

The Luminaries 1: A Man Called Lust

Stephanie Burke

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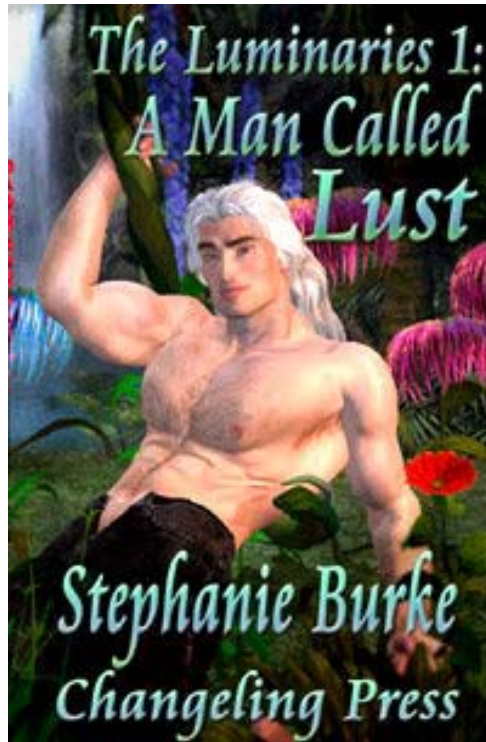
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Editor: *Katriena Knights*

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Prologue

*Hold these close to your heart,
So that you will never forget me.
Our time is short!
We are blessed with such a short time.
One day
Yet I know that this one day
This one day eternal
Will sustain me for the year.
For if they discover our secrets
Those secrets will destroy us.*

-- A letter from the box

Trembling, I reached inside and let my hands gently caress the aged parchment paper. My heart pounded in my chest as I felt each bump and ridge of the old papers, felt the emotion that permeated each thin sheet.

The appointed hour was almost here.

I stared intently into the mirror that sat on my dresser and again saw nothing special, nothing unique, and nothing that I could figure would make me the recipient of such a wondrous gift.

Large brown eyes, Plain Jane eyes. Same medium length black hair, caramel colored skin. Nothing exotic or beautiful, just plain old me.

I wondered what my parents were thinking when they made me, plain old me, guardian of their secret treasures, the letter and the carved wooden box.

But I blessed them, wherever they were, for the duty that had become a gift of immeasurable delight.

From the moment I'd received it so long ago, it had changed my life.

As the clock struck midnight on this night of all nights, I felt my pulse quicken and my eyes flash.

It was time... time to greet my love.

Even as I watched, the mirror began to grow cloudy. White and purple mists swirled and danced on its surface. Faster and faster they twirled, creating a cyclone of color in the dullness of my room. Faster and faster they turned, keeping pace with my pounding heart, and then I saw his face.

Large lavender eyes blinked owlshly at me, before the mist began to fade. As I watched, a slender, almost delicate hand pressed against some invisible barrier, leaned against it and, without a sound, forced its way through.

"My love," the reed-thin tinkling voice, distorted by distance and space, whispered as the hand beckoned me to follow.

It was time.

My heart racing in anticipation, I eased the lid closed on the letters and placed my hand in his.

It was Valentine's Day and, for a few hours, I would be away from the wasteland that the wars of 3009 created. I would be away from the land that never produced enough to eat, away from the struggling people, the constant darkness that surrounded the earth, away from the misery of my life here.

For a time, I would be free, I would be with him, and this yearly blessing allowed me to stay sane, to survive another year here.

Without him.

Chapter One

*Come quickly, come alone!
If you are followed, disaster will surely befall us!
Together, we will defy those who would separate us
Those who are against us.
But as I stare into this mirror,
At my reflection, know this.
In my eyes, I see you.
And I love you, forever.*

--A letter to my love; from the letterbox

As always, I first felt a chill as I pressed one hand against the glass.

The mirror was all the vanity that I have left. All of my femininity, the only thing of beauty that I own. And as I leaned against its familiar chill, I again prayed that this time I would find a way to stay.

The hand I held was warm, pulsing with light, almost hot to the touch. And he was mine.

Pressing harder, I began to feel the barrier of glass, like some thick gel, part for me. Its coolness eased past my face, making my nose itch as I began to force my way through. That warm hand was a beacon urging me to move faster. I closed my eyes and my body tingled as my face began to pass through.

This was always the hardest part, the face. Even the popping of my ears never sent a shiver up my spine as the coolness of magic and time slipping by, as if it would rip me back or toss me into an eternity lost in a void of darkness. I never watched. Once I had opened my eyes and was almost thrust into shock as the colors filtered and danced before my eyes. They surrounded me like they knew I was something that didn't belong.

But as soon as I felt the coolness on my neck, the hand that still held mine gave a tug, and almost like a pea popping from a pod, I was forced through. I was free of the mirror and once again, I faced my love, my life, my air, my reason for being.

"Sinopee," he said as I threw myself into his arms. His voice was as raspy and deep as I remembered.

"Lust," I breathed into his chest, inhaling the rich scent of him, almost tasting him as I lost myself in his touch.

His name was Luster, but I called him Lust. And oh, how he sparked and shone in the sunlight.

His large, almond-shaped, lavender eyes perfectly matched his hair, which was so silver it sparkled. The long mane hung to below his buttocks and shimmered with his every movement. His skin, so pale and delicate in appearance, gave him an elf-like quality, an illusion supported by his set of high, pointed ears. But that was all that was fae about Luster.

He was over six feet of strong, muscled warrior. The sword that hung at his back was no mere ornament. I had seen him practice with the sharp blade, and he could do serious damage when he wanted.

As always when he greeted me, he was dressed only in tight black leather pants and knee-high boots. The silver ring in his left nipple glistened, as did his hair, as did his whole body. On his wrists was a set of huge, black braces, tooled with the name of his clan and the land that he was born to control, but was denied... by them.

"You have come back to me." His hands, those warm, work hardened hands, caressed my face as he lifted my head to meet his gaze.

"I will always come back to you. You are my life."

"I am your fuck toy and you know it." His rumbling laughter belied any seriousness in his tone.

"And I only have a day, so let's get to it!" I playfully demanded.

"Commanding creature," he hissed, tangling his hands in my thick hair. "Do you not know who you order about?"

"Yes, my fuck toy, and the best fuck toy I ever happened to own."

"Own? Me? Great warrior that I am? It is you who are my object. And it is you who will find herself in serious trouble if you do not give me the respect I deserve."

One would almost think he was serious, if it were not for the laughter sparkling in his eyes.

"I respect you," I taunted. "Now take off the pants! I don't have all day!"

He threw his head back, roaring with laughter, this merry sound carrying over the lush green grasses and tall trees that I would have never experienced had he not performed the sacred ritual that drew me, through the words in the letters, through the mirror.

"I have missed you, Sinopee."

"And I you, Lust," I replied, tears welling up in my eyes against my will.

"None of that! You have time for tears after the mirror draws you back. For now, I intend to enjoy what I have missed during your long absence."

"No relief?" I teased as he took the wooden box with the letters and placed them in a pouch at his side.

He said nothing, but took my hand and began to lead me to where he had set up a camp.

"Only my left hand," he sighed mournfully. "You know I am connected to you. I could never derive any pleasure from the act if I were with another woman."

"Lucky me!" I giggled as he led me to his tent.

Large, black, and made of some silky material, Lust's tent was filled with lush carpets and huge pillows. It resembled some desert pasha's harem from Old Earth.

"Is this how a rebel leader lives now?" I teased.

"Only for you, only on this day," he replied, serious as he eased me inside and lowered the flap.

"And if they attack?"

"Glow and Shimmer will alert us. We are alone, but never totally alone."

"I understand."

I looked up at him. Even in the dim light of the tent, he sparkled and shone with an inner light, an energy that I had never experienced before.

As I watched, he reached out one hand and gently caressed my face.

His fingers trembled.

He pulled me closer, and his hands began to explore my features, one by one, memorizing them for the long separation we faced after this day. His pupils, black islands on seas of purple, dilated and became hazy. His nostrils flared as his skin began to heat, to burn.

"I want you," he breathed, pulling me close to his hardening body. A noticeable bulge grew in the confines of the supple leather, taunting me with its hidden secrets.

"How?" I whimpered, feeling my body respond to the nearness of his.

"Hard," he whispered, lowering his head to mine. "Deep," he added as his tongue, long and pink, lashed at my lips, moistening them with his essence, marking me as his. "Now."

His mouth touched mine, that agile tongue reaching out to part my lips, to invade the territory he marked as his own.

I closed my eyes and moaned. The large warmth of him took command of my mouth, exploring each tooth before delving deeper to taste the very essence of me.

"Yes, now!" I whimpered. I began to rub against him, like a cat in heat. My nipples tightened and began to swell with my racing emotions. My heart pounded as I inhaled his scent, the smell of earth and musk. Desperately, I ran my hands along his thighs, feeling his muscles tense under the leather, now hot to touch.

Slowly, I dragged my hands upward, skirting his obvious erection and sliding up the muscled abs that supported a chest built for pleasure, my pleasure. I shuddered at the feel of his hot skin and pulled back to watch my progress as my fingers grazed his erect nipples, tugging lightly at his ring.

Lust threw back his head and groaned, the almost pained sound filling the confines of the warm tent. His hair cascaded backwards as he arched his back and reached for my touch.

"Yes," he hissed. One large hand covered mine, forcing my fingers back to his ring, silently telling me to pull at it, to stimulate his nipple with a touch of pain.

Knowing his limits, I grasped the ring and gave it a gentle tug, my breath catching as his body sheened with sweat and he began to tremble beneath my touch.

Then suddenly I was lifted from the ground, his arms a tight vise around me as he carried me to a pile of pillows in the center of the room.

He grasped the material of my tunic and rent it in two with one fierce jerk, his knuckles grazing my chest. My bouncing breasts were exposed to his hungry view.

"Have you been waiting for me?" he demanded. He sat and roughly pulled the boots from his feet. "Have you been a good little girl?"

"For you, always," I breathed, excited by his touch and the lust in his eyes.

"I will know." He stared at me a moment before his hands went to the drawstring that held up his pants.

Slowly, under my watchful eyes, he tugged the thong free, exposing the firm, pale flesh beneath his navel and the silver treasure trail that marked the way to his greatest prize.

"Let me," I whispered as I reached out and grasped his slim hips, my torn tunic falling from my body with my movements.

Slowly, I rose to my knees, grinning up at him, before I leaned in close for my first taste of paradise.

His skin was slightly salty and, oddly enough, tasted fresh and new. Slowly, I ran my tongue down that glory trail, tickling his muscles, wetting his flesh, then I gently blew on the wet path I had blazed.

He moaned and then I could feel his hands shifting through my hair, tugging slightly, massaging my scalp, urging me onwards.

Eager to comply, I moved my hands from his waist to gently score his sides with my nails, then slipped them down to the opening in the confining leather. Almost teasingly, I ran my fingers around the small indentation made by the waist of his pants. I tormented him further by moving my hands to cup the hard firm globes of his ass.

“Sinopee,” he groaned as I played my erotic game of touch. “In a moment, I am going to forgo any tenderness that I feel and just fuck you until you can’t remember your own name.”

“Promises, promises,” I purred, but firmly gripped his pants and peeled them from his body.

Instantly, I was assaulted by the scent of hot leather and even hotter man. Inhaling deeply, I gently eased the front of his pants down, carefully freeing what I had craved for so long.

A thin sprinkling of hair made up his pubic bush, in the same silver tones as the hair on his head. It trailed lower until it surrounded the base of the most beautiful cock that I had ever beheld.

Thick was the only word that would do him justice. Thick and long, reaching about ten inches in length. The most amazing thing about his hard flesh was not the super soft skin, the near scalding heat it threw off, or even the sight and smell of the sweet pre-cum that oozed from the purple, mushroom-shaped head when he was really excited, like right now. It was the curve.

Lust’s cock was bent in such a way that no matter what position I was in, the head scraped against my hot spot with every thrust. It was also perfect for double stimulation, as I lay beneath him and let his hardness slide down my throat. There was a lot to love about Lust, and I was ready to begin!

Chapter Two

Looking up at Lust, I lowered my head enough to run the tip of my tongue up the backside of his cock, from the base to the hard ridge of flesh at the tip. He closed his eyes and his breath hissed from between clenched teeth.

Smiling, I hungrily lapped at the head, swirling my tongue around its flaring base before I engulfed the whole of him in my mouth.

"Gods, yes, Sinopee!" he breathed, and his hands once again tangled in my hair, urging me faster.

Always ready to comply, I began the learned process of easing him to the back of my throat, gagging once as I became used to the feel of him in my mouth, then swallowing him deep.

"Pull off now!" he hissed. "This load is not going down your throat!"

That said, I slowly pulled him from my throat, marveling that I actually had swallowed it all. When finally only the head rested in my mouth, I gave him one final lick then sat back on my knees, waiting to see what would happen next.

I didn't have long to wait.

In a flash of silver hair and pale skin, Lust pounced on me, pulling me to my feet, ripping the scant covering of my panties from my body. At last, I stood bare before his lavender gaze.

"You are beautiful," he breathed as he took in first the damp curls that hid my pulsing center, then my heaving breasts with their erect, berry colored nipples. Finally, his eyes met mine, and I knew that the heat brewing within him would soon be flowing through me.

Before I could blink, his mouth slammed onto mine, sucking the air from my lungs, stabbing his tongue deep.

I whimpered as his fingers ran down my back to cup my ass, to pull me into the long hard length of him. He ground against my curls, making me moan into his mouth.

Those same hands slipped up to my waist, lifting me, leaving me no choice but to wrap my legs around his waist and hold on for dear life as he positioned me for the taking.

"This is what I want," he hissed as he pulled back, the long strands of his hair caressing my swollen nipples, making me tingle with an inner fire that he controlled. "Hot, wet, and mine."

I felt him free one hand to position his hard cock at the entrance to my wet pussy.

"Please," I whimpered, wiggling around. The large, mushroom-shaped head began to part my lower lips.

A leering grin crossed his lips and a twinkle filled his eyes. I held my breath, anticipating his entrance, then I screamed as he drove home in one long, deep thrust.

It had been quite some time for me, and the feel of his hot steel parting me was a painful pleasure. Almost immediately I tightened my legs around his body and began to ride his pleasure pole.

"Tell me!" he hissed as he held my writhing body still, trying to keep control of me.

I whimpered in response and threw my head back. I could feel his heartbeat vibrating and beating inside me through his cock.

"Tell me!" he demanded again, refusing to move until I acknowledged him.

"Fuck yes!" I cried out, reassuring him that I was uninjured. "Please! Ride me hard!"

He groaned at my words, but then I felt the big muscles of his thighs contract a moment before he eased out of me, a slow delicious slide, then slam back home.

"Lust!" I cried, tears filling my eyes as fire shot from my nipples to my clit. "Please! More!"

He smiled. His hands returned to my waist and shifted my body. His silky pubic bush ground into my clit, making it burn with a fire of his creation. He rotated his body as he pulled out, making sure the thick shaft of his cock dragged against my clit. This was an entirely new feeling.

By now my head was lolling back and forth on my neck, my mouth hanging open as my moans and cries filled my ears and took me to another level of excitement.

"Faster?" he asked. I felt him shift again.

Before I could even get my thoughts together to respond, he dropped to his knees, the jarring of his body sending another frisson of pleasure shooting through mine. Then my back was to the carpeted floor, his large body looming over me, his purple eyes dilated in pleasure as his breath hissed through those perfect lips.

"For life," he breathed, resting his hands on either side of my head.

Lost in desire, I began to lick at his thick wrists, tasting the salt from his sweat, the taste of my man, while urging him silently to cover me and lead me on to the glorious explosion I only experienced in his arms.

He grunted and shook his head, his long silver hair caressing my breasts, my neck, my chest as he began to move.

"Take it!" he growled as the first powerful thrust nearly lifted me from the floor.

My legs slid up until my knees were almost pressed to my chest, opening myself fully for his assault.

Lust took advantage of my actions by pulling my legs around his torso, sliding his hands under my back to cup my shoulders and pull my body deeply into the curve of his. The race was on.

I struggled to thrust my body toward his as he began thrusting deeply into me. The wet slap of our bodies combined with our passionate screams and gasps filled the air. The scent of our combined bodies created a heady perfume that drove my senses wild. I needed more!

I could hardly think at all as the large, flaring head of his cock hit my every hot spot, repeatedly. Faster and faster he moved. Sweat slicked both of our bodies and the

hard press of his body gave me a feeling of being dominated by the mound of muscle above me.

Harder and harder we strained against each other, building and striving until my muscles began to tense in anticipation of a cataclysmic explosion.

Suddenly, for a moment, the world tipped on its axis. I forgot how to breathe, to see, to think. All that mattered was the next thrust of his cock that would send me over into the next realm, shooting through the galaxy on my journey of delight.

Explosions! Eruptions! Detonation! I was there!

My internal muscles spasmed around the fullness of his shaft, caressed and milked and pulled until a scream exploded from his throat. I whimpered as blast after blast of his hot cream bathed my insides, soothing the muscles that he had abused, filling me with a sense of joy and peace.

I looked up at him, my man, and saw the damp silver strands of his hair sticking to his face, the mouth slack in pleasure, his muscles rippling as they dealt with this outpouring of emotion, his dazed yet beautiful lavender eyes.

"I love you," I whimpered, and shuddered in his arms.

"More than words," he repeated. "Forever."

Chapter Three

I leaned in closer to him, eager to feel the warmth of his touch again. We had so little time! I had to store up my memories, I had to hold a part of him embedded in my mind, for the time when the magic faded and I was thrust back into my own pathetic, dark existence, where I was a brain, nothing more, nothing less.

His hands, those pale powerful hands, cupped my face gently. He understood my pain, for he shared it. I could see the knowledge in his eyes, see him damning the fates that had so cursed us, yet hoping against hope that this time would be different.

A tear fell from my eye as his lips brushed against mine, but a loud noise, the sound of a horse's hooves, broke us apart.

Luster turned as the door flap was flung open. The onyx face of Glow appeared around the tent flap. Lust opened his mouth to protest, and I dove for a pillow to use as cover.

"Titans!" Glow shouted. His knowing eyes took in my naked body cowering behind pillows and the unashamed nakedness of his leader.

Lust was instantly all business as he reached for first his sword, then his pants. "How many and where?"

"A group of twenty," Glow answered, staring at the ground. "And they are headed in this direction. What magic do they possess that makes us so easy to track?"

"Damnable luck," Lust responded. He quickly donned his pants and attached his sword to his back.

"But to find us here? They have never been able to track us here!"

Glow, so named for the white-hot glimmer that exploded from his eyes at his agitation, swore softly and turned to leave the tent. "Something is not right, Luster.

Glimmer feels it, I feel it, and maybe if you weren't so involved with the Thinker, you would feel it."

I gasped, staring at his retreating back. Never had Glow spoken so harshly of me. Thinker was the worst insult that could be laid on someone in this world of myth and magic.

"Glow!" Lust shouted, anger lending his pale skin a bluish tinge. "Sinopee has nothing to do with this."

"Well... they left us of the forests alone until she started visiting. And she is from a place where Thinkers rule. Thinkers, just like the ones who are hunting us down and killing us slowly!"

"It was magic that brought me my Sinopee, Glow. Do not forget that."

"Well, I guess that magic does not hold the answers to all problems, does it?" Glow slammed out of the tent without another word, leaving his leader panting in anger.

"Maybe I should go," I offered, my voice trembling in trepidation of what he would say. He alone held the final verdict. No one could force me to leave my Luster, no one but Luster. And if he willed it, I would go.

But to never see my lover again, never to caress the ice-colored hair or the skin that seemed too delicate for a man. My heart would break, my reason for being extinguished.

"You go nowhere," he said, turning back to me. "My people appointed me leader for a reason, Sinopee. Glow is just flustered by the Titans being so close. They are growing more skilled. It seems that maybe this science stuff has some merit, or maybe they got lucky."

"Science is important, Luster. If you would let me help you, we could set up..."

"No, Sinopee. It is science that created the Titans. It lends them their strength and is their greatest predictability. We will rely on what was gifted to us, magic and strategy."

"But Luster --"

"No, Sinopee." He smiled at me to alleviate some of the sting of his words, but they hurt nevertheless.

"Luster," I began again, turning away from his great beauty. "Science is my gift."

"But Sinopee, sweet Sinopee," he sighed as he dropped to his knees beside me. "This is not your world, not your fight."

"But I was brought here!" I protested, trying to keep the frustration and fear out of my voice. If anything happened to Luster, if anything happened to my lover...

"For me, Sinopee. You were brought here because I need you to be complete. Without you, I have no will to go on."

"Just maybe I was brought here so that you could utilize my gifts," I repeated sullenly.

Before Luster could answer, Glow returned.

"I have brought clothing, Sinopee," he said. "And... an apology. I was out of line. This has been our fight for years, for as long as I can remember. I let my anger get in the way of my judgment. Neither you nor anyone else will make a difference in this battle. I fear it will be eternal."

"Thank you, Glow," I answered, trying desperately to think of something more to say. But what can you say to people who have known war, poverty, hunger, and desperation all their lives? I feared that if this war ever ended, the people would lapse into decline for lack of knowledge of anything else but war. "I appreciate the clothing and the apology."

"We had best make haste." He nodded in my direction, then turned to exit the tent.

Glow was a gorgeous man, as dark as Luster was pale and light. His onyx skin seemed to show off each muscle to perfection. His hair was straight and long, the black mass hanging below his waist, and he moved silently like the shadows. But it was his eyes, the pearlized white eyes with the even paler pupils that made Glow stand out. He was Luster's right hand and the resistance would be lost without him.

But he was so pessimistic!

"Well, make haste, woman!" Luster laughed as he turned his purple eyes, happy once again, in my direction.

"But go where? We always spend our day in the tent, here. Next to the ancient rowan and the crystal clear stream." I closed my eyes and listened for a moment, hearing the roar of the waterfall that fed the stream that I hailed near in my dreams.

"Yes, but now I will have to take you with me."

"Where?" I wanted to know! In all the time I had been journeying through the mirror to these foreign lands, I had always found myself in the company of Luster and his people, here. I had been nowhere else. I knew of no other places. And what if I could not make it back here before the enchantment ended?

I shuddered, recalling the blank void of cold nothingness that separated these two places, my world and his.

"We go to the Citadel," he said. He held up the garment that Glow had chosen.

It was very feminine, in a homespun kind of way. It was a long gown, in a light tan color that I knew would complement my complexion and my eyes. But I had never worn anything like it. My tunics were mass-produced by the government. Everyone wore the same shapeless thing, though the men's tunics were a bit longer. But still, uniformity was kept. This was completely new to me.

"Get dressed," he urged as he plopped the thing over my head.

It felt almost rough to the touch, but so light and... and feminine. I could almost picture myself running through the trees and picking flowers, something I had been only able to do here.

Shrugging and struggling to hide my delight, I slipped the garment on and stood, easing it down my bare legs.

But then I felt something else easing wet down my inner thigh. I blushed and looked up at him.

"What?"

"I need to use the... river," I stammered, taking baby steps to the exit.

Laughing and understanding my predicament, Luster nodded. He called for Glow to help take down and pack the tent.

"Five minutes," I heard him say as I gingerly made my way to the bushes that grew along the bank. "And then, to the Citadel."

I let a smile break free as I reached the river and stripped off my new garment. After all these years, Lust was taking me to his home.

Chapter Four

I smiled as I tromped through the tall green grasses, delighting at the feel of their dampness beneath my bare feet. I looked up, toward the heavens. Sunlight filtered down between the tall branches of stately trees. The air had never smelled so sweet, felt so fresh, been so important to me. I stifled a giggle, fighting the urge to race ahead, touching everything that I could, gathering nature to my chest, burying my face in the splendor that no one from my world had ever experienced.

"Slow down!" laughed Luster, who followed in my wake. "It is not as if you know the way."

"But I am free, Lust! Free and I have never felt more alive!"

I twirled around, getting my hem caught on the odd bush, but even that was a joy.

"We don't have trees where I come from. Only pictures."

"Where do you come from?" Glow asked. Between the two of them, Luster and Glow had broken camp and had stashed the tent and the pillows behind the waterfall. Luster said that was where they kept special things, and I agreed. That tent was indeed special. Luster still carried my ancient box of letters, and both men carefully listened for any signs from the still unseen Glimmer.

"From the other side of the mirror," I said as I fell back to march between the two warriors. "Where Thinkers rule and life is dull."

"But where is that?" Glow would have made an excellent scientist, with all of his questions and queries.

"It is just there, Glow. And it's so different from what is here. I mean, there is no grass and trees. Well, there is some grass at the University. They are trying to grow or

create more. And the air is not as sweet. That is because of the lack of trees. There are some trees left, but the great wars killed off most of them.”

“That sounds... ugly,” Glow said as he held back a branch from a large tree for all of us to pass.

“It is very brown,” I decided, after a moment’s thought, and nodded my thanks as I walked past him. The land began to curve downward, and I almost slipped. “And the people, well, there are no people like you where I come from.”

“And what does that mean?” Glow asked as he tried to picture a world beyond his imagination.

“Well, we all kind of look like me.”

“Everyone?” he asked, incredulity in his voice. “That’s not possible! We are all born with certain gifts.”

“There is no magic where I come from, Glow,” I said, sighing in true regret. There hadn’t been magic back at home for a very long time. And for me, more so, since my parents had disappeared. “And just about everyone looks like me. There are no people with glowing eyes or translucent skin. We all are kind of... brown.”

“Like the land.” He shook his head, as if oddities like this were abominations.

“Like the land,” I assured him. “The land and the people are quite plain and brown.”

“But you are not plain, Sinopee.” Luster laughed. “You are full of wonder and energy. And you are mine.”

“As you are mine,” I agreed. “But I am plain and brown. The land is plain and brown. We kind of match.”

“But with magic...”

“There is no magic, Glow.” I sighed. “We have science. Only science. Science will help create a better world for our future generations. My parents died searching for a way, and I will carry out their work to find a way. Perhaps being here has inspired me, but for now, there is only science.”

"But I have heard you mention these weapons of war that destroyed your planet, your Earth."

"Yes." I sighed again as he marched onward. "We created the bombs and the chemicals that caused a lot of damage."

"Then did your science, the science that you depend on now, not destroy your land?"

"People..."

"Same with magic," Glow interrupted. "The people who control it shape the use, be it for bad or for good. But with magic, only certain people get certain gifts. There, anyone can use this science and create disasters. It is what made the Titans so powerful. Any one of their choosing can yield it, use it, and destroy with it. Magic is scarce. Those of us who possess it regulate others. We cannot hand it down to people who will follow. It is... sacred."

"Good point, Glow," I conceded as we began to leave the tree-studded forests and head for clearer land. "But look what science is doing here. Only a few have the magicians on the run. You need to even the battlefield, to regulate it."

"The best way to defeat your enemy is to know your enemy," Glow said, nodding in agreement.

"The best enemy is one who can make you think that he does not exist."

Glow paused and turned to face me, his eyes... glowing. "The woman has some intelligence, Luster!"

Luster beamed. "And here I thought that she was just a good lay!"

"Hey!" I glared at Glow for his comments, but both he and Luster exploded in laughter.

"But it was not me, screaming like a cat in heat!" I sniffed. I walked ahead, grinning as Lust's face exploded with embarrassment, and Glow's hissing snickers filled the air.

I could take it, but I dished it better.

“Coming?” I called back. But as I turned to resume the trek, a whistling sound filled the air, and the land to my left exploded as though struck by lightning.

“Titans!”

Chapter Five

“Move!”

Luster’s voice sounded in my ear a moment before his heavy body thrust me to the rocky ground.

“Where the hell is Glimmer?” Glow’s voice whispered and I realized that he was lying off to my right, close enough to protect Luster with his body if need be, but far enough away to give him room to maneuver.

“No time!” Luster hissed. He peeked over his shoulder, up the hill, I assumed to see how far we were away from the timberline. “Where did the blast come from?”

“Ahead,” Glow answered, cautiously rising up on his elbows.

I realized we were sheltered partially by an outcropping of stone that grew out of the earth. As I lifted my head a bit, I could see where the trees started again at the bottom of the hill. But I could also see the great distance we had to cover without any protection at all.

“Positive?” Luster asked as he dropped down and looked toward Glow again.

“Positive enough,” he hissed a moment before another blast tore up the ground a few feet away from us, the closest the blast could get with us behind our protective barrier.

Fear struck me numb, but also there was curiosity. Would I finally get to see what the feared Titans looked like, and would I live to tell the tale?

“Can you do it?” Luster asked Glow.

What? They had slipped into that damn code speak they sometimes used. I realized it was an efficient way of giving orders when time was short, but it kind of bugged me. Maybe it was my analytical mind; maybe it was because I was curious by

nature. Or maybe it was because I hated being in the dark about anything. But I looked over at Glow, trying to see what it was that he was supposed to be able to do.

"No choice," he hissed back, then he did something that I thought I would never see. Glow began to undress.

Peeking over the stone every few seconds, Glow mentally plotted some course of action while he divested himself of his garments. His gauntlets went first, the black leather sliding from his powerful forearms and fists. Next, he slid his tunic over and off his chest. Unlike the men that I had met previously, Glow was the only one who always wore a shirt. Now that the muscular planes of his chest were exposed to the dim light of the growing day, I wondered why.

Each muscle was perfect under his ebony skin. Each bulging with strength that could only come from hard work and practice. His massive shelf of a chest tapered into a neat triangle of muscle, a slim waist and a stomach that rippled with tightly drawn abdominals.

He unknotted the ties of his pants at one side and pulled the material down thick, tense thighs. He paused for a moment to ease his boots from his feet, before drawing the dark leather trousers away from his body.

I tried desperately not to look at what I wanted to see, but curiosity moved my eyes. As Glow leaned up to peek over the boulder again, I let my eyes roam over the very core of his body, to see if he measured up to Luster. Crass, I know, but under the circumstances, not knowing if I would live to see another year, I had to peek.

Even unaroused, Glow carried a formidable weapon. Just as dark as the rest of him, Glow's manhood hung heavily between his muscular legs. It rested atop a pair of neat, rounded balls with its large flange of a head that was, strangely enough, circumcised.

For that matter, Luster was circumcised. For rebels who escaped and now lived in the underground protected by the forests, and who were immersed in magic, it seemed quite odd to me.

But Glow's next words brought me swiftly out of my musings and back to reality.

"If you are done examining me, I will endeavor to explain what is happening."

My face exploded in color and Luster chuckled from behind. Thank God he wasn't upset by my lapse in manners, but Glow was worth a few glances.

"Not funny!" I hissed. "Besides, I wasn't expecting a strip show. My people just don't remove their clothing at a moment's notice."

"A pity. If they did, I am sure that you would find the thought of our impending death more attention-holding than a few bits of male flesh."

I stuck my tongue out at Glow. Childish, I know, but it was the only thing I could think of at the time.

"No wonder you were screaming." Glow had his eyes firmly on Luster as he delivered his words. "I bet that thing could wrap around you twice, it is so long."

With all the dignity I could muster, I pulled my tongue back into my mouth and felt the burn as my embarrassment reached new heights.

"Nay!" Luster chuckled. "I am far too thick, but she can use her tongue in ways I never imagined."

"Luster!" I protested, reaching out to pinch a conveniently located thigh.

"Ouch!" he hissed, sounding wounded. "It is a talent; something to be proud of."

Then I realized that they were trying to use a bit of humor to break the tension. Glow's muscles still bulged, but were not as tense. His attention was once again drawn over the lip of the boulder, observing something.

"There are shadows there," he explained, easing back down beside us. "There are shadows, and that should be enough."

"Enough for what?" I asked quickly. I wanted to know what to expect. I couldn't fathom Glow moving from behind the protection this boulder offered. It scared me to think of the rough-spoken man putting all of his naked glory on the line for us, while we did nothing.

"The shadows, Sinopee," he reminded me. "The perfect enemy. Remember?"

The perfect enemy was one that could make you believe that he didn't exist.

"Glow?" I reached out to touch his arm. What was this man planning on doing? What was Luster letting him do?

Before I could say anything more, Glow nodded to Luster, who rose to his knees, a perfect target, and let loose with a flash of purple-white light.

It flared so bright that I had to cover my eyes, yet I knew that it exploded from his person. This I had seen before, when we first met, when he first recited the spell in the letters that brought me here. He used a bit of his energy to gain my attention through the mirror. But now, I saw no purpose to what he did.

I turned to ask Glow what was happening, but there was no one there.

I rolled back to face Luster, but he dropped to the ground beside me, just as several bolts of light struck the stone just above where we were hiding. Stone chips and dust kicked up and encircled us as Lust once more covered my body with his.

"Now we wait," he said, settling himself more comfortably on top of me, burying his face in my neck.

"Wait for what?" I asked. I reached up to grasp two handfuls of his hair, pulling his face up so that I could look into his eyes. "Where is Glow? What just happened?"

"Glow has gone to be the perfect warrior or the perfect enemy."

"What?"

"The shadows, Sinopee. Glow is perfectly suited for moving in shadows. I just provided enough light to create some, so that he can utilize his magic to its fullest potential."

"Speak English! What did you do? Where is Glow?" I was almost shouting in my fear. I had never sent anyone out to die for me! I didn't want Glow to be the first. I would rather us perish together than to carry that guilt for the rest of my life.

"Glow's magic," he soothed, "is based on shadows." He pulled his hair from my frantic grip, wincing all the while. "If he can find a shadow as small as a blade of grass, he can meld with it, hide in it. That is why he thought your words about the perfect enemy amusing. Glow is the perfect enemy. The light blast I provided distracted the

Titans watching, and created a big enough shadow so that Glow could have a good start on making his way down the hill."

"He is going for help?" I hoped that he could reach the Citadel in time. I had no idea how long the Titans would hold their position. If they knew he had no serious weapons, they could rush us and end the matter permanently. I knew of no magic that could bring the dead back to life.

"No, he is going to get the Titans."

"What?" I shrieked and tried to rise to my feet. If Luster would not end this foolishness, I would call Glow back myself.

"Calm down!" Luster hissed as he pulled me back to the ground, this time pinning me with his weight, so that I could not move. "Glow knows what he is doing!"

"He is going to get himself killed!" I tried to fight against Luster's strength, but he easily held me to the ground.

"This is our fight, Sinopee. We are experienced. We know what we are doing!"

"He is but one!" I argued.

"One of us is all it takes."

"But..."

Tears began to fill my eyes as I stared up at Luster, at the beautiful eyes that on the surface appeared calm. But being around him long enough gave me insights into his person. Under the façade of ease and confidence, there was worry.

I realized that doing this, allowing his men to tromp out into danger, hurt him. He was almost like a parent, wanting to protect each one, and hurting when they faced danger. He had confidence in Glow's abilities. I saw that as well. But this course of action was eating him up.

"Glow knows what he is doing," Lust stated again, with authority. "He knows what to expect and has gone against the Titans before. He will signal when all is clear."

But as he rested against me, I could feel the rapid beat of his heart, feel the tension that never quite left. And I knew that Lust would suffer until he saw that signal.

I did the only thing I knew that would calm him a bit, that would ease his tortured spirit.

"I believe," I whispered, staring deep into his eyes, showing him that I meant what I said. "I believe in Glow and I believe in you."

I'd had no idea that my doubts were causing him to worry. Now I tried as best I could to ease the damage.

Instead of answering, he lowered his lips to mine. I felt the brush of his tongue a moment before his mouth descended and took control of mine. I moaned as his tongue invaded, coaxing mine to duel, and his unique flavor filled my mouth.

In that instant, worry became desire, and God help me, I relished it.

Chapter Six

I whimpered, my body instantly responding to his caresses. Before I could even think or breathe, a white-hot passion filled my body, making me moan into his hot mouth and arch my back, dying to get closer to his naked flesh.

"Oh God!" I gasped, pulling away. "What are we doing?" Glow was down there, somewhere, risking his life, and all I could think about was burying my face in Luster's crotch and inhaling his male musk.

"Sinopee," he breathed. His hand began to pull the dress up my legs, baring my skin to the shock of his callused flesh.

Then my thoughts were lost again as his fingers teased at my thighs. "Maybe we shouldn't" became "Please!" and "Yes!"

Up my inner thigh his hard fingers trailed, pressing hard enough to not cause a tickle, but just light enough to tease. His tongue was playing a new game too, licking at my lips, daring mine to tangle with his, as he tasted my face.

"I am going to eat you out," he whispered as his mouth moved up my neck to blow a puff of warm air in my ear. "I am going to eat you and suck all the juices from your body. Are you wet for me, baby?"

I nodded, my voice escaping me as my body writhed against his strength.

"Not an answer, baby." His fingers moved a bit higher and his tongue made a foray down my neck and into the cleavage the gown allowed to show.

But it was not enough. It was never enough. The gown, my sturdy yet feminine dress, the most ladylike thing I had ever owned, had to go. Ignoring his chuckles, I pulled the gown higher than he had.

I felt no shame. There in the waning darkness of the night, I pulled my gown up, exposing my breasts to the chill air, my nipples tightening in reaction.

"Pretty, baby," he purred. His other hand left off teasing my thighs to caress the whole of my breast.

I gasped at the contrast between my cooling skin and his hot hands. I closed my eyes, my head rolling back and forth as his fingers gently tugged at a nipple.

"Harder," I managed. "More!" But then his fingers made a jump from the warm skin of my breast to the damp curls that protected my portal.

"Here?" he asked, his breath hot against my neck as he bit at my shoulder.

"Uh huh."

Then suddenly his head was between my legs. "Fuck romance," he said. "I want raw passion."

I bit my lip to prevent a scream as his tongue delved between my lower lips and lapped at my clit.

"Fuck yeah," he breathed. I arched up against his mouth, my moans becoming louder.

I felt his fingers part me and expose my throbbing nubbin. His hot breath rushed over me a second before his mouth descended. He took me into his hot mouth and began to gently suckle me.

"Luster! Don't stop!"

I whimpered and wiggled, trying to get closer to his explosive touch. Then he added another element to my arousal. I felt my juices slip between us as his fingers toyed at the portal to my cunt. I whimpered, thinking about how good those hard fingers would feel thrust...

He eased two fingers inside, deep. "Yeah!" I gasped.

His fingers gave me the penetration that my body desired, and they began to thrust in and out slowly, fulfilling my need to be taken. He wiggled his fingers as he suckled me a bit harder, making me whine like a bitch in heat, while he searched out that spot deep within that would explode my universe.

Then he found it, and electric waves went coursing through my body, lights flashing behind my closed eyes. When I jumped, he began to hum, sending vibrations

into the heart of me while his fingers moved faster and faster, grazing that spot, massaging it until my nerves were ready to snap.

My body locked up, my muscles tensed, and suddenly I was airborne, flung high into the sky by the convulsion now taking place within. His hands and his mouth worked together, masturbating me to the highest climax I had ever reached. I never wanted it to end.

My inner muscles grabbed at his fingers, squeezed them as liquid heat ran through my veins. My heart pounded in my chest, my breath heaved, and my whole body trembled in the face of such an awesome release.

"Luster," I managed after a moment, wincing now at his caresses. "Too sensitive." I gasped as slowly he withdrew from me, his fingers cupping my wet womanhood as if staking his claim.

Chapter Seven

I shuddered, dropping down from my climax, wondering if I would ever fly that high again. Catching my breath, I turned to look at Lust. His head rested on my thigh, his tongue lazily bathing my flesh clean from the juices that still dripped, showing him my willingness to do it again, and I thought, why not?

I reached for the thong that held his pants up.

I wanted more than a good... okay, a great lick from my man. Time was short and like he said, life was unsure. So I was going to take advantage while I could. My fingers tore at the tiny strip of leather that was determined to keep me from the hot flesh I needed.

I could picture his cock, thick and throbbing with his every heartbeat, its widened head oozing his sweet pre-cum. I wanted his essence to mix with mine. I wanted to feel that steel hard shaft sinking into my depths, forging new territory within my body.

Grunting with my urgency, I tore the belt pouch away from the thong holding up his pants and began whipping his clothing from him.

"Eager?" he joked, though his face looked pained. The tightness of his leather pants was starting to get to him. My baby needed release, a quick release.

Denying him an answer, I moaned in impatience as I began to work the hot tight leather down his body.

But then I heard it.

Glow.

"If you want to get out of here, I suggest you put the festivities on hold."

"Glow!" I nearly screamed as I pulled away from Luster and turned toward that naked man, my eyes assessing his dirt-streaked body before returning to his face. *"You are alive!"*

"Like you would have noticed if I died." He snickered, and my hands immediately went to my gown, pulling it down to cover all of my damp, swollen, exposed parts.

"Are they..."

"Report," Luster interrupted, earning a glare from me, which he responded to with a sheepish grin.

"I caused enough confusion so that if we are very careful, we can get out of here right now, if we hurry."

I was all for leaving. I might have some fond memories of this huge rock, but I was ready to go.

"How much time?" Luster asked as he retied his thong and loosely attached the pouch containing the letterbox.

"About two minutes." As he spoke, Glow tugged on his black pants, adjusting them to hold his obvious arousal, but not bothering with his shirt.

"What did you do?" I hissed. I straightened my clothes and crouched low, as both men were doing.

"I caused chaos and confusion. They are shooting at shadows, but they won't be for long. Let's move."

Following his lead, Luster and I carefully ran down a trail marked by Glow, a trail that apparently only he could see.

"Where is Glimmer?" I asked, discovering that my physical fitness could not be maintained screwing around with Luster once a year! I needed more exercise. I was out of breath as we zigzagged through a maze of boulders and scrub bushes. But I refused to slow the men down. We needed to get to safety and I refused to be the reason we met with disaster if we did run into Titans.

"Ahead," Glow whispered back. He dropped to the ground and slithered across the rough gravel of the exposed mountainside. "She got cut off, but I made some room for her to move and prepare the way."

I blinked at his actions. Moving like a snake, he seemed to have grown feet and protective gear under his bare stomach.

"I am not --" I protested.

"Down!" Luster grabbed my arm and almost ripped it off my body in an effort to get me low.

Obediently, I dropped. I decided to leave this to the professionals. But if a problem involving three-dimensional calculus ever came up, I was their girl.

As Luster hit the ground beside me, two things happened. There was a hiss and the air around us tingled. Then, a moment later, a boom sounded where the boulder had been. And under that, there was the faintest sound of wood cracking against stone. It almost sounded like a bone breaking, but the sound was sharper.

The box! The box had fallen out of Luster's pouch.

"Luster --" I began, but again he cut me off.

"Now is not the time, Sinopee!"

"But --"

"No! Tell me later! We need to try to save our lives, not worry about petty shit!"

"Petty!" I almost rose to my knees to tear a strip off of him, but the explosion to the right of me halted my movements.

Glow was now rolling down the remainder of the hill, regardless of the sharp stones and stinging branches. Taking his cue, I sucked in a deep breath and rolled.

I could come back for the letters later. If we didn't get them back... I remembered the cold feeling in the abyss of space, then shuddered. I didn't want to think about it right now.

But I could silently curse, feeling the skin of my hands and face tear as I slid across the rough gravel. I was too scared to remember to cover my face, so I just sucked

in my screams and tried to ignore the friction burns being inflicted upon my body, especially after the gown started to rise up.

Behind me, I could hear Luster doing his own barrel roll down the mountainside. How he managed to keep his sword from stabbing him, I will never know!

We landed at the bottom of the hill, at the base of a huge green tree, just as the sun chased away the final shadows of the morning.

“Run!” a voice hissed from above.

I looked up barely in time to see a shimmering form and deep blue hair before I was jerked to my feet and we were running.

Glimmer had arrived. We must be close to the Citadel, I thought.

And we had better not be too far away from the mountain! Luster didn't know we had lost the box with the letters. If anyone else found them, or if they were destroyed...

I didn't even want to contemplate that future. I always said that I couldn't live being parted from Luster, but if that box was not recovered, I would learn what it was like to die with him.

Chapter Eight

*My love! They know!
You must guard these words that I have written!
Keep them from prying eyes, the eyes that will spy
The eyes that will lie!
Disasters beyond your imagining will occur if these letters,
If these precious words, are lost to you.
Death will be preferable to having them own
My gateway to my sanctuary, your heart.*

-- From the letterbox

"This way!"

The fairy-like voice tinkling at us led us through a winding, twisting maze of tree roots. This half of the forest was darker, much denser, and harder to traverse. The men followed the voice and the flash of blue hair, and we never missed a step.

"Lust," I panted, ducking and dodging over the thick brown roots. "The letters!"

"Not now." He looked back over his shoulder before urging me forward. "We need silence. We are too close to the entrance."

"But --"

"Why didn't you just leave her?" the voice tinkled. The blue hair flashed, and I still could not see who was leaping from tree to tree.

"Because she is mine," Luster stated. "She owns me heart and soul."

"How cute!" the person snorted. The voice was definitely feminine. "And is she worth *dying* over?"

"That is *enough*," Luster snarled. He pulled to a stop. His chest was heaving, and damp tendrils of hair clung to his bare flesh. Gorgeous as always, I thought.

"Glow almost --" our guide protested.

"Glow did his job. Now I suggest that you do yours."

We halted at the base of a large tree with a thick, green base. The trunk was so thick that I doubted that Glow, Luster, and I, with arms linked, could reach around it.

It was from this tree that the arguments were now coming. As I looked up, the leaves began to tremble and shake, some of the leafy canvas dropping away to rain down upon us. I threw my head back further, hoping to catch a glimpse of the mysterious Glimmer, but got another surprise.

Bark hurts when it gets in your eyes.

"*Ouch!*" I cried out as a sharp brown bit of bark pierced my brain. Well, it lodged in my eye but the feeling was just as intense.

Tears instantly tried to flush out the foreign object, but to no avail. My nose stuffed up and I began to do a little hopping dance, blinking rapidly and trying not to wail out in pain.

"What is she doing?" The voice was closer.

I managed to stop the dance of pain long enough to catch a glimpse of a thing hanging from the tree. It had blue hair, so I assumed that it was the elusive Glimmer.

"What's wrong with it?" Glimmer asked.

"Her," Glow corrected as he scratched his head and stared at me.

"My eye!" I cried out. "It's in my eye!"

"Are your personal barriers so weak?" Blue Hair asked, curious. She stared at me with a familiar expression. It was the same look I gave new specimens under my microscope. Fascinated and faintly disgusted by the unknown.

"She has no barriers," Luster answered. He assessed the situation and walked over to take me in his arms.

His hands caressed my face, then a warm, gentle gust of air touched my eyes, pulling out the bark and soothing the scratches that no doubt covered my cornea.

Vision clearing, I turned to face the rude creature that still hung in the tree.

"You must be... ack!"

Well, it was female and it was beautiful in a strange sort of way. But speaking to people who hung upside down was just plain disturbing.

She must have been hanging by her feet, for her strong body swung back and forth slowly from a branch. It was odd staring at someone whose mouth was where the eyes were supposed to be, but I tilted my head and tried to fix Glimmer's appearance in my head.

Her skin was blue. Not unusual here, I decided, where skin tones seemed to flow to the extreme, but it was her extras that made her seem more alien to me than Glow or Luster. Her hair was a deep, almost cobalt, blue. As were her eyes, her lips, and her fingernails, I noted as she tapped her chin in consideration.

As I examined her, she was assessing me.

"No magic?" she asked. She crossed her arms just under her breasts and frowned. It made deep wrinkles in her forehead and gave her an even odder appearance.

"Look," I protested. "You're making me dizzy. Will you come down from there?"

"No time for this." Luster tapped the tree three times. "We have to get inside."

"But the letters," I tried again, turning to face Luster. "You need to know --"

But my words ended in a gasp as the ground began to shudder beneath my bare feet. I reached out to touch the tree trunk for support, but my hands touched nothing. I uttered a single muffled shriek.

The tree was gone.

And I plummeted into dark, unknown space.

Chapter Nine

"You know, magic could have prevented all of this."

That female voice made the comment, and I knew of only one female who would dare utter such rude words to a total stranger.

No, not my mother, but a blue-haired imp named Glimmer.

I tried to open my mouth to deliver a sharp retort, but only groans emerged as I felt my head throb.

"I think it's broke." With that, I managed to open my eyes and try my best not to scream.

I was surrounded.

There were glowing bodies everywhere! Pink ones, blue ones, purple ones, white ones, black ones, and was that periwinkle over there?

Where the hell was I?

"Sinopee?"

I recognized that voice. It was Luster.

"Ease off!" another voice called out. "I can smell her fear."

"If she had magic, she could defend herself." That from Glimmer.

"Be considerate!" Glow's deep voice rapped out. "She is smarter than she looks."

What?

"But magic could have saved her a fall. Luster could do better."

"Ease off!" Luster shouted and instantly the murmur that had begun to fill the place quieted down.

"I was just saying," Glimmer began, but at a nod from Luster, Glow reached out and bodily removed the woman from my presence. The others followed, shooting curious glances back at me.

"How are you?" Luster asked as he sat beside me. I realized that I was on some sort of platform. I looked around slowly, ignoring the pounding in my head and saw, to my amazement, that I appeared to be in a dark tunnel.

"I am... Where am I?"

"The Citadel." Luster gently ran a hand across my forehead.

"We made it?"

"The tree was guarding it."

Well, this was a place of magic. And I had just spoken to a woman with blue hair and fingernails. A guard tree. I could see it happening here. Seemed kind of appropriate.

"What happened?" I asked.

"You fell."

"I know that! But where?"

"I removed the tree -- displaced it actually -- and you tumbled down the entrance. You made quite a splash, too. My people have been eager to meet you for some time."

"Why?" I tried to sit up, but the dark room began to spin. So I decided to take a visual inventory while I waited for his explanation.

We definitely were underground; the tree roots hanging from the ceiling gave truth to that. But it was also very warm here, almost humid. It was dim, but not dark, now that my eyes had adjusted to the new environment. And there were pockets of light here and there.

The room I was in was pretty large, and the ground was covered in a carpet of thick, fragrant grasses. I had never seen the like before. There were even some small flowers growing here and there, adding color to the living rug.

Several colorful murals covered the cavern walls, which appeared to be made of stone. The brightness of the color contrasted with the dim room, but perfectly matched the people I had seen milling about when I first opened my eyes.

This place was beautiful!

The sounds of laughter, something that I rarely hear even in my own world, filled the air. These people were struggling and fighting, but they were also enjoying each moment of life that they had left to live.

And why not? At any moment, a Titan could slip up on you and fry you with an energy blast.

"They want to meet you because you own me," he said with a small laugh.

Amazed at his answer, I turned my eyes to him. "I... *own*... you?"

"Heart and soul," he affirmed.

"But..."

"My people mate for life, Sinopee. There can be no other for me. You are the one to hold my thoughts and my desires."

I was speechless. I knew that Luster loved me and we had often said that we belonged to each other, but this was total devotion, or that was what it sounded like to me.

"I love you too, Lust," I managed. Tears welled up in my eyes.

How could I leave this man? Why had the fates cursed me with a whole year between couplings? A whole year to wonder if I would become pregnant, a year to miss him and wonder what he was doing. A year to hate him for making me love him this way and then leaving me. A year of feeling guilty for my selfish thoughts, then accepting what had to be.

He was mine, but only mine for such a short period of time.

"I know," he said proudly as I reached out for his hand. "Otherwise the letters would have never brought you to me."

"Yes, letters. *Oh shit! The letters!*"

"What?" He leaned down to get a clear view of my face.

"They are gone! The letters are *gone!*"

Luster reached for his thong, for the pouch that he wore there, and encountered nothing. Emptiness. Space!

"What..." His eyes grew into wide lavender plates as the realization of what this meant sank in.

"Before we rolled down the mountain! I heard it fall!"

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because, *numb-nut*, you wouldn't let me!" I was getting angry at this point. If he had paused for a second to listen to the magicless Thinker, this could have been instantly corrected.

"Numb-nut?"

"You refused to listen to me, Luster! Just because I have no special abilities, doesn't mean that I can't think or feel or see when a box falls from a pouch!"

"You don't know what this means!" he said. The color fled his face. He rose up on shaky legs and stared at me.

"It means that when the sun goes down and begins to rise again, I will probably be sucked into a deep dark abyss of space and die floating in nothingness. Of course I know what this means!"

"It means, too, that I shall die."

"I hope that the void is not as cold as I think it will be. I am not equipped to deal with torture and death." Then I brought my eyes to his pale face again, realizing what he had said. "Did you say die?"

"You own me, Sinopee. I told you that. We mate for life! If you die, then I die as well."

Chapter Ten

We were walking.

I would rather have been discussing plans to go back out and get the letterbox before anything happened to it, but Luster wanted to plan.

"They will have the box by now, Sinopee," he'd said when he pulled me out of his chambers. "Now we have to plan how to get it back."

But instead of planning, we were walking.

I was enchanted by the underground land, but I was too scared to enjoy the beauty of the underground rivers and waterfalls.

The people were interesting though, each one so different and yet so similar. I realized that I was seeing the magic in each one. That was the one thing they held in common.

"We each are gifted, Sinopee." He led me to a vast underground waterfall. "But we can only give our hearts once. Each of us has a mate predestined. Each of us knows who our partner is. You are my partner, Sinopee. I can't function without you. And though I only have you for one day out of the year, that one day sustains me."

"Then why do we have only one day, Luster? Why?"

He turned to look at me, his purple eyes direct and serious. "Since I brought my people here, Sinopee, since I helped us to escape that place where they held us -- when I decided that I had had enough, a few joined me and we went against being held... I thought it my punishment."

"What?" I stared at him, incredulous.

"My punishment, for going against what surely must have been ordained. The Thinkers, Sinopee, they have always been. They were always there, ordering us, making us do things, hurting the order. The natural order of things, Sinopee. Maybe the gods

decreed that we were supposed to be under Thinker rule, but I went against them and showed my people a better way, a free way of living.

"I always thought that the gods finally agreed with my decision, for my people flourished, something that never happened under Thinker rule. But I could never find a mate, was punished by being alone and hunted. But then I found the waterfall, Sinopee. I found the cavern and the words to the spell, and they brought me you. And now I think that the gods were testing me, Sinopee. I think that they are testing me still. And if I can overcome this latest problem, you will be mine forever. But I must prove myself first. And when I prove myself, you and I will be joined as one forever."

"There has to be a way to keep me here, Luster," I sighed, watching the waters swirl.

I didn't believe in his gods punishing or testing him, but there had to be a reason his magic had brought me here. I didn't want to leave his side, and I just knew he was going to do something foolish to keep me here.

"I know you can't go home with me because of the Titans. They would destroy your people and all that you have built here. So the only solution is for me to stay here. I will help you in your battle, Luster. You have a Thinker on your side." Then I sighed as I realized what I was facing. "But here, I don't belong."

"*You belong!*" he almost shouted, turning to grip my shoulders. "You are mine, Sinopee. You belong here with me."

"But I will never fit in."

"You can!" he insisted.

"Lust, look around you!" I pulled away from him and pointed to the waterfall we were admiring. "Where I come from, there are no pink waterfalls, Luster. Waterfalls don't exist underground! People are not pastel colors! Where would I fit in?"

He stared at the waterfall for a moment.

Its waters were pink. It fell almost eight feet to the small river that flowed through the Citadel and disappeared again under some rocks. It was beautiful and

enchanted with its white mists and sandy bank. But still, it was a pink waterfall. An underground, pink waterfall.

"You fit in next to me," he replied. "And nothing else really matters, Sinopee. You are mine, as I am yours."

His words, the certainty in them, caused me to blink back a few tears as they touched my heart. Seeing them, he lowered his head to gently lick the salty droplets away.

That set off a reaction in my chest that rippled over my body. I wanted him.

It was easy to dispose of the dress. I tossed it aside, not caring that anyone could venture into this secluded spot. Hell, the thought of getting caught heightened my arousal. I just wanted Luster.

Groaning, he quickly doffed his boots and pants, and stood before me gloriously naked. His body seemed to shine in the bright light of the mist as I watched him step near.

"For this time, in this place where you are safe, my Thinker, I am going to fuck you so hard you will never forget your place is with me. And then I am going to love you so that you will always remember."

I reached for him, but he backed away, beckoning me with his eyes as he backed into the water itself. "Come to me."

I went.

Chapter Eleven

Lust disappeared beneath the flowing waters of the waterfall, and eagerly, I followed. As the pink water touched my skin, I let out a gasp of amazement. It was almost thick and had an oily feel to it. And it was very warm.

I giggled, trying to imagine what he was up to. I stepped through the waterfall and gasped at what I saw.

Behind the flowing pink waters, there was a smaller cavern, almost like the one in our glade. There, coated in the pink waters, Luster lay back against some pillows and furs.

"What is this stuff?" I asked, using both hands to pull my wet hair back from my face.

"Healing waters," he replied. "They keep the Citadel alive and feed the needs of the plants here. It maintains a balance."

"And this place?" I stepped forward, loving the way the odorless waters seemed to cling and bring heat with their very presence.

"This is the place where I will claim every part of you for my own."

Before I could blink, he was beside me, the waters shimmering almost purple as his skin began to take on a faint glow. He placed his hands on my shoulders and applied a gentle pressure until I found myself kneeling, facing the object of my most recent erotic fantasies.

Luster was built thick. The head of his circumcised penis was leaking pre-cum with his arousal. His ten inches pointed in an almost forty-five degree angle, jutting out from his body like the powerful weapon it was.

Gently, I wrapped my hand around the base and pulled him low enough to run across my lips. I looked up at him, wide-eyed, wanting to see his every reaction, wanting him to know how much I enjoyed servicing him.

His purple eyes beamed at me. They seemed to be lit with an inner light that transformed his masculine face into a thing of beauty. He raised his hands to his hair, to push the wet strands behind those pointed ears, and then he smiled at me.

Grinning back, I stuck out my tongue and ran it along the ridge below the head of his cock, tasting him, the slightly salty, slightly sweet taste that was Lust. His hands burrowed in my hair as he began to feed me his cock. I opened my mouth, covering my teeth with my lips, then almost inhaled his whole length.

"Gods, Sinopee!" he cried out, and his knees began to shake.

Still looking up at him, I placed my hands on the firm globes of his ass and pulled him in tighter. Breathing through my nose, I was able to take him deep in my throat for a few moments. I moved my head up and down along his shaft, encouraging his movements as I sought to please him.

But doing all of this had the desired effect on my body as well. My nipples began to grow hard and my body clenched in arousal. I could feel the warm pink waters heat the core of my being, adding to the moisture my body produced as I turned myself on by having Lust at my control.

And at my control he was, for any slight motion I made, he automatically adjusted, his eyes telling me that it was my game, for now. I winked at him, then began to swallow, caressing his cock with the strong smooth muscles of my throat.

Quickly, the lines of power shifted. Lust pulled himself from my mouth and I found myself on my back in the furs. Grinning up at him, I cupped my breasts for him, offering him a taste. His body covered me completely as he spread my legs and made himself a home between them.

His lips latched onto one nipple. He held it gently between his teeth, laving it with his tongue. Heat rushed through my chest at the small pleasure-pain. His other

fingers gently caressed the underside of my breast, gentling me, then his nimble fingers gripped my nipple and rolled it between his thumb and forefinger.

"Lust? What are you doing?" I gasped. Never had he treated my body so roughly.

I liked it.

"Taking you places, Sinopee," he growled. He ground his pelvis into mine, making sure that his hard-on skidded across my throbbing clitoris.

I arched up into his caresses, loving the feel of his body dominating mine. I ran my hands through his hair, tugging on fistfuls, forcing his head back to my nipple.

But Lust had other plans.

Pulling away, he spread my legs wider as he dropped his head between them. Inhaling deeply, he buried his face in my crotch. His hands pushed my thighs wide as he began to feast on me as if I were pure ambrosia. I threw my head back, my hands going to my own breasts, tugging and pulling at the nipples as he excited my body in ways he had never done before.

The oral incident at the boulder only heightened my feelings for him, served as foreplay for this event. His fingers came into play, running through what pink water was left on my body, then invading the hollow of my needy being. I arched up off the furs and cried out as I felt his fingers, two fingers, penetrate me.

Pulling his head up, his lips wet with the essence of me, he asked in a low husky voice, "Do you like that?"

I nodded frantically, wanting only to keep this feeling growing inside of me.

"Want more?"

Again I nodded, knowing if I opened my mouth the screams of passion would emerge.

Quickly he removed his thrusting fingers, replacing them with something considerably larger. The blunt cap of his mushroom-shaped head pressed against me and he lifted my legs around his waist while I waited for the pleasure to begin.

But he gripped my legs and pulled them higher still, until my heels rested on his shoulders. Then, as he began to sink inside, I felt his fingers tapping at my back door.

"Lust?" I began, a bit worried, but the sensations I got from that caress sent sparks flying through my system.

These new sensations, coupled with the feeling of him driving himself deep inside my core, had my senses reeling and my mouth watering. I began to pant as my hands reached for and clutched at his shoulders, digging my nails into his flesh. He growled at the pain.

"Keep going!" I screamed, never having felt this stimulated before.

Tangling my hands in his hair, I shuddered at the feel of its silky strands sliding through my fingers. I clenched it tightly in my fists and urged him on. Slowly, his finger pressed against my rosebud, then with a slight sting, it popped through the muscular ring.

I jumped in shock at the feeling, but his finger stopped moving, and he lowered his head to thrust his tongue deep into my mouth. My eyes, wide from the pain of the new entry, slowly closed and I moaned into his mouth. There were lots of interesting things going on down there now.

With his finger invading no-man's-land and his cock thrusting strongly in my cunt, I was almost ready to swoon with pleasure. And the more he moved, the better the feeling got. Soon I was thrusting up, forcing his steely rod deeper into me, then pushing back to let his finger hit nerve endings that had never been touched before.

"You love this," he purred as his tongue invaded my ear, making me arch my breasts up into the wall of muscle that made up his chest. "You want me to stop?"

"No," I whined, lost in the pleasure, hardly paying any attention to what he was saying.

"Then beg me not to stop." He punctuated his request with a deep thrust.

"Please, don't!" I gasped.

"Say my name."

"L-Lust!"

"Again!"

"Lust!"

"Again!"

"Luster!"

Hearing that explosion of sound from my throat, Lust bent over me and began to pound into my willing flesh. Harder and faster he moved his cock and his finger, working in tandem to bring me orgasmic delight. The tension in me wound tighter and tighter, and soon I knew that one more sensation would send me over.

"Come for me," he hissed. I whimpered as my body stiffened underneath his. "Come on! Come for me!"

I shuddered, and the world came to a grinding halt. I felt my body arching against his, demanding that one more move, that one final caress that would send me hurtling to the stars over the precipice of infinity.

"Fucking come!" He slammed home within me one final time, and my world exploded into a sea of red-hot fireworks and deafening explosions.

"Oh *God!*" I screamed as my body was wracked with shudders. I bucked so hard underneath him that he had to use his weight to hold me down.

Vaguely, I was aware of his shout and the feel of his cock growing larger before it too exploded in passion, but I was too far gone, lost in climactic pleasure, to pay it more attention.

Finally, the waves of release passed and I collapsed under him, the soft furs beneath and his warm hardness above.

"I love you," he whispered, so tenderly that tears filled my eyes. "And I will return to you."

I closed my eyes, wrapped my arms around his sweating, heaving body, and prayed.

Chapter Twelve

Tears ran silently down my cheeks as I watched Luster depart. He did not look back as he made his way to the roots of a large tree.

Glimmer suddenly appeared at his side. Solemn, she placed her hand beside his. "The tree says that all is clear."

I didn't react. Oh, in normal circumstances, I would have had a million questions for that one comment. But I only saw Luster, my man, leaving to travel into what could very well be his death.

"Listen to Glow," Luster said to me. He closed his eyes and his whole person began to glow. The tree shimmered and shook, then suddenly vanished as if it had never been.

He said that he had displaced it when I asked before. But seeing and hearing about something were two different things. Still, my sadness took precedence over any burning questions that I could ask. My man was still leaving, to save me, to save us both. And there wasn't a damn thing I could do about it.

"My heart beats for you," he said. Then he was gone.

I tried to hold the confident face, the face of the woman watching her warrior go off into battle, the face of the maiden watching her knight battle a dragon. But as soon as he disappeared from view, the smile faded.

My head dropped, my shoulders drooped, and I was just another woman watching her man go away.

I sniffled, trying to hold back the torrent of tears that threatened to break free at any second, but the pressure was too much.

With my sobs echoing through the cavern, I raced toward the area Luster called home, the place where he brought me for safety. Once there, I could give free rein to my tears and cry out all of my grief in privacy.

My bare feet raced over the soft green grass. Ignoring the shocked faces of the others, I ran to his quarters and threw myself down upon his bed. Big mistake.

Lying across his bed, I could smell his special scent. In the warmth of his blankets, I could feel him. If I wrapped them around me it almost felt as if he were holding me once again. My body shuddered and my eyes burned with my tears. My heart had broken and nothing would repair the pieces until he was safe in my arms again.

I never realized when the crying stopped and the ache in my center began.

All I could think about was Luster. His smile, his lavender eyes, his long flowing hair, his body. Every aspect of his being was being broken down in my mind and the pictures whirled around in my head.

I loved the way he touched me, the way my body responded to his touch. I shuddered in memory of our times in the enchanted pool, the water flowing over our bodies, the heat of his skin.

My whimpering became moans as I pictured what he would say to me if he were here right now.

No, Luster would not say anything. He would take me in his arms and he would ravish the anguish right out of my body. 'Life is for the living,' he told me more than once, and as I thought of him, my body came alive.

I remembered his fevered caresses, the naughty things he would whisper to me, and I began to tingle.

I ran my hand over my breast and pressed it against the beating in my chest, then gasped that the simple caress would cause so much pleasure when my heart was rent into a thousand pieces.

If I closed my eyes, surrounded by his scent as I was, I could imagine that it was his hand caressing me. A low moan escaped my throat. Lust would love to see me like this. It would make his purple eyes glimmer and his body harden in an instant.

Soon, those touches weren't enough. There was a fire in my blood and it had to be quenched. Even the simple gown I wore was irritating to my skin. I had to have it off! I had to know the feeling of the fur, the Luster-scented fur, caressing my bare skin.

The gown was gone in a flash and I settled back, pushing my shoulders into the soft warm fur, rolling my head back and forth, luxuriating in these new hedonistic tendencies. Hissing in pleasure, I rolled over, dragging the fur over my back and cocooning myself in the essence of Lust.

My hands went from rubbing my breast to the now awakened part of me that wept for release. Slowly, I spread my thighs, letting my fingers whisper down until I felt the soft hair of my pubic mound.

Should I do this? Could I do this?

Then as my body clenched in remembered delight, I decided that I could. Slowly, I let my fingers explore, brushing lightly over my clitoris, to the blood-engorged lips of my sex. I shuddered at the feeling.

Instantly I knew what to do to please myself, knew what touch my body needed. No one but Lust had ever played my body like this, and as I thought of him, I knew which caresses would give me the most pleasure, what would remind me of his possession.

Gently, I outlined the opening to my body, shuddering as fire followed in the wake of my caresses. My lungs fought to bring air to my body. The ragged sound of my breathing, inside the muted world of the fur cocoon, was another turn-on.

As I lay on my stomach, one hand locked between my legs, the other pulling at my nipples, I felt that something was missing.

Deciding that I needed more stimulation, I ran the pad of one finger around my hooded clit, pulling back its protective cover to touch the raw essence of me.

I nearly screamed at the sensation flooding through my body. I bit my lip and began to gently circle, stimulating myself, thoughts of what Lust's mouth did to this sensitive part of my body egging me on.

I began to grind into the fur, seeking more stimulation; something was still missing!

I pulled my hand from my breast, stretched it out under Lust's pillow, and it struck something hard and round. Pulling it out, I discovered that it was a sheathed dagger with a large, etched cylinder for a hilt. I smiled as I realized what it reminded me of.

With a large round smooth tip and a thick base, it looked like a cock!

Inspiration struck. I again closed my eyes and wondered if I should do this thing?

Then as my body gave one powerful lurch, the decision was made for me. Trembling in fear and longing, I lowered the hilt between my thighs. I rolled the smooth round tip against my clit, and whimpered at its icy coolness, contrasted with my blazing heat.

But soon it warmed up, took in the temperature of my body as my womanhood bathed it in my hot juices. Harder I pressed it against me, whimpering as the feelings that flew through me heightened in intensity.

Finally, with one whimpering sigh, I thrust the hilt home.

"Oh God!" I cried out as this replacement cock filled me.

It was not as thick or wide as Lust, but it struck a spot deep within that set my body trembling uncontrollably.

Again and again I ran it over this spot, heedless of the noise I was making or how my body bathed the hilt in its slick moisture. All I knew was that, short of having Lust deep within me, this was the best feeling I had ever experienced.

Lying there, I thrust my new toy deeply into me, stroking that spot, mashing my clit with the bones of my wrist.

Faster and faster I had to move! This was primal. Faster than anything Lust and I shared, different, but so damn erotic that I closed my eyes and let my fantasies run wild.

There was Lust, between my thighs, his tongue locked on my clit, drinking my juices as if they would give him life. Luster, striding naked and powerful in my direction, grinning as his penis thrust outward. Luster, holding his cock steady as he beckoned to me, calling me over to him so that he could bury his hardness within my softness.

His finger in my...

I never completed the thought.

I screamed as my body exploded around the hilt, clenching at it, setting off more explosions as its hardness caressed the spot over and over during my climax. My body shuddered as my thoughts swirled, mixing fantasy with reality. My body convulsed, sending pleasure shooting through my veins. I closed my eyes and savored each orgasmic clench.

I groaned. Suddenly I was too sensitive to touch, and I withdrew the hilt to give my body a chance to rest. My breath still heaving, I brought the hilt to my lips for a quick kiss, before I let my new toy lie beside me.

My body replete and, strangely, my tension eased, I drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Thirteen

"They have him!"

"What?"

I sat up in the warm furs that cradled me, Lust's dagger still in my hand, and stared at Glimmer.

"I said they have Luster! Are you happy now? They have Luster! Get up, you fucking bitch! They have our leader!"

I didn't know if I was stunned more by Glimmer's harsh words or the news that she brought.

Luster, my Luster, was caught!

"Where?" I stammered. I tried to unwind myself from the covers and rise to my feet. "Who has him?"

"The Titans! Who do you think? They have what they want. The resistance is dead without him."

"How do you know?"

"The trees! The trees told me. I told Glow and he said to get you, though I don't know why. Powerless, magicless waste of space that you are!"

I ignored her and reached for my discarded gown. I had to get to Glow and find out what was going on.

Fear seemed to freeze my heart in my throat as I haphazardly pulled the gown over my head and raced to the door. I absently noticed that Glimmer followed.

As did the eyes of all the rebels gathered there, once I exited the tent. I could feel their burning gazes, the anger and uncertainty they tossed in my direction. It made my feet move faster. By the time I made it to the tight knot of warriors, I was nearly

running. I knew their anger was directed at me, and my guilt was making their mistrust harder to bear.

"Glow!" I all but screamed as I reached the gathering, which appeared to be a war council. "What is going on?"

"They found the box, Sinopee. They knew that he would come for it. They set a trap."

"What can I do?"

My heart was pounding, but I pushed back the urge to scream and rant like a madwoman. Luster needed me, needed a plan, and I wanted to help in any way that I could.

"Why is the box so important, Sinopee?"

I realized that Luster had kept that aspect of our relationship a secret. But it was time for the secrets to end. They had to know what was going on! They were risking their resistance for him, for us, and had a right to know.

"Without it, I will die."

"What a shame," Glimmer snarled, shooting daggers at me with her eyes.

"And without me, Luster will die. We are bound."

Glow nodded once, then turned his attention to the gathered warriors.

"What can I do to help?" I asked, my heart, once dead, now pounding in my chest.

"You can go and wait."

I blinked at Glow's words. What did he mean, wait? "I want to help!" I protested. "Luster is my man, and I want to save him!"

"What can you do, Sinopee?" Glow stated this kindly, but the words still burned. "You have no magical abilities, you can't track, you are not a hunts-woman. You have no skills that could help save Luster, and having you along will slow us down."

"Yeah." Glimmer snorted in my direction, tossing the fringes of her blue hair. "You would only get in the way."

"I can think!" I cried out, desperate to help. "You need me!"

"You can think here," Glow stated with finality.

Glimmer snickered, damn her blue hair!

"As will you, Glimmer," Glow added.

"What?" She turned surprised eyes to Glow, too stunned to do anything but stare at him.

"You will get in the way, Glimmer. You are to stay here and... guard."

"But I talk to the trees! The plants hear me! I can be of help."

"Glimmer," Glow sighed with a long-suffering look. "You are too young and full of yourself. You need to learn control. Maybe Sinopee can teach that to you while we go and get Luster. But for the hours that she has left in our world, you will be with Sinopee."

That said, Glow motioned to his chosen men, and they began to prepare for battle.

"But I can help!" Glimmer wailed as she watched the warriors and their departing backs.

Saying nothing, I turned and made my way back to Luster's room. I had plans of my own, and I needed a moment to organize my thoughts for my attack.

"This is all your fault!"

Glimmer's words followed me down the hall, but I ignored her. I had more important things to think about.

"I am talking to you!"

I felt her hand around my arm and reacted without thinking.

I gripped her thumb and yanked it backwards, toward her wrist. While she gasped in unexpected pain, I drove my elbow back into her stomach, knocking the air from her lungs, then using her weak grip on my arms, I slammed her into the wall.

"Don't fuck with me, bitch," I snarled, reaching out to grab a handful of her hair to pull her face to mine. She was still gasping, trying to get air into her oxygen depleted lungs, eyes wide with shock. "I have to go and get my man."

Snorting in disgust, I released her hair and gave her a little shove, just to drive my point home. Then, calmly, I turned and made my way back to Luster's room.

"What do I know?" I asked myself, pacing in silence. "What do I need?"

The Titans would be easy to find, maybe. All I had to do was let myself get caught. But once there, what to do?

I stopped pacing and sat on the bed.

"Think, Sinopee!" I berated myself.

First I had to take my problems one at a time. That way, I would not get confused and screw up too badly. One at a time and very scientific.

Identify the problems. Easy enough, I thought. The Titans, who for some unknown reason wanted to wipe these people out of existence, had just managed to catch the rebel leader.

Problem: How to rescue him without loss of life -- mine or anyone else's.

Problem: How to get the letterbox back. Fuck finding a way to keep me here! If I could get the box back and we could have another year's long wait, I would be content. I just didn't want him to die.

Solutions: None immediately apparent.

Sighing, I again tried to get my mind to work, to get over the shock of not having Luster here. The only thing I could think of was to allow myself to be caught. Once captured, I would figure something out. The most important thing was to go to Lust.

Decision made, I leapt to my feet and began to search his room. He had to have footwear here somewhere. That and I needed a weapon, other than that dagger. That dagger was special. I had no magic to defend myself, so I had to depend on good old reliable steel.

As I was rummaging through his chests, I heard footsteps behind me. I had no idea how long I had been thinking and searching, but it had to have been a long time. When I tried to stand upright, my back ached and my muscles pulled.

Turning, I was stunned to see Glimmer there, tears rolling down her cheeks.

"What do you want?" I asked, at my coldest.

“To go with you. To help you. I have to help the man I love, even if it means teaming up with you.”

Chapter Fourteen

Stealthily, we made our way to the hidden exit of the Citadel.

When earlier I had shown my shock that we could find a way to leave, since Glimmer couldn't move trees with magic and I had none, she laughed at me.

"We all can't move trees, Sinopee. In fact, Luster is one of the few who can. So we all need an alternative route to get in and out when our leader is not with us."

Smart, I thought. But then I never thought that these people, these rebels, were a stupid lot. They were just ignorant about some things, like the positive use of science and analytical thinking.

Glimmer motioned for me to follow, and I brought my mind back to more important matters. Like sneaking past the guards.

They were rebels to the last one, but Glow, Luster's second-in-command, had given the order that we stay inside. The guards would probably do everything short of killing us to make sure we stayed inside.

Glimmer led me to the exit, touching roots that we passed along the way. I knew that she was gleaning information from them. But still her earlier words bothered me. She was in love with... Luster?

No. She didn't say Luster, but the man she loved.

I was puzzling over this when I felt a tap on my shoulder.

"We have to move if we are going to make it past the guard," Glimmer said. "Privacy break."

I nodded in understanding and we both scurried up a narrow path that led to the roots of a large tree.

"If you had any powers, you could be of some help. But since you don't, you had better start to climb."

I said nothing, but sighed deeply, then began to look for handholds in the roots.

Climbing wasn't easy, and Glimmer seemed to almost walk through the roots, knowing where to place her hand or foot next. But slowly, I managed to make the muscles of my arms strain and pull me upward until I felt a gap where the stone wall should be.

"This is it," Glimmer whispered as she disappeared into the hole. "Come on!"

Saying nothing, I forced my way through the crevasse, reminded sickly of the abyss I was sure to plummet through if we didn't retrieve those letters, and soon.

It took mere seconds to pull myself through the damp, warm place, and soon the heat of the waning sun caressed my face.

"How much time do I have left?" I wondered out loud as I stared at the sky, watching the deepening blues and purples as the sun began its descent.

"About six hours, and then you go back where you come from."

Glimmer didn't know about the restrictions or the letters, or had paid no attention to what I had told Glow. Or just didn't believe me. I bet she thought I sent Luster out on a feminine whim.

Again, I was silent as we began our journey through the forest.

"Where are the Titans?" I asked. "What do they look like?"

"No one knows," she said, sidestepping over a few fallen branches and piles of leaves.

"Then how can we find them?" I realized that as we walked, we were getting closer and closer to the area where the tree line ended.

"I'll think of something," Glimmer pushed aside a young leafy branch from a low-hanging tree.

"What?" I questioned, feeling like an idiot, yet still following her.

I narrowed my eyes and glared at her as the branch swung back, striking me a stinging blow to the chest. "*Oof!*" That would leave a welt.

"You have to watch what you are doing," she sniffed at me as she moved on. "And stop making so much noise. I want to surprise them and not have them surprise us."

"I'll 'noise' her," I mumbled, rubbing my chest. "Right on top of her blue head!"

For a short time, we marched onward, Glimmer flinging bits of earth at me and me doing my best to dodge them while resisting the urge to kill her.

By her actions, I knew that she had to want Luster. Too bad! He was mine, and I was not going to give him up to a spoiled little girl. But my animosity made the trip easier. I used my anger toward her to keep moving through the strange and foreign land that my home had once resembled.

Finally, we reached the sandy hillside where Luster, Glow, and I had come under attack from the Titans. The falling sun cast shadows across the land. All was quiet, and that worried me.

"Where are the animal sounds?" I whispered. I had become so used to the sounds of birds and other small animals that I instantly noticed their silence.

"Hush!" she hissed.

"But..."

"They are near."

Deciding it was prudent to listen to her, for now, I held my voice and waited.

We didn't have to wait long.

There was a gravelly sound, like metal on stone, and then deep voices. She pointed to the right, toward open land.

I gasped, trying to make sense of what my eyes were seeing. This couldn't be right!

I half rose to my feet, stopping only when Glimmer's hand latched onto my arm.

"This can't be right!" I whispered. "No!"

But the truth was right before my eyes. I knew what the Titans were.

Chapter Fifteen

"This is not right!" I breathed. "This is impossible!"

The Titans! They were wearing...

"Get out there!"

Before I could gather my wits, Glimmer shoved me out into the open.

Stunned, I froze while the two men, dressed in tunics, the familiar, male style of tunic, turned in my direction.

Like a specimen caught in the high beam light of a microscope, I froze. The two men turned to me and one of them smiled.

"Get her!" one shouted, and my feet finally decided to take action.

I turned away from the two and looked over my shoulder. Glimmer, that traitor, was behind me, and the Titans were blocking the only way out.

Almost screaming with frustration, I tried to dart past them. Remembering some old forgotten footage of some game played with a pig-skinned ball, I rushed the men, hoping to force a break in their dual barrier.

It worked. For a minute, anyway. Then they both dove at me, driving me to the hard unforgiving ground.

"Get off!" I bellowed, but my answer was a sharp prick in the neck, and then the world began to swirl in a mass of pretty colors.

"Why?" I whispered. The edges of my vision began to darken and my throat refused to work.

But I didn't know if I was asking Glimmer why she had done it, why the men were dressed in clothes from my world, or why my life had to be so damned hard.

* * *

I woke with my hands tied above me and a dull ache in my head.

No, I was awakened. Voices had pulled me back from the black void, and now my mind struggled to sort out what was being said.

"I brought her, as promised," Glimmer was saying. "Now release my man!"

"We did have a deal," a man said. "So I guess it would be fair of me to actually own up to what I said." Another male voice chuckled, and the first one went on. "Okay, your man may go free, but it doesn't matter. It's only a matter of time before we have all of you... abominations back where you belong."

I had no idea how long I had been out, but it seemed that someone else had been doing a bit of thinking while I had been trying to hatch a plan of my own. Glimmer, blue hair and all, was proving to be more cunning than any Thinker I had ever heard of.

I slammed my eyes shut as I heard footsteps approaching me.

"Where are they?" Glimmer sounded nervous. Good to be nervous when you made plans with the devil.

"Let them go!" I heard someone call. "Because of this one, we will have the whole lot soon enough!"

Then I heard a voice that I'd thought I would never hear again.

"Glimmer!" he called, then I heard the sound of rushed footsteps. "What did you do?"

"I had to do it!" I heard her say. "The trees told me what happened, how you were ambushed. Then they told me of the ultimatum. Her for you! What else could I do? Without you, the resistance is at an end!"

"But at what cost, Glimmer! What is the cost?"

"I had to!" she cried desperately. "For our *future*, for our *child*."

That brought my eyes open. Glimmer was pregnant?

"Oh, I see you are awake," a voice said, and I knew that I had given away my opportunity to gather more information. "Did the happy reunion wake you? We must teach them to be silent."

I glared at the man in the tunic as he continued to examine me.

"What kind of creature are you? You don't look like the others. You look... strange."

Well, you ain't no picnic yourself, I thought. But I only snorted and turned my head so that I could see the two people lost in each other.

Glow wore a shocked expression on his face. He stared at Glimmer, who had tears running down her blue-tinted cheeks. So that was who Glimmer was in love with, and apparently the feelings were returned.

A baby, I thought. *Was there any justice in the world when a blue-haired idiot like Glimmer got to be reunited with her love and have a baby?* Probably not. Suddenly, the gods testing Luster was not such a farfetched idea after all.

"Jealous?" the guard asked, and I had to turn again to look at his ugly face. "No matter, you will soon be reunited with that freak of yours. We have been waiting a long time for this."

"Sinopee," Glow said, his voice raspy. "We will succeed." He had Glimmer under one arm, placing her body behind his as he stared at me, helplessness in his eyes.

"I had to!" Glimmer tried to explain, her body shaking with sobs that she tried to hold in. "I had to! We are going to have a baby! I just had to save him!"

I understood, but I was still pissed. I looked at her and then at Glow, then made a gesture I was extremely proud of.

I wiggled my wrists until I could get my right hand forward, and I shot her the bird. Immature, I know, but my head was aching, my arms were going numb, and I was *trapped with no way of saving my man!*

All things considered, I was pretty eloquent.

Glow snickered and Glimmer gasped, but then Glow turned and pulled her out of the clearing. Almost instantly, it seemed that they disappeared into the growing shadows.

And the shadows were, indeed, growing. The sun had set while I was out and torches were now lighting the area. The day, and my time, were almost up.

Chapter Sixteen

They carried me over bare ground and soft grass. It seemed like hours they carried me, but never complained about the distance or the journey. As they trudged along, I sat in a cage, my hands tied above me, as I swung in rhythm to their walking.

It was a good time to think.

Part one of my original plan was in effect. Now I had to quickly come up with part two.

The sound of raised voices knocked me out of my reverie. I sat straighter, paying attention now, as I was taken to a huge building hidden in some trees.

Camouflage! That was how the Titans survived, but it was also how the rebels had outsmarted them for years. As we drew closer, I saw several more men and women, all dressed in tunics and carrying, of all things, lab equipment.

One woman held a radiation guide and another had a doctor's kit. Several carried small weapons strapped to their belts, the source of the Titan lightning. They were using laser guns, the very same guns that had been outlawed several years ago.

It seemed that I was not the first of my world to invade this paradise! Like the serpents, they despoiled paradise and it seemed they were determined to make a mark here.

"Very interesting," said a man in front of me, drawing my attention. "She is not like the others. The board will be intrigued."

The board? What the hell was going on?

Before I could formulate a response, I was carried into a large building and my cage placed beside a large examining table. More people swarmed into the room and I found myself pulled from my cage, hands still bound, and placed on the table.

I tried to struggle free, but before I could even move, hands strapped both legs down to the table, and my arms above my head. I gasped as fingers peeled my eyelids back and a bright light shone in.

"Hey!" I protested, but the person spoke out loud to the room at large.

"Brown eyes. This is a variant. Must be a genetic throw back."

"Throw back? *Ouch!*" A syringe plunged into my arm, drawing blood.

"No phosphorescence in the skin. Plain brown. Possibly lacking in the mutated traits and heightened abilities?"

"Are you sure that this is his mate?" This voice boomed from behind me. I twisted to get a good look, but I could only move a few inches. I saw the hem of another tunic. The voice spoke with authority.

"The other would not lie. She wanted her mate back too badly. You know that the control alteration malfunctioned. Instead of making them easier to control, it made them more aggressive. The only good thing about that little mistake is that we can use it against them if we can catch one of a matched pair."

"What is going on?" I finally managed. What were they talking about? Mutations and alterations? Who were these people?

"I suppose we should show the male that we have his mate. That may make him speak up about where he found the box and the words for the voice command."

Voice command?

I struggled to look around, to see who these people were, but I had no luck. All my wiggling did was earn me extra-tight restraints and more attention.

"Run the DNA tests," the large voice mused. "That will show us where we stand. If this creature is a throw back, we may have a weapon against the fugitives."

Fugitives?

"Ah, good! Bring him over."

Him? Then I felt his presence. They were bringing me my Lust!

"Luster!" I gasped, sensing his presence ever stronger as he drew closer. They turned the table, and then I could see him. My Luster.

He was strapped to a large, square frame on wheels, hanging from his arms, his hands encased in some material, his ankles lashed to the sides. He was completely naked and hung limply, but his eyes, when he raised his head, were full of defiance and anger.

"Now, Luster, will you cooperate? We have your mate and you know that we take no pity on those who defy us."

"She is not my mate," he said, his eyes warning me before he dropped his head again.

At first my stomach plunged into my feet as I took in his words, then my mind began to work. Of course he would deny me. If he reacted in any way, it would prove that I was his mate and they would have power over us both.

"Why do I not believe that?" the voice said.

"Maybe because not only do you lack magic," Luster sneered, "you lack eyesight as well. I have no mate. You knew that when you had my people imprisoned. The same holds true this day."

"Luster," laughed the man. "You were always the clever one, more Thinker than the rest. But I believe science will prevail."

"Damn your science!" he snarled.

"Very good, Luster. Damn us all. But I know something that you do not. When in the presence of your true mate, you will have an incredible urge to bond. All I have to do is leave you in the room and your body will tell me the truth."

Damn! That was why Glow had been sporting a very good hard-on when he'd returned from the shadows after warning Glimmer! His body hadn't been reacting to the erotic things that Lust and I were doing. He had been in contact with his mate.

As I stared wordlessly at Lust, I knew we were in deep trouble. There was no way to keep his body from reacting.

"Put them in the cage."

"No!" I screamed as I was wheeled into another room. I could hear the wheels of Luster's frame following.

One of the men released the bindings on my ankles, then the ones holding my wrists above my head. I heard Luster grunt and knew that they had let him off the platform. Then I heard the rapid retreat of footsteps and the closing of a door. We were alone, yet being observed.

I raised my head off the table to stare at this new cage. Three solid walls and one made of glass. I would bet my last hour here that it was a one-way mirror. Science at its observant best.

"What are we going to do?" I whimpered, turning to face my man.

But it was too late. He knelt on the floor, where they had left him, his cock rising and throbbing with his every breath.

"Give them a fucking show," he growled.

I gasped and shook my head, even as my body reacted to the sight of his.

"They want to observe us, Sinopee. This is what your science does. So we are going to show the sexless band of love-starved bastards just what they are missing. Come to me!"

I shook my head and tried to back away.

"Come to me!"

I whimpered, feeling my body clench and start to grow wet. The idea of being observed was starting to turn me on.

Why shouldn't we give them a show? Soon we would both be dead, so why should I deny myself this last chance to have Lust?

"Come to me!"

I took my first step toward him.

Chapter Seventeen

As I drew close, Lust raised his hands up and wrapped them around my waist, burying his face against my stomach. I wrapped my bound hands around his head, tangling my fingers in his hair, holding him close to me. His breath wafted against the naked skin of my stomach.

Silently, he rose to his feet, keeping my arms locked around his neck as he easily lifted my weight. He carried me as if I weighed less than a moment, less than a memory, over to the table that I had been strapped to.

As he placed me on my back, he shot one look at that glass window, knowing their eyes were on us. Grasping my hands, he pulled my arms from around his neck, but held them over my head. Silently he looked into my eyes, his glance saying more than mere words ever could. Lowering his head, he closed those magnificent lavender eyes as his lips brushed against mine. There was tenderness in his touch, tenderness and love.

I arched my body up against his automatically. It was like my body knew where it belonged. Sighing deeply, he pressed me against the table while using his thigh to spread my legs. Once settled on his knees between my thighs, he held my hands down with one hand while the other slowly began to explore my body.

I knew that they were watching, and I felt a blush turn my face red, but the feel of his hand caressing my cheek, my neck, and trailing across my breasts made me disregard them as unimportant. I raised my knees, exposing my woman's center to his touch, and he smiled at me.

We both knew that it was a matter of trust for me to open myself for him while others were watching, but as his nearness increased my arousal, I found that I could deny him nothing. I made a mewling sound as his fingers trailed across my stomach,

gently circling my navel before stopping just at the top of my mound. He looked over his shoulder, glared at the glass, then turned the fierce expression to me.

He rose up as his hands spread my thighs wider. He looked down and leered. I knew the pearly drops of my essence already coated my flesh, and I only needed his touch to start that trip to the stars.

His fingers, hard and blunt, invaded me, ran across my swollen lips, spread my moisture around. I cried out -- I couldn't hold the sound in -- and arched into him.

Taking this opportunity to reposition me, Lust pulled both of my legs high on his thighs, then his hands gripped my waist and pulled me into an upright position. My bound hands went over his head and around his neck as I tried to gain my balance. This new position placed his swollen cock right at the entrance to my womanhood. But instead of plunging home, he again lowered his face to mine.

"I love you," I whispered, my eyes staring intently into his.

"I know, lover," he whispered, placing gentle kisses on my eyelids, the tip of my nose, my chin.

Warmth swept over my body that had little to do with arousal or embarrassment. Luster was showing me how much he loved me, showing them, defying them, and taunting them with what they would never have.

I tightened my grip on him as he lowered his head to mine. His tongue gently lapped at my lips, tracing the outline before running along the crease. Automatically, I opened, inviting him inside, wanting to taste him as he was tasting me. One of his hands reached up to cup my cheek as he gently invaded my mouth, running his tongue along my teeth and the roof of my mouth, gently exploring what I so eagerly offered.

I felt his moan more than heard it, and the sound reverberated through my body. I tightened my legs around his waist. I urged him closer, flattening my breasts against his chest, feeling his hardness press against my softness.

His skin was hot and moist. I realized that passion was slowly taking over, that soon he would join with me, complete me, make me whole again.

"Sinopee," he breathed, "hold on."

The suddenly, he switched positions, sitting on the table and having me ride his waist. I felt empowered as I looked down and saw his hardness pressed against my stomach, throbbing. Yet we continued to kiss.

He broke away and buried his face in my neck, whispering, "Sinopee, I love you."

The feel of his hot breath across my neck caused me to shudder and moan.

This was Luster touching me, Luster loving me. I relished every moment even as I damned those who were watching, safe from all emotions, behind the glass.

"Are you ready?" he asked as the fingers of his right hand trailed down my stomach to cup my femininity.

I gasped and knew that he had to feel how wet I had become. His body was an erotic delight for me, no matter what, no matter where.

"Yes," I breathed, staring dazedly at him. I knew he was ready -- I could feel it in his rock-hard cock, the head that wet me with its free flow of pre-cum. "Please, now."

With an incredible show of strength, Lust lifted me up, positioned me over his throbbing member, and slowly let me slide down. I gasped, wrapping my arms tighter around his neck, as I buried my head in his damp hair, as I accepted Lust into my body.

He felt like hot hard steel wrapped in a velvety cover. I slid to his base. Once I was fully seated on him, we both let out a small groan of pleasure. He leaned his forehead under my chin as his arms tightened around my waist, gently lifting and lowering me on his body.

"Harder, Lust!" I cried out, impatient with his slow motions. Did he know how much I needed him?

In my mind, I could picture those behind the glass, watching, panting, drooling. And it made my arousal reach a new plateau. I had what they wanted, what they could never have! It made me feel powerful.

Tightening my legs around his waist, I began to grind from side to side, mashing him deep, massaging my clit on the hard base of his cock and his pubic hair.

"Oh, grind it, lover," he purred as he leaned back and arched into my movements, giving me an upward thrust to complement my side-to-side action.

I threw back my head, my moan filling the room. I began to ride him with the aid of his hands moving me faster up and down his pole. Then his hands slipped down to knead my ass and urge me to grind faster.

Soon the sound of our wet bodies sliding against one another filled the room. The raw scent of sex suffused our senses, and I was becoming lightheaded as lightning began to explode behind my eyes. Faster and faster I moved, my moans and gasps supplying the background for this loving.

Like a machine, Lust pistoned faster and faster, never tiring, always striking that special spot deep within my walls. He began to get louder, his movements jerkier as he drew close to completion. His panting increased and suddenly, he threw back his head, his eyes wild, his face a mask of twisted, agonized pleasure.

I screamed as the tension deep inside me broke. I felt him swell even larger, then bellow out as he erupted deep within me.

"Sinopee!" he screamed, his hair flowing wildly around him.

My inner muscles milked him, pulling the energy out of him while my mind took flight from my body. This was why I was created. It was for this purpose that I was here. Luster was mine. My man. And no one would ever take him away from me.

I sobbed out my pleasure as Lust's arms tightened around me, prevented me from falling back bonelessly.

"Are you okay?" he asked, his voice a whisper in my ear.

"Fine," I managed to gasp. "God, I love you."

I leaned forward and took his lips in a demanding kiss, plunging my tongue deep into the cavern of his mouth, savoring the flavor of him. From him, I drew my strength. He was my light, my partner, my equal in this strange world, and in my own. I needed him as much as he needed me.

Then, glancing over his shoulder, I once again saw the glass window, and knew that there had been intruders to our love.

Anger rose in me and began to take away my weakness. This anger had to have a release. As I stared at the glass window, the spy window, the anger took over.

Chapter Eighteen

"Learn something, you bastards?" I screamed, pulling myself off Lust's body. "Maybe you should take notes!"

There was silence behind the window, but I swore I could hear the confused murmuring of the scientists behind the glass. Almost sobbing in frustration, I turned back to Lust, who took my still-bound hands into his.

"This is the way of the Thinkers," he sighed almost sadly. "Next they will poke and prod and steal blood and take away what is left of our privacy for the sake of... science."

In that moment I could only hate what my people had done, what I was, what my people were doing here.

"Do not!" he insisted as he easily read the look on my face. "This is not your fault. None of this is your fault."

I sniffed and nodded my head, but inside, I knew that I was a part of the problem. Everyone like me, a Thinker, was part of the problem.

In one day, I had started as a Plain Jane in a dead world and had been transmuted into a thing of erotic beauty. Then I was once again a Plain Jane, only as good as her mind. But how could that help when it was the mind, the Thinkers, who had caused so much pain in the first place?

"How?" I asked, forcing my eyes up to meet his. "How did this happen?"

"The Thinkers have always been, Sinopee. From the moment I awakened as a child, the life I knew was behind these glass walls."

"Luster..." My heart was breaking for him.

"Shhh, Sinopee mine." He cradled me against his chest. My legs naturally went around his waist and I settled myself against him, knowing that the people outside

were probably still watching. "I watched them poison our bodies and our minds. I watched them break up mated couples to test a theory, and watched as those couples withered and died away. I watched friends, good friends, disappear without a trace, only for the Thinkers to come back and take more of us.

"Then one day, I got tired of watching. When the head Thinker took me to take more blood, I managed to hit him over the head. I have no idea where the knowledge came from, but I just knew what to do. I knocked him out and I freed the others. We all have an affinity for nature, all of our magic is based on nature, and we fled to the woods."

"You were lucky."

"The gods smiled down upon us," he agreed. "And the Thinkers have been chasing us ever since. They were chasing us the day I stumbled onto the magic mirror under the waterfall and read the words that brought you to me."

He hugged me tighter as he said this. I hugged him back, knowing that that day was the most important day of my life.

"And if I had not been sitting in front of that mirror going over my parents'..." I stiffened as a thought occurred to me. "The mirror! You spoke the words on the mirror."

"This I have said many a time," he said, a confused expression on his face.

"It has to be a link!" I hissed, and bent low to his ear, conscious that they might be listening to our conversation.

"What?"

"The man who caught me! He said something about the voice activation device. There has to be a link."

Before I could say more, the door was flung open and several men I could classify as guards entered the room.

"Miss, please come with us," one of them said, trying to keep his eyes off my bare body. Like he hadn't already gotten an eyeful!

"What do you want?" I hissed. Luster tensed beneath me.

"Please, come with us."

"No!"

They raised their guns.

In a flash, Lust threw me off of him, rolling us on the table until I was completely covered by his body. Then, before my amazed eyes, he launched himself at the three guards, taking them by surprise and knocking two off their feet.

"Run!" he roared at me as he leapt to his feet to take out the third.

The other two were slow to rise, unused to any physical activity, so it was easy for me to slip by them. But the third man pulled his gun and prepared to fire.

"No!" I screamed.

His eyes flashed toward me, giving Luster a split second to react. Diving low, he grabbed the guard by his knees, bringing him down with a thump. Before the dazed guard could move, Luster's fist plowed into his face, knocking him out cold.

The other two were rising to their feet when Luster scooped up the defeated guard's laser and pointed it in their direction.

"Do not move." His cold words sent shivers down my spine.

"He can't operate it," one man said to the other.

"But I am betting I can," I sneered. I stepped to Luster's side and placed my hand over his.

The two guards froze in their tracks.

"I am betting that it takes a certain DNA sequence to operate this gun, gentlemen," I said. "And I am also betting that I have the sequence."

There was silence.

Chuckling, Luster relinquished the gun without argument.

"We will be leaving now," I said as he began to back toward the door. "And I can honestly say that I haven't enjoyed this visit, though there have been high points."

"Time to go!" Luster backed out of the cage and slammed the door shut.

Smiling, I let out a small cry of joy and jumped to place a kiss on his cheek.

"Why wouldn't the weapon work?" He was finally showing some signs of curiosity. Maybe he was starting to believe that magic wasn't the whole of the universe. He reached out and snapped open the bindings holding my wrists and I flexed them, glad to be free.

"DNA," I said as we crept from the room.

I knew we had taken a chance, and that the entire outer room could be filled with scientists equipped with lasers and data gathering equipment, but our luck was holding. The room was vacant.

If they had run the DNA tests on my blood, I figured there was a lab full of confused long-tunics right now.

"DNA?"

"It's like..." How did you explain DNA to a person who believed that all things come from magic?

But as I tossed ideas back and forth in my head, Luster led me through the room, searching in corners and around doorways, taking us to the exit.

"Well?" He pushed me into a side room that was filled with tunics. Supply room, I guessed. He raised his eyebrow at me as he tossed me a tunic.

As much as I loved the sight of his naked body glimmering in the artificial light of the rooms, it probably wasn't a good idea to try and escape butt naked. Besides, his skin was beginning to shine and glow. As I said before, he was well named.

"Remember you said that each of us had different gifts, that it made us unique?"

"Yes."

I sighed in disappointment as the tunic covered his body. But then I got serious. We had to move if what I believed was true. "Well, DNA is what gives us those differences. It is like a signature that tells all about us."

He looked at me and blinked his eyes twice. "The thing that gives Glow the power to hide in the shadows or Glimmer the ability to talk to the trees, or me the power to move things?"

He had it!

"Yes! That is it!"

"Then your DNA is not like mine."

"Not like anybody's!"

"But your DNA allows you to fire the weapon?"

"Yes."

"Because you are one of them?"

Chapter Nineteen

I froze at his statement. Now how did I explain this to him?

"I am not one of them, Luster. I don't even know who they are. But they are like the people from my world."

"How is this possible?"

"I don't know!" I sighed in frustration as I paced in the small supply room.

"How did they come here? Are there more magic mirrors?"

"I don't know!"

Luster growled in frustration, then walked over to me. He jerked me into his arms and held me tight. "We have to find out."

"I know," I said. I felt like crying. I knew that we only had a few hours left, maybe less than that, and the prediction in the letters would come true.

"We have to get to the magic mirror."

"Yes," I agreed, resting my head on his strong chest. "But we have to get out of here."

Luster let me go and walked over to the rack of tunics. Pushing them aside, he touched the wall behind them. "This is wood."

I nodded and examined the texture of the wall. "Looks like it to me."

Smiling at me, Luster pressed his hands against the wall. It shimmered for a second, then simply ceased to be.

"I can displace natural substances." He held out his hand to me.

Smiling, I took his hand and we stepped out into the cool night.

He glanced back and the wall reappeared. My bet was that they would be wondering how we managed to escape. I looked up and noticed that the moon was

almost at its zenith. Time was almost up for me, and I didn't have any answers or the letterbox that I needed.

A tear rolled down my face as helplessness overcame me. But if there was anything that being here had taught me, it was hope. I had to keep up hope. I pulled myself together and followed Luster through the camp.

It was easy -- almost too easy. It seemed only seconds later we were following the trail back toward the forests. Luster reached out and touched a branch or a tree trunk from time to time, but we moved steadily forward.

"I think the answers will be at the waterfall," I ventured, following his lead. "What do you think?"

"I think I understand why we could never use the weapons that we captured," he said quietly as he moved us from shadow to shadow. "And I think I would give my nipple ring for a good sword."

Just like a warrior, I thought in amusement.

Almost before I was ready, we were at the waterfall, the place where I had come through the mirror, where all of this had begun.

"My parents left me that letterbox, Luster, before they disappeared doing some weird experiment." I looked around the clearing that had become so important to me, and almost wept to think that I would never see it again. "The answer is in the box."

In reply, Luster stepped through the waterfall and vanished behind a curtain of clear flowing water. I knew he was retrieving the mirror. I knew that my time here, that our time together, was almost up.

I looked around at the peaceful glade, remembering the nights when I fought back tears as I prepared to leave my love for another year. This glade brought both joy and sadness to my life.

I sat on the familiar rocks and waited.

"Mom, Dad," I sighed in true regret. "Why did you leave that box with me?"

"Because they were trying to stop us."

I whirled around, almost falling off of my rock, facing the man who had spoken.
“Who are you?” I asked.

He raised a torch, and I gasped in shock. It was the guard from the room. No!
This man was taller. Surrounding him were armed guards, and they all looked alike.

Then another man entered the clearing.

“It can’t be!” I protested.

I was staring at my father!

Chapter Twenty

*Your touch, only the touch of your hand,
The caress of your fingers
The sound of your voice
Shall save me*

--From the letterbox

"Daddy?" I gasped, tears falling from my eyes.

"Not quite."

I stared, my vision blurry from my tears as the man that so resembled my father pulled out the wooden box. "I should have guessed he would hide it here."

"He?" I slowly rose to my feet. "Daddy, what are you talking about?"

"I am not your father!" the man bellowed. "We just share the same DNA."

But he looked like my father. He sounded like my father.

"When we found a female Gen Ex 1 with my DNA type, I figured out what my predecessor had done," he went on.

I was stunned into immobility. I stood there and listened to the thing that wasn't my father, and my mind reeled. There was only one explanation that I could come up with.

"Clones?"

"I prefer the term genetic twin, actually," my father-not-my-father said.

"What were you doing here?"

"Where is the time machine?" he countered.

"Time machine?"

"Don't play dumb, you foolish girl! I may resemble the man who sired you, but believe me, I have no loving fatherly feelings toward you. Give me the time machine or I will relish causing you a great deal of pain!"

"Time machine? This is not another world, another dimension?"

Both men laughed at that.

"You have been reading too much fiction, dear girl! Wake up and join the real world. You are no longer in 3009, this is the year 5009."

My legs gave out. Instead of landing on my rock, I slipped off and hit the ground.

"I guess the old man never told her much," the guard look-alike said to the monster in my father's skin.

"Listen up, for I will tell you this once." The man who was not my father began to explain. "Your father and his team made a time machine to come to the future to replenish the past. Problem is that all the radiation from your time polluted the fauna and flora. To take such species back would cause many environmental disasters. But while we were here, we discovered that several of the plants were not breeding. They were multiplying by some form of chemical cloning. They were replicating their DNA and adapting to the environment they found themselves in. Naturally, we had to try this process with human DNA. The results are these so-called rebels that have gotten away from us. But we will get them back, and with the time machine, we will make our way back to the past and take our places as rulers of that dung heap."

"My father would never agree that!" My voice was hoarse with shock. "This would have never occurred to him!"

"That is why his constituents eliminated him and your mother, and the Titans were born."

"Eliminated?"

"You don't have to be alive to gather DNA, young one. The only unfortunate thing is that your parents managed to destroy our time window. We knew that they had to have another one, but your mother and father expired before they could tell us

where they hid it. So we remained trapped like the original Titans, the rulers of heaven and earth."

"The Titans were defeated by their offspring," I whispered, staring at the thing that shared the same DNA as I. I was ready to throw up.

Both men laughed.

"Too bad we need you alive. I would enjoy seeing you bleed," my father's clone said, all amusement suddenly washed away.

I stared at him, but a glimmer of some kind caught my attention. Was there someone creeping up beside the two men? I quickly returned my attention to him, not wanting to give any notice that the men might be in for an ambush.

"What about the people who live here? The rebels?" I asked by way of distraction.

"That is what you get when you cross the DNA of a brilliant human with that of some of the plant life here. Play around with their structure, mutate a few genes, and you have the perfect soldier. Too bad they refused to listen."

"You used brilliant minds," I added, trying to keep him talking. "What did you expect? If you didn't want independent speakers, you should have used a lesser quality DNA."

"We used what we had, because of your father trapping us here. But the time for our captivity is over! Like the mythical Titans exploded out of Tartarus, we shall leave this rotting jungle and turn the barren wasteland of Earth 3009 into our home."

"Not if the mirror is broken."

They turned to look beyond me, and there was Luster.

From the expression on his face, I knew that he had heard everything the men had to say. I also knew that he had figured out something while I was distracting them.

"Look! It's your son!" my father's look-alike crowed to the Titan standing at his side.

Then the final piece fell into place.

Luster could activate the time window because he had something of the other's DNA within him!

It wasn't the letters or the box that had brought us together! It was *him*, touching the mirror! His DNA and his voice activated the portal.

In his hand, Luster held the mirror. It was a longish affair, wide enough to pull a body through, but rather plain, like the one on my dresser. But Luster held it in such a way that we all knew that he was going to throw it.

"You don't want to do that," the guard's look-alike said. "It is our window out of here, boy! Think of it. A whole new world. You have conquering in your genes. I planned you, Luster. I created the mixture that runs through your veins. It is in you to conquer."

"We will," he said, and the guard clone smiled. "Conquer *you*."

With that, he flung the mirror against the rocks that stood beside the waterfall. The mirror shattered into countless pieces of glass.

"No!" both clones wailed, but their screams of denial were drowned out by the loud battle cries of the rebels in full battle mode.

"Like in legend," I growled as I rose to my feet. "The Titans will be overthrown by their offspring."

I pointed, and the men turned and paled.

There before them, a brilliant rainbow of glowing color, were the children that they themselves had created.

The men backed away in fear, wanting to run away but having no place to turn. And their children were closing in for the kill.

Epilogue

*With your touch you teach me
You take me to new worlds
Show me things that I never imagined.
Touch me again, teach me all
So that others will learn from us
Be their guide, My Love
Show them the way!*

--From the letterbox

I lay huddled against Luster, still in quite a bit of shock.

We had returned to the Citadel after the clones and their men disappeared under the wave of brightly colored warriors, all out for revenge. But there was still a lot that we didn't understand. I figured that some things would never be explained.

"How did you know that I wouldn't be sucked into the void?" I asked, snuggling against his chest.

I wiggled as his large warm hands worked their way down my back to cup my ass. I held in a squeal as a wandering finger eased over the hidden rosebud there, making my body grow wet. I began to grind against his thigh.

"You said it, Sinopee." He laughed. I wiggled closer to that exploring finger. "It was my voice and my touch."

I murmured in shocked delight as that finger pressed inward and invaded my tight hole. His other hand moved around to pluck at my clit.

"Your touch," I gasped, my whole body quivering in delight. I could feel my juices flowing over his hand as he began to play with my body.

"Pay attention." His finger burrowed deeper, wrenching a moan from my throat.

"I am," I insisted. My hand slid up his chest to grasp his nipple ring. He groaned as I gave it a tug, his whole body shuddering in pleasure-pain.

"Well, your parents gave you the letters in the box knowing that nothing would make you part from them, knowing that you would sit in front of their mirror and touch the paper, that you would feel connected to them that way."

He closed his eyes as my hand left his nipple with its ornament and slid down to grip his cock at the base.

"Go on," I insisted and purred as two fingers invaded my wet cunt.

"So it was a safe bet --" He slid me to my back and hovered above me. "-- that the stuff about disappearing into a void was a threat to make sure that if you ever got here, you would not let the box fall into the wrong hands."

The head of his cock, leaking pre-cum in a slick trail, slid across my thigh and pressed against the damp fur guarding my weeping womanhood.

"Yes," I breathed, arching against him, trying to force his finger and his erection deep into me.

"So that if you ever got here, you could show us how to use the things that the Titans left behind."

I froze at that. "The stuff... Oh shit yes!"

As I paused, Luster took the opportunity to drive his cock home deep.

"The... stuff." He punctuated each word with a thrust.

I screamed as my legs flew up to wrap around his waist, driving him deeper into me. His finger began a counterthrust that almost over-stimulated me, almost brought me pain. But I screamed and begged for more. The lines between discomfort and ultimate joy began to blur. Right now, any sensation added to the intense feelings crawling through my body.

My world shifted, consciousness dropped away as my being became a thing of complete orgasmic delight. Colors swirled behind my closed eyes and each of his movements rocked me higher and higher.

I could feel the sweat pouring off of me, felt his weight shift to the side a bit to grind against me, mashing my clit against his soft pubic hair and adding yet another thrill to my convulsing body.

His thrusts became rougher, harder, as he grunted above me, setting a rhythm that my body had no choice but to follow. I began to shake as tension built and built. I trembled and arched up against him, every muscle straining for completion.

Then it broke!

I screamed as my body began to convulse around him. The muscles in my ass clenched around his finger as my inner walls tightened around his cock, milking him intently, trying to drain the life out of his body.

He, too, cried out as orgasm took hold of his body, making him writhe and quake above me. The hot splash of his seed soothed me.

"Sinopee," he gasped. He settled, shaking in reaction, atop my still quivering body. He eased his finger free of me, and then I was engulfed in a tight embrace, our bodies trembling together as we both began to calm.

"Teach me to be a Thinker." He rolled to the side, keeping our bodies joined even as he pulled my head to his chest.

"You want me to... use my gifts?"

"Yes," he breathed. "This science thing has to be understood."

"But what about the magic? Have you given up on it?" I stroked my hand across his damp back. His muscles still trembled.

"I will never give up on magic, but I see the merit of science."

"Really?" I chuckled weakly. Damn, these sessions with Lust left me totally drained.

"Yes," he replied, bending low to take my lips with his. "How else will you explain us both touching the mirror at the same time, or how you just happen to be my true mate?"

I couldn't argue with his reasoning. I couldn't say anything anyway. I was too busy eating at his mouth, taking in his unique flavor, playing catch-me with his tongue.

Besides, who could explain the greatest bit of magic ever created?

Who could explain love?

The End -- For Now

The Luminaries 2: The Citadel

The key to the future lies in the past... When Sinopee finds her father's research hidden within the Citadel, she must choose. Should she attempt to change the past, perhaps saving thousands of lives -- at the risk of altering the future?

Stephanie Burke

Stephanie Burke, known to friends and readers as Flash, has a warped, twisted sense of humor, and she isn't afraid to let it show. From pregnant men to six-foot cockroaches, she's covered the gamut of the weird, the unusual, and the just plain strange. She has dozens of books currently in publication with one house or another -- she's not sure how many -- she hasn't gotten around to counting them of late!

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