



Alicia Sparks

*Desert Moon-
Ah-Ten*

LooseId

Praise for the writing of Alicia Sparks

Bayou Gold

Alicia Sparks is a wonderful author. This shifter story is unique and brings to life the unique depth of Louisiana... This is one more fantastic read from an author who often makes you long for ice cream and air conditioning.

-- Ariana Tregarth, *In the Library Reviews*

From the moment I picked this book up until the very last page, I was enthralled... I found myself laughing and crying right along with the story. I enjoyed the attention given to the "transformation." There was only one drawback to this story and that was it had to end.

-- Liegh Hegedus, *Coffee Time Romance*

Ms. Sparks pens a novella that is magical, mysterious and mystical, as well as sexy and romantic.

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Wowza! What a story by Alicia Sparks. There are almost too many elements to mention – voodoo, spiritualism, passion, tenderness, anger, betrayal, danger, and intrigue... Be sure to pick up a copy of this fantastic read by Sparks.

-- Robin Taylor, *Sizzling Romances*

Alicia Sparks certainly knows how to weave a romance that will have readers clamoring for more. She mixes humor and sex together perfectly, and in ninety-four short pages no less.

-- Sinclair Reid, *Romance Reviews Today*

Bayou Gold is now available from Triskelion Publishing.

DESERT MOON: AH-TEN

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This book is rated:

 SCORCHING

For substantial explicit sexual content, graphic language, some violence and situations that some readers may find offensive (ménage, multiple partners).

Desert Moon: Ah-ten

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Published by
Loose Id LLC
1802 N Carson Street, Suite 212-29
Carson City NV 89701-1215
www.loose-id.com

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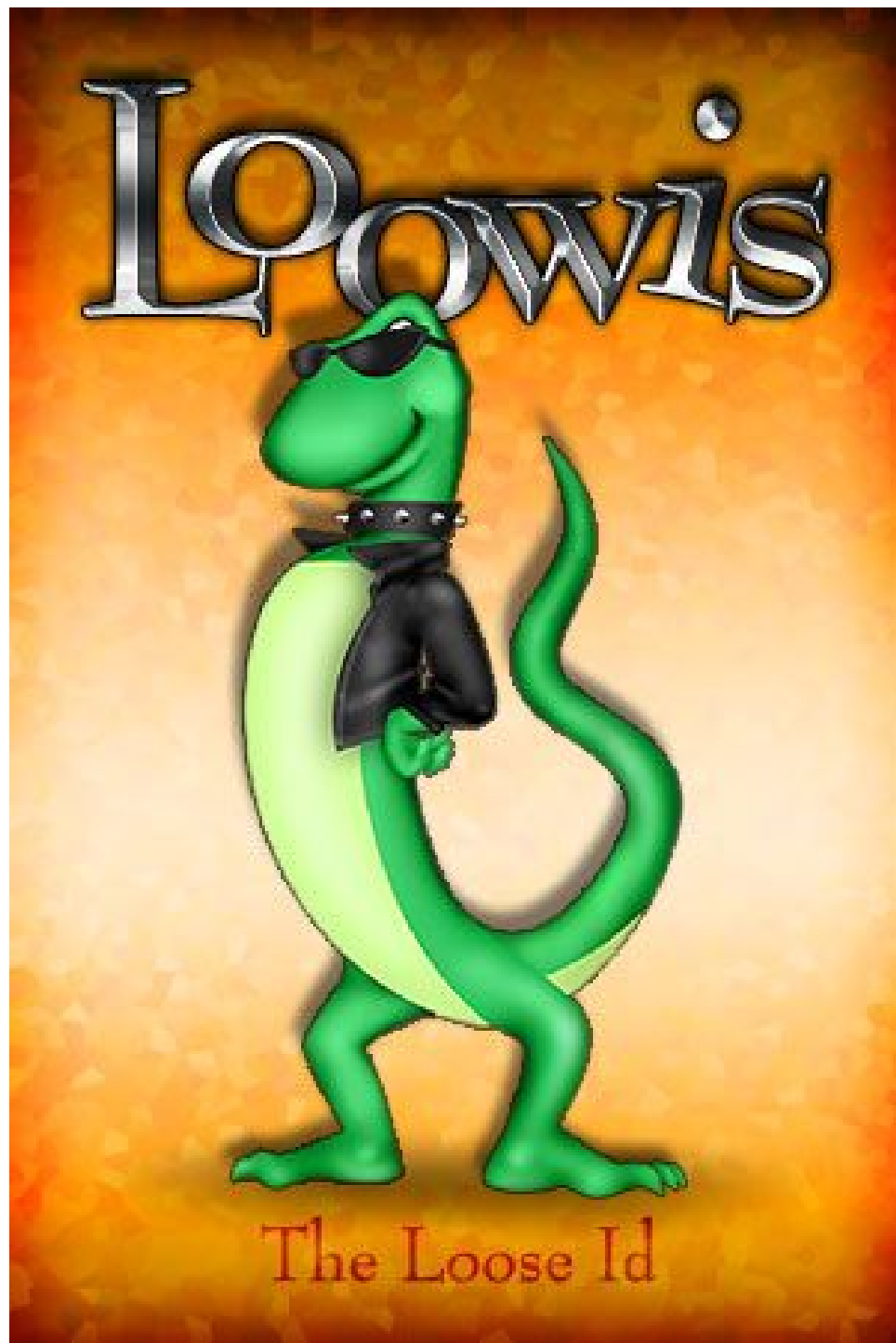
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ISBN 1-59632-084-2

Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Olivia Wong
Cover Artist: Jet Mykles



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Prologue

Ah-ten clutched his medallion, bringing it to his breast before tossing it to the earth. He would love nothing more than to allow it to sit in the desert sand, a grim reminder of his time on Earth, but his inability to walk away from the charm was stronger than his need to rid himself of it completely. The Djinn were a cursed race. Their servitude to others was part of the conditions placed upon them by the ancients. They were allowed the power to grant desires, to mold destinies, to manifest from thin air, but they could not control their own fates.

In the thousands of years his people had roamed Earth, few had ventured to question their servitude. To do so would mean to lose one's powers, something many were unwilling to do. Those who did question their place in the world soon found that life without magic was not a desirable one and took the curse back upon themselves. Even those who fled the earth after the great flood found themselves longing for their lost abilities. Soon, they reentered the life of Djinn servitude, granting wishes, fulfilling desires, surrendering to human passions.

Ah-ten refused to be one of those men. Knowing he held the power to impact his entire race, he removed the medallion and sought to unite his people in rebellion. His

insistence had cost him his beloved sister and had forced his brother to relinquish his throne. Still, he was unable to give in to the temptations magic had to offer. He refused to live his life in servitude to the Mer.

For three thousand years, he had roamed Desert Moon, a planet once deemed “New Earth.” His attempts at unity failed, and he found himself once more at the mercy of the desert and her people. As a djahdan, a renegade Djinn, he was a hunted man, and as a soldier in Prince Cael’s army, he only tasted the freedom he so desired.

It could all be taken from him in an instant. His medallion held his powers, and whoever possessed it could control him. He lived with this knowledge every day and knew that there would come a day when he would be forced to choose again. Fate would decree that he face down his demons and either reunite with the Djinn or overthrow the High Council, an entity that wished for his death.

His only hope was to find the legendary land of the dead and the queen who supposedly possessed the key to eternal life. With her help, he could retain his immortality and become invincible to the High Council’s minions. But first, he had to survive the desert.

Chapter One

Caire lay against the satin bed sheets, the scent of ylang ylang, a rare Earth fragrance, wafting up to meet her. It was supposed to heighten sexual awareness, but tonight, the incense was doing very little to get her in the mood even though Rolfe had been ducked between her thighs for well over half an hour. The soft breeze created by the men holding fans near the head of her bed swept across her chest, teasing her nipples, providing a greater sensation than the ones Rolfe was sending through her body as his masterful tongue attempted to bring her to climax.

This had happened far too often of late, and she knew the reason why. Rolfe was well schooled in the art of pleasure. His six-foot-four body and two-hundred-plus pounds of muscle, combined with his ten-inch cock, were usually enough to set her body to creaming the second he walked into the room. The man also possessed the most acrobatic tongue she had ever had the pleasure of having deep inside her body. And his long dark hair only accented his deep-green eyes. As one of the most beautifully formed men in Tu'at, he was a walking orgasm. Except lately, she had been distracted by thoughts of someone else.

She let out a moan lest he grow concerned. His sexual prowess was known throughout Tu'at, and it would not serve her well if he became self-conscious of his efforts. His tongue

ran along her clit before dipping back into her depths, teasing, licking at her inner walls in a way that only a tongue of its length and width could do. Willing herself to come, she listened to her breathing, hoping to conjure desire from somewhere deep inside her body. The breeze continued across her breasts, and the incense continued to spiral its way into her nostrils.

Still, she couldn't come.

"Are you ready for me?" Rolfe rose above her, his face wet with her cream, which had risen in spite of her inattention. Her body had a way of preparing itself for sex even if the orgasm remained elusive.

"Not yet." She pushed his head back down between her legs.

This time, his long fingers slid beneath her bottom, raising her up before sliding a pillow beneath her. His big hands spread her lips apart, pulling them almost to the point of pain but stopping just short. Part of her wished he would hurt her, would bring her to her breaking point. But he was a gentle lover, one who would never think to cause her the slightest amount of pain, no matter how badly she felt she needed it.

If he were to place his hands around her neck and squeeze at the right moment, she was sure her orgasm would threaten to squeeze his cock right off his body, but he remained in control, never allowing his breathing to quicken, never losing his focus on her body.

Her eyes remained closed tightly as she listened to the sounds of the room. When his hands left her body, her pussy protested, leaving her to wish he would have done something more, something she couldn't define. The bed groaned a release as Rolfe stood and moved across the room. She heard his footfalls echo on the hard floor before stopping.

The bed sank down again when his weight rejoined hers. Biting her bottom lip, she waited, hoping that whatever game Rolfe planned to play would bring her some sort of release. It had been too long since her body had given over control to a man. She had remained completely in control of her sexual adventures for the past few months, so much so that she had not come in all that time.

“What do you wish?”

I wish for a man with deep blue eyes, long black hair, a soul that I can't even begin to define... “Whatever you wish.”

“I wish to pleasure you, but I feel that I am falling short tonight.” His deep voice ordinarily would have sent a shiver of delight through her, but tonight it was a far cry from what she needed.

“No.” She kept her eyes closed, focusing on her breath, willing her nerve endings to awaken and to allow this beautiful man to drive her over the edge.

“Open yourself for me.” His voice was deep and husky, and the words were those which she rarely heard spoken from him. Rolfe did not give commands.

Her hands moved down to part her lips, the demand quivering through her. She inhaled sharply as the metal object came into contact with her opening. The immediate infusion of cold against her hot skin was pleasant and surprising. A tiny spasm shot through her, but it was not enough to tip her over the edge.

Surrendering to the object, her inner walls stretched to accommodate it, reveling in the sudden cold as it went deeper and deeper into her. It was large, this toy of his, so large that her lips stretched far beyond their normal capacity. She let out a tiny groan, an almost-protest as her body stilled itself, and she wondered if she could take more. His insistent hand continued to press until the object lay against her womb.

“Do you like this, Princess?”

“Mmmm. It's nice.” And it was so large that her lips did not encircle it so much as they were turned inward, stretched almost too far beyond their means. Still, she couldn't focus. Blue eyes haunted her; some foreign soul cried out to her.

“Will you come for it when you won't come for me?”

Her eyes shot open as his breath swept against her face. “I shall come for you.”

“No. You have not. All these nights I have come to you, not questioning. But now I begin to worry. Do you have another whose attentions you desire?”

She'd love to lie to this green-eyed god, would love to tell him he was the only man she desired, even though he knew he was not her only lover. “I desire you.”

“Yet you are prepared for more than just me. I think you need another.” His hand covered her breast and gave her nipple a squeeze.

“What is it you think I need?” The pounding of her heart increased at the thought. Perhaps Rolfe had some secret tricks left that he had yet to use on her.

“I think you need more than one cock. I think you need to be filled from every angle.”

Now, there was a thought. How many men did she have at her disposal? And how many times had she ever had more than one? Sure, she had allowed them to rub her body, to massage her, to stimulate her and then take her one at a time. But tonight, she knew what Rolfe was suggesting, and it was more than she had imagined.

The fanning across her breasts stopped, and her heart stuck in her throat. She waited and counted to ten before breathing again. He could not be serious.

Before she could protest, three sets of hands closed over her body. A shiver ran through her as she tried to concentrate, but sensations surrounded her on all sides. One hand closed over her breast, while another began to rub her clit, while still another moved to stroke her by pushing the toy in and out of her cunt. Gods, she would die from the sensation.

“We'll have all of you tonight,” Rolfe warned, the tone of his voice passion-laden.

“What will you have me do?” Her breathing was ragged, coming in short spurts as she tried to concentrate on one sensation above the others. The fact that three men were pleasuring her, preparing her for their bodies to take her at once, was one that enticed her more than she ever thought it would.

“I will have my cock in your mouth,” Jeret said.

“And I shall take your sweet, tight hole,” said Keno as he chose that moment to run his finger down to her anus and swirl around it lightly.

“And I shall replace this.” Rolfe pressed his hand against the toy as he spoke.

Determined to give herself over to them, Caire relaxed, but the man whose image had been burned in her brain for so long remained. There was no escaping his deep stare, the scowl that had eternal residence on his face, the soul she could see straight into.

“Roll over.” The words came from one of the three mouths surrounding her.

She obeyed as the pillow was removed and Rolfe slid beneath her, his mouth running along her pussy before he settled himself beneath her. His hot cock brushed against her clit before he pushed it down so that it was positioned at her opening, pressing against her, seeking an entry that was denied him due to the toy.

Jeret’s wet finger ran along her anus, coating it with cream before the tip of his cock sank into her hole. Very seldom had she ever been loved thusly. His cock, long and thin, was made for such encounters. She could not control nor deny the shiver that ran through her as she anticipated the full thrust of his cock.

Keno’s cock bobbed before her face, hard, thick. The veins along the sides were filled with blood just as the head was swollen with anticipation. She knew what he wanted, what he wished. Raising herself over Rolfe, she wrapped her hand around the base of Keno’s cock and pulled him into her mouth.

Everything else happened in one swift motion. The toy was removed from her cunt, which still felt as if it were stretched beyond belief. Jeret’s cock slipped from her tightest hole as his finger slid in, working itself around in a circle, seeking to stretch her out, and Keno’s cock slid further into her mouth, stretching her lips to take all of him in.

In another swift motion, Rolfe moved her onto his cock, though her pussy was still stretched and sore from the toy, and she was unable to fully feel him as he penetrated. Jeret bent her forward, and in doing so, pressed Keno’s cock deeper against her throat. Before she

could protest -- not that she would have -- Jeret's cock joined Rolfe's, both filling her hole to capacity. Had the toy not been in her pussy before, she was sure she could not have taken both men into her body at the same time.

Rolfe groaned when Jeret slid against him, and both men began rocking inside her pussy. Keno took control and began to fuck her mouth. Her hands sank into the bed sheets, twisting in the red satin, no longer able to hold onto the cock that was now forcing its way in and out of her mouth between breaths.

All sensation went directly to her pussy as it creamed, coating both cocks as they continued to take her. Oh, how she wanted to come! What she needed was an earth-shattering, all-out orgasm, the kind that would begin deep inside her womb and claw its way into existence as it ravaged her body.

Gasping for breath as Keno continued to move inside her, she felt light-headed and ready to swoon. Still, the three men continued to use her body, filling her, thrusting into her, probing her in every hole. The blue-eyed man vanished from her thoughts as a scream threatened to erupt from her body.

Keno's hands went to her face, holding her cheeks perfectly still as he moved his cock in and out.

Jeret's hands steadied her ass as he and Rolfe fucked themselves to their orgasms. One came and then the other, both spilling their juices deep inside her, filling her in a way she had never been filled before.

Caire gasped and groaned and did everything she could to encourage her orgasm. Still, nothing happened. Keno pulled his cock from her mouth before shooting his seed onto her face. She gasped when the hot mass shot onto her skin and then dripped onto Rolfe's chest and neck.

The scream that erupted from her throat was one of utter frustration. So many sensations had swept through her body, yet none of them fulfilled her in the way she so

wanted, so needed. When Jeret's and Rolfe's cocks left her pussy, she crumpled onto the bed, physically exhausted, yet still not sated.

"Do you wish us to bathe you?" Rolfe's heavy breathing was evident from his tone.

"No. Thank you. I shall do it myself." She was too ashamed of her obvious failure to open her eyes to them, much less allow them to bathe her.

"If you need anything else..."

"Thank you." She squeezed Rolfe's hand, wishing she could have given more to the men who had just done everything within their power to bring her pleasure. The disappointment on Rolfe's face was clear as her eyes fluttered open.

He motioned for the others to leave the room and they obeyed, not bothering with their clothing on the way out. "We shall find him for you," he whispered, tracing his hand along her face.

"It isn't about a man." As she spoke the words, the heaviness in her chest grew, almost choking the breath from her throat.

"You cannot lie to me. I have lain with you for too long. I know it is about a man. I know who you seek, what you need. And we shall find him for you." His eyes glittered with sincerity.

"You are a true friend."

"You are my princess. I will do anything for you." He kissed her hand and looked deeply into her eyes as he spoke.

"Thank you."

"I shall leave you now. If you have need of me..."

"I know."

She watched as he left her room. The sheets were stained with the proof of the men's arousal, their release, of everything save for her climax. She owed them more than her affection. They were her protectors, her lovers, and they deserved passion. Yet she had failed

them, and it was all because of her visions, the gazing ball, and the man she swore she would have as her own.

There was no relief for the fire burning between her thighs and threatening to consume her. The man, the one whom she had watched on the battlefield, was the only one who could quench the never-ending thirst that tormented her body. There was so much more to her obsession with him than her lust. She should be able to sate her lust anywhere, with any number of men. The attraction for this one lay in something much more primitive, in the way her blood pounded through her veins, not flowing as it should, but rather stomping a path to her heart, moving with the rhythm of the fierce warrior's body. She must have him.

She lay in silence, staring at the dark ceiling. There were answers in the ancient tiles, she knew. All she had to do was concentrate, and the forces of love would come down to her and guide her to him. Only then would she have the reprieve she so sought.

"Busy night?" The voice came from the darkness but could only have one source -- Ari. As a Djinn, he had the ability to read her mind and to control the thoughts of humans. He could also enter her domain at will.

As she scrambled to pull the bed-covering over her naked body, Caire's heart lodged in her throat at the sound of the intruder. "What do you want?" She had seen enough of the arrogant Djinn prince in the past weeks to make her stomach turn. His once handsome face, with the deep scar that ran from his forehead to his chin, practically splitting his face in half, was now a mockery of all things holy.

"I came to see you." He floated across the room on inhuman feet and towered over her, leering down at her body, sending a shiver of disgust through her.

"I don't wish to see you."

“No, but you will wish to hear my news.” The diabolical smile that spread across his face made her wonder if she would ever welcome his presence, no matter what news he bore.

“What do you want?”

“I bring you news of the man you wish to have.”

“The man?”

“Do not play the innocent one, Caire. You know of whom I speak. The one above. The one you long for but know you can never have. Right now, your heart tightens at the thought of being without him. You can have him if you wish it hard enough.”

“And what is the price? Surely you want something in return. You have never appeared out of nowhere to bring me news, and not expected something. I can see the evil in your mind. You want something.” Ari always wanted something, and lately, he had been everywhere she turned.

“Of course, I do.” His laugh rang out in the room, practically deafening her with its intensity.

“Then out with it, or do you wish me to die from anticipation?” The sooner he was gone, the better. The one thing she hated about the Djinn was their ability to appear and disappear with little or no warning. And there was no way to know if this one watched her while she slept or loved. The thought sickened her.

“The man you seek. He is a renegade, a djahdan. And he can easily be manipulated.”

“Some say the djahdan do not exist. No one has ever encountered one. They are myths, fairytales.” She waved off the comment even as her heart pounded in anticipation. To capture a djahdan was unheard of. To have one as a lover...

“Some say the queen of the dead is also a myth. Yet every morning you wake and look in the mirror. You know your own existence; you do not doubt it. Why should you doubt the djahdan?”

“I am no queen. Besides, if he is real, if he is a djahdan, then what does it matter to you?”

“It matters because controlling him is a simple matter. All you need is his medallion, his link to the Djinn world. If you find and place it around his neck, he will be your servant and forced to do your bidding.”

“I would never enslave him.” She swallowed hard when Ari joined her on the bed, his weight forcing the mattress to sink. *Please do not let him touch me.* Once, in desperation, she had made that mistake. He had promised her protection, but she knew that Ari’s promises always came with a price.

“But you shall if you wish to have him. That is the only way. Otherwise, he will never be yours, never agree to the life you have planned for him.”

“I have nothing planned for him.”

“You lie. You have forever planned. You have your title. Your father will never give you complete control until you marry. And you have chosen him for more reasons than that. You want a life with him, babies. Tell me, do you think a djahdan can reproduce? No. His power lies within his medallion. All his power. The power to love, to be loved, to possess, to procreate.” His fingers ran along the gold medallion hanging from his neck, proof that he was still at the mercy of the High Council. Caire’s skin crawled with thoughts of the evil radiating from it. Should she trust this man? “You wonder now if I am trustworthy.”

“Why should I believe you? I have known you for some time, Ari, and I know you never do anything without a price.” This time, she desperately needed to know the price before she agreed to another of his sinister plans.

“There is a price. I need two things from you. First, by claiming Ah-ten as your husband, you will be doing me and the council a service. We shall no longer be responsible for his actions. Second, you will arrange for me to have the Princess Ah-lia as my bride.”

“Who?”

“Ah-lia. She is betrothed to Prince Cael of Lemuria. And she should be mine.”

“I can’t force her...” Her powers did not extend to mind control.

“There will be no force. Only manipulation. Just a tad.” He pressed his thumb and forefinger together. “And surely someone of your power can manage.”

“I can’t do this for you.” Placing an innocent girl in Ari’s hands would be beyond cruel.

“You must if you wish to have Ah-ten. It is the only way.”

His words echoed in the room as he disappeared as easily as he had appeared. All that remained was a cloud of smoke, and then it, too, vanished. A sick feeling took over her stomach, threatening to tear her dinner from her body. A deal with Ari was worse than a deal with her father. Yet she felt as if she had no choice in the matter. If she wanted to possess Ah-ten, she must place the medallion around his neck.

The only way. Somehow those words seemed to stay in her head long after Ari had disappeared. She wanted Ah-ten, but she wasn’t sure to what extent she’d go to have him. Worse, she wasn’t sure what she *wouldn’t* do to have him, a thought that frightened her as her father’s words rang in her head: *Just like your mother.*

Chapter Two

Ah-ten trudged through the sand, making his way forward, hoping no one was following him. If he had had the medallion around his neck, he would be alerted to any intrusions or coming invasions. As it was, he was on his own, left with his instincts to guide him. He would not die today; this he knew as he felt the presence of his older brother guiding him. The Djinn were able to move with an invisible presence, something Ah-ten had not been able to do for three thousand years.

If Creed's plan worked, if all fell into place as they hoped, soon he would have the best of both worlds, the freedom of the djahdan and the powers of the Djinn. But all relied upon forces no man had ever been able to harness without paying a dear price. Creed swore this would work, though, as he set the plan into action. Ah-ten knew they had little choice.

The council had already appointed Ari, Ah-ten's twin brother, in charge of rounding up the djahdan and returning them to the Djinn realm for punishment. The High Council knew the djahdan were the only ones standing between them and domination of the planet. Until they could be contained, the High Council would not have the power it needed to overthrow the Mer rule on Desert Moon. If they could not control the djahdan, they had no chance of controlling the Mer. All this was necessary to make their dominance of the planet

a reality. Because the Djinn appeared to be at the mercy of the Mer and had made themselves indispensable to the Mer, they were in the perfect position to finally take over the planet.

Ari's hatred for Ah-ten ran deep. It had been thus since their mother died and Ah-ten refused to live as a servant any longer. As the one appointed to return the djahdan to their bondage, Ari took pleasure in seeking him out. At some point, his anger toward Ah-ten had changed and become a driving need for control. As the youngest son, he had always felt unwanted. Creed was the heir to the Djinn throne, which remained vacant while the High Council ruled, and Ah-ten had taken his fate into his hands, leaving Ari with what was left. He had become a man driven by a dark revenge whose beginnings were obscured by time.

Ah-ten had been one of the first to dissent, removing his medallion and therefore removing the Council's control over him. He knew they were only pretending to serve the Mer. It was only a matter of time before war erupted between the two factions. Now his life was in danger and his way of life threatened. If Ari had it his way, he would wipe out the djahdan.

Everything rested in finding the woman. She held the key to eternal life in her hands. No one knew her hiding place, though Creed could sense her nearness. It had taken much convincing, but Ah-ten had finally conceded and agreed to be the pawn in the game, hoping to lure her from the desert's depths and bring her to the surface, but not before ridding himself of a few mortal enemies first. As he moved forward, they surrounded him, coming out of the twilight.

Today was not a good day to die. Not that any day would be particularly good, but today was one that screamed out for life. Change was on the air. Ah-ten could feel it course through his veins even as his sword made contact with his enemy's neck. His muscles were alive with it, making his six-thousand-year-old body feel as if it had not lived a day beyond thirty years. He watched as the head fell to the ground, but his focus was now on the men surrounding him, those who threatened to tempt the fates and bring death to one who swore he'd never die.

Djinn lived forever -- in theory, anyway. In reality, things were a bit different. No one understood the unwritten laws, the codes they were bound by, ordering their world, dictating their every motion. Ah-ten was no longer subject to the laws, as a renegade Djinn, a djahdan. He had been free from those bonds for over three thousand years, but each day seemed to place another test in his way, another obstacle that would keep him from his goal of absolute freedom.

The muscles in his arms flexed as his hand tightened on his sword. He watched the crowd of men, those who would oppose him today as they moved, stalking him in an ancient dance. None of them would live to see tomorrow. Men had attempted to kill or control him for centuries, and none had been successful.

The crowd advanced on him, circling him, tearing his mind from his fate and forcing him into the here and now. He went for the throat of the largest one first, spilling his opponent's lifeblood, knowing the weaker ones would retreat once the leader was cut down. Three remained, all of whom met their fates at the end of his sword.

Sweat poured from his brow, streaking into his eyes, stinging them as he raised his face to the sky. Partially for defiance, partially for vengeance, he shook his fist at the powers who continued to send obstacles into his path. There was no doubt about the source for the legions of men who sought to halt the army's advance. The Deh-wa were not this powerful. The threat could only come from one source: the Djinn.

Ah-ten knew they watched him. Many times, he could feel their eyes on him, betting with one another who would send the death stroke. The idea of killing him might have appeal for his Djinn brothers, but it was an impossibility. Had they been able to kill him, he was sure they would have done so in the thousands of years since he'd removed his medallion and become a renegade.

He let out a war cry, signaling to his captain that the way had been cleared and they could now advance toward water. On Desert Moon, everything was controlled by the water and access to it. Right now, Cael, the leader of the Gen-ru, and his contingent from a

Lemurian outpost were determined to have access up the Deh-wa River with or without consent of the people who ruled the area. Tonight, it was without as the battle moved forward, threatening to take them to the shores and the edge of the Deh-wa before sunrise.

Creed had protested Ah-ten's alliance with Cael. As a Mer prince, Cael's people worshiped the gods of the waters, the ones who had destroyed the earth and betrayed the Djinn so long ago, damning them to a life of servitude. Even though Creed had not taken his place on the throne of the Djinn, he was still the rightful heir. As such, he made it his life's work to find a way to separate the Djinn from those who controlled them. Ah-ten knew his alliance with Cael would help him find the entry to Tu'at, the legendary land whose inhabitants controlled the waters of immortality. With the water, he could become immortal and remain free from his Djinn bondage. And with the water, Creed would finally take the Djinn throne, overthrowing the High Council.

Ah-ten wiped the blood from his sword, smearing it along his pants, oblivious to the stains of dirt and blood already gathered there. He stalked forward, determined to make his way to the river. He had taken this appointment for one reason alone: access to the sacred waters. There was a legend among the djahdan that somewhere in those waters lay a spring, hidden from the eyes of men. If it was ever found, it could relieve a Djinn of his curse, his bondage. He would remain immortal and be ruled by no man. As it were now, the djahdan gave up their immortality when they removed their sacred medallions, rendering them free from human bondage. One day, Ah-ten would die. His body would begin to age, and his freedom would no longer be foremost on his mind. He knew if the Djinn were able, they would speed up the process and render him an old man before sunrise. Instead, they sent legions of men who were unable to defeat him.

The only danger a human posed to the djahdan was if one happened upon the djahdan's Djinn medallion. Then the djahdan's powers could no longer be controlled by him. Instead, the mortal would wield the power and could bend the Djinn to his desires with very little more than the power of suggestion. In essence, the power of the Djinn would be

transferred onto the mortal with no consequences to the human. But these powers did not fulfill wishes or fancies. They fulfilled desires, things so deep within the human conscience that the power was downright dangerous.

All Djinn guarded their medallions with their lives. For the djahdan, protecting the medallion was almost as important as protecting one's life. Without one, the other would be a hopeless existence, forced to bend to the desires of the greedy humans. It was the price Ah-ten soon learned they must, as rebels, all pay. They were no longer enslaved by their Djinn powers, but they were enslaved by the constant reminder that at any moment a human could take the medallion and return the djahdan to his former status as an enslaved Djinn.

Ah-ten had set the trend for those who came after him, leaving in his wake entire legions of rebels. They were defenseless against the other Djinn and, thus, most of them exiled themselves to the North Land, a region where no self-respecting Djinn would journey. He, however, refused to hide from his brothers, who continued to live at the mercy of humans. Instead, he joined the Gen-ru army, aware of Cael's plans for gaining access to the river. His head filled with childhood legends about secret passages and magickal waters, Ah-ten would gladly serve a mortal lifetime to be reunited with his powers and immortality while still being free from bondage.

From his perspective, the fairytales had it all wrong by playing his people off as comical, but sometimes malevolent, entities who granted wishes to those who "freed" them from their bottles and lamps. The Djinn were freed from their confinement only to be enslaved by human desires. Once material, a Djinn remembered never to vaporize in the presence of humans again lest he lose his bodily freedom and once more become imprisoned in the bottle or lamp.

Ah-ten watched as Cael approached, the young prince looking very much like a regal warlord as he moved across the desert sands. Ah-ten had little respect for him, but then, there were few whom he did respect. As Mer went, Cael was not a bad man; he just seemed

misguided at times, though he was once meant to be Ah-ten's brother-in-law, during a time before things had gotten out of control.

"You fight like a hero." Cael slapped his back, gaining a snarl from Ah-ten, who disliked contact with humans.

"I *am* a hero." He let his voice echo over the sand, only to be lost as it sank into a dune.

"You shall be a hero once you and I break through these meek defenses. I shall offer you gold and riches beyond your dreams." The spark in the young prince's eye was one Ah-ten was accustomed to seeing there. Cael's visions for his land were heavily influenced by his idealistic vision and his youthful vigor. Very little of it had to do with common sense.

Ah-ten sheathed his sword and stared up at the night sky, sniffing the wind as it blew through his tangled hair.

"The enemy is near." He repeated his brother's silent warning, which only Ah-ten could hear.

"And you have a warrior's instincts."

"My warrior's instincts have kept me alive all these years." He'd never reveal his secret to a mere mortal. No one need know who -- or what -- served among the ranks.

"We shall make camp," Cael announced, seemingly unconcerned with Ah-ten's statement about the enemy.

"I will scout forward. We are being watched. From ahead." Ah-ten's instincts rarely ever led him astray, and tonight, something told him the enemy was much closer than they thought.

"Report back. Will you take men with you?"

Ah-ten turned and threw Cael a half-smile. "I can take care of myself."

He preferred to travel alone, especially when danger threatened. And it threatened tonight in a way he hadn't known in a while. What he felt came from ahead, now surrounding him, its source a mystery. He moved beyond the next rise, not stopping until he

was certain he no longer lay in view of the camp. It was then that he knelt down and checked his bootstrap. His fingers frantically moved across first one boot and then the other, then moved to check his makeshift bag and his sheath. All came up empty. Darkness fell around him, and he watched the last of the lingering orange and red rays of the sun drop into the night sky. His heart sank, the danger even more real now.

The medallion, his link to the world of the Djinn, was gone.

He squeezed his eyes shut and wiped the sweat from his brow. It had been lost on the battlefield. Some dead man probably lay with it firmly grasped in his lifeless hand. The one connection to his life before now, the one thing that could rip him from his world filled with freedom, lay out there, somewhere in the vast desert sands filled with the bodies he had slain today. Men who were cut down for no purpose save for their loyalty to whatever forces sought to make him a memory. He squeezed his eyes shut and wiped the sweat from his brow

He concentrated, trying to feel the medallion. If it were still on this planet, in this plain, he would find it. The vibrations began deep inside his chest and worked their way out to his fingers and down to his toes. He imagined it in someone's hand. The medallion pulsed and glowed, calling out to him. His Djinn sight took over. He saw the hand, the perfectly formed, shapely hand whose long fingers and sharp nails slipped around the gold chain. It twined the chain around the fingers and clutched the medallion to a woman's breast.

A sharp pain hit him in the chest, rendering him breathless for a moment while he stood, dumbfounded, unable to speak. It was then that he lost the vision. Whoever she was, the woman possessed a great deal of magick. And she held his fate in her hands.

* * * * *

Caire watched the warrior stalk across the desert sands. His lips moved and his hand shook angrily at the sky. He threw his arms back and let out what she knew to be a warrior's cry.

Her heart raced in her chest when he looked up, as if he sensed her on the evening air. One hand was primed at his waist, prepared to unsheathe his dagger, while the other pushed his long, tangled hair from his face. Watching him move with catlike grace, she felt a tingling throughout her body.

She waved her hand across the mist, attempting to clear the image that had grown hazy. For six nights, she had watched the warrior make his way to Deh-wa. Tonight, he was right over her head. She closed her eyes and tilted her head up, imagining his feet planted on the earth that hung above her, shielding her and her people from the outside.

A knock on her door interrupted her thoughts of the man.

“Enter.” She opened her eyes and blew the mist from her scrying mirror, clearing the image.

“Madame.” Her guard bowed to her and then stood.

“Please, no formalities. Tell me the news.”

“A band is prepared to leave at sundown. And something has been found for you. One of the boys took it from the hand of a dying man.”

Her heart leapt into her throat. “The boys? One of the children was out?” Every time one of her people ventured above ground, it placed them all in danger. Only the most trusted soldiers dared explore the upper world, and then only under the cover of night.

“Pardon me for speaking such. No. Not one of the children. One of the lower soldiers. A scout. He found this.” Jakar opened his fist, allowing the golden triangle to fall from his fingers and into her hand.

She closed her eyes and was immediately assaulted with images of the warrior who last owned the medallion. “Thank you, Jakar.” She twisted the chain into her fist, letting it rest on her fingers before clutching it to her breast.

“Do you wish us to strike tonight?”

She nodded. The decision had already been made.

“Jakar, do not harm him.” She knew even as she spoke the words that the man was immune to harm. After having watched him battle for days, waiting for him to approach, to come near the opening to her world, she knew what a strong and invincible warrior he was. This was the reason she had chosen him. If she were to journey to the surface, she would need his protection. Of course, there was also the matter of her throbbing need for him, but that would be met soon enough. No man could resist her. She hoped.

“Have you seen him fight, ma’am? No one shall harm him.” Jakar’s dark eyes smiled when he spoke. It was likely that her warriors would be harmed before he was.

“Then do not allow him to harm my men. Your lives are precious to me.” All the lives of those who lived in the Tu’at were important. Their existence defied the logic of men. To lose one would be traumatic.

“Yes, but our livelihood rests on your finding a champion in this man. We all know the risk, Your Highness. And it is one we willingly take.” Jakar made a low bow before leaving Caire to contemplate the necklace she held between her fingers.

She held up the medallion and inspected it, carrying it with her to the mirror. The carvings were beautiful, unique, and otherworldly. “It’s as I suspected,” she whispered to herself as she ran her fingers across the metal. Snakes intertwined with vines and all surrounded a cloud of smoke. The back held a cryptic incantation. She could recite it without looking at the words. One thing her father had taught her was how to manipulate all the inhabitants of the earth. And that included the Djinn and their kind.

Caire had never used her abilities for personal gain, but every day, she grew closer to her breaking point. If the need between her thighs didn’t drive her, the emptiness in her heart surely would. The thought of becoming like her father, cold and alone, frightened her. Still, she considered using her powers. Just once.

“Goddess Hecate of old, mother Persephone, guide me. Show me the way.” With a wave of her hand, the man appeared once more.

Every hair on her arms stood on end as she watched him. This man would change her life. He stopped. She knew he felt her just as she felt him. If she concentrated hard enough, she could feel his breath against her neck, feel his skin sliding against hers. She shook herself. He would be here soon enough, and then they could discover more about destiny together.

Placing his medallion around her neck, she tucked it against her cleavage, letting it rest against her breasts, knowing its loss was the source of his frustration. It lay warm against her skin, pulsing in time with her heart. She inhaled and tasted his scent in her throat. There was no doubt in her mind; he was the one.

“Come to me,” she whispered, knowing she must prepare for him. Everything should be ready. She threw open her door and called to her dressing maid. “I shall be out for a while. I must speak to Lakan. I should like for you to prepare the next chamber for a guest. A very important guest.”

The walk to Lakan’s quarters was not a long one, but it was enough for her to decide a plan of action. If this man was who she thought he was, she would need more than one plan, because he would challenge every obstacle, every strategy she could set into place.

Pushing open the large door, she stepped into the apothecary’s chamber and was instantly greeted by the scent of wildflowers and herbs. The smoke stemming from the fireplace swept out to welcome her, winding itself into her hair. The old man greeted her with a smile and a warm embrace. “My child, what brings you here this night?”

She pulled the medallion from her blouse and watched the man’s eyes glitter as he gazed upon the jewel. “This. Tell me it is what I think.” Placing the gold medallion into the old man’s withered hands, she bit her lip, awaiting his response, wondering if all her girlish fancies were about to come true.

“The Djinn. Have you captured one? You know how they dislike bondage.” His rich laughter echoed throughout the room as he stepped aside, offering her entrance. “Would you like some tea?”

“Yes, please. So, it *is* a Djinn medallion.” She sank down onto one of the low cushions he had scattered around the floor, allowing the scent of his herbal concoctions to infuse her brain. Perhaps she should ask for one, a potion to make herself more desirable to the man she planned to capture.

“Yes, it is a Djinn’s. Tell me, how did you come to separate him from his medallion? To do so is quite an achievement.” He turned his back and began boiling the water with an incantation.

“It was not around his neck. He had removed it and lost it in battle.”

“A djahdan?” He gave her his full attention now. It was common knowledge that no one in the Tu’at had encountered a djahdan.

“Yes.”

“These marks indicate his family lineage. His is royalty.” The old man’s eyes shone as he focused for a brief moment on Caire’s face.

“I care not about his titles. I think he’s the one.” As she spoke the words, her heart’s steady beating increased. He *was* the one, of this she was certain, but she could never tell Lakan of her involvement with Ari, something that placed her entire kingdom in danger.

“The one?” He handed her a cup of tea and then took his place on a cushion across from her.

“Yes. The first. I think he’s the one I have waited for. The one the prophecy speaks of.” Even speaking the words out loud made her heart beat wildly with anticipation.

“Child, the prophecy has been in place for thousands of years.” Lakan did not believe in the prophecy. “And it is yet to come to fruition. And you believe now that it has come?” The laughter in Lakan’s voice seeped into her skin, igniting the anger she knew she must subdue. Caire refused to believe this was a hoax.

“Yes, I do.”

“Why did I not feel it?” He folded his arms and turned his weathered blue eyes to her, scolding her as he had when she was a child.

“It is my prophecy. It is not for you to feel.” She raised her chin, defying the old man’s words.

“You think highly of your skills as a priestess.”

“You forget my father,” She smiled in order to hide her irritation.

He laughed at the mention. “Few could forget your father.”

“It is he. I feel it. Here.” She placed her fist against her heart. “And now that I know this is his medallion, I know what I must do.”

“So you seek to end this war, the one that threatens to control two lands? The one that has not yet erupted?”

“It is what I was sent here for, why I have been allowed to live so long. You know that I must.”

He nodded slowly. “Then you must go above.”

“Yes. And I must marry him. He is the only one who can protect me, and I am the only one who can protect him.”

“So you must.”

“You know it is the only way.”

“Your father will not be pleased.”

“My father has more than his share of problems. I assure you he will not notice my absence.”

When had Hades ever given more than a passing glance to the daughter he had practically exiled on Desert Moon? She certainly wouldn’t allow him to interfere now. There was a time when she had been young and reckless, when she had felt the need for his approval. No more. The one thing she needed above all else was the Djinn who would end

the conflict causing a rift between Earth and Desert Moon. In the process, she hoped he would capture her heart.

Chapter Three

The warrior's roar met her before she entered the room. Most people would run in fear of his echoing curses, but a smile spread across her satisfied lips. He had come. Caire crossed the room, reveling in the excitement of what lay just beyond the door. Her man, her destiny, the one who would change her life, was finally in Tu'at. Quickly, she brought his medallion to her lips and planted a kiss on it before replacing it within the bodice of her red silk gown. He would be unable to resist her, she was certain. If by some chance he was able to do so, she would have to find a way to break through his shell.

She threw open the door to see him there, chains wrapped around his waist and wrists. For the first time in a long time, her pulse quickened in anticipation as she ran her tongue along her bottom lip. He looked like a wild animal as he struggled against six of her strongest men.

"What shall we do with him, my lady?" Jakar asked, clearly out of breath.

"Bring him into my chamber." She stepped back, allowing the men entry. Her gaze locked onto the deep blue eyes of the warrior. His war cry became a growl as his lips turned up in a snarl. "Leave us," she directed the men as soon as he stepped completely into the room. She fought back the urge to run her hands along his beautifully bare chest. She'd have

to remember to thank Ari later, no matter what the price. Standing inches from him, she could feel his hot breath brush against the rise and fall of her chest.

“Release me, and I shall let you live.” His voice was strong, deep, and warned of the sensations it would send through her as it vibrated against her bare skin.

“There is no need for threats.” She softened her voice, hoping he would do the same, even though she suspected the man did not possess a soft tone. There was nothing soft about him, in fact. Circling around him, she took in his massive size.

He was even more impressive in person than he had been in the mirror. His angular nose and square jaw only accented the fierce look in his eyes. His long black hair was wild and untamed, falling well below the middle of his back. Shoulders almost as large as her doorway melted into a massive chest that tapered down into a still more impressive waist. A line of black hair began just below his navel, warning her of the pleasures that lay just beneath the surface of his well-worn pants.

“Who are you and what do you want?” he growled.

“I am Caire.” She took a step back, eyeing the chains encircling his wrists and ankles. He held his hands in tight fists, forcing the veins in his arms to show themselves, making him look even more savage than when she’d watched him battle the enemy above ground.

“You are enemy to Prince Cael?”

“No, I am not. Prince Cael has plenty of enemies. He does not need me as one. My mission is quite simple. I have an offer for you, one you will be unable to refuse.” She was confident. No man would refuse immortality. It was offered to very few, and even then only after inhuman feats. For this one, her only desire was that they wed, offering her a way to keep her kingdom and put an end to the war that was brewing above the surface. A war that, she was certain, he would have a hand in starting when it finally did erupt.

“I doubt that.” His wild blue eyes swept over her body, making her realize what she already knew to be true -- he wouldn’t be able to resist her. She knew her beauty was

legendary, even if no one knew she actually existed. As ruler of the dead, she had never seen the light of day.

“I shall unchain you, and you and I shall talk. First, your name.” Tapping her bottom lip, she attempted to play the role of calm, confident leader, when in reality, her insides had all but melted.

“I shall give you nothing of me.” The defiance in his eyes was praiseworthy, but she knew she would break him.

All she had to do was keep up her ruse of self-importance. She reached out to stroke his arm, noting the way it tensed under her touch, noting the way his breathing changed at the contact. There was no denying the current of heat that ran through her body as the tips of her fingers brushed against his battleworn skin. Sliding against such a hard, strong man would bring her every fantasy to life. “I think you shall. Your name.”

“I have no name.” His jaw was set, his teeth clenched as she continued to stroke his arm. She dared move her fingers to his broad chest, settling them over his heart. His skin was tight, warm beneath her touch. She bit her bottom lip, inhaling his scent, which went straight from her nostrils and into her heart. She could fall in love with him.

“I think you do have a name,” she purred. “And I should like to have it from you. One way or another.” She flashed him a wicked grin. This was the man she wanted, the one she needed, the one who would help her fulfill her destiny. Placing her palms against his chest, she reveled in the warmth there. Touching him was electrifying, starting a myriad of sensations in her fingertips only to have them travel down to her toes. His skin was soft, but the muscle beneath it was hard as ancient stone, making her wonder just how hard the rest of him would be if she could convince him to stay with her. She must convince him to stay. The effect he had on her while he stood before her in chains was enough to make her want to seduce him. Her head reeled from the sensation of touching his flesh. Nothing he could say would ever convince her that he wasn’t the one who would be her husband.

“Do you wish to kill me? Entire armies of men have tried to eliminate me, and none have been successful. A mere woman will not destroy me.”

She removed her hand and took a step backward, contemplating his harsh tone. “I do not wish to destroy you, warrior. I wish to marry you.” She settled onto the bed that stood a few feet from where he remained in chains.

“Then you might as well kill me now, for I shall marry no one.” The challenge in his eyes was clear, but still she held hope. He didn’t know the gift she could give him.

“Are you a civilized man?” She reclined, hoping the position would show off her legs, would tempt him in the same way he was tempting her just by standing there, throwing mental daggers at her with his wild eyes.

“You tell me. You have me in chains.” The hint of sarcasm in his voice made her sit up, lean forward, and offer him a view of her cleavage.

“If I set you free, will you wrap your hands around my neck and kill me, or will you clean yourself, prepare for dinner, and dine with me? You and I can come to an arrangement that will benefit us both, I assure you.” Her confidence was wavering even as she tried to remain in control. She realized now why no one had ever captured a djahdan before. Their will was as strong as their bodies.

“I do not have time for this. Release me now.” He pulled at the chains to emphasize his point.

“Release yourself.” She pulled a pillow beneath her head and turned on her side before looking at him again, hoping to tease him with her lack of concern. “You can release yourself, can you not?”

“Woman, don’t think I can’t have you even while I’m in chains. Do you dare tempt a dangerous man?”

She was aware of his gaze on her breasts, which heaved beneath his focus. The fire that burned within her threatened to rage out of control unless he chose to douse it. She hoped he would. Taking a deep breath, she drew in her confidence once more.

"It is all about temptation. Me tempting you. You tempting me." Her hand went to her neck, and she slid a finger beneath the gold chain, pulling the medallion from its hiding place. "By the way, did you lose something?"

His eyes narrowed. "Where did you get that?"

"You lost it today on the battlefield. Not too careful with your trinkets. And now it is mine. Would you like it back? I could slip it around your neck and..." She stood and strolled back toward him, removing the necklace as she spoke, as if she were preparing to return it to its owner. If he were a djahdan, he would never allow her to enslave him this way. Her pulse quickened as their eyes met in challenge.

"No." The urgency of his voice stunned her.

"And why not? It's such a pretty thing." Her fingers tensed as they wrapped around the medallion and rubbed along the engraving.

"Release me, and you and I shall talk," he said finally as he lowered his eyes to the medallion.

There was something very strange about this man who went from someone determined to someone who seemed almost eager to please. Yet he didn't want the medallion that secured his identity as a djahdan. "Release you?" She'd love to give him a release he'd never forget. For now, she would settle for dinner.

"It is what you desire, is it not?" His eyes were a cold mask now, covering his anger as he tried to outsmart her, proving he was a worthy companion.

"Yes, it's my desire to release you. But why are you agreeing to it now?" To be honest, Caire knew very little about the djahdan or their abilities. As a Djinn, he would be bound to grant her wishes, to bend to her desires. As a djahdan, who knew what powers he held?

“No questions. Just do it.” He held his wrists in front of him.

She shrugged. “Fine. I shall call Jakar with the key. Then you shall bathe and meet me for dinner?”

“Is it your wish?”

“Yes, it is my wish.” She ran her tongue along her bottom lip. Dinner and dessert, preferably with a little heat mixed in.

“Then I shall.” His blue eyes cut into her, sending a shiver down her back as his words belied his demeanor. This warrior was not a man accustomed to giving in.

“Jakar,” she called, never taking her eyes from the handsome warrior’s rugged face. “Release him, please. And see him to the guestroom off the hall. Have Vendela bring in women and water to bathe him. Be sure he is comfortable.”

“Yes, my lady.” Jakar made a bow before removing the key from his belt.

The chains fell to the floor, and Ah-ten groaned, apparently satisfied to be free of them.

“Thank you.” Caire nodded toward Jakar before turning back to her prisoner. “I will see to your needs here,” she promised the warrior. “You shall want for nothing.”

“I already want for nothing.”

“We shall see.”

Ah-ten followed the man out of the room, leaving behind the curiously intriguing woman. Intriguing because she didn’t appear to know who or what she had captured. Or what the medallion she had carelessly slung around her neck could do. It was his fault for not being more careful with it, and now it lay in the hands of a mortal woman. He knew how to deal with mortal women. He would cater to her basic desires, doing nothing more than he must until he found a way to remove himself from this place. And if he fulfilled her little wishes, like having dinner with her, perhaps he could keep her desires from ruling them both.

Being agreeable was not in his nature, but tonight, it seemed advantageous to everyone if he did not stir the ire of the woman who had done in an hour what no man had been able to accomplish in three thousand years. She had captured him without the aid of magick and without seeing his true form.

Ah-ten entered the room as directed by Jakar. The surroundings surprised him, making him wonder who his captor was that she could afford such luxuries. This was not the kind of place a man like him had become accustomed to. It was the kind of place he had once known another lifetime ago, when he hadn't been a djahdan. The room looked much like the woman's room, except rather than decorations with rich, dark colors like red and deep purple, it was pristine white with hints of green throughout. The bed was high and large, just as hers had been, but this one was piled high with green and gold pillows.

"The women shall be in to bathe you." Jakar made a low bow. "The bathing room is just inside this doorway, if you desire to get comfortable. The water in the pool is warm and luxurious. You shall find this place to be very desirable."

"I do not desire to stay here." He folded his arms and attempted to remain defiant, but there was something in the sparkling green of the other man's eyes that told him the two could be friends.

"Yes, but the princess desires you."

"We shall see." If she were in fact a princess, then she was one Ah-ten had not yet come to know. He had made it a point to learn all of Desert Moon's royalty, by name if not by sight, on his quest for freedom. This woman did not fit any description he had encountered.

"Be kind to her. She means you no harm." Jakar bowed again before taking his leave.

Ah-ten opened the door to the bathing room and was not disappointed by the sight. A large, rectangular bath sat in the center of the room, surrounded by small trees and candles. Soft music played, reminding him of his home, his Djinn home. Incense burned in a holder,

intoxicating him with the scent of nag champa, a fragrance that had been with the Djinn since time immemorial. How had the princess come to know the secrets of his kind?

He stripped off his clothing and carefully stepped into the water, which was so warm that steam rose up to greet him. His weary body welcomed the warmth licking at his toes and then making its way up to his waist as he sank into its depths. Closing his eyes, he let the peaceful surroundings infuse his system. His muscles protested the thought of ever leaving this place. He'd heard stories of warriors who were taken by seductive women only to be lost for decades before returning to their rightful worlds.

He let his mind wander to the mysterious Caire. He'd never heard of a princess by this name, which made him wonder about the location of her kingdom. He remembered two things about his journey here -- first, that it was extremely short; second, that he had crossed through a waterfall. His captors had immediately blindfolded him, preventing him from seeing where they were going or how they arrived.

Ah-ten could not concern himself with this place, mysterious or otherwise. He had joined Prince Cael for one purpose -- to attain passage to the sacred waters whose legendary powers were his only hope. The only way to do that was to find their keeper, a woman who was a mystery herself. She was believed to be the only one on Desert Moon who held the key to transforming the waters into the elixir sought by Ah-ten and his djahdan brethren. If his brother Creed had learned of his imprisonment, he would be here shortly to relieve the princess of his medallion, and he could continue his quest for Hades's daughter.

Caire. His thoughts strayed back to the woman who had interrupted his plans, however temporarily. *Luscious* was one way to describe the siren. Her long white hair hung to her waist and was filled with curls and curves. Her dark gray eyes should have been soulless, resembling empty pits. Instead, they were alive with warmth and desire. His flesh responded to the memory of her hand on his chest. It had been a long time since a woman had touched him without his permission. This one met his fierce gaze with no fear. Even when she

released him, she didn't back down, holding her back straight, jutting out her ample breasts, making him wonder how it would feel to cup them in his hands.

His cock sprung to life in reaction to the thought. A woman like her would be an equal match, someone who wouldn't cower from him and who wouldn't be demanding of him. She could easily control him with the medallion, yet she made no demands other than to know his name. Even that she conceded.

His eyes shot open when he heard the door behind him open and close. His reaction was to reach for the sword he knew wasn't there. Forcing himself to relax, he dipped his arm back into the water and rested his head against the side of the pool. The women were here to wash him. It was best to allow them. A half-smile crossed his face. Women pleasuring him would be quite a change.

* * * * *

Caire wanted to run her hands along the man's broad chest, to explore the tiny thatch of hair just below his navel, to take his tight nipples between her teeth and watch his deep blue eyes smolder with gold as she had seen so many times in her dreams. But she waited with baited breath, hoping she could subdue him enough, hoping her incense and smoke trick would entice him so that he would willingly come to her. Anything to have her hands in his hair, his body pumping into hers.

Her breath caught in her throat as she watched the women bathe him. Their tiny breasts floated on the water, just out of reach of his mouth as he sat in the tub, submerged to the waist in the warm, clear water. She would have gone to him herself if she had not meant to test his reaction to the women. In the seconds when they had met, he claimed to be a man who could not be owned by women. Her heart pounded against her chest as she sat in the shadows, anticipation flowing all through her body.

Medina, one of the young girls with long, dark hair, ran her hands along his chest, leaving a trail of lather in their wake. He tilted his head back as a lazy smile crossed his face.

The man might proclaim to be immune to women, but he certainly seemed to be enjoying his treatment at their skilled hands. Corine stood behind him, lathering his thick hair, twisting the dark mass in her small, white hands.

Caire inhaled a deep breath, wishing she were the one standing behind him, his head on her chest as she wove her fingers through his hair. One command was all it would take to empty the pool of the others. Then she could take her time exploring the warrior's body, taking in his ample chest, the thick mass of hair that covered it, sliding her fingers down lower to wrap around his cock.

Watching the others surround him both aroused her and angered her. She should be the one attending him. The desire to stand, announce her presence, take control of the situation, was strong, but before she could move, he reached out and took Medina's breast into his hand and gently coaxed her forward.

Caire's wetness came as no surprise. She had watched others have sex before and had been more than intrigued by their actions. But tonight, watching the man she longed to have, a new surge of yearning swept through her, one that was so much stronger than anything else she'd ever felt.

He let out a low moan, deep enough for her to hear as the sound echoed through the stillness in the room. Corine had ducked beneath the water and no doubt had his cock in her mouth. Caire licked her lips, imagining how it would feel to have them stretched over his thick rod, his hands buried in her hair as she licked and sucked, moving on top of him.

She reclined on the chaise, still hidden in the shadows, her eyes intent upon watching the women as they pleased Ah-ten. Spreading her legs, she imagined him raising himself above her, placing his cock in her mouth. Her hand wandered down her stomach to graze against her soft patch of hair. She let it linger there for a second, imagining how his tongue would feel if it were to sweep against her while she stroked him. Then her fingers moved lower, closing over her clit, which was already swollen with anticipation.

Corine came up for air as Medina slipped from Ah-ten's arms and slid into the water. Corine sat astride him, her breasts pressing into his face as his fingers dug into her back. Caire couldn't see, but knew that he had Corine's breasts in his mouth, lavishing attention on one and then the other. From the sounds of the moans floating out to her, Caire imagined his skilled tongue moving swiftly, followed by his teeth, which would sink into her flesh, gently biting, bringing her to ecstasy.

Finally, her fingers slipped into her wet warmth. One hand moved to cover her breast, to squeeze her nipple as she imagined what Ah-ten was doing. The other worked furiously at her wet pussy, attempting to bring herself to orgasm as she watched Ah-ten take turns with the maid's breasts. She longed for him to lift them out of the water and glide them over his cock, which she somehow knew would be thick and large with deep purple veins that begged to be squeezed to release.

Her fingers weren't enough. Not when the man who was the object of her obsession possessed something so much larger than her fingers. The table next to the chaise held an assortment of fruit, as did most rooms in her palace. Her men had used various items on her before, but her favorite was the jolen fruit, which was long and thick with a bulbous end and did resemble a penis when it wasn't peeled.

Closing one hand around the fruit, she used the other one to slide her underclothing down her thighs. Her hand shook with anticipation as she imagined Ah-ten again, rising above her, positioning his cock at her opening, threatening to take her in one long, swift thrust. The fruit lay there, just on the edge, nothing but the tip pressed against her hole. Her teeth closed over her bottom lip as she slid the fruit in, all in one motion, filling herself completely.

The moan that escaped her throat joined with Medina's moans as Ah-ten now lifted her out of the pool. Corine followed, her breasts gently dancing with her movements. Rather than placing the women on the opposite end of the pool, Ah-ten led them just feet away

from where Caire lay. He had to have been blinded by lust not to see her in the shadows, not to hear her as she pleased herself.

Medina got down on all fours, positioning her opening so that Caire could see her tight pussy wink in the light. Corine lay in front of her, her legs spread wide so Medina could bury her face there. The women were both skilled with their tongues. Caire knew this firsthand. Both had licked her to orgasm more than once. Often, they would join Caire's favorite men, covering her body with hands, tongues, and come. But tonight, they were pleasuring the man Caire wanted more than she wanted to breathe. The thought sent a sliver of pain through her, even as the fruit lay buried within her cunt.

Ah-ten's cock was amazing as he positioned it at Medina's opening. He took her as Caire had imagined, all at once, in one long thrust. Her hand slid back down to the fruit as she watched him cling to Medina's hips and thrust, his long hair swaying as he moved, catching the light, bouncing against his back.

Caire moved the fruit in and out with a renewed vigor. One hand squeezed her nipple while she watched Medina's tongue lap at Corine's juices and listened to the sounds of Ah-ten sliding in and out of the wet maid. The sounds of Caire's pussy joined them, forming a symphony of fucking as the three women let out soft, low moans. One hand closed over her mouth as her other hand continued its assault on her pussy. She had been taken softly and violently before and loved all manner of sex.

Tonight, she longed for brutal sex with the warrior who claimed to not need a woman. Corine's breasts jiggled from the force of Ah-ten fucking Medina. Caire's breasts moved from the force of her fucking herself with the fruit. The desire to move from the chaise and spread her legs, demanding that the women eat her while she sucked Ah-ten, was so strong that she almost moved, almost revealed herself.

They all seemed to come at the same time. Ah-ten's head leaned back and a low howl shot from his lips as his hips stilled. Medina's ass slapped against him, milking him, begging for more of his hot seed. Her moans slammed against Corine's pussy as the woman let out a

cry, her orgasm ripping through her, as well. And Caire's heart almost stopped in her throat when she came so hard she was sure she bruised the fruit that lay buried inside her.

It took a few seconds for the room to come back clearly into view. Ah-ten lay on the floor, his back to Caire. Medina took the opportunity to sit on Corine's face while Corine licked the come from Medina's body. The two women loved to fuck even more than Caire did and often licked their lovers' come from each other's pussies. They had also licked come from Caire's more times than she could count. Jealousy flooded her, making her wish the two tempting beauties had not been sent to Ah-ten, who was obviously enjoying watching their love play.

Ordinarily, Caire would have enjoyed it, too, but the moment had passed. What she wanted now was to proclaim her presence here and take Ah-ten into her body, removing the taint of any woman who had taken him before. She pulled the fruit from her pussy and straightened her clothing, determined to have him now.

Ah-ten lay on his side, watching the two women pleasure each other. His cock grew hard again as the dark-haired one buried her face in the other one's pussy. All it would take would be a simple command, and one of them would sit on his face while the other rode his cock. But for some reason, tonight he wanted something more. His thoughts drifted back to the one who had captured him, who held him here, enslaved. She might have brought him here in chains, but he was determined that she would be the one to leave thusly.

One look at her had been enough to make him want to sink his cock into her body, a desire he hadn't had for a long time. If it weren't for her, he would not have taken the woman who lay before him. He had always been a man who could control his needs, but tonight, something had changed that, and he didn't like it one bit.

The next time he saw the wench, he would toss her back onto her satin sheets, drive himself into her body, and watch those gray eyes of hers smolder with desire. Her body had

been made for sin, and Ah-ten was a sinful man. Reaching down, he took his shaft into his hand and slowly began stroking it as he watched the women play. He wondered if Caire had ever had her pussy licked by another woman, if she lay back and allowed her maids to tease her clit, to fill her cunt with their fingers, to spread her open and taste her honey.

If she were his woman, he would take her every night, and he would find ways to pleasure her that she had only dreamed of. There would be a woman on hand at all times to do nothing save for lavish her pussy with tongue baths. But he had no desire to have her as his woman. None.

He moved closer to the women and sank his fingers into the light-haired one's hole. She was wet beyond belief as she turned her body for him, positioning her hole right in his face. From this angle, she almost looked like her mistress. Her body was not as curvy, but her hair had the same iridescent glow of firelight against white silk. He took a handful of it and twisted his fingers around it as he pulled himself up and drove into her before he could reconsider.

Using her hair as leverage, he pounded away as he felt the other woman move beneath him to lick at his balls as they passed. His cock grazed against her chin as she lapped at the other woman's pussy, teased her clit. Yes, this was what he wanted to do to the princess. He wanted to love her while one of her servants licked at her folds, teased her hardened bud, reached up and grabbed her nipples.

Releasing her hair, his fingers dug into the woman's hips, pulling her back with such force, he was afraid he would hurt her. Her moans only drove his desire as she squeezed against him, encouraging him to fuck her even harder. The sound of his balls slapping against the other woman's face became a rhythm for him as he continued to fuck, hoping his release would come soon.

Her white-blond hair brushed against his cock when she threw her head back in release. His heart pounded in his chest, but still he couldn't come. It was too soon since loving the first woman. This one's cries became shrill, high-pitched, and he wondered if he

was hurting her. Looking down, he realized he had dug valleys into her hips with his sharp fingernails. He released her, cringing at the half moons that now graced her otherwise flawless skin.

Pulling himself from her body, Ah-ten tried to catch his breath, tried to regain control over his wildly fluctuating emotions. He had to find the princess, had to bury himself deep inside her. To hell with any plan for redemption or anything else. For the first time, he no longer cared. The only thing that mattered to him at this moment was the princess's soft skin and the pleasure he knew existed between her thighs.

"Leave me, now," he commanded the two women, who had made their way over to him, their eager mouths ready to repeat their performance.

"As you wish, my lord," one of them bowed her head and then both scurried out the door. He didn't even look up to watch their tight asses as they moved away. Instead, he made his way back into the pool, hoping to drown away thoughts of the princess, the one woman he did not need in his head.

He closed his eyes as he sank back into the warm water, relishing in the scent of fresh flowers, which infiltrated its way into his head. One set of footsteps made its way to the pool, the soft clicking of a woman's shoes setting the rhythm of his breathing.

The water pulsed around him, lapping at his chest when she entered the pool, causing the water, which had stilled, to swirl with movement. He lifted his arms out of the water, resting them along either side of the top edge of the bath, opening himself to her ministrations.

When her hot hand made contact with his chest, his eyes widened and his hand leapt to life, encircling her wrist.

"You."

"Yes, me. Is there a problem?" Her deep eyes looked up at him innocently, but he knew she understood his surprise.

"You were to send attendants to me." Perhaps she knew that he had already made a meal of her attendants. Her face was unreadable.

"And they were all occupied. It is a busy time. You don't mind, do you?"

Mind? Her breasts were hidden by the ripples of water, but he had a very vivid imagination, thinking their ample size should allow them to float up to the surface. "Do you often wash your prisoners?"

"You are a guest." She moved toward him, a bottle of soap in one hand and a cleaning cloth in the other. "And you shall be treated as such."

"Do you treat all guests in this manner?" He cursed the lazy drawl of his voice, wishing he had the desire to recapture his earlier growl. He hated to admit that he had allowed himself to become too comfortable here.

She smiled, sending her amusement all the way to her eyes -- and blood straight to his cock. "No. But you are not just any guest."

When she rose above him, standing to lift her body out of the water, her breasts came fully into view. The sight of the rosy peaks would have pleased him beyond all belief had his gold medallion not been situated between the two mounds. Surely she knew the incantation. She could enslave him with the words so that he would never be allowed to leave, if only she would. Perhaps she was toying with him, making him wonder when she would use the magick to control him. At the moment, his lower region was thinking for him, having been awakened by the women before and then by thoughts of the princess.

"And you are no real princess." He let the words slip out through his teeth as he wondered how her breast would feel in his mouth.

"I assure you I am." She squeezed the amber bottle, allowing the liquid to flow onto the cloth. He watched as her hands worked the liquid into lather. She looked down at him and smiled again. "Where shall I begin?"

“Where would you like to begin?” The sex and subsequent release had addled his brain. This was the only explanation for his sudden teasing. That and the fact that, in his mind, he had just been buried inside the woman who now stood before him, naked.

Her eyes flashed, letting him know they were both thinking the same thing. He’d love to have her riding his cock until the morning, but right now, he had to figure out where he was and why the “princess” was naked in his bath.

She didn’t answer him. Instead, she advanced, letting the cloth lie against his chest for a second before she began rubbing the soap into his skin. The scent of a thousand flowers assaulted his senses at once. And then something else. Sandalwood, perhaps. Maybe patchouli. Manly fragrances that mixed with the floral essence she wore. The aromas were causing his brain to formulate image after image of the two of them naked, wrapped up in one another.

“You have a warrior’s body,” she commented as her hands began working on his shoulders. She leaned into him, allowing her breasts to hang right in his face. If he were so inclined, he could lean in for a taste. In fact, he could take them into his mouth, then turn her over and impale her on his throbbing cock in one motion, and she’d never know to protest. Instead, he closed his eyes and inhaled her scent, allowing her to wash him.

“I should like to wash your legs, as well, if you’ll lift yourself out of the water and sit on the edge.”

His eyes shot open at the suggestion. Surely she was teasing. Could she really be as bold as she appeared? He held her gray gaze with his as he lifted himself out of the bath, his erection evident, and sat on the edge of the pool.

“Quite nice,” she smiled as her glance slid across his manhood.

Her hands began at his knees and worked their way down to his feet, carefully rubbing each area with a light touch. All his nerve endings awakened to her touch. Everything about her set him on fire. She gently worked on his feet and then slowly moved up. First one thigh,

then the next. His cock stood at attention, waiting, longing for her gentle touch. When she took him firmly in one hand, he gasped for breath.

His hand covered over hers. “You know not what you do.”

Her determined eyes held his, making him realize just how obstinate she was. “I know exactly what I do, Ah-ten. And now you shall listen to me.”

He released her hand, but not before pulling it away from his cock. He slid down into the water and captured her waist with one arm. Hauling her against him, pressing his length into her stomach, he looked down at her. “How do you know my name?”

Chapter Four

Caire's heart caught in her chest. The anger shooting from his eyes was like that of the fairytale imp whose identity was uncovered. Of course, she knew who he was, knew what he was. She also knew that she could offer him something he would never refuse. But she'd hoped to seduce him with her body, as well.

She looked up into his dark blue eyes, hoping for a sign of desire to match that planted against her right now. Instead, all she saw was a mask of fury. Even the low growl emitting from his throat did not have a hint of desire but rather a tinge of rage.

"I know all about you. You think I would risk my entire kingdom for anything less, anyone less? Now, release me, and I shall answer your questions." She pulled away from him, hoping to steady her racing heart with the distance.

"Do you plan to enslave me?"

"I have no desire to control you. I told you what I wish. You and I shall marry."

"And I told you I will marry no one. Even if you seek to control me, use the trinket as you call it, I will never be yours. You might own my body, but you will never have my soul."

“I do not wish for your soul. Wash yourself, then I shall tell you anything you wish to know.” The pain in her chest was quickly fought down. He had so willingly joined with Medina and Corine, yet he resisted her -- the one he should desire above the others.

She rose, stepped out of the water, and grabbed a towel. Wrapping it around her body, she avoided the eyes she still felt on her back. He had no reason to trust her, and who could blame him? She had had him captured and brought here, and now she expected him to understand why she needed him.

Cursing herself for her impatience, Caire stood behind the dressing screen and replaced the dress she'd removed earlier. Swallowing her hurt, she focused on the task at hand. Time was essential if her plan was to work. Ah-ten might have thought he and his army were working their way to the Deh-wa holdings, but in truth, they were heading toward an ambush of grand proportions. One that could lead to the destruction of life on Desert Moon. And his brother Ari had laid the trap.

“I am ready for those answers,” he called.

She stepped out from behind the screen and let her gaze wander down his frame, which had been covered with a loose white robe. It clung to his chest, accenting the already bulging muscles. She didn't allow her eyes to stray further down to see if his cock were still primed and ready for her. It was best to lay the truth out on the table, as it were. She could always seduce him later.

“I have food in my chamber. I hope you are hungry.”

She slipped on her shoes, then led him back into his main chamber and out into the hall. There were no guards tonight, all of them having been alerted of Ah-ten's presence. There was always an added danger when someone went out into the night. Even more so if anyone was ever brought into Tu'at. Tonight, all guards were at the entrances, hoping they had not been followed.

"I apologize for my behavior," she began as soon as they were seated on the pillows, which were scattered around the low tables.

"I want answers," he growled, his eyes on her body, raking over her as if she were his meal.

"And I have them. Wine?" She lifted the decanter and poured the red liquid into his glass.

"You first," he held the glass out for her to drink from. His gaze held hers fast as the liquid slid down her throat. She knew he didn't trust her, and with good reason.

"There. Satisfied? I know who you are, Ah-ten. I know you are a djahdan. Worse, you started this revolution. It is your blood they seek."

"Who seeks?" She had his attention with that statement. His hand stopped in mid-motion, the bread inches from his lips.

"Your brother."

"What does Ari have to do with this?"

"You know that when you left the Djinn, he was put in charge of rounding up the dissenters. You are the one who inspires those who continue to leave. There is a war brewing, Ah-ten, even as you and I sit here and enjoy this food. And it threatens to destroy our way of life."

"You speak as if you have something to lose. Tell me, Princess, who are you?"

"My people started this land. We made it what it is today. And then your war came. You brought it here. Those of you who escaped the earth when Atlantis fell, those responsible for the great deluge. And for twelve thousand years, my people have held it at bay. And then you and your kind decided you could no longer be enslaved by the humans. You gave up your immortality when Djinn laws forbade it. By disrupting the codes, you have disrupted the land. Do you not see it?"

He narrowed his eyes at her. "You are not human?"

“I am mortal. But I am not human.” She motioned toward the ceiling. “I am the daughter of a god and a human. And I have the power to end this war. But I need something only you can give me.”

“A husband?”

“A protector,” she corrected, fighting the urge to run her hands along his chest. He made it difficult to think, difficult to reason while her desire raged out of control.

“Why me?”

“You started this. You should end it.”

“I started nothing.”

“Yes, you did. I know all about your people, Ah-ten. I know your oldest brother, Creed, is the rightful Djinn heir, yet he refuses to take the throne for reasons even you do not understand. I know Ari wants ultimate power and will do what he can to seek it. And I know the weight on your chest. You feel responsible for everything having gone awry.”

“You know nothing of me.” He stood, looking like a hunter stalking his prey as he moved to the door.

“I know everything. And I know you are here for more reasons than you would have me know. You and I can work together. We can be allies in this attempt to realign the heavens, to reopen the portal to Earth, to unite our people.”

“You think you know me. You know nothing. You don’t know what’s inside my soul.” He turned and looked down at her with his deep blue eyes, the ferocity of a warrior shining therein, threatening her at the same time they washed over her body with a spark of desire.

“I can help you, Ah-ten. But you have to end this.”

Ah-ten stared at her, trying to see the truth in her words. Did she know about his family? About the pacts and honor and then dishonor that had plagued them for so long? Did she know that his sister, the one who could in reality put an end to everything, had been

missing for ten years? Did she know the pain in his chest as he looked at her, seeing his own soul reflected in her lonely eyes?

"I started nothing. I no longer wished to be at the whims of the humans. I wanted to control my fate."

"And so you have. You've controlled it to extinction. You removed this." She pulled the pendant from around her neck and placed it on the table in front of him. "And in doing so, you put us all in danger. You and your brother, who refuses to take his throne. Why is it that the Djinn throne has been empty for so long? Why is it that you would let someone undeserving take your father's place?"

"The council is in place..."

"The council is corrupt."

"As are you. Tell me, Princess, if that's what you call yourself, why did you enter the pool with me, naked?"

She bit her bottom lip, a motion that made his cock spring to life once more. When her eyes turned up to look at him, framed by her long lashes, he saw her for what she was -- a master seductress. "I wanted to seduce you."

Honesty. But it wasn't any kind of honesty he'd ever heard before. It was the kind that went straight to his already straining cock, making it difficult to think of anything other than having her hands on him again.

"And you wish to seek a bargain with me? With your body?"

"We don't have time to play this game. The people up there are in danger. And you and I must do something to prevent another flood. Do you understand that?"

"Up there? Where are we, exactly?"

"We are beneath the desert sands. This is Tu'at, the land of the dead."

"Which would make you the daughter of the damned." He leaned back, contemplating this knowledge, aware now that this woman and her waters of immortality were in fact the

woman and waters that he and Creed had sought. He sank back down next to her, knowing he was defeated. Creed had shut himself off to many of his Djinn gifts; otherwise he would have been able to tell Ah-ten where the woman resided. Now, he knew. And, it would appear, he was at her mercy.

"Yes, I am." She moved over him, her hand gripping his knee. He let his eyes lazily roam to the exposed cleavage, which still beckoned to him. The intensity of her grip brought them back to meet her gray eyes. "Please, you must help me."

"You could force me." He motioned toward the necklace, which still lay on the table. "You could enslave me, use the incantation. Why do you seek an agreement from me? You already know I will be bound to do whatever you wish."

"Because," her voice was low, strained, "you have to want it as much as I do."

"Want what?" his voice caught in his throat as her eyes softened. Her hold loosened to a light touch on his knee, one that he wished would raise itself just a little bit higher.

"This." She leaned into him, brushing her breasts against his chest as her lips moved up to skim over his. The light touch was all he needed to send him over the edge. He wanted to taste her, wanted to be inside her. But he feared it would cost him so much more than he was willing to give. The daughter of Death himself, a man -- no, a god -- whom Ah-ten knew only from legends of Earth. Surely there were laws, codes he knew nothing of, which would circumvent this and every moment he spent with her.

Her hair spilled forward, brushing against his bare chest, falling into his face as she deepened the kiss. He took her into his arms and fell back against the pillows, all the while allowing her lips to explore his. His hand slid up the side of her dress, feeling every curve of her hips, her waist, moving up to the rise of her breasts, which had teased him almost from the first moment he set eyes on her.

His cock, ever having a mind of its own, pressed against her, seeking out her warmth, knowing an invitation into her body was only seconds away. He wondered if he would have

the power to resist her charms as she moaned against his lips. He held his mouth firm, not yet ready to grant her entrance. When her hips writhed against him, he knew he had to take control or be lost to the vixen.

In one motion, he rolled her over and pressed her glorious breasts into him, reveling in their heat. One hand moved up to claim a fistful of her hair and pull her against him. He opened her mouth, darting his tongue between her full pink lips. His teeth grazed against the bottom lip that had held his attention earlier. When he inhaled, her essence shot through his body, intoxicating him, making him think of nothing save taking her.

“Stop, witch,” he groaned against her, not wanting to break the kiss, but knowing he could go no further without doing the one thing he wished to do.

“You want me, Ah-ten. You want to help me. You want to take me, bend me over, drive your hot shaft into my body. I’m wet for you, hot for you. Why don’t you just do it?” Her eyes held a challenge, one demanding to be met. He wouldn’t lose his soul to the daughter of the dead. Not until he knew exactly what the price was and if it would indeed be his soul.

“No. Not until you and I understand one another.” He sat up, pulling himself off her. The distance was not enough, so he stood and began pacing back and forth. “What is the price of marrying you?”

“There is no price. I need your protection.”

“And how do I offer it when you say I am unable to protect myself?”

“I can grant you something you long for, something you have been searching for ever since your secession.”

He stopped and turned to face her. “And that would be?”

“Immortality. I can give it to you.”

The one thing he longed for. Immortality with no strings. No servitude. “And how do you propose to do this?” He knew already. She would grant him access to the waters and to the elixir she could produce from it, but she would have a price.

“Because my people hold the key to life everlasting. I know where the sacred waters flow.”

He sat next to her, knowing she was right. The offer was one he could not refuse. He didn’t long for the power to grant wishes. What he did long for was a future without having to use his sword to protect his head, a future without looking for the enemy over the next rise. “You lie.” Ah-ten knew he must test her to be sure she was the one. If he brought a false goddess to his brother, they would both be in danger.

“No, I do not. I can tell you things you’ve only dreamt of. And I can give you the one thing you desire above all.”

She spread her legs, letting her soft skin linger against his before moving away, leaving his leg cold, aching to be touched. Right now, the one thing he desired was her. “What is the price? The codes of your people? What does it say about my joining with you?”

She stood and walked back to the bed, wrapping her arms around her body, her eyes not meeting his.

“What does it say?” His voice rose to meet his ire. There was something she wasn’t telling him.

“Nothing. It says nothing.” She still refused to face him, a sure sign that something wasn’t as it seemed.

“You lie, princess. And I shall not lift a finger to help you until you tell me the truth.”

“You won’t like the truth, Ah-ten.”

“I have no doubt about that.”

* * * * *

“These look like mere corridors to you, but I assure you that we are underground.”

Ah-ten followed her as she led him through a maze he knew he would never find the end to. Colors and lights were everywhere, brilliantly adorning every wall and running along the massive ceiling. Mosaics and paintings resembling those in ancient Egypt lined the path as lanterns hung over their heads. Ancient kings and gods kept company with mortals in the murals, reminding him of the thin balance on Earth and here on Desert Moon, a place his people had come to inhabit twelve thousand years ago.

“This is amazingly similar to Egypt.” He remembered Earth’s earliest civilizations, even those created after the Flood. Then, the portals between the two worlds had been opened, and Ah-ten had been a slave on two planets.

“You remember your homeland?”

“Not my homeland. I am a man of Babylon.”

“Ah, but before it was known as Babylon.” Her skirt swayed as she walked, whispering to him, inviting him to watch her curves as they moved beneath the fabric.

“Yes, before it was known as such. But I have fond memories of that land.”

“I thought you came with the first.”

“There was a time when my kind traveled between the two lands. Surely you know this.” In his youth, he had been free to travel even though he was enslaved by the humans, but when he removed the medallion, the portal was closed, separating the Earth’s Djinn from the evil influences of the djahdan.

She turned, throwing him a smile that almost stopped him in his tracks. “I had heard such.”

“I take it you put little stock in fairytales.”

“I put all stock in tales. The portal was once open for us all. And then things changed.”

“I changed them, you mean.”

“You and your kind. We are here.” She put a finger to her lips before pushing open the door. “This is the temple.”

He stepped into the room behind her, watching her hips move as she bent onto one knee and then rose again before turning back to him. Two large statues stood next to the altar, which was covered with a red cloth. One was of her father, no doubt. His fictional horns and forked tail were in place, but the smile on his face belied his fairytale nature. The lord of the dead was not the Satan of Earth. The woman who stood next to him appeared virginal and innocent except for the wickedly tempting body that was barely hidden by a veil of fabric. She looked every bit the siren, just as her daughter did. “These are your parents?”

“Not exactly. A likeness of each done by an Earthling before the portal was closed.”

“And they are here for what purpose? Surely you do not worship them.” He folded his arms as he watched her approach the altar.

“There is no worship involved. We provide; we take. We owe nothing to fictional gods nor to those who exist. What we do live by is the word of the prophets. And this is their decree.” She took a large black book from the altar and pushed it into his hands. “Can you read this?”

He scanned the pages. The language was one that hadn’t existed on Earth for twelve thousand years. It was the language of the Atlanteans, one every schoolboy in his time knew and every Djinn learned lest he suffer the consequences found in miscommunication. “I know it.”

“Then you will understand the warning herein.” Her finger slid down the page, directing his eyes to a passage.

“And so it will be that the gods of air shall lay down their chains and they shall take up the swords. And the gods of the sea shall reunite and seek control over the vast wasteland. The two worlds connect, each bringing honor, each bringing death. And the gods of the dead

shall rise up and destroy them all.” He read the last dramatically, adding a laugh before looking into her serious eyes. “You think this is some kind of prophecy?”

“I know it is. Read on.”

““And they shall be led, the gods of air, by the one who first removed the chains. And he shall destroy them all.” He swallowed hard as his words echoed in the chamber and made their way back into his head. “This is not about my people, nor is it about me. I removed the chains, but I have no desire to destroy. I only wish to be free.”

“There is more about you. Talk of your battles, the death. And there is talk of ending the war.”

“The war, my lady, has not yet begun.”

“But it will. And when it does, I will be forced to stop it. And in doing so, we might destroy not one world but two. The portal might be closed to us, but it is open to our destruction. And what we do here will change their lives on Earth.”

“You are far too dramatic.” He slapped the book closed and replaced it on the table. All the talk of prophecy and war was too much. The only thing he wished to do was be free from all his bonds. And to sink himself into her lovely flesh.

Her hand on his arm forced him to look into her eyes, and his cock reacted to the sincerity he saw. “Tell me about your sister.”

Shrinking away from her words, his cock retreated. “I have no sister.” He swallowed hard even as he spoke, the memory of the girl who had disappeared fresh on his mind.

“Yes, you do. She was the one who would have wed Prince Cael, the descendant of Atlantis. Their union would in truth unite this land for once.”

“She died out there in the desert. She is no more. And any pact with the Lemurians was lost with her.” He turned away from her, forcing the images of Hyla’s laughing eyes from his mind.

“What if I told you she isn’t dead?”

Ah-ten couldn't hide his rage at the suggestion. He fiercely seized her arm and hauled her into him, forcing her smiling face up with his free hand. "You lie." The words made their way through clenched teeth, and he hoped her words were untrue. If Hyla was alive and he had done nothing to recover her, he would never forgive himself.

"But --" He squeezed her jaw until her eyes shut from the pain he knew he inflicted. Her words ceased and she pulled away from him. "She lives, Ah-ten." She took several steps back, only stopping when her backside made contact with one of the worship benches.

"Release me from this place." His hands shook as he said the words. He had never been close to killing a woman of his own free will, but this one was trying his every patience. If he had a sword, he feared he would have already driven it into her body, splitting her in half. As it were, he struggled not to place his hands around her tiny neck and snap it in two.

"I can't release you. Don't you understand? You have started something that I must end. I am bound to end. You and I can work together to save these two worlds, or you can sacrifice yourself for your pride. Either way, I will not fail them."

Her words caused her to tremble, and he could clearly see how much she believed what she said. Listening to her words, his anger still boiling in his chest, he knew there was but one answer to his dilemma. The princess must accompany him above ground. Then he and his brother Creed and the djahdan would decide what to do with her.

Chapter Five

Caire stomped from the room, her feelings for Ah-ten moving far beyond irritation. Things were not supposed to go this way. She never should have shown her cards, never should have revealed what she knew of his past, his family. Should have played the dimwitted twit who needed a husband, as she had attempted to at first. If he were to learn the full extent of the danger they posed to both their world and Earth, he would do one of two things -- he would call her a liar again and possibly kill her... or he would see that they must end this. But he refused to see the danger, stubborn man that he was.

She stalked to her chamber and threw open the door, frightening her dressing maid when she flung an ancient vase against the wall only to have it crash into a thousand pieces and then recollect itself within three seconds.

“Can I get you some tea, mum?”

“No. Leave me.” Her voice was harsher than she wished, causing Janie to avert her eyes to the floor before she scooted out the door.

She ripped her gown from her body and threw it into a heap, cursing Ah-ten all the while. Immortality! She could have handed it over to him. All he had to do was marry her,

protect her, help her end this war. *The war hasn't started yet*, she mocked his voice in her head. She couldn't wait for the damned war to start.

Right now, his brother awaited his arrival at the river. Prince Cael was moving toward an ambush that would send the gods of the sea into a rage. He was a direct descendant of the Atlantean king and, as such, was a powerful enough influence to cause two worlds to collide. The gods of air would be forced to fight, as Ari was one of their own and seemingly acting under their influence. And when the two ravaged the land, Caire would be called forth to collect the dead, an overwhelming prospect. All the while, the Earth would be reacting to forces it neither knew nor understood. There would be no survivors this time, as the battle would spark a fire that would cause the entire planet to burn.

She grabbed her robe and pulled it to her body just as her chamber door flew open. A gasp caught in her throat when Ah-ten walked through the door and closed it behind him with a resounding slam.

"What do you want?" She pulled the robe against her naked flesh, her eyes holding fast to his.

"I have read your book." His voice was once again a low growl.

"You read rather fast."

"It's a gift of the Djinn." He advanced toward her.

"You are no longer a Djinn."

"Where is the medallion?" She lowered the robe at his words, revealing the chain that still hung around her neck. "Give it to me."

"Not without your word."

"About what?"

"I need to know that you will help me end this war."

“End the war? The one that hasn’t yet begun?” He towered over her, his breath now hot on her exposed chest as he lowered his head. “I still have yet to see what I shall gain from this.”

“You have seen enough.” She raised her eyes to meet his. “Now, do you wish to work with me or against me?”

“First, I wish to work inside of you. Slowly. And at length. Then, when I am satisfied, you and I will discuss the finer points.” His words sent a liquid heat all the way down to her toes. The sexy timber of his voice made her want nothing more than to toss her robe aside and allow him the entry he suddenly sought.

“Not without a vow.” She looked into his eyes as his hands closed around her arms and pulled her to him. His heated body burned straight through the robe she still foolishly clung to. Her nipples stood at attention, awaiting his touch, longing for his tongue to run across them. He lowered his head as if he planned to capture her lips.

“I will not marry you.” The words were like a gentle breeze sweeping across her face, but their meaning was poison to her system. He had to marry her, *had* to take her body.

She swallowed, bracing herself for his kiss, hoping it would come soon. “Then you must vow to protect me. I need your powers to keep me from harm when I travel to the surface to end this war.”

He released her, pushing her backward a bit. She righted herself and then raised her chin, determined to see this through. “My powers? You wish me to return to the Order? To be a Djinn?”

“I need you to do so.”

“Never.” He turned on his heel and made it to the door, his hand grasping the latch.

Her body ached to go after him, to force him to turn around and face her. Instead, her mouth took over, spilling truths she wasn’t ready to reveal. “Hyla is on Eden Four.”

She watched as his shoulders straightened and tensed. Beneath the thin shirt he wore, she could see all the tension in his upper body. She swore she could even see the breath he held. Bracing herself for his rage, she knew that when he turned to face her, he would unleash it on her.

Ah-ten turned slowly, his breath stuck somewhere in his chest. This woman, this goddess or whatever she was, knew more about him than he wished. More than anyone outside of the Djinn hierarchy knew about him. And now she knew where his sister was -- if, in fact, she was still alive. Every instinct he had told him to walk away from her, but his body protested the thought.

"What else do you know of my sister?"

"I have told you all that I know." She retreated, taking a tiny step away from him, but it was enough to draw him forward.

He crossed the room in three short steps and had his hands on her once more, his fingers digging into her flesh. "Tell me."

"You can't get to her." She squirmed beneath his grasp, attempting to escape.

"And why not?"

"Because you can't travel there. They will never allow it."

"They who?"

"The Djinn. The High Council."

"Are you saying they know Hyla is alive?"

"Yes, Ah-ten. They know. Who do you think sent her to Eden Four? When Ah-lia marries Cael, the Djinn prince, your brother Creed will lose his throne forever. Cael will be named brahman, lord of the Djinn, and he will be under the High Council's control. Had he married Hyla, things would be different. They know this. The High Council has plotted your

destruction for millennia. They took your beloved sister from you and changed the course of things.”

“Ari will never take the throne. It is not rightfully his.”

“And because Creed, the true leader, refuses the throne, the title of brahman is open for any who may seek it out.”

“No. They would never allow...”

“If you mean the council, they will allow it. They have masterminded this. And you are but a pawn, just as your sister was.”

“How long have you known about this?”

“A long time. But it was not my concern then.”

“And now it is?”

“Yes. My people are in danger. If your brother becomes brahman, if Ari succeeds to the throne...”

“Yes?”

“He will enslave my people. And I will not allow it.”

“Then we must do something. We must return Hyla to her home.”

“No. Not you and I. We have too much to attend to here. There is someone else who has a stake in this, though. Someone who will be pleased to know his bride still exists.”

His fingers loosened their hold, but his hands still held onto her. “Cael.”

“He is the one. He can set her free.”

“She is a prisoner?”

“Please, Ah-ten, do not ask me. You don’t want to know.”

“I do want to know.” He gave her a little shake, just enough to force her to talk.

“She is on Eden Four... as one of the kittens. You know what they are, don’t you?”

“Sex slaves.” He let her arms slip from his grasp and took in a long breath. The look in her eyes was all he needed to know she spoke the truth. The need to free his sister now outweighed every other thing on his mind.

“Cael can free her. But we must stop him from advancing on the river.”

“And in order to do that, I must agree to this joining with you?” She flinched at his tone, the distaste there obvious. The truth was, he didn’t dislike the idea of joining with her. Everything she offered to him sounded like the answer to every question he’d ever asked.

“I need you.”

His jaw tensed. “And it would seem that I need you, as well.”

“‘Need’ is a very powerful word, Ah-ten. How is it that you need me now, when only minutes ago you wanted to rip my throat open?”

Damn the woman for challenging him.

“I need you as well as you need me. I do not trust you, but I do agree that something must be done. This rift between the peoples of Desert Moon cannot continue.”

“Then you agree to marry me?”

“I agree to nothing.” His lips turned up in a smile he couldn’t hide. “But I would like to taste your wares, see if this agreement of yours would be beneficial to us both.”

His fingers skimmed across her bottom lip, and he watched as she closed her eyes and let out a tiny moan. His heartbeat quickened as he felt her velvety softness.

“I won’t have sex with you without an agreement.”

“And why not? Just a short while ago, I was all you could think of.”

“Times change. I’m not interested in sex for the sake of sex.”

“Ah, but you’ve never had sex with me. Did you know that the Djinn are well trained in the arts of love?”

“You’re not a Djinn anymore.”

Still, she reacted to his hand on her cheek as a woman in need of a man. She closed her eyes and seemed to relish his caress. He knew he was moving beyond the plan he and Creed had made. There was nothing in there about seduction or bending wicked women to his will. But something about Caire made him want to break all the rules and think with his body rather than his mind.

This time, he didn't have to hold her arms in order to keep her where he wanted her. This time, all he did was take one more step forward and move himself into her. She raised up to him, meeting his kiss as if she had been waiting for it all night. In truth, since the first moment hours ago, when his lips had settled upon hers, he had wanted to taste her once more. This time, he wanted more than a sample -- he wanted all of her.

A low moan escaped his throat as she moved back toward the bed, pulling him with her. The robe she had held as a flimsy barrier between them dropped when her hands reached up to seek out his hair. She twined her fingers there, pulling his hair tight and drawing his lips further into the kiss, enticing him to use his tongue and his teeth.

His hand skimmed up her side, and a satisfied grin crossed his face when his palm finally came into contact with one of her soft breasts. His fingers moved around to the rosy tip that had beckoned to him before and now pouted against his chest, begging for release. He gave it a squeeze and reveled in the way her hips squirmed against him. He took a step back to look at her once more.

Her body, which had called to him earlier in the bath, now made his cock hard and made his fingers long to explore. He ran his palms along both breasts, lifting the orbs and testing their weight before pinching the nipples again. The shiver that ravaged her body drove his need to touch her, to tease her. She threw her head back as she raised herself onto the bed, taking the steps slowly so as not to break the contact with his hands, something he would not have allowed anyway.

When she sat on the bed, her legs spread open for him, he dropped to his knees, the wonders she held too much for him to resist. Her silky hairs appeared to beg for his touch,

for his tongue. He wondered how her white hair would look when mixed with his. He pulled her legs onto his shoulders and pulled her bottom to the edge of the bed so that her woman's lips were level with his face.

Ah-ten moved slowly at first, allowing his tongue to trail up her inner thighs and back down again, avoiding the place where they both wanted him to be. He wondered if she were a virgin, and then decided the thought was a ludicrous one, considering her bold behavior so far. It didn't matter if she had been taken by a thousand men, or one. She was his tonight, open for him, ready, her cream already building at her opening.

Running his hands along her inner thighs, he stopped when he reached her lips and held them open so his tongue could probe inside. She quivered against him when his tongue first made contact with her inner walls. His teeth rested against her clit, moving against it as his tongue lapped, exploring her inner depths. Desire coursed through him, forcing blood to his already strained member, which was pulsing and ready to drive itself into her.

Inhaling her scent, he placed a kiss on her clit before sliding one of his long fingers into her. He watched in wonder as her muscles clenched around him, causing her outer lips to spasm and shudder. Her wetness slipped around him, the need for her increasing as her desire for him became more evident.

He raised himself above her, watching her face as she ran her hands across her nipples, teasing and tweaking them the way he had earlier. When his hand left her body, one of hers slid down to replace it, stroking her clit before making its way down to her opening. He watched as her small finger slid in and out with a frenzied abandon. She had obviously pleased herself before now. Holding her legs, he watched as she swiveled her hips in time with her strokes. Her other hand moved down to massage her clit while she continued to fuck herself with her finger.

"You like to watch?" Her eyes opened as she spoke, a smile covering her lips.

"I like to watch you."

“I could show you all kinds of things,” she promised.

“I believe you.”

“Would you like to see? Would you like me to show you just what I can do to you?”

The idea had some appeal. But watching her finger move in and out of her wet warmth was enough to make him lose all restraint. “I’d rather watch you come around me.”

“Then what are you waiting for?”

“You and I have business to attend to. We shall play later. For now, I want you to tell me all you know about this place. I need to know everything about your people.”

“Oh, no, you don’t. You can’t drive me to the edge of wanting and then not give in to me.”

He slid on top of her. “Does sex drive you, Princess? I can control my lust. How about you?”

“I have no desire to control anything.”

“Except me.”

She chose that moment to wrap her hands around his cock. Feeling her warmth through his pants, he knew there was no need to deny her any longer. He wanted her, and her desire for him was obvious in her eyes and in the way she softly caressed him through the material.

Her lush, warm body provided a cushion for him as he raised himself above her. In one motion, he rid himself of his pants and positioned himself at her opening. This was not how he had imagined taking her. He had wanted slow and easy, taking his time to feel her, to savor the moment. But need coursed through him. He could no longer contain his desire.

Her body was so wet, so warm, so inviting. He had been with so many women during his time on this planet and on Earth, but none had felt like this. She was a combination of velvet and honey, sweet and hot, and she was driving him over the edge as her body opened for him.

“Your breasts are beautiful,” he murmured as he watched the white globes bounce on her chest with his every moment. Her pink nipples puckered as her fingers closed over them, giving them a slight squeeze while she threw her head back in ecstasy.

He rose above her, pulled her thighs flush against him, then took her ankles in his hands. Raising her legs to his shoulders, he looked down at her snow-white body as his dark cock drove into it, opening her lips, grazing slightly against her clit when he changed his angle. Filling her up to the hilt, he watched as her lips began to quiver a little. She tightened around his cock as he remained perfectly still. Her wetness spread out onto the bed beneath them, and her eyes opened, a satisfied smile on her face.

Still, he wanted more of her. He wanted so much more of her, he could hardly think to control his motions. Ah-ten wanted to move slowly, wanted to take his time with this woman who had infected him with her passion. Her body forced his to react rashly, driving into her over and over again, bringing his release much sooner than he wanted. He felt it build and tried to hold it at bay. As she ran her hands along his chest and looked adoringly into his eyes, he lost all control. With a low bellow, he thrust into her one last time before feeling the liquid fire pour out of his body and coat her inner walls.

When she began to quake in welcome release, her nails dug into his skin, causing the sensation to move from his cock all the way up to his shoulders. Everything about her made him only want to stay inside her. In spite of this, he slipped from her body and stood over her, watching her eyes change from passion-laden to serious. He had met her challenge; this he could clearly see. Their joining had been just that -- a challenge, a dare. And he had fallen right into her trap. Yet he wasn't prepared for the words that came oozing out of her mouth, coated with sugar but filled with venom.

“Have you had your fill of me?” Her voice was breathless from their lovemaking, but her words were harsh as they twisted his heart, making an act that had seemed so sacred now appear to be routine.

He looked down at her breasts, her wanton pose on the bed, and wondered if she had felt the fire within her the way he had felt it in him. It had burned through him, threatening to destroy his sanity. And now, as his cock ached to be inside her once more, she was making their joining into something very wrong. "I have had more than my fill," he lied, unwilling to allow her to see his pain.

"Then you and I shall get down to business." She pulled herself further up onto the bed, making room for him to sit next to her, something he refused to do.

"We have no business save for finding my sister."

"There is also the matter of saving a world or two, unless you have forgotten."

He raked his eyes across her naked body one last time before stalking into the adjoining bathing room. This time when he sank into the water, it did nothing to soothe his aching body. Or the ache that threatened to overtake his soul.

* * * * *

"She has made a fool of you." Creed paced back and forth in the bathing chamber, his boots causing an echo as they scraped against the tile floor.

"I am already a fool to have been captured. Tell me if she is the one." He allowed the warm water to lap against his chest, hoping to remove her scent from his body, since there was no use in trying to erase it from his mind.

"My sources say she is indeed the one we seek."

"Then I am no fool. Tell me, how is it that you could not find her before now?"

"You know how our powers work. You and I are linked to each other. I found her through you. Had she not taken you, brought you here, I would not have found her. And now, you have taken her without thought of the consequences." Creed's usually diplomatic voice held an angry tremor. Ah-ten's decision to mate with the woman had set his brother on edge, a difficult feat.

"I thought of consequences." He just hadn't thought of all the consequences. Never had he imagined how his skin would feel sliding against hers, how the moment would not last long enough to suit him, how seconds after he came she would change their union into something less than amazing.

Djinn were forced to have sex with their masters. In all his years as a djahdan, he had never had sex with anyone because they had wished it or desired it or demanded it. He had called the shots, taken what he wanted when he wanted. The women of Desert Moon were more than eager to accommodate him. But this one was different.

Her body spoke of her experience, yet her eyes held an innocence that shook him to the core.

"You aren't listening to me."

"I am listening," he insisted, trying to shake the memory of her soft skin from his mind. The urge to go to her and have her again was almost uncontrollable. He inhaled deeply, hoping the surge of breath would clear his mind. It was no use. In less than a few hours, he had become smitten with a woman who had the power to destroy him. This was not in his nature. There was no denying it, however -- she had gotten under his skin.

"You must take your medallion from her."

"She will not use it against me."

"How do you know? Because her body opened for you? Because you came? Damn it, Ah-ten, this is not just about your soul, but also the souls of others. You can't allow her to control you. Get the medallion."

"I know the importance of our task. I know that we must have the waters in order to truly be free. Tell me, brother, why have you not removed your medallion?"

Creed had refused to join Ah-ten as a djahdan, stating that he would be of more use if he could still travel as a Djinn. Ah-ten had never questioned this decision until now. Perhaps there was more to Creed's loyalty than was apparent. Caire had hinted that there were things

about Creed that Ah-ten did not understand. He had no doubt that Creed had made decisions himself that Ah-ten would consider questionable.

“My decisions are none of your concern.”

“As mine are not yours. The council has been ruling in your stead for far too long. It is time for the rightful ruler to step forward before another takes your place.”

“Are you suggesting stepping forward?”

“I have no desire to rule, brother, but it is your birthright. You are the one who was chosen to be brahman, and now you refuse the title. If our sister were alive...”

“Do not bring her into this.”

“If our sister were alive, she would have married Cael, placing him in a position to rule in your stead as part of our line. Now, he will marry Ah-lia and our line will be broken by the very council our father put into power.”

“Cael cannot become brahman without marrying into our line.”

“Yes, he can. Especially if the council deems it so. They are in charge, Creed. They have been since our father died. And they will remain in charge until you step forward and reclaim what is yours. You owe it to us, to our people.”

“Just as you owe them good sense. Do not trust this woman.”

“I cannot help but trust her. She has told me things, made me see things...”

“You will regret this, Ah-ten.”

“If I regret it, I assure you I will take full responsibility.”

“See that you do.”

Creed vanished with the last words, leaving Ah-ten alone to contemplate exactly what his next move should be. He knew what he would like for it to be. He would like nothing more than to go into Caire’s chamber and sink himself into her soft folds once more. This would not be what she wanted, since it appeared she had used sex as the obvious means of

bending him to her will; yet she had not placed the medallion around his neck, the easier solution.

Ah-ten knew giving in to her was a weakness, something he rarely showed. For some reason, her soft flesh held an invitation he was unwilling to ignore, even if it meant his soul was on the line. There was something in her eyes, something that called out to him, lost and lonely and completely innocent, and he felt deep in his chest that he was sent here to protect her, even if he had resisted her plans.

“It’s awfully lonely in here.”

His lips turned up in a smile when he heard her voice. He refused to leave things as they were between them, and it appeared that she refused to, as well. What he wanted was to relive their moment together, to do things right, not to rush in with little warning. He wanted to feel everything he had felt when his head exploded and fire shot from his cock and into her body. For the first time in a long time, he had felt something other than pain or anger. And it felt good.

“I thought the company here was better than that which you offered.” His breath lodged in his throat when she came into view, standing on the opposite edge of the pool, her body illuminated by the light, her gown all but transparent.

“I came to call a truce.”

His pulse raced and fire licked at his loins when she began unlacing her dress and then slid it down her chest, revealing the breasts he had loved only minutes before. “A truce?”

“Yes. I wish to apologize.”

“Do you?”

“Yes. I acted rashly and did not think. I can admit that. This whole thing was wrong, and now I wish to start over.”

“You wish?”

“Yes. And as a former Djinn, aren’t you bound to grant my wish?” She smiled at the comment.

“No, I’m not. But as a man, I can accept your apology if you allow it.”

She dipped her toes into the water, as if she were testing its temperature before stepping in. Soft waves covered his chest when she entered, reminding him of hours earlier when he had first set eyes on her naked body.

“I think I rather like you as a man.”

“You never knew me as a Djinn.”

“Good point.” She moved across the bath, the waves gaining intensity as she walked. Finally, she stopped just inches away from him, and his heart thumped in his chest while his fingers longed to reach out and stroke her breasts.

“You are tempting the devil,” he warned.

“No, I’m not. The devil is my father, and believe me, you are not he.”

“Perhaps not, but I am still a dangerous man.”

“I have dealt with worse.” Her eyes avoided his as a tiny blush crept across her chest.

Modesty? From her? Somehow he doubted it. His doubts were confirmed when her eyes met his, and he became aware of the smoldering need there. “I doubt anyone can be worse than me at the moment. I am a danger to you, Princess. Are you willing to take the risk?”

“I need you. You understand that, don’t you?”

When her palms made contact with his chest, his breath lodged in his throat and all the blood rushed to his cock as it strained against the water, announcing its intentions. “I know you need me, but I come with a price.”

“Everything comes with a price. I assure you I am willing to pay whatever you ask.” Her head bent forward, and her breath neared his chest.

“I want the waters.”

Her advance stopped, and she looked up at him, the desire in her eyes replaced with something else. “I had assumed that. Most men want the waters.” When her teeth captured her bottom lip, he fought the urge to pull her to him and erase the hurt that crossed her face.

“I need it. There is more at stake than you realize.”

“No, there isn’t. I told you about the war, and I do need your help. I realize exactly what is at stake. If you want the waters, I’ll give them to you freely. But I need you.”

Her voice was so tiny, so innocent, it tugged at his heart, making him uncomfortable. He shifted beneath the water, hoping to move away from her sad gaze, wishing he could disappear and be back above ground. “I will help you, Caire. But you must help me as well.”

“Done.”

The pad of his finger ran along her cheek, guiding her lips close to his. “Who are your enemies?”

Her tongue coated her bottom lip, creating a glossy glow that made him want to lean forward and take her mouth before she could answer. “The same as yours. Those above have always sought the waters. The Mer need it to regenerate their gills; the Djinn need it to free themselves from their bondage. And the humans... who knows the diabolical plans they have for it? Can you imagine what would happen if they were to become immortal?”

“You know that I wish to free myself, as well?”

“Yes. But you don’t understand. Only a Djinn can protect me. I will give you the waters if you agree to take me to Lemuria to meet with the king. Be my protector. ”

“I can protect you without being a full Djinn.”

“No, the prophecy says...”

“Damn the prophecy.” His arms snaked around her waist and pulled her against him. Her breath hung in her throat when she made contact with his erection. “Come here, woman; let me show you how I can protect you without using magick.”

“But...”

“No. We shall do this my way.”

The ferocity of his eyes burned into her as he lifted her from the water and set her on the hard marble floor. She was wet already, and it had nothing to do with the water she had been submerged in. The heat between her thighs had not subsided when he took her earlier. Even though she had come, she was far from fulfilled. It was all her fault, she knew, for pushing him to the edge, for tossing aside their mating as if it were nothing to her. In truth, she burned for him with a need she couldn't explain. And that scared the hell out of her.

“Your way is on the floor like an animal?” She couldn't help goading him again, pushing him to the edge. The fire lit his eyes, warning her that he was not a man to tease. Still, she couldn't help but spread her legs in invitation and wonder if he would sink right into her. His cock was already prepared, the head purple and swollen.

“Roll over.” The command was a low growl that did sound animal like.

“Make me.” She half sat up, but he managed to maneuver her body around so that she was face down on all fours before she had the chance to complete the motion.

“I'll show you animal.”

Just hearing the rough timber of his voice was enough to make the cream rise in her cunt. He would show her, all right. She was certain he would live up to her every fantasy tonight, even if he had been reluctant at first.

His fingers made contact with her wet slit. He leaned against her back, pushing her breasts into the cold floor. “You want it rough? You're already wet for me. I think you want to be taken, to be forced. Don't you, Princess?”

“I won't bend to you.”

“You already do. You bend before me with your sweet, hot box wide open and ready for me to slide my cock inside. I could take you in one motion. You already drip with

wanting.” He slipped a finger inside to prove his point, and she couldn’t still her hips from automatically reacting to the invasion, arching for him, allowing him entry.

“Take me, then.”

“I’ll take you. I’ll fuck you so hard you won’t be able to move. Do you know what you have unleashed? I haven’t fully loved a woman for thousands of years. And tonight, your sweet ass is mine.”

He positioned his cock at her opening and teased, but only for a second. Just when she thought he would move away, the game up, he pushed his cock deep into her, using her fleshy hips as leverage as he angled her exactly the way he wanted her, breasts flattened against the floor, ass raised, pussy open.

Her nipples reacted immediately to the chill and the hardness. When he gripped her hips and began pounding into her, her nipples rubbed against the floor, causing a painful friction, which should have sent her screaming. Instead, it only caused her pussy to clench around his cock and begin milking him of its own accord.

His hand grasped the back of her neck, holding her head to the floor. If she had wanted to move, wanted to look back at him, she wouldn’t have been able to. This was his way of controlling her, she knew. It was how he planned to regain his leverage over the situation. And, gods, it was driving her insane. This was exactly how she needed to be taken -- rough and hard. She wanted to feel the cold floor against her knees, feel the rub on her nipples. She wanted to wake tomorrow and remember the throbbing between her thighs and the way her clit reacted when it, too, came into contact with the floor.

He had fucked her so that she was spread-eagled, unable to hold herself up on her knees. She flattened against the floor, her clit now grazing the marble while his cock continued its assault at a whole new angle.

When his hand released her neck, she climbed back up on all fours, determined to meet him stroke for stroke this time, determined not to crumble against the floor as he drove into her.

“You do not own me,” he growled against her ear as his teeth made contact with her shoulder, sending a wave of pleasure all the way down to her cunt. “You are not my master.”

“I don’t want to be your master.” The words made their way out through clenched teeth as he took a handful of her hair into his hand and pulled her head back against his chest.

“Remember that.”

He lifted her, pulling her against him as she felt his body go rigid, his cock stiffen even more. The second after, he let out a low groan and impaled her once more on his cock. When his fire shot into her, coating her insides, seeking out her womb, her entire body began to quake. It was instantaneous. One second she was pressed against him, feeling his release, and the next, she was clinging to him, her fingers digging into his arms as she crumbled into a thousand pieces in his arms.

In no time at all, he had done what her other lovers had not been able to do in weeks. He had made her come twice, breaking down her defenses with each joining. And she found herself helpless against him as her breath steadied. She could fall in love with him without consideration for the future or the past, but she knew she couldn’t allow it until he consented to helping her. Swallowing the emotions that threatened to overtake her, she pulled herself from his arms and wordlessly sank into the pool, hoping the warm water would ease the ache in her body and bring her back to her senses.

Chapter Six

Caire looked at the man sleeping next to her, the one man who could give her everything she wanted. Ah-ten could be her protector, her champion, her partner, but he would never do it willingly as a full Djinn. He had proven that she was nothing more to him than a means to an end, and he meant to have the sacred waters. She would bring them to him, award him with the gift, but only after they were wed. And right now, she knew the only way he would wed her would be if she slipped the medallion around his neck as she had been instructed.

Stealing from the bed, she crept across the room, wishing there were moonlight to illuminate his sleeping frame. The gas from the lanterns gave off an eerie glow, as if highlighting the pain he would feel if he learned she was the one behind his enslavement. And how could he not know? She was the only one who knew the whereabouts of the medallion. Unless she could make it appear that someone else had slipped in and placed it around his neck, but that would require more planning than she had time for right now. Time was running out. If all the ancient texts were correct, she needed to go to the surface immediately and put an end to the war that was brewing, and the only way she could do that was under Ah-ten's protection.

The fear of betraying him hummed through her body. If she were to do this, to do the one thing she'd sworn she would never do, she could lose him before she even had him. Ah-ten was not the kind of man to forgive. This she knew by instinct and by the hard look in his eyes. He had been betrayed before, and it had left him bitter and alone. If she were to break what little trust they had, she would never be able to win him back. So much was at stake, though -- things she couldn't control, things she couldn't handle alone. She needed a Djinn who was whole, strong, and capable, someone who could not only watch her back but who could deliver her safely to the king of Lemuria and then take her to the High Council.

Caire was well aware of Ah-ten's relationship with Cael, the prince of Lemuria, and she knew he would help her sneak into the palace unnoticed so she could seek an audience with the king. The healing waters could aid in ending the war, and she was the only one who knew their whereabouts. They could also entice the Djinn prince to take his rightful place as ruler. For three thousand years, the High Council had ruled the Djinn, but a new order was well overdue. All this put her in a most uncomfortable situation as she slid open the drawer that held Ah-ten's medallion.

Could she do it?

A hand closed around her shoulder, causing her breath to stop in her throat. The lion had awakened. His rough hands ran along her bare arms, threatening to start a fire deep within her system at the contact. *Please don't leave me*, her heart cried out. It was then that she realized her fear of being without him. They had only known each other a short while, but she had waited her entire life for him. And now, she knew she had to have him. No matter what the terms.

"Come to bed, Caire." His words brushed against her back, sending a shiver all the way to the base of her spine.

"I can't sleep tonight." The words were true enough, but they tasted bitter on her tongue.

“I have a remedy for that.”

“Since when? When did you decide to share my bed with me willingly? You were so reluctant up until a few hours ago. Has that changed?” She didn’t dare turn around, but she heard his heavy sigh in the darkness.

“Nothing has changed.” His fingers traced along her neck and shoulders. “But I must have you. You have bewitched me and made me want you. If I did not know better, I would swear you had enslaved me.”

Her heart raced at the notion. She would have in only three more minutes, if he hadn’t interrupted her plans. “I would never enslave you.” She swallowed hard.

“I should think not. My enslavement would only end in your destruction.” The words sent a chill through her as she had no doubt he would follow through on any threat.

“Why would I ever betray you?”

“I have no idea how a woman’s mind works.” His lips made contact with her bare shoulder, sending heat all the way to her core. The man was so intoxicating, she would agree to almost anything he asked. Almost. Right now, her only thought was of turning in his arms and allowing his lips to work their magick on the rest of her body.

As she turned, the medallion slipped from her fingers and made contact with the hard floor, the sound of her betrayal echoing in the room. If she could have seen Ah-ten’s eyes, she knew they would have blazed with anger. Instead, his fingers wrapped around the narrow part of her arms and hauled her roughly against his chest. Fear shot through her, but it was quickly followed by shame. She had not placed the medallion around his neck, but she also had not been honest with him.

“What were you planning to do, Caire?”

“I...”

“You planned to capture me while I slept. Did you have a plan, or were you doing it for selfish reasons, to keep me as a lover?”

“No, it’s not like that. I...”

He roughly pushed her aside and bent down to scoop up the medallion that glittered in the lantern light. “I never thought you would betray me, Caire.”

The words were like a dagger, cutting deeply into her system. Every nerve ending in her body was alive with what she had done, while her inner voice pleaded with her to go after him as he stalked out into the hallway.

Under the cover of night, Caire could pretend that loving Ah-ten had done nothing to her. The truth was, he fulfilled her every fantasy just by placing himself inside her body. How could she tell a man like him that he was everything she could ever want? Loving her could likely destroy him if he allowed it. She knew he had been on his own for longer than most. As such, he had become completely self-reliant and would never admit to needing a woman for more than a pittance.

She watched his back as he maneuvered the caverns, seeking a safe route of escape. She vowed then and there to follow him above ground even if it meant her life. If anyone discovered that she dared venture alone above, the entire system below could fall into chaos. She pulled her hooded cloak closely around her, hiding her hair and covering her face. Her eyes never left the man whom she hated to admit she had come to care about deeply.

His medallion glittered in his hand as it hung from the chain. She wondered even now if she would have had the courage to enslave him. Fear welled up inside her chest as she knew she could have taken him, forced him to love her. In that, she was no better than her father, who had held her mother prisoner.

“Where have you taken me?” he growled when he finally turned to face her.

“You are in my home, below ground.” He knew this already, but his anger over the situation seemed renewed.

“Release me now.”

"The entry should be just up ahead," she whispered, trying to ignore the pain that seeped into her chest at the knowledge that he really did wish to leave her.

"That is where I shall leave you, then."

She stopped at his words. "That was not part of our agreement. I must go with you."

"We had no agreement." He continued to advance, unaware that she had stopped and was refusing to move.

"When you took my body, we made a pact."

He turned, his face a mask of indifference. "There was no pact. Nothing but sex. A release for both of us. I have broken none of your laws in taking you, as I am sure I was not the first."

His words stunned her into silence. She thought he had understood the act as she had. They needed one another, and for more than just a *release*, as he called it. "I am going with you."

"No, you're not. And I do not plan to stand here and argue this further. I will find Cael and convince him to leave Desert Moon and search for my sister. In the meantime, you will stay out of trouble." She knew his words were meant to be the final say in the matter. But she also knew Ah-ten needed her more than he would ever admit.

"Find your own way out, then." She spun on her heel, leaving him standing only a few yards from the entryway, a place he would never find even if he looked straight at it. It was a hidden entrance that could only be seen from the corner of one's eye, not an easy feat in the dark.

Caire knew the series of tunnels and caverns as well as she knew her own name. She could navigate them in the dark without trouble, which was why she was completely perplexed when she had only taken a few steps away from Ah-ten's light and found herself quite literally stopped in her tracks.

The arms that encircled her were not friendly, and the hand that flew to cover her mouth tasted of the desert air. Somehow, someone had found the entrance and had lain in wait for this opportunity. Every scream she'd saved for such a moment died in her throat, the same place where her heart was now lodged. She tried to think, tried to struggle, but something strange was happening to her. Something which made it difficult to concentrate on standing, much less screaming. The last thing she felt was the earth moving beneath her feet and then her body resting in a pair of strong arms that felt nothing like those of her lover.

* * * * *

Whatever drug had made its way into her system was now wearing off, making it difficult to breathe. Her dry throat begged for water, while her stomach growled a protest. The first thought that came to her mind, save for one of nourishment, was of Ah-ten. How could he have been just a few yards away while someone kidnapped her? Had he no intuition? No inherent Djinn sense of danger?

Her head throbbed as she tried to sit. Strong hands held her firmly in her place. She searched for her voice, to demand her freedom, only to find that it had left her somewhere in the night. With blurry vision, she looked up at the figure, blinked twice, and waited for him to come into view.

A more classically handsome man she'd never seen. He was handsome in the way of Alexander the Great and other men who had the power to charm a woman with nothing more than a wink and a smile. Prince Cael. He could be none other, as his eyes were the deepest blue, reflecting the waters of his people. His tanned skin attested to his time in the sun, and his light blond hair also spoke of a love for the sand and sea. His lips turned up in a half-grin, showing perfectly white, even teeth. Quite the charmer, even though he held her captive.

Where the hell was she, and how did she get here? Her head swam as she tried to think, tried to make sense of what had happened to her and where Ah-ten had gone.

“Relax.” Even his voice seemed to have been sent from the gods. Her breathing steadied as his eyes gazed into hers, a reflection of friendship rather than an intention of harm. “You have something of mine, and I want it back.”

She swallowed hard, hoping her voice would find its way back to her so she could say something brilliant and adept. Instead, a tiny croak came out, making her feel like a desert rat.

“Do you recognize this?” He held the medallion’s chain between his fingers, allowing the charm to swing before her eyes. She nodded. “Where is its owner?”

A threat could not have shocked her more severely than those words, which traveled their way into her heart, twisting and wrenching it until she thought it would explode. Ah-ten had not made it out of the caves? What if he were still lost? A man could travel for days and never find his way out. He could be weak, dying, and it was all because he had angered her.

Her stomach protested the thought. He was too strong a man to lose his way. Surely he would have been able to figure out the entrance. A warrior such as he would not be done in by a series of caves.

“You do know its owner.” His smile mocked her, making the emptiness inside her spread all the way up to her neck and down to her core.

She nodded. Yes, she knew its owner. He was the man she... loved? No. She hadn’t known him long enough to love him. But she had watched him. Had watched his body move across the field of battle as if it were dancing to a symphony of destruction. As if it were made for physical activity.

Her eyes strayed to the water pitcher beside the bed. She nodded in its direction, hoping Cael would understand. In doing so, she glanced behind the man who had filled up

her line of vision thus far. The room he held her in was a grand bedchamber, the kind one would use for seduction rather than for kidnapping. Rather odd if he planned to ransom her or if he thought she was responsible for his man's disappearance. Also odd considering that when she last saw Cael, he was on a battlefield and far from his own land.

She watched his capable hands fill a cup with water and then hold it out to her. Carefully sitting, she raised the cup to her lips, wetting them before quenching her thirst. Her throat immediately screamed out in pain. Two more sips and the pain subdued.

"Who are you?" she asked with a scratchy throat, fully aware of his answer.

"I am Prince Cael of Lemuria, ruler of Gen-ru. And you have something that is of great value to me."

"Your warrior?" She took another sip of the water before replacing the cup in his hand.

"More than a warrior; this we both know. He is the key to unlocking every mystery of this land." He held out the medallion, allowing her to take it into her hand. "And this is his."

"There is no mystery to this land. Men fight over water." She avoided his eyes as she spoke, knowing that if he were a seer, all he would need to do was look into her eyes, and he would know the truth.

"Men fight for more than water."

"They fight for control, then. I do not have your warrior."

"But you know where he can be found."

"Why is he important to you? He's nothing but another soldier. Another man bent on destruction."

He let out a laugh, clean and clear, that filled the room with charm. "Dear woman, if you did not know the power of this medallion, you would not look so surprised to see it."

"I like it. It's pretty."

“And I am no fool. You were saying his name. While you were out.” He smiled again. “And saying all kinds of other interesting things. I know you know him. And you know what is at stake.”

“You and I should strike a deal, then. Your man in return for something.”

He wrinkled his brow, then smiled again, making her wish her heart wasn’t already otherwise occupied. “You would bargain with the man who holds your life in his hands?”

“You hold nothing, save for your ego. I know all about you, Prince Cael. And I know what you long for more than you long for the return of a trusted warrior. And I can give it to you.”

He straightened his back and folded his arms before once more casting a wary stare at her. “Oh?”

“Yes. You need a woman.”

This announcement gained booming laughter. “You seem to have your own ego.”

“Not me. I am already taken. You need someone else.” She reached out to stroke his large bicep, which flinched at her touch. “You need someone who has been trained in the arts of pleasure. I’m afraid I won’t do.”

“You seem to have someone in mind.” He pulled away from her, seemingly unaware of how his flesh burned into her fingertips. Something about him made her want him. This same something could be very useful to them if she could convince him to go after Ah-ten’s sister. It was imperative that he leave Desert Moon and find Hyla before he met his death here.

“Tell me, where are we?”

“We are in a hidden palace of mine.”

“Hidden?”

“Yes. A gift.”

“From whom?”

“A prince of the Djinn.”

“The Djinn? Do you trust them?”

“I have no reason not to trust them. I am to marry a Djinn, the high councilor’s daughter.” His words lied.

“What about Ari, the youngest son of the former Djinn ruler? He wants something of yours.”

Cael’s mask of indifference turned to one of staunch concern. “What do you know of Ari?”

“I know that he would rather kill you than see you take the ancient title he covets. I know that he has a hand in all council affairs.”

“Who are you?”

“It does not matter who I am. All that matters is that, yes, I am a seer. And I see more now than you think. This might be your palace, but it is a place of smoke and mirrors, Prince. This is a prison, one designed to keep you away from what matters the most.”

“Which is?”

“Your lovely young woman. Ari wishes to wed her.”

“What to you know of my bride-to-be?”

“She is in danger.”

“That isn’t possible.”

“She is a peace offering, then?”

“It was an arranged marriage.”

“One Ari intends to overthrow. What could you gain from the Djinn?” She tapped her bottom lip, asking the question more for her own benefit than for his.

“Unity. We have been at odds for too long. With them on my side, the people of Desert Moon will unite and...”

“Not all of the people.”

“No. Which is where our friend comes into play. Ah-ten can control the djahdan.”

“What of the Tu’at?”

“They do not exist.”

“You have been misinformed. What else will you gain through this marriage?”

“An ancient title. I will become brahman, lord of the Djinn.”

“You can’t just become brahman. You must be of the royal bloodline.”

“The royal bloodline has refused the title. It is now in the hands of the High Council.”

“Ari wants the title for himself.”

“He doesn’t have the power. Even as the king’s son, he doesn’t have the army to back him. If the council approved of him, he would be king now, would he not?”

“True enough. But if he could control the djahdan and earn the High Council’s blessing, no one could stop him except...”

“I could stop him.”

“Not if he kills you first.”

“He wouldn’t risk war.”

“He already risks war by keeping us here as prisoners.”

“We are not prisoners.”

“No? Then show me the way out. You and I are very powerful players in this game.”

“Is that so? You look like just a woman to me.”

“I’m no ordinary woman. Prince Cael, let me introduce you to the princess of the Tu’at, the people you think don’t exist.”

His eyes widened as she extended her hand.

“The Tu’at?”

“Yes. And I seek peace, too. But I also seek protection. Ah-ten can protect me, but who can protect you?”

“I have an army.”

“Have you ever battled a Djinn? I mean, really battled one? They have mind control; they move between walls. How will you defend yourself?”

“Why should I tell you my secrets?”

“Because you know you’re in danger.”

“And what do you suggest I do?”

“You should disappear. Go to Eden Four.”

“And leave my people without a leader? You’re insane!”

“No. You will only leave them temporarily.”

“No.”

“You must go, Cael. You are in danger. You must go to Eden Four and find the djahdan, Hyla.”

“Hyla?”

“You know her?”

“Yes, I knew Hyla. But she is... she isn’t. No, it isn’t possible.”

“The High Council took her from you, Cael. They took her and hid her on that place so that you would be forced to do exactly as they wished. Don’t you see?”

“I see nothing.”

“Yes, you do. It’s in your eyes. Did you love Hyla?”

“I hardly knew her. We were young then.”

“But she was to be your bride.”

“Yes, she was.”

“She will be able to help us.”

“Where is Ah-ten?”

“You honestly don’t know?” Her heart sank once more. Surely he knew where Ah-ten was. She’d assumed he was only attempting to gain answers from her when he spoke of Ah-ten’s disappearance.

“No. I don’t. All I know is he was heading toward the river and he never made it there. That part was your influence. However, you say you left him in a cave.”

She sat up. Not just any cave. Her cave. And if Cael hadn’t been the one who abducted her, then who had? She bit her bottom lip, hoping a thought, an image, something, would rush into her mind. No such luck. Such was the gift. It came and went when it saw fit. And reading minds took more concentration than she had at the moment while her heart pounded away, warning her that Ah-ten was in danger.

“How did I come to be here?” She let out a long, slow breath, hoping to calm herself.

“I was told a prisoner had been captured for questioning. When I saw you, I knew you were no ordinary captive. I had you carried to this room.”

“Who brought me here?” She narrowed her eyes in an attempt to read the events that had brought her to Cael’s palace.

“One of my men.”

“Which one?”

He stopped pacing altogether and stared at her.

“Which one?” she repeated.

“I am not sure.”

She stood, making her way across the room to him. Placing her hands on his arms, she looked deep into his eyes. “You must leave this place. It isn’t safe. I swear to you, I will do all I can to find Ah-ten and to protect Ah-lia, but you must not be here while I search for them.”

“You said I was a prisoner. We are both in danger. Do you believe that?”

“Yes, I do.”

“I have seen things here that defied logic.” He stalked to the bar that sat across the room from where she lay.

She watched as he poured an amber liquid into a small glass and then drank quickly. “You must leave this place. Do you see the danger?”

“I’m beginning to, but don’t think for a second that I trust you. But if Hyla is out there, then I owe it to her to find her. I *need* to find her.”

“Trusting me is not a requirement, but you must believe me. You must go to Eden Four, and find her. I believe that it is the only way to save yourself and your land.” She pulled the cover around her as she stepped from the bed.

“I shall go. But first, I must discover how to leave this place.”

“What do you mean? You don’t know how to leave?”

“You are correct about my status here. I am a prisoner and have never left of my own accord.”

“Well, you must find a way to leave now. Pay somebody to get you out of here. Whatever you must do.”

“And you?”

“I will find my own way out.”

* * * * *

“There will be men. She will bring them to her bed.” Ari stood behind Ah-ten, his voice causing the hatred to bubble up inside Ah-ten.

“You cannot manipulate people like this.” Ah-ten’s hands, still bound behind his back, clenched into fists as he watched Caire and Cael share an embrace.

“I can and I shall. How many would you like to see take her? Ten? Twenty? And she will welcome them into her arms, into her body. Two, three at a time. Perhaps an entire

army. Would that be enough? Do you think her body would hold out? She will want them, crave them. She'll be wet against their skin, hungry for their cocks."

"Enough!" he growled. "What will you have me do?"

"I think you know. It's quite simple, really."

Ah-ten had never hated his brother as much as he did at this moment. He thought Ari was more than capable of manipulating Caire to take men into her body. Having her taken by force would have been bad enough; making her need them, welcome them -- that was something entirely different. "Get on with it, then."

"The High Council has elected me in charge of returning the renegades. And you, as their leader, are the top prize. Replace your medallion; accept your fate."

"I lost the medallion," he said through clenched teeth. If he ever got out of these chains, he would kill Ari with his bare hands.

"Look closely at her bed. She has the medallion, and all you have to do is take it from her, return it to your neck, return to your bondage. And she will be free."

"How do I know you're not lying?" He had never trusted Ari, and there was something in his deep black eyes that warned against taking his words at face value now.

"You don't."

"Why are you doing this? Because of the council? Would you like to know what your precious council has done to us? To our family?"

"They have done nothing save give me a place as a ruler. I am in line to take our dear brother's place."

"No, you're not. They are manipulating you. Did you know they took Hyla? She still lives."

"You lie! You would do anything to save this woman you hardly know. Did you know about us? Our past? She was mine before she was yours."

The words cut deeply into him. Thinking of Ari's hands touching Caire's skin made him sick. He turned back to the couple on the bed. He would protect her. Whether or not Ari believed him, he knew the truth about Hyla now. Somehow, he knew Caire had spoken the truth.

"What are they saying? Let me hear them."

"They are speaking parting words of love, no doubt."

Ah-ten's hatred washed over him. In spite of himself, he cared for Caire; even if he had no desire to marry her, he did not wish to see her pine away after a man like Cael, a man who, indeed, usually took what he wanted from women and then left them. "Now, it is you who lie."

"Suit yourself. Now, will you take the medallion, or shall I send in the troops? I am sure they will be more than eager. A body like hers... Perhaps I shall take her myself." Ari turned his back before he could see the dangerous look his brother threw his way. Ah-ten would kill Ari -- for this and many other crimes. But first, he had to free Caire from the fate Ari would have her endure.

"I will do it." The words came from somewhere deep in his chest, and when they made their way to the surface, they caused everything inside him to go numb. For three thousand years, he had escaped his fate, run from his birth title. And now, because of a woman who had kidnapped him, who had taken him without permission, he would be forced to go back.

Ah-ten wanted to hate her for stealing him, for seducing him, for attempting to betray him, though she had failed the last. Yet his heart ached as he recalled the tenderness and the fire between them. Their parting had been due to anger, something he now regretted. He, too, had set out to betray her, to kidnap her and to use her powers. The only difference between them was that she had succeeded where he had failed.

Still, his arms ached to hold her, and his soul ached for the fulfillment felt when he saw himself reflected in her eyes. He would save her, no matter the cost.

Chapter Seven

Fog swirled around his head as he slipped the medallion over his neck. He was alone in a chamber that was little more than a prison cell. Ari had betrayed him, had turned his back on his own flesh and blood, all for power. He had always been ambitious beyond reason, and this ambition had led him down this path.

Ah-ten sank down onto his cot. As a Djinn, he had powers, but the powers would not fully come to him until he had a master. Caire was his master. Like it or not, accept it or not, he knew she was the master he needed. Her face lingered in his mind, and it was almost as if he could reach out and touch her. There was something about her that defied logic, that made him fall in love with her, no matter that it was not in his best interest. Or hers. He was not a man who could live with a woman for eternity. But Caire was no ordinary woman.

His hand reached for her in the darkness, and he realized she shouldn't be there. There was only one explanation. He had to be dreaming. He watched as she walked into the room, naked, glorious. Her long, white-blond hair looked like rays of moonlight as it swept around her body, teasing at her nipples, caressing her rump. She turned in the light, just enough that Ah-ten could see the shadow of her mass of woman's hair as it rested just above the place

where his cock longed to be. Her breasts shook when she turned back to face him. His mouth opened, his tongue darting out. He wanted to wrap it around her rosy tips.

She advanced, holding between her hands a rope made of red velvet. He swallowed hard, watching her move toward him as if in slow motion. Already hardened, his cock pulsed against his stomach, as if remembering how it had felt to be wrapped in her tight, wet box. Knowing that was the place where it belonged, where it could find a release unlike any other.

"I have come to make you my prisoner," she announced, a smile on her face. He was powerless against her, already her prisoner in every way that mattered. All it had taken was one time for her to get inside his heart and claim something he swore had long been dead.

The ground beneath him became his bed. It wasn't where he had slept in a very long time. This was the bed back home. In the Djinn realm. In the place he'd sworn he'd never return to. The slick satin sheets lay beneath a thick velvet covering, a delight for the senses. He inhaled the fragrances of his home, the incense, the exotic flowers only found here. Candles glowed around them, teasing him with a display of shadow and light while the smell of the melting wax made his throat go dry at the prospects it held.

"Are you ready for me to take you?" Caire cocked her head to the side and smiled, threatening to take his sanity along with his body.

"I shall never be your prisoner." The words were empty, and he knew it even as he spoke them.

"You already are." His medallion winked at him from between her breasts. "And I am yours. Tell me, Ah-ten, what would you do with the princess of the dead? What would you have her do for you?"

He blinked. When his eyes opened, the scene had changed. She lay on the bed, spread-eagled, her legs tied to the footposts with the same velvet rope while her hands were bound above her head. Every womanly curve and crevice was open for him to explore. Her heavy

breasts spilled off her chest, while her long hair was spread out against the red velvet covering.

“Now you shall be my prisoner.”

“What will you do to me?” He knew the fear in her voice was part of the act. Women loved to be dominated, and this one needed it in a way few did. She needed someone to take control of her body, take away her choices and her natural dominant streak, and replace it with submission.

“I will make you beg me, call my name over and over long into the night, before I ever lay a hand on your sweet cunt.”

“No.” The word came out as a gasp, another sign of their play. Her hands struggled with the ropes while her head flailed back and forth.

“Yes. And you shall look at me while I do things to you you’ve never dreamed of.”

His cock jerked in reaction to the thought as he moved toward the bed. Lowering himself onto it, he skimmed a hand along her side, delighting in the shivers that ravaged her body. He lay naked against her, his cock resting on her thigh, his breath on her shoulder.

“Where shall I begin?” Dropping his voice to a low growl he knew would cause a reaction, he leaned forward and spoke into her ear. “I think here.” One hand moved to cover her breast, gently at first. “Do you like it here?” He heard her gasp when he squeezed her nipple, bringing it to attention.

“Yes,” she moaned, then attempted to turn her back on him, to press her ass against him. He held her fast to the bed.

“No. You shall not move until I give the order.”

His words sent another shiver through her. She liked to be controlled, as was evident by the growing damp spot beneath her on the bed, a place where he let his hand stray, staying just inches from the place she wanted him most. Even as she twisted and turned on

the bed, the ropes held her firmly in place, allowing him to explore without touching her there. Yet.

Desire threatened to overrule his senses as he took his time exploring her lovely body. He would never tire of touching her, of loving her. His fingertips traced a trail from her ankle to her knee. Silky skin burned straight through him, sending all his blood to his cock. He listened as she gasped, her sharp intake of breath driving him to look into her eyes.

Lust shone there, giving her dark orbs a smoky appearance. Her passion-swollen lips turned up in a smile. "Do you wish to own me?"

"I wish to make you mine."

"I am already yours."

He held his breath as her words sank in. "Tonight you shall be mine over and over. I will erase the memory of every man who has had your lovely body."

"You are the only one." She looked up at him. "Love me," she begged.

"Is it your desire?"

"Yes."

Her heat sank deep into him. It was a gift of the Djinn to feel human emotions, to feel their desires. That the princess longed for him, he had no doubt. What he doubted was her honesty, her intentions.

"I shall bury myself in you. I shall make you mine. But you shall never own me."

"I just want to love you."

Her admission only caused the blackness in his soul to grow. The woman could not be honest, could not speak the truth. He blocked out his instincts, the part of him that insisted her love was genuine. Knowing genuine love with someone like her would only lead to more pain, he blocked out the thoughts, giving in to the sensation of her skin as he slid against her and found her opening.

“Untie me,” she urged, arching her back against the bed, raising her wet warmth up to meet him.

“No. I am in control. I shall have you this way.”

He wanted to hold his hand over her mouth, to force her to close her eyes, to look away from him. Anything other than to whisper words of love or look at him with emotion-filled eyes as he thrust into her. She opened for him, allowing him entry to the one place he knew he could find redemption. Her sweet words settled into his head, forcing him to move, to drown out her love with moans.

As his cock slipped in and out of her body, her moans increased, threatening to send him over the edge. He held her open, her legs already spread wide from the restraints. As his fingers pushed her skin back, he watched his cock move in and out of her in a rhythm set by the intensity of his desire. Teasing her clit with his thumb, he watched as she writhed against the bed, her arms pulling at the ropes, desperate to free themselves.

“You shall not escape me,” he warned.

“I have no wish to escape you.” Her breath came in short bursts as she spoke.

“You shall never escape me.”

* * * * *

“The woman is our weakness. You must allow her to fool Ari into believing he has captured you.”

Ari *had* captured Ah-ten, but Creed had freed him, if only momentarily, to discuss their plan of action. Now, Ah-ten stood in his brother’s home in the Djinn realm, knowing his body stood elsewhere, while Caire was unguarded, open to attack and harm. “And how, dear brother, do you expect me to do that?” Creed always had a plan, yet tonight, Ah-ten was unwilling to go along with him. He had but one thought in his mind -- to return to Caire, to free her from her Djinn prison.

"She must believe you have been defeated."

"I will not betray her trust." Ah-ten's voice echoed off the cavern walls as his hand hung in a tight fist. Creed had not asked the impossible. It should be easy to betray a woman such as she, a woman who should be nothing more than a means to an end. But everything inside him protested the notion of betrayal, and he was certain that if he did commit the sin, he would live to regret it.

"There was a time when you would betray anyone to meet your needs." Creed mocked him with the hidden message of his voice.

"That time has long passed. I am no longer interested in a treaty with Ari or the council. I now seek my freedom and no longer search for forgiveness or a pardon."

"It is not your decision to make. They have been relentless in their search for you. Taking her, taking you to Ari's palace, tempting you, forcing you to this." His fingers grasped Ah-ten's medallion, the proof of his enslavement, resting against his bare chest.

"I made a choice."

"You were fooled!" Creed seethed with mounting rage, an emotion Ah-ten could feel as if it were a tangible item.

"I was not fooled. I did what I had to do to save her. You would not understand..."

"Would not understand love? Loyalty? You forget too easily our time on earth, what we both lost there, the reason for your dissent."

"I forget nothing." How could he ever forget Lucinda or that the way he had been betrayed had not only led to her destruction but to the deaths of so many? He lived with the pain daily. Though it had lessened in three thousand years, it still managed to sneak up on him in the middle of the night or when he was completely unaware. He would feel her come up behind him, press her lips to his bare back, and whisper words of promise to him.

Then the raw anger would emerge, the consequences of her actions, things he could neither control nor take back. It snaked its way through his system, almost blinding him; the

emotion was so real, so painful, it made living almost an impossibility. But he had managed. And now, he had found a woman who was perhaps worthy of his attentions, who would, he hoped, fulfill her promise to him.

“You trust this woman? You think she will free you? How many have promised in the past?” Creed’s words enveloped him like an acid mist, reminding him of all the betrayals through the years, each one deepening the scars inflicted by Lucinda, each one leading to this moment.

“I do not believe she will betray me.”

“Though she sought to enslave you on your first night together.”

“That was different.” He had been there to enslave her, too. He had been as dishonest as she, and the pain from that knowledge had not yet left him. The point was, she had not managed to enslave him on that night and had never placed the medallion around his neck. When he took it, he did so freely. To save her.

“How was it different, brother? We all have an agenda, something we wish to gain from this venture. You seek immortality coupled with your freedom. Have you wondered what she seeks to gain? Have you thought completely of the consequences?”

He had, and he fully knew what Caire wanted from him. She wanted a protector, a champion, a husband. But most of all, she wanted to prove to her father that she was not her mother. He could see it in her steely determination, the way she set her jaw when facing down Cael. She wanted her father’s acceptance. For that alone, Ah-ten felt for her. But there was so much more to the woman who had infected him with an unknown passion. She was a mystery, an enigma, someone who was supposed to exist only in myths and legends, yet her warm body had been real when it lay next to him. Her heart had beat and her lips had brushed against his, and his heart lurched with longing, making him wish he could be the man she wanted him to be.

"I have thought of the consequences," he said finally, his throat constricting at the admission.

"Then go to her. If you have considered where this will lead you, what it will do to us, to the djahdan, then go to her."

"You do not like her."

"My liking has no bearing on your decision."

"She knows where Hyla is. As we speak, she has managed to convince Prince Cael, the Lemurian prince, the ruler of Gen-ru, to seek her out."

"Hyla is dead." Creed's jaw pulsed as Ah-ten studied his eyes. His brother knew he spoke the truth.

"No, she is not. And you know it, or else your jaw would not leap with tension. You, too, have sought her out all these years. And now, Cael is on his way to reclaim her, to return her to her home. And this woman, the one you despise, is the reason for it all. She can help us, Creed. She will."

"For your sake, I hope you are right. If not, she is your commander now. You have given her your freedom. I hope you do not live to regret it."

"And what of your decisions? You have the power to unite this planet. You, the heir to the Djinn throne. Did you not give up your soul for a woman?"

"I gave up my title. She has my soul."

"No. The High Council has your soul. As long as this rift continues, you are bound to this world just as I am. Where is your honor?"

"You know little of honor."

"I know you send her dreams, your Carly. I know your link to her is so strong, space refuses to divide you."

"I made a deal," he growled.

“You made a sacrifice. Your title for her immortality.”

“There was no sacrifice. I did not choose to be king.”

“You chose to be defeated. You made the sacrifice thinking it would save her. We all made sacrifices. Had there not been a sacrifice, the portal would be open and she would be in your arms now.”

“No.”

“Yes. And what has the High Council done to preserve this pact? They took our sister. They sent her to a life of misery. And now they are about to overrule our father’s laws. Do you understand this, Creed?”

“I understand more than you think. I understand that time must be used. Patience. Do you know what you do when you rush into things? Do you know the havoc you have caused, the chaos your decisions have spawned? Go to your woman. Do as you wish. But our time as brothers ends now.”

Creed’s boots punctuated his words as he retreated from the room, leaving Ah-ten to stare after him and consider his words. They had not been brothers since this battle had begun, since Hyla had disappeared, their mother died, and everything went wrong. His pact with Caire would not change this.

* * * * *

Wicked dreams filled Caire’s head. She imagined her lover’s hands caressing her body, his lips grazing against her skin. She smiled and stretched, reveling in the feelings of warmth that surrounded her. Then her hand made contact with something. She ran her hand where she thought Ah-ten had been last night. No words of love had been spoken between them, but she knew he had to feel something for her. The fact that her telepathy didn’t work on him was enough to tell her that his feelings for her, by necessity, were stronger than he would have her believe.

Slowly, she opened her eyes. "Shit." The curse escaped her lips as she sat up. Last night had been a dream. She had forgotten where she was, trapped somewhere in the Djinn realm. Gone were the memories of the force which made her body to do things it didn't wish to do. All she could recall was Ah-ten and his touch as she had felt it last night, as he had tied her to the bed, forced her to submit to him, something she had longed to do. Now, he was nowhere to be found.

Pulling the bed sheets with her as she stood, she turned on the lights and searched the room. There was no sign that he had even been here. Her heart pounded in her chest. Danger was near, and this danger seemed to come from nowhere. It wasn't the kind that lurked in the back of her mind. This one hit her at once, as if it had been cloaked previously and only now sought to reveal itself.

Her clothing was missing, but someone had come in at some point and left a pair of men's trousers and a shirt that would fit her. She pulled them on and ran her fingers through her hair before binding it with a piece of leather. Slipping on the boots that had been left, she walked to the door as calmly as possible. Whatever danger lurked would be here soon. She had to get out -- with or without Ah-ten.

She stole a last glance at the bed. He had been here, hadn't he? She couldn't just have dreamed what they did last night. Couldn't only have dreamed the soft way his hands caressed her body, the way his eyes smoldered with desire when he looked at her, the way her heart broke thinking about him. She was in love with him.

She inhaled slowly and blinked away the tears that were building. When all this was over, she would find him. If he was still alive. He had to be, because she needed him. Pushing the door open, she was immediately forced back into the room by the black eyes that awaited her.

"Going somewhere?" The man didn't walk -- he glided into the room. Her voice caught in her throat at the look of death in his eyes. All her senses were on alert. Ah-ten was in danger. Her hand went to her throat as she feared for her life for the first time ever.

“What do you want?” she demanded, trying to keep up a brave façade.

“I am your host. You are my guest. Please, sit.” He swept his arm out toward the room, but she held her ground. She would not allow Ari to see her fear.

“I do not wish to be your guest. I wish to leave this place.”

He smiled wickedly and placed a finger on his chin, as if in contemplation. “And why would you ever wish to leave this place?”

“I have to be somewhere. I have to get back home.”

“Oh, my.” His voice held a thick sarcastic tone. “That is a problem.”

“It will be if you don’t move out of my way.”

“No, Princess, the problem is yours.” His hand was on her arm before she could move from him. It was as if he moved on the power of thought alone. His fingers dug into her flesh as he forced her completely into the room. The door closed behind him of its own accord. She looked back up into the black eyes, determined not to be weak.

“The problem shall be yours if you do not release me. My people...”

“Your people are defenseless against me. I know where your secret entrance lies, remember? And now I want something else from you.”

“No more deals, Ari. No more bargains. Release me.” Her heart twisted at his words. Everyone was in danger now because of her. If she hadn’t wanted Ah-ten so badly, none of this would have happened. Her entryways would still be hidden, secret. She freed herself from his hold and stared up at him.

“Not yet. I need something more.”

“What is it that you want?” She tried to steady her voice, but swore she heard a tremble in there. She was the daughter of Death, and Ari was but a mere Djinn.

“Your gift.”

“My gift?”

“Yes. Immortality. I want it. And I know that you are the one, the only one, who knows its whereabouts.”

“Why would I grant you immortality?” She’d rather return to Earth and her father’s home than grant him immortality.

“Because if you do not, your people will pay dearly.”

She swallowed hard. The fates of thousands lay in her hands. But something told her if she granted this man her gift, even more lives would be lost. “Never.”

“Have it your way.” He shrugged and moved away from her.

Her back, which had been straight, relaxed a little. Too easy, too easy. That was too easy. He had made it to the door before he faced her again. Within seconds, he was on top of her, pressing her against the bed. She hadn’t even seen him move! Damn him! All the talk of having Ah-lia was a ruse to leave her unprotected. Now, she realized the truth, realized she had been in danger all along.

His hands held her wrists firmly to the bed while his hard cock pressed against her womanhood. When she struggled, he laughed, low and demonic, and pressed harder against her. She would never allow Ari to enter her body again. No man would ever touch her again save for Ah-ten, if he would have her after her many betrayals.

“Let me go and I will let you live,” she cursed.

“Give me what I want and I will let you live.” His laughter filled the room as his breath brushed against her cheek. “I can make you want me. I can make you desire my touch, warm to it, grow wet for it. All I have to do is place the thought in your head. “

“Go to hell.”

“And meet your father, Princess?”

He leaned into her, his mouth almost making contact with her just seconds before she felt him being lifted from her body. Confused, she sat up as she caught a flash of Ah-ten throwing Ari against the wall. Her heart threatened to beat its way out of her chest. She

watched as he lifted Ari again and flung him, his powerful muscles tensing and relaxing as he moved.

Ah-ten was alive! Her entire body ached with the knowledge, and she longed to go to him, to wrap her arms around him and tell him how thankful she was. There was no time, as the battle between the Djinn erupted. Still, she felt her heart beat wildly, knowing he had not died. Then she caught a glimpse of the medallion as it shone in the light. He was fully a Djinn, having surrendered his freedom.

"You've come to save your whore, then." Ari stood, and Caire watched as his feet disappeared into a cloud of smoke.

"I come to destroy you," Ah-ten growled.

"Ah, but you can't do that as long as you are a man. You must fight in your true form. Or are you afraid of frightening your wench?"

"I am afraid of nothing." He stalked across the room toward his nemesis, who completely vaporized.

"Come get me, then." Ari was now incorporeal.

Caire stood, hoping to stop Ah-ten, hoping he wouldn't use the Djinn magick. Once he did, the medallion would take hold and he would fully be a slave. As it were, he still had a choice. "No!" Her words hung in the air. She didn't know if he heard.

There was a flash of light before the evil one appeared again, this time bearing a large blue bottle. The smile on his face told her all she needed to know. He had captured Ah-ten, the man who had been free for more than three thousand years.

"Now, Princess, where were we?" His evil black eyes leered at her.

She held her head high as he approached her. There was a way out of this, and she would find it.

He stopped in front of her and reached out to stroke her cheek. "I think you and I have unfinished business. I wish to have your body and your waters. And you will do as I say, or your lover will remain my prisoner."

"You can take my body, but I will never grant you passage to the waters. You shall not know their whereabouts."

"Even for love, my dear? You would give up this man --" He held the bottle for her to see. "-- for water?"

"I don't even know if he's in there. How do I know you didn't kill him? You have no proof." She folded her arms and hoped she sounded bolder than she felt.

"I have all the proof I need. He is in the bottle. And I shall sell him to the highest bidder. Perhaps send him to Earth. Lay him at your father's feet."

"You can't gain passage to Earth."

"Ah, but the ban will be lifted. The man who started the dissent has been captured. The other renegades will soon follow. And you and I have a bargain to work out." His black eyes closed in on her. "Or shall I use my mind control on you? Yes, that's it. I'll have you beg me for it. On your knees. You'll make a pretty little servant." His hand closed around her chin, his fingers digging in to her flesh.

She would not give up control to this man. Why sex was so important to men, she'd never understand... Yes, she did. She knew men fought wars over it. How many times in the past had she also used it to gain what she wanted, needed? She'd used it with Ah-ten just as she had in the past. But she had never fallen in love before. And the thought of being forced to crave a vile man's touch was enough to make her stomach turn. Unless she could outsmart him.

"You really killed Ah-ten?" She softened her eyes and smiled, hoping to fool him.

"Not killed. Captured."

“Killed, captured. It takes a hell of a man to fill his shoes.” She glanced down at his cock. “But I see you have the equipment. More than what’s necessary, in fact.”

“Would you like to see it? To taste it?”

She licked her lips, hoping the ruse was working. “Yes I would.”

“I bet you loved having my hard cock in your mouth. I bet you’d like it other places, too.” His voice was a rough growl.

“Mmmm.” She placed her hand over his crotch, trying to keep her mind steady, trying not to think about how he repulsed her.

“Tell me how you want me to fuck you.” He thought his mind trick was working. She could sense it, since he had let his guard down.

“I want you to drive it into me hard. I don’t want a soft lover like this man in the bottle. I want it hard, rough.” She pressed her hand against him as she spoke, emphasizing her point.

“I can give it to you hard and rough.”

She watched as he placed the bottle beside the bed. She had seen how quickly the Djinn could move. “I know you can. I know you can split my pussy wide open with your cock.”

“Mmmm. Come here and we’ll find out.” He pulled her to the bed and she followed, trying not to glance back at the bottle.

She climbed on top of him, straddling him, and began working on the buttons to his shirt. She pushed the fabric aside to reveal his massive, tattooed chest. With lust smoldering in his eyes, he wasn’t an unattractive man. It was his heart that made him so black. She rubbed her crotch against his to emphasize her fake interest in him. He let out a low moan and closed his eyes. He really believed he was controlling her!

“I think I’d like to ride you first. Have you ever been ridden?”

“By thousands of women,” he bragged, his eyes still closed.

"I'll bet none of them could ride a man like I can." She bit her bottom lip, trying to decide the best plan of action. The bottle was out of her reach. And she wasn't sure if the old legends were true. In reality, she had no idea about how to free a Djinn from a bottle. And the one she was straddling would still be a great danger to her.

"You've had a lot of practice, Princess?"

"Mmmm. Enough. I have plenty of male slaves who would let me ride them every day if I wish." She knew she was turning him on with her dirty talk.

"I have no doubt they do. I want to watch you ride me. Then I'll bring my men in and watch while they take you. I want them to fill up your sweet ass, your pussy, come inside your mouth. Would you like that, Princess?"

She faked a shiver. "Oh, yes! I would *love* that." He was sick. But he was also fooled into thinking he controlled the situation, which was to her advantage. "What will you have me do to you?"

"I want you to suck me."

My pleasure.

She unzipped his pants and pulled them to the floor as his cock sprang free. It was impressive. Too bad she was going to have to harm it to save the man she loved. She ran her fingers along its length. "You like that?"

"Yes." His voice was a low groan. "I want it in your mouth."

"Whatever you wish." She swallowed hard. She knew she could do this. Biting her bottom lip, she stole a glance at the bottle and then at the door. Four steps and she could be out of here. And she hoped to the gods he couldn't move while he was in pain.

She began by licking the tip, her distaste only evident on her face, which he couldn't see. "I need a different angle. You're so big, I can't fit you in like this." His legs were hanging off the bed, and she was kneeling in front of him on the floor. Gently, she guided his hips to

the right a couple of inches. Then she guided him back a bit so that his cock was not far from the table where Ah-ten's bottle sat.

This time, she took him fully into her mouth, letting out a deep moan as she did. Carefully, she glanced at the bottle, judging the distance. Her left hand clung to his balls, massaging them. His face twisted in ecstasy, his eyes still shut. Her right hand snaked out to grasp the bottle at the same time that her mouth worked its magick. The roar that escaped his throat when her teeth made contact was enough to send a shiver down her back. She tasted blood in the seconds before she sprang from the room, bottle in hand, moving toward what she hoped was freedom.

Chapter Eight

There *had* to be a way out. Caire was reluctant to admit that she might be trapped. She knew she should have thought this through a little more, but the knowledge that Ah-ten was trapped in the bottle, even for the time being, was more than she could bear. Clutching the bottle against her chest, she slipped into a darkened hallway and hoped Ari didn't catch up with her.

"I hope this works," she whispered, running her hand along the cobalt glass. She closed her eyes and envisioned awakening Ah-ten, having him materialize before her. Nothing.

"Magick words," she mumbled, hoping they would come to her. "Surely there are magick words. Something, anything." She concentrated, certain he would send the words to her through telepathy, but she couldn't read him, had never been able to.

She sank down in the darkness, hiding behind a large statue. Hopelessness enveloped her, threatening to overtake her. There had to be a way out of this palace and a way to rescue Ah-ten from his prison. If only it would come to her, if only...

A hand closed around her mouth, and she gasped at the contact with the hard body that pulled her back, seemingly into the wall.

"Do not scream," the voice warned. "I will get you out of here."

She nodded. Something about the voice seemed sincere, and she felt no threat. In fact, she'd felt no indication of another person's presence. The hand moved from her mouth and the wall closed behind her. She was safe, at least for now.

"Who are you?" Her eyes roamed up the figure of the man who had pulled her into his haven. He was built similarly to Ah-ten. Large, tall, with long black hair and piercing green eyes. They could almost be twins, save for the scar that ran across his forehead and sank down to his left eye. It didn't take away from his appeal. In fact, unlike Ari's scar, his only made him more alluring.

"I am Creed, one of the Djinn. And I am here to save you and my brother." He held out his hand, indicating the bottle. She hesitated a second before placing it in his hand.

"You know how to free him?" Her heart pounded with anticipation. If this man could free Ah-ten, then she could get out of here and go back to Tu'at.

"Of course I know how to free him. My kind have been imprisoned in these for centuries. And we know the incantation that leads to freedom. But we cannot speak it ourselves. I shall give it to you, and you shall release him." He stalked across the room, allowing her to fully see where he had taken her.

Massive walls as ancient as the ones in her home surrounded the area, though the furnishings were sparse. Three wooden chairs sat haphazardly placed around the room. A tiny table was at one end and a bed at another. No rugs, no paintings, no signs of the inhabitants could be found save for the furnishings. She made her way to one of the chairs and sank into it, her eyes never leaving the massive Djinn who appeared to be conjuring fire from thin air.

"Why are you helping me?" She ran her gaze up and down his long, massive form, wishing she had left Tu'at sooner. Who knew the Djinn were so handsome? He turned back to her once the fire had grown.

“Ari. My other sibling. He is filled with anger and rage, and he wishes to kill Ah-ten and all who care for him. You are in grave danger and cannot stay here.” He placed the fire in a large cauldron and then motioned for her to come closer. “Warm yourself,” he commanded.

She dragged her chair so she could sit next to the fire and near the man who again had his back to her. “I am aware of the danger, and I have no plans to remain.”

He turned. “Good. Then you will awaken Ah-ten, and I will return you to your land.”

“I’m not going alone. I’m taking him with me.” There was no way she was going to leave him here at the mercy of a sadistic brother who had already managed to capture him once. And she wasn’t going to let him out of the bond they now shared, the promise they had made with their bodies.

“No. He must stay here. A war is beginning. He will stay and aid me in defeating our brother. Only then will he have the choice of leaving.” Creed’s stance indicated that he was not a man to argue with.

“I know all about the war. And I know a thing or two about your brother. He owes me a debt.”

“Wishes? Desires? My brother owes you nothing.” He stalked across the room and began a new incantation, this time producing a meal from thin air.

“You have no idea about your brother or about our arrangement.”

“My brother does not make arrangements with women, no matter how beautiful. I don’t know what hold you think you have over him, but he is his own man. He bows to no one, much less a woman.”

“Why did you bring me here, if all you planned to do was insult me?”

His laugh rang out, reminding her so much of the man she’d come to love. “I had no intention of insulting you. I only intended to save you and have you leave.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” she argued, folding her arms.

“Come, eat. I have been watching you. I know that your time here has been strained. You should have nourishment, and then you shall leave.” He conjured a table and then placed the food there for her to see. Warily, she stood and took a seat at the table.

“Watching me? And what have you seen?” She narrowed her eyes at him.

“I have seen all of you, my lady. And I know that you think you have more control than you have. This place does not respond to your type of magick. You are defenseless here, and you need watching.” He smiled, then joined her at the table. She watched as his big hands reached for the wine.

“And I suppose you plan to be the one to watch me?”

“I have no time for such frivolity. This is why you shall return to your home. Have your own people watch you. When Ah-ten is free, when the war is ended, he will choose to go back to you or choose to free himself from his bond to you, as you put it.”

“You don’t believe me, do you? You think Ah-ten and I did not swear words to one another.”

“My lady, I know my brother. He would never speak words of bondage, either out of love or consequence.”

Creed’s flippant remarks heated her insides. Ah-ten did love her. She swore she had seen something aside from lust shine in his eyes. The pit in her stomach indicated that she must be correct. Otherwise, it would not hurt so much.

“You say he has a choice, yet you act as if he will be forced to remain here.”

“He will. When you release him, you shall command him to stay. You care about him, do you not?”

She nodded.

“Then you must command him. You understand the seriousness.”

“Of course, I do. Do you know who I am?” If he had watched her as he had said, then he must know her identity.

“A human. A mortal.”

“Surely you know I am far more than that.” She drank the wine, reveling in the warmth that it spread through her body. The food he had placed before her was tasteless, not aiding the hunger deep inside her body. But the wine, it went to her head, making her feel warm inside, reminding her of how it felt to love Ah-ten, to have his body pressed against her.

“You are a woman. That is all I need to know. Women are fickle and not to be trusted.”

“Your brother trusts me.”

“Ah-ten trusts no one, not even his own blood. Now, we shall end this conversation, unless you wish to accede to my wishes.”

“And what is it that you wish?”

“You shall release my brother. “

There was no way to win with this man. “I will do as you say. I will release him and give the command for him to stay, but I wish to stay as well. I have a stake in this war that even you do not understand.”

“No one has a stake save for the Djinn. You will be a distraction. You must return.”

“I can’t do that.”

“You will have no choice.”

“You cannot command me. I answer to no man, and to no Djinn!”

“If you do not do as I say, your beloved will remain imprisoned. That is not what you wish, so I suggest you acquiesce. I will give you the charm, and then you will return to your home. When the war has ended, he might return to you, if he wishes. Until then, you must not interfere.”

“Ask yourself, Creed, who else do you think has a stake in this war? Who else is mentioned in the great prophecies? And who is it that chose to give up his title for a woman?”

“You know nothing about me.”

“I know you are as much to blame for the prophecy as your brother is.”

“I do not live my life, nor make my decisions, based upon prophecies. I live by logic. Tell me, lady, if you believe you have such a stake, then who are you?”

She leaned forward, her hand brushing against his arm. “Who do you think I am?”

He moved his arm away from her and then looked into her eyes. “I know who you think you are.”

“No. I am who I say. I am Caire of Tu’at. My father is the lord of the Underworld. He sent me here to protect the people, and that is what I must do.”

His laughter flooded the room. “The Tu’at, you say? The Underworld.”

She felt the steam rising up to her ears. How dare he laugh at her! “Yes, you fool! The Tu’at.”

“I knew your father. Back when the world was young. You think he sent you here to save the people? He sent you here for other purposes.”

“What are you talking about?” Her stomach felt weakened as the wine made its way into her system.

“Your father. You have been a thorn in that man’s side since your birth. Constantly causing trouble. You think he sent you here to become a martyr?” He wiped the laughter from his eyes. “This prophecy you speak of -- tell me, what does it entail?”

She stood, even though her knees felt as weak as her stomach. “The prophecy has guided my life for an eternity. I am here to save my people, to end this war.”

He folded his arms, narrowing his eyes at her. “The prophecy you speak of is from the dark times. Tell me, have you ever been above ground? Have you seen the land that dominates this planet? The powers there? You and your little magick have no place in the modern world.”

“You are full of yourself.”

“Not as full as you. Do you wish to see the real world? To go down there from here and look upon what you wish to save? It is corrupt, controlled by the Mer. This is why Ari brought Cael to this realm. And you have now sent him away. Do you know the cards you are playing? The hand you are helping?”

“I am not listening to your riddles! Speak the truth or stop speaking.”

“I shall speak the truth. Release Ah-ten, and he shall tell you the state of the world you wish to save.”

“Why can you not tell me?”

“I have other matters to attend, things you would not understand.”

“Why should I trust you?”

“You have no choice. Set him free and leave him to do what he is meant to do.”

“Which is...”

“Return to the Djinn.”

“He has his medallion.”

“It is not enough. He needs a master, someone to serve.”

“I won’t enslave him.”

“You have no choice. Tell me, do you want to help me? Do you want to end the rule of the High Council, to destroy them once and for all?”

“Yes.”

“Then do it.”

* * * * *

Caire knew she had no choice. Creed was right. She and Ah-ten could work together to set things right, but to do so, she had to control him as a master controls a Djinn. But there was no rule against wishing for his freedom. She hoped.

She spoke the words and then watched as Creed vanished and Ah-ten materialized in front of her eyes, the smoke clearing as he moved forward.

She smiled. "You're alive."

"Of course I'm alive."

Her smile widened. "I need your help."

"I know." He was ready to admit it now. He knew he was the only one who could protect her. Her world was in danger, but more importantly, she was in danger. "Come to me."

She walked into his waiting arms and pressed her cheek against his chest. "I need you to take me home."

"I will take you home. But first, there is much to do, so much you must understand." How could he explain to her the danger they all were in? Ari's plan was so far-reaching, even more than he and Creed had first suspected, and now that Ari knew Caire's secret, knew that she held the key to immortality buried under the sands, he would not let her go so easily. With her powers, Ari could rise above the council and take control of the Djinn.

"Your medallion." Her eyes searched his as her fingers caressed the metal. She knew now that he was her slave.

"Yes."

"Is this the reason why you agreed to help me, take me home?"

"It is the reason why I am bound to do it, but the reason I shall do it is because I now understand why you must end this war, how you must end it. I know you have been speaking the truth. Too much has happened here, and the words you have told me make sense. I know my sister is alive, and I know the High Council must be overthrown."

"Ah-ten, I feel so weak."

"I know. You are weakened because you have been too long outside your realm. The Djinn realm is a magickal, wonderful place, but it will also drain your powers if you are not

accustomed to the sensation. All you have to do is wish it, Princess, and I will return you to your home.”

“And what of you? Will you go with me?”

He nodded. His entire soul ached to be with her, to have her know that he was doing this for her, not just because of the Djinn laws to which he was now bound. “I shall go with you because it is what you desire. But, Caire, it is also what I desire. I did this for you.” He raised the medallion and pressed it against her cheek, amazed by the heat that surged through the metal at the contact with her skin.

When a Djinn was under the control of a human, the metal heated up to the human’s touch. In all his years as a servant, the heat had never raged beyond control. Tonight, he could feel it all the way to his core, throbbing in his blood. Caire was more than his master now. She was his ruler, his divine appointment. She was the reason he had lived for so long, and now he knew it as easily as he knew his own name. She would end the war that threatened, but only after she was stronger.

“Come, we must return to Tu’at. There, you will regain your strength, and then I will explain to you what you and I are up against and how we must defeat it.”

“Wait.” Her teeth closed around her bottom lip, as if she were contemplating her next words. He waited, his breath lodged in his throat. For once, fear of uncertainty surrounded him. She could choose to make him stay here.

“What is it you wish?”

“Shouldn’t I set you free? Isn’t that what you want? What you have sought? You saved me, saved my life. I owe you your freedom.”

He ran his hand along her cheek, letting his fingers linger at her lips, closing his eyes at the sensation of touching her. “Save your wish for another time. For now, you need me as a Djinn. I shall protect you, but I need all of my powers until you regain yours. Now, come. We should return.”

For three thousand years, he had longed to hear the words of freedom. To be honest, he had wanted to hear them for far longer. It was only after the final betrayal, the thing that led to his dissent, that the longing grew stronger. He wanted to be free, to be his own master. Everyone who had ever promised him freedom had betrayed him. And now, the one woman whom he knew could make good on her promise stood before him, soft, beautiful, willing to let him go.

His heart surged with what he knew was more than respect. It was love. She had faced down Ari in an attempt to save him when she thought he was trapped in the bottle. She would have given up more of herself if she had had to, but she had found a way out. For this, Ah-ten admired her tremendously, but there was more to his feelings for her than admiration. He loved her. And he was almost ready to admit it to himself and move on to the next level by her side. They would end this war.

Chapter Nine

Ah-ten knew he defied every law by going with Caire back to her world. He should have stayed to fight, should have hunted Ari down and presented him to the High Council as a gift. But he had been unable to move when she'd asked him to take her home. He was her prisoner, her servant. And now, all he wanted to do was bury himself inside her in the bed where he had taken her that first night.

"I can smell your pussy." Ah-ten ran his hands along Caire's bare arms, causing her to suck in her breath when he touched her. His three thousand years of freedom had roughened his hands to a sensual level. Having his hands stroke against her intensified the fire deep within her that had been lit the moment his eyes glittered over with desire.

"What do you want?" She tried to sound aloof, tried to pretend that his touch on her skin was not killing her at the moment. But when his breath touched against her bare shoulder, she knew she was lost to him.

"I think you know." His lips blazed a trail up to the crook of her neck before his teeth grazed against the sensitive skin there. "You have infected me with desire for you. Do you know that I can smell you now? I can sense how strong you desire me, how you long to have me inside you."

She trembled against him as his teeth made their way to her sensitive earlobe. When his teeth caught it and gave a light tug, she inhaled sharply before melting against him. Her bottom came into contact with his erection. "Is this a Djinn trick?"

"My ability to smell you? No. It is a lover's trick. I am in tune with your body now, walking to the same rhythm, sensing your desire as it grows."

"You lie." Could he really sense her? If he could, that meant they were bound to one another, didn't it? Thoughts of promises and forever flashed through her mind before he turned her in his arms and looked down at her, a slow fire burning deep inside his gaze.

"Does this feel like a lie?" He led her hand to the growing bulge in front of him. "Does it, Princess?"

No, it didn't. It felt like the ultimate truth to her, something she longed for more than her next breath. She shook her head, all she could manage before his lips captured hers.

Kissing Ah-ten was like taking in the breath of the gods. He made her dizzy, forced her to cling to him as his tongue parted her lips and demanded she yield to him. Right now, doing just that was all she could think of. His hair tickled her neck as he pulled her flush against him, pressing her bottom in so that her most sensitive spot was rubbing against his rough trousers.

Even through her dress she could feel her clit throb and ache with longing. She wanted his teeth wrapped around it, gently pulling, like he was doing now, except it would replace her tongue as he sucked and stroked. His hands sank into her hair, forcing her head to still, even though her mind churned with possibilities. She wanted to please him, wanted to show him why he should stay with her, why he should allow her to be his, why he should long to be hers. All of her instincts, her sexual prowess, seemed to abandon her when she needed it the most. With Ah-ten, she felt like little more than a virgin.

“Let me love you.” She pulled away from him, hoping for permission. Her lips ached to wrap around his cock, to please him the way she knew she could, but he refused to release her.

“This is not about you loving me.”

The words stung, almost bringing tears to her eyes, causing her chest to ache in the same way it had before he had come to her. “You don’t want me to love you?” The words barely made their way out between her heaving breath and the tears that stung her eyes.

“No. I want to love you. Lie back and allow me to do it. Allow me to show you what three thousand years of loneliness can do to a man.”

The tears she held at bay spilled as he gently pushed her back onto the bed, amidst the pillows. One slowly crawled down her cheek at the tenderness of his words. *I want to love you*. She would take nothing less than this, she realized as he rose above her, his eyes never leaving hers.

“Are you sad, love?”

“No,” she managed. “I’m not sad. I have waited for you for so long.” A sob tore at her chest as he covered her with his big body.

“No tears. Just lie back and let me.”

His tongue began its journey once more, this time starting at the hollow of her neck and working its way down to her exposed cleavage. His gold medallion fell against her skin, reminding her that Ah-ten was more than likely under the Djinn control and was acting against his will. All she wanted was to have him all to herself, of his own free will. But doubt crept in as his hands moved up her thighs, sending desire coursing through her body.

She could love him like this, couldn’t she? She could allow him to take her even if doing so was deceitful. Biting her bottom lip, trying to hold the tears at bay, she decided that she could not live without his touch. The hands that closed over her underwear and began

pulling them down her thighs were the ones she wanted on her always. Even if she had to enchant him in order to make it so.

“You are so beautiful,” he murmured against her thigh as his tongue began working its way higher, to the place that now sobbed with heat, that longed to have his face buried there.

“Ah-ten.” She tried to coax him into taking her and placing his mouth over her mound. It was no use. His hands closed around her wrists, holding them at her sides.

“No. In my own time. Last time was rushed. This time, I shall have you the way I desire you.”

Her hands fisted at her sides and her head thrashed back and forth as he began blowing his hot breath across her clit. It begged to be stroked, to be bitten, to be loved. Her pussy quivered and wept, spilling out her cream, beckoning him, hoping he would give up the teasing and just drive himself into her.

“Do you know how sweet your pussy smells, Princess? It smells like incense from home, like ten thousand flowers. And your cream...” He inhaled sharply. “... it cries out for me.”

“Yes. Please.” She gasped the words.

“No. Not yet.”

He shifted on the bed, pulling her dress over her head as he moved. “I want to see you first.” The cool air met her skin as he turned onto his side and began lazily stroking her breast. “You have the most beautiful breasts. I want them in my mouth. I want to run my cock between them and have you push them together, swallowing me whole. Will you do that for me?”

“Yes. I’ll do anything for you.”

He rose above her, holding himself off her chest, dangling his cock in front of her mouth, tempting her tongue to run along his shaft. “Push them together.”

Her hands finally moved, pressing her breasts close enough for him to drive in between them. He moaned long and low as he positioned his cock at the opening and slowly began working it between her breasts, as if he were entering a sacred temple. When the tip finally broke through, he let out another moan and then slid the rest of his shaft through.

She had been fucked this way before, but never by a man quite like this. His cock peeked out from between her breasts, again teasing her mouth. She leaned forward and licked the tip before it disappeared again back into the folds of her cleavage.

“Caire. Gods, you feel incredible.”

Her pussy spasmed, her wetness increasing as he continued to fuck her breasts, each stroke gaining more of him into her mouth. Finally, he remained perfectly still, allowing her to suck his head while his scrotum rested against her chest. One hand snaked around to her pussy, which longed to be stroked. When his fingers closed over her clit, she let out a cry, unable to do much more with his cock buried inside her mouth.

“Do you want my tongue here?”

She nodded, then whimpered when he pulled his cock from her mouth.

“You are so wet.” He slid down her body and parted her lips, holding them open while he watched her muscles tense and release. “I can see how much you want me.”

“Please, Ah-ten. Please.” Gods, she was reduced to begging him. And she would do so on her knees if it meant he would give her the release she needed. Just to have him deep inside her would be enough. She didn’t care at this moment if he loved her or not, if forever existed for them. All she wanted was him, flesh on flesh, skin sliding against skin while he pounded them both toward ecstasy.

“Please what? Wish it, Caire, and it will be yours.”

The words lodged in her throat. She couldn’t wish it, couldn’t force him. Gods, she wanted to, wanted to make him give her all that she needed. But the words wouldn’t come. “I can’t,” she managed.

“Why not? I’m so close. All you have to do is say the word, Caire. Say it.” His voice grazed against her skin, causing every nerve ending to stand at attention. Still, she refused to wish.

“No.”

“Why not?”

Gods, why not? She couldn’t think with his tongue so close to her, so close to sending her to the heavens. “Because I love you.” She had barely breathed the words when his mouth closed over her and his tongue delved inside. This was what she wanted. Oh, gods, yes. To feel him moving inside her, to feel his tongue darting in and out of her swollen lips while he feasted on her flesh, to feel his fingers dig into her thighs when he slipped the pillow beneath her bottom, raising her up for him.

This was what she would die for if he asked it.

Ah-ten knew it was cruel to bring her to the edge and then deny her pleasure, but he had to be sure. Most women would break if his head were buried between their thighs and he was promising them pleasure beyond belief. Not Caire. She could have enslaved him in that moment, could have forced him to be bound to her forever. Instead of whispering a wish or an incantation, she whispered the words that squeezed at his heart, words he never thought to hear from a woman. *I love you.*

“I can’t wait, Caire. I have to have you now.” He rose above her and placed his cock at her tiny slit. He should have split her in half, but somehow, her body stretched to accommodate him, to fit him, even though it was a tight fit. “Gods, your pussy feels so incredible. You have no idea how much I missed making love.” And he had, because making love had not happened very often in his lifetime.

“Ah-ten,” she whispered his name slowly, softly, as he raised her legs, spreading them open so he could watch as his cock moved in and out of her pink folds.

“What, love? What do you wish?” He shouldn’t have said it, shouldn’t have tempted her again, but he couldn’t control the words. He wanted to fulfill her wishes, wanted to be with her, to do for her, to be her champion and protector and whatever the hell else she needed.

“Nothing.” She shook her head, as if she knew he still tested her. “I wish for nothing.”

Her pussy fisted around him, tightening even more as he began thrusting into her harder. Her last admission was all he needed to drive him over the edge. The sounds of their lovemaking rose up to him, followed by her scent, the one thing that drove him insane.

Fire began at his toes and traveled its way into his system as her tight body welcomed his every stroke, tightened and released as he moved within her. Her pretty clit stood at attention, swollen, begging to be loved as his cock worked in and out of her slit. He angled himself so that his cock rubbed against her clit as he entered her. He would have moved his fingers down to lavish attention, but holding her open like this, watching their bodies join, was such a sacred sight, he could not find the strength to release her.

When her orgasm came, her eyes closed tightly and her hands dug into the bed, fisting the covers in her grasp. He felt it deep within her, as if it came from her very soul. When the tremors took over, humming through her body, he could no longer maintain control. He dropped her legs and pulled her to him, circling her waist as she clung to him, her hands in his hair. The tiny whimper that met his shoulder was his undoing.

The orgasm ripped through his body as he spilled his seed into her. She welcomed him, her body stilling as if it refused to release his seed, as if it wanted every part of him to remain inside her. His breathing refused to steady and his hands shook as he pulled her to him even closer, grinding his cock into her. She was his. His woman. All he wanted now was to protect her. To love her.

Placing a kiss on the top of her head, he whispered words he knew she couldn’t understand. His native tongue. *I love you. I am yours.*

“Why did you agree to help me?” Caire wove her fingers through Ah-ten’s, determined to keep him near her. What she had felt for him those weeks watching him on the battlefield paled in comparison with how she felt having him here with her.

“I agreed to help you because I now understand the importance of your place in this.” He pulled her to him, and she pressed her cheek against his bare chest.

They lay on her bed, propped up with the pillows they had used to aid their lovemaking only moments ago. For once in her life, Caire felt complete. There was no longer a desire to prove herself to her father, no longer a need to control all aspects of life on Tu’at. All she wanted now was to love the man who lay next to her, running his hands through her hair, placing tiny kisses on the top of her head.

“My place in the war?”

“Your place in the world. You know, you are a myth among my people, a legend. Everyone speaks of your beauty, but none can claim to have ever set eyes on you. I was the first.”

“You were the first for a reason.” She traced tiny circles on his chest, avoiding the medallion as she moved her fingers along the taut flesh. His broad, tanned shoulders were the most awe-inspiring sight she had ever witnessed. She rolled onto him, unable to resist touching him, feeling his flesh pressed against hers once more.

“Yes, there was a reason, one that I was reluctant to admit. Tell me, Princess, do you still wish to have me as a husband?”

The words should have sent her into a frenzy of delight. Instead, she felt her heart sink at the question. There was no denying that the medallion that rested firmly against his chest. In the time that she had known him, he had not agreed to anything so easily. There was only one reason for his compliance now. She was his master, and as a Djinn, he was bound to

agree to her demands. If she asked him to marry her now, he would have no choice but to do so.

As much as she wanted Ah-ten, she did not want him like this.

“All I wish right now is for you to do as you wish. Tell me, Ah-ten, what would make you happy?”

His face softened, and it was as if all the tension left his body when she spoke the words. He gathered her face in his hands and held her head still. Looking deep into her eyes, he spoke the words she never dreamed she’d hear. “I want to love you. More than anything, that is what I wish.”

Tears stung the backs of her eyes at his admission. This could not be happening. He had fought her so bitterly, had spoken words she would never forget, had told her she would never be more to him than a means to an end, and now it felt as if all her wishes were about to come true. Looking into his eyes, she swore she could see her future there. Doubt crept up on her, though. She did not know the ways of the Djinn well enough to know how much he could control his own mind while the medallion hung from his neck.

“I want to free you, Ah-ten.”

His finger closed over her lip. “Free me later. For now, I want you to love me.”

Caire pulled her legs from beneath Ah-ten’s sleeping frame. She had to get a handle on this, had to think about what had taken place. Everything inside her wanted to believe that he had changed, that somehow, somewhere, he had discovered he loved her. But could a man who swore against love for three thousand years suddenly change his mind? She wanted with every fiber of her being to believe that it was so. She wanted to feel the way she had felt when she looked down at him and saw herself reflected in his eyes. More than anything, she wanted his love to come to her willingly.

“You have your slave now.”

Her heart leapt into her throat. It only made sense that if Ari had come into her world before, he could follow her now. "What are you doing here?" she demanded of the figure who still hid in the darkness.

"I am here to collect on your debt. You owe me, Princess." The sinister voice rang out, threatening to awaken Ah-ten.

"I owe you nothing." She tried to steady her voice, tried to keep it just above a whisper, but her fury raged at the thought of Ari's invasion.

"You owe me everything, bitch. I have given you that which you sought. You have your slave. Now you must fulfill your end of the bargain and give me that which I need."

"We had no bargain." She pulled the sheets tightly around her.

"We had a bargain when this all began. Remember?" He moved across the room, his hands closing around her throat before she could protest.

"No woman would have you." The words barely choked their way out as she shot a desperate glance back at Ah-ten.

"Just as no Djinn would have you without a medallion placed around his neck." He pulled her from the bed, dragging her across the room on his inhuman feet.

"Let go of me." His hand threatened to cut off her air, and the look on his face warned that he might snap her neck in two without thinking twice.

"I made your little love nest possible. Do you think he slipped the medallion around his neck of his own free will? No. I placed it there; I enslaved him; I made it possible for you to release him." He shook her, sending a blinding pain all the way down her back. If she could have screamed, she would have, but the room was threatening to go black under the force of his grip.

"Don't do this," she managed the last words before he flung her to the side. It took a full ten seconds for her to recover enough to realize Ah-ten no longer rested on the bed. He had transformed himself into a Djinn. Murder filled his eyes as he locked onto his target.

The sudden chill in the air signaled Ari's transformation. His body vaporized, sending him, she supposed, to the other realm as well. Panic seized her. God, if Ah-ten ended up getting captured again, she wasn't sure what she would do. And if he killed Ari, the council would surely have his head. She couldn't lose him. Couldn't. Fear wrapped around her as she recalled his words earlier. *What do you wish?*

"I wish you were safe, Ah-ten. I wish Ari were gone."

No sooner had she said the words than he reappeared, his shirt covered in blood.

"Ah-ten! Are you hurt?" Her heart thundered in her chest, threatening to beat right out of her body as she stumbled toward him, still light-headed from having Ari's hands around her throat.

"No. It's Ari's blood. He has escaped me."

"Escaped you?"

"Yes. But not before he could tell me what you did to him." A slight smile turned up the corners of his lips. "Remind me never to make you angry."

He fell into her arms. He smelled so good, felt so good. She closed her eyes and pretended that this moment would never end. That he would always be there for her. There was a way to make it so. She had wished him to safety and could wish for him to be bound to her side.

"So, you didn't kill Ari?"

"No. He disappeared."

"He could be anywhere."

"No. He is not in this realm. I promise, Caire, he will not hurt you." He tipped her chin and looked deep into her eyes as he spoke, and she knew it was true.

"We have other matters to settle, then." She pulled away from him, ashamed of what she had done. Had she caused all their problems? What damage had her wish done?

“We have no secrets, love. I am with you. Removing the medallion will not affect my love for you. If something is bothering you...”

“I made a wish, Ah-ten.” She watched as his eyes changed. His breath was visibly caught in his throat.

“What did you wish?” The words sounded strained.

“I wished for your safety.”

“Is that all?”

“No. I also wished for Ari to be gone.”

He let out the breath he was holding, turning it into an audibly pleased sigh. “It worked. But where is he now?”

“I don’t know.”

“We’ll find him.”

“How?”

“You will wish it. Wishes are very powerful, as you can see.”

“How will I wish it? You do not control your brother.”

“No. But you can.”

“I want to free you.”

“In time. For now, we must say the vows; we must join with one another. Allow me to protect you as you once wanted. Then you and I will go to the council, and we will stop Ari. He wishes to overthrow not only the council, but also the Lemurians. This world was founded by three peoples, and it is time that we join forces. If any one of us grows in power, the others will weaken, and we will have what happened on Earth so long ago. We can’t let this place be destroyed, too. “

“I am with you.”

“Then let us go. We shall go to the council and demand they step down. You and I can do this. Together.”

“Yes, together we can do it.” She squeezed his hand. “I wish we were standing before the High Council.”

Epilogue

“We have heard your testimony, Ah-ten, and we must agree that your brother did pose a threat to the council; but you must be warned that you have placed us all in danger by ridding the planet of the Lemurian prince.”

“I accepted that risk.” Ah-ten stood before the council, wanting nothing more than to end this game.

“Yes. You accepted it for all of us. For that, you will pay. Also, there is the matter of becoming a djahdan, of your original dissent. For that, you must give up your powers forever. You will return your medallion, and you will lose all powers associated with the Djinn.”

“And *you* will tell me why you sent my sister to be a kitten on Eden Four, why you wish to control the Mer through Cael’s marriage to Ah-lia, and why you have placed my brother Ari in charge of a plot to overthrow the Mer!”

The high councilor appeared stunned. He opened his mouth to speak, but Ah-ten interrupted him.

“You do not deserve your title. The time of the council has ended. If my brother refuses to take the throne, then I will take it willingly. Step down.”

Ah-ten's fingers closed around the medallion that had rested against his chest for three weeks now. In one swift motion, he pulled it from his neck and threw it onto the floor.

"I choose to be my own man. And I will honor my father by taking his place."

"You defy us again!" The councilor's voice boomed.

"I defy no one. I will protect what is mine."

"You have no choice and no means of protection," he was warned.

Yes, he did have protection. Now, he had something on his side that he had never had before. Love. And he was certain that it would overcome whatever obstacles the council and Hades planned to throw into his path.

"He has me." The deep, raspy voice came from the back of the room. An audible gasp strangled from the high councilor's throat.

Ah-ten turned to face his brother. "Creed."

"I am Creed, prince of the Djinn. And I am here to claim my throne. I have heard all that my brother claims, and I do believe it to be true. I have denied everything far longer than I should have, and now it is time for me to take my place as ruler of this land. For too long, your deception has played a part in our world. No more. I know of your plotting and scheming. I know you took my sister and placed her on a planet far from here to keep the Mer from uniting with the Djinn's true leaders. And I know that you are responsible for the hardships that have befallen this planet since that time. This woman, the leader of the Tu'at, has the protection of her people and now of mine. Guards!"

The high councilors were not able to move quickly enough to escape the guards who ripped the medallions from their necks and placed shackles on their wrists. Confusion surrounded the room as Creed moved to the front to face Ah-ten.

"For your part in overthrowing the council, I grant you leave of this place. If you have no desire to be a Djinn, you are no longer obligated to be bound by Djinn rules. You may

leave this place, rule with your woman as King of Tu'at, if that is her wish. It is not necessary for you to change your plans to rule in my place.

"I will take your place if it is needed."

"You are needed elsewhere."

"Yes." Caire stood next to him, taking his hand as Creed spoke. Ah-ten was speechless at his brother's actions. What had convinced him to take his throne?

"Then he is yours. Treat him well. And as for you --" Creed turned his attention to the governors of the Djinn colonies around Desert Moon. "-- you are either with me or against me. As I speak, Prince Cael of Lemuria, leader of Gen-ru, is on his way to reclaim my sister, Hyla. When he returns, he will be brahman. The war is over as I declare it. The portal to Earth will be reopened. And Hades help you if you choose to stand in my way."

Ah-ten slipped his arms from around Caire and approached his brother. "Creed, may I speak with you for a moment?"

"I thought you might have questions." Turning to the assembly of people, Creed nodded his head, indicating they could now leave him with his brother. To Ah-ten's surprise, they nodded back, signaling their acceptance of Creed's position as ruler.

"Why did you decide to do this?" Ah-ten had always known his brother to stand by his word, and when they had spoken last, Creed had had no plans to change his mind about his chosen life path.

"I have to know the truth. If Cael finds Hyla, then the councilors were responsible for her disappearance. If Ari knew this... if he knows this now, he is as much to blame as they are. If they manipulated this situation, their punishment will be severe. Even the gods will not be able to help them."

"So you did this for Hyla?"

“Yes. For her. And for me. It was time. You are right -- I have been punishing everyone in the name of honor, and yet I have had little of it myself. I am a man of my word, a man of honor. And it is time I act in such a way.”

“Brothers?” Ah-ten placed his hand on Creed’s shoulder.

“Brothers.” Creed repeated the motion, then nodded toward Caire. “I have you to thank for this.”

She smiled. “No need to thank me. I only did what I had to do.”

“Without you, none of this would have been possible.”

“And I thought you didn’t like me.”

“I never said I didn’t like you. Now go. I have much to do, as do you. Take care of my brother.”

“I plan to do better than that.” She winked.

With a few more parting words, they were on their way. For the first time in a long time, Ah-ten knew how it felt to truly be free.

“Your brother is pretty impressive,” Caire whispered as her fingers traced tiny circles on Ah-ten’s chest.

“Thinking you should have chosen him?” He smiled down at her.

“No. I have exactly what I want right here. Husband.”

“And I have what I want, too.”

“I’m looking forward to a new order.”

“So am I.”

“But you know what else I want?” She licked one nipple then the other, and gave him her most wicked smile.

“Mmmm. What’s that?”

“I want you. Forever. Here. I have something for you.”

“What’s that?”

She handed him a golden cup. “It, my love, is the key to immortality. Drink from it and live forever. It will renew you, keep you young.”

“You’re sure you want me forever?” His lips turned up in a smile that was growing more common these days.

“Yes. I’m sure.”

“Do you wish it?” he teased.

“With all my heart.”

He raised his lips to the cup and drank from it. Then he pulled her back on top of him. The room started to spin as his hands traced a map of the world on her back. Her world. Their world. It was safe now because of him.

When he entered her body, they wordlessly made a pact. Forever. Sounded good to her.

 THE END 

Alicia Sparks

A Gemini through and through, Alicia likes to leave everyone around her breathless from her numerous projects. Not only does she make you quiver with her words, she is also a Ph.D. candidate who is studying Folklore. In her spare time, she is a university professor who teaches freshman composition and American Literature. An avid lover of music, most of her inspiration comes from the gorgeous musicians she listens to. The rest is imagination with a little reality thrown in for good measure.

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* * * * *

Read on for a tantalizing glimpse of

Tales of Enchantment 1: The Question of Royalty

by Kai Andersen

Available Now from Loose Id

Tales of Enchantment 1: The Question of Royalty

Frederick trailed hot lips across her cheek and nibbled on the shell of her ear. “You're so beautiful, Serena. So lush and full and sweet. You're made for me.”

The sensations coursing through her were so exquisite that she sobbed as his lips continued its assault on her ear. She was swept into a world where nothing mattered but the pleasure of her senses. She just knew that she was burning, and only he could satisfy that fiery need. She wanted nothing else but his lips on her lips, on her breasts, on her body.

Responding to an inner urging, she pulled his head down and her lips touched his hungrily. They shared an open-mouthed kiss so hot and torrid that Serena felt the ripple of shock that went through Frederick. Instead of being alarmed, she experienced a decidedly feminine thrill that she could incite such a reaction from a man like Frederick.

He moved, his lips reluctantly leaving hers to explore her chin and neck, making biting little kisses, sending curls of heat shooting through her entire body. His lips danced lower... even lower... grazing the slope of her left breast...

A quaver started in her belly at the desperate way his hot mouth captured her beaded nipple. She arched into his mouth and cried out as he sucked strongly. Varied sensations splintered within her, going straight to her core and causing a strange tension to build up in her belly.

“Sweet...”

“Frederick...”

“You're mine, Serena.” His breath feathered her nipples. “Mine. Say it!”

Her head fell back. “Yours.”

He continued his sensual assault on her other breast, intensifying her pleasure as he suckled. Delayed, their conversation suddenly registered in her brain. With a strength born of alarm, she pushed him away. “No!”

Her breast popped free of his mouth. Frederick staggered and fell off the chaise. He stared up at her in bewilderment from the floor as she frantically held her torn bodice together. “Wha -- ?”

Serena tried to sit regally, but she surmised that she failed miserably with her hair all tousled and her hand holding the bodice of her gown together. Gazing down at the man lying at her feet, she wished they didn't have to stop. She missed his kiss already. But they had to. She had to. “I'm a princess.”

Just those three words and his face changed back, became hard and unyielding, forbidding and stern. His eyes lost the slumberous look, turning empty and cold.

She almost wished time would flow back. If it did, she probably would've kept her mouth shut and just gone on kissing him.

He stood up and dusted himself. “Prove it.” His stance echoed the challenge he had just voiced.

Serena was taken aback at the hard glitter in his eyes. She recognized the distinct disadvantage of her position when she was forced to look up at Frederick. Moreover, his request -- rather, demand -- wasn't expected. “What?”

“You say you're a princess. Prove it!” When she just continued to look at him, he continued disdainfully, “Surely, you don't expect us to just take your word for it, do you?”

His insult was too much. She put on “her princess face,” as her youngest sister used to call it. It was a visage devoid of emotion, cold and forbidding as his. “I am a princess. My word is truth. Whether you believe or not is up to you.”

Serena delivered her words with indifference, but deep inside, she was hurting. How could he kiss her like that and not believe her? She was startled from her thoughts by the sound of slow clapping.

She lifted her eyes.

“I must commend you for that little speech. It almost has a ring of truth in it, as Stepmother said.” His eyes mocked hers. “Who taught you that little trick?”

Serena felt sick and bewildered. What was he accusing her of doing? “I don't understand. What are you saying?”

“Oh, cut out the acting, *princess*.” She did not like the sneer on his face. “I know who you are.”

Serena paled. She shifted on the chaise and clutched her bodice tighter. *He knew? How did he know? She had been so careful last night...* “Who am I?” Her tone was carefully neutral.

“I don't know where you're from...”

Serena breathed a sigh of relief.

“But I know that you're a pretty good schemer angling to be the next crown princess of Mithirien.”

Stunned silence.

Then a burst of shocked laughter bubbled from her lips. “Why would I... want to be a princess... when I'm already one?”

Through eyes slitted from laughter, she saw uncertainty cross his face, saw it dissolve into an embarrassed but determined resolve to maintain his stance, if for nothing else but his dignity. She understood; she had been in the same situation countless times before.

“But you're not.” He held himself stiffly. “You're a common peasant with your eyes on riches and rank. You've learned that I'm looking to wed a real princess, and came up with this scheme to trap me. You know, it's to your advantage if you can prove that you're a princess. I don't know. Maybe you can ask someone to pose as your father, the king of some never-heard-of kingdom. If we can establish somehow that you're a princess, I might even marry you.” He leered at her. “Anything to possess that lovely body. Whoever sent you has certainly studied me very well. They knew I wouldn't be able to resist a woman as beautiful

and lush as you. Few men could.” He murmured the last few words huskily as he slid his hand over the hard bulge outlined by his tight breeches.

Like a magnet, Serena's eyes were drawn to the movement of his hand, and everything in her melted with desire. When he reached out a hand toward her, she came to her senses and her head snapped up, desire giving way to a hard, burning anger. How dare he distract her with something like that?

She jumped up from the chaise, her skirts swishing, her eyes blazing and her red hair flowing behind her like a scarlet cape. “For one, ‘common’ and ‘peasant’ are redundant. For another, I have no wish to marry you.” In her fury, the words tripped over one another in their rush to get out. One finger pointed at him, jabbing his chest with each word. “For a third, if you're really a prince, you would be offering me your jacket, instead of taking advantage of my dishabille. For a fourth, if I marry, *when I marry*” -- a particularly hard jab poked him in the chest -- “he's going to be someone who'll love and cherish me, and not someone who wants only my body and acts like he wants to eat me up. Whole. Like a snake.” Her eyes flashed fire. “Lastly, I'm not about to stand here and be insulted. I'm leaving! Right this very minute.”

A particularly loud clap of thunder boomed across the sky. Serena checked in her motion toward the door.

“Wait!”

She knew she'd hate herself later for it, but she stopped.

“Are you really a princess?”

“I don't have to answer you.”

“Please.”

“Don't you know how insulting that question is after I've assured you all repeatedly that I am?”

“Try to understand it from our point of view, Serena. You dropped in from out of nowhere, with no retinue whatsoever -- a behavior never heard of in a princess -- and you expect us to believe whatever you say just like that?”

Hearing it put that way, Serena had to admit they were right to be wary of her. Royalty, especially the ruling family, have always been targets for whatever crazy reasons.

“Why would this time be any different?” Her voice came out cold and frosty, the way she intended.

“Turn around and look at me, Serena.”

After hesitating for a moment, she turned and met his gaze head-on.

“Because you'll be looking into my eyes while you said it. Eyes don't lie.”

Her back stiffened. “I am a princess.”

“I believe you.” A smile crossed his lips, dispelling the tension in the room. “You're not scheming to trap me into marriage?”

She found that she couldn't hold on to her anger in the face of that smile. She smiled back. “It never crossed my mind.”

“Pity.” His low voice carried in the quiet room, the rain muted by the tightly closed windows. “You would've made a beautiful queen.”

A frown creased her brows. “I don't understand you. First, you're angry that I'm trapping you into marriage. Now, you're wishing that I want to marry you?” Her voice rose incredulously on the last words. “And they say women are fickle-minded.” She scowled.

“I ache and burn for you, Serena.” Serena was shaken to see his eyes darkened with need. “If I have to marry you in order to possess you, I will.” His gaze dropped down to her mouth.

A curl of heat unfurled in her. Serena was floored, even as one part of her thrilled at his words. No matter who he believed she was, he wanted her. *Her*. Serena, the woman -- not the princess. Yet, another part was dismayed. He talked of possessing, but not of love; of his

body's needs, but not of his heart. Shouldn't the two go together? She was confused, for it was very evident to her that for Frederick, they were very separate. Also, didn't he already have a betrothed, his stepsister Giselda? What did he take her for, some kind of fool? Or maybe she was to be his mistress?

At this thought, she bristled. "Watch what you're saying, Your Highness. Remember who you're speaking to." If he had professed his love, she probably would have... But it would be a lie. *No, it's better this way.*

"Now I've made you angry." He smiled ruefully and dipped his head in apology. "I'm only saying what I feel. You wouldn't want me to lie to you, would you?"

Her lips trembled. What did she want? Suddenly, nothing was clear anymore. She thought she wanted marriage to a nice prince who'd love her and settle down and have half a dozen lovely children. But now, her father was forcing her to marry an old lecher. She had found her prince -- *a prince*, she corrected herself hastily -- but he didn't have marriage in mind. Oh, he did, but only because he wanted to have her body, which he couldn't have any other way. To top it all off, she couldn't really fault him, for she was having these odd feelings for *his body*, like kissing him and seeing if his body was really as perfect as it had felt when he was lying almost on top of her. She had tingled in places she didn't know she had when he had caressed his -- she gulped! -- cock. She had wanted to see what it looked like, wanted to touch and feel and kiss. Even with the space between them -- almost three feet -- she could sense his tension, a raw magnetism that called out to her befuddled senses.

But more than that, she wanted to *know* him, to know how his mind worked and to understand the events that molded him into the man that he was right now. She wanted to erase the cynicism she saw in his eyes and unearth the child-like trust and wonder that she was certain lurked somewhere deep in his soul. She wanted to find something worthy in this man who affected her as no man ever had.

"Has --" She cleared her throat and tried again. "Has it happened before?" At his blank look, she explained, "Peasant girls claiming to be princesses and all that."

He snorted. "It happens all the time. But it became especially serious these last two years when I was out wife-hunting, to the point that I was ready to give up and to forget all about it. But I couldn't." He was silent for a moment. "I'm the Crown Prince of Mithirien, and I have a duty to my family, to my lineage, and to my kingdom."

The vise clamped tighter around Serena's heart. This was what the queen was talking about last night -- this duty. At the same time, her heart squeezed at the strained look on his face and in his eyes. How she wished she could take away all his burdens. No wonder he was always so serious. Even in his enjoyment of her body, he was so intense. The heavy weight of responsibility must have pressed down on him.

"So you're looking for a princess to wife --"

"Not just *any princess*." He strode swiftly to stand before her. "But *a real princess*."

"Why?" *Was that why he was marrying Giselda? Did she count as a real princess?*

"I promised my mother. She was dying."

"I'm sorry." She offered her condolences in a quiet voice.

"It was a long time ago, about eight years. I guess I'm lucky, because I got to know her before... before..."

"You miss her."

"She was a wonderful mother."

"I'm sure she must have been."

"I killed her."

* * * * *

What people are saying about

Tales of Enchantment 1: The Question of Royalty

Kai Andersen

The Question of Royalty is a nicely written story that lovers of prince and princess stories who get a happy ending will enjoy... Kai Andersen did a great job writing a compelling tale that will make readers want to read more of her work.

-- Claudia Maldonado, *The Road to Romance*

Ms. Anderson does a fine job in taking the idea of the fairy tale and making it into an erotic tale. She is able to keep the whimsical qualities of a fairy tale and imbue them with the sexy story content that brings it a unique and very readable twist.

-- Kim, *Coffee Time Romance*

This story was surprisingly hot, enough so that Kai Andersen will be added to my auto-buy erotic list... I'd recommend *Tales of Enchantment 1: The Question of Royalty* on both the romance and erotic scenes, and especially on how well the relationships were shown between characters.

-- Tara Black, *The Romance Studio*