



Midnight Showcase

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DEITIES ⊕ F DESIRE

Insatiable Interludes by Ann Cory

Menage by Mae Powers

Behold The Beauty by Megan Hussey

Deities of Desire

MIDNIGHT SHOWCASE

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MIDNIGHT SHOWCASE
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Insatiable Interlude, *Ann Cory*
Ménage, *Mae Powers*
Behold the Beauty, *Megan Hussey*

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DEITIES OF DESIRE

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Insatiable Interlude

by

Ann Cory

Prologue

Ethereal music filled the air, drops of golden sap fell from the ancient Yakshas, and the cries of the songbirds disturbed the sacred emerald grove. One by one, the fragile strings of the instrument broke and extended to his pale flesh. Around his neck they wove and tightened until a single drop of blood fell.

She looked on in satisfaction, and the dampness between her thighs became noticeable to her. A thin river of crimson bled along the ground until it found a place to rest. The roots of the Yakshas stirred, and welcomed the rush of renewed energy deep inside. A rush of cool wind blew her naked body back into the box, where she would wait for another to play her a song.

Chapter One

Derrick walked the winding trail, his boots worn to the soles. Heavy blankets had been left behind, as the extra weight had become a burden. His friend was to catch up to him soon, after a hunt for their late breakfast.

The night had been long, but neither could sleep and agreed it better to continue on by the light of the moon. Nightfall had been delayed again with the presence of a harvest moon. The pinkish-orange glow lit up the sky like a rupture of soft flames, haunting yet full of splendor.

While the lack of sleep would catch up to him soon, he had the mindset to make the most of the day. Animal tracks had been fossilized into the dry, barren earth—prints they hoped to not have to worry about any time soon. With the food scarce, they could only do so much, and didn't want to risk carrying around anything with a tainted scent for long.

Only weeks away from the town of Montage, where work was to be had, they were still ahead of schedule. The fire in their own village had burned the only source for money, and men everywhere set off to find new work. With winter a mere three months away, no one could afford to wait.

Derrick looked up into the trees full of lush foliage and songbirds. He was reminded that beauty did still exist, and that all you had to do was look. A cardinal poked its head around and dashed to a limb to welcome him with a melody. He hummed along with the spirited sonata and enjoyed the lazy draft of air against his face.

"Rabbit!" shouted his friend, his face red and sweat-covered.

Derrick turned and raised his arm. "Tasty choice," he called back.

"I hated to do it," Prado panted as he ran to catch up. "I'm still much too sensitive to be a hunter."

"To harm any creature is difficult to stomach, but it's the way things are. You don't want to hear my speech on the whole food chain subject again, do you?"

He enjoyed the young man's gentle nature. It was one of the qualities that had shown through from the first day they met.

"No, you can spare me. I know that once it's in my stomach, I'm sure to get over it," his friend laughed heartily.

"You're an expert hunter, and I could learn a lot from you. Because of your patience, we eat like kings when others are scrounging. Were it not for you, I'd be skin and bones by now."

Prado beamed with pride. "You know very well that I learned everything from you."

"Maybe so, but you've outdone the teacher now, and for that I'm proud. Besides, these temperamental joints of mine keep me from being as spry as you."

"You're not old Derrick, but you are wise beyond your years."

"Why thank you, that's quite a compliment coming from such a young man as yourself, who I'm sure will never age. You have a youthful spirit, and I envy that. I fear I've become much too cynical and lost my sense of adventure. Come, let us look for a place where we can sit and enjoy this hearty meal."

The two walked in silence for another few miles when they came to an open area with ample shade.

"This looks like the perfect place to cook this little beast up and rest a spell. What do you think?" Derrick pointed to the lump of bloodstained fur. "Then if it should rain, we'll be well sheltered."

"Sounds good to me." Prado tossed his pack to the soft earth's floor.

He ran his hand along his thick brown hair and started to set up camp.

"Shall I make my famous rabbit stew?"

A loud rumble echoed between the men. Derrick rubbed his stomach and gave a sheepish look. "I think you have your answer."

"Consider it done. A nice warm meal will do us good and restore our energy. If we continue to have more clear weather like it's been, we'll be looking good for time."

"At this rate, we'll be in Montage early enough to get to know our way around the town. I'm looking forward to a nice home cooked meal, with fresh baked muffins and pounds of potatoes. Of course I

mean no disrespect to the feasts you've provided my friend, it would just be nice to not have to hunt for our own food."

"I take no offense, for I feel as you do. You're just lucky I enjoy cooking," his friend mused. "Of course, I'm afraid I've spoiled you now. I, on the other hand, may never know what it's like to be served again."

"I'm sure you'll find yourself a golden-haired lass who will happily cook for you."

"That's a delicious incentive to keep me going without food or rest. To be in the company of a woman would be an experience I've not had for a long time. I'd probably come across as an immature fool. But first, I'll charm her with my dashing good looks."

"Here, here!" Derrick laughed and thrust his arm in the air. "Now let me have a look at this place we'll call home for the night."

He scouted the site, inspecting the soil between his fingers. A swim in a cool, refreshing lake had been his goal for days, but they hadn't come to such a place thus far. Off in the distance he could barely make out a subtle trickle of water.

"I think we'll finally get a chance to clean ourselves up tomorrow. Wouldn't that be nice? You've so much grime on your face, I'd think you were growing a beard."

"I can't say you look too bad, since you've got that whole rugged, adventure guide look to you, but you could do with a sweeter scent."

Derrick walked over and lightly punched his friend in the arm. "That's for stroking my vanity."

After a few more times around the site, he decided his legs were too restless to be of much use. "It looks like there's plenty of firewood to take care of supper, but we may need more for later. I'm going to have a quick look around a little farther in the woods, and then I'll join you in dinner preparations."

"Admit it, you hate to watch me cut the poor animal up. For such a strong man, you have a very soft side."

"Yes it's true, but don't tell anyone," Derrick whispered with a finger to his lips.

"Just don't get lost or I'll have to eat this all by myself."

"Not a chance," Derrick shot back, and gave a nod to his friend.

With several paths to choose from, he let his intuition be his guide.

Deities of Desire

* * * *

Gandharas smelled a strong earthy scent surround the box, and sensed a presence. A sturdy man approached with a deeply embedded passion for music. There was another element that she sensed in him, but she couldn't put her finger on it. She cared more for his musical interest, a melodious lust that would breathe new life into her. The fact her body reacted so strongly, let her know there was an extraordinary quality about him. Tiny vibrations ran through her veins until she thought she'd burst into a million pieces.

This man, a stranger, offered her an inkling of hope, and it had been ages since she'd executed that feeling. She wanted to rub her body against the flesh of a man, to feel his calloused fingers brush against her tender skin and up through her golden locks. More than anything she wanted hungry eyes to look upon her body as if she were the most beautiful flower in the meadow, and beg to pluck away her skirt to find the stamen hidden inside. Her lips longed the kiss of another, and warm breath to fuel her very essence.

Love was an emotion she'd almost forgotten; yet it consumed her nightly thoughts. The dreams were of a young woman's sensual fantasy, somewhat warped, but still something she yearned to attain. Time had sapped her of happiness, suitors, and life itself. She couldn't let this newly presented opportunity disappear.

Her restless desire pushed at the lid of the box, trying to open it with all her strength. "Come on," she moaned, her body straining hard. "I need this."

"You are running out of time." A chilling voice whispered into her ear, startling her. "It is best you gave in and accepted your life in this form."

She cringed. The witch was always meddling where she didn't belong.

"I will never accept this as my home. It was wrong of you to take me away from my village. I don't deserve to be imprisoned while you do whatever your heart desires."

"There, there. No sense wishing for things to be any different, my pet. I have what I want and you can't take that away from me. Ever."

"Don't get too comfortable in that fake blanket of beauty you wear," she challenged the witch. "I will find the right man and he will fall in love with me through his passion. This curse you plagued me with will end and you'll go back to your old, decrepit self. Mark my

words. As I sit in this box, I think only red thoughts of you. I will take back my life.”

Several moments had passed without a reply. She sighed in relief, comforted to be alone with her thoughts again. In her diminutive form it was exhausting to hold such a tedious conversation. The old hag knew how to bait her with words. One day soon she’d get even and take back everything that was wrongfully stolen.

With one final push she opened the box. Gandharas took in a deep breath of fresh air and stretched her cramped arms out wide. Her gossamer wings shone in the afternoon sun and warmed her insides. Her dainty feet touched the soft mossy soil, and the transformation began. Rips and tears seared through her body, a brutal combination of pleasure and pain. It took a few moments to regain her balance; legs were something she’d found foreign after so much time cooped up.

As the stranger neared the forest, her body expanded until she was of a womanly form. With each step closer, she would appear real. For every note he played, she would lure him in. Gandharas reached inside the box and tugged at her dress. Once she slipped it on, its material magically covered her body, but did not conceal it entirely.

A rustling of leaves signaled her to hide where she wouldn’t be seen, but where she could safely watch him. This lone man had to be the one to rid her of a life in captivity.

Chapter Two

Derrick walked for a short while, until a magnificent tree stood in his pathway. Its brilliant limbs drew out in all directions and provided excellent shade under miles of lush foliage. The strewn limbs reminded him of fingers that held a fan to shade him from the rays of the late afternoon sun. He'd climbed many a tree as a boy, with the belief the limbs would lead him somewhere special and sacred. They were guardians to him, and kept him safe from dark and evil spirits.

As he rounded the tree, he let his fingers trail along the mahogany jagged bark. It had a large girth and looked to be hundreds of years old. Had he the agility of his youth, he'd scale the tree, and stretch his arms out wide as if he could fly. Derrick searched for extra wood that would come in handy later. He was not one to take from the trees themselves, as he regarded them to be living spirits. Instead, he took what was offered to him from the ground, and always gave his thanks in return. Most nights he lay awake, unable to drift off, but a cozy fire after a delicious and filling meal soothed some of the old memories and gave his body a chance to relax.

When he went to pick up several stray branches, his attention was drawn to a unique shape on the ground. Lodged between two gnarled roots was a small box, deep chestnut in color. Derrick picked it up and ran his fingertips along its smooth edges. The creator of the box showed expert craftsmanship, much like his father's artistry at one time. A latch of gold kept it closed tight and he worked hard to pry it open.

"Interesting, does this belong to anyone?" His voice echoed around him.

No one answered. With his tongue lodged inside the corner of his mouth, he worked the box like a puzzle, trying to maneuver the sides

and the latch in various directions. A scarlet-colored bird fluttered onto a nearby tree branch and watched him with considerable interest.

His thumbs continued to work at the stubborn lock, but he couldn't get a solid grip. He rested his back against the tree and worked at the latch for quite some time until it finally came loose. The moment the box opened, intrinsic music echoed from all around the forest. His heart did a double take as the emotive cadence stirred his soul. Tears threatened to fall and land upon the soft velvet sheath that lined the inside of the box.

Tiny iridescent musical notes floated visibly around his head and swirled up into the sky. They reminded him of fragile icicles that hung from his old thatched roof in the winter. His wife had called them frozen tears. She said their house wept tears when it was cold, and longed to have the sunshine cast its warm rays upon it.

He watched the notes blend with the colors of the sky until they faded into the landscape. It had been over a year since he played his violin, and he missed the way music made him feel inside.

"Thank you," a voice as soft as a lullaby sang out to him.

Derrick moved away from the tree and emulated a warrior stance. The box slipped from his hands and gingerly landed on a flat patch of moss.

"Who is there? I order you to answer me." His eyes darted in every direction, looking for a dangerous foe. One could not trust those who lurked around in the woods.

"My name is Gandharas." From around the tree stepped a woman bathed in pale light from her head to her toes. The glow illuminated her honey-like hair and magnified sapphire-blue eyes. Her dress was unique; a single layer of sheer fabric that lay atop her skin, making her look more like a queen than an average woman.

Derrick wasn't sure whether to run away or to bow at her feet. The curves of her body shone through the gown in a way that made his cheeks burn red. For just a moment he pictured her completely nude, with a look in her eyes expressing an open invitation to look where his eyes pleased.

There was an air about her that seemed forbidden. Illicit. She took a step forward and gestured to the ground where he stood.

"Please, close the box and set it down with a careful hand. It's quite delicate."

"I'm sorry." Derrick placed the closed box on the moss as she asked.

He looked around to see if there was anyone else with her. "I didn't realize it belonged to anyone."

"It is my world," she said simply.

"Are you alone?"

"Not at the moment. You are here. Do you happen to have a name or shall we continue on with a one-sided greeting?"

"My apologies, where are my manners? I am Derrick," his voice quivered as he spoke.

Why did she make him so nervous? He watched her walk from the tree in a slow, deliberate motion, and stood a comfortable distance from him. It was difficult not to stare. Her hips were shapely and full, with long lithe legs that begged to be caressed. He imagined his hand on the small of her back, pushing her into him.

Her heat radiated from a distance, bringing with it a primal presence. Somehow a passion he'd forgotten had awakened his senses.

"Looks like you were lost back there." The sultry woman's voice broke him out of his daydream.

"I'm sorry?"

"I said you seemed to lose yourself in the song that was playing a moment ago."

"I believe it came from the box, but I wasn't sure if I was imagining it. I know it sounds strange, but it's been a long time since I've heard the sound of music. I played the violin once."

"You say once, as if you don't play anymore."

He shook his head. "No, I do not."

"Why would you stop such a skilled and gifted talent?" A look of confusion stretched across her features.

"Because my wife died, and with her went my sole inspiration to play."

There, he'd said it. His wife's death was something he hadn't mentioned for a long time, and it never got any easier. The words tasted like rusted metal against his tongue.

"I'm very sorry for your loss. Perhaps you need someone new to awaken your muse?"

"I doubt I'll ever play again," he mumbled, and circled the toe of his worn boot in the dirt.

“That would be a shame. I’m sure your wife would have wanted you to continue to play and nurture your talent.”

Derrick’s stomach turned in knots. He felt uneasy holding this type of conversation with a stranger, let alone the fact he hadn’t been in the presence of another woman since his wife passed on. Thoughts of his precious Marie invaded his mind, and the remembrance of the final path her dying fingers had traced along his arm warmed and comforted him. He called it her blessed mark, to keep him safe from ill intention and harm. She promised to watch over him until his last breath, when he would once again rejoin her and continue to fulfill the dreams they’d once made. Life would never be the same, and he wished there had been some way to save her.

Gandharas strolled around him, her eyes never leaving his. Her hands ached to feel the texture of his wavy black hair and run along the hairless mounds of his chest. Even with his clothes on, she could tell he was muscular, probably from years of intense physical labor. But what attracted her most was the way his mind worked. He was a deep thinker, and full of emotions. She was correct that there had been another source for his passion, but had been unprepared to deal with a ghost. Was love truly strong enough that one would continue to pine over their mate, even after death? She couldn’t remember.

If it was that strong, she was going to have to pull out all the stops. She couldn’t have a ghost stand in her way of what she wanted. It was clear he was a sensitive man, and she would use that to her advantage. First, she would need to make him forget.

Chapter Three

Derrick wasn't sure how to behave around such exquisite splendor. Jolts of electric currents lapped at his weather-beaten skin, and made him feel awkward in his movements. The woman's aura was like a magnet that held his attention, drawing him in, and erasing any sense of control.

Try as he might, he found it difficult to look away, for fear of her disappearing. Where had this beautiful creature come from? He'd been alone in the glades of the forest just moments before. Now her presence made the forest small and claustrophobic, like a trap of some sort.

A sweet floral scent drifted in the air, a scent that beckoned a memory. Gandharas walked closer to him.

"Would you play for me?" Her eyes pleaded in a childlike way.

Derrick shook his head. "No, I could not."

"Do you think me unworthy? Am I so disgusting and ugly that my very company would keep you from something you obviously enjoy?"

Pouting, she placed her hands on her voluptuous hips. He wanted to feel those lips touch his. How could she think such a thing as being ugly and unworthy? There was no other woman he'd ever encountered that was as glorious as she.

His eyes traveled up and down her angelic body and took in all its charms. For such a petite thing, her existence loomed all around him. Derrick watched the outline of her womanly curves move with each breath. Her nipples protruded from beneath the sheer gown, pulling the material inches away from her supple breasts. He didn't know how to explain to her why he couldn't play for her, not without the risk of hurting her feelings.

"I promise, it's not you. I haven't even touched the instrument since Marie died."

Her eyes stared hard into his. Strange sensations crept up his back and infused themselves deep inside his pores. A flash of their bodies intertwined together passed through his mind, hands roaming naked flesh in raw, uninhibited gestures. His body went weak, surges of heat lapped at the soles of his feet and palms. Beads of sweat formed along his brow and trickled at the sides of his face. He fought to ignore the fantasies.

“I promise it will be okay.” Her smile offered comfort but her eyes promised a darker form of affection. “Your spirit wishes for you to play.”

“I don’t think I understand.”

“I’m a woman of many gifts myself, many of which are unique and difficult to explain. One such gift is the ability to hear the voices of all the spirits in the forest. The Yakshas, ancient tree spirits—the very goddesses of nature—love to listen to melodies of all kinds. Music has a way of resurrecting life, all forms of life. You’d be doing a great service to allow them to hear you play.”

Derrick shifted his weight from one foot to the other. He couldn’t keep his mind off visions of holding her, kissing her, and making love to her. *Gandharas*. Her very name sat on the tip of his tongue like sweet wine and sugar. The lips that spoke to him were two wet dew petals that sent pangs of hunger deep within his abdomen.

She inspired him to play her body like a fine-tuned instrument, fingers strumming along the damp strings between her supple thighs. His palm would rest gently against her mound, while fingers flickered against her swollen nub. He imagined her gasps and sighs to accompany his music, a duet of ecstasy and forbidden prose. The tightness of his pants reminded him of how long it had been since he’d last experienced the throes of an orgasm.

Intense pressure from inside made him want to push her down to the soft earth and unsheathe her body. Like an animal he wanted to explore this new prey, inhale her intoxicating scent, and devour her flesh. No crevice would be left undiscovered, or untouched.

His cock stretched inside the rough material, begging to be released deep inside her caverns of wanton lust.

“Go on then.” Her eyes locked on his.

Had she read his mind? Was she asking him to take her right then and there?

“Pardon me?” His throat filled with yards of cotton, rendering him speechless. With the back of his hand he reached up and wiped away the pond of sweat from his forehead.

“Go on and play for me. Please. It would mean so much to me, and the spirits of the forest.”

Derrick found it difficult to resist her. Was she asking for all that much? He struggled with the bevy of voices inside his head. She didn’t understand the feelings that playing the violin would bring. Not a day went by where he didn’t grieve over his wife. He’d never played for another woman before and it didn’t sit right with him.

Still, Gandharas had a way about her that was addictive, seductive, and compulsive. It was difficult to form the word “no” with his lips, though he knew it was what should be said. There couldn’t be harm in trying, just once, he reasoned to himself. If the pain became too intense, he would stop and let it be.

“My violin is back where my friend, Prado, and I set up camp. To be honest, I think it would be too upsetting for me to play.”

“For me?” She clasped her hands together between her breasts. Two luscious peaks winked at him from behind the sheer cloth, the peaks he yearned to nip and taste.

He couldn’t come up with any other excuse that would satisfy her. No one had given him a reason to play, until now.

“All right, come back to the camp with me and I’ll—”

“No. I can’t leave!” Her hands shot up in front of her as if an invisible wall separated them.

“I don’t understand, why not?”

“It’s the rules.” Her eyes glanced about the trees frantically. “Please, I can’t explain. I do so much want to hear you play, but no one else must know I’m here.”

“My friend is a gentle soul, he wouldn’t harm you, I promise. He cries over the animals he kills for our supper and treats people as if they are gold. I couldn’t ask for a better traveling companion.”

“I don’t doubt the qualities of your friend, Derrick. But should anyone find out that I’m here, then I shall go away and you’ll never see me again.”

Her words seemed harsh and final. Threats never worked well on him, but there were other forces at work here. He hardly knew her but already craved the feeling of her skin enmeshed with his. The growing need to do anything she wanted was far too great to ignore.

To please her, to make her smile, and to impress her with what his fingers could do—both on and off the violin, would be his motive.

There was much mystery that surrounded her, and for that he was intrigued. He couldn't believe such a woman would roam alone, especially in the woods. Derrick didn't understand her reasoning, but it was obvious the music was important to her.

"Promise me that you'll tell no one I'm here." Her eyes narrowed into slits.

He knew Prado would never hurt her, in fact he'd probably try and win her heart, but it frightened him to risk not seeing Gandharas again.

"I assure you I'll return alone."

Chapter Four

She watched him glance over his shoulder twice as he walked away. A smile crept along her face. She had him in her clutches, and he didn't even know it. His concern for her leaving overshadowed any fear or guilt he had about playing. She sensed the only thing that kept him from the want to play was his wife, and it made her want to scream.

Memories of the life she once led passed by in the gentle breeze. She'd been sixteen and adored by all the boys in the village. Only one had captured her heart, and she pretended to hold little interest in him, in the beginning. Playing hard to get was something her mother had instilled in her, to catch the best man possible for a husband. She'd forgotten his name now, but she could still make out his boyish features. Her father didn't want her to marry young and forbade her to have contact with any males, citing her too young and foolish to know better.

Once her mother had passed on, she wanted to be away from her father. His constant strict rules and refusal to admit she was growing up only increased her need for attention. One night, her father had caught her with the boy and flew into a fierce rage. Before she had time to apologize, the poor boy had been beaten and ridiculed until he took off, with fear and shame written all over his face. She'd decided right then to leave. The forest was the only place she found solace in the day, so that was where she went.

After hours of sobbing, she hadn't a single tear left to shed. When she looked up, the forest appeared different. Darkness had brought with it shadows and sounds that made chills run up her spine. She stood up and brushed off her dirt-covered dress. As she glanced along the pathway she'd come, it too looked unfamiliar. Trees loomed around her, making her feel small and helpless. Uncontrollable cries and screams escaped her lips as the panic set in.

It was then an old peasant woman had appeared, almost as if by magic. She introduced herself as Selma and held out her hand. The elderly woman offered to guide Gandharas to her home, claiming to live in the village as well. At the time, Gandharas had been skeptical, she hadn't recognized the woman at all, and she just wanted to get home. The woman had other plans.

She called upon two ugly crows that flew down and turned into odd-looking men. Selma had called them shape-shifters. They grabbed hold of her head while the old hag chanted words in a language Gandharas didn't understand. She begged the woman to release her and swore she wouldn't tell anyone about what happened. But they would not let her go.

"What are you doing to me?"

"I'm taking your beauty, child. You have no need for it. I promise it would only bring you trouble later in life."

"But I want to go home."

"No you don't, dear. You ran away from home. I can offer you a place where no one will ever tell you what to do or how to feel. I will keep you safe. Don't you want that, precious?"

"I guess I do. How can you take away my beauty? Will it hurt?"

"Of course not dear, you won't feel a thing. Memories fade, beauty fades, and soon all your heartache will fade, too. It's a small price to pay I assure you. Besides, beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

When she looked up, the old hag's youth had been restored. Wrinkles had disappeared, her stark white hair had turned into a glorious mane of rich raven tresses, and she smiled with a row of pearl-white teeth. It was only after Gandharas was thrust into the music box that she realized the woman was a witch.

Selma had cursed her to live as a spirit within the walls of the box, with only one way to break the spell. A man had to come along with a passion for music, which would then extend into a true form of love for her. Only then would she be allowed to leave the forest and become human inside and out. The music would resurrect her soul and bind him to her.

Most of the memories from her past had faded, but not this one. It haunted her day and night. It was difficult to say just how many years had passed, but she'd watched the season change many times.

Gandharas wiped away the stream of tears and waited for Derrick's return.

* * * *

Through the path of trees, he found his way back to camp easily. It seemed strange how quickly the afternoon light had faded. The early signs of night had already set in, but while he was around Gandharas, her aura had illuminated the entire forest, with more brilliance than the sun ever could. He nodded at Prado, and inhaled the scent of rabbit stew as it cooked on the fire.

"You were certainly gone long enough," his friend teased. "I had to start the fire without you."

"My apologies, I lost track of the time."

"No worries. It won't be long now, I've just added some herbs for flavor." Prado gently stirred the blackened pot. "I take it you did not find any more wood?"

"What?"

"I thought you were out gathering more wood for the fire, we may not have enough to last through the night."

"No, I'm sorry, I ran into a distraction." He nervously smoothed down the back of his hair.

Derrick's skin crawled. He didn't know if it was anxiety or an overload of his senses at work. It wasn't easy to keep things from his longtime companion, but he wanted to keep his word to Gandharas. He didn't want to admit that her beauty attracted him and left him with the urge to make love to her.

In her eyes he became lost, but at the same time he found a renewed love of his music. The past year had him believing that music was attributed to sorrow and pain, when it had always lifted his spirits before.

Derrick rummaged around his large burlap sack, and removed an extra set of clothing, a worn journal, and an assortment of bird feathers he'd collected along the way. The feathers helped him reconnect to the earth when he was feeling low. There was something about their texture and color that made him think of happier times. When he got to the bottom of his sack, he lifted out a leather satchel.

"Is that your violin?"

"Yes. The most beautiful one I've ever seen."

He slipped the sleek instrument out from the bag and brought the wood up to his nose. With a deep inhale, the scent of magnolias and

cedar drifted into his lungs. He stroked his hands along the neck of the instrument and admired its glossy sheen. Images of his wife dancing to the music trailed back into his memories.

At once he felt guilt for thoughts of being with another woman. Marie had bought the violin for him and encouraged him to learn. It was a symbol of their love and affection. Whenever they were experiencing hard times or a cruel winter, she'd ask him to play. It had done his heart good to watch her smile and see her eyes light up. Tears came to his eyes as he recalled the last night he'd played for her. She'd been terribly sick, coughing up blood into his well-worn handkerchief and hallucinating. He couldn't keep her warm enough no matter how close he pressed his body against hers. The once healthy glow on her face had changed to a gaunt pasty look with dark ringlets of gray around her eyes. His feisty little raccoon, he'd called her, hoping for a smile on her sullen face. Marie had forced herself to stay awake, for fear of falling into an eternal sleep. All she asked was for him to play, to soothe her aches and pain.

Each night he sat by her side, holding her hand as she drifted in and out with a raging fever, until finally she let the sleep take her. If she were watching from above, he wondered what she was thinking right now.

"I don't believe I've seen you with your violin since Marie passed," Prado interrupted, breaking him out of his reverie.

"I think I've found a reason to start up again."

"If you don't mind my curiosity, what would that be?"

Derrick hesitated. They were close, more like brothers than anything else, but circumstances forbade him to explain. Prado had been a comfort in his darkest hours, and the best support anyone could ask for. They'd never kept secrets from one another before, and he didn't like how it made him feel. He felt regret and shame.

First he was betraying his wife, and now he was lying to his friend—what kind of a man was he? Still, there was something about Gandharas. She provoked feelings that hadn't been stimulated in over a year, and he craved more. Derrick promised himself to reveal everything to Prado as soon as he returned.

He clutched the violin to his chest and exhaled. "Inspiration. Inspiration has renewed my interest. I shall be back shortly."

"You won't even honor me—your esteemed comrade, with a quick note or two?"

Deities of Desire

“I’ll play for you after I’ve warmed up. It’s been a good length of time and I’m sure to be rusty. It would embarrass me to play before you. For now I just want to see if I can even remember how.”

“Suit yourself. You’ve always been a stubborn old cuss,” Prado joked. “It won’t be long before the stew will be ready to eat.”

“Excellent. I look forward to it.” Derrick took off along the same path, careful to not lose his way. It would be dark by the time he returned.

Chapter Five

“Foolish girl, you think I don’t know what you’re up to?” Selma’s voice boomed like thunder.

“Please, give me another chance,” Gandharas begged.

“I tire of watching you throw yourself at men. You’ve learned nothing from all your experiences with heartache.”

“That’s not true. More and more I understand how precious the gift of love is, but you give me little time to explore it. You require a man to fall in love with me in a moment’s notice, and it leaves me to seem desperate and selfish. I believe pain comes with love, in one form or another. But I must hang on to the hope that I still have a chance at such an emotion. Isn’t love important to you?”

“My beauty is the most important thing to me, and I will not have you spoil it. You’re wasting your time and my energy.”

“This man is different, I assure you. If I can’t make him fall in love with me, then I’ll return to the music box and leave you in peace!” Gandharas clutched her hands together, pleading.

“Very well, I’ll allow you another try. But be warned, a man holds only one true love in his heart, and you better hope that he chooses you.”

“I understand. It is through his music that I can bring passion back into his life. If I succeed this time, will I remain free forever?”

“Yes. Now I grow tired and must rest.”

Gandharas smiled. She knew what to do. Selma would be in for a big surprise.

* * * *

As he made his way, Derrick caressed the wood finish of his prized possession with his calloused fingers and laid them along the strings. A slight vibration stirred him from inside. When he neared the landmark tree, he saw Gandharas. He watched her lithe form

dance and sway to sounds that he couldn't hear, no matter how hard he strained his ears.

Her feet hardly touched the ground while elegant arms extended upwards to the sky like wisps of smoke. The long tresses of her golden hair trailed along her shoulders, covering them like a satin blanket. Her elegant skirt swished against her ankles in a gentle game of tag. She looked to be at such peace with eyes closed and a calm smile. It reminded him of the way his wife looked when he honored her with a song. The faces of both women fought for attention in his daydreams. He wondered why his mind played such wicked tricks on him.

The moment Gandharas turned to look at him, all thoughts of Marie vanished. She held his gaze with steady precision.

"Play," she instructed.

He hesitated. What if he'd forgotten how? More importantly, something tugged at him, a voice that made him want to turn and run away. She had no idea the magnitude of her request. This wasn't easy for him. But he'd forgotten why.

"I'll be happy to inspire you."

Her hands reached up and caressed her breasts. The gown fell away to expose milky white skin. Translucent. Lucid. Stains of pink erupted with berry nipples that called out to his eager lips. She let her fingers swirl around each nipple, her eyes closed while waves of pleasure erupted in cherry blotches across her face. He wanted his tongue to follow the same path her fingers traveled. Her ruby lips parted with sighs and gasps escaping in an erotic melody. Everything about her screamed lust and desire, like nothing he'd ever experienced before. Her movements transfixed him and tears fell from his eyes.

The passion to play had resurrected inside his soul, and he could not keep it away any longer. Closer he walked to where she stood, smelling the sweet scent of her sex in the breeze, and lifted the instrument to his chin.

Derrick inhaled until his lungs were ready to burst and slowly let the air travel back out. It was a cleansing exercise he learned to let go of stress and worry. With his other hand he steadied his fingers along the bow and strummed it over the strings. Bittersweet music surrounded his ears and his heart instantly grew light.

A flood of emotions poured out of him and into the instrument. Derrick ran the bow along the strings again, his fingers positioned

with an airy touch. The violin sang. Its voice rang out and vibrated the ground beneath his feet. When he looked around, the forest had come alive. A heavy load lifted from his heart, as if released from iron restraints, and repositioned high above the clouds.

The lid of the music box opened and miniature notes floated out. They drifted around his body and hovered, placing butterfly kisses along his cheeks. The soft poetic rhythm poured out of him from every place in his body, music he had once played for someone, but he couldn't remember her name. His heart, soul, and spirit aligned with every resonance and cried out for more.

Gandharas danced and circled around him in moves of exquisite grace. In the early hours of evening light, her body shimmered like glitter. As she twirled, the sunset kissed the highlights in her hair, a kaleidoscope of colors to bewitch the eye. It was as if time stood still in that moment and nothing else existed beyond the forest.

Heavenly arms enveloped him and removed the violin from his hands. She slipped close to his body and looked deep into his eyes. Strands of her hair tickled his chin and neck, but he dared not brush it away.

"Don't you want to touch me?"

Ruby lips parted and her warm breath invited his to sample what lay beyond.

"Yes I do, but..."

"I saw everything you envisioned in your mind. Our bodies meshed together, as one. I'm not as fragile as you may think."

"How could you know my thoughts?" His face flushed scarlet.

"I told you, I'm a woman with unique gifts. Now don't be such a gentleman with me. Play my body like you play your violin. Inspire me."

Derrick tried to take a step back, but she reached for the button of his pants. The heavy material slid and rested around his ankles. Gandharas knelt down to free him of his boots and pants. His body ached to feel her pressed tight against him. Gods, how he wanted her, it was almost too much for him.

Her hands brushed up his bare legs and stopped at his cock, now at full attention. He quickly removed his shirt, then ran his fingers through her satin hair.

The sunset was almost over and the forest grew quiet. Nothing existed in that moment, except the heat of their bodies. Her fingers

rolled along the head of his sex and cradled it, her touch gentle as a lamb. The moment her lips parted he sucked in his breath. Derrick knew what was coming. More than a year had passed since he'd been in this position, and the excitement rushed like a torrent through his veins. Her ruby lips fastened themselves over his cock with determination.

The force of her mouth swallowing him up was more than he thought he could handle. Damp, moist heat met his throbbing flesh and struck him like a jolt of lightning.

"I-I don't think I can take that."

Sapphire eyes looked up at him and smiled. With her hands, mouth, and tongue, she made him dance. Back and forth her body moved, taking him inside further each time. To watch her was highly arousing, each movement was slow and confident, she would bring him to a powerful orgasm, of that he was certain. The rhythm she'd found was in tune with his heart beat, rapid and drum-like. If he didn't know better, he swore it echoed in the forest. Part of him wanted to accept the generosity she was showing him, but he'd fantasized about being inside her, and he didn't want to be too spent to experience it.

"Please, I want to explore you. Don't deny me the chance to pleasure you as well."

She removed his cock from her mouth and stood up. "Very well. Do what you want with me. But I beg you, don't be a gentleman. I like a man who isn't afraid to take what he wants."

Her eyes flickered scarlet, begging for him to give her something carnal.

Derrick walked around her and admired each and every curve. Her ass was prominent and full, luscious enough to bite into. He couldn't wait to cup each proud cheek in his hands and squeeze. His fingers traced along her curvaceous hips as he made his way back to face her. The pink stains of her breasts made his cock throb fiercely. Derrick didn't just want to touch them; he also wanted to taste them.

As he bent forward, his tongue trailed around each pronounced peak, suckling at them like they were tufts of fruit. Peach pits. Hard and ripe. He pulled his lips back and lightly nibbled at one, and then the other, excited by her reactions. The urge to plow into her caught him off guard, but was that what she wanted? Her request to take her, to not be a gentleman, left him puzzled. He'd always been a

gentleman with a woman, especially in the matter of sex, her needs were as important as his own.

The art of making love was something he took pride in, but a new feeling was gnawing away at his core. Soft moans erupted from her throat as he risked biting harder. With her hands she thrust his face deeper into her body, smothering her breasts against his face. He nipped and sucked her nipples until they were engorged and flaming red.

“More,” she cried. “Damn you, I want more.”

She trembled against him, offering her body to do with as he pleased.

Derrick pushed her down onto the grass, her body shining like a pebble against the approaching moonlight. His fingers walked down her taut stomach and rested on her hairless mound. Here is where he'd truly play her like an instrument. Two fingers splayed open her inner folds. The smell of her sex wafted in the evening breeze. As he slipped two fingers inside, he was stunned to find her soaking wet. Her body shook and shuddered with each steady movement.

“I want you now. I can't wait any longer.”

He smiled at her impatience. Derrick had other thoughts in mind first. His tongue flickered at the juicy pink swell, another set of mesmerizing lips, plump and begging to be kissed. Such hunger overcame him. The hunger to hold her down, and pound his powerful cock into her over and over again. He wanted to take her until she fell exhausted, and then take her some more. He wanted to hear her scream, cry out his name, beg for him to turn her over, and spank her milky white ass until it turned a deep shade of crimson.

The rawness of his fantasy was a new emotion; it awakened a part that he'd always kept hidden. This beauty was his muse, the woman who inspired him to dream again, and he wanted to offer her a thunderous orgasm. With his lips, he lapped at her in a determined fervor. Her thighs shook while his tongue sank inside, exploring soft layers of dewy bliss. More fingers found their way inside and stretched her wide. He looked up at her. Her breasts quivered and quaked with each quickened breath.

Derrick watched her head rock side to side and he knew she was close to the edge. His tongue lolled around her clit and he suckled at it, as if drinking nectar from flower petals. He'd be inside that flower

soon, and he couldn't wait. First he wanted her to shower him with her inner song.

"Please don't stop," she begged between labored breaths.

He tried to steady her legs with his arms as his fingers, tongue, and lips devoured her insides.

Her body shook violently, followed by a medley of pleasurable moans and cries. All at once she screamed and her juices enveloped his fingers. He licked at the wetness and smiled to himself. With his face buried in her mound, he held her until the spasms subsided.

"I hope you don't mind, but I'm not quite through with you yet," he said with tenderness.

"I want all of you."

For a moment, Derrick hesitated. It seemed there was something else in her voice.

She spread her legs far apart, exposing her glistening sex. The ache for of wanting to be inside her quickly expelled any further thoughts. He rose onto his knees and placed her legs around his shoulders. Without any effort his cock slid where his fingers had been. Further in he dived, the muscles of her sex grasping his shaft and clinging on for dear life.

Gandharas raised her hips to him, meeting his fast paced fury, pulsing in time to his own orchestrated demands. He felt her hold on tight, milking him, pulling him in. Sweat dripped down his flushed face.

"You're all mine, no one else can have you." Her words were laced with a sugary poison and topped off with euphoric sighs.

It was difficult to decipher anything happening around him. The trees of the forest meshed together in the moonlight, and fingered limbs stretched out toward the sky. Derrick wondered if there were things watching him? Black crows flashed in his mind, only to change into the ethereal face of Gandharas.

His adrenaline was on high and he couldn't keep a single thought clear. He erased the confusion and focused on the intensity building in his loins. Blood rushed through his veins, a mad race that threatened an explosion. Her breasts bobbed as he plummeted into her vast lubricated mound, stretching it to full capacity, making his shaft slick as rain. A massive wave of tortured pleasure sped forward all at once, and he held his breath. She squeezed her legs tight.

"Now, right now. I can't believe what you do to me."

Deities of Desire

“I’m almost there,” he returned between gasps.

He’d held back, waiting for her encore.

Derrick thrust deep inside and pulled almost all the way out, just so the very tip of his head felt the port of entry. Her spasms further enhanced the intensity and his body shook. With a crashing vehemence he released all the built up tension and came inside her. He roared and bellowed like a wild animal caught in a trap.

Chapter Six

Aftershocks jerked his body for several minutes, until he was completely spent. Ragged breaths kept him from finding his voice and he dropped down onto the ground, lying next to her glowing body.

“You’re a very beautiful and giving man. I haven’t felt anything like that in so long. You’ve restored energy to me that has been lost.”

“I have you to thank. You inspired me.”

A familiar scent floated in the air and rested against his face. Magnolias? For a moment Derrick was confused. The composition altered and he noticed the abrupt changes that took place around him. He was fully clothed again and playing the violin.

Iridescent notes floated above the trees and cascaded down around him like rain. They changed shape and formed into miniature faces of Marie. Her eyes stared back at him, a look of confusion and pain. “*How can you play for another?*”

The notes turned wildly in the air, diving at him like tiny daggers. They dipped and streaked by his flesh, too close for comfort.

Or were they crows? Birds, as black as night, spread their wings and flew between the shards of notes. His eyes hunted for Gandharas. What was this madness? Derrick could barely make out her form between the glints of the notes.

The violin bow forced his hands to play, an erratic sound bounced off the trees and sliced his ears. He watched her dance about naked in the twilight, her hair spiraling behind.

“You are a fantastic lover. I want you to take me again and again. I haven’t felt this free in years.”

“Wait, I’m not sure I understand what’s happening,” he mumbled, looking at his hands. “I can’t stop myself from playing.” Derrick tried to will them to let go of the violin.

“Don’t ever stop. If you do, it all goes away.”

“What do you mean? Look, I—I don’t like games.”

“But you like to play music, and you certainly liked playing with me.”

He fought to release the instrument from his hands, but his fingers were wound tight. They seemed to be melted and fused together as one.

Gandharas twirled around his body. The characteristics of her face changed and when he looked again, he stared into the beautiful blue orbs of Marie, the eyes of his beloved wife. Was this just what he wanted to see, or was it a figment of his imagination?

“Please, I need to quit for a moment. I can’t think straight.”

Gandharas stopped her dance. She looked over his rugged features and noticed fear behind his eyes. Now was not the time to have him lose interest or ask too many questions. She almost had him. His love had spilled over to her, but a part of him still clung to his wife. Until she changed that, there would be no hope. If she kept his interest on the music, and let it consume him, she was sure that the final memories would fade.

“Very well, but just for a moment, until you regain your composure.”

At once his hands arms fell stiffly at his sides. Gandharas walked up to him, and let her nipples brush against his skin. Once again he was aroused, but how he couldn’t understand. His body was reacting and running on its own fuel. Her ruby lips parted and hypnotized him.

“Did you not feel it? While you played, the music filled the spirits of the forest. Your heart let go of everything that has been weighing it down. It resurrected some life back into my body and helped me to feel again. You seemed so happy. Why would you want all of that to just go away?”

He couldn’t deny the joy it had brought his soul to play again. He’d missed the feeling of control, being able to make beautiful music with his own two hands. At the same time he’d touched beauty with his hands and things were changing too fast. He’d forgotten his wife and given himself to another woman. Unless it had been a dream—he wasn’t sure what had happened. Derrick wasn’t sure if he wanted it to be true. Shame was the only thing he felt.

Somewhere between the fantasy of making love to this beautiful creature, and the reality that he stood fully clothed with the violin still in his hands, something unimaginable had taken place. But the feelings had been too intense to ignore.

“Well?” Her voice was harsh and impatient

“Indeed it was wonderful to play again. But while I got lost in my music, I thought you were my wife, and it hurt. I saw her face just now. I smelled her presence. She spoke to me and told me I’d caused her pain. That is why I needed to stop.”

“It wasn’t your wife, that was just me. It was tricks of the mind.”

“No, I could see her, almost taste her even,” he reasoned.

“Nonsense, it was me blurring your dreams,” Gandharas said, confusion clouding her eyes. “Considering your wife is dead, I would expect you to know the difference. She can’t very well show up whenever she wants, unless you remember her in your memories.”

“You don’t understand. My wife meant the world to me. Yes, she’s dead but I keep her alive in my heart. Our bond was very strong, and I still feel the connection. Your notions of love are much different than the real thing and playing with one’s emotions is harmful.”

“Since you like your illusions, you shouldn’t ever stop playing the violin. If you play, all your dreams will come to fruition.”

“What do you mean? You’re speaking with a foreign tongue to me.”

“Anything that you want will appear before you, but only when you play.”

Derrick shook his head. Her words made his head hurt and his heart heavy. Nothing had made sense the moment he entered the forest. What kind of charm ruled these parts? It had to be magic, perhaps even black magic. He’d heard stories about the witches of the woods and how they could force a man to do anything, even against their will.

Was Gandharas a witch? She claimed to have unusual gifts. Her powers were quite strong. He hadn’t considered her a threat before, but he was no longer as fascinated or blinded by her beauty. His thoughts had become muddled and aroused, a dangerous combination. She had to have put a spell on him.

“Don’t you want her back?”

Derrick shook his head. It sounded too good to be true. To look upon his wife’s angelic face—to have her living, breathing form within arms reach—why it was just the kind of vision he had in dreams. Only, that’s where they belonged. One couldn’t cross over to such fantasies of the mind, no matter how well intentioned they were.

“She can’t ever come back. I resigned myself to that fact over a year ago, and I can’t go through it again.”

“Spirits can be reborn. Why would you close your heart to such a wondrous event? If you had the chance, would you not take her in your arms and tell her everything you’ve ever felt? You shouldn’t shut out such precious possibilities. Just play again and you will see. There is magic in the song of your violin.”

The words were music to his heart, and no matter what powers Gandharas possessed, he couldn’t deny how much he missed his wife. Was there truly a chance? With the very thought of Marie’s spirit reborn, it awakened his soul and passion. It couldn’t hurt to try. Risk was something that came with love, and he was willing to risk it all to have his soul mate back with him. His arms brought the violin back up and he resumed play.

Derrick didn’t recognize the song he played, but it flowed like he’d always known it. Trees swayed their leaves in time to the rhythm, their boughs dipped and moved. Birds flew from limb to limb and circled about in a chaotic frenzy. The sky opened up and large billowing clouds formed, making way for the spectacular harvest moon. Night had made its appearance and the luminous hues dripped along the horizon.

Gandharas smiled and danced about. She knew his eyes watched her body, and he wanted her. Seduction was a game she knew how to play.

“It is such a lovely piece. Your music goes right through me.” She could feel strength returning to her body and felt the warmth of blood pulsate through her veins. The passion of his music was restoring her back to a fully human form.

He was becoming lost in his music, a captive to his passion, and soon he’d be a prisoner of her love. The music helped him forget, she could make him forget forever, but he just had to let go of the last strand of hope. She smiled and danced close around him. Freedom was so close she could feel it.

Chapter Seven

Her porcelain face changed back into Marie's again. Long luminous locks hung loose around her pale naked shoulders.

"I love you Derrick."

His eyes blinked several times, trying to make sense of the vision before him. Marie. He'd recognize her anywhere. This wasn't magic, but her way of letting him know she was alive and still a part of him. Her eyes were every bit as blue as the lake into which he'd thrown her ashes, a request upon her deathbed. She begged to become one with the water, for her spirit to be reborn under the velvet night sky, and become one with nature. To bury her under the harsh ground would have been hard on him as well, so he fulfilled the promise. She'd always said she'd watch over him, to make sure he never felt alone.

"My Marie, is it really you?"

A mischievous smile played upon her berry stained mouth, a sight he'd missed. The musical notes wrapped around and ushered them close, until their lips touched. A kiss was exchanged and warmth spread throughout his veins. Her body melded against his and he basked in her essence. Reunited at last.

He took a deep breath and inhaled her scent, every bit as sweet as the day they'd met. She'd had such a way about her back then, and she'd warned him about her fiery side and temper. It was funny how all the characteristics he'd thought were going to be difficult, ended up being the very things that endeared her to him most. They'd had many a heated argument, but he wouldn't have changed any of it for the world.

With eyes closed, he brushed his lips against hers again and tasted spun sugar. This was his dream come to life, and he was empowered. Gone were the feelings of loneliness and sadness. No longer did he feel weak and heavy in his heart. The emptiness that lingered was now free to welcome back all the grand things life had to

offer. He would play every day if it meant he'd have his Marie again. The supple body he'd loved many nights was before him, requesting his touch. His cock remembered their rhythm and the way her body undulated over him, her thighs straddling him tight. Her head would fall back, pliant breasts swaying like pendulums, nipples ripe enough to pinch.

"Take me, my sweet," she sighed.

How could he say no to the one woman he loved more than life itself?

"But of course, as many times as you'd like."

Her body melded to his, the heat scorching through his clothes.

"Shall I help you off with these?" She tugged at his pants.

"Let me do it." He let them fall to the ground. She pressed close into him, her breath warm. His fingers trailed along her neck, stroking skin that had always been dewy soft. He slid down to the ground and lay against the cool earth. Moonlight kissed her body above him. The familiar pose of her straddling him brought joy to his heart. Hands cradled breasts and whispers of love filled the forest.

* * * *

The witch returned and spoke to her with a mocking tone. "You're losing him my dear."

"I have him where I want him," insisted Gandharas.

"He doesn't know the difference between you and Marie. Look closely at him. He's not talking to you."

Gandharas looked closely. Derrick seemed to be entranced, talking to someone or something that she couldn't see.

"You're living in an illusion. You think I never fell for the charms of a man? How do you think I ended up the way I did. Music was what broke my heart."

"What do you mean?"

"The man I loved played his mandolin every night. I would sing and dance as he strummed the strings, bringing my body to life. Music is its own entity. It takes control of the spirit and soul, and moves the body to its own beat. One night I watched the way another woman danced, listened to her voice and watched her eyes. The man I wanted for my husband took his eyes off me and wouldn't stop looking at her. His rhythm changed, it became tribal, carnal, and it took on a life of its own. I danced with ferocity and fervor, trying to catch his attention, but he wouldn't look at me. Their eyes locked and

he no longer played for me, he played for her. She danced for him until her clothes lay at her feet. I watched him whisk her away and carry her off to the very bed we had made love a thousand times. He let the passion and lust of the music deter his illusion into something she could give him, but it was all in his mind. I've never forgiven him. I let that rage fester into every part of my life. It ate away at me until it robbed me of any chance to stay young at heart. I started to age early and realized my rage for him poisoned me. Music left a vile taste in my mouth."

"So, that is why you've chosen to keep me in a music box, with a spell based on passion and love?"

"Yes, because a man is moved by things we cannot control. That woman was younger than me, beautiful, and inexperienced. She offered him things I could not give him anymore. To him, I was old, used, my body had been discovered too many times, but she was uncharted territory. There were no wrinkles to her, no laugh lines. All crevices and curves were new and virginal. All I ever wanted was the power she had, because it broke down all my defenses. Her youth and looks stole the love and passion I had and made it into something ugly. It made me ugly."

"I am sorry you suffered such a loss, but how does that have anything to do with me?" Gandharas asked. "Why did you choose me to be the one to capture?"

"I watched you betrayed by love. You ran away from the shame, guilt, and torture that would only be worse for you later on. I needed your youth and your beauty to give me back the power."

"After all this time, have you not found someone?"

"I have many lovers, but I'm still looking for the right one. Other women envy me, and I love the way that makes me feel. It's empowering. I will not allow you to take this freedom away from me. I've regained a second chance. I'm sorry you have to suffer, but it was for your own good, at the time."

"How can you justify such a thing? I've missed out on life, on love."

"No one will have you now, you are bound to the spell. Even I cannot break what was laid upon you at the time. While you are desperately trying to get men to fall in love with you, the only one you're truly hurting is yourself. But, I see what you do to them, the men, when they don't take the bait. It's wicked."

“I do what I have to do. If I can’t have their love, then they won’t love either. Besides, that is my business. You’re no better, I assure you. Because you’ve taken love away from me, I react the only way I know how.”

“You’ll never find someone naïve enough to fall for you. The price you ask is much too high. Love takes time, and you want it immediately. I designed the spell to be unbreakable for a reason. You were never meant to leave the music box. It is by my good graces that I temper your games and watch good men be sacrificed. Your illusion of love is just that, an illusion. You play a sick game, but it doesn’t do me any harm. Continue to play sweetie, but remember that it was I who saved you in the end. You should be on your hands and knees kissing my feet in gratitude, for I saved you from ultimate heartache. I’ve helped you stay young and immortal.”

“I’ve heard enough. This time I will get him, and you’ll go back to the ugly hag you always were and still are.”

Chapter Eight

Derrick reached out to pull Marie to him, when he felt the wind knocked out of him. He blinked his eyes several times to be sure he wasn't seeing things. Gandharas stood before him, smiling.

"But you can't be—" he started.

"What are you talking about? That wasn't me you were ready to make love to."

"Get away from me," he cried, pulling his pants back up.

"Derrick, I assure you that whomever you thought you saw, it was just in your imagination. You seem to be very confused."

"I've grown weary of these games! I cannot stand here and take any more foolishness."

"What foolishness are you referring to?"

"The floating musical notes, the control over my mind and body, the eyes of the crows that watch my every move."

"The crows?" she interrupted. "What about them?"

"Are you blind, or is this more taunting? They infest this forest and multiply every time I look at them!"

Gandharas paused, her brows furrowed.

"That isn't me. That's Selma's shape-shifters. They help her do her dirty work."

"You expect me to believe that, on top of everything else you've put upon me? I feel like I'm losing my mind around you," he grumbled, his hands gripped his forehead.

"You don't believe me?"

Derrick shook his head. "No, I think you have lost touch with reality some time ago and are trying to drag me into your madness."

He could feel things shift around him that sent chills up his spine. The trees closed in around him—much too close. He watched the roots slide along, underneath the ground, bark covered snakes without a forked tongue.

“What is wrong with you? Did you forget we made love, how you took from me and devoured my body? I’ve given you back an incentive to play and put my heart on the line. I did it all for you, to win your love. Still, you push me away like some diseased weed.”

“Love is not a competition. At least it shouldn’t be. I admit that I fell for your charms, you are a beautiful woman, and I’ve been a lonely man. You gave yourself to me freely, I did not force you, but I’m not in love with you in the way you want. I love my wife. Gandharas, I hardly know you. I’m quite certain you put a spell on me.”

“You’re stupid, silly man. I’m not a horrible witch if that is what you’re thinking, though there is one that roams this forest. She is Selma, the woman I mentioned. I’m simply a spirit, cursed to a life in the music box that you picked up, looking for my way back home. My world is so very small. When you opened the box, I was given another chance at freedom. You showed me love, passion, and reminded me how it feels to be a woman. I’m bound to this forest until you express your love to me, and I need your help to make that so.”

“How can you be a spirit? I’ve felt you. We made love, you said so yourself. If you were just a spirit, my hands would go right through you.”

“I’m real, while the hope is there. Men are quite easy to lure when it comes to a naked woman. The minute you started to play your music, the more power it gave to me. I assure you it was my body you embraced, touched, and loved. They were my lips that wrapped around your cock and stirred your desire. I’ve tasted life, and now I want more. You can make me whole again, it’s a dream I’ve longed to come true. I refuse to go back to a life in that music box.”

“I cannot give you what you seek. My heart belongs to another.”

“I admit that the dedication to your dead wife is more potent than I was ready for. But you see, I am dead as well. Inside my heart it is a black tomb. You shone your light inside the tomb, and I want to always have that. I’m sorry if I hurt you, and I won’t do it again.”

He sighed. “It doesn’t work that way. Love comes from a place deep inside and I’m not able to extend that to you.”

“You’re a fool. I watched you, I could even feel the love wash over me, and you know it’s true. Don’t let yourself to go back to the unhappy world you’ve inhabited, give yourself a chance to learn how to love all over again!”

“You don’t understand.”

“Do you plan on spending the rest of your life alone? Will you not allow yourself to ever fall in love with another?”

“I can’t answer that. If someone was to come along and it was the right time, than I suppose it could happen. You can’t just wish it to be so!”

“You had no trouble in getting what you wanted. You wanted to taste between my thighs, and I let you. I did not deny you. How can you stand before me and I deny me what I need?”

Rage stewed in the pit of his stomach. There were no words to argue with her statement, and he’d have to live with his slide in judgment. Derrick watched her stomp around the woods, her arms flailing wildly in the air. In many ways she acted like a child: the games, the tantrums, the need to have things only her way.

He felt sorry for her, and her plight. It couldn’t be easy for her, but his sympathy wasn’t enough to pretend to love her. Inside he had a hard enough time accepting his weakness, to have to live with his poor behavior, but he realized part of him had wanted to recapture the moments he and his wife had shared.

He’d have to keep his wits about this woman, or witch, whatever she was. She was a poison, and she’d already gotten under his skin once.

“Please calm down.”

“Calm down? You have no idea what it’s like to be trapped inside a cage! My need to escape makes me appear selfish I admit, but it would be to make you happy in the end as well. I can’t breathe in there. It’s a confinement with four walls. I am meant to be a free spirit, to come and go as I please!”

Derrick tired of hearing any more. Her poison was working its way inside, and he could feel its cold draft filter through each pore in his body. He had to remain calm. His intent was not to hurt her feelings. Maybe, if he reasoned with her she would understand.

“How is it you became detached from this world in the first place?”

“A curse was placed on me. I’m the product of a jealous witch’s black magic. So long as I’m in the box, she has her youth and beauty. I was so close, but you pushed me away again. Do you think it right that a selfish old hag, full of vanity and darkness, should take a girl of sixteen and rob her of life and experience? By leaving me here, you

are justifying what she has done. Once I'm human then, she will age and die, and I'll never be trapped again. Please help me to live again!"

"I'm not the right person. Someone else may come along who can fall in love with you at the snap of your fingers, but I just can't."

"You've seen what I can do. Without knowing, the witch transferred a few of her powers to me. It took awhile for her to catch on, but it's nothing she can undo. I have the ability to control your body, as you've obviously seen. I will keep you here if you won't release me, and make you be a slave to my love. If I can't leave, you can't leave. Now, you will play your music and forget your wife!"

Derrick took the violin and shook it high in the air. As much as he cherished it, he couldn't figure out any other way to break the spell she had over him. He'd have to smash it into tiny bits of wood, break it apart until nothing was left, and burn it until it was charred black. It would be his last connection to Marie. "I will not play another note for you!" he cried, anger striking every nerve in his body.

A cool smile formed on her lips. It was a glimpse of what he imagined death to look like.

"You're making a big mistake."

Chapter Nine

Everything that was beautiful and enchanting about her, suddenly altered in a single moment. The pale light around her form blazed red and flames of fire shot out from her fingertips.

She threw her head back and howled at the violet sky. Her feet dangled above an uneven ground, and she swirled around his body in the air. The satin tresses of her hair beat against his face like whips fashioned in leather. A strange silence overtook the forest and before his eyes, the season changed.

The trees shook off their leaves, and undressed their lush foliage until they were bare. Snowflakes fell from an ivory sky, and a sturdy cold breeze drifted in. Her eyes turned black, inhuman. The chill that bit at his flesh was nothing like the chill embedded in his blood.

“If you do as I say, I will spare your life.”

He realized the violin was still above his head, his arms frozen in mid action. His body resisted all orders to slam the instrument to the ground.

“I want your hands to touch me everywhere. I want you to put all your energy and focus into me. If you do, then I will give you everything you want and more.”

Derrick stood paralyzed. Snow was piling up to his knees. He wished he had the blankets he’d left behind many nights ago.

“I can understand your need to be free, but I’m not the one you want to spend the rest of your life with.”

“I just want a chance to have a life.”

“I won’t be the one who gives it to you right now. That doesn’t mean it won’t ever happen. If you let me go, and give me time to think things through in a rational manner, perhaps I could find a way to love you. It’s not possible for me to extend the love you want at this time. I have some old wounds that need to heal. But given some

distance between us, I can better sort out my emotions. Maybe then I can come back and rescue you from your walls of wood.”

“I’m tired of waiting. You have only one chance, one small window of opportunity. Give me what I seek, and you won’t suffer.”

Derrick looked down. The snow had frozen his legs solid. If this was to be the end, he knew someone was waiting for him. He made one last effort, in the hopes she would not be able to go through with taking his life.

“Then I will suffer.”

“Very well,” she laughed, and glided across the snowy white tundra.

Chapter Ten

The skeleton trees creaked and groaned against the force of the powerful northern wind. Pellets of ice lashed at his skin and burned his flesh. His arms had a mind of their own and positioned the violin against his chin. He strained hard but the bow traveled along the strings.

This time the song that played was one that invited death. The eerie ethereal music filled the enchanted woods. Golden sap fell from the ancient Yakshas and froze on the bark. The cries of the birds and animals disturbed the peaceful grove. Large black crows rushed in, their eyes wide and hungry for the possible prey before their eyes.

“Please, don’t do this! I just need time.”

“I’m sorry, time is all I’ve had. If you want me to save your life, then you must save mine.”

Derrick pleaded with his eyes. The sapphire orbs that had drawn him into seduction, stared back in red. He didn’t want to die, not yet, but he wasn’t desperate enough to give in to her demands.

“The difference between us Gandharas, is that if I die, my spirit will be free, where as you will just go back into your cage.”

She scowled at him and raised her arms up to the sky. He smelled the intoxicating scent he had grown to love, magnolias. His Marie was on the other side. Waiting. In his last effort, he forced his arms to move and brought the violin down along the solid mound of snow that enveloped his legs. Part of the violin stayed intact and moved out of his reach.

“You fool. I’ll make you pay!”

One by one the strings broke and extended to his flesh. Lacerations formed where they whipped him repeatedly. Derrick shouted for her to stop but no voice would come. The pain was fierce. Music continued to play, though not by his hands. The now ebony notes sliced through his body with sheer intensity, infecting his

essence with more of her dark magic poison. Around his neck the strings wove and tightened until a single drop of blood fell onto the bleak pallid snow. The ground opened up beneath his frozen feet and swallowed him, another root added to the tree.

When he opened his eyes, the white tundra had vanished. Before him stood a meadow streaked in magnolias. Marie stood just a few feet away, dressed in a pale yellow dress, her hair billowing behind her with each tender stroke of the wind.

"I've been waiting for you my darling," she said.

Color had returned to her cheeks, she looked renewed and full of health. He ran toward her with tears in his eyes.

"I'm so sorry."

"For what my love?" Her fingers brushed away his tears.

"I have wronged you. I let fantasies and illusions sway my true heart's desire."

"I do not know what you speak of my love," Marie said. "Here in the meadow I was unable to watch over you. I blew kisses with the hope they would reach you, kisses blessed with the fragrance of magnolias. I knew when you passed on, your spirit would choose to come here. I wait everyday for you, though the time that has passed has seemed like an eternity."

Derrick took a deep breath in. Happiness filled his heart, spirit, and soul. Now, he was where he wanted to be, where he belonged, with the woman he loved. Millions of colored feathers fell from the sky, just like the ones he'd collected. He understood now, their love would always survive, and endure. They had wings when their love soared.

Gandharas sunk to the ground as the snow melted. Her energy had almost been depleted from the fury she'd unleashed. She hated how things had ended with Derrick, but the fear in his eyes let her know that love would never be possible between them, no matter what threats she spewed at him. Her plan had almost worked.

"One of these days you'll listen to me," Selma said. "Until then you will just keep getting your heart broken."

"I was closer with him than I'd ever been before. I couldn't make him let go of his wife."

"I admit you were very close, so close in fact that I had to step in."

Deities of Desire

“I knew that was you, when he mentioned seeing the crows. I knew you’d used your magic.”

“I looked in the mirror and saw my reflection change. Wrinkles had formed around my eyes, and my skin had lost its soft texture.”

“You went back on your word.”

“I never gave my word. If I had, it wouldn’t have been worth much more than the value of a stone. You heard what you wanted to hear. While you were able to control his body, you could not control his mind, and that is where I stepped in. By forcing him to remember his wife, there was never going to be a chance for you to be free.”

Gandharas put her head in her hands and let the tears flow. “You’ll never truly be beautiful, your heart is much too ugly.”

Selma appeared before her, more youthful and radiant than the first time she’d seen her.

“Don’t mix ill words with me. You’ll go back in the box and live out your future there. The nonsense must stop. You think you won by killing Derrick, but you’ve only helped him. Now, as we speak, he is in the arms of his wife, their bodies intertwined. His true passion has been restored, and you sit here alone.”

“You can send me back in the box, but I will always find a way out. My intuition is strong and the powers you passed onto me intensify each day you age. You may look young, but the blood that courses through your veins holds the truth.”

The witch raised her hands and everything in the forest vanished.

Chapter Eleven

Gandharas opened her eyes and found herself back inside the wooden tomb. Her vision took its time adjusting to the darkness. She sensed the presence of Derrick's friend, Prado nearby. He ran along the many paths, searching for his missing friend. If she didn't act quick enough, she would lose a golden opportunity. This man was young, naïve, and held no ties. There'd be no ghost to contend with. His was a carefree existence, with a want to please everyone, and a desire to find a mate to spend his life with.

She would control his body, make him play music, and weave her naked legs tight around him at the same time. He'd cry out her name and promise her the world. This would be the last time she would return to her cage.

Outside, the violin reconstructed itself and lay on a patch of soft moss. A final push of her body opened the lid of the box. Gandharas hid behind a curtain of trees to wait for his fingers to strum the strings and make her real. In the pale glow of the moonlight, her body began its painful transformation. She felt energy burst under her skin and found that it was different this time. Love was hers for the taking. Passion would fill the forest and free her from the invisible chains of the witch. This time there would be nothing for Selma to use against her.

Prado stepped in the enchanted forest and bent to pick up the violin. "What is this? Derrick's violin. I cannot believe he would leave it out here like this. Not with what it means to him." He stroked his chin and looked around. Before he could say another word, she made her move.

"Play," she insisted, stepping into the soft light, rays of the moon bathing her naked flesh. "I have longed to hear the sound of music. Please, I beg of you. Play."

Deities of Desire

He took in her beauty with a swift appreciative glance and smiled. "My lady, I hardly know how."

She gave him a pained expression and stepped closer, her hands slaking along her breasts.

"That is a shame, for I would give myself to a man who could seduce me with his music."

His eyes darted from her breasts to her eyes, with a look of an eagerness to please.

"For you, my lady, I shall try. I would give you anything your heart desires."

Gandharas knelt down and picked up the bow. A mischievous grin spread across her face. "I promise it will be worth your while."

Prado raised the instrument to his chin and streaked the bow across the strings. She did not care the notes were harsh and forced. The curse was broken. Shrieks from the witch echoed in her ears, and shook the limbs of the trees like a violent storm. Gandharas watched the lid of the music box slam shut and the latch break off. Hundreds of crows filled the sky, and swooped down to gather the box between their wings. As quickly as they had appeared, they disappeared. Once again the roots of the trees would have their fill of man blood. She turned away and took in a deep, slow breath. The taste of freedom was hers once again.

The End

Ménage, *Mae Powers*

Three lovers must outwit a devious goddess who tries to use them for her own nefarious and selfish means.

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Ménage

by

Mae Powers

Chapter One

Midnight, the darken hours the time between twilight and dawn to some, and an apex of otherworldly things to others. The time of strangeness and strength and a happening of power to those who knew how to wield it. And Tagreth did.

She harnessed the power of night, specifically the midnight passage between the worlds of the mortal and immortal. It was a time and an essence of being, when she felt her energies at their fullest. When she was most powerful. When she could grant those she favored their deepest desires.

The one desire she had the most right now was to make him come. Come into her and sheath himself within her midnight folds of wet flesh. A dark wetness only he had been able to ever make her achieve. Even during her brief spite of being human she never felt anything this overwhelming.

Tagreth sat within her shell-shaped throne, looking out over the vast ocean that bordered her realm. The maw opening of the darkened throne-room of her temple cavern allowed for her to see the huge moon sink low into the water's horizon. Before long her force would be even stronger. As powerful as she was, her energies were greater at

night. And he would come to her again, very soon. She clenched her fists and licked her lips in anticipation. Soon, he'd be hers.

He had been the most obstinate, the most resistive, and the most cunning, and still was. And he was the sexiest most sensual priest who served her realm. And he was married. Soon, she would bait him, out-smart him, and then make him hers. She smiled a cold hard smile. Oh he would be worth it. The heat that emanated from his body would fuel her desires for years to come. She would not let anything stand in her way of her need to have his shaft rammed deeply into her cunt. And by the blood of the six Elder gods, she would make sure that the two people, who stood in her way, would not find it easy to thwart her desires.

She had a mound of love servants with impressive cocks to lather her with their attentions and fuck her as much as she wanted. She had two of the most lustiest elder gods, who were on a power level of her own might, ravishing her wanton body often enough. Yet still, she remained unsatisfied. And all because of a mortal. She could not force him to lay with her, to use that delicious looking penis upon her, but there were ways around his stubbornness. Being the goddess of midnight desires and lustful needs did have its benefits. She was also the goddess of the hearth, and that went well with her plans for him.

Especially since he was married, and a First Husband, whose pathetic wife and spiteful sister were service bound to Tagreth. She thought hard about what she would do to get him to comply with her. Thoughts formed in her ancient devious mind. Never had she wanted a man so much. Her cunt ached and her mind spun with wicked plans. Oh yes, she thought, I have much in mind for my precious priest. He never should have turned me down.

“My goddess, might I naught please you tonight?”

She looked up from her shell-throne and glanced at one of her many lovers. He was tall, athletic and hung well, and almost the coloring of the man she desired. She would find a way right now to satisfy some of her own lustful needs, and while she did so, perhaps she would come up with the perfect plan to turn Zied to her way of thinking.

She waved her hand at the male servant. Now he looked taller, more muscular, with wavy hair that tapered in layers down to a nicely rounded taut ass. His skin was almost as dark as her own, but softer like a mauve-brown gleaming in the palest moonlight. His hair was

like a shining amber moon, like his eyes. She opened her legs and leaned back on plump red pillows.

He knelt down before her, and without having to be told, he lowered his face to her dark sable curls. Ah, her own personal heaven. Yes, his long tongue pleased her well. He lapped at her with fierce abandonment. She writhed beneath him as his mouth and tongue did wild teasing motions around her pussy.

“Open my lips with your fingers. Slide those large fingers in my hot cunt now.” Oh yes, she needed this long foreplay. It helped her to think more on how she could get Zied to do her bidding. She may have him captive in her dark realm, but natural forces of this world kept her from forcing him to fuck her with that hot big cock of his, as long as he was of his own mind. However there were ways to get him to do her bidding. Some of them could be very entertaining. Yes, soon she would have Zied doing to her what her imaginary Zied lover was doing to her.

She'd be damned herself if she let that damn princess-heir take back what she the most feared goddess around wanted. Zied was meant for her service not that half-breed godling bitch. She had wanted the ripe priest for her own and behind her back the royal bitch had taken him first. Yania, akin to the great Tagreth or not, was not going to keep Zied for long. It was one of the reasons she often came in between the sisters and used the unsuspecting slut Kaedeah for her own purposes. Tagreth would take back what was hers and do it in such a way that the pitiful princess would think twice to tackle a goddess. And Zied would come to her or lose what he wanted the most. There were ways around the natural order of things that often prevented a goddess' interference.

As her lover's fingers and tongue plunged in and out of her, she formulated a most cunning plan that would have her getting what she wanted, and giving those who infuriated her a taste of what it was like to play games with a goddess. As he opened up her pussy lips further, she took the dark head of the man above her and shoved his face deeper in to her cunt. Bucking and rubbing hard against his unshaven face, she ravished his features and pressed him to please her even more deeply.

By her own dark lust energies she had devised a plan. Oh yes, this servant's twin tongues were thrusting nicely into her deep channels. She could feel her juices starting to flow over his face. She

wound her legs around his head and jerked up against him harshly. Soon, she'd have others at her mercy and she would enjoy the games she'd play with their minds and bodies. It was so much more fun to play with mortal lives using games and such. Their reactions were an aphrodisiac to her bottomless soul. She lived for making others do her biddings, and complicating their lives.

She cried out and ordered her lover to fuck and suck her harder with his face and fingers. He gasped for air, but she ignored his needs. She rode him hard and tightened her hands in his hair. Oh yes, the plan was forming nicely and she was finally getting a good orgasm rising. She pulled him up by his shoulders with her supernatural strength, and he automatically thrust his engorged cock inside of her slippery folds. She bucked underneath him and screamed out with glee as the spasms of her climax and her plans sprung forth giving her a satisfying moment she had not felt in some time.

Her dressed up lover barely had finished his own orgasm when she threw him off of her. She got up and walked towards the ocean that her temple cavern looked out onto. She dove into the dark depths of the twilight colored waters, cooling her ardor and swimming towards the dark foreboding shore ahead to put her plans in action.

* * * *

Zied paced his luxurious prison. He stopped for a moment and glanced around at the almost exact duplicate of his study back in the palace. His large oak desk, only newer, with lots of tomes upon it, although these were mostly about Talgreth, stood in the center of the room. Near it were two divans upon which she liked to lay and have him watch as she was serviced by some of her servants. She either had them drugged, spelled or the men and women liked pleasing her and benefiting from her insatiable needs and amusements. This large room was not as stacked with memorabilia and magic objects as his real study. She did not permit him all his favorite things. For instance, no picture of his family, friends or wife was allowed to him. He did have the necessities, like a latrine and a bathing area. Food was brought to him by magical means or the goddess would have her servants bring them food when she deigned to keep him company.

He wished she would just leave him alone and let him return home. But that was not in her plans. She and Kaedeah, promising him some objects of historical value he deeply wanted if he would attend one of the goddess' rituals, had lured him here. He had not had time

to even say goodbye to Yania, when the goddess' powers whisked him away to her temple lair. Once he had willingly agreed, she had power over his being to some degree. He had not known that it was her sexual ritual to have him pressed into her service and cunt was what she had in mind. He could not allow her to win out over him. There had to be a way that he could thwart her and get out of her clutches. Thankfully he had had one ally here for a few weeks if nothing else. Her favorite lover, and a jealous one at that, had unwittingly came in to taunt Zied when he knew the goddess was not around. Toopek was a naïve idiot and Zied got information from the man that he didn't realize he was giving to Zied.

Somewhere he had placed a book here and hidden it, ah yes, he'd left it in the bottom drawer. He went over to the drawer and opened it. It was a small tome, but had been valuable to him. Tagreth didn't like history, nor did the sex and hearth goddess read much. She just knew if the books had something about her in them, she kept them around hoping it would make him get more use to her. Oh he read a lot about her and what she could or couldn't do, and how she got around things. Now this particular book told about body shifting, and Tagreth's ability to do it, or manipulate her way into another's body.

If he could somehow astral project to another's body, then he could get word to his wife where he was. He felt there was only one recipient he could trust; his friend Davel. He had learned to "feel" when Tagreth was or wasn't around. She was gone now, and he quickly made use of the free time to try and contact his old and dearest friend. He would find a way to freedom and back to his home and his beloved wife.

He missed Yania. Missed her heart and long sun-blond hair flowing over his body when they made love. Not only his mind, soul and heart ached for her, but also so did his body. He had never known a passionate woman such as her. She could be across a room unaware of his glances and he would feel his cock growing with need for her lovely body. She had the hottest and deepest cunt he thought possible. He knew he was quite large, he'd been told by foreplay lovers. His fingers had tested several, but Yania was the deepest and took him in easily.

How he wanted to slip his penis into those wet depths of her, feel her sheathed around him giving her all to their fucking. Her eyes would devour him as much as her hands and body could at times.

Sometimes he creamed explosively from just one of her torrid promising looks. Her eyes could eat his throbbing cock just as wonderfully as she could with her long tongue and hot, generous mouth. He ached fiercely now for her.

Damn Tagreth and Kaedeah for knowing his one weakness about ancient artifacts. Although she had left one tiny one here, he had not figured out its usage yet. He only hoped his sweet and delectable princess-wife would forgive him for listening to the lies of those two over-heated bitches. He would somehow get in touch with his beloved.

Chapter Two

Yania stood there on the throne dais pretending that she watched the proceedings. She did not want to choose a second husband, but by their laws and customs she had to. At a nudge from her younger half-sister to pay closer attention to the contingents, Yania started taking in more details of the Second-Husband she must choose. Most of the men were slightly tall, one or two kind of thin, some muscular, some just a slight athletic build. But all of them wore masks. She stifled a sigh. It had to be done. She had to narrow the candidates down to three this night. She didn't let her sister prompt her again mentally or physically and this time descended the few stairs down into the palatial throne room where she met with her subjects on a more fair level.

She let them parade in front of her one last time then held up her hand. She stopped before the eight contenders and with each one she found something distasteful. Well almost in each one. She used her extra senses of smelling to know how close these men might have been to the goddess or to her sister. Three of them carried the goddess Tagreth's essence of fish and seaweed, while three at least wore her sister's heavy, musky scent. She chose one that had less of her sister's or the goddess' odors upon them. She stopped before the last two. These had neither of the distasteful kin-feminine smells on them. Yet, somehow one seemed familiar and had a most agreeable scent that she could best describe as refreshing. She chose them and the palace priests led the other men away.

She did not bother to look at the three remaining, but waved an honored signal to them that she was pleased with them. Then turning, she left the room of people, and exited the throne room despite the mumblings of those around her. She had enough for one evening and could not take this ridiculous, frustrating pre-ceremony any longer.

Yania could feel the goddess close to her, the ancient spirit had always seemed like a second mother...No, she corrected herself, the goddess had almost felt like a second skin, an invasion at times, into her very soul. She could pick up mind-essences from time to time, but not on their extent, but she had learned to tune her empathic senses to when they were near mentally, most of the time.

Sometimes she wondered why she had been destined to be part of Tagreth's lineage. Why had the goddess fucked her forefathers? And why had Tagreth allowed a human priestess to carry her child? She wished there was a way to find out those answers and to have Tagreth's influence over the City of her birth not taken away from the vindictive-at-times goddess. For in that puzzle lay the goddess' weakness, Yania felt positive about.

She covered her thoughts quickly, least the goddess or her half-sister wandered into her chambers. The two could read a person's open thoughts too easily at times. And she could not afford to offend the goddess Tagreth. Her sister, Yania thought, could care less whether she offended a powerful deity or not.

After the Preliminary choices had been made, Yania went to her bedroom and threw herself upon the large white covered bed. She lay face down, but neither cried nor screamed. She was tired out with all this façade of ceremonies. And all she wanted was Zied to come back and hold her in his arms and tell her everything was going to be okay.

Nerve-racking troubles of her half-sister, Kaedeah, scrambled with frustration into Yania's mind. The woman was insistent on Yania finding a lover. She was sure it was because Kaedeah wanted to ease her way into the throne. There was no love lost between them. No matter how much over the years she had tried to like or get to know Kaedeah, the devious woman remained innately mean towards her. But because they had the same mother, Yania kept trying. But her patience was about as worn thin as it could get. She was determined that Kaedeah would not interfere anymore.

She had the feeling that her sister had tampered with the ceremonial plans. Probably had even gone so far as to tempt one of the men towards her nefarious way of thinking. Yania did not think it would be unlike the younger woman to do something so underhanded. She smelled the foul musky scent of her sister on a few of the men.

She could kill Kaedeah for sending her first husband away. Kaedeah was just jealous of what she and Zied had together. Kaedeah

coveted Yania's first husband; and, as she had come to learn recently, so did Talgreth. If the spiteful lead priestess couldn't have him, she made sure all concerned were unhappy. The ungrateful bitch had power given to her by Yania. She had tried to make Kaedeah happy, but nothing that she did could make the woman show kinship and caring for Yania. Their over-ambitious and often spiteful mother did not make matters easier, but the "in-name-only" queen of the land of Anthar did not have the imperial powers as Yania did. Perhaps that's why their mother often showed favoritism to Kaedeah. It was their father who had been born of the goddess line and not the queen by marriage.

At the conception of her Second Marriage, Yania would be the Full-Queen and Miassa would have to step down as temporary queen. Neither Kaedeah nor their mother would like that, no matter how hard she had tried to please the two. Still her lowly half sister used her power as guardian priestess of the goddess Tagreth's temple to send the Third High-Priest and First Consort of the future queen to do the goddess' bidding, and Yania would not have known that information except Kaedeah leaked it out. Yania was sure that Kaedeah had done that on purpose to further annoy her.

Once in the goddess' temple one could not return without her permission. It was her domain there, and not even the power of nature could stop any thing there, except she could not force one point blank to do her bidding. Unwitting force and coercion, yes; some things could be gotten around if one were as wily and diabolical as Tagreth.

After Kaedeah had spoken the goddess' wish, the deed could not be undone without the goddess' permission or some other divine intervention that had the powers to go against Tagreth's might. Yania had not let her sister's thoughtless deed go unpunished. She forbade the high priestess to have full sexual pleasures until Zied returned. Only the princess/queen to be of the goddess' birth realm had that much power. Kaedeah was not pleased. And Yania put a watchman in the priestess' chamber nightly. Oh she could get away with foreplay by saying she was testing future servants for the goddess, but Kaedeah knew better than to push Yania too far. She waited for the little bitch to make one wrong move then she would find a way to punish the younger woman for letting Talgreth take her husband away.

She knew that it would be excessively hard to contemplate bedding another man without Zied to help her choose the Second Consort. But he had been gone for two months now and Yania could not put the Choosing ceremony off any longer. Her heart and her body ached for Zied. How would she be able to allow another man to touch her after his caresses had made her whole being soar to the stars and beyond? Which of the three would she wind up making her life-long bed partner? And which would she bestow the honor upon of becoming her possible heart-mate? There was to be a period given each new perspective. They would have their chance to woo her and gain her trust. Yet she needed help with this utmost choice.

Then she formed a plan of her own making. There was one who could help her. One man she trusted as much as her husband Zied—their life-long friend Davel. Perhaps Davel would help her choose her next husband. She trusted him and knew that Zied would approve of Davel's choice. Yes, she thought, he could help her through this. It was her only recourse of action.

Now less frustrated, Yania got off the big bed and went to her bathing unit. For her, that would be one of the best places to unwind. Several servants appeared as if by magic to help her undress. These palace servants never left the princess-heirs quarters unless given permission. They were not allowed to tell of the princess' nightly bathing rituals. However, unlike her sister, she allowed her trusted bathers to live lives outside the palace. They did not wish to lose her favoritism, nor the monetary gifts she bestowed on them and their families to keep her privacy quiet. However, she had instinctively known from the beginning she could trust these four with any secret.

Four people attended her, two males and two females. It pleased Yania that the couples were married and she had known them since they first came to the palace. Yania herself had picked them. Not Yania's interfering mother or half-sister. Most of the time she didn't like having her bathers bathe her. She and Zied usually took care of their own needs. Tonight, she needed the attention.

"Are you feeling low, our princess?" The bather-couple Litus and Zeeta asked in unison. The dark haired couple, since the beginnings of their first adult year, were trained sensors of need for the royal family. They could only legally and mentally tune their slight empathic sensing to the princess and her husbands. (Though she had no

husband right now.) She trusted them and nodded her approval to go ahead with the ministrations to her needs.

Yania knew about her bathers' preferences and had for sometime, but had let them go with their natural wishes. The two couples were love-mates and often swapped mates, but in the confines of the palace bathing rooms or their own quarters. Publicly it was not allowed. She motioned to the other couple who were slender and had light and dark blonde hair. "Come Isha and Perz. I have need tonight of your relaxing hands."

Yania smiled thoughtfully at the two couples. She rarely asked much of them, but they were warm and dutiful and honest with her. She could sense their feelings and their excitements. They truly desired taking care of her and all of them were so good at their willing duties. They had been raised to perform the royal responsibilities she required of them. Besides being able to scent people, she could empathically feel their desires. No one, not even the goddess Tagreth had her heightened senses when it came to knowing what people were mentally-emotionally wanting, whether she could tune into their minds or not.

She never permitted the men to penetrate her orifices with their cocks, because only Zied had ever been allowed to be so intimate with her. She and Zied were not above occasionally allowing the bathers to please them with their hands, or perform for them in other intimately pleasurable ways. Tonight, she could almost feel Zied with her. Her heart and body were lonely; she would let them please her tonight.

She held her arms out straight, and the two women came and gently pulled her outer robe off and waited. "Your touches are appreciated tonight. Will you not bath and service me tonight and ease my royal stresses?"

It was custom for her to ask them and they seemed to vibrate with more willingness to please her when she asked them nicely. "We are honored, oh high-princess to bathe you." Isha said sweetly.

"And to give you comfort and pleasure." Zeeta bowed her head and then motioned for the men to come forward. Zeeta was the head bather and this being a matriarch society, she commanded the men to do the princess' bidding.

However, Yania was glad she was a monarch who gave men equal billing as long as they did not abuse their partners. Yania could tell the men were only too happy to oblige their wives and the

princess. The women finished undressing her and the men then hooked their arms together to make a seat for Yania. She sat on their arm-chair and allowed them to escort her down into the deep warm and inviting bathing pool. Tonight she would feel no stress.

The men carried her down into the deep water and sat her down on a circular, ceramic dais-seat built for two to four people. The man-made semi bench portrayed a motif of flowers and ivy and naked people. It's golden and silver and green colors matched the décor of the large, opulent bathing room. It was comfortable and pleasing and very serviceable for anyone's needs who sat upon it.

She leaned back against the centerpiece settling her arms upon the highest peak of it, as one would the back of a sofa or lounge settee. Her dark-nippled breasts jutted out for attention. The men were there, kneeling before her. The two were almost as good as her husband in suckling her turgid nipples. Like an orchestrated leader, Zeeta told the men to trickle water over her relaxing body. It was warm and teasing as the cupped water in their hands and then sprinkled over her breasts, letting rivulets run down her taunt belly and back into the water.

The two women came to join the men in massaging her and cleansing away all her worries. When her cleaning was nearly done, she sighed and allowed the men to carry her gently back to the edge of the pool. There they both took one of her thighs and gently pried them apart. Each took his turn running their long tongues down over her inner thighs. Each used a hand to open her vaginal lips and then both slowly put a long finger into her slitted crevice.

The two females got out of the pool and came around to her backside. They immediately began to massage her shoulders and her arms, before bending down and massaging her full breasts. Yania groaned her pleasures out loud. Oh yes, she so needed this attention.

"Would you like even fuller pleasure, our queen?" Perz asked.

"Whatever you wish for." Litus put in, slipping another finger into her moistening cunt, having two in there just as Perz did.

"Just tell us you requests," Isha said, between leaning over and starting to suckle with aplomb her princess's large nipples.

"We will give you any pleasure and desire you crave." Leeta too chimed in as she got down on Yania's other side and not only fondled her other breast, but began fervently sucking it into her wide sweet mouth.

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Yania further groaned out her wishes. “Play with me, suckle me, make me cum as many times as you can.” And she was pleased they obeyed her royal commands.

Chapter Three

Davel could not ignore the heaviness in his heart and in his mind. He was so close to them that it ached everywhere. Zied was in the clutches of the goddess of lust and Yania did her damndest to hide her unhappy nature. His two friends were at a lost for each other, and he knew he wasn't sure how he could help them. That was until a month ago, just before the First Choosing. Then he thought there might be hope and perhaps, just perhaps, he had found a way to help his dearest friends.

He sighed and glanced around the large study, where every place one looked books or some magical object was strewn about the room of knowledge and learning. Four wide columns stood in significant sections around the circular room. Vast shelves of dusty and used tomes resided in overflowing places around the study. Two long oval shaped windows were at the far end of the room, giving plenty of light. Another less used table and chairs were near the windows. To the left a small worktable that held magical utensils and behind it was an oriental free-flowing wall, which Davel knew hid another hidden doorway into the room.

Only four people that he knew during his current lifetime had knowledge of the room's second entrance/exit. Yania's late father, the last king, Yania, Zied, and then himself were the only ones. Despite Zied's disappearance, the room with its vast array of strange memorabilia and odds and ends, looked inviting to Davel. Perhaps it was because so much of Zied's presence was here. He spent many good nights and days in here with both Zied and Yania, but mostly his life-long friend Zied. The man had been a constant comfort to him many times as only a good friend could. Although they were not lovers, the two shared intimate secrets.

Friends almost since birth, he remembered the good and the bad growing up with Zied and Yania. They had even helped him get around the greedy over ambitious parents of his. They were some of the few who understood why he had sometimes wanted to be a priest of the robes instead of a warrior, which would have kept him at his home more. It was when Yania made him head of the Second Division of the Royal Guards whose main duty was to protect the Royal Family and the Palace, that his life became more bearable with his parents.

Davel cared for his parents no matter they chose to ignore what he wanted. He had learned to live with their over ambitiousness many years ago. Thankfully they had aligned themselves with Zied's and Yania's parents, and had somehow become court favorites, which allowed their only son to be friends with Zied highly placed family, and the princess. Looking back on things now, he was thankful for that much of his parents' interfering ways. His long-time friends and confidants were the only ones who had an inkling of what he wanted.

Davel could *sense* at times the presence of Zied in this room. His aura and personality filled it completely. He felt it was here if any place that Zied might try to contact him. Davel had an affinity for feeling otherworldly persona. Somehow, Davel felt the goddess Tagreth would not let his friend go that easily. He would have to look into some way to rescue his friend. He had not done so before because he knew Zied would want him to stay for the Second Choosing. They had once briefly discussed that if something ever happened to Zied, that Davel would be there for Yania. He knew that Zied and Yania trusted him implicitly and loved him dearly.

If Zied were here right now, they would be talking about their friendship, personal beliefs and goals/desires, as well as their feelings for Yania and this Second Husband ceremony. He could not let his friends down. Nor could he let Kaedeah wreck more havoc in Yania's life. It was enough that this talented and wonderful woman had lost her First Love for the time being. Davel would make sure she did not suffer any more by the hands or jealousies of the goddess Tagreth or the spiteful half-sister. He still remembered well overhearing Kaedeah boasting with glee to her then lover, about how easy it was for her and Tagreth to get an unsuspecting Zied to do their bidding.

He had not spread it around himself, for fear of hurting Yania. He was sure it was the lover, as Kaedeah probably hoped, that spread the

rumor around. He was with Yania a few hours later when the fact also reached him and had been confirmed when a messenger from the goddess said that Zied would be staying in her temple indefinitely to do service for her. It had amazed him a bit that Kaedeah had worked with the goddess. Probably because the bitch didn't like it when Yania was happy. She had had the blatant desires for Zied and was not afraid of anyone knowing that fact before Zied and Yania married.

Kaedeah thought Davel too low for her, though she had tried once before to get into his pants. She was horrid about teasing him about having love-struck desires for Yania. Kaedeah didn't know by half what kind of desires Davel had. Before when he wanted to go as Zied had done, the way of the robes, he had not thought such was for him. But even though a priest did not have to marry, a warrior was suppose to give a woman of means strong young sons and daughters to carry on the hearth and home. His parents were forever after him to try marrying a highly places woman. They even suggested once he could mask himself and try for the high placing of Royal Second Consort.

He had not let anyone, his parents, other friends and especially Yania that he had disguised himself and approached one of the priest friends of Zied to admit him as a candidate for Yania's hand in marriage. He had the feeling Yania might recognize him, but had to be circumspect about it. He had wanted to help Zied and Yania, to make sure she was protected – as Zied had asked him to do should something ever happen to him. It was the least Davel could do after all they had gone through together.

He would do it too for Yania. Some how, he had the feeling that Zied had known all along about his deeper, hidden feelings for Yania. But he was sure there was one thing he had never told Zied. Something he had kept to himself because he had no wish to harm their friendship. Out of all the women in the land, his dearest friend's wife was the only one who could get a rise out of him.

Davel had felt embarrassed to tell his best friend that. Yet during the few long talks they had before Zied disappeared and landed in the clutches of the goddess Tagreth, Davel had the feeling that Zied might have guessed. He realized that his friend might have known, just a week prior to his forced leaving and captivity, because Zied had told him about the secret passage way that led from one of the chambers

off the hidden door of the study, and ended up going to his married friends' bathing chamber.

Davel's curiosity had gotten the better of him, and one night he had gone down the dimly lit hidden corridor to a sealed door that had a window he could open though. The hidden passageway, the royal bather's entrance and the royal couple's bedroom door were the only ways into the bathing chamber. Through that window, he had witnessed his dearest friends making love. Dumbstruck and fascinated, he had watched them and their heated desires taking place in the flesh. It was more than he had ever vividly saw or felt before. And it still confirmed his deepest desire, that of wanting to taste all the wantonly sexual fulfillments he knew he could only find within Yania's voluptuous body and tender arms.

Had Zied indeed meant for him to see so much of her voluptuous beauty displayed? Her dark sun-blond pubic hair was naturally the same color as her long silky masses covering her head. He had enjoyed watching Zied cover that delicious looking pussy with his thick lips and suck on her tender flesh. Their hot, quivering, writhing bodies made him nearly explode his desire and he had to stifle his groans so that he wouldn't give away his presence.

Zied had fucked her repeatedly and she had let him suck her and fondle her body with slow deft touches. Then the bathers had come in and joined in the foreplay and performed for Zied and Yania. Would that be something he would be allowed to see if Yania chose him as her Royal Second? He hoped so. Even now, there was no other woman that could get such a rise out of him. He hoped also, that she would not be angry with her for keeping his candidacy from him. He'd always made a point of telling Zied and her almost everything.

Yet even, as he really suspected now, he had not been able to tell his best friends, especially since that day of watching their sexual exploits, was sure that Zied must have known. Otherwise why would Zied have told him about the peephole? Zied must have wanted him to be the Second Husband. Davel suspected it was his inherent shyness where women were concerned that kept his best friend from talking about this intimacy with him. He wished now that they had. And he hoped too, that somehow Zied would give him a sign as to what to do next.

* * * *

Kaedeah smiled inwardly, so pleased with her idea to seduce one of the Marriage Candidates into joining her side of this whole messed up business. She would see each one in turn on the sly. Vorus, a young and upcoming warrior to be stationed as a First Guard at the goddess' temple near the Ocean Mountains, would be her first to convince. It would be much easier to overtake the throne should the Second Husband be on her side.

He would be easier to seduce, she thought than the other two. Vorus was the only one she knew of at the First Choosing Ceremony. He was the guard Yania put in her quarters to make sure she didn't have full intercourse with anyone. She had tempted him before, but never quite slept with him. He should be sexually frustrated enough by now that he would want her and do her bidding. It was to his fortune that she had not yet slept with him. She'd made sure he bathed several times to make sure Yania had a hard time scenting Vorus out.

Kaedeah was sure it was because Yania had smelled the scent of her sex-seductions on the other three she and a few priests had approved for the ceremony, that Yania did not pick them. She was also sure that was the same reason Yania didn't pick any of the four other men, because they had the goddess' scent upon them and who probably were choices from Tagreth and her cohort priests.

She would meet Vorus soon. No one could know or would know about her meeting with him, she had taken all kinds of personal and magical precautions. If she could turn him to her way of thinking, she could be his wife once Yania was gone for good. Then once she was his wife, he would be of no use to her. But until then he would be a good sex partner and cohort in her plans to get rid of Yania.

She made no mistake about showing her dislike for the elder princess. Her mother may have spoilt her a bit and put rivalry between them, but Kaedeah knew she should have been the ruling princess and not some damn uncaring goddess spawn. Yania didn't deserve the throne. It should belong to Kaedeah. Kaedeah was of a Second Husband and not Yania. Hearing her large bedroom door open caused her to come out of her reverie.

She let out a sigh of pleasure and made a moue of her lips as she saw Vorus shut the door behind him and lock it. He was just what she needed tonight. By the desiring, voracious glances he was giving her body, and the thick protruding cock poking out from beneath his short tunic, she was sure he wanted to fuck her wildly. With a purposeful

stride he moved over to her big bed with it's frilly gold coverlets and red pillows, and stood before her half naked form.

She smiled up at him and slowly removed her clothing. She played with both of her plumb breasts, squeezing and kneading them and coyly watching his eyes widened with a fierce hunger. Oh yeah, she thought, he couldn't wait to get that big hard cock of his pumping into her hot cunt. She played with her creamy pussy; shoving two fingers in and out of herself, making his eyes widen even more. His sword belt came off first.

Soon his breastplate and tunic followed. That wonderful bulge had grown even more. She licked her wet fingers slightly after pulling them out of her pussy. He leaned his head and lathed them with his wide tongue. Oh he was going to be a good lover tonight. Lots of fucking is just what she needed. She backed further onto the bed, and didn't have long to wait as he finished undressing and edged onto the bed himself.

She reached down and played with herself some more, exposing her dark haired pussy even further to his hungry eyes. He lowered his face towards her until he was just in front of her hairy mound. With out approval he reached down and touched her mons with fevered intent. One hand caressed her plush mound while his other explored her glistening cunt. She bucked beneath his plundering fingers. He lathed her then with his tongue for sometime, before he shifted himself and made his way up to her, until he lay completely over her. Then he leaned down and covered her full lips with his own, scorching her lips with lots of deep wild kisses.

She arched against him and spread her legs further. One hand snaked down to cup his large sac in her palm. She gently squeezed his balls, getting heavy guttural moans coming out from his hard kisses. He shifted again, and this time positioned his engorged cock to her dripping cunt. Then seconds later, he shoved himself fully into her. Kaedah wrapped her legs and arms around him and shoved her hips up to meet him. It had been too many days since she had a thick cock in her pussy and she wasn't about to let him go for quite some time that evening.

Before the night was out, he'd be satisfying all her dark needs, and he would be another of her mesmerized love slaves. She shoved him hard against her, groaning in intense pleasure as her climax shot to the depths of her very core. Ah yes, so good to feel a dick shooting

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its come into her again. Soon, she'd be having her fill of other large cocks and have the throne all to herself.

Chapter Four

Zied could feel his essence flow from his body. He looked down and could see himself lounging on one of the divans in his mock study of the goddess Tagreth's cavern-temple. He had never really seen himself in such a slumbering, almost innocent state. Nor had he realized how tall he was. He was athletic looking with some muscularity, though not as bulky as Davel; the two friends were of the same height. Were as his friend, he recalled, had long dark auburn hair that only came to his shoulders and was as nearly pale as moonlight, Zied had dark cinnamon skin tone and hair that tapered down to his ass.

He knew others considered him dark and handsome except for his bright amber eyes. Yet, it only mattered that one person thought him beautiful and handsome to her, and that was his Yania. Soon he would see her again, after two long months of captivity in the goddess' temple. Tagreth was away from the temple and Zied knew that he would not have much time to fly to Yania's side. If he could not find her alone, his next best chance would be to find Davel.

He knew neither his wife nor his long-time dearest friend would ever let him down or give up on him. He saw villages and towns and meadows pass rapidly below him. He willed himself to the capital of Tagath, the luminous and multi-spired City of Tinjar. Soon below him he saw the capital in all its splendor. It was a colorful and large city. Merchants of all sorts blared their wares in the two-leveled market sectors, one sector being the higher priced items than similar things on the second tier of business. He could see dancers and other entertainers preparing themselves and their troupes of revelers for the coming festivities that the Choosing of the Second Husband was set up for and more.

Many times had he traversed the wide streets of his birth-city with Davel and his wife Yania. And some times with each alone or by

himself at times. Now, as he summoned more of his inner strength, he would whisk his spirit essence to the palace and hoped to the older more wondrous gods that he would be able to speak with Davel or his precious wife.

He flew through room after room, but did not see his wife in their quarters or in the rest of the palace. Then he sensed her and Davel somewhere else in the large royal housing. His private study, he was sure, was where he would find the two. He had to find a way to talk to them soon and let them know what his plans were. He had to get back to his beloved wife and friend soon. He did not know how much longer he could stay safe from the goddess's insatiable needs.

He felt as if he landed on his feet when he glided himself upright in the middle of the study. How he missed this place. His heart skipped several beats, then he let out a sigh as he saw them enter the room together. Davel, he knew had the power to detect another presence of power when he let his mind become open with the possibility. He opened his mind now and willed Davel and Yania to feel his presence.

The two stopped talking and began to glance around. "Yes!" he wanted to shout.

Yania reached upwards as if wanting to touch his cheek. "I can almost feel him, Davel. Or is that coolness just the wind."

Davel shook his head. "No, my friend. I can actually sense another's presence here. If I am not mistaken, it surely feels like your beloved's."

Zied glided to his large desk and was glad when he could will the books to bounce on the desktop. "I am here my dear ones. Listen to the wind of my voice."

"It is he, Davel. I can feel him too!" She moved quickly over to the desk. "Oh, show us my beloved. Tell me where you are. Tell us how we can bring you back home safely. Davel is he still here?"

"I think he is just about to do that, Yania. Look at the desk."

Zied was glad that they had seen him pull back the chair, though they could not see him physically. He mind-commanded a pen and paper to come before him. The yellowish parchment paper flattened out and the pen began to write his words down. Soon they would know what he had been thinking. After a few minutes he let the pen drop but let the paper float into Yania's open hands.

He was happy to note that both his loved ones read the letter quickly and carefully. They let out a gasp of relief when they saw, he realized, that it was in his handwriting. He moved nearer to Yania and ran his hand against her cheek. She touched her cheek almost as if she could feel his flesh.

“We will do what you ask of us, Zied. Go now before she realizes you are gone.”

He did not wish to leave them, but knew that he had to before the goddess realized that he was gone. With regret and a sigh, he flew across the vast kingdom and back to the temple. He had only been back into his body when Tagreth’s favorite found him lounging on the chaise. He harrumphed when Zied weakly sat up. The servant clanked a tray of food down and left without a word. Zied let out a long sigh of satisfaction. Soon, his dear friend and wife would help him to leave this blasted temple behind.

* * * *

Yania let out a laugh of relief as she crumpled up the paper in her hands and stuffed it into the pocket of her gown. She had sensed Zied around. Yes, she was glad she had not doubted him and he had truly found a way to contact her and Davel. Davel had told her earlier this day that he thought the same thing. Dear sweet Davel.

She turned on him and threw her arms around his thick neck. “You are the most wonderful friend in the world. I adore you and more, my dear Davel. You were so right all along about him trying to contact us.”

He let his arms lay lightly around her full bodied curves. “I am glad to see you happy again, my princess.”

She chuckled. “I am your Yania, remember.” She hugged him and only had to slightly tilt her head back to view him. “I’ve always been that to you. Now tell me what do you think that we should do next?”

He put a finger to his lips and bade her to be quiet. She followed his lead and tried to sense with her empathic powers, like he did with his otherworldly sensing, whether anyone else was near them whether they did or didn’t have magical or supernatural powers. After he shook his head, she did the same. She faintly clutched at the paper crumbled against her thigh and hiding in her pocket.

“In less than a week after the Choosing Ceremonies, it will be easier to go find him. Then as your royal bodyguard it will not cause

any commotion for me to take you on an outing. We must be careful that the goddess Tagreth or Kaedeah or their cohorts do any thing to disrupt our plans.”

“Nor, my Davel, “ she gently stroked his cheek with friendly affection, “can we let them even find out a word about this.”

She moved away from him and went over to the desk. On it was a lit candle which she pulled closer to herself. She took out the paper and let the flames eat it up. Davel reached around her and grasped the dark ashes and stirred them up in the candle plate, making sure that they were mixed up and all dark ash. She absently put her arm around his waist and he did the same as they glanced at the last embers of the message dying out in the large candleholder.

“Do not worry, sweet princess, we will get our beloved friend back home soon.”

She leaned her head against his broad shoulder. “With you here, Davel, I do not find that hard to believe. I am glad that you are here to help me through this.”

She felt his sigh of contentment blow softly upon the side of her face. “I would not let you go through this alone. Zied and you are the dearest people in the world to me.”

She inhaled his scent. Deep and fresh as the night of a green blossoming wood; and yes, very earthy and diligent. He smelled of not only those scents and aspects, but also of compassion and love. For her and Zied. They were lucky to have him in their lives. She could not have gone through these last lonely two months without him. Her arm tightened around him. She realized then that she should have asked him a long time ago to be her second.

“Why did I not realize before now that you would have been the best choice?”

His perplexing glances disturbed her senses in more ways than she could fathom. Would her beloved Zied not prefer that she had asked Davel to be her Second Husband? They all cared for each other, were best of friends. She looked up at him in bewilderment as he let his arms slacken before he slowly moved away from her. Perhaps it was best he did. Had she offended him?

“Davel, have I done something wrong?” She reached out for him, but he backed away from her touch.

He shook his head. "I just realized that I am needed for the guard changing. We will meet tomorrow morning and discuss our findings later. I wish you a good evening, my princess."

She found herself alone moments later. Somehow, she knew she had to set things right between them. It hurt her to realize she had let him down about something. Just as much, she suddenly thought, as if it had been Zied she'd hurt. She blinked her eyes in wonderment. Had her heart finally opened to him as a definite second or perhaps even more? Why had she not thought about this before? Had it been because she felt him more as a long-time friend and not a lover-husband prospect? She knew now that perhaps she should have considered the possibility and should have talked it over with Zied before her husband had been kidnapped by that damn Tagreth.

She let out a sigh, and thought about another bath. And wished that Davel could join her there. She shivered with awe and some hidden delight at that last prospect. Would he have been a great lover like Zied, maybe even different, better even? She would never know, she realized, because she had three official candidates from which to choose. With heavy heart and mind, she retired early and actually went to her room for a long and much needed rest. She hoped she slept well enough so she could handle what the morning would bring to her day of choosing.

Chapter Five

Glancing around the temple area: Tall columns supported the massive room. Two staircases that went in an arch lined each opposite wall from the ceremonial dais and the main opening into the temple, which had windows behind them. Priests and dancers stood on the ascending and descending stairs. Near the front entrance, lights surrounded fountains of clear gold water, which bubbled upwards in a sensual dance. Depictions of the goddess and the other deities of the world were painted upon the walls as well as mythical beings and creatures. Although this was not Tagreth's official temple of worship, the main temple housed her festivities and those of the cultural ones of the land and palace.

Though this was her birth city and most people worshiped her here, it was also built on the land of the ancient gods and therefore the high priestess/princess queen heir had to also make sure that the other gods had equal billing to be satisfied. The soft yellow white of the marble floorings just echoed the gentle but insistent clicking of the ceremonial goers foot movements. Also along the walls were delicately woven tapestries that depicted the history of the land and praises to the ancient gods.

Through the tall windows, two on the stair walls and one on three of the other walls of the six-sided temple, one could see the unusual formation of the land with its myriad landscapes and bountiful forests. There were doors from the hexagon temple that led out onto vast gardens of fantastic beauty, where other smaller open temples resides, for such things as marriages, birthing ceremonies and days of ones birth. The land loved their celebrations and merriment. It was basically a good place to live and be. But like any major metropolis, Yania was sure its inhabitants might have things it would prefer not doing. Such as she was doing now, having to preside over the long-time ceremony of choosing her Second Husband.

Many had come dressed in their finery for the festivities to come, and to see their favorite princess choose her next consort. Yania was sure that by now, after nearly two months of Zied's disappearance that almost all the subjects of her vast land knew he was gone and in the company of the goddess Tagreth. She pulled her shoulders back, determined to get through with this exhausting day. She held up her hands and the merrymaking commenced as she came down the throne dais and began to mingle with her people. It was custom before the candidates were honored before her again.

She would have to give each man a turn in her company, and it was looked upon in a favorite way by the people, who would be first, second or third place in getting slots to win her favor. She knew she could let the people choose for her, but she would do so herself. She had felt the auras of the people and the candidates, but her extra sense of smell helped her this day to determine who would be most favored.

To her way of thinking, she would take the worst first and then so on. The third she would make her favorite. It would be easier to get the unwished for candidates out of the way, so she could concentrate more on the true husband she would claim.

Yania sniffed the air around the masked candidates. She had come to recognize their scents immediately with her traipses around the palace. She was glad of her unusual power and could differentiate people, places, things and creatures animate or inanimate with this gift.

One particular scent caught her attention and made her shiver with delight. She knew this man, knew his heat and had picked up on his body vibrations. No, not Zied, but someone dear. So he had done this for her. Davel had not been mad at her. She knew his visage despite the ornamental hooded robe and gilded mask he wore. Though but by a few inches, he was taller and more confident than the other two choices who wore similar masks and robes.

She had to keep thoughts of knowing him out of her mind unless another more powerful thought-mage picked up on her thoughts. Yet her emphatic powers were more highly trained than most of the mage's and priests and goddess-favorites in the whole ceremonial temple. Their combination of mind-emotional-physical sensings were not as great as her own, but she still had to be careful least the goddess had heightened one of her spies' powers. And she figured, especially if the goddess was here in disguise.

She had no doubt that the goddess wanted her pick to be the one she chose. The second of the tallest men, she remember him smelling like a mixture of salmon and seaweed with water lilies thrown in, had to be Tagreth's cohort. She would then make this man her first choice. Then she recognized the efficient but formidable stance of Vorus, her sister's guard. The two had had sex; Yania could tell, no matter how much Vorus had bathed and had sex with Kaedeah's bathers. He would be the second choice, but she had to be more careful with him, he was under her sister's spell and obviously had thoughts of sitting on the throne, no matter whom he had to bed to get there. She would not relish his attentions.

She kept her mind off her third choice, and replaced it with the day's activities. Today she would officiate their attentions and their wooing. They each had a day at their least, more if she bestowed it, in which to get to know her and impress her. It was not only customary during the 2nd husband ceremony preliminaries, but also a bit of law. She had to keep her mind on the proceedings, but knew she could not allow the first two to get that intimate with her. The third choice was going to be tough.

She moved around the throng of people, some who hailed her and made their wishes know. Then after her greeting and mingling obligations, she moved back to the throne dais. She had the two main priestess, her sister and another close female kin who was not in cahoots with Kaedeah; bring each male before her twice. The second time she made the choices. She was sure she felt the room glow with an otherworldly vibration when she chose Bendus first, then Vorus, and finally Davel.

After each choosing, the gentlemen had knelt before her and offered her their thanks and loyalties and undivided devotion to her. Then their hoods came off and she had to kiss the cheek of each man. She kept her shivering down and gave them each a peck of acceptance. Then she allowed her first choice to lead her to the banquet tables in the next large ceremonial area, where dining and entertainment would begin, and last well until the late night hours. Tomorrow, her wooing would begin.

* * * *

Shopping Stalls ran almost side-to-side at the Market Square. Davel pointed the various stalls and merchants to her that normally she might not have known. This she remembered as a young teen

when she first fell in love with Zied and the two vied for her attention. The city's splendor and fascination was still the same for her then and now. She remembered much of the city and its nuances.

Now she walked with Davel and he bought her trinkets and things at different stalls, to remember their day out. Suddenly a driven cart zapped out of nowhere, headed right for her. Davel was quick to grasp her waist, pulling her out of harms way. She looked up into the dark lit eyes of her 2nd and now he would be the one.

She had spent the prerequisite day alone with the other two choices, and had managed to keep their hands off of her. She knew that would be hard to do with Davel. He kept her close to him for the rest of the day, making sure that nothing else befell her personage. He was caring and attentive and his hands were magnificent to feel with in hers and as he held her gently at times during their outing. It surprised her that he had not come forward before, nor that she and Zied had chose him. It would have been the preferable way, but it didn't matter since the two of them were together now.

He had told her about his plan to help her and become a candidate, but couldn't reveal himself, since it was part of the ceremony/law/ requirements of the chosen candidates. Had Zied and she chosen a candidate or two, she still wouldn't have known, cause the chosen had to keep his identity secret until she chose fairly from amongst the masked contenders. She was glad she waited. Although she felt his shyness at her nearness, she also felt his desire for her. She had had time to think about him being in her bed and was not totally adverse to it, just a bit awkward, as he portrayed.

They had only chatted briefly about their interests and friendship of old, and pretended to be absorbed with each other. They had little privacy really because some servant or priest or duenna of some kind was always around, as was required until the official choosing and wedding was over. After she and Davel had their outing, she later found herself alone in Zied's workroom. She could still feel his presence here, felt as if he were reaching out to her trying to caress her. She thought about their wondrous lovemaking sessions here, particularly that 1st year of marriage on his birthday. He had laid her upon the desk and thrust her gown up over her buttocks, pleased to find her with no under clothing on, and then put her legs over his shoulders and began to suck her cunt oh so deliciously. His tongue was long and fierce as it plundered her silken depths creating waves

of intense desire. Then he had fondled her pussy, making her even more wet and wanting for his plunging. Minutes later she shivered as she felt him impale her with his huge cock. They had climaxed as wild as the heavens when born.

Would Davel take her like that? Would he be a strong and gentle and caring lover? She felt herself quiver with anticipation? Was he, as she sort of expected, a virgin? Had he been with other women? She had not smelled any recent feminine wiles on him. Either he was a virgin or it had been a really long time since he had had a woman. She was filled with both trepidation and excitement.

She came back to the present problem—they had to go find and free Zied. With a weary heart, she turned and went back to her rooms and hoped she could handle having two pieces of her heart torn asunder. She was starting to fall in love with Davel, but she still longed for Zied. What ever the hell or heaven was a princess to do?

Yania sat down and slumped over Zied's desk. She missed him and it was very confusing for her to have all these mixed emotions about her missing husband and his best friend. She almost felt as if she were cheating on him. Somehow though, she felt that Zied would want her to be happy and he had often said Davel would make a good husband for some woman one day, if he did not want to leave the warrior-hood and go into the Robes as Zied had once mentioned Davel wanted to. But the royal warrior had made his parents happy and became a warrior of the palace instead.

She sighed and thumped her hands down on the desk. A book fell over her hands and to a open set of pages. Yania glanced down and it only took her a few moments to realize that it was Zied's journal of discovery notes and personal views on his experiments and his daily discoverings. She sat up further. He had mentioned her in these pages. She began reading and found herself in awe and going through mixed frustrations. How could he have not told her of all these recent findings? She looked at he dated notes again. This was written just a few days before he disappeared. That might have been why he hadn't told her and why this private journal was still upon the table. He had not had time to put it away or tell her of his findings.

One thing she had admired about him was that he was very thorough in what he undertook and made sure that his findings were correct before he let anyone know about them. It was one of the things his teachers in mage school had admired about him and Davel

and herself. He had wanted to complete his findings before he told her the truth. Did Davel know? She could not be sure, but if he did, he probably did not want to talk to her until he knew for certain also. Yania knew she had some findings of her own to make. If these notes were true, then her father had not died, but took his place amongst the elder gods. Would she then have powers that might come to her soon, being the daughter of a god? The thought made her shiver.

Her father had gone on an expedition when she was just turning of adult age. He had never come back. That was more than ten years ago. She still missed him but had become the ruler he had trained her to become. She sat up a little straighter and closed the book. She sensed out the book and smelled and felt that only Zied had been using it lately. She opened his one of his drawers and put the journal towards the back, then waved her hand over the desk drawer opening and put a lock-spell upon it. It would be safe for sometime from prying eyes and hands.

She was not sure what she would do with this new information. Perhaps her worries of late had been the cause of why she had more heightened awareness and found it easier to use her magical abilities. Whatever the reason, she would find out, but be careful how she did her investigations, so that neither of her siblings or anyone else could find out what she was up to. Perhaps she had found a way to get her First Husband back. After her wedding, she would share this with Davel. She knew she could trust him, but thought it best to wait until after the wedding to let him know.

Chapter Six

Kaedeah was the vilest of bitches at times, Yania thought as she traipsed around the lush palace gardens where the wedding would take place, similar to the one she had with Zied, only this time it would be with Davel. Last night she had not joined in on the festivities of the official choosing. Her half sister must be feigning sickness right now, but Yania felt as if it were just a ploy to stop the wedding or halt it.

But there were other royal priests to perform the ceremony and she had chosen one to officiate the formal procedure. Therefore she knew, that her sister would not cause trouble that way. Her thoughts meandered to other more pleasant areas. The flowers were in full bloom. Her father had loved flowers, but no one had laughed at the tall, virile king for enjoying nature. Sometimes she truly missed him. It had been many years since her enjoyed these trails with her. Zied had taken over that duty a few years ago. Now he was gone, and it would be Davel's turn.

Many questions came to her mind and she knew she had to find out the answers to them and soon. As thoughts of Davel fixated in her mind, she haphazardly enjoyed her plush surroundings, hoping that would calm her nerves as her wedding night with him approached very soon. One more day and they would be married. They did not have to wait for any customary required time. She was glad, for the two had plans to make, besides that of a wedded couple. Although she still waited about telling him about the journal, she let him know with whispers of affection and stolen caresses that she was not adverse to him being her lover.

However, though they had not spoken about Zied completely, she did wonder what would it be like for Davel this time, since he would be attending the wedding as the groom instead of best man? Would he feel that he is in the shadow of Zied's love, or would he believe that

she loved him for just himself? She was still in awe over it being Davel. She had inwardly somehow known, but it was still a surprise and a pleasant one. Was it more than friendship that he was doing this for? Did he always have some requited love for her? Was she in love with Davel on the same intensity that she cared for Zied?

She sighed and picked a large red & yellow flower. It was hard to answer some of those questions; however, some of them were answered in her heart. A comforting feeling came over her. A breath not of the normal world whispered caresses against her neck. She froze with surprise, not daring to move. Zied was nearby.

Her heart began beating fast as those caresses became more tangent. She saw no body around but she could feel one now pressing up against her. Her nipples hardened. He was definitely here. She felt the wetness between her legs start to flow as those invisible hands shaped her body with abandoned touches of desire. Was he in spirit form? If so, it must have been a recent talent he was exploring. He had made notes about it in his journal. Did he have the power to partially or fully form any part of his invisible body? She hoped so, for she missed his touches fiercely.

“Zied?” she whispered his name beneath her breath. “Are you here?”

She felt a chin nuzzle against her at the same time she felt those hands on her bare breasts. “I...am for a few moments. Marry Davel soon. Come...to...me...”

She felt the sudden coldness. He was gone. Her chest heaved in wariness and frustrations. She should go get Davel and be on her way now to find her beloved. Why had she not done so before?

“Because,” she felt him in her mind answering her question, “Tagreth would have found a way to stop you and take over the kingdom. United with me and Davel we stand a stronger chance. There are ways. I can’t say yet, but we will talk of them. Soon, my love, soon.”

Once more, she felt that horrible cold emptiness she had when she’d realized he was taken away from her heart and her bed. She believe him that he could only come for moments at a time least Tagreth find his essence gone. He had been studying astral traveling for the last year before his disappearance, but she had not known for sure if he had finally learned how to do it. Perhaps, in the confines of the goddess’ temple, he had finally found out how to do that magical

feat. She herself had some powers, but not like Zied's or, like Davel's latent ones, she thought, until she had read Zied's journal. She had been practicing with them.

She wondered if Zied had had enough time to contact Davel too. She had to know. She had to find a way to meet with him secretly so that they could meet to discuss how best to rescue Zied. She had formed some plan already, but the two of them had not had much time to speak privately, because some servant was around attending them, even as they had gone to the market and other places during their minute courtship and get to know each other period. She needed to talk to him soon, but still felt after the wedding would be best, because her inner sensations told her that both hers and Davel's movements were being watched. With a heavy sigh, she went back into the palace to take care of some necessary royal duties.

* * * *

Now officially chosen to be Yania's warrior husband and Second Royal Consort, Davel felt less as if he was entering Zied's private domain and being an intruder. Although he knew that once he was made the Prince Consort, and he could have his own private chambers and study, right now, he needed to be close to his friend in some form or fashion. The wedding was in the morning and he was as nervous as hell. He still felt as if he were cheating on his best friend, with his best friend's wife.

Yet, Zied and he had talked briefly about this, that he would be a preferable choice. Yet, it had not been but a passing thought, nothing planned or official between the friends. Just ideas voiced over late night drinks and scientific/magical studies. Somehow, he felt that Zied knew he would take care of Yania for him. He had never loved a woman or desired one as he did Yania. Only Zied had gotten to her heart first. Davel knew it was pathetic of him, but instead of being jealous like some men would be, he basked in his best friend's love. The thought of actually contemplating being a second husband had never really entered either one of their minds, he was sure. It was the goddess' law and the pushing of the high priestess Kaedeah that had prompted the law to prompt the princess to marry again. Especially since the First Consort was missing, and officially it was suppose to be the Second Consort who seeded the children and heirs of the queens of the realm.

Whether late or not, the idea had come about and he was glad that Yania had chosen him. He had the feeling that she was not totally adverse to him. Not since the time Zied had told him about the secret tunnel to their bathing area had he dared to see Yania naked again. Would she accept him and not compare him to her former lover? It was important to him that she knew he would be different. He was not jealous of Zied, but still didn't want to be compared to his friend in matters of the bedroom.

Just after he sat down in the chair in front of the main desk, a sudden chill of wind entered the study. His head shot up and Davel knew that he was not alone. His *otherworldly sensing* powers told him that. He kept his mind partially open, but guarded his thoughts well. His latent powers, from his father's side, he was sure, were becoming stronger recently. Then he felt two invisible hands clamping down on his shoulders.

He knew that touch and opened his mind more. "Zied?"

One invisible hand stroked his back. "Yes, my dear friend."

Although the two had never been lovers, they had caressed and hugged each other as dearest of friends were wont to do. "I am glad. She chose me. Do you still approve?"

"Yes...I could not handle anyone else touching her. She is so lovely and I want her to be happy should I not make it back."

"You will, I swear, my friend." He reached up to pat the invisible hand. It covered his own. "We will get you freed. Send me your thoughts and I will share mine."

He could feel that it was truly Zied's mind touch upon him and opened his mind to his friend even more. "These are my plans as I briefly wrote them to you before, and now you must talk them over with Yania and implement your own plans with them."

Davel leaned into the hand that caressed his face. "I will, Zied."

"Yet you are troubled less by freeing me than you are bedding Yania."

Davel pulled back as if stung. "I want your freedom with all my heart, Zied. I am wary of bedding your wife. I would not wish to disappoint either of you."

He heard a soft windy sigh. "I do understand. Another man I could not bear touching her, but you are like part of me, Davel. Love her as I do. I know you have feelings for her."

"This is true, Zied. Yet I would not cause you harm or come between you two. And I have never...um..."

Zied finished his words for him. "You've never bedded another woman because you love her too much and desire her as no other. I have felt this. Do not be ashamed of this. You have my blessing and I will not interfere."

"There is more, Zied. I am afraid of displeasing her. I've...um ...seen how you make her feel."

A soft windy chuckle echoed through the room. "I thought I felt you there before, just after I told you about the secret passageway."

"I do not think that I can please her so. I wish that you could help me through my wedding night."

Another caress on his cheek made him more comfortable. "Then I will do what I can. Would you be averse to sharing your body with me then? We can love her together, as I have often wished we could."

Davel felt the awe of the situation. He had longed for the same thing that Zied now spoke of. He had often wanted to share in their bathing rituals together. "But how would she take it, my friend."

"I want this to be your night with her. I will come once, the first time to help you over your fears. Then you will be able to enjoy her soft body without my interference. I give you my blessings to make her happy, Davel."

He rubbed his cheek against the invisible hand. "I will do this then. And soon we will free you, dear Zied."

"Thank you, Davel. I must go now. I have visited her already. I will be back on the eve of your wedding. The goddess will be away then and I can escape for a few hours of bliss."

Then just as suddenly as the wind had come he felt it whisk away into nothingness. Then the room was silent and he sat back in the chair, his mind contemplating what had just happened. In a way it pleased him that Zied would be there. Although he knew about the act of lovemaking he had never done it before with a woman. Yania would be his one and only. He felt a bit more relaxed knowing that Zied could share her love with him. He would not disappoint either of his beloved friends, but neither would he deny himself the fierce need to be buried within Yania's hot sweet depths.

He loved her and wanted to shower her with his love. He felt a bit more lightened of heart and surer of what his wedding night would bring. He knew that Yania had come to care for him. Tomorrow he

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would learn to what depths that love would take. He would not tell her about Zied right away, but when the time came, he would. Soon they would be together, and then they could make plans to free their beloved Zied. A small smile played upon his wide mouth. He wondered if she were bathing now.

Chapter Seven

It had been a splendorous wedding. Yania could not complain, nor she felt, could have Davel. She was a bit scared of their night together, but also anticipated it. She hoped that she pleased him well. Soon, the damn ceremonies were over and they were led by the wedding procession to their official chambers. Servants waited for them just at the hour of the darkening time, midnight, and they waited upon them with soft appetizers, candles and music. Yania gave them a few moments, then waved the servants away.

She was glad that her low-cut wedding gown had no hard or tiny fasteners. She slowly moved over to Davel, holding her hand out to him. "Would you care to bath first? The water in the pool is always warm and filled with relaxing minerals. I would not rush you if you are as nervous as I am."

He smiled down at her and took her proffered hand. "I should like that. Lead the way, my Yania, my wife."

She blushed at his deep, heart-felt words. "I like the way my name rolls off your lips, Davel. I care deeply for you and will do my best to make you a good wife."

He reached over and caressed her cheek. "I think you have begun that already."

She smiled back at him and led him to the bathing area. The bathers were waiting for them, but she gave them a wave of her hand to stop them. "Tonight, I wish to be alone with my husband and bath him myself."

They smiled and bowed at their princess and took themselves off the side door that led to their own suites. Yania let out a breath and glanced at her new husband. He looked splendid in his dark blue ceremonial robes and they only emphasized his broad shoulders and long torso. She had seen him in tight jerkins before, but this would be the first time she was going to see him naked.

"I hope that tempting smile is for me, Yania." His eyes alighted with a hunger she'd only seen once before in a man. Yet his dark blue eyes were mesmerizing in a way that Zied's were not. "I have longed to see your lovely emerald eyes filled with desire for me...and only me."

"I have only desire for you right now, my husband. Tonight is ours only. I will not think of any but you. Let me pleasure you in any way you choose."

He put a finger to her lips. "Then let me undress you."

She gasped as his hands undid the fastening of her gown. The ribbon came undone and her gown loosened around her upper waist. He bent down and kissed her trembling lips. His kiss was gentle at first, and then deepened as she responded. His lips became hotter over her own and then the fire between them rose even higher. Her arms went around him and she had to reach up a bit to put her arms around him. She had been almost even in height with Zied. She quickly forgot thoughts of Zied as his arms came around her and he pressed her close to his incredibly sexy body. Yania knew she was in for one amazingly long and pleasurable night of divine sexual pleasures with her excitingly desirable new husband.

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It would not be long, Zied thought. He pretended to be asleep as usual when the servants came to lock him in the study for the night. As soon as he felt the air around him clear, he left his body and flew quickly to his remembered quarters with Yania. He was pleased to find his friend and wife alone. He could feel and see their tentative ease with each other, but he also felt their desire for each other. He was not jealous, but relished the excitement he felt emanating from his beloved ones.

He waited a few more minutes, for he knew he would have the time this night since he knew Tagreth was away on one of her ravishing parties to find new sleep meat. He put thoughts of her out of his mind and concentrated on keeping his spirit form from being detected by his friends. It was hard because they were empathic and were close to each other in many ways. He was getting a mental hard on just watching them slowly touch each other and whisper words of sweet endearments to each other.

He could tell that even though Davel was extremely desirous for his wife, he was still hesitant. Zied felt the air and slowly eased into

Davel's body. He had gotten better at it, for he was sure that his friend was unaware of Zied being inside his body. And Zied knew that part of the reason was because of his heated desires and concentration on pleasing their wife and queen to be. He would awaken Davel slowly to his presence and let his friend become relaxed with Yania first, before he joined and helped Davel with pleasuring Yania.

* * * *

Davel pressed his mouth harder over hers. How he wanted her to be sheathed around him. He pulled his arms away from her body only long enough to help her slip off her gown. He had no problem pulling off his robes and was glad he had worn nothing underneath them, as she hadn't her gown. His large hands covered her heavy orbs of flesh and he groaned to finally be able to feel them.

"Ah, Yania, I've wanted to touch your beautiful breasts for so long now. Your body is more wondrous than the heavens above."

"I desire you, Davel. Touch me, hold me, and feel me. Make me yours tonight."

Davel picked her up in his arms and carried her to the steps of the sunken bathing pool. He stepped down into the warm, whirling silken waters keeping her tightly within his embrace. He looked at her long supple body and groaned. Oh he wanted to take her now, but was still wary. Yet when he looked into her eyes, he saw the same intense desire that he had for her. And he did not feel Zied around yet. He lowered his mouth back over hers and let her body slip down against his.

She felt perfect against him. Warm, pliant and ready. He touched her all over, basking in the feel of her hands as they explored his body. Fears were left behind and then he picked her up and sat her down on the edge of the pool. There he knelt before her and partook of her fleshy delights. She opened her legs to allow him easier access and when he felt and saw her need for him, he touched her mons, parting her womanly lips and lowering his tongue down over her labia. He delved deeply down into her hot depths relishing her moistened channel.

She rubbed his back, urging him upwards. "You are so hot, Davel. I can't wait to have you inside me."

He eased up beside her and she reached out for his long, thick cock. "Are you sure, my Yania?"

At her nod, he leaned over her and lowered her to the floor. She opened her thighs for him and he moved between her offerings of herself. He caressed every inch of her body slowly, knowing she writhed in agonizingly wonderful ecstasy from it. His empathic senses picked up on her heated desires; just as sure hers picked up on his. She reached between them and stroked his heated shaft. He was as ready for her as she was for him.

He lowered his hips down over hers and eased his large penis into her deep wet folds. Ah hell she felt as good as he imagined. She moved her legs up beside him to give him easier access into her cunt. He started stroking her in long hard plunges. She arched up against him, crying out his name. He moved faster and more furiously inside her. Davel cried out her name and pumped harder and deeper into her pussy. Together, he felt them both begin to quake and as she cried out her release, he unloaded his pent up desires within her hot cunt. Afterwards, he wrapped his arms and legs around her, keeping her tightly against him. For long moments he kept her close to him and did not withdraw his arms from around her.

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Zied waited before he eased back into his friend's body. He had been there in the beginning, but when he felt Davel overcoming his fears, he watched from outside his friend's body and let the newly weds have their first time together. Now he knew he could not wait to feel Yania's hot depths again. And even using Davel's body, he'd still be able to feel what the other man felt. Slowly he felt Davel awakening, and without asking, he knew Davel did not mind if he took control of the situation. He felt himself harden within Davel's form, and could feel Davel and him stretching Davel's cock to larger proportions. Without waiting for her invitation, Zied/Davel impaled her swiftly. They sloshed into her wet depths and dually enjoyed her gasps of pleasure. Harder and harder they fucked her together as spirit brothers in one body. She bucked against them and came explosively.

Zied was glad of the feel of her legs and arms around him, Davel's body. She felt so good to be inside of again. After a moments rest, Zied felt Davel hardening again and once more they fucked her hard and fast giving her plenty of pumping flesh to mingle with her own hot liquid flesh. Her silken crevice and scorching responses sent both men over the edge with her into sweet oblivion. As they slept together, Zied made mental notes to Davel. Moments later, when the

newlyweds were dozing arm in arm together, Zied quietly returned to his body and his imprisonment.

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Tagreth had not missed Zied's coming back into his body these last three nights. She followed him a few times and witnessed him using his friend's body to make love to his wife. She would not allow them their amusements much longer. To think that he thought he could outwit the most devious mind around, he was out of his league. She would teach them not to fool with her. And when she wanted something, she went all out to get it. Tonight, she'd allow them one more time together, but oh she'd be there to put her thoughts and revenge in place. Yania was too besotted with both of her lovers to know what was fixing to hit her. She would show that ungrateful subject not to mess with a goddess, especially when a goddess wanted something as badly as she wanted Zied in her bed.

She had gotten so horny watching them she slipped into that damn priestess Kaedeah's body and made herself enjoy the fucking that her guard Jorus was giving the little bitch. Not that it wasn't too bad though, because she liked Kaedeah wide cunt and enormous breasts. She could have all kinds of lusty fun in a body like this. Perhaps she'd make the priestess pay her dues. She got around showing Tagreth true worship. She bade other lovers in Kaedeah's voice to join them that night. Tagreth wanted lots of fucking and was bound and determined to get it one way or another. Getting her pleasures taken care of first, she temporarily forgot about Zied and his little threesome.

Chapter Eight

During their nights of lovemaking she had become aware of Zied coming into Davel's body, and Yania found the extra attentions so intoxicating and she was deliciously fucked several times a night. And they both were fantastic about showering her with their attentions. Never had she been licked so much and tongue fucked so deeply. She wasn't complaining, but was glad when they started using their times together to start making plans to free Zied. She wanted both of them to truly be able to physically fuck her.

She had not been mad, even in the beginning, when she learned that Zied had meshed his spirit into Davel's body. When they knew that Zied had left, she and Davel talked about the situation. He did not mind sharing her with Zied, nor, he told her, did Zied mind it either. They both loved her and desired her body. It was enough for her, especially since she loved both of them so much. Then they made their plans and would put them into action when they made sure that Tagreth was not around. For Davel had said he could feel her creeping around. They had agreed, no more than one more night together, before they started out on their journey to find Zied. And what a fucking fantastic night it had been.

Now, they were headed, supposedly to others, out on their honeymoon, but She and Davel and their entourage had detoured to the quaint little town that lay near Tagreth's Ocean Mountain temple and her seat of power. Zied had told them what to bring with them and together, the three had devised a plan they hoped would defeat the vindictive and devious goddess. Davel and she had gone out on their own, with some provisions and had found a backdoor, a cavern tunnel that Zied said led into the goddess' realm. The cavern was at the base of one of the mountains near an old abandoned temple. He had found it during his spirit travels before meeting up with them. She and Davel had no problem finding. They had stopped there and made love for a

few hours, before resting and continuing to look for the cavern opening amidst the overgrowth of flora around the backside of the temple. When they found it, they made their way warily within the darkened depths of the old rock hewn cavern tunnel.

She watched her step carefully as she and Davel traipsed the treacherous tunnels and caverns that led to the goddess' throne room. She felt at some point that they were led by the goddess' folly and her whimsical clues while they hunted for the whereabouts of Zied. She vowed to have the courage to face the goddess whom her ancestors purported to be descended from. Each time she tripped, she felt Davel rush to her and help her up. They talked in whispers about what they had to do. It would be dangerous going up against the goddess.

Soon they came to an underground chamber that was naturally lighted and had a pool in its midst with some stone formations they could sit down and rest upon. Davel and she partook of the sweet water in the pool and opened their travel packs to partake of some food. They were going to need all the energy they could muster up, so ate heartily to store that needed energy up for later use. They sat in quiet comfort for some long moments and was glad for the quiet, Yania knew. They had made a brave and bold decision to take on the goddess, but hopefully their plan would succeed. She sure as hell hoped so.

For a while they stayed there to catch their breath and make sure that they were truly refreshed. They did not want to be exhausted when they found Zied and the three of them came up against the spoilt goddess Tagreth. The female deity was powerful and especially during the midnight hours, but if what they and Zied found out was true, then Yania was certain that they had a damn good chance of defeating Tagreth.

She knew that the darker beings from the unholy realms awoke mostly in the hours between dusk and dawn; and were strong like Tagreth after the midnight hour had started to pass. Some of them however didn't work with or side with Tagreth, and that was one aspect that she, Zied and Davel counted on to be in their favor. After realizing that they had rested enough, she motioned to Davel that they should continue in the search for Zied, before the goddess or one of her minions stopped them. For a long while they were quiet and continued traipsing through the caverns; yet she knew that eventually they would find signs or senses of Zied being around.

Somehow, she had this terrible feeling that the goddess was laying in wait, just for the right moment to spring out upon them and do something to terrify or hurt her beloveds and herself. She took a deep breath and drummed up all her strength and storage of power to make sure she was ready when the goddess or one of her servant minions did strike. Yania kept her extra senses open and on guard. She could psychically feel Davel doing the same; and somewhere, she could feel Zied nearby. She had to keep her feelings of worry locked up for now.

She had still not told Davel about her findings or what she had discovered in Zied's study and journal. Yania knew she could trust him and Zied, but if the goddess, realized she knew some of her secrets, there was the chance that Tagreth could somehow use the information and results against her and her two deliciously sweet husbands. She could not allow that to happen. However, she was still determined at their next stop, that she would broach the subject with Davel, especially if the area was clear of conniving goddesses and other darkling creatures of the midnight hours that were approaching fast.

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Davel could almost feel Zied inside of him again. Was he indeed taking shape in his body? Would Zied a part of him again? They had formed earlier inside the abandoned temple; and they had discussed their feelings for Yania, their friendship and their desires for life and a way out of the goddess clutches. She could usually tell when Zied had finally entered Davel's body, though she did not have Davel's particular power; however, Davel kept her from knowing, this time at least. He and Zied thought it better. He wanted to tell Yania, but having felt that the goddess' or Kaedeah/s spies might be around, he kept things to himself so that they would not be overheard by them or any other unscrupulous beings.

Davel had enjoyed this time with Zied and Yania, and he and his friend made some notes on how much more they could pleasure her once they were of two bodies again. Even Zied had enjoyed watching him make love to Yania, as Davel had liked watching from just outside the bathing room at the palace. He had not told Zied or Yania about the few other times that he had gone through the secret corridor to watch Yania and her bathers erotic bathing rituals. There would be plenty of time for that later.

Right now, their main duty was to get Zied out of that damn Tagreth's clutches. So far it had been too easy to come through these tunnels, without the goddess or one of her henchmen servants around finding their whereabouts. He knew the three of them were doing their damndest to keep from getting discovered by the goddess. If what Zied had recently told him was true, then there was a reason why the goddess had not been able to totally discover them in the tunnels.

Did Yania know about her true heritage? She had never spoke to him about it, and Zied mentioned that she never said anything to her, which is why the two of them never talked it over with her. He and she had spoken briefly about the plan Zied had come up with, but he felt that there was something she was still holding back. He was sure she would tell him when the time came. However, during their next rest stop, he knew he had to tell her of Zied's findings and suspicions.

Davel had made a map of the spirit Zied's findings, and then had shown it to Yania, and after both had memorized it as much as they could they had burned it. Still, he felt that it had been too easy a time to get through the passageways. His skin prickled and he kept close tabs on Yania. Davel remembered that Zied had said he suspicioned there might be another entrance to the room of his imprisonment, but that Zied had not been able to find it. One of the cavern tunnels led close to where his prison-study was located. Davel attuned his sensing powers to try and locate Zied's presence. He had the feeling that Yania was too. They had to find Zied, and hopefully soon.

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Tagreth was impatient, and sent her lovers and their playmates away. She had no time for sexual pleasures right now. Not when she knew she was about to be invaded by the very three people she wanted to punish. Did they think that their plans would really stop her from getting what she wanted? Zied would be hers and nothing the stupid amazonishly built princess could do would stop Tagreth. Unless...but no, Yania did not know her true heritage.

And if she did have some inkling, there was naught the half-breed could do to use her hidden powers against her own mother. Tagreth leaned back into the warmth and comfort of her throne. She could sense them out there. They just didn't know yet that she was aware of their presence. Their own sensing skills were open, wary of her interference; yet, their openness gave Tagreth the edge she needed to

pull a few tricks of her own, and to find out something she had been wanting to know for long time now.

Did Yania have her seductive powers in her genes? Tagreth had never come against anyone else that had her powers of physical and mental seduction. She kept her true might to herself. There were many ingenious things a goddess could command and do with the extent of seductive powers. Seduction controlled many of life's essences and related instances, be they sexual or of the heart or for another reason. People and other beings were seduced for different reasons; sex, greed, competitiveness, and more. And Tagreth knew how to manipulate them all.

She would not allow another to have what she had, not even a sibling of her own. She would take care of the three and somehow dispose of Yania. The blasted woman didn't have the protection of her father anymore and that pleased Tagreth very, very much. For a few months she had become human, through the help of Yania's real father, the King of Emoral, who was also a god in disguise. One of the elder gods in fact, one that she had tried to seduce for a very long time.

Quindar could not conceive a child with a goddess so his only option had been a human consort. He may have had feelings for the high priestess-queen of Emoral, but it didn't matter to Tagreth. Under his protection, she got her whim of being human to satisfy her curiosity and desires, but there was a price to pay for wanting to satisfy that curiosity. She screwed with Quindar long enough to seed a child, just after she became human. Once the conception was done, the seedling half-breed was embedded in the womb of Yania's foster mother and carrier. Though he was her first husband, the queen was allowed her second husband and that had been Kaedeah's father. The man had not lived too long because he'd broken his neck in a fall. He wasn't a good screw anyway, Tagreth thought.

Though she had found it to be a fantastic experience bedding Quindar, she could not abide the thought of being pregnant. She was glad when the process had been done with and then she could get on with her personal enjoyments in human form. That had been nearly thirty human years ago and she had not given it much thought until lately, when she had fallen in lust and love with Zied. Now, she would not be thwarted.

She would find out what the three were up to and soon. Zied was

her priest and she would keep it that way. Still it couldn't hurt to have some fun with the three of them. They been enjoying a threesome at her expense, perhaps she could join in on the fun. Deliciously sinful ideas swarmed within her ancient mind and she could feel her mental and physical juices flowing with the sheer possibilities of what fucking pleasures could be had with Zied and Davel. Yania had to be dealt with, if she was going to use the princess's body for a few hours of lusty dealings. Oh, yes, this was going to be so much wanton fun, she could hardly wait to feel both their cocks. Soon, very soon she would have what she wanted from Zied and her new love-slave-to-be, Davel. She could smell their desires mounting. They were indeed close by. In a short while, she would have them all at her mercy. Tagreth was very pleased with herself.

Chapter Nine

“I can feel you both close by.” Yania heard Zied in her mind. She turned to look expectantly at Davel. He nodded as if answering her unspoken question. He too was hearing Zied at the same time as she was.

“We can hear you, beloved. I feel that we are very close. My powers have indeed grown stronger.”

She heard both the mental gasps of both Zied and Davel, but it was Zied who had spoken out loud. “Forgive us, Yania. We wanted to discuss this with you, but the opportunity never seemed to arise.”

“Forgive my laxity, Yania.” Zied said into her mind.

She made a gesture with her hand and smiled at Davel physically. “Both of you are forgiven. I read your journal by accident Zied, just after we first spoke in your spirit mind. Since then, I have made a few discoveries on my own. Forgive me also, for not telling you two sooner.”

She shared her startling discoveries with them mentally, letting them know that she had spoken with the mother just before Davel and she had gone on their honeymoon. Her mother had told her the truth that the goddess Tagreth was the female being who had conceived Yania with her father, but she bore her and in return was able to have another child by Yania’s stepfather and the queen’s first love. Yania told her husbands that she had made some amends with her conception mother, but at least finally understood why her sister Kaedeah disliked Yania now. She told them she would deal with those two later, because using her newfound knowledge of her godling heritage to help Davel save Zied was the most important thing to her right now.

Relief was in her husbands’ minds. “We are all at ease with each other then.” Davel said into their minds. “I too sense that we are not far from you, Zied. We must act quickly because I feel the goddess is

not far from you. Some inner instinct tells me that she is aware of us here.”

“I sense the same, my dear friend.”

“As do I.” Yania agreed. “We have to find that door soon.”

“Yania, scent my desire for you. The powder I asked you two to bring from my study is a magical dust that will allow an opening to form in case there was no door way to this room from the tunnels.”

“He is right, my love,” Davel put in. “Your idea to have her scent you out is perfect, since I feel telepathic force fields of sorts around the cavern walls that I believe are for keeping beings from teleporting you out.”

“Then we must hurry.” Yania took Davel’s hand in hers. “Think lustful thoughts of me, Zied. Ooh, yes, your tongue slowly caressing my cunt...I can smell your desire!”

She tightened her hand over Davel’s and led the way down a short corridor. She stopped and moved slowly around a small cavern that had some light emanating from one wall. Yania felt that was not a natural light but something sparked from her mind and scent powers. She was being shown where Zied’s cell was. She groped along the wall and Davel joined her. However, neither one could find an opening. She was not sure that she had the magic just yet to do such a feat and was glad that Zied had instructed Davel to gather things from his study to use in their plans of freeing Zied.

She was pleased as Zied quickly rummaged through the travel pack he had been carrying over his shoulder and whipped out a small, blue, leather pouch that had the powder in it Zied mentioned before. Davel bade her to move back, and she watched as he took some of the powder and threw it on the wall. For a few seconds, nothing happened. Then a small rumble was heard by both of them and an eerie glowing circle outlined a large oval for a few moments and then the inner part of the circle disappeared. They waited for the smoke to clear and then entered through the newly formed opening.

Moments after they stepped inside they saw Zied’s tall dark body jumping up from a chaise. He ran towards them as they sped in his direction. The three of them hugged each other quickly, but Yania knew that they had to hurry and get out of the luxuriously furnished prison cavern. She did not want the goddess to catch them.

“I think you are a bit late, Yania.” Some one said into their minds.

All three broke apart at the booming voice that filled the room. Another door opened before them and the goddess Tagreth in all her splendorous robes of dark yellow and sable flowing hair came gliding in making the room swell with her ominous presence. They turned to the other opening, realizing that they had moved too slowly. Her servant guards and other magical creatures she controlled were barring the opening. Yania and her husbands turned back to the goddess.

“It has been fun trying to see you outwit me, but now, sibling, you are no longer needed for the fun I’m about to partake of.”

Yania screamed out in intense pain as the goddess thrust her hands outward and a dark eerie golden light shot out at her. She crumpled to the floor, and as Zied and Davel reached for her, she heard their screams of surprise, pain and anguish. Then she felt their minds go blank and realized that the goddess had caused them to go unconscious. She followed suit just seconds before she saw the bitch that was her true mother looming over her fallen form. Then darkness engulfed her and her mind faded away into a deep darkened realm of nothingness.

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Kaedeah could not believe her luck when the goddess had believed her. She disliked the powerful bitch, but knew if she wanted to be more powerful and rule the land, she had to get Talgreth on her side. When she had overheard her stupid mother and Yania talking about Yania’s real parentage, she had kept her eyes open. She had not missed “sensing” that somehow Zied was around. She had gone to get Yania that day in the garden, to try and get back in Yania’s good graces, but had froze in her tracks when she saw her sister swaying sensually as if unseen hands were touching her body intimately. She had known then Zied had found a way to leave the goddess’ prison. Soon afterwards, Kaedeah had gone to the goddess’ favorite temple to appear in and dismissed any servants and priests around the praying dais. She let her mind go freely to the goddess and awakened her to the plans she suspected that Zied, Davel and Yania were up to. The goddess had promised to reward her.

Kaedeah intended to make sure that Tagreth kept that promise, no matter what it took. Now she stood in the goddess’ throne room glancing down at the lifeless body of the goddess. A body that had Yania imprisoned in it in a deep sleep. The goddess had planned to

use Yania's body for her own pleasures, and perhaps keep it if it suited her. Then she would be back and promised to officially make Kaedeah queen of Emoral. Kaedeah could hardly wait.

She had naught to do but stand here and wait for Tagreth's return, and make sure that Yania did not wake up in the goddess' body. With the spell-magic loaned to her from the goddess for that very use, she did not think she would have any problems were Yania was concerned. However, if Yania did wake up, she was going to have a bit of pay back fun with her damn elder sister. Yania deserved some punishment for having everything that Kaedeah had wanted and should have gotten. Oh, yes, she would have her revenge.

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Zied awoke, his mind swimming with pain and anguish. The goddess had jolted them with her powers just enough to stun them and cause them to black out. He sat up, taking note of his surroundings. He glanced around a poshly decorated area he realized quickly was a bedroom. Silken drapes of yellow and pearl white flowed from every corner and wall around the room, including open drapes flowing from the top of the huge circular bed he was on. He wasn't alone.

The bodies of Davel and Yania lay close together upon the bed, and they were as naked as he was. He moved over to them, touching Yania first to see if she was alive still yet. She breathed heavily, but he could ascertain no bruises, broken limbs or any permanent damage. He glanced at his dearest friend and saw that his chest rose and fell sporadically and he became worried. Then Davel's eyes fluttered open and he leaned up slowly on his arms.

Zied smiled warmly at him. "How are you feeling?"

"Sore, but I'll survive. I don't feel anything seriously wrong with me. How is our beloved?" He got up and moved closer to Yania.

Zied pulled her head in his lap. "She will be fine. The goddess must have some plans for us, we are not dead or permanently harmed."

Davel glanced around the lush prison. His mind immediately was open to Zied. Zied felt his friend use his sensing power to ascertain if the goddess or her cohorts were around the area. It was some moments before Davel's deep-set eyes came back to glance at him and then down at Yania. He laid a hand on her cheek and stroked the tender flesh.

"Yania will be fine, Davel." Zied assured him.

"I know, I sense that. The goddess is somewhere close by, but not in this room."

"We shall just have to wait and see what she wants from us, and try to figure out how to escape her with our combined forces."

"I agree, my friend."

"As do I, beloveds."

Zied jerked his head down and saw Yania smiling lovingly up at him. He bent his head and brushed his lips over hers. She glanced up at Davel who slowly did the same gesture. She stroked both of them as best she could, he felt, to let them know she was fine and that she was glad to still be with them. Yet, he still felt some unease within his wife. He let it slip at the back of his mind as she moved away from them and got off the bed. She glanced around the room, and then sat back down facing him and Davel.

"I do not know what she is up to, my loves, but let us at least rejoice about being back together. Oh, Zied it is so good to be near you again."

She threw herself against him and he wrapped his arms slowly around her torso. "It is good to have you in my arms again, Yania. How do you feel?"

"I am going to be just fine." She turned from him to peer at Davel. "Come, my beloved Davel. I would hold both of you in my arms. Before the goddess makes her demands and tries to prevent us from being together, let us all three love upon each other. I have missed our times together."

Davel moved closer and Zied could tell he finally relaxed and was happy to have their wife back amongst the living. "I am relieved, Yania. Zied and I were worried."

Zied chuckled and pushed closer against her backside. "But worry is the least of my emotions right now. Don't you agree, Davel, that we should make use of this time and show our beautiful wife just how much we have both missed being with her?"

Davel nodded. "I do indeed. Can you not tell by the way her eyes are lighting up at our hardening shafts, just what is on our desirable princess' mind? I think that we should make her happy while we can."

Zied concurred with Davel's idea. "Remember those delicious things we talked about that we wanted to do to her, let's put them in effect now."

Zied glanced over at Davel for acknowledgement. His long-time

friend and second husband to his wife, nodded slowly and Zied was glad that Davel had sensed what he had, and was following his lead. He kept his mind closed and focused on making sure that the Yania he held in his arms stayed happy and satisfied. Davel joined him in making sure that's just what they did to her and her body.

Chapter Ten

Yania floated above the goddess' body. She saw Kaedeah along with Tagreth's bodyguards watching over the true form of the goddess. They thought that she was imprisoned within the young looking, but ancient body. They were all wrong, and her heightened powers kept them from knowing that and revealing that to her wretched goddess mother. She had had the feeling that Kaedeah must have found out something about hers and her husbands' plans. The ungrateful wretch would get what so justly was coming to her soon, when Yania took care of the goddess.

She had wakened moments ago to a lightened realm; one that she knew belonged to the older gods. Her father was of those ancient beings, and somehow Yania felt at peace. She knew that no harm would come to her up in this unusual ethereal plane of existence. A shadow of white light had met her and she knew immediately it had been her father. Their spirits briefly met and she was enveloped in a warm feeling. Immediately she had felt a change within her. Powers of her father were bestowed upon her. She was becoming a goddess herself, she believed, even if not full-fledged yet. She would have, though the powers she needed to prevent Tagreth from seducing her husbands with her nefarious and almost insurmountable powers of intense seduction. This was what her father hoped she would do. He had known all along, that only one with Tagreth's gene could put the goddess in her place and keep her in line. Though she knew her father-god cared for her well being, she also knew that that was the main reason he had coupled with Tagreth.

However, she didn't bear him any ill will, as specially as these powers granted to her by him and the other gods were hers to keep and they knew and hoped she would give Tagreth her due punishment. Tagreth and Kaedeah both would get their just

comeuppances. She moved swiftly and started looking for her husbands and her own body, which she knew currently her the goddess Tagreth was inhabiting and trying to use to seduce Zied and Davel into her domain of influence. If she did not stop the goddess soon, Yania knew her husbands would be lost to her. Especially if the goddesses made them believe she was the true Yania and they both coupled with her. It was the only way that Tagreth could get any true hold on Zied and Davel, despite her keeping them all imprisoned.

Her astral form glided, no flew through the vast domain of the goddess' temples and caverns. She felt as if long agonizing hours went by before she scent-sensed them and mentally found their whereabouts. She would be with her beloveds very soon. Making the protective, non-detection spell around her body even stronger, so strong the goddess could not tell if her spirit and mind forms were there, Yania, as if on magical wings, launched herself to the rescue of her husbands.

She found them in the bed naked together, but immediately did not attack the goddess; instead she formed a much better plan. She kept still for a moment, and then slowly edged into Zied's form. Then making herself felt by him without the goddess knowing this, she moved into Davel's form. She was pleased that the two had somehow felt that this Yania was not her. They had not had intercourse with her, but had started making foreplay with her only long enough to find their way out of the goddess' hold over them. Yania made her move then and crept into her own body. Tagreth was not going to know what hit her. She would make sure that this bitch did not fool around with other women's husbands.

She could sense what the goddess and her husbands were feeling and thinking. Her heightened powers let her view all of the other's feelings. She let the goddess think that she was taking control of her husbands' and so did they. Zied, who she wanted most, became very ardent. He got the goddess all hot and bothered and then teased her with hot strokes over her voluptuously dark body; and Davel pretended to do and act the same as Zied did. Yania almost lost control at the awful site, but slowly regrouped herself and made ready for what was to come.

Zied and Davel made the goddess sway with their caresses and got her wet and bothered, making her think that they were under her spell. She could feel that they were having a hard time not letting their

repulsions for Tagreth spring forward. Yania crept slowly around the goddess' inner spirit and just as Tagreth tried to force Zied down so that she could impale herself on him, Yania tightened her hold on her body and used her new powers on Tagreth immediately.

She fought for control of her body as Zied and Davel jumped off the bed and carried her squirming body towards a doorway that she made open for them. They fought off any guards that were around and made a dash to the main room of the temple where they found Kaedeah fucking around with one of the guards and not keeping her eye on the goddess' sleeping body. Yania squelched the goddess' desires and doused her with a spell of dissatisfaction and then thrust the spirit of the goddess back into her own body. Yania quickly took control of her own personage and further used her powers to freeze the goddess in her darkened form.

Then Zied and Davel used their powers to keep the minions out of the throne room and her half-sister and lover stayed frozen in place also. Yania saw the goddess come to life and try to break off the freeze-spell on her, but Yania's quickness had kept the goddess imprisoned in place. Those hateful dark eyes stared up at her, but Yania was not afraid of the woman who helped to conceive her and bring her to life. This woman was a stranger to her emotionally. She had a mother and Tagreth was not that woman. She would make sure Tagreth stayed in her own realm from now on and did not harm innocents of either sex again; nor would she let the supernatural female with her powers of wicked seduction play her devious and selfish games upon them.

"Swear not to come after me and leave me and my kingdom alone from now on and I will free you, Tagreth. Do not make me summon my father and the other gods. You will not win. Anytime you take someone against his or her will or have an inclination to do so, that spell of dissatisfaction will stay upon you until you repent your deeds. There is nothing you can do about it. Kaedeah will stay her in your service until I deemed she has learned her lesson. Do you agree to my demands?"

Yania waved her hand towards the goddess and allowed her to sit upright on her throne. "I agree. But be on your guard, Yania, I will find a way to seek my revenge."

Yania thrust her hand out and a large bolt of energy came forth. Tagreth screamed out in agonizing pain. "I do not think so, Tagreth. I

will not deign to call you mother. You are not deserving. Now swear by all the lustiness you derive your powers from that you will do as I bid.”

The goddess nodded repeatedly. “I will. Please stop, I will.”

Pleased with herself and the results, Yania let the dark goddess of lust and seduction crumple in a whimper to her shell throne. “See that you do. Davel, Zied, we will depart from here. Kaedeah, you will stay and service this damn wretch until she is displeased with you. Do not show yourself in my kingdom again.” With those words said, she magically whisked her and her husbands out of the darken realm.

For long moments their true forms flew over the vast land of Emoral and it’s many tiered landscapes. Yania felt that the best place to be right now was home and in their private chambers. She would see to the needs of her people soon enough, but right now she need to have her husbands home with her and in their quarters.

Yania was ecstatic as they came into the royal bedchambers. Zied and Davel both wrapped their large wonderful arms around her. They took turns reining kisses over her mouth and neck until she chuckled with glee and bade them to give her breathing room. The two naked men stood proudly back, and even though they had been through some rough moments, their cocks were still at attention, and she could tell that they were ready to do her bidding.

She tilted her head to one side and opened her mind to them. “I may be powerful, but you are my husbands and rule with me, not under me. I am humbled by your love and ecstatic that you so truly desire me still, though I have under gone this transformation. Do not worship me as a goddess, but love me as a woman. It is all that I ask of you and I will devote myself to making you both happy and loving you always.”

Zied pulled her swiftly into his embrace. “You are always the goddess of my heart, sweet Yania, and my wife. Though not as a deity, I worship your wondrous body and am grateful that you love me still so deeply after all that I have put you through.”

She reached up and stroked his cheek fondly. As I always shall.” She kissed him deeply then moved over to Davel and reached up to fondle his cheek also. “I will love you and desire you as much as Zied. He has a place in my heart that was there first, but know that I care for you and want you as much as him. And it pleases me that you two wish the same and feel no ill will towards me either for any

reason. Let me know if there is anything now that your hearts desire, and I will make it so this very moment.”

She was puzzled as Davel looked at Zied first and then glanced mischievously down at her as his big arms encircled her body as tightly as he could. “How about a long warm bath?”

She was ecstatically turned on and more than willing to comply with his wish. However, both Davel and Zied pulled back and each took one of her hands, and led her towards the royal bathing area. She shivered with all the promises of pleasure that their eyes blazed with. A goddess in the making couldn’t get it any better than this. The two royal consorts wore devilish smiles along with their engorged cocks, letting her know that she was in for one devilishly delightful evening. Hell and heaven, she thought, my life is damn good. It was going to be a bath she would never, ever forget for a very, very long time to come.

Behold the Beauty, *Megan Hussey*

Prince Beau loves healer Agnatha, and with the help of an all-powerful godling, the two may find the happiness each deserves.

<http://goldenmuse.tripod.com/>

Behold the Beauty

by

Megan Hussey

Chapter One

Beausoleil had his fill of simpering maidens vying to become his bride. In the eyes of his female admirers, the maidens of a Utopian land where his family ruled supreme, his masculine beauty shone as radiantly as the sun above him.

They sometimes spoke in admiration – or in outright envy – about his hair, which was the hue of pure gold and fell in luxurious waves down his smoothly planed back.

“I swear, the lasses are either begging for my room key or the brand name of my shampoo,” he scoffed.

And they giggled among themselves, and sometimes wrote achingly bad poetry, about his skin that held a hint of bronze that covered a tall, muscular frame.

His eyes sometimes widened in apparent irritation or outright fear as he heard their blunt, loudly spoken observations. But all they noticed was the fact that those eyes shone “like emeralds” from a sculpted face. They drooled (and in some bizarre instances swooned) as they regarded a mouth, full and sensual, and they openly basked in the warmth of his disposition, which generally was as sunny as his moniker.

Generally.

“I’ll have no more of this! I declare, all the panting and drooling stops now!”

Beausoleil, or Prince Beau as the citizens of Ravenshead called him, issued this declaration in his father’s great hall—a massive room with a towering ceiling, an intricately carved fireplace lined with fine silver pottery, and wooden tables filled with guests.

These elite villagers were titled lords and ladies who gathered this day for a feast hosted by King Benjamin, Beausoleil’s father.

Benjamin was known as the man who ruled Ravenshead, a small, elite nation on the border of other lands sovereign by gentry representatives of various nations; titled folk who yearned for larger lands, luxury and, in many cases, uninterrupted debauchery. Indeed, while they praised Benjamin’s leadership skills, Beau was truly known as the man who served prime ale at his monthly feasts.

Yet, as guests were presented with bountiful tankards, as well as plates stocked with beef, pork, cheese and fruit, Beau was presented with heaping helpings of eligible females – all vying for a seat beside him at the head table.

“This is insane,” he told his smirking father, a blond, broad-shouldered man who himself cut a striking figure. “I want simply to enjoy a good meal and the wit-filled tales of our storyteller, not to be ogled and pawed like a side of raw venison.”

But it was too late. He saw the whites of their eyes, and of their under-shifts, as they flipped their colorful skirts to gift him with a subtle ‘flash.’

“Aye, but I am blessed,” thought Beau, rolling his eyes heavenward.

His gaze then shifted to a long, lavishly designed tapestry that adorned the far end of the hall.

A work of sheer teal velvet, handcrafted by a castle weaver, the tapestry depicted a forest scene in all its earthly glory. Tall, noble trees stood beside bountiful bushes. Both boasted leaves of dew-glistened emerald, and provided a mystical setting for a lone fallow deer with a rich chestnut coat.

Beau felt a strange affinity for the regal stag—one who he perceived not only prized his freedom, but yearned for a greater measure of it—along with some treasured privacy.

Mumbling his uneasy apologies, Beau rose from the table and walked abruptly from the hall. He knew he probably appeared a bit

desperate, sprinting across the castle courtyard and into his father's stables, but frankly, he was beyond caring about the opinions of his father's elite, debauched friends.

Xavier, his prized ebony stallion, pawed restlessly as Beau saddled and bridled him.

"Aye, Lad, I know," Beau whispered in a soothing tone. "We shall leave here. We shall take a ride through the forest, forget the lot of them, and leave them behind."

With this, he mounted the regal horse in one swift motion.

The two of them escaped into the dark of night.

Chapter two

The feel of fine linen was amongst the few sensual delights enjoyed by Agnatha the Healer.

As she stood at the booth of a Ravenshead merchant, her sturdy hand canvassing a whisper soft bolt, the hue of a sunrise, her pleasure was disrupted by the whispers and stares of those who passed.

“Look at her hair! It’s the color of the burning bush and just as unruly!”

“She is well past thirty summers and remains unwed.”

“Agnatha the Healer? I hear she’s a witch!”

“Why does she wear fine linen and not wool? She is but a peasant!”

Agnatha heard enough. Turning sharply on her heel, she greeted this last speaker—a balding middle-aged man accompanied by his quiet, frowning wife—with a withering glare.

“Better a peasant than a pea brain, dear sir,” she said, tone cool.

The man’s eyes widened, then narrowed in apparent anger. “Ye will not address me in such a disrespectful manner, you freak of Ravenshead. In fact, ye may not address me at all.”

With this, he pointed his cowering wife in the direction of the merchant’s cart.

“Go select a bolt of ruby red cloth,” he ordered. “I want ye to make a new headdress for yourself, so you’ll look suitable at King Benjamin’s feasts.”

Agnatha stiffened noticeably as she saw the timid woman retreat to the merchant’s cart, lowering her head over the fabric indicated.

Yet this gesture failed to conceal the tears that formed in the woman’s wide, sad eyes, or the telltale scar on her delicate cheek.

Lips firmly set, Agnatha turned to the surly, balding husband and said, “Perhaps the headdress would better suit you, milord, to cover

that bare noggin and seep some warmth and good humor into that head."

The man's face brightened to a shade of fiery red, and he pointed an accusing finger at the smirking Agnatha.

" 'Tis little wonder no man has claimed ye for a wife," he observed. "You don't know your place as a woman. Ye fancy yourself a healer, not a mother."

Agnatha shrugged.

"Am I not a good healer?" she challenged him. "Have I lost a single woman to childbirth, or man to disease?"

"That is my point!" the man roared. "The rich rule Ravenshead, it would be better if the few peasants among us died off and disappeared, so we would not have to support them."

"Support them!" Agnatha echoed, gaping. "Ravenshead was once a land of rich natural resources; a land of promise where beautiful, bountiful things could be grown and manufactured. And a land where simple, friendly folk lived side by side with godlings, good witches and people of magic."

Pausing, she glared openly in the man's direction. "Your beloved 'rich folk' have overtaken the land, made it a place of snobbishness and debauchery, and driven good native folk deep into the forest."

"And I hope they all die there!" the man roared. "They would, if not for your witchery. Indeed, I do not know of a single peasant family in our land who has not lost one woman or bairn in childbirth - - unless they visit your witch's house in the woods."

With this, he drew closer to Agnatha, and she almost trembled as she was hit with the full force of his savage glower.

"Ye even look like a witch, with that fiery hair and those coal black eyes," he accused, adding, "Everyone knows the truth of ye. You don't do your work with herbs and the letting of blood."

He paused for a pitifully weak attempt at dramatic effect.

"Your only tool is magic," he finished, nodding sharply.

Agnatha rolled her eyes and stepped sharply backward.

"If that was true, milord," she said. "I would turn ye to a toad."

The man snorted.

"And why is that, Witch?" he demanded. "So ye could make me your sorcerer's pet?"

"No," Agnatha replied, cringing at the very thought. "It would be in the desperate hope of transforming ye to a higher life form."

The man's angry roar was echoed by the laughter of his wife, who seemed to release years' worth of anger and tension in a single sharp guffaw.

She fell silent, however, as her husband pinned her with a furious stare.

He said nothing, but Agnatha cringed as his eyes indicated that his wife would pay dearly for her disrespect.

Abruptly he turned away, leaving the two women to an uneasy silence.

Slowly turning her head, Agnatha regarded the forlorn wife with a gentle but probing gaze. "Look at me," she prompted, voice gentle but firm.

Slowly the woman lifted her gaze, revealing in full the angry red mark that seemed the handiwork of a madman.

Agnatha didn't look away or cringe in distaste, as Agnatha was sure virtually everyone else did. Instead she raised her hand and touched the bruise with tender, agile fingers. Then she flexed her fingertips until they lightly poked at the woman's cheek.

The woman opened her mouth to object, then closed it when she came face to face with a gold-plated mirror Agnatha removed from her pocket.

She took in her breath, and Agnatha smiled, as both saw the bruise disappear, and the wife's face was fully restored to its vibrant, youthful fairness.

Impulsively she hugged Agnatha, then drew back to look into the healer's eyes.

"I care not if ye are a witch," she said. "Ye are a good witch. Thank ye, milady."

Clutching the woman's shoulders, Agnatha planted a maternal kiss against her delicate forehead.

"The only way to truly thank me is to leave him," she told her. "Steal away when he is asleep – or tell him ye are going to the market and do not return." She paused, shaking her head. "It is the only way," she insisted. "Please say yea."

The woman nodded, seeming to draw strength from Agnatha's words and touch.

"I will," she promised.

* * * *

In the eyes of many Ravenshead residents, the castle of the forest was smaller and more modest than the grand palace that formed the true cornerstone of the land. At the same time, its color and spaciousness clearly distinguished it from the cramped, thatched roof cottages that belonged to peasants.

Yet as many often observed, perhaps it was no surprise that the house which defied definition belonged to an indefinable woman.

Agnatha sighed, relieved, as she walked into the airy wooded area that surrounded her home. She cherished the sound of the emerald leaves as they rustled and crackled beneath her feet, and the sight of the towering pine and oak trees that formed a nature-made canopy above her.

A narrow cobblestone path, one lined with roses of scarlet red and dainty lavender violets, lead her to a dome-shaped house painted a startling shade of ivory, which matched the lily white skin of its owner.

A ruby red door proved further striking contrast and opened to reveal a neatly kept room filled with handmade cherry wood furniture and bordered by a broad window, one that filled the home with radiant sunlight.

Although Agnatha treated all residents of her land with equal respect, she couldn't help but note that these features sharply distinguished her home from peasant-owned cottages, which had few windows and modest furnishings.

Agnatha, furthermore, was no peasant.

Her sisters, in fact, lived in large, stately homes adjacent to Castle Ravenshead. Their husbands were noblemen and property owners, and treated their wives to the lifestyle afforded women of their breeding and station.

Agnatha never visited the homes of her sisters.

"Women branded witches, especially those who speak their minds, seldom are welcome in proper households," she observed.

So Agnatha claimed her share of their inheritance, left her by parents she loved and dearly missed, and retreated to the woods.

Contrary to popular belief, however, Agnatha did not live alone. And she warmed at the sight of the curious catlike creature who sat in her hand-carved rocking chair.

Edgar was a furry, ebony-skinned godling with a broad and friendly smile. His smile now dissolved, however, as he seemed to note the set lips and stormy eyes of his longtime friend.

“Something happened in the village,” he assessed, watching as Agnatha claimed the seat beside him and soothed her long, burgundy velvet skirts carefully around her. “What did they say today, Aggie?”

Agnatha seldom ventured into the village. And when she did, it was generally at the request of a family who needed her healing skills.

Her infrequent shopping expeditions were rare for a reason, as they always came accompanied by the insults and cold stares of people she met.

When she came home, she sometimes related these unpleasant experiences to the understanding Edgar, a lifelong resident of the Ravenshead forest who now shared a home with his childhood friend.

As a girl, Agnatha often retreated to the forest after being beaten and ridiculed by the children of the Ravenshead elite, many of whom mocked her strong ideas and unusual appearance.

Her godling friend used his mystical powers to heal her wounds and light humor to heal her spirits.

And when he seemed to sense her gentle and intuitive nature, he gave her the ultimate friendship token, the gift of healing.

Yet while the power to heal enhanced Agnatha’s life and supplied her life’s work, it isolated her further from her contemporaries—and her life away from home was miserable.

When she felt sad, she appreciated the fact that Edgar would go to any lengths to heal her heart and improve her mood. Sometimes he would conjure a gourmet meal, or tell her a humorous story. Other times, he would tell her fortune, a prediction she found difficult to believe.

“One day, Lass,” he would say, “your days will be filled with a beautiful sun.”

Today, she wondered if her deeply evident hurt would prompt Edgar to employ more extreme measures. Measures he seldom used.

“Wait here, milady,” he said now, patting her delicate hand. “I have a special evening planned for ye.”

Immediately Agnatha stiffened, and shook her head vigorously.

“Edgar, do not,” she told him. “I am a maiden of sound upbringing and should act as one.”

The godling only smiled, and retreated to his chambers.

“Godling, I mean as I say!” Agnatha called. “I’ll say nay – I swear it.”

Though she never did. Leaning back into her chair, Agnatha sighed heavily as a telltale tingle of sweet anticipation canvassed her skin. Her pulse quickened, and beads of sweat lined her fair brow.

“Edgar,” she summoned, voice slightly trembling. “I baked bread this morning, and bought some fine fruits and vegetables at market today. Cease this nonsense and let us enjoy a peaceable evening meal.”

She took in her breath, however, as her summons was answered by an ethereally handsome young man who emerged suddenly from Edgar’s chambers.

The man had long, luxurious hair of pure ebony, much like the skin of the godling, and his eyes were a vibrant green – also like those of her friend and housemate.

Yet unlike Edgar, this man boasted a towering height and a lean, muscular frame. His skin was pure ivory, and his face was flawlessly sculpted.

His lips were full and sumptuous, especially when curved upward in a sensual smile.

“Mistress, I shall hear no talk of ye preparing our dinner,” he told her, walking into the room with long, catlike strides. “I am your manservant. Milady shall relax while I serve her and bring her every pleasure.”

Agnatha sighed, though her gaze fairly devoured the gorgeous young man before her.

“Edgar, I know ye bring me pleasure in this form,” she allowed. “Ye claimed my maidenhead like this and showed me the pleasures of the flesh. Yet in the morn I have to face ye and know I have sinned.”

She fell silent as the godling, who, much to her chagrin, had assumed a most godlike form, seared her with a narroweyed, boldly seductive gaze.

“I will make the sin a divine act of sensual cleansing,” he told her. “I will bring you sublime comfort through a state of unadulterated, delirious ecstasy.”

Agnatha sank back into the depths of her chair, sighing resignedly.

“If ye truly wish to be my manservant this eve,” she informed him in a dry tone, “Then put yourself to good use and prepare for me a feast.”

Grinning devilishly, Edgar raised his hands high in the air and clapped them dramatically. Suddenly the atmosphere was filled with the smooth, calming sounds of an invisible flute.

Her senses pacified by the soothing rhythm of her favorite instrument, Agnatha felt her entire body relax. Further succor was immediately forthcoming, as her 'manservant' approached her with sleek, deliberate steps and took his place behind her chair. Then he grasp her shoulders with his strong hands.

"The first course of your feast, milady, will be total relaxation," he whispered, tone low and hypnotic.

After kneading and rubbing the tension from his lady's shoulders, Edgar's hands moved up her neck and around her collarbone, molding her skin until she sighed with quiet contentment.

Her upper back was the next to receive his attentions, as he playfully tickled the sensitive area between her shoulder blades.

Agnatha's eyes closed and she exhaled sharply. Taking this as a cue, Edgar's nimble fingers played lightly against her spine before loosening the stays of her burgundy gown.

" 'Tis only to enhance your comfort," he whispered.

Agnatha nodded.

"Blessed be the day womenfolk will wear clothing that is remotely comfortable," she agreed.

Soon her gown and corset were loosened, and she smiled in spite of herself as Edgar's probing hands rubbed sublime comfort into her sides, waist, and upper chest.

When his fingers ventured lower, however, she once again straightened in her chair and cleared her throat loudly.

"That was most pleasant," she allowed. "Truly, though, I am hungry..."

She fell silent as Edgar once again clapped his hands.

The flute music, which originally had sounded quiet and soothing, took on a pounding, pulsating rhythm that filled the atmosphere with a distinctly erotic air.

" 'Tis good ye are hungry, for the next course has arrived," he said. "A dance of seduction, to please my lady's palette."

To demonstrate his words, his toned, muscular body began to sway slowly and rhythmically in time with the music. His masculine grace was evident as he fell into a perfect motion, and Agnatha nodded approvingly as she noted the seamless radiance of his dance.

“Your servant is glad he has pleased his mistress with his dance,” he said, adding with a coy wink, “but ye ain’t seen nothing yet.”

With this the nature and character of his movements changed dramatically, and he thrust his hips back and forth in a smooth, seamless motion, perfectly imitating the intimate thrusts of sex.

Agnatha’s eyes widened, and she let out a sharp, short laugh.

“What manner of dance is this?” she asked, averting her gaze.

She was compelled to look again as he grasped his soft ivory shirt and pulled it slowly, temptingly upward—revealing a bronzed, rippled abdomen and an upper chest that bespoke muscular definition.

Covering her mouth, Agnatha giggled in a rare show of girlishness.

“What are ye doing, Edgar?” she demanded.

“Dancing for milady’s pleasure,” he replied, pulling the shirt over his head and tossing it brazenly into her lap.

In a show of what appeared to be masculine pride, he flexed his chest muscles and braced his strong shoulders.

And he beamed as Agnatha’s eyes widened in obvious appreciation of his finely toned physique.

She admitted her crafty godling-shifter cut a fine form. And that his strutting and gyrations were sparking a slowly building fire in the depths of her loins. A telltale wetness moistened her private area, and she bit her lip as a graceful twirl brought him closer to her.

Her arousal peaked a moment later, as he stood dangerously close to her – thrusting his leather clad groin boldly and blatantly in her face.

“Would ye like to do the honors, milady?” he whispered, probing her with what she perceived as a heated, seductive gaze. “Feast your eyes on my form—the body that was made for your pleasure—then have your way with me. My queen, my goddess...”

Suddenly, Agnatha surged upward from her chair, her heart pounding with passion. Sweeping her tempter into her arms, she rubbed and stroked his massive chest, licking his perfect lips and sculpted cheekbones, and grasping the silken strands of his long, luxurious hair.

Edgar stood motionless for a moment, seemingly submitting himself to Agnatha’s will.

“How I love being ravished by a woman of passion,” he growled, taking in his breath as his body was tasted, kissed, nipped and even lightly bitten. “I love to taste your power, Agnatha, when passion

consumes you, to tempt forth the passionate beast that lives deeply and secretly within you.”

Finally, he again found movement, sliding the smooth burgundy fabric of Agnatha’s dress smoothly from her shoulders. Then he slowly, gently lowered her corset to expose her small white breasts.

She was beyond objecting to his actions. In fact, she pressed her bared flesh hungrily against his, hissing as their bodies made full and delicious contact.

Sweeping her up in his arms, Edgar cradled her against his chest and carried her to the fireplace. Lowering her to the floor, he stood tall and proud before her and slid his leather pantaloons smoothly and slowly down his finely toned legs.

Throwing her head back, Agnatha squealed as she beheld the long, massive shaft that, when erect as it was now, actually equaled the height of her godling in his true form.

Yet she did not now think of the man before her as her longtime friend and mentor. He was her seducer, an alluring tempter who coaxed forth and satiated her deepest desires.

True to this mission, Edgar covered her body with his and kissed her, deeply and fiercely. Their tongues met in a heated duel that set fire to their bodies, and their arms locked in an almost desperate embrace.

Agnatha moaned, in fact, as Edgar parted slightly from her—allowing his thick, dark blanket of ebony hair to fall gently across her face. Then he buried his head in her neck, plying her with nips and sweet baby kisses as his hands massaged her full hips.

After making quick work of her thick petticoats, he massaged and parted her soft ivory thighs as their lips again locked. Intoxicating her with deep and probing kisses, he parted her nether lips and gently grasped her throbbing, soaking wet clit.

Staring deeply into her eyes, he stroked and teased her to a state of full arousal before again covering her body with his. “I have to have ye now,” he growled.

Yet Agnatha frowned, and gave a short, sharp nod. This was a sort of code phrase for them, an indication that Edgar’s spell was about to run its course. And as close as she felt to her godling friend in his natural form...

“We shan’t quite get that close,” she decided.

Drawing Edgar closely to her, she wrapped her legs around his trim waist.

Hissing his apparent approval, her lover penetrated her and began to pump her with swift, heated motions. Tightly the couple embraced, their eyes meeting in a gaze that, in her mind, bespoke warmth and understanding.

“Aye, but never love,” thought Agnatha, sighing in spite of herself. *“A godling and a human—even a human as outright odd as I—cannot fall in love.”*

Coherent thought abandoned her moments later, as Edgar covered her mouth with his. Engaging her in a full-mouthed, passionate kiss, he pressed his body fully into hers and carried her to orgasm.

Suddenly Agnatha’s body shuddered as waves of pleasure coursed freely through her being, sending her into a pleasurable spasm that, for a few moments at least, drove the pain of her life from her mind.

And replaced it with mind-blowing ecstasy.

“Aye, I’d say I enjoyed that,” she said moments later, resting in Edgar’s arms.

The deity smiled, pressing an affectionate kiss against her forehead.

“I am glad, milady,” he told her, running a tender hand down the length of her cheek.

Then he rose slowly from his place on the floor, gracing Agnatha with a friendly salute.

“I would love to share more special time with ye,” he told her, “but the spell is about to abandon me, and it may feel awkward.”

Nodding sharply, Agnatha waved the godling in the direction of his chambers.

“I shall see ye on the morn, my friend,” she said, adding with a smile, “I thank ye.”

Winking playfully, Edgar retreated to his chambers and closed the door behind him.

Agnatha, meanwhile, retreated to her own bedroom, a small but well-decorated chamber with a mirrored cherry wood vanity and a feathered double bed.

After washing up in a nearby basin, Agnatha jumped unceremoniously onto this bed, her naked body sinking freely in its luxurious depths.

Grinning with sweet satisfaction, she rolled freely across the hand-stitched floral quilt that covered her luxurious sleeping place. Her body felt so relaxed after sex—her spirit so refreshed. And as she stared with a broad smile at the lavender canopy that oversaw her dreams, she wished fervently that she could feel this way always. Better yet, that she someday could share this feeling with the love of her heart and life.

Chapter three

The sound of a hummingbird drew the healer from a deep sleep the next morning, and propelled her quickly from her bed.

Agnatha hurriedly donned an ivory silk daygown and slipped quietly from the cottage, relieved for once that Edgar was a sound and late sleeper.

He told her repeatedly not to take shame in their lovemaking, but she knew that what they did was not truly an act of romantic love—or even passion. For Edgar, it was an act of friendship that, in Agnatha’s mind, veered dangerously close to sympathy.

For the healer, it was a sign of weakness.

Since adolescence she had craved the pleasures of the flesh, and fantasized about a gorgeous man who would soothe her raging desire.

“Much luck with that, considering that not even the plainest lad in Ravenshead will speak to me,” she told herself at the time.

She at least was able to confess her feelings to Edgar, her sole confidant.

And on her eighteenth birthday, he gave her the ultimate gift—a night of passion with a gorgeous man, under the stars in their forest.

It was the most thrilling eve of her life, until afterward, when she saw her mysterious lover transform into a familiar old friend.

Her initial reaction was one of shock and revulsion. Her lover was not even human.

He was a deity of desire, if there was such a thing.

For a time she refused to speak to Edgar, or to return to their forest meeting place.

Yet she soon came to miss the unique understanding and companionship he provided.

And soon enough, her body’s physical demands once again overtook her, and her godling, with his sharp intuitive skills, always

knew when she needed satisfaction. Furthermore, he always knew how to give her what she needed, in any way she desired it.

Yet while his alternative form could bring her satisfaction and momentary relief, the fact remained that a godling could never truly fall in love with or wed a human.

And while he could alleviate her frustration, he could never dissolve the shame she felt following their encounters. She sighed relieved this particular morn, as she slipped anonymously into a forest woodscape of tall, emerald-leaved trees, swaying daisies and ferns stirred by balmy breezes, and whimsical creatures such as squirrels and frogs—beings that could neither judge nor condemn her.

Agnatha even began to hum contentedly as she savored her natural surroundings. And she bent to pick some fresh berries and nuts for her and Edgar's noontime meal.

Her merry song was silenced, however, as she noticed another creature lying beside a nearby pond.

Of course he couldn't properly be called a creature, for his long tunic, colored a crisp shade of royal red, indicated he was a man—and a nobleman.

Yet Agnatha never had seen a man quite that beautiful.

His hair was long and silken gold, and fell in bountiful waves around his muscular shoulders. His face was sculpted and perfectly planed, and his eyelashes fanned in a radiant silhouette above carved, bronzed cheeks.

His perfect lips were slightly parted, as if trying to issue a cry for help.

Agnatha heeded the call, kneeling to the man's side and probing him with an assessing gaze.

Her commonsense wisdom told her he was in a deep state of unconsciousness with a broken right leg. Her healer's intuition told her he had lain in the forest for at least a day and needed immediate help.

Focusing her gaze on his right leg, which was contorted at a frightening angle, she used light, delicate fingers to touch the core of his injury—the place just above his knee.

Continuing to probe the injury with her intense gaze, the healer tapped his knee with light, purposeful fingers, a seemingly simple act that sent intense supplements of healing energy to the core of his injured limb.

Within moments the leg had resumed a more normal appearance, though it still seemed very fragile, and the young man remained unconscious.

Running toward the cottage, Agnatha opened her mouth to summon the godling, whose powers exceeded hers.

Yet he already stood before the door of their home, shaking his head.

“Agnatha,” he began, tone low and sad. “When will you stop running from me—from yourself? I tell you again, there is no shame in what we do.”

Planting her hands on her hips, Agnatha rolled her eyes heavenward. “A young man is lying unconscious in our forest, and likely will die if we don’t move him,” she informed him. “Will we find shame in that situation?”

Edgar’s mouth dropped open, and he hurriedly followed Agnatha down the stone-strewn path that lead deep into their forest. He exhaled sharply when he saw their unexpected guest.

“I healed his broken leg,” Agnatha explained, her earlier sarcasm replaced by an air of cautious concern. “Yet it appears as though he has been here for some time.”

“Two days,” Edgar quickly assessed. “Ye weren’t a moment too soon, lass.”

Nodding, Agnatha said, “We need to take him to the cottage, but I fear moving an injured man. And I alone do not have the capabilities to bring him inward.”

Going quickly to her side, the godling grasped her hand and said, “We must share our focus and combine our powers to send him, unjarred and uninjured, into our domicile.”

Grinning slightly, Agnatha squeezed her friend’s hand. “I agree,” she assented, adding with a wink, “Yet this joint activity is not likely to be as enjoyable as the one we shared last night.”

* * * *

He was dead – and enjoying every moment of the experience, thank ye very much.

Beau awakened from what seemed an eternal sleep, in a setting that could only be described as idyllic.

The birds sang a radiant chorus to greet the temperate morn. The breezes blew gently across his face, until soft wisps of his abundant hair brushed tenderly against his cheeks.

He lacked the strength at first to open his eyes and confirm that he had left the world behind him. Yet confirmation arrived moments later, when he felt his body and being levitate freely in the air, carried as if by the wind to an unknown destination.

"Aye, I assume I am an angel now?" he thought. *"I guess I was forgiven the theft of my aunt's blueberry tart when I was all of five summers. Good thing. I was concerned."*

He landed in an indoor location, atop a soft feather bed that felt heavenly, indeed.

And when he finally mustered the strength to open his eyes, he saw an ethereal being who—in his mind at least—qualified as an angel.

She was not a beauty, at least by society's standards, but her eyes held a sharp, focused gaze that bespoke great intelligence. And her delicate mouth carved upward in a tender, knowing smile.

Her flowing ivory frock well befitted an angel. And her voice was pure and gentle as she spoke.

"Ye are safe and well," she told him. "I shall care for you."

He returned her smile, though even that simple gesture cost more energy than he possessed.

His smile broadened a moment later, when she touched his hand. He squeezed her agile fingers and felt a strange, though very pleasant, spark pass between them.

"Methinks I shall enjoy the afterlife," he thought before darkness once again consumed him.

When Beau again awoke, however, he wondered immediately if the Almighty had changed His mind.

For while his first vision was angelic in demeanor, the one that now greeted his eyes was decidedly more mysterious.

The being stood on two legs but resembled a black cat. And he displayed a smile that, while pleasant enough, also conveyed a hint of mischief.

"Welcome back to the land of the living, lad," it said.

Egad. It talked. What next?

Ah, but wait a moment. The – um – gentleman identified him as 'living,' a notion quite contrary to his previous belief.

Before he could contemplate this odd turn of events, the angel of his earlier vision appeared at the foot of his bed.

"Aye, that's better," he thought, giving her a warm smile.

Beau cocked his head, beaming warmly at his concerned caregiver. Her eyes were so probing and intense, and filled with keen intelligence – and they seemed to penetrate the exterior that others found so fascinating and see clear through to his soul.

Returning his smile, Agnatha drew closer to the man she had tended and cared for the past few days.

“I am so pleased to see those eyes opened at last,” she told him, adding silently, *“Especially as they’re every bit as gorgeous as the rest of ye. And blue, just as I suspected.”*

And the man’s voice, while still a bit raspy and weak, was deep and melodic, just as she had imagined.

“Where am I?” he asked.

Agnatha approached the side of her bed, taking the stranger’s hand into a comforting clasp. “At my cottage in the woods of Ravenshead,” she replied, then gesturing toward her catlike friend, “This is my friend, Edgar. In case ye wondered, he’s a godling,” she added helpfully.

Her visitor looked with wide eyes at the chuckling Edgar.

“When I was a young lad, I always yearned to play in the forest, to discover the mystical beings I read about in books,” he said, adding with a sigh, “My parents forbade me. They said such activities were uncivilized.”

He paused, staring with apparent wonder at the godling before him. “ ‘Tis truly an honor to meet you, good sir,” he said finally, offering his hand to the cat deity.

Much to Agnatha’s delight, the gentle and most comely young man followed his first friendly gesture with a second, this one intended for her.

Taking her hand warmly into his, he planted a feather soft kiss across her fingers—prompting a slight, involuntary shiver that she quickly covered with words of genuine concern.

“How are you feeling?” she asked, sitting beside him on the bed. “Does your leg pain you? I have been applying special herbs to your injuries, in hopes of healing them.”

“My leg feels well, milady,” he assured her finally, then cocked his head curiously. “Was it broken?”

Agnatha nodded, patting his shoulder in tender reassurance. “You probably should stay in bed a few more days, to ensure its healing.”

Beau shook his head, jewel blue eyes narrowed in confusion.

"I know the village healers take much stock in herbs," he said. "Yet can you truly heal a break with them? Many in my situation would have died..." He paused, cringing visibly. "Or been crippled," he finished.

Agnatha bit her lip and folded her agile hands self-consciously in her lap.

Apparently sensing her discomfort, Edgar stepped forward. "Agnatha here is a very special woman," he informed their guest. "She is a superb healer and has keen instincts. She also..." He paused, peering cautiously at Beau. "If ye can except the existence of a godling, lad," he began, tone quiet and halting, "Can ye accept the idea of a woman with mystical healing powers?"

Agnatha ducked her head, grinning sheepishly as if to say, "*Aye, that's me.*"

Again Beau studied his hostess, his gaze taking in every wonderful, exquisite aspect of her. Unlike women of nobility, who either carefully plaited their hair or smothered it with a headdress, Agnatha's mane was wild, fiery, and untamed.

Unlike many of his female contemporaries, who spoke in low tones and were careful to express no clear opinions of their own, this woman spoke boldly and with clarity.

She was unafraid to laugh or smile, to think and speak freely. And her eyes shone like a stone of radiant ebony opal.

"Accept her?" he thought. "I think I shall adore her."

Agnatha, for her part, kept her eyes lowered, so he wouldn't see how deeply she admired his own crystalline gaze, or the bronzed, planed form of his face. Nay, she was too tempted to reach out and stroke that long, leonine hair, then run her fingers over those sculpted lips.

He had to be the most perfect being she ever had seen.

If he were cruel or arrogant, this fact would matter not one whit. After all, some of her Ravenshead tormenters were very fair of face.

Yet this man was endlessly gentle and courteous, and treated both her and her godling with utmost respect.

Edgar and Agnatha rarely entertained guests, for while she truly liked people and yearned to learn more about them, the abuses she suffered made her hesitant and ill at ease around strangers. "*Yet he is no stranger,*" she thought, finally venturing to meet his probing, thoughtful gaze. "*From the moment I saw him, I somehow knew him.*"

He doesn't look at all like me," she observed. "But somehow he is me."

"What is your name?" she asked abruptly.

Beau's mouth opened, then once again closed. He wanted to be forthright with his hosts, wanted, in fact, to reward them richly for saving the life of a nobleman. Somehow, though, he knew that these fine people would be unimpressed by notions of nobility; that they might in fact perceive him as an arrogant blueblood who might pose a threat to their simple, peaceful life.

So in the end he said simply, "Call me Beau."

"Beautiful," Agnatha translated, voice barely above a whisper.

Chuckling, Edgar countered, "As he is a man, Agnatha, I believe the word would translate properly to mean 'handsome.'"

Agnatha nodded. "*Of course,*" she agreed, adding silently, "*Though handsome does not begin to do him justice. He is truly a beauty to behold.*"

Chapter four

Beau enjoyed his evening meal in bed, courtesy of his doting hostess.

Agnatha presented him with a plate of fresh vegetables, cheese and fruit, along with a hearty helping of goat's milk. And she thrilled as he leaned back into the depths of his feathered pillow, rolling his eyes heavenward as he savored the taste of a rich round cherry. "Delicious," he praised, smacking his lips.

Agnatha agreed that the sight of a reclining Beau, with his long golden hair spread beautifully across his pillow and his emerald eyes narrowed contentedly, was delicious indeed.

Suddenly their gazes collided and locked, and they stared silently into one another's eyes.

Leaning forward, Agnatha whispered, "Milord, if I may be so bold. . ."

"Call me Beau," her guest insisted, his own tone soft and inviting. "And ye may."

Chuckling, Agnatha raised a gentle finger to Beau's succulent mouth, wiping a sweet, sticky stream of cherry juice from his full, sensual lower lip.

She then gasped as this light but tender touch prompted Beau to grasp the offered finger and pull it purposefully into his mouth.

Brazenly he licked Agnatha's fingertip, all the while teasing her with a blatantly sultry gaze.

Taking in her breath, Agnatha felt a telltale tingle invade her nether regions. "*I generally feel no arousal for weeks after Edgar pleasures me,*" she thought, watching as Beau licked and nipped each of her fingers. "*Ah, but I have never faced such temptation—at least not from such a tempting source.*"

As if reading her thoughts, Beau ran his tongue boldly across her palm and playfully kissed her wrist.

“Beau,” Agnatha said finally, withdrawing her hand from his grasp. “Is this truly how a nobleman kisses a lady’s hand?”

He paused, nodding affirmatively.

“If it is, I must find my way to more royal feasts,” she said.

Beau frowned.

“How do ye know I am of noble birth?” he asked.

Shrugging, Agnatha gestured toward the scarlet red tunic that adorned Beau’s muscular upper half.

“Your tunic may be soiled, but it is clearly velvet,” she told him, adding, “Just so ye know, it was Edgar who lifted your tunic to apply the healing herbs. I swear I did not peek.”

Beaming wickedly, Beau selected another round, ripe cherry and raised it to Agnatha’s lips. Then, coaxing her mouth open with some gently prying fingers, he slipped his fruit inside.

“You may look at me if you like,” he whispered, now using the same hand to caress her cheek. “Or even touch.”

Agnatha drew back, shaking her head in confusion.

“You barely know me,” she said, though her gaze warmed with obvious feminine interest.

This interest intensified when Beau suddenly leaned forward and seared her lips with a wet, hot kiss.

“I know ye as the woman who saved my life,” he reminded her. “I know ye as a woman of wisdom and wit.”

With this he again leaned forward, and said his next words softly into her ear.

“For days you have tended me in your bed,” he whispered, then, brazenly nibbled her sensitive earlobe. “So why not take your pleasure as an ample reward? Take me, Agnatha.”

The woman drew back, clearing her throat loudly.

“I...well.....no,” she replied, nodding as though her words made some semblance of sense. “I shall not take advantage of a man who’s unwell. I bid ye good night.”

Rising quickly from the bed, she walked with firm, purposeful steps from the chamber.

Agnatha had slept little the past few days, catching occasional naps in chairs and on the soft rug before the fireplace.

Tonight, however, she knew she needed a full night's rest, and with the captivating stranger sleeping in her sheets, she had only one place to turn.

Edgar's bed.

Wishing to avoid yet another moment wrought with sexual tension (*"One can only have so many of those moments in one day before the fun simply goes out of it,"* Agnatha mused), she stole carefully into the godling's chamber – relieved to find Edgar asleep atop his satin pillow.

She undressed quickly and slipped between his sheets, sighing with relief as her weary body sank in the depths of his feathered mattress.

"I shall sleep only a few hours," she told herself, her eyes falling easily shut. *"I shall be gone before he wakes."*

Yet as much as she craved a restful sleep, her heart pounded for the seductive visitor who lay only two rooms away. Sweat formed on her brow, and her clit was throbbing and wet.

She wanted to feel his hands and mouth all over her body, to taste every inch of his bronzed, muscular perfection. She wanted to run her hands through that long, silky hair and over the planes of that chiseled face, to straddle his trim waist and fill her hungry vagina with what she assumed would be a long, most delightful shaft.

"Agnatha."

"Beau?"

The name slipped past her lips and sounded so sweet and natural. Even so, she knew she had made a critical mistake.

"Edgar," she said into the darkness. "Accept my apologies..."

"I know you want him," the godling replied, turning to face her.

Edgar's catlike eyes shone like green gems in the darkness.

"Gems of wisdom indeed," Agnatha thought, sighing deeply.

Aloud she asked, "What shall I do, Edgar? I cannot..."

"Hush, hush," Edgar's voice was smooth and soothing, and his fingers were firm and ever so nurturing as they massaged her temples.

"You are in your human form," Agnatha assessed, noting the sheer, masculine strength of his touch.

In answer to this statement, Edgar lit a bedside candle and held it carefully between them.

Agnatha came face to face with a radiant vision, a planed ivory face framed by long, coal black hair that spilled beautifully across his satin pillow.

Leaning forward, the transformed Edgar planted an affectionate kiss on Agnatha's forehead.

"You won't find rest until your desires are cooled," he told her, voice barely above a whisper, "and the needs of your body are fully satisfied."

"Aye, I am aroused," she admitted. "Yet I am also too weary to do overmuch about it."

He kissed her lips, softly and sweetly, then drew back to stare deeply into her eyes. "Ye need do nothing – just relax," he whispered. "I shall take care of ye."

With this, he buried his head in her delicate neck and pressed sweet baby kisses on her nape. His mouth lightly canvassed her work-weary shoulders before moving to her breasts. He licked her nipples until they were hard and erect, and also laved her bellybutton.

Then, gracing her with a catlike grin, he parted her legs and planted his sleek head between them.

Throwing her head back, Agnatha hissed as the godling's full, succulent mouth made delicious contact with her sensitive feminine folds.

Playfully nipping the hood that concealed her feminine jewel, Edgar opened it to reveal the ultimate source of her pleasure.

Taking in her breath, Agnatha braced her hips as she awaited the imminent pleasuring.

Her head flew up, however, as she felt Edgar shift his position between her legs— rising up on his knees and turning slightly away from her.

Following the direction of his gaze, Agnatha gasped as she saw their visitor standing in Edgar's doorway—wild-eyed and gloriously naked.

Just as she had imagined, Beau's body was a study in perfection, boasting a golden, muscular chest, a trim waist, long toned legs, and a thick golden shaft.

A shaft that was hard and fully erect as he regarded the scene before him.

In his days as a sought after lover at court, Beau saw many women more lovely than Agnatha. Yet he never saw one more beautifully passionate.

None of his lovers threw their heads back and moaned.

And none would permit him to kneel between their knees, tasting the juice of forbidden fruit.

"Truly I never have seen a woman like her," he thought.

And although he wasn't her lover (at least not yet, but he swore he soon would rectify that situation), his body nonetheless responded to her passionate nature.

Drawn from his bed by her tender moans and heated sighs, he now stood fully erect near the bedside, captivated by the vision of Agnatha.

"Please do not stop," he said, deep voice raspy with desire. "Please, Agnatha, let me behold ye."

Agnatha vaguely made note of Edgar turning to her, staring questioningly into what she was certain were her wide, passion-dazed eyes. Edgar grinned mischievously, and she knew the cat deity was very aware of her desire for their visitor. She wanted Edgar to continue ministering to her body.

Yet Agnatha's gaze still was penned to the flawless form of their visitor, and her only response to Edgar's question was the quickening of her breath and the instinctive bucking of her hips towards the deity's face.

"I shall take that as an 'aye,'" Edgar murmured, pressing his head back between her thighs.

He arched his dark eyebrows as he tasted her wetness. Agnatha herself knew she never reached this level of arousal, and knew moreover that Edgar was not her sole inspiration. Yet she smiled encouragingly as he fixed his full and sensual mouth around her wet, throbbing clitoris.

Beau, meanwhile, began his own sensual ritual – taking his painfully erect shaft in his hand and stroking himself to an even fuller erection.

Agnatha watched transfixed as his vivid blue eyes narrowed in ecstasy, and his exquisite chest heaved with the weight of desire.

Her enchantment grew as she noted the matching rhythm that emerged between Edgar's mouth and Beau's hand, both stroking and

caressing in even measure, combining to heighten her arousal and bring her to the brink of ecstasy.

Sweat formed on Agnatha's brow as a fire sparked in her feminine area and spread into the pit of her gently rounded stomach. Lowering her hand, she stroked Edgar's silky black hair, though she also imagined Beau's golden locks slipping like sunlight through her fingers.

Edgar purred at the touch of the healer's hand and increased the pressure of his lips on her clit. Simultaneously, Beau threw back his glorious head and released a low, manly moan. His muscular shoulders flexed beautifully as he grasped his glistening shaft and thrust his perfect hips thrillingly forward.

Suddenly their gazes locked, and Agnatha joined the perfect rhythm inherent in the encounter. As Beau's hips thrust forward his mighty shaft exploded into his own hand, and simultaneously, Agnatha climaxed into Edgar's mouth.

Both screamed a mighty release, their gazes colliding across the room.

* * * *

Soon Edgar lay down beside Agnatha and fixed a tender arm around her waist. He looked first at her then at Beau, both of whom only had eyes for one another as their visitor bid them good night and retreated to his bedroom. Yet he felt no jealousy or angst; on the contrary, as he laid back into the softness of his feathered bed, he wore a mysterious smile worthy of a sly feline.

Chapter five

The next morning found Agnatha again in the forest, head bowed low over her favorite rose bush.

Once again, she escaped an uncomfortable situation, and the prying eyes of two men who unlocked and exposed her deepest desires.

Or so she thought. Unbeknownst to Agnatha, one of her admirers stood subtly beside her own window, taking quiet joy in the way her fair skin shone like an ivory lily in the light of the morning sun. And the way she greeted even her own roses with a secret, slightly guilty smile.

“She’s beautiful,” Beau assessed, beaming softly.

“Much like a beautiful sun?”

Turning quickly, the nobleman faced his other host, one who once again assumed the form of a catlike creature.

Yet his eyes held a truth that could not be denied.

“How did you know?” Beau asked quietly.

Edgar chuckled, shaking his head.

“For years, I have watched those in Ravenshead parade in and out of the forest,” he said. “How could I not recognize the son of the man who rules our lands?”

Sighing deeply, Beau gestured out the window to Edgar’s housemate.

“Does she know?” he asked.

Shaking his head, the godling replied, “Agnatha’s family is noble, like yours, but she left them more than ten years ago, after the death of her parents. Ye were still a lad when she left home,” he continued. “And she rarely ventures into town. As a matter of fact, she hates the place.”

Beau cocked his head and stroked his chin curiously.

"I would have been eleven summers old a decade ago," he said. "Surely I could never forget her. What was her family name?"

"Banesworth," Edgar replied.

Beau's eyes flew wide open, and he gestured broadly toward Agnatha.

"That kind, good-natured woman is the Witch of Ravenshead?" he asked, then, shaking his head, "I should have known it was a pack of lies. Those Banesworths are like many of the tenants who inhabit my father's land, gossipy hens, the lot of them." With this he arched a sardonic eyebrow. "And their wives are just as vile," he added, smiling slightly. "I tell ye, if the king ever calls upon his residents to go as soldiers into battle, he'll get his share—they'll be able to 'harp' and 'gossip' the enemy into deep retreat."

Edgar laughed, clapping his guest's back.

"'Tis little wonder you don't wish to go home," he said. "Ye have more wit than the lot of 'em combined."

He fell silent, however, as Beau beset him with a pleading glance.

"Please, sir, do not tell her," he said.

Edgar smiled and patted his shoulder in a welcome show of tender reassurance. "She would not judge ye," he assured his guest.

"I know," Beau said quickly. "I want her to be comfortable with me. And I would very much like to court her. I doubt she would accept the advances of Benjamin's son."

Pausing, he added with a cocked head, "And I must ask, Edgar. Would you accept the idea? Or would you challenge me for Agnatha's hand?"

Edgar snorted.

"As for Aggie, methinks she'd accept your advances in a barley sack," he scoffed good-naturedly. "And I, dear boy, would encourage her to do so. As dearly as I love Agnatha, I am obviously not an appropriate lifemate for our lass. And long have I waited for a man who could truly claim her heart, and fill her life."

Beau grinned, obviously pleased by this response. "I would love to think this is so," he admitted. "And she already knows from my clothing that I am not a peasant." He paused, focusing on a painting mounted above Agnatha's fireplace. The painting, done in oil, depicted a freshly picked bouquet of red roses in a polished gold urn. It overlooked a room of finely polished cherrywood chairs, a silk-

upholstered pink settee, and an assortment of painted vases molded from casts of silver and imported china.

“And neither is she,” he finished, adding, “I sense she is a woman who values her power and independence. I must move carefully to woo her...”

Turning to Edgar, he pleaded, “You may not be Agnatha’s intended, but you share her home and her bed. I can tell by the tender smiles she gives you that you know her better than anyone. Please help me.”

Edgar paused, stroking his furried chin thoughtfully.

“I know of a good place to start,” he said finally. “One deceptively simple gesture that could truly win Agnatha’s favor.”

Leaning forward, Beau addressed the man’s words with wide, almost imploring eyes. “Tell me, Edgar,” he plead. “What is it?”

Edgar stepped sharply backward, wrinkling his whiskered nose.

“A bath, lad,” he replied.

* * * *

It was nearly noon when Agnatha emerged from the wooded area that bordered her home. Carrying a wicker basket filled with blueberries and nuts, she walked slowly up the cobblestone path that lead to her front door.

This eve, she decided, Edgar and Beau would see the true Agnatha—a woman of absolute dignity and composure. A woman who could not, would not be seduced, regardless of how hopelessly, infernally beautiful they were.

A wide azure lake formed the east border of Agnatha’s cottage and sparkled with the tint of the noonday sun. The lake, with its gently rippling waves and surrounding emerald grasses, was always a sight to behold. Yet today, the lake was merely a setting for another variety of natural beauty: two men who played like merry children in its waters.

Agnatha’s heart pounded as she beheld the flawless figures of Beau and Edgar (the latter, she knew, loved to bathe in human form to avoid the appearance of ruffled, soggy fur), their sleek chest muscles further defined by a coating of shimmering water droplets.

Beau especially resembled a woodland nymph, with his hair hanging in soaking ringlets down his smoothly planed back, forming a curtain for his wide blue eyes and carved cheekbones.

Despite the vision of flawless beauty he projected, he laughed like a lad as he and Edgar swam laps and engaged in a boyish water race.

Agnatha reveled in the sound of his melodic chortles, and in the sight of his graceful, masculine form as it soared heavenward in a peerless flip. “*The man even makes guffaws sound melodic,*” she mused. Edgar, too, looked magnificent in his human form. While Beau’s golden skin glowed in the sun, Edgar’s fair complexion shone like a beacon of light—and his long ebony hair clung like black silk to his bare, wet back.

Agnatha stood transfixed, her body inflamed by a sight that rivaled the most beautiful portrait.

In the lake, meanwhile, the two men she admired splashed one another with boyish playfulness.

Edgar’s laughter ceased, however, as he realized they were being watched.

“She’s on the path,” he told Beau.

Yet Beau’s grin only widened at the mention of Agnatha.

“Shall we invite her to come and play?” he asked, raising his eyebrows.

Chuckling, Edgar stepped back and gestured toward the shore.

“Why not give her a show that would rival a summer romance performed at a palace festival?” he challenged.

Winking his assent, Beau rose in a mighty splash from the waters below him, allowing reams of water to splash playfully from the planes of his body.

With an agile leap he came ashore and stood tall and proud before the lake.

From her vantage point on the path, Agnatha took in her breath as she got her first glimpse of Beau’s round, hard derriere.

She also savored the way his long golden hair clung to his back when wet, and the manner in which his bronzed physique stood like a monument to the sun.

Yet as her gaze happily devoured his perfect form, her famished hands ached to touch him—and her entire body yearned for his touch.

Shaking her head, she forced her gaze from her delicious guest and strode forward along the cobblestone path. She again froze, however, as with a graceful flourish Beau turned toward her – again exposing his magnificent chest and flawless face.

“Aye, and there’s that blasted, ever-lovin’ shaft again,” Agnatha bit her lip. It rose to a firm salute, in fact, as their eyes met across the lawn.

Immediately drawing back, Agnatha waved an uneasy apology.

“So sorry,” she mouthed, grinning sheepishly.

Yet Beau held his stance, and narrowed his eyes at her in blatant seduction.

And his deliberate challenge intensified when he raised his muscular arm and, in a forthright tease, crooked his finger in her direction.

The subject of his attentions stiffened noticeably, but gave him a mischievous, teasing smile before turning away.

Agnatha knew not what the pesky nobleman was up to, but she liked it. Aye, very much.

Chapter six

Making what she regarded as a noble attempt to avoid Beau's blatant seduction, Agnatha retreated quickly into the confines of her home. Instead of the comfortable luncheon for three Agnatha expected, she soon found herself sharing a more intimate meal for two.

Edgar, she was told, had business in the forest. So now she shared her noon repast with a gorgeous blond nobleman, who hung unabashedly on her every word. He laughed at her every quip, and reveled in her knowledge of healing; a topic that generally bored men to distraction, if not a subtle suicide attempt.

And while Beau avoided questions about his family and home, he did admit concern for the horse that apparently 'threw' him into his current situation.

"I know Xavier would never harm me purposefully," he allowed, adding with a shrug, "He must have tripped over a rock or branch in the forest, throwing me in the process. Then he likely ran away in fear." He paused, brow furrowed. "I only hope he's all right."

He smiled, however, as Agnatha clamped a warm, reassuring hand on his shoulder.

"We shall go into town tomorrow to look for him," she assured her guest.

Beau started, eyes wide.

"Ye hate the town," he reminded her. "Edgar told me so this morning."

Shrugging, Agnatha replied, "I go several times a month to aid its expectant and infirmed. I shall certainly go to help a friend find his most treasured companion."

Beau shook his head, obviously warmed and touched by Agnatha's sentiments.

“In my world of thusly called ‘lords’ and ‘ladies,’ few show such genuine concern, especially for people they barely know,” he told her. “Though you, Agnatha, already seem to know me better than most.”

After a pause he continued, “Agnatha, may I be bold?”

Agnatha grinned, raising her eyebrows.

“Ye may,” she echoed his words of the evening before.

Giving her a sly grin, Beau revealed, “I was merely wondering, in all the tales I have read, godlings never mate for life with humans.” He paused, cocking his head curiously. “Yet Edgar can take human form...”

His hostess chuckled, waving away his concern. “Edgar is a godling, through and through, and we could never mate,” she assured him, adding more quietly, “He simply assumes human form to...tend to me once in awhile.”

Agnatha bit her lip, looking down sharply.

Yet she took in her breath a moment later, as her companion took her chin in a firm but gentle grasp and stared deeply into her eyes.

“As I am certain Edgar has told you, there’s no shame in what ye do,” he assured her, tone gentle. “Only I fail to understand it.”

Agnatha frowned.

“Surely ye take your own pleasure at court,” she said sharply, then tilted her chin upward in a show of feminine pride. “Should it be different for a woman?”

“It should be different for this woman,” Beau clarified, stroking her cheek with a warm, tender hand. “A woman of your warmth and passion for life should have a lover who can give her his full and total self, as well as a castle where ye may rule as queen.”

Snorting, Agnatha gestured broadly around her.

“Here I am queen of my own domain,” she assured him. “I call no man lord, and I do as I please.”

She took in her breath as, suddenly and impulsively, Beau leaned forward and seared her lips with a warm, but passionate kiss.

For a moment, he lingered, lightly tasting and caressing her lips before deepening their kiss.

Agnatha hungrily responded to Beau’s kiss, pressing her mouth into his and thrusting her tongue forward.

Blimey, he even kisses elegantly, she contemplated, a keen thrill coursing through her veins as their tongues engaged in a spirited

tango, stroking and teasing until finally she leaned forward and braced her hands against his broad, muscled shoulders.

Finally, they drew back from each other, each staring at one another through passion-dazed eyes.

“Ye said you do as you please,” Beau whispered, extending a tender hand to rub and knead Agnatha’s shoulder. “Did that please you?”

His hostess grinned, and he was pleased to see a beaming flush grace her fair cheeks.

“It did,” she assented, adding, “Beau, ’tis no secret Edgar and I are lovers.” Here she paused, eyes alight with sheer wonder. “Yet, though I’ve felt sexual passion, from Edgar, I’ve never known such intense passionate stirrings from just looking upon you.” She shook her head, brow furrowed in confusion. “How can this be, when I have known him for many summers. And ye are but a stranger?”

It was Beau’s turn to shake his head, and he took Agnatha’s face firmly in his hands. “I feel like we’ve known each other forever, and have never really been strangers, Agnatha. Never before has my heart stirred for any woman but you,” he added. “And while Edgar is a sweet and trusted friend, he never can truly love ye as a real man would. I could be your lover, every day and every night,” he told her, searing her with a gaze of passionate intensity. “And while I gladly would fulfill your every need, desire and fantasy, milady, I also would savor and bask in our passion. You would feel the heat of my desire, strong and true. Every day and every night.”

Agnatha gaped, shaking her head in sheer disbelief at Beau’s words.

She usually met every life situation with a sound mind and strong reasoning skills.

Yet how could she reason, or even form a complete sentence, when her heart thudded in her ears? When her underthings were soaked with the sweet juices of arousal, when her hungry gaze devoured the kind, sincere beauty of the man before her?

Abruptly she stood from her seat, smoothing the ruffled folds of her forest green day gown.

“ ’Tis too soon for this,” she assessed simply, moving slowly away from the table.

Abruptly she turned, gracing a watching Beau with a soft, tender smile. “I am glad I met you, Beau. I enjoy spending time with you,”

she said, adding with a shrug, "The pain of my life's experiences, however, will not permit me to live impulsively."

Her eyes then widened as Beau leapt gracefully to his feet, and came with quick steps to her side.

Gathering her hands in his, Beau kissed them reverently before taking her fully into his arms. Staring deeply into her eyes, he leaned her body backward and pulled her closely to him.

Then again, he covered her mouth with his. His kiss this time was hard and insistent, and her mouth soon opened to accept the intimate courtship of his tongue.

Agnatha's body relaxed as she succumbed to Beau's advances, and sank leisurely into his warm, strong arms.

His body was a delicious study in hard, toned muscle, and she sighed as her hungry hands had her fill of his perfection.

Moments later, however, she used those same hands to push him gently away from her.

"I told ye," she admonished, fighting to steady her breath, and the pounding of her heart, "I cannot be impulsive."

"And I never have been," said Beau, then searing her with a piercing, famished gaze, "I want to be impulsive. And ye, milady, I wish to lure into passionate, unbridled impulsiveness with me."

* * * *

Midnight.

King Benjamin of Ravenshead sat quietly in his great hall, staring blankly at the towering ceiling that capped his beautifully bleak surroundings.

A lavish work of stained glass, the ceiling depicted the mythical creatures of Icarus and Daedulus; the father and son who ventured too close to the sun.

And just as Daedulus lost Icarus to the sun, I have lost my son, my Beausoleil, he thought, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

Benjamin had not shed a single tear since Beausoleil's disappearance—and many assumed the lord of Ravenshead, who frequently voiced disdain for his son's restless wanderlust, was relieved by the boy's absence. In truth, however, Benjamin's soul cried out plaintively for his missing offspring.

Over the past few days, his guards had scoured the village

for some sign of Beausoleil or his mount. And while their search was fruitless, his heart and mind were still on the hunt, desperately seeking and striving for answers, or at least possibilities.

"Where could he have gone? Where could he be?"

If he was still alive.

At times such as this, Benjamin wished that noblemen could show emotion. He yearned desperately to throw himself into the arms of Beau's mother and share freely in her misery.

At least Queen Beatrice was permitted her tears, which flowed freely since her son's disappearance. Yet the king never cried. It was simply undignified.

Aye, mayhap that's the problem, he thought, managing a small, sad smile. I always assume the role of the proper ruler, and expected Beau to do the same. Even as a lad, I chastised him for daydreaming, for laughing too loudly, for venturing too far from the castle. I often told him he was unbecoming.

He paused in his thoughts, perusing once again the glass illustration that now seemed prophetic.

I have been a great leader, he thought, then shaking his head sadly, And a horrid father.

His tortured meditation was disrupted by a hard, pounding sound that erupted just beyond the hall window, shattering the quiet night that consumed Castle Ravenshead.

Jumping to his feet, King Benjamin frantically sprinted across the length of the expansive room and through the hall door, stopping just as quickly as he was confronted by total and complete darkness.

I must have imagined the sound, he concluded, sighing deeply.

The lord jumped, however, as this darkness was again disrupted, this time by the sound of a loud, resounding *neigh*.

Running forward into the night, he almost collided with the broad black side of Xavier. The horse's sleek ebony coat made him one with the darkness.

In spite of his best efforts at restraint, the ruler's eyes now filled with bittersweet tears. Sweet because his son's mount was recovered. Bitter because his son was still lost.

"Oh, Xavier," he said aloud, patting the horse's coat with lovingly familiar hands. "If only you could speak."

Deities of Desire

Pausing, he stared reflectively at his son's prized charger.

"Surely ye must know where he is," he assessed. "And that's why you came home, to lead me to our lad."

Stepping forward, Benjamin buried his head in Xavier's strong, sturdy neck.

"We shall go seek him tomorrow," he told him. "We shall bring Beausoleil home."

Chapter seven

The next morn brought beautiful sunshine to Agnatha's home, as she and Edgar enjoyed the company of their lively guest.

Beau, she found, was a sprightly lad who woke in a sunburst of energy, not only volunteering to prepare the morning meal but singing as he did so.

"Beyond belief," Edgar observed, shaking his head.

"Take note and follow the example," Agnatha directed him.

Even better, he prepared a glazed fruit-filled pastry that was a desired commodity in the king's court.

He insisted on serving Agnatha and Edgar at their own table, and particularly delighted the lady of the house by feeding her, himself.

"Ye took care of me," he told them both, then, looking with unsettling directness into Agnatha's eyes, "Now I shall care for ye."

The mood darkened, however, as the couple contemplated their afternoon trip to the village.

Beau told Agnatha that he yearned to lose himself forever in her calm, placid world. Yet he could not fully enjoy his new surroundings, he said, until he found Xavier—until he brought his lifelong companion into his newfound circle of friends.

Edgar, for his part, informed Beau privately that he could not join their planned village expedition. For although he could assume human form whenever needed, he seldom could remain in that form for more than a few hours' time.

"I want ye to concentrate on finding Xavier, not on checking periodically to see if your tall, self-admittedly

attractive friend is morphing into a short, self-admittedly hairy one," he told Beausoleil, a broad smirk on his feline features. He added more seriously, "And ye, my lad, had best exercise your own caution. You easily could be recognized on this trip."

He paused, cocking his head curiously. "Your parents must be concerned gravely for you, milord," he reminded him. "Don't you at least want to visit them?"

Beau hung his head, sighing deeply.

"Edgar, few understand the life of a nobleman's son," he told him. "Imagine living in a velvet box. A beautiful but strict enclosure that restricts your movement and dictates every aspect of your existence." He paused, raising a finger for emphasis. "Now imagine removing just one side of this box and replacing it with a sheet of glass, so you can see the people and world around you but cannot step outside to join their activities and celebrations," he continued, adding in a dry tone, "Ah, but the people can see you, they monitor your every move and judge your every action."

Beau again sighed, his jewel blue eyes clouding with something akin to tears. "I love my parents, truly I do," he said. "Yet like an innocent man who has escaped the dungeon, I simply cannot go back. Not when I have found so much here," he finished.

The two fell silent as Agnatha walked into the room, dressed for the day in a royal red day gown; a work of smooth velvet accented by puffed sleeves and gold trim.

"You're beautiful, milady," Beau praised, eyes alight with admiring wonder.

Agnatha beamed, obviously pleased with his praise. And she herself nodded approvingly as she perused Beau's attire. He finally removed the royal red tunic that denoted his princely status, replacing it with clothes on loan from Edgar -- who kept a small peasant's wardrobe on hand to suit his human transformations.

And while Edgar cut a striking figure in these clothes, Beau was nothing short of stunning in formfitting breeches and a loosefitting shirt, both colored a smooth shade of tope that evoked a charmingly modest effect.

In his view, perhaps too modest.

"Perhaps I should don my tunic," he said, casting a self-conscious glance at his finely dressed companion.

Agnatha waved away his apparent self-doubt. "Ye would glow in a barley sack," she told him, taking his arm as they made their way to the door.

* * * *

The main avenues of the large town of Ravenshead, so named for the nation in which it served as capital, seemed quiet this morning, and Beau felt himself relax as he walked freely and casually through the streets he technically ruled.

Or had they ruled him?

He recalled endless days of festivals and parades, riding Xavier behind court jesters and before his father's gold-plated, jewel-encrusted carriage. On those days he had felt like a bird in a gilded cage, perhaps admired but definitely watched. And decidedly trapped.

Today, for the first time, he felt as if he truly owned the streets of Ravenshead. The breezes blew freely through his golden hair, which was flowing and unbound.

His clothes fit loosely and comfortably, and he walked the streets with an easy, relaxed gait, for once unconcerned about standing at attention. And, best yet, he stood beside a woman whose kind smile and easy laughter elevated his spirits. He savored the way that Agnatha truly revelled in her surroundings—stopping to admire lilacs and bluebirds and beaming at passing children.

Sadly, however, even the youngest citizens failed to return this friendly gesture. Indeed, even toddlers stared with condemning eyes at the Witch of Ravenshead, some even greeted her approach by hiding in their mothers' skirts. What was worse, Beau observed, was that their parents did nothing to scold or censor their inconsiderate behavior.

Probably because 'tis a learned behavior, he thought, cringing as a willowy young woman stopped to stare and laugh openly at his companion.

The woman then turned her harsh, assessing eyes in his direction, taking in his modest clothing with a rude, condemning snort.

"Aye, ye are a peasant," she spat out, then arched a curious

eyebrow. "Ye are also a most comely man. Why would ye befriend *Hagnatha* of Ravenshead?"

Agnatha opened her mouth, prepared to pin the woman with one of her biting witticisms.

She just as quickly closed it, however, as Beau swept her into his arms and pulled her closely to him. Looking deeply into her eyes, he joined their mouths for a passionate, deeply felt kiss. It was a full moment before they parted, and Beau playfully pecked Agnatha's nose before turning to their stunned witness.

"Ye asked why I befriended her," he said, beaming brightly at the gaping woman. "Is it not right and natural to befriend one's own wife?"

The visibly befuddled woman finally turned away with a deeply set frown. "Well I never!" she exclaimed.

"Aye, and we all can tell," Agnatha called after her.

"I thank ye," Agnatha said, planting a warm, affirming kiss on Beau's smooth cheek.

Yet Beau only snorted, and chucked his companion's chin. "Ye never have to thank me for kissing ye, milady," he told her. "The pleasure is always mine."

His beam broadened a moment later, when he spotted a sleekly coated black stallion walking slowly up the road before him. "Xavier!" he exclaimed, running forward with brisk, spirited steps.

Yet he froze a moment later as he identified the man who rode his prized charger. A man who looked like an older version of himself. The last man on earth he wanted to see.

Grasping Agnatha's arm, Beau pulled her with him as he ducked into a nearby alleyway. Silently the two stood and watched as King Benjamin of

Ravenshead rode past the alleyway, stopping briefly to look both ways for any sign of that which he sought.

Me, Beau decided, pressing his back tightly against a hard stone wall that formed the border of the alleyway.

He then cringed as Agnatha gaped in recognition at the sight of her king, riding a horse that fit the description of Beau's treasured mount.

Even after the king passed, the two remained silent for several moments before turning to face one another.

"Who is King Benjamin to you?" she asked, tone low and dark

gaze probing. "A horse thief? Or your father?"

Beau looked at her, his deep frown and agonized eyes telling the truth of the tale.

"Answer me, Beau," Agnatha commanded.

The man before her shuffled his feet and shook his head uncertainly. Ultimately, though, he struck a firm, tall posture before his questioning friend, one who he knew deserved the truth. "King Benjamin is my father," he said.

Nodding, Agnatha released a sharp, bitter laugh as she walked purposefully from the alleyway.

"Aye, Beausoleil," she said, refusing to meet his gaze as he fell into step beside her. "I should have known. Even as a child ye were the fairest boy I ever had seen."

Beau shook his head.

"I never meant for you to learn my identity this way," he began.

"Did you mean for me to know you at all?" Agnatha interrupted, her words slightly heated.

Moving quickly before her, Beau planted his hands firmly on her arms and stared deeply into her eyes.

"Nay," he answered honestly. "I did not wish to lie to you, of course, but Agnatha, my whole life has been a lie. I never lived, never breathed, until I met you."

He paused, wondering at the sudden appearance of tears in Agnatha's eyes. Finally he continued, strengthening his grasp on the woman he

yearned desperately to keep in his life. "I did not tell ye I was Beausoleil," he said, "because I no longer wish to be the beautiful son and heir apparent of

Ravenshead." With this he leaned forward to sear her mouth with a fiery, passionate kiss.

"I only wish to be your Beau," he finished.

Both remained silent for a moment as Agnatha processed this information. All the while, Beau ran a tender, comforting hand against her fair cheek before cupping her slightly trembling chin.

"Do you hate me, Agnatha?" he asked finally.

Shaking her head, the healer took Beau's face lovingly into her hands. Slowly she ran her fingers along every perfect plane of his sculpted visage, as if memorizing him.

"I could never hate ye," she assured him. "Though I am angry—angry that you could not tell me the truth of your identity." She paused, planting her hands firmly on her hips. "Beau, do you realize I could be thrown in your father's dungeon for keeping you at my cottage?" she asked.

Beau shook his head. "You saved my life," he countered. "I will see you richly rewarded."

Agnatha would have none of it. "The only reward I desire," she insisted, pointing an angry finger in his direction, "is the company of a man who does not fill my ear with lies; who does not lift me with false hopes then send me plummeting to the ground."

Shaking her head, she continued, "Would you like to hear a rather pitiful tale, Beausoleil? When I turned eighteen summers, I was seduced by a handsome stranger in the forest, one who claimed to be a friend of Edgar's and a longtime *secret admirer* of mine. Only he was Edgar, assuming a human form for the first time. I know Edgar did not mean to hurt me; to this day he remains my dearest friend." She paused, spreading her arms expressively. "Yet for a few precious hours, Beau, I thought I had found the man of my heart," she finished, tone low.

Immediately Beau took her into his arms, running his hands through her fiery red hair. "Agnatha, the man of your heart is here now," he insisted, kissing her forehead. "I am sorry for Edgar's deception, and how it hurt you, but if he had become your suitor, I would have been forced to challenge him for your favor."

Drawing back slightly, Agnatha grinned in spite of herself. "A fine feat, considering ye would have been all of 8 summers at the time," she told him.

Yet the healer sobered as she considered her last words.

"We share much between us, Beau—similar natures, common interests, strong passions," she allowed. "Yet we also have much that stands between us—age, social rank, perceived attractiveness. . ."

"My father is fifteen summers older than my mother," Beau interrupted. "It means nothing."

"Your father is a very handsome man," Agnatha reasoned, adding with a shake of her head, "Aside from that fact, 'tis simply different for a man."

Beau looked at her, nodding thoughtfully.

"A woman is not supposed to love a man younger than herself," he agreed. "A woman is not supposed to be a healer or a homeowner. A woman is not supposed to venture out with an uncovered head and her hair flowing wild and free—and beautiful..."

He paused, and the two shared a quiet, gentle smile that, in his mind, bespoke mutual understanding.

"Agnatha, you never have allowed your society to dictate who you are," Beau reminded her. "Why should ye allow the bastards to determine who you love?"

Agnatha said nothing, only stared at Beau with wide eyes and a heartfelt smile.

"Dear Sir," she began, wrapping her arms warmly around his muscular shoulders. "May I say, and I hope this does not offend ye, your wisdom exceeds even your beauty."

Beau started, eyes opening wide. "No one ever has blessed me with such praise," he said, voice barely above a whisper. "I thank you, dear lady."

Agnatha shook her head. "Do not thank me," she told him. "Love me."

Chapter eight

When Agnatha and Beausoleil arrived home, they found Edgar standing expectedly at the door of the healer's cottage.

"Did you find the horse?" asked the godling, green eyes keen with concern.

"Yea," said Beausoleil, then shifted uncomfortably. "Only we could not bring him home."

"You could not take your own horse?" Edgar asked. "Whyever not?"

"We faced one tiny obstacle," Agnatha replied, smirking. "His father was riding Xavier."

Starting, Edgar looked helplessly at Beau, who patted his shoulder with what appeared to be fraternal reassurance.

"She knows, Lad," he said. "And she understands."

Yet Agnatha drew back slightly as she overheard their conversation.

"Did you know?" she asked Edgar, eyes wide.

"He did not tell me," the godling replied quickly, stepping forward to kiss her fair cheek. "I had seen him in the village parades and knew him on sight." Pausing, he smiled kindly at a suddenly sheepish Beausoleil. "He did not mean to deceive ye, Agnatha," he reassured her. "He wanted to court you, but was afraid you would reject the son of King Benjamin."

It was Agnatha's turn to appear sheepish. "I do not dislike King Benjamin," she insisted. "From what I knew of him during my days at court, he was a just and considerate man."

"Yet he never went so far as to treat you kindly, or to truly acquaint himself with you," Beau replied. "And you are not alone in that, for he never liked me either. Loved me, perhaps, but never truly liked me."

Stepping forward, Agnatha ran a loving hand down Beau's carved cheek.

"I know that's not true," she insisted, adding, "Beausoleil, men such as Benjamin are taught and trained from the time they are bairns to be solid and emotionless—to place duty before friends and even family."

Beausoleil shrugged. "I know this is true, as he raised me to be just as he is," he conceded, adding emphatically, "Yet I am not like him." And with this he looked Agnatha directly in the eyes. "When I love," he insisted, tone soft, "I love with my full and true heart."

Beaming broadly, Agnatha took Beau in a warm, all-consuming embrace. "The reason for this is simply explained," she smiled, then took his smiling face in two tender hands. "Your father is a good man. And you are a better one."

Chuckling softly, the couple joined their mouths in a warm, tender kiss, then parted to find Edgar regarding them with an intent and all-knowing gaze.

He said, "I do hate to break this lovely mood, but I have bad tidings."

He paused, sighing dramatically to emphasize the supposed seriousness of his message. "I have business this evening in the forest and will not be present at our evening meal." Tipping his head, he shrugged somewhat uneasily. "In fact, I may not return home 'til morn."

Beau and Agnatha looked quickly at one another, then frowned politely for Edgar's benefit.

"I am sorry to hear this, my friend," said Agnatha, playfully tweaking the godling's whiskers. "We shall miss ye this eve."

"Indeed," Beau replied, nodding. "Very much so."

"I'm certain you will," Edgar agreed, though he couldn't conceal his feline smirk. "Ah, but worry not, I'll be home early on the morn."

"How early, exactly?" Agnatha asked, voice tinged with an apparent hint of concern.

Her friend looked at her, then gave her a sly, subtle smile. "Not very," he assured her. "I have much to do." With this he paused, turning to face a stone-faced Beausoleil. "I am sure that, in the midst of the boredom and loneliness likely to occur in the wake of my absence, you will find something with which to occupy your time."

His mischievous grin broadening considerably, he inclined his head politely and turned with purposeful steps toward the forest.

"Have a blessed eve," he said.

"And the same to you," Agnatha wished him, then watched as Beau waved his own goodbye.

The two watched silently as the godling retreated into the depths of the forest. Then they stepped forward into Agnatha's cottage, closing the door firmly behind them.

"Aye!"

Clasping their hands high in the air, Beau and Agnatha then joined arms to perform a spirited measure in Agnatha's sitting room.

"Ye dance far better than the ladies at court," Beau praised, sweeping Agnatha into his arms and twirling her gracefully across the floor. "Far more freely."

Agnatha shook her head. "'Tis not their fault," she reasoned. "At court you have to wear at least one corset and two petticoats with the stays adjusted to 'strangulation' level. One cannot dance, move, or think coherently without endangering her very life."

Beau nodded, rolling his eyes heavenward.

"Aye," he agreed. "This is evident whenever I attempt intelligent conversation with a lady at court."

Suddenly he twirled Agnatha closely up against him, looking directly into her eyes. Impulsively he seared her lips with a thorough kiss.

"In truth, milady," he whispered, rubbing her cheek with a gentle, loving hand, "I would greatly prefer you wore nothing at all."

Agnatha bit her lip, her earlier excitement replaced by a sharp, keen tension.

Edgar had no expectations of her as a lover; indeed, their lovemaking was primarily for her benefit, and as far as she knew the godling had no other lovers. As deity, he didn't need sensual satisfaction, but could take it as he pleased.

This man, on the other hand, probably had slept with some of the most beautiful women in Ravenshead; both fine ladies of the court and, she assumed, the serving wenches with whom noblemen frequently dallied.

And what can I offer him? she thought, then, stepping abruptly away from him, *Ah, I have it! Vegetable stew.* Aloud she said, "Beau,

we cannot forget all of that delicious squash and cabbage we bought at market today. I shall make us a nice stew for dinner.”

Ignoring Beau’s perplexed expression, she grabbed their market basket and retreated into the kitchen. Bowing her head over her stew pot, she sought to concentrate on the preparation of their evening meal; a task she never savored but at least could perform.

“Agnatha of Ravenshead!”

The healer started, recognizing the voice of her guest – but not his tone.

Sporting a concerned frown, she set aside her soup ladle and walked hurriedly into the sitting room. Her concern quickly turned to shock as she saw her usually polite guest had donned an expression of unabashed, tight-lipped haughtiness.

And removed everything else.

“Agnatha of Ravenshead,” he repeated.

“Aye, I think that’s my title,” thought Agnatha, staring blankly in his direction. “Not that I can remember overmuch when I’m staring at that bulging beautiful shaft again.”

Apparently noting her befuddled expression, Beausoleil grinned slightly, then reassumed an air of *stiff* nobility. “I am Prince Beausoleil, the son of King Benjamin of Ravenshead,” he announced. “And it has come to my attention that you are a most unique citizen.”

Agnatha snorted, for some reason playing along with Beau’s bizarre game.

“That fact is just now coming to your attention, dear Sir?” she asked, planting her hands firmly on her hips.

Beau chuckled, nearly breaking character. Yet soon he again stiffened his spine, and regarded her with an intense, serious gaze. “When I say unique, I mean that in the most positive sense,” he clarified. “Ye are a great healer, a kind soul, and a wise being.”

Agnatha smiled.

“Beau, thank ye...” she began.

“I have not finished!” Beau objected, raising a finger for defined emphasis. “What I have come to tell you is that you deserve a reward – both for your goodness and your good deeds. So with that in mind,” he continued, voice and gaze softening noticeably, “I am going to issue you this reward—first, however, I must give you a royal command.” With this he closed the distance between them and swept her into his arms. Then, fixing his masculine hands securely around

her waist, he stared deeply into her eyes. "I command ye," he whispered, pressing his hard, bare body against hers, "to divulge your naughtiest, most intimate, most thrilling fantasy."

He paused to give the silent and shocked Agnatha a firm, full kiss on the mouth.

"Your reward," he continued, his long, golden shaft rising dramatically to graze Agnatha's gently rounded abdomen, "will be the ultimate fulfillment of this fantasy. Here and now," he whispered. "Tonight."

Agnatha gaped, a sudden wave of moist warmth invading her private area. Her breath quickening, she braced her hands on Beau's trim, perfect hips and almost pulled him into her. The time for resistance had passed, she decided, sharply inhaling his musky masculine scent.

The sensual beast that slept within her was waking quickly. And more than that, her heart pounded with pure, genuine love for the gentleman before her.

"Woman, may I remind ye, you are under royal command." Beau belied his official tone by running his thick, wet tongue slowly down her cheek. "Tell me now. What is your deepest, strongest fantasy?"

Shaking her head briskly, Agnatha's entire body began to tremble in the arms of Beausoleil. He smiled, his noble façade cracking.

"Aye, I see the wildness emerge from within you – the same unbridled lust that claimed you that night with Edgar," he hissed. "My heart races to know that, on this night, it is I who tempts the beast."

"Tell me," he coaxed again, his manhood now literally throbbing for need of the woman before him.

"It's you," Agnatha exclaimed suddenly, sweeping him fiercely into her arms. "My deepest desire, my greatest fantasy, is a yearning for the Beautiful Sun!" Choking on her words, she fell forward into Beausoleil's strong arms and sighed deeply as he swept her from her feet.

Silently he carried her into her chambers, laying her body tenderly across her bed while kicking the door closed behind them.

"Ye needn't do that," said Agnatha, grinning as Beausoleil sat down beside her on the bed. "Edgar will be away all night and well into the morn." Grinning devilishly, Beau brazenly buried his head in Agnatha's ivory neck. "Did I not tell ye, milady?" he told her, voice

tinged with a sexy growl. "I plan to keep you here for at least a week."

Returning his grin, Agnatha attempted an indignant snort. "Are ye planning to imprison me, Prince Beausoleil?" she asked, unceremoniously tweaking his nose to relieve him of such haughty notions.

"Nay," Beau countered, adding in a matter of fact tone, "I intend to make you feel so good you won't want to leave."

As if to prove his point, he rolled her gently onto her back and undid the stays of her royal red dress. As each inch of the woman's skin was exposed, he graced it with a tender token of his affection: a kiss here, a lick there, a light nibble elsewhere. Soon, Agnatha had been stripped to her corset, and looked expectedly up at Beausoleil.

"I suppose ye want that gone too?" she asked, gesturing toward the stiff, stifling undergarment.

Beau nodded, but then promptly crouched to his knees and crawled to the end of the bed.

Agnatha wondered at his actions, though she quite enjoyed the image of his retreating rear end.

The mystery soon was solved as he gently, methodically parted her legs and knelt with great purpose between them.

"I shall feast my eyes, hands and mouth on the whole of your beautiful form," he promised. "First, however, I must do my duty as an officer of the royal court."

Agnatha threw her head back to laugh, but instead took in a sharp breath as Beau buried his golden head between her thighs. His long, luscious tongue made delicious contact with her feminine folds, licking and laving until her clit throbbed for his loving attentions.

His hands, meanwhile, massaged her full thighs before finally parting them to expose the source of her pleasure. Beausoleil's tongue sparked lightning shards of ecstasy in his lover's nub, teasing her until she yearned for the full, sumptuous feel of his flawless lips.

As if reading her mind, Beau braced his hands on her hips and fixed his mouth around Agnatha's clitoris. Slowly he suckled her, tickling her hips until they bucked forward instinctively, granting him a full, unbridled taste of her.

Throwing her head back, Agnatha bit her lip as her entire body was consumed by the flames of desire. And she screamed outright when the spasms of ecstasy finally overtook her.

She still was reeling from the first pleasure when she felt her tight, restrictive corset slide slowly from her body; after removing it, Beau covered her body fully with his own.

Embracing fiercely, the couple kissed with great passion as they sank in one another's arms.

Then Beau lowered his head to Agnatha's breasts, taking one fully into his mouth.

Hissing, the healer arched her back and buried her delicate hands in Beau's long, silky hair. She smiled a moment later, when he slowly and luxuriously kissed his way up to her face until finally their heated gazes met.

"I have waited for this moment since we met," Beau said, rubbing her flushed cheeks with two tender hands.

Beaming warmly, Agnatha suddenly recalled her adolescent dreams of the perfect lover, one who would fill her heart and satiate her body. "And I, my dearling, have waited much longer," she told him.

Reaching upward, she grasped the head of Beausoleil and brought him down for a long, heated kiss.

Their lips and legs both fully entangled as they sought the ultimate intimacy; a state they finally discovered as Beau sank his hungry cock into her soft, wet femininity. Both gasped and shuddered as they were overtaken by the sensation of sublime oneness, a state that immersed and consumed their bodies in a passionate inferno.

In a brazen move, Agnatha wrapped her long legs around Beausoleil's back and pulled him more deeply into her. Their hips formed a perfect rhythm enhanced by the embrace of their arms, creating a cocoon of intimacy that Beau enhanced further as he massaged her mouth with his tongue.

Then, rising slightly above her, he looked deeply into her eyes as—with a final intense thrust—they hurtled beyond the brink of unbridled delight.

With a mighty roar, Beau came inside Agnatha, throwing his head back like a passion-struck lion.

She climaxed simultaneously, digging her fingernails lightly across his well-muscled shoulders.

Yet instead of falling sated and exhausted into Agnatha's sheets, the couple kissed again – a soft, tender peck that lit a second fire between them. Their kiss deepening, Beau let out a murmur of

approval as Agnatha grasped his masculine shoulders and rolled him onto his back.

Now hovering above him, she took a moment to admire the sheer artistic perfection of his well-muscled form. Then she proceeded to gently devour it.

As Beau writhed in ecstasy beneath her, she kissed his sculpted face, licked the nipples of his perfect chest, nipped his rippled abdomen, then came face to face with his long, golden shaft.

Here she paused, carefully considering his most intimate body part, one that a woman never was supposed to discuss, let alone touch or examine up close.

Reading her thoughts, Beau extended his hand downward to run a loving hand through her hair. "You don't have to, Love," he assured her, tone sublimely gentle. "The ladies at court seldom do."

Agnatha looked up at him, regarding her lover with dark, knowing eyes. "Sounds like a challenge if ever I heard one," she said dryly.

"Nay, not at all," Beau countered, shaking his leonine head.

He paused, however, and stared curiously at Agnatha. "Did ye taste Edgar?" he asked.

His lover guffawed, playfully swatting his knee.

"Taste him?" she repeated. "You make me sound as if I am one of those cannibals my Uncle Arthur allegedly usurped during his overseas expeditions." More seriously she added, "Nay, Beausoleil, I never serviced Edgar. He does not have the same physical drives as a fully human man, and our activities were primarily for my benefit. Yet, secretly, I always yearned for a real lover," she revealed.

The two beamed at one another, grasping hands, as their already strong mutual bond seemed to deepen even more.

Then without further hesitation, Agnatha tasted the full beauty of Beausoleil. Her tongue was at first tentative as it planted short, teasing licks along his golden shaft. Yet as she heard the deep, pleasure-driven moans that arose from her lover's throat, she took his penis fully into her mouth and suckled him with heated intensity.

She grinned with satisfaction moments later, as Beau doubled over and screamed his release. "This is what I never found with Edgar," she reflected, sighing as her lover gathered her into his arms and pulled her closely to him.

Planting his lips firmly and affectionately against her forehead, Beau cradled her in the comfort of his all-consuming embrace and nestled her delicate neck.

“Ye, milady, are magnificent,” he told her. “I think I shall never leave your bed.”

Agnatha patted his arm, giving him a small, sad smile. She only wished she could be so certain, both of their immediate future and of their ultimate fate.

Aloud she said, “At least not tonight. Beausoleil, I want you to share my bed with me.”

Beaming broadly, Beau tightened his arms around Agnatha’s waist and kissed her fully on the lips. Then silently they lay, relishing a cocoon of gentle warmth.

Even so, Agnatha mused, taking a last long, intensive look at Beau before closing her eyes to sleep. I know ‘tis only a matter of time ‘afore they try to tear us asunder.

Chapter nine

The lilting melody of birdsong awoke her the next morning, though she kept her eyes tightly closed, having no wish to awaken from the dream of an evening with Beau.

Finally. Agnatha stirred, kissing her lover's sensual mouth before rising slowly from the bed.

"Ye cooked my breakfast yesterday," she told him, thrilling at the tousled blond hair and sleepy-eyed gaze that distinguished a freshly awakened Beausoleil. Traits that likened him to a radiant angel in repose. "So I shall pick some fresh berries this morn for yours."

Beau beamed, reaching upward to grasp Agnatha's hand.

"Ye would please me even better by coming back to bed," he told her, accenting his words with a devilish wink.

Agnatha returned his playful grin, but stepped sharply away from the bed. "Behave," she admonished lightly. "Edgar should be home any moment—and he too shall be hungry for a morning meal."

Agnatha dressed in a mint green daygown and moved slowly toward the door.

"Return soon, milady," urged Beausoleil, tone soft and low.

"I shall, love," Agnatha promised.

Once outside, the healer ventured into the wooded area that formed the boundary of her property. Inhaling deeply, she took in the fresh scent of pine as it was served to her by balmy breezes – then admired the emerald canopy formed by the trees above her. The crisp chirp of a friendly robin completed this picture, as did the sight of the brightly hued berry bush that grew bountifully within the forest.

Leaning over to pick the ripest fruit for her and her lover's meal, she hummed happily as she contemplated her first night of true passion.

Beau, as he had promised, truly desired and cared for her—showering her with an exquisite combination of gentle affection and heated ardor.

Biting her lip, she chuckled girlishly at the memory, then realized she hadn't truly and properly giggled in many a summer.

Yet the giggle turned quickly to a gasp as a rock sailed past her.

Her heart nearly stopped as she faced a strange young man, one who regarded her with a scowling mouth and hate-filled eyes. Her lips firmly set, she tilted her chin upward and asked, "Who are you and what business have you here?"

Snorting, the uninvited visitor gestured toward Agnatha's cottage.

"What business have ye, evil woman, bewitching a lad of our village and imprisoning him in your witch's house?" he demanded.

Agnatha froze, a cold, eerie chill racing down her spine. Yet her gaze remained sternly fixed on her unwelcome visitor.

"I keep no one at my home against his will," she said, adding with a sneer, "I cannot dictate who comes to my property, but I can decide who leaves, and you, Sir, will leave now."

Yet the man stood his ground, hands planted firmly on hips.

"A noblewoman said she saw you with the lad yesterday," he said. "He was a fair lad, little more than twenty summers, and he claimed ye as his wife."

The man then relaxed his scowl to release what Agnatha perceived as a sharp, bitter laugh. "As if the likes of you could attract such a man," he scoffed, then pointed a clearly accusing finger in Agnatha's direction. "Whether you have kidnapped or bewitched him, you evil witch of Ravenshead, ye commit a most heinous crime."

Agnatha shook her head, greeting his words with a haughty smirk. "Not as great a crime as your parents committed when they birthed ye, you bastard," she seethed, "inflicting your hatred and narrow views upon the world."

She paused, shrugging.

"Of course, they had so little with which to work. One cannot blame them, I suppose," she reasoned. "One cannot cull a silk's purse from a sow's ass."

Openly, the man charged at Agnatha with fists clenched.

She stiffened, balling her own fists and bracing herself for a fight, but an unearthly screech arose from the forest behind them.

Both she and her attacker froze as a sleek black creature bounded suddenly between them, sinking his sharp, saber-like teeth into the man's leg.

His previous bravado deserting him, the man threw his head back and yelped weakly. Yet Edgar, who Agnatha recognized was in full godling form, showed no mercy, refusing to release the viselike hold that subdued her would-be attacker.

She again started, however, as she heard the pounding charge of footsteps erupt loudly behind her. She turned to greet the sudden approach of a clothed Beausoleil, who now charged the scene in a brilliant flash of catlike stealth and bare masculine fury.

Felling the man with one hard punch, he then pinned him to the ground while delivering several more.

Finally hovering above his enemy with a sharply clenched fist, he hissed, "Did you harm her in any way, heathen? Did you touch a single hair on her precious head? Answer me truthfully!"

Agnatha shook her head, marveling at the transformation of her peaceable cherub into an avenging angel, radiant and ethereal in his divine fury.

The felled man who had threatened her, for his part, shared her awe, but trembled in fear. He looked up with reverent eyes at the man who had easily bested him. "Beausoleil," the man murmured, mouth agape in sheer disbelief. "It is ye the witch has enchanted."

He soon appeared to regret these words, as his jaw once again made startling contact with Beausoleil's fist.

"You will not insult this exalted woman in my presence," Beau admonished, his voice low and dangerous.

"Nor in mine."

Beau and Agnatha turned to face Edgar, who had slipped into the forest the moment of Beau's arrival and now emerged in his human form, fists clenched and teeth sharply gritted. "You will apologize to Agnatha," he ordered with a dark and commanding growl. "Then you will leave this place and never return."

"And you will reveal to no one what, or who, you saw here," Beau added.

Quickly the man nodded, and breathed a heavy sigh of relief when Beau released his hold and allowed him to stand. The relief was shortlived, however, as the injured man struggled with a groan to his unsteady feet.

His departure was temporarily blocked, however, as both men stood solidly before him.

"We told you to apologize to the lady," reminded Beau.

Giving another immediate nod of apparent agreement, the man turned to face the quiet, frowning woman in question. "I am sorry," he allowed, though this sentiment wasn't reflected in his stormy, sharply narrowed eyes.

Nodding shortly, Agnatha watched as the man made his hasty retreat, limping with amazing speed as he disappeared swiftly into the forest.

Immediately, she was joined by her two protectors, who drew her tightly into a warm embrace, a cocoon of comfort that all but enveloped her entire body and being.

"He shall not bother ye again," Beau assured Agnatha, kissing her fiercely. "Have no fear of him."

Agnatha embraced each of her valiant rescuers before drawing slowly away from them.

"I fear no one," she assured them, adding in a slightly choked tone, "It just grieves me that..." She paused, tears flooding her eyes.

"What, Agnatha?" Edgar asked, brow furrowed in concern. "What grieves ye?"

Turning, the healer grasped her skirts and ducked her head as she turned toward the cottage. "They sooner would believe that Beausoleil is my prisoner," she said, voice barely above a whisper, "than my lover."

And with this she was gone.

Beau sighed deeply, then turned to face Edgar.

"I cannot bear to see her so stricken," he told him. "What can we do?"

Edgar thought a moment, then said, "I believe I can remain in human form for several more hours," he said, adding, "By now, Beausoleil, we should both know how to lift Agnatha's spirits."

Beau raised his eyebrows, grinning slightly.

"We?" he asked.

* * * *

Agnatha heard their footsteps when they walked into her cottage—but she gave them no greeting. She simply sat in her rocking chair with her head deeply bowed, fighting her own tears with firm resolution.

It was nearly an hour before Edgar joined her, and instead of giving her the hugs and sympathy she expected, he stood stoically before her and regarded her with what she perceived as an intense, thoughtful gaze.

“Milady,” he began, “Your prisoner awaits ye.”

Agnatha looked up, bewildered by his actions.

“Edgar,” she almost hissed. “How can ye possibly jest about the accusations that beast, made against your dearest friend?”

Edgar made no reply, but gestured toward the bedroom.

Shaking her head in confusion, Agnatha arose from her seat and made her way slowly into her chambers.

Stopping in her doorway, she took in her breath as she saw that Beausoleil was fully nude and sprawled beautifully across her bed.

This was, of course, not the first time that his muscular form rested easily on her sheets, or that his flowing golden hair spilled beautifully across her ivory pillow.

It was, however, the first time his hands had been bound to her bedpost with her own blue silk kerchiefs.

“Beausoleil, what is the meaning of this?” she asked.

Beau grinned, and ran a long, hot tongue across his perfect lips. “I am your willing prisoner, milady,” he purred, his azure eyes searing her with a gaze of blatant seduction. “Take me and do with me what ye will.”

Again Agnatha inhaled sharply, aroused by both Beausoleil’s words and by the sudden presence of Edgar’s strong, firm arms around her waist. Her heart pounding, she felt a sharp wave of pleasure suddenly overtake her as Edgar buried his head against her neck, planting a line of wet, hot kisses that teased and tantalized. Finally the healer turned to him, allowing her body to seek divine comfort in the sanctity of his arms.

Engulfing her in a tight, all-consuming embrace, Edgar engaged her in a full-mouthed kiss as his hands slid slowly up her sides. Then he gently, lovingly caressed her breasts, running the pads of his thumbs across her nipples until they peaked in the heat of desire.

Lost in a rapturous haze, Agnatha groaned involuntarily as Edgar withdrew from her, then turned her enflamed body in the direction of Beausoleil.

“It truly would be cruel and unusual punishment for me to keep ye all to myself,” he whispered, “and not share you with your willing prisoner.”

Agnatha started, abruptly rousing from her ecstatic state.

“Both of ye?” she asked, raising her eyebrows with a defined snort. “Nay, I don’t know if I can.”

Grinning broadly, Beausoleil nodded to Edgar, who came forth and handed Agnatha a jar of warm golden honey he fetched from their kitchen.

“He is here for your pleasure,” he told Agnatha, gesturing toward Beausoleil. “Have fun with him. Then, if the fancy strikes ye, I shall join him in pleasuring you.”

Agnatha took the jar from Edgar’s hands and moved forward slowly, as if in the midst of a sensual trance or ecstatic dream state. Leaning over her bed, her gaze hungrily consumed Beau’s sleek, muscular body as it lay across her ivory sheets. The golden hue of his skin and hair, she noted, well matched the bronzed honey that filled her clear glass pot. Moving forward, she made the ultimate comparison. First she dipped her finger into the honey pot and sampled the substance within, to ensure it wouldn’t burn her lover’s skin.

This move, she noticed, greatly aroused Beausoleil, who growled in deep appreciation as he saw his lover suckle her delicate fingertip. Grinning for the first time since the villager’s intrusion, Agnatha poured a dollop of honey on his hardened nipple and licked it off, allowing her fire red hair to fall luxuriously across his massive chest.

Throwing his sleek head back in a leonine motion, Beau hissed with apparent approval as Agnatha laved his nipple, then poured streams of thick, sweet honey across the plane of his rippled abdomen. She herself moaned as she virtually devoured her lover’s perfect body, licking and nipping to her heart’s content. Then, she gave him a soft, tender kiss before asking in a hushed voice, “This is acceptable to you? I mean, if Edgar joins us?”

Chuckling, Beau leaned upward to brazenly lick Agnatha’s fair cheek. “As I said, milady, I submit to your wishes,” he reminded her.

“Will ye be comfortable?” she pressed.

Giving her a roguish wink, Beausoleil assented, “Aye, my darling.” Yet, here he paused, regarding Edgar with a look that seemed to bespeak mock suspicion.

“Providing, of course, that the godling keeps his hands to himself,” he revised, “and to you.”

“I well heard that,” said Edgar, snorting sardonically as he joined them on the bed. “Ye bloody noblemen fancy yourselves irresistible, even to a deity who is not remotely attracted to males.”

The trio laughed as Agnatha untied the kerchiefs that bound Beau’s hands to the bedpost. And as she raised her arms to do this, Edgar extended his own hands to grasp and massage her tender breasts.

Moaning softly, Agnatha threw her head back, then sighed deeply as Beau buried his face in her neck.

Wrapping his muscular arms around her waist, the nobleman drew her onto his lap until she fully straddled him. Edgar, meanwhile, shifted his hands until they stroked and massaged her back.

Sandwiched happily between two perfect men, Agnatha wrapped her legs around Beau’s trim waist and rubbed herself brazenly against him, then leaning back, she engaged Edgar in a deep, hot kiss as Beausoleil nibbled her neck.

Then, joining hands with Edgar, she and her longtime friend watched intently as Beau slipped his long, hungry cock delightfully inside her.

As Agnatha’s blonde lover grasped her full hips, drawing her further into him, her ebony-haired paramour massaged her shoulders and blew impulsively into her ear.

Edgar began to hum what she recognized as the same rhythmic, sensual tune he had seduced her with before, the one that formed the background of his exotic dance.

Taking this as a cue, Beau claimed Agnatha’s mouth in a passionate kiss, his tongue and hips claiming a rhythm that matched Edgar’s tune.

Driven by this sensual symphony, Agnatha’s hips began to buck wildly upward, driving Beau’s shaft fully and intensively inside her. Kissing deeply, the couple climaxed together. Then Beau and Edgar exchanged sly smiles as Agnatha collapsed into the godling’s embrace.

Gathering the dreamy, beaming woman into two strong arms, Edgar laid her gently across the length of her bed and situated himself between her legs. Parting her trembling knees, he fixed his mouth around her throbbing clitoris, a soaking wet nub already prepared for

a second pleasuring. Her other lover, meanwhile, hovered at her back, caressing her breasts with sturdy hands and whispering into her ear.

“The young prince of Ravenshead never has been asked to share a lover,” he said, his teeth nipping playfully at her earlobe. “Yet for you, I shall. For you, Agnatha, I shall do anything. I love ye, milady.”

Beaming, Agnatha turned her head to engage Beausoleil in a searing, binding kiss.

“And I love ye,” she said, tone soft and sincere.

She felt Edgar smile warmly against her femininity. Apparently he approved of their sentiments.

This was her last coherent thought as Beau’s lips covered hers, and Edgar’s mouth gave her an intimate kiss that elicited a second incredible climax.

Chapter Ten

It was nearly noon before Agnatha fell peacefully asleep, immersed in a cocoon formed by two men, who nurtured and adored her.

Yet as her mind descended to the depths of serendipitous dreams, only one man passed the gates of her dreamscape: Beausoleil.

In her dreams, he truly resembled an angel, with his hair flowing in the breezes of an overhead wind and his eyes alight with wonder and love.

Dressed in a tunic of ivory with gold trim, he looked more like a heavenly king than the prince of Ravenshead. And when he opened his arms gracefully to her, she gladly went, drowning blissfully in his warm embrace.

Immediately their lips met in a passionate kiss, pouring forth the intense emotion both held in their hearts.

Tenderly Beausoleil buried his hand in Agnatha's fiery hair, drawing her closer to him.

The healer sighed contentedly and fixed her arms around his muscular shoulders. She then became fearful, however, as his previously gentle grasp became an almost viselike grip.

Roughly, he grasped the tendrils of her delicate hair and pulled with all his might, until he practically lifted her from the ground.

"Beausoleil!"

Roused by her own cries, Agnatha awakened to behold a face quite different from that of her lover. The man was dressed in a black velvet tunic with a crest that depicted a feathered ebony bird, one that commonly denoted a member of the Ravenshead guard. His ruddy face contorted in rage, he pulled Agnatha roughly from her bed and set the stunned healer on her feet.

Also freshly awakened, Beau and Edgar, much to her relief, rushed to the lady's defense. Jumping to their feet, the two tall, imposing

men descended upon the abusive guard, who quickly held them at bay with the aid of a long, bronze-hilted sword.

Turning toward Agnatha, the guard barked, "So I see ye have bewitched two young men, you bloody witch. And one of them is the son of our ruler."

Starting, Beau stepped sharply forward.

"I know you," he told the uninvited guest, pointing an accusing finger in his direction, "You are an officer of my father's guard. And ye know bloody well we do not intrude uninvited into the homes of innocent citizens."

"Innocent?" the guard spat out. "This woman is a witch, and she has enchanted you, the son of Benjamin." His expression softened somewhat as he turned fully to face Beausoleil. "I am here to take ye home, Lad," he said. "A loyal subject visited your father this morn and told him you were here. We understand you are a victim of this woman and her black magic. All will be forgiven when you come home."

Beau shook his head, and folded his arms firmly before him.

"I am home," he declared, glaring sternly at the guard. "And if you mean to deny me a life with this woman, you might as well smite me now."

With this he paused, beaming softly at Agnatha.

"Cut out my heart and give it to this woman," he continued. "For it truly belongs to her."

Agnatha shook her head, her dark eyes clouding with tears. "Your life is young and golden, my beautiful sun," she told him. "Do not sacrifice yourself for me."

Yet the guard only scowled in the face of these sentiments. "It is not his life that will be sacrificed if he refuses to go," he told Agnatha. "It will be yours, Witch of Ravenshead."

With this, the man grasped Agnatha's arm and pulled her roughly up against him.

Again Beau and Edgar advanced quickly forward, fists clenched. They stopped just as quickly when they saw the blade of the man's sword pointed at Agnatha's throat.

"Release her," Beau said, tone staunch and demanding. "I command you."

Yet he froze, when the guard grazed Agnatha's fair neck with his swordpoint, nipping dangerously at her skin.

"I am at the command of your father," he reminded the young nobleman. "And he told me to bring you home at any cost."

An uncomfortable pause ensued, after which Beau said in a low voice, "I shall do as you say. Just release her." Pausing, he shook his head sadly. "For once and for all, let her alone."

Immediately the guard released Agnatha. Instead of showing relief, the healer watched with set lips and stricken eyes as her beloved dressed quickly and left her home, staring back at her with a gaze that screamed his internal agony.

All was silent for a time after his departure. Finally, Edgar stepped forward and gathered Agnatha tenderly into his arms.

"I am so sorry, lass," he whispered, kissing her fair cheek. He braced himself, expecting her to sink fully in his arms.

Yet instead, she stiffened, squaring her shoulders and drawing gently but firmly away from him.

He stared questioningly into her eyes, and when he saw her expression harden, and her gaze sharpen with a firm resolution, he had his answer.

"Edgar," Agnatha declared, tone low and determined. "I am going to bring him home." Here she paused, dark eyes flaring as she nodded with renewed certainty. "For years they have pushed me to become the beast of Ravenshead," she said. "Today they see the beast. And I shall claim their beauty."

* * * *

Upon entering the royal feasting hall of Ravenshead, the first sight that met Beau's eyes was that of a beaming King Benjamin.

"Again my hall flows with the rays of a beautiful sun," the king declared.

He and Beau's mother, a petite woman with bountiful auburn hair and catlike green eyes, moved forward to greet their son in the far corner of the hall.

"Beausoleil!" cried his queen mother. Her silken skirts rustled as she walked with what her son recognized as quick, almost frantic steps.

The trio met just beneath the velvet tapestry that had inspired him to run.

Looking abruptly upward, Beau's gaze collided with the intense ebony eyes of the regal stag depicted in the tapestry.

Those dark eyes, and the emerald forest in which the stag stood, called to mind the truest, freest person in his life.

And for a time, I was free, he thought, shaking his head sadly. *Like the stag*. His musings were sharply disrupted by the loud, commanding voice of his father.

“Beau, thank the fates ye are home,” said Benjamin, then, raising a finger for emphasis, “And rest assured, we will bring that witch to justice for her wicked enchantments. She will be tossed in the Ravenshead dungeon, where she can bother you no more.”

Beausoleil’s expression remained dark and grim, though he did lean forward to kiss the fair cheek of his beaming, misty-eyed mother.

“I love ye, mother,” he said sincerely. “And I hope someday you will comprehend and forgive what you are about to see.”

Then, balling his fist, he drew his arm back and struck his father full and hard across the face.

Chapter Eleven

Agnatha always perceived the gate of Ravenshead as a well-preserved sanctity of order and dignity, a place marked by a cast iron fence and an ever-present guard. On this day, however, a commotion in the great hall had sent every castle guard scurrying inward to investigate—hence deserting their normal posts.

This situation permitted the woman to freely approach the gate of Ravenshead Castle; though onlookers gaped at her flaming red hair and ivory silk day gown, and at the sleek ebony charger that had brought her to the gate, and which was able to jump it easily.

Ignoring the tall turrets and sweeping balconies of the imposing stone castle before her, she drove the horse onward until they stood at the door that lead to the structure's great hall. Then, dismounting, Agnatha the Healer grasped the long, gold-hilted sword that Edgar conjured that morning.

After patting her trusty mount, she advanced with quiet dignity into the great hall.

The sight of Beausoleil, however, quickly shattered her composure. Yet, this Beau differed markedly from the gentle, genial lad she had come to know. This one, in fact, stood atop a hall table, holding a gold-hilted sword strikingly similar to her own, except his boasted a glowing ruby embedded in its tip.

"Those blasted noblemen overdo everything," thought Agnatha, scoffing.

Her brow furrowed in concern as she saw his table surrounded by officers of the castle guard, men at the command of a surly lord with a noticeably blackened eye.

"Take him!" Benjamin commanded, gesturing toward his visibly furious son. "Ye all know Beausoleil would never harm anyone."

Pausing, he turned to his wife and whispered, "Though recent experience tells me I may be mistaken."

Beau, for his part, met his father's words with a nod of reluctant agreement.

"Aye, my father knows me well," he conceded. "I would never harm anyone."

Yet, with a dramatic flourish, he turned the sword easily in his hand so that it faced his heart. "Yet if you will dictate how I live—to take my life from me," he continued, "Then by the fates I shall take it myself."

"No!" screeched Queen Beatrice, her delicate hands flying upward to grasp her sculpted cheeks.

"Take him now!" commanded Benjamin, waving his guards onward.

As his men charged the table, Benjamin's breath caught in his throat as he saw the ruby-tipped sword—one that Beausoleil had grabbed from its place above the hall fireplace—pierce his son's chest, drawing a thin stream of blood that left an eerie stain of scarlet across his lily-white shirt.

His son was taking his own life, and he was powerless to stop him. "So much for the all-powerful lord of Ravenshead," he thought, a single, bitter tear escaping the eyes that radiantly mirrored his son's.

For a full moment he stood motionless, watching as nightmarish events unfolded around him at lightning speed.

He saw the life drain slowly from his son's expressive eyes as he crumpled limply to the table beneath him. He heard his wife's scream of soul-felt agony, and felt her condemning stare as she turned her emerald eyes to the man she apparently held responsible.

Himself.

A screaming spectator rushed the table where his son lie dying. Ordering everyone away, the flame-haired woman climbed hurriedly atop the table and knelt beside the body of Beausoleil, regarding his fallen form with visibly wide, sad eyes.

Yet unlike Benjamin, this woman did not seem paralyzed in the face of grief. Taking swift action, she pressed a clean kerchief over Beau's wound to halt the flow of blood. Then she turned toward the door and cried, "Edgar! Come quickly! We haven't much time."

All eyes turned toward the hall entrance, then widened in sheer amazement as a stately black charger, one who had stood for some time just outside the door, morphed into a short, sleekly coated,

catlike creature, who bounded across the hall and joined his friend on the tabletop.

Hurriedly joining hands, they focused their collective gaze on Beau's wounded chest. Then, after removing the kerchief that concealed his seemingly mortal wound, they used their other hands to tap and rub the afflicted area.

"Are they insane?" Benjamin asked his wife, then turned to summon the castle doctor.

Yet Beatrice shook her head, and pointed toward their son. "The wound is closing," she said, voice tinged with quiet, apparent awe.

Benjamin shook his head in sheer wonder as Beau's skin regained its healthful glow, and his eyes as they opened to behold the beauty of his healer.

Rising up, he kissed her, and lovingly said her name.

"Agnatha."

* * * *

A summer passed, and Agnatha was pleased to see the royal guard of Ravenshead once again desert their posts to crowd the castle hall.

She also noted, this time with familiar love, that Benjamin and Beatrice stood in the same place at the center of the hall, and again watched as their son kissed his beloved.

Agnatha once again wore white, though this time the dress was a shimmering gown of pearl ivory satin—one accented by billowing skirts, a high lace collar, and a sheer wrap in seashell pink.

Edgar the godling stood dutifully by her side, though this time she joined hands with Beausoleil as the village cleric proclaimed them husband and wife.

Then Beau swept his wife up into his arms and carried her to his royal chambers, where he laid Princess Agnatha of Ravenshead across luxurious silk sheets and kissed her from head to toe.

And as he gathered her lovingly into his arms and joined their bodies as one, she happened to gaze with passion struck eyes at the mural adorning his wall.

A painting that depicted a Ravenshead sunrise—one that seemed to christen their newly formed union with its bountiful rays.

From that day forward, Agnatha's life was blessed by the beautiful sun.