s a fucking war going on! You need your best fighters.”

“I will not allow human blood to be shed on Atlantis! Get her to safety.”

Human blood? “Are you telling me there is a human on the island?”

“Don’t be an idiot! Your damn journal brought her here so she’s your responsibility. Now go!”

Lorrick had been a warrior for too long not to obey a direct order. He turned and ran through the ranks of his fellow faerie and prayed to the Gods that they would make it out of this alive without his help.

He didn’t know how Magda had found the island. Even with the book it shouldn’t have been possible but somehow she’d managed to breach the glamour shield that hid Atlantis from mortals. And if the dark court knew, and there was a good chance they would sense her presence sooner or later, they’d rip the island apart looking for her.

It seemed to take forever to reach the caves. Every few feet he had to slash his way through dark court warriors who were determined to see him dead. They all recognized him of course. The only man here to be dressed in cut off khaki shorts and a silk shirt he didn’t exactly blend well.

“Human loving scum!” one screamed before Lorrick’s blade sliced into the man’s throat, silencing any more insults.

He prayed he wasn’t being followed but he didn’t dare take the time to lay a false trail. Magda would be helpless and even Cain would be no match for a mob.

Finally a jut of jagged rocks came into view.

“Goddess be praised, Lorrick! It’s about damned time!” Cain stepped out of the shadows at the cave’s entrance. His expression was grim and he held his sword at the ready.

“Is she okay?”

“She’s pissed as hell but she’s unharmed.” There was an edge to Cain’s voice.

“What’s wrong with her?”

“One of the guards put a blinding spell on her when she arrived so that she wouldn’t be able to see everything here. It was for her own protection but when the army came there was no time to reverse the spell.”

“Damn! I don’t want to risk undoing it without knowing the exact spell.”

“That’s why I didn’t try.”

“Do you know who did it?”

Cain shrugged. “There were at least half a dozen down at the pier when she arrived and—”

“You could try talking to me instead of about me, you know,” Magda called from deep in the shadows. “I’m blind, not deaf.” And she was mad as hell, Cain had been right about that.

Lorrick followed his friend into the darkness to the alcove where the woman sat. In the glow cast from Cain’s mage light, he could see her hands were fisted on her thighs, the knuckles white. “Are you all right?” he asked.

“You son of a bitch! If I could see where you were, I’d pummel you to death! Am I all right? Do I fucking look all right?” Her voice had gotten shrill with both anger and fear.

“I’m sorry, Magda. I never dreamed you’d get dragged into this. I thought you’d be safe on Bimini until I came back.”



“Oh, I was supposed to stay in that damn cottage with Oliver,” she spit the name out like it was a mouthful of poison, “and wait for you to come back and explain why you’d stolen from me?”

“You don’t understand the importance of what you found and there is no time to explain. Your life is in danger.”

“Of course! I should have known you’d say that. You never explain anything.”

“If you weren’t so stubborn, I wouldn’t have to keep repeating myself.”

“I’m not stubborn! I’m pissed off! You stole from me and you left me in bed with—” she broke off and in the blue light he could see fear warring with disgust on her face.

“If it makes you feel any better that man is probably sitting in a jail cell right now wishing that he’d never even met you.”

“Well that makes two of us then.”

“Lorrick, you don’t have much time. They’re coming this way,” Cain called from the cave’s entrance. With a start, Lorrick realized he hadn’t even noticed his friend had gone.

“Right. Magda, I swear I’ll explain everything, but we have to get out of here.” He watched indecision flicker across her face before she reached out one trembling hand towards him.

The minute he took her hand, he heard footsteps echoing through the cave. “Get out of here, Cain. Flash back to the pier and hold them off.”

“Where are you going to go?”

“The last place they’d expect me to go.”

Magda felt the ground fall out from beneath her and screamed but before the sound could register she felt herself standing on solid ground.

“What the—? Where are we?” Her stomach was cramped from nervous tension.

“We’re in my old rooms at the faerie court. We should be safe here.”

“Wouldn’t they look here first? And how did we get here?”

“I flashed us here. It’s one of the most useful bits of faerie magic. And no, they won’t look here. Four hundred years ago, when I made the mistake of trusting a human with the secret of Atlantis, I was banished from court. If not for the war raging on the island, there would be dozens of warriors here right now.”

“So we just wait?”

“No. We need to get you into the Bell Tower. Magda, I think it’s going to be you that will put an end to this war.”

Magda blinked against the blackness. “Me? What can I do?”

“You can activate the key and convince Amanii to move Atlantis.”

Move Atlantis? “Now might be a good time to do some more explaining. Who is Amanii and how do you move a bloody island?”

She could sense his hesitation, and waiting for several long moments listening to his breathing before he spoke. “Amanii is a faerie who sacrificed her life to protect the island. Her soul resides in that golden sphere you found. Without that key, we cannot work the island’s magic that has kept us safe from human eyes for thousands of years.”

“You can actually move the island?”

“Of course. If we hadn’t moved it, we would have been discovered hundreds of years ago. Once we were thought to be a country in the Mediterranean, an advanced race that the people from that area regarded as an ally. Then, when they began to explore the seas we worried that they would discover the island and know that we were more than merely their human neighbors.”

“But what of the stories of Atlantis’s destruction?”

“We faked that. You’d not believe the number of times we enacted our own destruction. You can imagine that after the first few times it became a big party. There were several who would get drunk and run through mainland cities screaming that the world was ending.”

“I can’t believe I’m hearing this.”

“Of course, we had to put an end to those activities when nobody took our warnings about Vesuvius seriously. The death of thousands sits uncomfortably on our shoulders.”

Magda felt a rush of excitement. Here was a man who’d been present at Pompeii and countless other historical events. Her researcher’s mind filled with questions that she knew would have to wait. “How did the key come to lay at the bottom of the ocean?”

“It’s my fault. I brought a human to the island. I thought I loved her and that she loved me. She stole the key and I’ve been tracking it ever since, following rumors mostly.”

“But you have the key now, why do you need me?”

“Because Amanii is being stubborn and seems to only respond to you. If you can convince her to reactivate the key’s power, we can move Atlantis and renew the shield that has kept it hidden from the dark court.”

She wanted to sit down, but didn’t know if there was even any furniture in the room. She sank to her knees, suddenly so tired and drained that she could barely think. “There’s a lot you aren’t telling me, isn’t there? More at stake than just a magical island?”

Magda heard him curse softly. “Atlantis a sort of vault for dangerous artifacts. It was created to keep them out of the hands of humans who would abuse their power.”

“And what happens if the island is destroyed?”

He sighed. “We don’t know. Some of the items will be destroyed of course, but not all and if they were to fall into human hands—well, I’m sure you can imagine the chaos that would erupt if Pandora’s Box or the Arc of the Covenant were to get into the wrong hands.”

“This is a joke right? That’s why you’re all of a sudden so free with information? Because it’s all bullshit?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“Then why are you telling me? If it’s dangerous for humans to know about it, why are you telling me all this?”

“Because for some reason, you’re the key to saving the island.”

A sudden thought flashed into her mind. Dear God, was this one of those If-I-tell-you-I’ll-have-to-kill-you situations? She scrambled backwards blindly until she bumped against something solid. Would he eliminate the witness when she was no longer needed?

“What are you doing?” His voice sounded both concerned and annoyed. Magda winced as she felt the floor vibrate at his approach.

“Stay away from me.” She sobbed and felt tears streaking down her cheeks. For the first time since the faerie guards had taken her sight, she felt vulnerable and it immediately sent her spiraling into panic filled memories.

Sweat beaded on her forehead and her arms and legs erupted into gooseflesh. He could do anything to her, anything he wanted, and she would be powerless to stop him.

Just like Oliver.

“Blessed hell, what’s the matter?”

He was right beside her, she could feel his breath on her face and knew he must be squatting down to her level. She flung herself back and hit her head on the wall behind her.

“Dammit, would you talk to me?” Anger tinged his voice and she felt her throat constrict.

“You’re going to kill me,” she gasped out, nearly shrieking at the feel of his hand on her knee.

“Are you out of your mind? Why the hell would I kill you?”

“When you’re done with me. To protect the island.”

He sighed and drew her into her arms, waiting patiently for her tense muscles to relax.

“We don’t kill humans. Surely you must have figured out that the Light Court is devoted to protecting humankind?”

Magda sighed. It had been over a year since she’d had a full blown panic attack. She’d almost forgotten what they were like.

“I’m sorry, you’re right. I just panicked.”

“There was more to it than thinking I would have you killed. Tell me what’s wrong, Magda.”

She hesitated. She’d known this man—faerie—for only two days, two days full of terror and chaos. “I don’t know if I can. I just—I just don’t like feeling helpless.”

“Were you abused?”

She hesitated, the need to confide in Lorrick so great she could all but feel the words dangling from the tip of her tongue.

Something crashed against the wall and Magda threw herself against Lorrick’s solid chest out of instinct.

A sinister chuckle sent ripples of fear through her. “Lorrick, you pathetic fool, how nice of you to finally show up.”

She could feel the tension in his body as he pulled her up to her feet and shoved her behind him. “Get us out of here!” she hissed.

“I can’t. They’d follow us.”

“What about the bell tower? Do that warpy-thing so I can do whatever you need me to do!”

“Oh yes, Lorrick. Do flash her to the tower. We’d love to get our hands on Amanii’s key.”

Magda shrank back as the voice came closer. Sweetly dark and menacing, it immediately made her think of devious villains from old Batman cartoons.

“What do you want Gerin?” Lorrick asked.

“The key of course. Our queen is most anxious to find it.”

“I don’t have it and I don’t know who does.”

“I don’t believe you. Perhaps a few days in the dungeons will help you remember.”

Rough hands jerked her away from Lorrick and she cried out. “What do I do with the human?” Another voice asked.

“Kill her.”

“I wouldn’t do that. The key only responds to her. Without her, it’s useless.”

“Very well. Throw them both in the dungeon. I’ll inform the queen of our success.”

## Chapter Ten

The damp chill sent gooseflesh dancing across her arms. Magda sat huddled in a pile of moldy hay, or what she assumed was moldy hay. It felt like it, anyway. God, what a mess. When they said curiosity killed the cat, they weren't kidding.

She didn't know where Lorrick was, but he wasn't in the same cell as her. She'd crawled around, feeling out the perimeter and knew she was alone with a pile of soggy hay and a few puddles of stagnant water which could very well have been rat piss for all she knew.

Helpless. Again she was helpless, trapped in the dark in a small room waiting for some form of punishment. Dear God, it was all too familiar. How many times had Oliver played this game? Sick son of a bitch.

She had no idea how to get out of this situation. Even if she could see, how would she get out of a dungeon in the faerie world?

Strange how she was so easily accepting that she was in a magical world. Her logical mind could have clicked in and insisted what she'd seen and experienced had been hallucination or a dream, but she wasn't going to waste time and energy disbelieving what was right before her eyes—even if those eyes weren't working right now.

She only wished she weren't alone.

As if her thoughts had conjured him, she felt the air around her move, announcing someone's arrival. Over the musty odor of decaying

feces and hay, Magda recognized Lorricks spicy clean scent and she instantly relaxed the muscles she hadn't realized were tense.

"Are you okay?"

She hesitated. No, she wasn't okay. Neither of them was remotely okay, but she wasn't going to break down, not again. "I'm fine. How did you get in here?"

"I flashed."

Hope surged. "Then flash us out of here!"

"I wish I could. The dungeon is shielded against flashes. I can go anywhere I want inside the dungeon itself, but not out of it. Pretty slack security."

Magda felt her bottom lip begin to tremble and bit down to keep it still. "So it's hopeless."

"Nothing is ever hopeless, Magda." His words were meant to be reassuring, but she could hear the fear in his voice. She was going to die in a dirty, smelly stone cell and nobody would ever know what happened to her.

"Lorricks, will you make love to me? Please? If we're going to die, I'd like to be held one last time."

She couldn't hear him breathe, and for a second, she thought he'd flashed back out of the room. Then she felt his warm fingers on her shoulder, sliding softly down her bare arm. "We aren't going to die Magda. We'll find a way out of this."

"You can't know that for sure."

He sighed and pulled her into his arms, cradling her against his chest. "You've been through a lot in the last few days and I can understand your need for some tenderness and passion, but Magda, I won't let you use fear as a reason for sex. Not again."



Magda winced. She had used him. In the tradition of wilting heroines everywhere, she'd used the expedient of sex to help block the trauma of the day from her mind. And she'd accused him of seducing her to get to the key!

The rumble of laughter shook her. "Baby, if I'd not wanted to be used, you'd have been sent into the same dream state as your friend was in."

"He's not my friend." The words came out instantly and so filled with bitter hatred that even she was shocked by the outburst.

"Tell me."

Magda hesitated, but the softness of Lorricks's voice was making her mind weak. She could tell him, had to tell him.

"He was into domination. I didn't even know what that meant. At first it seemed like sort of a joke or a game when he suggested tying me up. He's a master manipulator and I didn't even realize that I'd let myself get drawn into something I wasn't comfortable with.

"He made me into a slave, a slave who he could punish without fear of retribution because he had me so brainwashed that I never once thought that what he was doing was wrong. Once he left me blindfolded in a closet for three days with only a bottle of water and some stale bread." She shuddered at the memory. She'd been forced to scrub the closet when he finally let her out and Oliver had stood over her, watching her body shake with fear at being in the small space again.

"What made you leave?"

"I had an opportunity for berth on a salvage rig that would let me spend a few hours diving the nearby wrecks. Oliver let me go and I was too excited to notice that it was out of character for him. It had been a long time since I'd gone diving, since before my father had died. I was lucky, or unlucky as it turns out, to find a famous necklace that was lost in shipwreck sometime during the fifteenth century. I was ecstatic, then

all my research on the wreck as well as the necklace disappeared. It wasn't until Oliver's book came out that I learned what had happened. Strange that it was the loss of my work, and not the degradation, that brought me to my senses."

Lorrick sighed. "I wish I could tell you that you're safe with me, but, well, we *are* sitting in a dark court dungeon. I may be able to get myself out, but without eyesight, I doubt you could keep up. I won't get you killed."

"They need me, you said so. They won't kill me, at least not yet. Get yourself out and help your people."

"I won't leave you alone in the dark, Magda. We'll find a way to get out of this together."

Magda bit her lip. If only she had magic of her own. She felt so useless, worse than useless. It was her inability, her human frailty, that was keeping Lorrick from escaping.

She pressed a kiss to his chin, soft and gentle. "You're a good man, Lorrick."

"I'm not even a man, not really."

Magda's hand drifted down to the thick bulge in his shorts. "You feel like one to me."

"Magda." His tone held a warning that she was determined to ignore.

She shushed him softly. "I'm not asking, I'm giving. Something tells me there's a sad story behind those cool green eyes."

"Everyone has a sad story. Magda, we shouldn't do this. They could come back for us anytime now. I shouldn't even be in here. You should try to sleep."

Magda frowned and drew back, feeling his breath hitch against her back. "I wish I were faerie," she whispered and felt herself falling once again, into unnatural blackness.

She was floating, weightless and warm through a golden cloud. Had he put her to sleep with his magic again? Damn, it was so annoying when he did that.

“Do you truly wish to be faerie?” The voice was soft and feminine and it seemed to come from every direction. Magda searched through the shimmering light for the source, but could see nothing.

“Who are you?” Her voice trembled slightly. Lord, there was just so much of this supernatural stuff a body could take in one day.

“The one who called you. There is a connection between us.”

“Why do you ask if I want to be faerie?”

“The power is in you to be anything you want to be, but do you wish to be fae because of the power it would bring you? To never again be helpless would be a great temptation to one who had suffered as you did.”

Magda frowned. This sounded like a trick question and she wasn't sure which way the trickery was to lead. “I admit it would be nice to not be powerless to defend myself but there is more to it than that. Lorrick is going to be executed because he won't leave me. His people need him.”

“He's not the one his people need.”

“They need him to fight.”

“The fighting could be stopped before any more blood was shed. Do you have the courage to face two armies?”

“Me? What do I have to do with this?”

“Do you have the courage to fight for the safety of the world?”

God, was this woman insane? How could anyone think that Magda Marks had the courage to do anything?

She didn't even publish under her own name and it wasn't like she was writing erotica or anything. There was nothing racy about her

historical recounts of ships in their last days, and still she chose to use a pen name.

And yet, she'd stood up to two assassins, gone off into the middle of the Bermuda Triangle after a thief and offered to stay behind in a smelly dungeon so that Lorrick could save himself. Whether that made her brave or crazy, she couldn't say.

Magda asked herself one question. Would she risk her life if it meant saving the world? Oh sure, it was easy to laugh it off when the question was hypothetical but in this case the danger was very real. She'd heard the clash of swords during her blind flight with Lorrick's friend, smelled the metallic bite in the air that she recognized as fresh blood.

"I don't think anyone could turn away from that kind of thing." Blood thrummed in her ears. Whatever the consequences, she'd just offered herself up as a tool to end a war.

"Be still, daughter. I would not send you into a danger that you had no hope of surviving. Now open your eyes and call for the key. It is the first step in your awakening."

Magda gasped and jerked out of the dream. Lorrick's strong arms came around her, meant to comfort, not trap. To her amazement, she snuggled into his embrace without thought where only yesterday she would have bolted.

He had the beginnings of a beard and dark circles surrounded his silver eyes. She let her eyes travel over the planes of his face, sharp and elegant as befitted a faerie warrior.

"Holy shit, I can see!" Magda leapt to her feet and scanned the room. Hell it was worse than she'd thought. She'd swear a rat had scurried into a crack when she'd jumped.

"What? How did that happen?"

“That woman must have done it. I don’t know who she was. She sounded familiar but I just can’t place her voice.” She was babbling, surveying the room as if the woman from her dream would jump out of the shadows.

“What woman?” Lorrick looked a little spooked, and his eyes searched the room for an unseen presence.

“In my dream, but it wasn’t really a dream. At least it felt real.”

“What did she tell you?”

Magda bit her lip. “She told me to call for the key, that it would wake me up or lead to my awakening. She called me daughter.” She shook her head. “It was weird.”

“Do it. Call for the key.”

Magda spun around and saw the grim determination on his face.

“How do you call for a key? Even if I still had it, I doubt my cell phone would work in here.”

“Magda, close your eyes and wish for the key, the sphere you found. Call for it.”

“This is stupid. I don’t have telekinesis or anything.”

“Just try.”

“Fine, but I’m just going to look dumb. You better not laugh at me if nothing happens.” What was she talking about? Of course nothing was going to happen. She could almost hear the woman’s voice chiding her. *Anything is possible if you want it badly enough.*

Pushing aside her doubts, she closed her eyes and wished for the sphere.

Nothing happened.

Magda screwed up her face and pulled with everything she had.

*Ping!*

The sound jerked her from her concentration.

“Good job.”

There on the filthy stones, lay the golden sphere—the key to Atlantis.

“How did I do that?”

Lorrick didn’t answer, but bent and scooped up the sphere. When he held it out to her, she had the strangest urge to step back. Whatever had just happened, she somehow knew that if she did nothing else, she’d remain herself. Everything would change if she touched it.

“It won’t bite you,” Lorrick teased.

No, it wouldn’t bite her. But it would cost her Lorrick. Hadn’t the other faeries all said he had a weakness only for human women? In the grand scheme of things, it seemed a ridiculous indecision. Even if touching the sphere were to make her faerie, the fate of the world was at stake. Giving up a man who’d stolen from her and who she didn’t love seemed paltry next to saving humanity.

But what if she did love him?

Christ, she had to get a grip. She’d known him for what, a day? She was attracted, nothing more. Magda Marks was not one to lose her heart so foolishly.

She took the sphere from him, felt it’s impossibly warm weight in her palm.

The room spun. Light poured from the key, from Magda’s skin until it was so bright she could see nothing but a golden glow as empty as the darkness that had surrounded her earlier.

Slowly the light faded, and she saw Lorrick kneeling on the filthy floor, his head bowed in supplication.

“Rise, Champion of Light.”

Magda nearly dropped the key. The voice. The one from her not-dream.

Flawless creamy skin, hair as black as midnight and the elegantly sharp bones of the fae, she stood beside Magda in a flowered halter-top and khaki shorts that looked very familiar.

Lorrick stood, ignoring the black slime trickling down his knees. “I am no longer Champion.”

The woman laughed. “You will always be who and what you are. It is your destiny to be here, with my daughter, and to help her bring light back to the courts. I apologize for leading you on a merry chase all these years, but it was necessary if my key was to fall into Magda’s hands.”

“What the hell is going on here?” Magda backed away until her back bumped up against damp stone.

“Magda, it’s okay. This is Amanii, the faerie whose soul resides in the key.”

“Why did she call me daughter?” But she knew. Magda only had one picture of her mother, and in it she’d been wearing the exact same halter top and shorts. Her hair had been shorter though. Amy Marks was a faerie? Amy Marks had died in childbirth.

“You’re supposed to be dead?” Did the surprises never end?

“Yes, I can tell you I’m glad that’s over. I’ll never forget how happy I was to finally have a girl after thousands of boys.”

“I have brothers?”

“Well, not exactly. Your father would technically be your half brother, but then again so would your grandfather and great-grandfather and so on.”

“Oh, my God! I’m inbred?” She had to fight the urge to check herself for extra ears. Why hadn’t she remembered the warning to be careful what you wish for? An inbred faerie—who could have foreseen that kind of consequence?

"In a sense, but when I took human form I ensured my DNA was different every time so there would be no effects. Magic would have prevented any abnormalities, but I didn't want to risk it."

"So the prophecy is true." Lorrick's words pierced the fog of denial in Magda's brain.

"Prophecy? What prophecy?"

Lorrick shook his head. "It's only rumor. Something about a half-blood child. Nobody really knew more than that or if it was even based in fact."

"It's true." Amanii smiled. "My brother, the seer, foresaw a time when the fighting between light and dark would threaten to destroy both our world and the human world. It was my duty to guard the island and to deliver the means of preventing that. Every twenty-five years or so I took a human form and had another child. Now my task is done." Amanii began to fade. "Remember what I told you, daughter."

"No! Don't go!" Magda screamed but it was too late. Amanii was gone. Uncaring of the questionable substances on the floor, Magda slid down to her knees, choking back tears. Her mother was gone again.

"It's not fair," she whispered.

"I know, baby, but now's not the time for sorrows. We have to get out of here."

Magda nodded and allowed him to pull her to her feet. "How do we get out?"

Lorrick grinned and in a blink they were on the other side of the cell door. Magda stumbled against him and gave him an elbow to the ribs. "You could warn me when you're about to do that."

"Maybe I enjoy you clinging to me."

But would he still enjoy it when she was fully faerie? Magda sighed. She had to stop thinking about it.



With her stomach fluttering from nerves, she followed Lorrick down a series of dark corridors until he stopped at a junction. Voiced echoed down the tunnels towards them.

“Stay here,” Lorrick whispered. Before she could protest, he slipped around the corner, creeping silently from shadow to shadow. Magda waited for sounds of a scuffle but heard nothing.

A hand fell on her shoulder, drawing a scream from her throat. “Dammit! How did you manage to sneak up on me?”

Lorrick laughed. “Come on, let’s go.”

“Wait, what did you do?”

“What I’m trained for.” His voice was light, almost cheerful, and she could almost believe he hadn’t just killed. Magda shuddered, remembering the slick feel of blood on her hands.

“So can we flash now?”

## Chapter Eleven

He flashed them back to the island, relishing the feeling of her body pressed against his. For the first time in his life, he didn't feel guilty about the desire that struck him each time he touched a woman. Magda was faerie, or part faerie. She didn't know it yet, but she'd already begun to change. Her eyes shimmered, just slightly and her skin had begun to pale.

And curse the fates, he was afraid to let himself take that final step from caring to something deeper.

He'd allowed himself to fall in love before and had been badly burned. Until he knew that he wouldn't lose her, Lorrick wasn't going to risk his heart again.

He brought them to the bell tower and deliberately set Magda away from him. "Here, take the key and go inside. There's a pedestal in the middle of the room where the key fits. Once it's in place, you can activate it and get Amanii to move the island."

"But Amanii said her task was done. She's handed over the responsibility to me."

"What are you saying?"

He watched her bite her lower lip for a moment. "I'm saying I don't think the key will work anymore."

"What?" For a moment, he saw her scrunch up her face in concentration and then she was gone. "What the hell? Magda!"

Damn. Damn. Damn. How had she learned how to flash? With a curse on his lips, he followed her, the trail easy enough to follow.

He popped into the middle of chaos. The smell of blood and smoke was so strong even he, a warrior with centuries of experience, could hardly comprehend the extent of the slaughter.

She stood in the middle of it, her face pale but composed, with the golden sphere clutched high over her head.

“Are you out of your mind?” Lorrick hissed, stepping between her and the dark court army. Together, he and Magda stood between two groups of blooded warriors who had stilled, breath bated, while waiting to see what this lone woman would do.

“Probably certifiable.”

“You flashed.”

She grinned. “I know. It’s actually not that difficult is it?”

“No, but you could have warned me. Scared a few centuries off my life.”

She snorted.

“What’s your plan?”

“I don’t have one. Amanii asked if I had the courage to stand between two armies, so I decided to take that literally.”

“Goddess, you’re the craziest woman I’ve ever met.”

“Hey! I’m told by my therapist that I’m improving.”

Lorrick cursed and wished he’d thought to get his sword and shield. The air sparked with tension, as if something was just waiting to erupt. The air was thick with anticipation. How many times had he felt that heavy weight pressing on his chest? Battles all but lost in the fog of memory surfaced—Waterloo, Sterling, Troy, Normandy, Stalingrad, Ypres, The Plains of Abraham and hundreds more he’d lived through.

Always he'd fought alongside humans, as the Faerie Champion, charged with aiding the cause that would most benefit faerie.

This was different. The blood soaking into the soil was not human, but fae, and the weapons that glinted in the fading light could kill where human weapons could not.

"Magda, we have to get you out of here. I don't care what Amanii said, you can't be here." He grabbed for her, the oppressive weight nearly choking him. Something was going to happen and it was going to change everything.

The flash was his only warning and suddenly Magda was shoving him, throwing herself in front of a blast of energy that she had no hope of surviving. Flat on the ground, he gasped for breath while a woman screamed and gold shards shot out like shrapnel, piercing his flesh.

The Key.

"Magda!" He scrambled to his feet. The ground beneath him shook with the power of hundreds of rushing feet. Two armies bore down on him and the woman who knelt at his feet, sobbing uncontrollably.

"She's gone! Lorrick, she's gone!"

"Give me your hand," he ordered. "We have to get out of here."

"No! I'm not leaving her."

"Magda, she's gone."

The wind slapped him with a sudden gust that nearly knocked him off his feet. Gold shards flew into a funnel of churned up grass and surrounded Magda. Her arms flew up as if in offering to the Gods and Goddesses. Lorrick struggled to stay standing, pushing with all of his strength to get to her.

She screamed.

Lorrick squinted his eyes trying to see through the debris. Then the wind stopped so suddenly that he fell to the ground. His shirt was ripped, his arms covered in dozens of tiny scratches that stung viciously.

The armies had stopped, both sides staring in stunned amazement at the woman between them.

Gold bands patterned with impossibly intricate swirls covered her upper arms, wrists and ankles. Around her belly button a golden sun flared, surrounded by symbols he knew only too well.

The ground shook.

“Magda, what did you do?” he called against the sudden rumble.

“I am the key. Lorrick, I can’t control it!”

The air was full of the sounds of rock grinding against rock, of glass shattering and wood splintering. The earth shuddered and two massive fissures opened, one on each side of them so that they were cut off from both the army of light and the army of darkness.

“She’s destroying the island!” someone called. Like two candles guttering in the wind, the blood-spattered soldiers began to flash themselves to safety.

Within moments, they were the only two left on the hillside as Atlantis cracked and heaved beneath their feet. Cliffs sheered off and dropped into the sea and Lorrick saw massive waves hurling against the grassy slopes.

“We have to get out of here! The island is sinking!” The ground between them split and he felt himself drifting away from her.

Magda laughed, a hysterical kind of sound that sent shivers down his back. He wondered briefly if the events of the past few days had finally become too much for her.

Water swirled over his feet and darted away, eroding the precarious earth and shrinking the foundation of his perch.

“How do you feel about Hawaii right now?”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

Light blazed, blinding him. Lorrick covered his eyes and threw himself to the ground, unable to keep his balance. He knew in that moment that if they didn’t get off the island, they would sink with it into the sea and be lost forever.

The air became still and silent in the blink of an eye. Warm breezes carried a perfume that he didn’t recognize. The ground ceased its bucking and heaving.

“Oh, come on. You didn’t think I’d really destroy Atlantis, did you?” Magda’s teasing voice drew his head up. She was smiling down at him, her face trickling blood from tiny cuts. Behind her head the sun flared, creating a golden halo.

“Get up, big guy. It’s over.”

“What the hell happened?”

She laughed. “You gave me the idea. I just pretended to sink the island and once everyone else was gone I moved it. I’ve always wanted to visit Hawaii and now we’re just a short sail away.”

Lorrick looked around, dazed. Other than the torn up grass from the earlier battle everything was immaculate—perfect.

“How did you do it?”

“When the key shattered, Amanii passed its powers to me.” She looked ruefully down at the bands on her arms. “I think these are permanent, but I guess it’s better than being stuck inside a golden ball.”

“What are you saying?”

“I think I’m faerie now. Either way, I’m the only one that can control the island and keep it hidden.”

A harsh laugh drew his eyes to the top of a nearby hill.

“Very good. So I just need to kill you and all of Atlantis’s secrets will be mine. Much easier than trying to track down that damned key.”

The voice was rough and gloating. Lorrick spun around and saw a dark warrior with a dagger poised to throw.

“Magda, get down!”

Light flared at the same moment Gerin released the dagger—a double attack, magical and physical. Lorrick spun a shield and flung it around them both but the blade cut through the barrier. Magical energy lashed him fully across the face, threw him to the ground and sent him spinning into darkness.

## Chapter Twelve

Magda threw her arms up out of instinct, unable to do more than that to protect herself.

A dull clang echoed in her ears before a sharp pain sliced through her left arm. The dagger fell to the ground at her feet, imbedding itself in the rich soil.

The dark court warrior roared and drew his sword.

“You can’t escape me. You’re alone and defenseless. If you want to live, you’ll join me.” Panting, she watched him and though she didn’t recognize his face, she knew the voice. This was the man who had caught her and Lorrick—the man who had ordered Lorrick’s execution.

Magda looked down at Lorrick lying on the ground a few feet away. His shirt was scorched, his blond hair dark with soot. Was he alive? Her heart constricted painfully. He couldn’t be dead.

“I’m not so defenseless.” Dear God, don’t let him call her bluff. She had no hope of defeating a man with a sword and strong magic.

“Pathetic half breed. You’re just like the prideful fools in the light court who couldn’t see the potential of the objects they were protecting. I knew you’d be weak, that you’d pose no threat to me no matter what the seer claimed.”

“Why do you want those artifacts? Lorrick said they were dangerous. You could destroy the whole world with them.”



“Or enough of the world to rid it of humans! Why should you puny mortals enjoy the freedom to come and go as you please while we skulk in the shadows, living in the hidden realms that are all that is left to us?”

He was creeping closer, the sharp edge of his sword glinting in the fading light. Magda resisted the urge to back away. She had to stand strong. The tight pull of skin where the sphere had attached itself comforted her, as if her mother was still with her.

If only she knew enough about faerie magic to do something. Her one attempt at flashing had been a lucky fluke, and she somehow knew that Amanii had guided her through moving the island. She couldn't count on being lucky again.

“The other warriors will be here soon. You can't possibly breach the island's defenses in time.”

His grin faltered briefly before a menacing sneer pulled at his lips. “Then I'll just have to keep you, won't I? You can block the others from finding us.”

“And why would I do that?”

He was almost to her now, close enough that he could reach out and cleave her head from her shoulders if he chose. Dear God, what could she do against a man with a sword?

“Because if you don't hide us, I'll kill lover boy over there.”

Her heart stopped, then with a hard, violent pulse sent adrenaline coursing through her veins. “He's alive?” she whispered. Magda spared a glance at Lorrick's body. His skin was streaked with black from burns but she couldn't tell if he was breathing. She needed to go to him, feel his heart beating against her fingers, to know she wasn't alone.

She couldn't let him die, but she couldn't let the dark court destroy the world either. There had to be a way to save both.

As if someone had whispered in her ear, the solution came to her. The sphere was destroyed, and without it, there was nothing to protect the island except for her. What the island needed was another object to defend it.

And if she had to become that weapon, so be it. Isn't that what should have happened in the first place? She was too fragile to be an effective guardian. What she needed was something strong and deadly.

Magda lunged, rolled across the soft grass and brought her feet up under the warrior, knocking the blade from his hands. It fell across her stomach, the razor sharp edge slicing into her flesh.

A feral growl was her only warning before a heavy body fell on top of her, forcing the air from her lungs. Stiff leather dug into her throat.

"You can't beat me." He sneered, lifting himself off of her, the blade of the sword clasped firmly in his hand.

"I don't need to beat you." Her blood was already on the sword. Instinct took over; perhaps the remains of Amanii's soul guided her as she spun magic around herself and the weapon.

Light flared, harsh and brilliant, blinding her. She felt as if she were floating, despite the weight on her chest.

"What are you doing?"

She couldn't speak. Her throat had closed, her body began to shake violently and then she felt nothing, and she knew she'd left her body behind.

"Magda, no! Don't leave me!"

A shrill scream split the air and then the world went black.

## Chapter Thirteen

“Wake up, Magda. Come on now.” The voice pulled at her, drawing her from the darkness. Her eyes flickered and she winced at the fierce blue of the sky above her.

“What happened?” Her voice was raw.

“That’s what I’d like to know. Goddess, you scared me.” Lorrick loomed over her, blocking the harsh light from her eyes. His hair was rimmed with gold, a stark contrast to his soot darkened face.

With a groan, she sat up. “I was trying to be brave. Evidently I failed.”

“You almost vanished! Then Gerin faded away and his sword rose up into the air by itself. I barely got you out of the way before it stabbed into the ground right where your heart had been.”

“He—he disappeared?”

“And I want to know how that happened.” She hadn’t even noticed the crowd that hung back, a few dozen feet away. A woman had stepped forward, her silver eyes looked hollow and haunted, her skin sickly pale.

“Queen Lihbaerda!” Lorrick leapt to his feet and Magda couldn’t decide if he was searching for a weapon, or deciding if he should bow.

“Be easy, Lorrick. We all want to get to the bottom of this.” Now Lorrick did drop into a bow.

“Ahrken?” The queen’s voice trembled with confusion.

Magda had absolutely no idea what was going on, but it felt significant. The faces of the gathered crowd, some with the black leather

armor of the dark army, some with the buff tan armor of the light warriors watched the queen and the man Ahrken with trepidation.

“Magda, what happened?” Lorrick had dropped back to her side, helping her to rise. Her legs trembled but she managed to stand and saw for the first time the slender sword swaying in the ocean breeze.

“I don’t know exactly. I remembered what Amanii had said, and how she’d existed in the key, acting as a sort of guardian. I tried to do the same thing and it was working. I felt myself leaving my body and then I don’t know what happened.”

“You tried to put yourself into the sword?”

Magda turned to look into Lorrick’s face. A muscle in his jaw ticked and his eyes had gone cold. She swallowed nervously and nodded.

“I heard you call me and I knew then that you weren’t dead. I faltered. I’m sorry. I failed.”

His expression softened. “You didn’t fail. I think Gerin is in the sword.”

“What?”

“You were vanishing, then you were back and Gerin disappeared. I think your spell switched his soul for yours.”

The queen strode forward and grasped the sword by the hilt. Magda watched her tug, saw a frown mar her face when the blade refused to budge.

A swirl of blue light filled the air and a boy appeared flashing a gap toothed grin at the gathered crowd. He wore vibrant yellow shorts and a faded Rolling Stones shirt.

“Well done, niece! I can see my sister did her job well,” the boy said, stepping in front of her, then ran a finger along the gold bands on Magda’s arms. His smile faded.

“Your sister?”

He nodded, silver eyes sparkling with grief.

“Seer, what can you tell us about this day’s events?” Ahrken had stepped forward to stand next to the queen.

“My king, my vision has proven true. A half blood has saved us all and has lifted the veil of darkness that settled over our courts many, many years ago.”

Magda blinked. Ahrken was the king? He looked like any other Light Warrior in scuffed up leathers and with a generous shadow of stubble on his chin.

The boy turned to the sword and laid his palm across the blade. “Gerin will spend eternity defending the very treasures he sought to steal. It is his punishment for the deceit and trickery that nearly led to the destruction of two worlds.”

The queen gasped. “He cast some kind of spell on me! I felt it lift a short while ago—when his soul bonded to that blade.” Magda watched her stumble and fall to her knees. “Oh, Goddess, I should have known.” Ahrken stepped forward and placed his hand under her arm. “You never betrayed me, did you?”

The king’s gaze was cold, bitter, and then to Magda’s surprise, he sighed and dropped his forehead down to rest on the queen’s.

Libhaerda’s hands were trembling and her already pale skin had gone deathly white. The king put his arm over the queen’s shoulders and drew her into his embrace.

“I don’t understand. You knew that Gerin was controlling the queen this way? That he was responsible for hundreds of years of strife and you did nothing?” Magda stared at the impish grin on the boy’s face. He showed absolutely no remorse for his lack of action.

“Of course I did nothing.”

Anger churned in her gut. Beyond the gathered crowd the ground was soaked with the blood of hundreds of fallen warriors. Her own mother had lived in a golden sphere for centuries, and it could all have been prevented if this little brat had only said something.

“Someone should spank your butt!” She stared forward, determined to do the deed herself but felt herself dragged back against Lorrick’s strong chest.

“He did as he was permitted. A seer cannot change the future, only predict it, Magda. If he had acted, you would not be here now, with me.”

The anger fled and in its wake came a sick dread.

“And I’m no longer the kind of woman who appeals to you.”

Tears stung her eyes, blurring her vision. She felt herself being spun around and strong arms wrapped around her back.

“You are the bravest, most beautiful woman I have ever met. How could you not be the kind of woman who appeals to me?”

“You know what I mean.” She peeked up into his face and saw his eyes were soft as burnished silver.

“Magda, this was meant to be. We were meant to be. You are what I have been searching for my entire life. Amanii was right about that. My preference for human women is what brought us together, but it has nothing to do with the way I feel.”

Her heart thudded. “And how do you feel?”

His hands cupped her cheeks and she felt warmth flood into her. Colors filled her mind and somehow she knew what each one of them represented. Yellow for friendship, red for lust and most wondrous of all, pink for love.



Soft sunlight reflected off the rippling waves. Magda adjusted her sunglasses and pressed herself farther into the thick cushion.

“Here you go.”

Magda turned at the sound of his voice and accepted the tall frosted glass from him. “Thanks. What took you so long?”

Lorrick dropped into the second deck chair and grinned at her. “I ran into King Ahrken. He and Lihbaerda are taking a little vacation on Maui and wanted to say hello. It took me forever to flash away from them.”

“And how are they doing?” She sipped her drink, thinking of the terrible twist of fate that had separated the two rulers for so long.

“Remarkably, Lihbaerda is pregnant.”

Magda choked on her drink. “Are you serious? That’s wonderful!”

“If it’s a girl they plan to name her Magda.”

“Oh my!”

Lorrick chuckled. “Come on, finish your drink and let’s get back to work.”

Together they climbed down to the main deck of the small yacht that Lorrick had purchased. *The Faerie Treasure* was anchored off the coast of Maui—close enough for the sweet perfume of the islands to surround them. At the back of the yacht lay their diving gear.

“I still can’t believe all of this.” Her fingers traced the golden swirls on her upper arms. At the same time Lorrick’s palm pressed against the starburst on her stomach, his fingers almost, but not quite dipping under the elastic of her bikini bottom.

Heat pooled between her thighs and her gaze jumped to his face. “Do you need a reminder?”

A slow smile curled her lips as his fingers slipped lower.

“But what about all of the treasure down there waiting to be discovered?”

With a laugh, he scooped her up and carried her across the deck and into the cabin. It wasn't until he'd laid her on the bed and stripped off her bikini that she realized the double meaning he'd found in her words. "Lorrick! That isn't what I meant and you know it!"

"You are my greatest treasure. If you don't already know that, then I'd best show you."

His fingers trailed up her thighs to tease the spot that ached for his touch. Magda gave up with a sigh. There would be other days to dive, after all, the oceans had guarded their treasures for hundreds of years. What she'd found with Lorrick was more priceless than gold, silver or jewels. Not only had she found love, passion and purpose, but she'd found herself the day she pulled the golden sphere from the sea.



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*When two strangers meet by chance, their shared ecstasy challenges cultural differences and changes the course of their future.*

## Taboo

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*Available December 5, 2007 at Samhain Publishing*

Two societies have lived apart on a remote planet for generations. At the top of the Dwelling live the Aerotaun, people who have built wings to help them fly. The bottom is occupied by the Marimar, hearty swimmers who live and feed by the sea. Because of the mystery surrounding their ancestors' landing, suspicions and distrust thrive between the cultures.

Until a taboo encounter occurs on an isolated beach.

Ariana, an Aerotaun, cannot resist the seductive allure of the forbidden Andreus. Their few days alone ignite sexual exploration and uninhibited ecstasy. But when Ariana finally learns the shocking secret about their purpose on the planet, she must decide if her heart belongs with her people or the sexy Marimar.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Taboo*

He was forbidden.

Ariana hovered behind the branches of a tree, where she stole glimpses of a lone man on the beach. He was a Marimar, that she was sure of. His wide chest and sculpted shoulders told the story of a man with strong lungs and powerful arms.

She had not seen one this close before. But then again, she had not ventured this far from the Dwelling either.

Ariana settled on a heavy limb and watched him hobble along the sand. He must have injured his ankle, for his gait was strange, more of a limp.

Even so, her mouth watered at the corded muscles on his legs. The small red cloth at the juncture of his legs did not cover much of his warm tawny-colored skin.

He was a surprising sight for her to see today, the first day of her solitary journey. She'd left early this morning, slipping out before Hanken could notice her gone. She must make this decision on her own, not have her betrothed's soft whispers distracting her.

The man below stumbled, then fell to his knees, his roar of pain sending birds into flight.

Without thought, Ariana dropped from the tree limb and landed on the warm sand only feet away from him.

The Marimar snapped his head up, eyes like the deep ocean waters widened in alarm. But then his face softened, the corners of his full lips curled.

"Aren't you a lovely sight."

His voice skated down her spine, setting her wings fluttering. She cleared her throat, found courage in the crossing of her arms. "My name is Ariana. Do you need assistance?"

"Ariana." He rolled the word with a sensual twist, sparking heat deep inside her belly. "I am Andreus."

She swallowed and stepped forward. Never had she been so close to a Marimar. Usually they were several hundred feet below.

"You-you are hurt."

He nodded, then with a grimace rose to his feet. Lifting one foot tenderly, he tried to hop away from the water's edge.

"I can help you." Ariana took another step closer to him, the scent of salt and something else—something wild and raw—tickled her nose.

Andreus raised a dark brow, but leaned on her shoulder. His weight and strength were far more than she ever imagined. Hanken, and others like her, were of slight build. It made them lighter and easier to fly.

She helped him hobble up the beach to a line of trees, where a make-shift shelter jutted out across the dry sand. Once inside, he dropped to the ground. "I thank you."

Ariana pulled her gaze from the hard curves of his chest, where virtually no hair covered his bronzed skin. He fascinated her. Her fingers itched to touch the long length of his legs, the broadness of his back.

"How-how will you make it back?"

He smiled. "I must wait for my ankle to heal. I can not swim like this, nor can I walk."

"Oh." She fiddled with her belt, jiggling the wings on her back.

"And you?" His sea-colored eyes stared into hers without reservation. "Have you been blown off-course?"

*A handsome Warrior King a beautiful strong willed Seer...trapped in a battle...losing their hearts could mean their life.*

## Tournament of Fire

© 2006 Toni L. Meilleur

Kegan Blaise has an unusual psychic talent. She can 'read' the history of anything she touches. When called to recount the history of an ancient sarcophagus, Kegan unknowingly releases a being—a *lethal* dethroned Warrior King seeking retribution and reinstatement of his Kingdom.

To Kegan's untimely bad luck, he sees her as a possible ally of his enemies and takes her with him.

Along the way they pick up a delightful pet gargoyle, overcome betrayal and murder, and hopefully can trust each other enough to realize the love between them is worth it all.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Tournament of Fire*

Her attention immediately centered on the box. It looked to be pure gold, with holes placed throughout the top. There was a small gap about six inches from the top that suggested a lid. No other markings adorned it.

“What is it?” Logan got right to the nitty-gritty.

“I don’t know.” Kegan bit her lip in concentration. She felt energy from the box that made her nervous. It appeared to be about seven feet long and four feet across. It had to weigh a ton. She briefly envisioned Nathan buckling under the weight of it and getting crushed. “It looks like a sarcophagus of some kind.”

“Is it Egyptian, did I find another fucking mummy?” Logan sounded irritated.

“No, Egyptian artifacts are highly decorated and they tell you something of its contents, this...this doesn’t even feel like gold...” she murmured the last part to herself. The metal *looked* like gold, but her instinct screamed that it wasn’t.

“Will you see what it is?” Logan asked softly.

“I don’t know...”

“Look, I wouldn’t have called you if I didn’t have to. I, of all people, know how your gifts hurt you. But I need this, Kegan. I spent millions of dollars digging this up.”

He didn’t need to say the rest. He needed a return on his money. His men wanted to get paid. Logan had been in a dry spell for two years now. He was what some would call a grave robber, or worse. He often compromised archaeological digs by swooping in and unearthing what took professionals forever, then selling it on the black market. He was a history thief. Probably took out a loan to make the dig before whatever geek had clearance and a grant to dig. His only Achilles heel was his inability to save and invest money. She didn’t want to think about the money he’d probably gone through in his life.

“Okay, fine, get my...”

“Already done. Steele, bring it over.” He snapped his fingers and a tall lanky man, who looked like anything but steel, came carrying a tray with a glass of ice water, a bottle of Motrin, rubbing alcohol and paper towels unopened. Couldn’t risk history transference. “And of course your usual fee of ten percent is still in effect.” He flashed her what used to be his killer smile but...she remained unaffected. Kegan felt her legs tremble and she frowned. Deep down she knew once she laid hands on this block of metal, her life would be changed forever. Her cavewoman brain told her to run, danger, danger. The intellect in her said go for it. Damn intellect is what always got her in trouble. Kegan cast a wary glance at Logan, who tried to smile in support but it only came off as greed.

She slowly peeled off her gloves and placed them on the tray Steele was carrying. With a deep breath, she situated her hands on the cool metal and instantly her brain seized the images. A tall man carrying a large weapon sliced through men on some sort of battlefield like butter. Lots of pain, lots of blood. She felt sick to her stomach. Images clouded her mind and she tried to let go of the box, but it wouldn't let her. The images were old, very old. She saw the man slay a beautiful woman, and she crumpled at the warrior's feet. Kegan began screaming and frantically tried to tear away from the box. It seemed to hold her hands captive. Oddly, it seemed for a brief second that an image of warrior with multi-colored eyes looked right at her. The images were torn away from her as she felt herself being lifted from the box.

Logan cradled her in his arms and sat her on a couch at the far end of the loft. Kegan was visibly shaking. The shocking images making her brain mush.

"Kegan can you hear me?" She heard Logan's anxious voice, but couldn't respond. He must really be worried, Kegan thought. Her tongue felt thick in her mouth, it made her mouth seem too full. She couldn't speak around it.

"Kegan!" Logan was shouting at her now. She turned dazed eyes his way. "That's it girl, come back to us," he crooned to her.

But Kegan wasn't looking at Logan. She was looking at the box behind him, illuminated by the lights. The lid was sliding off as if on some sort of hydraulic system. It was so quiet she was sure no one heard it or saw it since all eyes were on her. She couldn't warn them. A tall figure, the warrior from her visions, sat up in the box and looked around. She froze as he made eye contact with her. She began to hyperventilate.

"We should call a doctor." a voice said to Logan.

"Shut up, she's going to be fine. " Logan answered. "Kegan, come on, baby." He snapped his finger in front of her eyes. But she didn't see him



or hear him—she just saw the warrior. He'd stepped out the box so quietly. His large, muscled chest was huge; he had to be at least six and a half feet tall. Two long, black braids came down at his temples and settled past his shoulders. The rest of his hair flowed down his back like black ink. Lavender eyes with gold trim stared at her.

"L-look!" she managed a warning to the others. They all turned to see what had her in such terror. Logan stood immediately, pulling a gun from the band of his tight-fitting jeans. His men aimed weapons at the man.

The warrior smiled and waved his hand. "Byminh" he said softly, and all the men slumped to the floor. The warrior frowned when he made eye contact with Kegan. .

*No need for worry, Kegan,* was her last thought then thankfully she blacked out at well.

Da'rak knew the moment he laid eyes on the woman she was the reason for his early rising. The humans lay around him like children's toys long forgotten. He had no time for their primitive weapons or whatever unnecessary violence they wanted to offer him. His eyes were trained on the witch. Aye! She was beautiful. He watched her brown eyes close in shock and almost laughed. She was long for a woman, which meant she was tall, with heavily sun-kissed skin. Her eyes tilted slightly, reminding him of an animal he had once seen on Earth—a cat, he believed it was called.

Her clothes were too big for her. He frowned in disgust—the female body was supposed to be displayed for a man's enjoyment.

He stepped around the men until he towered over her. Of course she picked that moment to open her eyes. She recoiled in fear, trying to somehow ball up and go inside the large, soft seating she had been lying

on. Foolish woman. He reached for her, she shrieked. Then began to scream and scream.

He yelled for her to shut up, but he suspected she did not understand him. Perhaps all the time he had been on Earth he should have learned the language, but he could not bring himself to socialize with such lower beings. If she would but just speak a few intelligent words, he could break the code of her language, but all the shrieking had to stop.

Da'rak hated to do this, but he had no choice. She would scream herself sick. He waved his hand again, repeated 'byminh', and watched her slump into the soft seating.

She would have to come with him. He could not leave her here. She had the power to wake him, what else could she do? He could not leave a possible enemy at his back, and what's more, he could not bring himself to kill her in cold blood. She was surrounded with armed men. True, they were more like insects with weapons, but perhaps she knew who he was and meant him harm. Maybe she was hired to kill him before the tournament. Either way, he had to know these things and could not leave her. Da'rak looked around his surroundings and knew he was not in the cave he had settled in fifty Earth years ago. He picked the witch up and slung her over his shoulder, envisioned his cave and then he and the woman disappeared.

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