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SEXTREME: Excessiveness; many instances of unconventional sex; may be hardcore; not for the faint-hearted

Gracie C. McKeever

Sisters of Emsharra, Book 1

Guardian Seductress : Predator's Salvation

Guardian Seductress

When the mysterious Genesis shows up at Alex Ryan's condo claiming to have known Alex's mother, warning that his father's death was no accident, and that Glenn Ryan wasn't the target, Alex thinks the woman is stark raving mad. Once Genesis explains that she is not human, and has been watching Alex since he was born, he is certain of it.

Genesis is Inanna, an ancient race of people who subsist on the energy they regularly siphon from humans through sexual intercourse. But one of their own broke the sacred covenant twenty-eight years ago when she gave birth to the *cambion*, Alex Ryan. Now, time is running out. A power struggle is afoot in Emsharra, and a major shift is about to occur. The insurgent doesn't want any loose ends threatening her rise to power-mainly the only other blood kin of the current *Quna*: Alex Ryan and his treasonous guardian, Genesis.

GUARDIAN SEDUCTRESS

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Siren Publishing, Inc.

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Guardian Seductress

Sisters of Emsharra, Book 1

By Gracie C. McKeever

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PROLOGUE

Emsharra Settlement, Outskirts—Twenty-Eight Years before the Alliance and New Regime

"Arrrrgh! He's ripping me...aparrrrt!"

"You are so certain it is a 'he'?"

"Of course...it is a...cambion...why else would he...torture me so?"

Genesis Enki smiled at her friend, heard Kalika's teasing tone through her panting and agony.

She knew how much Kalika wanted this baby, knew how much he meant to her and what Kalika thought his existence would mean to their people. She was counting on the babe's mere existence to end the border wars between their people, the Inanna of Emsharra and their enemy, the Sebitu of Gaiam. She thought that he could end the indiscriminate, unnecessary killing and brutal enslavement of the humans; that he would be the beginning of a new regime and a solution to the human conservation issue.

Genesis thought it was too much responsibility to put on one little being who had not yet arrived into the world, but he was why they were here, in an isolated cave, hundreds of miles away from Emsharra, delivering an outlawed child, an abomination, in secret.

Kalika released another shriek, and no longer did Genesis believe the remote grotto a safe haven. It would be a miracle if they managed this birth with no one finding out.

That is if no one had found out already.

Genesis had never gotten over the idea that Kalika's cousin LaMia suspected Kalika's condition. She was certain LaMia only held her tongue and had not gone to the other female inhabitants of Emsharra, the Sisters of the assembly, with her suspicions because she had no proof. Kalika was a favored daughter of Emsharra, a respected member of the assembly, her credentials and lineage as Enlil royalty unimpeachable. It would take much to sully her name or prove wrongdoing, much more than the words of an envious Sister, even if that Sister were LaMia Enlil, granddaughter of the Highest, *Quna* Nahemah.

"Do not fret so, Gen. All will be well." Kalika patted her hand and Genesis grinned at the sudden reversal of their roles as she turned her hand over to grip her friend's moist fingers.

"It is I who is supposed to be comforting you, Kalika."

"And you will...have more than your...opportunity...arrrrgh!" Kalika panted rapidly, blowing air through her pursed lips, her entire body drenched in perspiration.

Genesis stroked a cool wet cloth across Kalika's face, then patted dry her throat and arms, trying her best to keep her friend comfortable.

She had already endured this labor for the last six hours with no sign of the babe. Genesis wondered why Kalika insisted on having this *cambion*. She couldn't understand why her friend insisted on delivering this half-human baby when bearing an Inanna or Sebitu child would have been so much easier; it certainly would have been sanctioned and more appropriate.

"Please do not frown like that, Gen." Kalika squeezed her hand. "I know exactly what you are thinking, so do not. You know why I do this. Why I must."

"Falling in love with a human was bad enough, Kalika. But having this child...this—"

"Do not say it. He is not abomination. He is ... a miracle."

Only because he would be the only one of his kind known anywhere.

Far and wide throughout the outposts of Emsharra and Gaiam, there were no known births of *cambion* or *alu-demon*. The last known Sister Inanna to become pregnant by a human and carry the child to term had been executed, the babe murdered directly after. That had been more than a century ago. And no one had dared so blatantly break the covenant of the Inanna or Sebitu since.

Until now.

"You paid your penance to him, Kalika. It was not your fault he died."

"But do you not see, Genesis? It was my fault. I had control. I just did not exert it. I could have, but I did not. That is abomination."

"The ways of our people—"

"Must change. That it has always been 'the way' is no excuse to let the killing and slavery continue. It is no excuse for this babe's father's death."

Genesis sighed, knowing she would get nowhere with logic. Kalika's mind and heart were set, and when Kalika put her mind to something, woe the dissidents in her midst.

She was adamant that the old ways needed to change, believed the existence of their

people, and current supply and demand necessitated it. Genesis sympathized with and respected her friend too much to dissent.

Rogue and not-so rogue Inanna and Sebitu were slowly but surely working their way through their kind's food source, and as limitless as the supply once seemed, such was no longer the case. Stock steadily dwindled either through natural calamities or through systematic genocide in the human world. These conditions made killing humans after and during the process of siphoning life-force, *kundalini*, rather than practicing preservation and repeat contact, impractical. Restraint had to be exercised now before it was too late.

Kalika was not the only proponent of the change. Many Inanna, including Kalika's grandmother Nahemah, respected Kalika, as did Genesis, and believed in the conservation theory. Many also endorsed the proposed treaty with Gaiam in hopes of combining Emsharra and Gaiam's governing bodies and coming to an agreement on how to solve the dilemma of shrinking supply.

But change took time, more time than Kalika was willing to wait. With this child, she thought to force the assembly's hand, hurry along the accords between Emsharra and Gaiam.

A risky move, Genesis thought; one more likely not to pay off than to pay off even if Kalika was the Highest's granddaughter.

Another scream rent the air and Genesis positioned herself between Kalika's legs to see if there was any progress. Sure enough, the head of the baby peeked through Kalika's opening, a cap of silky black waves visible.

"Push, Kalika, push! He is coming!" Genesis placed her hands beneath the child's head, prayed she would do this right. It was not as if an Inanna had much experience delivering a human child into the world. So much could go wrong.

"But so much...could go...right," Kalika whispered before releasing another gutwrenching screech and bearing down.

The baby emerged from his dwelling with ease once the shoulders passed Kalika's orifice, sliding out with a robust wail and into Genesis' hands almost devoid of placental fluid and trailing the umbilical cord.

Genesis used her *athame* to cut the cord, the baby's vigorous cries echoing off the cave's rock walls as she quickly and efficiently wiped him clean before wrapping him in swaddling clothes and handing him to his mother.

"Oh...he is as beautiful as I knew he would be." Kalika pushed the clothes back to get a good look at her son, caressing his wavy black hair as she cooed to him.

Genesis came to stand at Kalika's head, bending close to see the baby too, now that he was comfortably bonding with his mother. "He is beautiful."

"For a *cambion*?"

"No. Just beautiful." Genesis smiled. "There was no way he could be anything but with you as his mother, Kalika."

"You are kind, but now..." Kalika lifted the baby for Genesis to take. "You must do your duty as promised."

"I do not know if I ca—"

"You can and you will. You promised."

Genesis nodded as noise of approaching forces sounded from the mouth of the cavern.

She had been so busy with the delivery and birth; she had forgotten her sentry duty.

"Go, Gen. You must go now!"

"But what about you?"

"I will be fine. Just ... make sure that he is taken care of."

Genesis reluctantly stood to go, had a second thought and leaned in to hug Kalika and kiss her brow.

"Make sure that he knows I loved him."

Did Kalika realize she spoke in the past tense? As if she knew she would not be around to relay the information herself.

Her friend was prepared for the worst, prepared to pay for her crime.

"Give him this for me." Kalika slipped the pendant she wore over her head and placed it and its chain in Genesis' hand. Inanna's knot, the sacred symbol of their people. "Now go, Gen. Go and do not look back."

The tears were right there; ready to choke Genesis as she watched Kalika turn away her face. Her own heart filled to bursting as the footsteps grew closer.

"Go, before it is too late."

"Be well, Kalika."

"Good-bye, Gen."

Genesis turned and ran toward the back of the cave, toward escape and freedom, Kalika's baby boy sucking his thumb and cradled close to her breasts.

CHAPTER 1

New York City, Current Day—Twenty-Eight Years Later

They had failed, but then so had she.

Genesis stood on the edges of the gathering, the graveside attendees somber and dressed in black poised around Glenn Ryan's coffin. She listened to the Catholic priest speak of a life cut down in its prime, a good family man lost to his only son, Alex Ryan.

An incredible sense of déjà vu overwhelmed Genesis at the sights and sounds, memories of Alex's mother's funeral merging and melding. The circumstances had been totally different as disease had dealt the deadly blow to Cassidy Ryan, whereas a tragic "accident" had killed her husband Glenn.

Should she be glad that the insurgents had made a mistake and killed the wrong man, when the right man's father lay dead? When Alex Ryan's closest human relative, the only father he'd ever known, was but a memory?

Glenn Ryan should not have died, not on her watch, only blind luck preventing Alex's death, preventing him laying in a coffin too, buried beside his father. Had she been up to the task, perhaps Glenn Ryan would still be alive as well as Alex.

Her failure was proof positive that she had been on this detail too long, twenty-eight years too long, but she had made a promise, one she intended to keep until she could not anymore.

Besides, she was involved now. At least her body was, especially her cunt where cravings for the new, the unknown, and sustenance dwelled. Involved like she had never been before, caught up in the allure of the *cambion*, something for which she was totally unprepared.

He was special. Genesis had known this for some time now, but his uniqueness, the mixed blood of his ancestors never more evident to her than in the last few weeks. His life-fluid called to her like the much sought-after elixir of her kind, spirit-boost, the most potent form of

kundalini that a human could possess. It made her pussy weep and her mouth water with primal need.

Was this what it had been like for Kalika? Was this how her downfall had started, with the undeniable push-pull towards something totally illicit, totally unattainable? Was this uncontrollable lust what Kalika had felt with Alex's father? More, had Kalika's last human male possessed the elusive spirit-boost?

Genesis thought she had long ago given up trying to figure it out, but how could one disregard, forget and lay away a lifetime? Watch a friend die and not have the whys plague her for years and centuries to come?

Certainly, she was tired. Tired of running. Tired of guarding a man who did not even know she existed, indeed, could care less that she had been watching over and protecting him since his momentous birth.

Genesis closed her eyes and immersed herself in the bitter memories—her torture and imprisonment, Kalika's execution—tuning into Alex Ryan's grief.

Or at least she tried to tune into it.

He was a gifted telepath; there was no doubt of this, his ability to block seducement or any other sort of mental infiltration enough to impress any Inanna or Sebitu. She had tried numerous times, seducement, persuasion, calling, all too little avail. During sleep, when most of her kind plundered, he was minimally more vulnerable, open to her mental summoning when he was barely aware of her in his waking hours.

Maybe she was better at her duty than she thought; shadowing, stealth and survival skills honed to a fine edge since she had escaped Emsharra with the baby.

Baby then, grown man now. And oh, how he had grown.

Genesis closed her eyes against the sudden flood of desire rushing to her center, moistening her panties. That she could feel such a tide of lust here at a funeral would have shocked her were it not for the subject of her sexual fantasies.

Tall, at least for a human male, at 6"3, with broad shoulders and weighing, by her estimation, a lean-muscled two-hundred pounds, Alex Ryan was as far from any baby as one person could get; like no baby that Genesis had ever known.

True, twenty-eight years was but a blink in the scheme of things, in the life of an Inanna, but for a human, a twenty-eight year old was a mature adult, one more than old enough to take care of himself and make his own decisions; one old enough to hear the truth.

Lilith, the idea of sitting him down and relating the story of his birth, relating the circumstances of his adoption, did not appeal to Genesis at all; but it had to be done. He had to know his heritage in order to understand the danger he was in now. He had to understand that some of her people would not stop at the death of his father, indeed would not stop until *he* was dead.

Had Nahemah stepped down and relinquished her rule? Or had a more violent end befallen her? Was LaMia ready to take over rule? Was she behind the attempt on Alex, the only other blood kin of the Highest? Was she leading the insurgents? But probably the most important questions of all were, how had they found Alex, and she unknowingly led her people to him? Lilith, she hated being cut off from her and Kalika's people, but there was no choice. Her life was here, in the human world, the bottom layer of the Great Above. She had existed here for almost three decades now. The only reason for her to think of her people and home now was the attempt that had been made on Alex's life and what it meant.

Distance could not deny the fact that change was imminent; the faction against the new ways, and a remedy for the energy shortage, was ready to make a move towards power. That was, if they had not made a move already. LaMia Enlil was ready to take over the reins from her grandmother, and probably gleefully.

Genesis pictured LaMia the last time she had seen her. Gloating, just barely holding back a smile at her cousin's execution. There was no love lost between Genesis and LaMia.

Genesis, like Kalika and *Quna* Nahemah, had always seen through LaMia, seen into her dark soul, felt her hunger for power. A hunger that would have her stop at nothing to get what she wanted, and if that meant selling out her cousin and killing that cousin's son, then so be it.

What Genesis could not understand is why such an indirect attempt, more prone to failure? Had LaMia and her kin already attempted some other method, coming up against the protection spell Genesis had woven around Alex Ryan's sleep? Or had something else kept him safe when Genesis was not around to guard him, his own powerful aura and telepathy perhaps?

Genesis blinked as the priest brought the ceremony to an end.

She watched the gathered family and friends of the deceased as they shook hands with Alex and expressed their condolences and sympathy before filing past him towards the exit. She saw him glance her way, his bright amber eyes locking onto her with questioning intent.

Her stomach swirled with familiarity, as if he had touched her with his hands and not just his eyes. She remembered the feel of his small body cuddled close to her breasts. His low cries had pierced the air and her heart as she'd left him at the doorstep of the first house of worship she'd come across in the human world..

The heat of his gaze went straight through her now, zinging sparks of need directly to her cunt and beyond, making her legs weak. No human male had ever affected her so, especially without physical contact. What would it be like to have him?

Often Genesis had wondered about this, especially in the last ten years, seeing a gorgeous desirable male she might pick up at a club or bar, instead of the verboten son of a Sister. He was different, in more ways than one, and Genesis wondered if this were due to his Inanna blood or the fact that he was a hybrid.

So little was known about *cambion* and *alu-demon*, the half-breed offspring of human and Inanna and Sebitu, most of the myths written and propagated by man, none coming close to the truth. It was said that a male child born of an Inanna or Sebitu and a human would become a rapist, or that unless touched, a *cambion* would show no signs of life until the age of seven.

Genesis knew the last to be totally false, for Alex had come out of his mother's womb with a lusty cry before she had ever touched him. Later he'd gurgled and sighed with infant appeal as she had held him in her arms and felt him vibrant with life. His lungs expanded with his cries; his heart pumped blood through his tiny system; his color-change amber eyes looked up at her with surprising awareness, and his little chubby legs bicycled as she had taken him to safety. He was the only *cambion* she knew, forced her to reevaluate and learn as she went if only

for the sake of a promise she had made to her closest friend.

Genesis snapped her eyes back to the dwindling congregation in time to see Alex Ryan purposefully stalking towards her. Lilith, how had she let this happen! She did not want to shapeshift, especially so suddenly—it would emit a spirit signal to any Inanna in the area—but she had no choice.

* * * *

The woman had been haunting his dreams since before his mother's funeral three years ago, and now she had come to torment his waking moments at his father's funeral. That she had chosen to come out in the open and light of day here, now, fucked with him as much as the fact that he could not read her thoughts. And that the strange woman totally turned him on. He didn't know if the location and timing had anything to do with how turned on he was, just knew that he was as hard as the granite headstones and plaques marking the graves around him. He couldn't ever remember being so turned on except in his sleep, and he well knew who had been the cause of those nocturnal wet dreams of late.

Maybe the six-months he had been celibate, as long as his last relationship had survived, as a matter of fact, had finally caught up with him.

Alex didn't know what made him turn and make his way towards the woman. But as soon as the last mourner had shaken his hand and left, he felt his feet turning in her direction and advancing towards her.

She held his gaze as he approached, and for a moment he thought she'd start walking towards him to meet him halfway, and dismiss all the erotic fantasies he had been having about her since he'd seen her by saying something totally mundane. As if someone who looked like her could ever be anything resembling mundane.

He didn't know what he would do when he reached her, but figured he'd come up with something soon since he was quickly closing the ten yards between them. Alex pictured himself catching her by the shoulders, pulling her against him and rubbing his impossibly hard erection against her slit as he scorched her mouth with a kiss.

Could his behavior and thoughts get anymore indecorous? Maybe grief had finally caught up with him, and in the most inappropriate way, no doubt. He could hear his mother's I-told-youso from the grave, grimly smiled at the notion.

She use to warn him all the time about his restraint, that if he held in his emotions all the time, they would eventually come out at the most inopportune and unwelcome occasions. She warned him too that once released, there might be no putting the genie back in the bottle. He'd gotten the same spiel from several girlfriends too, women who thought a few heated moments between the sheets with him gave them the right to take apart his psych; women who had no problem calling him a cold fish and a robot when it suited them.

If they only knew.

Small wonder he'd never had a relationship that lasted more than six months, tiring of most women somewhere between the second date and the first fuck. This meant his liaisons usually averaged a couple of weeks if he was lucky. And this didn't include numerous filler masturbation sessions and one-night-stands to satisfy his unrelenting libido until his next short-lived relationship.

Kate Summer, his most recent and last "girlfriend," had broken the record for longevity, and only because he thought she was something that she had inevitably not been, something compatible with him: sexually insatiable.

Alex peered at the strange woman now, thought that she could easily be sexually compatible with him. She certainly had been equal to the task in his dreams, fulfilling every kinky hunger he had ever harbored of late. He had seen her so many times in recent memory he felt like he knew her every want and desire, her every fantasy, because they were his. He knew her, could not mistake those features and Amazonian build—the long wavy titian hair, glowing copper skin and vibrant jade eyes—sleeping or awake. She stared at him as he approached, stood frozen between fleeing and facing him down; he could sense her indecision, and he hurried his steps before she could act.

That's when the weirdest thing happened.

Hell, weird had nothing on what she did next: disappearing right before his eyes in a puff of blue smoke. Poof!

Alex shook his head, couldn't believe it. He must have blinked and missed her departure. He dealt with logic and hard facts every day in his business at his father's architectural firm, prided himself on his innovation and reasoning skills. There had to be a rational explanation for what just happened. He just hadn't wrapped his mind around what it could be yet.

He glanced back at the gravesite where the priest lingered, tempted to go back and ask him if he had seen the woman. He finally decided against it, knew the man would chalk Alex's vision up to his unresolved grief.

Instead, Alex came closer to the spot where she had been, circled the nearby headstone twice before standing still and scratching his head. No sign of her anywhere.

Until he glanced at the headstone directly in front of him and right above the epitaph—*In Loving Memory of Ethel Parsons, 1917 to 2000*—he noticed the hawk, nonchalantly perched on the stone, watching him. He saw the jade eyes glaring from the avian face and knew he had gone off the deep end.

* * * *

Alex hooked his long black trench over the top of the mahogany coat tree as he entered his upper west side condo and hung his keys up on the matching pegboard. He distractedly sifted through the mail he'd retrieved on his way to the elevator.

Bills, bills, sympathy cards, sympathy cards, condolences and more sympathy cards. He was not looking forward to sending out all those requisite thank yous, didn't want to be reminded of what he had lost.

He was alone, well and truly alone.

Sure, he had the inevitable aunts and uncles scattered across the country and some cousins here and there that he usually only kept in contact with on birthdays and holidays. Alone was something he did well, he was a loner after all, and with good reason. Not too many people wanted to deal with someone who could read their minds. And it's not like he enjoyed having other people's random petty jealousies, desires, hates and wishes bombard his thoughts either. He did everything he could to block them. Most times he succeeded, had gotten so good at it, he sometimes thought himself a normal guy.

But he knew the truth, had known it for a long time.

From early childhood he had discovered that he was different from the other three and four year olds at pre-school. Once he understood that he could do things most normal *adults* couldn't do, it was easier for him to keep to himself. It was easier, and necessary, to keep his talents a secret. Not even his parents knew what he could do, Alex instinctively understanding that they wouldn't be able to handle his uniqueness.

"Hello Alex."

He started, jerked his eyes to the far corner of his tan chenille sofa from where Kate Summer was slowly rising. She looked as he remembered her, tall and full-bodied like he liked his women, but immaculately clad in a navy dress that reached to her knees, with pearl buttons down the front and lace around the Peter Pan collar.

Prim, proper, sedate Kate.

This is how he had come to think of her by the time they had parted ways, back when he thought a life of quiet colorless domesticity was what he wanted. Back when he had thought Kate was what he wanted. Back when he'd thought he wanted forever.

Somewhere between her finicky, regimented sexual tastes and his gradually dwindling hard-ons, Alex realized that Kate was not what he wanted and he was tired of compromising his libido and ethics in order to fit her neat little mold of the perfect husband-to-be. There had been no spark, no fire, no chemistry between him and Kate. Had there been, he might have been able to overlook all the other little quirks that made Kate Kate, and incompatible with everything that was Alex Ryan.

But the sex had been unfulfilling, something inevitably missing. Somewhere along the line, Alex had realized that he wanted more. *Needed* more.

Alex had tried, had gone into the relationship wanting to make things work, wanting to, for once in his life, connect with a woman on a purely non-sexual level. He had thought to have a long term relationship, but he hadn't been able to pull it off. How he'd managed to stay with Kate as long as he had, and without losing his sanity, was still a mystery to him.

"How did you get in here?"

"I seduced your doorman Tommy downstairs, convinced him to let me in."

That she had used the word "seduced" in a sentence alerted Alex that all was not well in Cinderella-land. And when Kate approached him, all sinuous, swaying hips and breasts, Alex knew something was up. He frowned as she slid her arms around his neck and leaned in for a kiss. Not a prim and proper Kate kiss, but an open-mouth, tongue-down-the-throat, devour-all-that-is-Alex-and-then-some kiss that sent his heartbeat racing and instantly reanimated his slumbering cock.

Alex pulled away from her, tried to catch his breath as he stumbled several steps back and gawked at her. "Are you on drugs?"

"Why would you say that?" She stalked him as he backed away, towards the kitchen. Alex felt like they were playing Red-Light-Green-Light, One-Two-Three. "This isn't like you, that's why."

"I thought you might need some company after the funeral, an outlet for all that grief."

"I got your card."

"Nothing like the personal touch." She smiled and Alex did a double-take, thought he saw a flash of fangs. Or maybe he was projecting because of her behavior.

"C'mon baby. You were always telling me to loosen up and let you please me. Well, I've decided to get with the program and thought this was the perfect time to let you know."

"I think it's a little late for us, Kate."

His cock shouted up from his trousers, begging to differ, relentlessly pushing against his zipper at the sight of Kate unbuttoning her coatdress as she slowly came closer. Six months of celibacy was in serious jeopardy when she reached the last button and dropped the dress to the cream carpeted floor. She was naked beneath. Her smooth ivory skin beckoned under the living room's dim lamplight.

Alex peered at her eyes, and that's when he knew something was seriously wrong.

Instead of the liquid bedroom gaze he expected to see, the eyes of a woman trying to seduce her man, Kate stared straight through him. Her expression was dazed, as if she were in a trance or under a spell. He tried to read her—too affected and confused to try it before—and couldn't. Usually Kate was an open book; from her aspirations to marry him and have two-point-three kids, to her wanting to make him into a Stepford husband, he'd always known her every thought without really trying to.

Now there was nothing but a blank slate, as if someone had gone into her brain and wiped the essence of Kate away.

He waved a hand in front of her face. "Kate?"

She blinked, stared at him and shouted, "I'll kill you!" right before she rushed him with her hands stretched out in front of her.

He tumbled to the floor, head cracking against the threshold of the kitchen's marble floor with Kate's full weight on top of him. She wrapped her long fingers around his neck, trying her damnedest to choke the shit out of him.

Okay, he'd wanted passion and heat, but this wasn't quite what he'd had in mind! Alex grabbed her wrists and pried her hands from around his throat, quickly reversed their positions and flipped Kate on her back; he was still stunned as he straddled her and imprisoned her wrists above her head. She wriggled beneath him like a wild woman. Hell, had she been this energetic in bed...

"I'm going to kill you! Let me go!"

"Like I'm going to follow that dema—" Alex gasped when her knee connected full-force with his balls.

Oh fuck.

He fell off of her, wanted to roll into the fetal position and cry like a baby, but didn't have the luxury when Kate leaped up and ran for the kitchen counter where he kept his knives.

Oh shit! She was serious.

Alex had time to get to his knees before she came at him with a carving knife. Kate slashed downward and Alex raised an arm to deflect the blow from his throat. He felt heat and liquid as the blade sliced through his shirtsleeve and reached flesh. The white material of his shirt instantly turned crimson, blood spurting from the slash and against the elegant cherry wood island top.

Shit, if she hit a vein..."Kate, put that down!"

"So, the robot does bleed."

Alex watched as she cackled. Actually cackled like one of those witch sisters from *The Wizard of Oz*—he couldn't remember which direction was wicked—and he shivered like Toto.

"Kill you...Kill! Kill! Kill!"

"Yeah, so you mentioned."

He was going to have to put a stop to this and quick before she succeeded with her diabolical intentions. Alex dodged her jabs, maneuvered just under his hanging pots. He blindly reached overhead and jerked down a copper pot just in time to parry Kate's next assault.

The knife clattered to the floor and both he and Kate scrambled for it. God, she was so much stronger and faster than he remembered, but then he'd never engaged in a life and death struggle with her before.

Kate got a hand on the handle first and Alex had a second to jump back and avoid an upward swing towards his stomach. She advanced now, backing him against a wood-paneled wall of the kitchen.

Alex didn't have a weapon now, had dropped the pot in the struggle for the knife. He reached behind him for the wall phone, grabbed the receiver and when Kate made a move towards his gut again he dodged and swung out with the receiver, averting the business end of his knife by a centimeter as he connected with her knuckles with a resounding thud.

The knife remained in Kate's hand though, and she made for another attack.

Alex felt the energy in the room suddenly change, as if someone had turned the thermostat all the way up. He was already hot and perspiring from his exertions, but the heat in the room now was sauna like. And just when he thought he'd lost the battle and would die at the hands of a crazed ex, that blue puff of smoke appeared between him and Kate, and the strange woman from the cemetery instantly materialized.

"Kill, kill, kill!"

She glanced at him over a shoulder, made the briefest eye contact before giving her full attention to Kate, and thrusting her hands out in front of her. Blue electricity emitted from her fingers, circling Kate until the wild woman was completely encompassed by the strange ethereal current.

"Nice trick, Merlin," Alex panted. "Mind telling me what the *fuck* is going on and who the hell you are."

"You needed my assistance. I am here to assist you."

Assist was not quite how he would have put it, more like saving his neck for starters.

Nonetheless he muttered, "I could have handled her."

The woman smirked and Alex caught a hint of dimples. The effect in combination with her high cheekbones and obstinate cleft chin was stunningly erotic and had him shifting his weight from one leg to the other.

"We must talk."

"I was just about to suggest tha----"

She caught him by his uninjured arm and led him to the living room.

Alex came up short, glanced back at Kate. She hadn't moved an inch, frozen in a blue ball of suspended animation. "Is she all right?"

"She is unharmed."

"How long will she stay like that?"

"Until I release her."

She said that with such aplomb and authority, Alex's stomach dipped with longing; the idea of being at her mercy was far more appealing than frightening. What kind of sick shit was that?

"Come."

Alex let her drag him to the sofa, admiring her erect posture, the sensuous swing of her generous hips. His cock hardened again, ready to come out and play now that the threat of it being separated from his body had been removed. She let go of his arm as they neared the sofa and he took the time to admire her body in more detail. Five nine, one-forty-five, not far shy, she was a copper-toned Amazon with voluptuous breasts barely contained by black leather bustier. Her long, athletic legs were encased in painted-on black leather pants, and her feet were outfitted in black leather boots. Damn. He'd always had a thing for female superhero types—Wonder Woman, Catwoman, not to mention Elektra in that hot red leather outfit, and Trinity from The Matrix—maybe because he didn't think any "normal" woman could handle—

"You are bleeding!"

Alex absently lifted his arm for her inspection. He had almost forgotten he'd been injured in that fray until he felt the blood dripping from his arm onto his cream carpeting in big round splashes of red. *That's going to be hell to get out*.

"It's just a scratch."

"It is more than a scratch." She shoved him down on the sofa, pulled the sleeve up to his elbow and frowned at the wound as if she was a surgeon trying to decide how to stitch him up.

Damn, Kate had gotten him pretty good. He was feeling light-headed, the room spinning before his eyes. He'd never felt faint from the sight of blood, not that he'd had all that many opportunities to see it up close and personal before today. When she gently guided him back against the sofa cushion, Alex didn't resist.

CHAPTER 2

Genesis glanced at Alex as he lay safely cuddled beneath the sheet and bold blue patchwork comforter of his four-poster bed. The last thing she wanted to do was leave him alone, but if she did not feed soon and replenish what she had given him and lost in battle, she would not be any good to him or herself when the next attack came. She would be unable to save him.

Not that she had done the best of jobs saving him just now. He had very nearly died; surely would have had she not intervened when she had. Once again, she had fallen down on the job, arriving almost too late.

Genesis had to risk leaving him; there was no other way to fortify herself. She would get a quickie, as the humans called it, tap the doorman in the lobby. He would be perfect, and her feeding would not release nearly as much of a spirit signal as what she had emitted restraining Alex's friend Kate.

Genesis reached out a hand to caress Alex's left cheek, and on impulse bent to kiss his brow. Her lips lingered of their own accord as she inhaled his masculine scent—a subtle spicy aroma of man and fragrant musk. She closed her eyes and shivered. Were he well, she would have fully indulged, did not think she would be able to resist, verboten son of her friend or not.

He was not well, however, at least not yet. Genesis was optimistic, though, that by the time she was done, he would be awake and able to listen to what she needed to tell him.

* * * *

She returned, teleporting directly to Alex's bedroom as soon as she was done, twenty minutes later. Tommy-the-doorman was safely asleep at his reception desk, not-too-much the worse for wear. Genesis was not fully energized, but she was refreshed enough to do battle if she had to.

She thought how easy it had been to cut short her joining with the doorman, as depleted she was. Before she might have drained him until he was a dry empty husk. But she could not in good conscience, and in deference to Kalika's memory, do such a thing now.

Perhaps, too, thinking of Alex as she had left him had allowed her to end her joining with

Tommy-the-doorman prematurely. The memory of Alex's hard, ripped abdomen, and long leanmuscled legs encased in only a pair of boxer briefs that contained a sizeable package, made Genesis eager to get back to him. Being with Tommy-the-doorman had felt too much like cheating, and where such an antediluvian, human emotion had come from, Genesis could not say. Probably the same place as her jealousy at seeing Kate Summer naked in Alex's kitchen.

True, the woman had been trying to kill him at the time, but jealousy was not logical.

Genesis came closer to the bed, stood at Alex's head for several moments, relieved as she watched the gentle rise and fall of his chest beneath the covers. He was safe and still alive. The mission now was to keep him that way.

Once again, the insurgents had tried a roundabout method rather than confronting the *cambion* themselves. This time, they had manipulated a human to do their dirty work rather than a convenient "accident." Were they all just cowards, unwilling or afraid to get their hands soiled? Or was it something else? Did they fear coming into direct contact with the *cambion*?

Genesis' heart sped at the notion. The possibility that so powerful and gifted a species as the Inanna would fear a cast-off hybrid was not as farfetched as it might seem. She had to admit there was a certain mystique surrounding the product of human and Inanna or Sebitu matings, probably even more so with Alex considering his lineage.

Kalika had been a skilled sorceress, more powerful than most, stronger in mind and body than the average Inanna, the perfect choice to replace *Quna* Nahemah when the time came. More was the pity for Emsharra that she had been put to death. She would have led Emsharra with a fearless but fair hand. Much more fair than LaMia.

Genesis could not countenance the idea of LaMia Enlil ruling the province of the Inanna, and would have wagered that more than half her Sisters felt the same way, just too afraid to say it out loud. Nahemah was not afraid, but then, was she still in control of Emsharra? Or had she been destroyed, and now LaMia was busy tying up all the loose ends by sending her followers to kill the *cambion* and his treasonous guardian, each a threat to her ascendancy?

The attempts, at the construction site and this latest one with Kate had Xaphan Pazuzu's handiwork written all over them.

Xaphan was Sebitu, second-in-command to Tenebrion, the Supreme and ruler of Gaiam. Despite being enemies, Xaphan shared LaMia and other insurgents' opinion of the human conservation campaign and proposed alliance between Emsharra and Gaiam: he was opposed to both.

From what Genesis knew of Xaphan, he was LaMia's Sebitu counterpart in every way that counted. He was ambitious and had a devious and inventive mind. He knew how to get what he wanted, and liked fanning the flames of disharmony and uprising. It was no secret he wanted Tenebrion's seat, but the last Genesis knew, Tenebrion, much like Nahemah, *his* counterpart in Emsharra, showed no signs of abdication.

Xaphan and LaMia were a match made in the Great Below.

Genesis wondered if Tenebrion knew what his underling was up to. She did not want to believe that the attempts on Alex's life had been sanctioned by either Supreme Tenebrion or *Quna* Nahemah; did not want to believe that they had allied Emsharra and Gaiam for this dark purpose in direct opposition of Kalika's wishes and against her beloved only son.

Alex stirred beneath the covers, yawned and stretched his arms over his head. He froze when he opened his eyes and saw her standing over his bed.

"You are awake."

"You have a funny habit of stating the obvious." He pushed himself up to sit against the pillows and headboard of his bed, stared at her. "Where is she?"

"Kate is gone."

Alex's eyes widened. "You killed her?"

"Of course not. I released her."

"Where?"

Genesis gritted her teeth, the green-eyed monster holding her tongue. Why was he so concerned about where and how Kate Summer was? The woman had tried to kill him! True, she had been bedazzled and under the influence of Inanna or Sebitu enchantment at the time, but that was beside the point.

Finally, Genesis sighed then said, "She is home, asleep in her bed. When she awakes, she will have no memory of what happened."

"Lucky her. I wish I didn't remember what happened. Starting with my father's death."

Alex closed his eyes, the sooty lashes so long and thick they brushed his high cheekbones in a sensual stroke that made her heart somersault in her chest at how vulnerable he looked. Vulnerable, totally sexy, and very fuckable.

Genesis' pussy muscles clenched as if applauding in agreement. She saw his rich bronze complexion redden as if he had heard her thoughts and was blushing in response.

Had she slipped? Was she broadcasting? Lilith! Genesis felt heat rising to her face, signaling her own unusual blush. Where was this modesty coming from? She had had thousands of men in her lifetime, had killed at least that many. Shame and embarrassment did not customarily figure into her mentality.

True, she was worldly-wise and experienced, but never had she been around a man who could read her thoughts as well as she could read his. Never had she been so exposed, so naked when not in the act of feeding and sex.

Vulnerable.

Was this why being around Alex made her bashful as a turkey at Thanksgiving? His ability to so effortlessly strip her when she least wanted to be stripped? His ability to make her feel...powerless?

As if to anchor herself, regain some control, she reached out a hand to grab one of his and squeezed. "You will be fine."

"That remains to be seen." Alex opened his eyes to glance at her. "How long was I unconscious?"

"Several hours."

"Several hours!"

"You lost a lot of blood. More than you realized."

"She hit a vein then?"

Genesis fidgeted, did not like where the conversation was going; was not ready to answer his questions. He might get curious about how he had healed so quickly, about... "I believe so."

Alex held up his arm, inspecting the bandage, stark white against his darker skin.

Since she had rescued him from Kate Summer, she was able to read him much more clearly than before, as if saving him had bonded them in some way. Consequently, she felt his surprise at the lack of blood and pain, though his face remained neutral.

Genesis realized that this situation went both ways. If she could read him, then that meant he *could* probably read her too, hence that earlier blush.

"Want to tell me who and what you are?"

Genesis started as if coming out of a trance. "What I am?"

"I already know you're not quite human. But I'm wondering if there's an alien abduction or anal probe in my future."

She smiled at his ironic tone, except that probing his anus sounded like a delicious idea about now, more attractive than the inquest she knew he intended to conduct. She definitely would not mind more closely inspecting his butt, ready to admire it more up close and personal, feel the steely power of his ass cheeks in the palm of her hands when he pumped into her.

Genesis glanced at him, and noticed him blushing again.

"I don't know whether to be flattered or frightened."

"Perhaps a little bit of both," she blurted, sure now that he was reading her, and decided she had to be more careful with her shields around him.

"So, uh...what do I call you?"

"My name is Genesis. I am Inanna."

Alex frowned. "What is an Inanna exactly?"

How could she tell him hers was a race of predators and his species was the prey? Genesis quickly blanked her mind to stop him receiving any of that. She could have taken the easy way out, she supposed, and let him see for himself, see the pictures of her past inveiglements and victims. But she would not be a coward, at least no more than she had been already in deserting Kalika when she had. She had come this far, had promised to tell him that his mother loved him.

And Genesis always kept her promises.

"You will not believe me."

"Lady, you disappeared before my eyes and turned into a hawk at my father's funeral. Then hours later you subdued my psycho ex in a blue ball of light. I think I'm more than open to any explanation you have to throw at me."

Genesis went to the foot of his bed and paced before it, pausing to stare at him and say, "It is difficult to explain."

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Lilith, she would rather be doing anything in the world right now than this. Like stripping him of his briefs and slowly ravaging his body. She would start at his head, sliding her tongue into his unresisting mouth, tangling it with his, tasting his spicy flavor. Then she would move down his chin, plant her lips against the pulsing vein in his neck...

"You're doing it again, Genesis."

She jerked her eyes to his, saw the small grin, his slow murmur touching her core and teasing her clit with its sensuality. "I am sorry." She hurried to the overstuffed chair adjacent the bed, sat down and crossed her legs as if to strangle her misbehaving pussy into submission, stop it from throbbing with heat, so wet she thought she would float away on the tide of her cream. Genesis did not think she had ever wanted a man so much.

"I knew your mother," she blurted as if bringing up Kalika could stop her rampant desire. Not likely, but it had been worth a try for her to steer the conversation in another direction.

"In what capacity?" Alex asked now. "You can't be more than twenty-five."

"I am...a bit more than that."

He tried to scan her, she felt him probing around the edges of her mind, pushing for entry, and backing off in frustration when he could not glean her thoughts.

Impatient, was he not?

"How much is a bit?"

"I am the equivalent of two-hundred human years."

Alex arched a brow. "Two-hundred?"

Genesis nodded, scratching the surface of his mind where his thoughts were clambering to make sense of her statement, how he instantly discounted her claim as preposterous. She heard all this, felt his frustration at his perception of being lied to. He was a man who dealt with logic after all, facts. Abstraction was not something he could deal with, not something he wanted to deal with despite his own illogical "gifts."

"Inanna have been around for centuries. We...subsist on the uh...energy of others."

"Energy that you obtain how?"

Lilith, he was going to make her say it out loud? "We extract it from humans during sex."

"Okay." Alex nodded, got out of bed, and took her by an arm to lead her to the bedroom door. "I think it's time for you to go back to the mental ward where you came from, lady."

Genesis jerked her arm out of his, planted herself on the threshold of the door and put a fist on each hip as she tried to stare him down. She had a time of it, especially when she had to tip her head back to close the several inches separating their gazes. "You wanted me to tell you the truth, said that you were open to any explanation I had to throw at you. Well, that is it."

"So, what you're saying is you're some kind of succubus?"

"That is so gauche a term and does not nearly begin to cover what we are. We have evolved so far beyond the primitive myths and misconceptions of man." Or at least they would have had Kalika gotten her way, had she and Nahemah managed to make the assembly see things their way and unite the Inanna and Sebitu on the human conservation issue. "I'm calling 'em as I see 'em."

"It is so much more than just what I told you."

"You said you knew my mother," he stated. "Which one?"

"Which one? You know-?"

"That I was adopted? My mother and father confirmed it one day when I was six and they sat me down to explain the facts of life to me. But I've always known."

Genesis sighed, relieved her job had become easier. "So, you know. That is good."

"Really?"

"It makes it easier to explain."

"Is my mother like you?"

"Your mother was my best friend. We were like sisters."

"Is she like you?" he repeated, not yet picking up on her use of the past tense.

"Yes, she was."

Alex stumbled back to the bed and sat down on the foot of it.

"It is not what you are thinking."

"How the hell would you know what I'm thinking? Oh, that's right. I forgot. You're some freak telepathic succubus, and evidently so am I."

"Your mother was a good person. Kind, sympathetic, strong, intelligent. I admired her."

Kinder and more sympathetic than most of our kind. That is what killed her.

Genesis would not suffer the same fate, she decided, nor would Alex whether he wanted her protection or not; whether he believed what she had to tell him or not.

"Nice sales pitch, but I'm not buying."

"I am not trying to sell her or this situation to you, Alex."

"Where is she now? Can you take me to her?"

Genesis was finding it difficult to keep up with him. Despite being able to read his thoughts, she was unable to anticipate the order of his curiosity, thus which question would come out of his mouth next. Trying to deal with the spoken and unspoken inquiry was driving her mad. The main focus of his curiosity, however, did remain his mother. She decided to do her best to satisfy it.

"Your mother is dead."

"Well, that's something I'm used to hearing."

She knew he was upset, disconsolate, could feel each emotion coming off him in waves, but he never raised his voice, tone remaining disturbingly even and steady. Except for when she had first arrived and immobilized his friend, one would have never known the depth of his confusion and passion concerning the day's events; never known that in the span of a week two attempts had been made on his life. Maybe the last was her fault. Maybe she had not done a good enough job trying to convey the gravity and truth of the situation he was in. She would have to remedy that.

"Show her to me," Alex said.

"What makes you think-?"

"I have an idea of what sort of powers you have. I've seen and felt what you can do. I think you can show me. You owe me at least that."

She wanted to argue with him, but could not because she agreed with him. Whether truth fed her perception, Genesis did not know, no longer cared. She was tired. She wanted this trip to come to its logical conclusion and the only way she could accomplish that was to deal with the past. Here and now. She refused to consider her other option, that a guilty conscience was at play. She rarely did anything out of guilt. Like shame and embarrassment, guilt was not a part of her make-up, not a part of her race's make-up; at least it had not been before she had met Alex.

Genesis approached the bed and sat down beside him. She felt his heartbeat speed, a tremor of anxiety peeking through his unremitting façade of control, but there was no fear, just his growing curiosity. She turned to face him, took his face between her hands and drew him close.

"What—?"

"I will not harm you."

"I know."

Emboldened by his faith, she leaned in, unnecessarily brushed his lips with hers. Physical contact was not essential to fulfill his request. She just *wanted* to touch him, feel his warm skin beneath her palms, inhale his clean musk scent, and took full advantage of his proximity, his attention.

"Close your eyes," she murmured and Alex did, instantly and without question.

She had to make this quick; did not want to use more psychic energy than was absolutely necessary; did not want to alert any Inanna in the vicinity with her spirit signal. She was still not sure of the scope of the Inanna tracking practice outside of the boundaries of Emsharra. She had been living and functioning in the human world for decades without being intercepted, but it never hurt to be careful, especially now.

Alex sat motionless in her grasp, breathlessly waiting before he gasped when Genesis entered his mind like a prowler in an unlocked, unguarded house. She easily slipped through the various spaces of his brain until she reached the room that held his memories.

Genesis nudged his mind with hers, projecting the images of Kalika that she wanted him to see, careful not to touch too close to the day of his birth. She found it difficult to hold back, however, and not let him rush her, or suck her in with his abilities. His hunger for information, his impatience, were strong. *He* was strong, much stronger than she had first thought, pulling when she held back, like a baby suckling a tit without regard to the source, only interested in feeding his own yearnings.

"I see her," he whispered. "She's beautiful."

"She was."

"She looks like you."

Genesis felt herself blush again.

Lilith, this shyness and vanity were unprecedented!

That he thought her "beautiful" should not matter to her. She should not care about his opinion of her looks one way or the other. Vanity was a human characteristic, a weakness to which the Inanna did not lend credence.

Until now.

The man was dangerous, made her do and feel things that were peculiar to her nature. Either this or she had been around the humans too long, and was falling prey to their unique idiosyncrasies.

Genesis pulled back to look at his face, watched his eyes running back and forth beneath his closed lids as if he were deep in REM sleep. She did not think he was even aware of what he had said or her reaction to it.

Thank Goddess!

She leaned in again, juices flowing from her cunt into her thong in anticipation as she touched her lips to his again. She thrust her tongue between his parted lips, darting it in and out before Alex sucked it in, mated his tongue with hers, groaning deep in his throat as he drew his arms around her.

Genesis slid her arms around his neck, pressed her hard, pointed nipples against his bare chest, pleasure-pain zapping straight to her pussy like a bolt of electricity. She was famished, the extent of her hunger shocking her so soon after a feeding, shocking her that he tested her control as no other human male ever had before. Her energy levels dwindled and spiked at so alarming a rate she could no longer gauge need from want, did not know whether she was coming or going, giving or taking.

Genesis moved a hand to his lap, squeezed, then fiercely stroked his burgeoning shaft through his briefs, and broke their kiss to slide her mouth down to his neck. His wild pulse pounded against her lips, making her pussy and heart throb at one fell swoop.

Alex arched his throat, fingers roughly pulling at the ties in front of her bustier, and at once, her incisors elongated to razor points, a throwback to the aborigines. Genesis' people had long given up the practice of obtaining energy through blood as barbaric, primitive. But with the coppery scent of Alex's life-fluid filling her lungs, she could suddenly see the fascination, vaginal muscles spasming at the prospect of tasting Alex in the most basic way possible, his blood spilling onto her tongue, the metallic-salty flavor of it flowing down her throat, visceral and hot and...

She scraped her fangs across his bronze skin, preparing to sink them in, not much, just a prick, before Alex pulled back, panting and gaping at her.

"Tell me about my father."

"Your father?" she mumbled, fangs retracting as she returned his look, dazed.

"What was he? I mean, was he African-American, like your people?"

"African-American?" Genesis blinked, could not believe his calm posture; that he wanted to discuss his pedigree *now*.

Her cunt contracted at his restraint. Lilith, it was aphrodisiacal! Genesis closed her eyes, took a deep breath, tried to rein in her lust before she stared at Alex. "I never met him, but your mother told me he was of mixed heritage. Unlike my people, he was pale complexioned but sloe-eyed, perhaps of half-Hawaiian descent." Though Kalika had been coffee-colored, a shade or so darker than Genesis' copper skin, Inanna did not judge themselves on the basis of skin color despite, like humans, Inanna coming in all colors of the rainbow. The deciding factor, the only factor that connected Inanna and Sebitu alike was each race's need to merge with and feed from humans.

Alex nodded now, seeming to digest her thoughts and words, and Genesis felt compelled to add, "She said you looked just like him, so perhaps he resembled your actor, Keanu Reeves."

He flushed at this, reacting to her unintentional flattery. "I always wondered. I never felt like I came from my parents. Even before I realized I was adopted, I never felt like I belonged to them, or that they belonged to me."

"I am sure they loved you," she blurted, not understanding her sudden softness, or this intense need she had to comfort as well as protect him. Such tenderness was unheard of among her people, a useless trait and a frailty for someone like her, someone used to taking what she wanted, what she needed, someone who could not afford to care about the personal consequences of her actions, or the casualties she left behind.

Alex did not say anything, just stared at her.

"Your mother loved your father very much."

"You're telling me this, why?"

"It is something you need to know."

"Why did she give me up?"

"To save your life."

"And my father's life?"

"Your father's death was an unavoidable byproduct of his and your mother's joining."

"Is that the party line that lets you sleep at night?"

She registered his disdain, hackles rising in response. "I do not have to answer to you."

"No, you don't have to, but then why are you here?"

His smug tone angered her, especially when he knew nothing of what she had gone through all these years to keep him safe. Especially when he knew nothing of the sacrifice his mother had made for him.

Genesis pushed him back onto the bed, straddled him before she realized what she was doing, wrapping a hand around his throat just firm enough to hold him captive but not choke as he struggled beneath her. "Contrary to popular opinion, your mother was not a murderer."

"What else am I to think?" Alex rasped. "You come from a race that sucks the energy from humans, that kills—"

"To *survive!*" She pressed her thumb against his windpipe, choking off anymore of his accusations and insults as he caught her wrist with both hands and tried to remove her hand from his throat. She watched his amber eyes widen and tear, his thrashing and gasps for air suffusing her folds with the cream of her excitement.

She had never been so turned on, the prospect of fighting for a meal unappealing enough to make it necessary to incapacitate her prey in some way. Alex's struggles beneath her, however, his cock hard and thrusting against her slit, felt like some weird form of foreplay.

In addition to her arousal, she was feeling vindictive and very defensive of her people, their way of life and survival, wanted to show Alex that Inanna superiority and strength was not to be toyed with or disparaged. How could she feel this way about someone she'd sworn to protect?

Kalika's face flashed before her mind's eye as if to remind Genesis of her mission and she immediately dismounted and released Alex.

He sprang from the bed, coughing and massaging his neck with a hand as he leaned against the top of the bureau across the room and glared back at her with an ah-ha, I-thought-so expression in his eyes.

"Believe what you wish," she said.

"I see through you. You're not as unaffected as you want me to believe."

Genesis stood and folded her arms across her rounded breasts as she peered at him, her nipples painfully hard and pressing against the leather material of her bustier. "Do not think because I held affection and loyalty for your mother that I am in any way susceptible to your allure."

Even as the words left her mouth she knew she was lying.

The look that Alex gave her said that he knew it too.

Genesis sighed and approached him.

He did not flinch or blink as she stood a foot in front of him, and a shiver of pleasure coursed through her pussy at his spirit in the face of a strange being's unpredictable anger, her sexual excitement rising again. "Your mother was working to change the old ways. It was why she had you. She thought your conception a harbinger of the future, that your existence would force the assembly's hand and end the war between the Inanna and the Sebitu."

"Vampires," he muttered.

"No!" Genesis denied, despite what she had been about to do to him only minutes before. "Kalika saw the future. She knew that our kind could not survive if we continued as we did, that there needed to be a change; the indiscriminate killing had to end."

"Was this before or after my father?"

"You are blaming her for his death when you should be thanking her for your life."

"Perhaps I would, if she were here." He stared at her long and hard. "How did she die?"

"You do not wish to know."

"Oh, but I do. Don't stop your revelations with how she lived. Tell me how she died. I

need to know."

Genesis took a deep breath. This was the hard part, what she had been dreading since she had run from that cave twenty-eight years ago. "Your mother was a very progressive thinker, in case you did not know."

"That's not what I asked you."

"No, but you need to hear this, that there was more to her, to us, than how we obtain our nourishment."

"And my father?"

"She paid penance for his death every day after that she lived."

"What happened to her?" he bit out.

Genesis closed her eyes against the images of torture, the hours of flaying that Kalika had endured during the interrogations before her execution, her refusal until the end to incriminate anyone except herself. Even still, Genesis had been whipped and imprisoned as an accomplice, only much later escaping with the help of one of the Sisters.

She wondered if Xevera still lived, or had her perfidy been discovered too.

"Shit," Alex hissed.

Genesis popped her eyes open to stare at him, had not realized she'd been transmitting her thoughts until she read the truth in his suddenly pale face, that he had seen the images as clearly as if he had been in Emsharra and experienced the torture himself.

"I want them to pay for my parents' deaths."

Genesis did not need to ask to know which parents he meant—Kalika Enlil and Glenn Ryan—and that he knew now exactly why she had come to him.

CHAPTER 3

Alex wasn't surprised when he woke the next morning in bed alone.

Genesis had retired to the living room sofa before he'd gone to sleep, claiming he needed his rest after the attack, but he knew she was afraid to be alone with him. He couldn't blame her. He was afraid of being alone with her, afraid of the chemistry in the air when they were together. He was afraid of the instant lust that besieged him since he'd met her, like being on the edge of obtaining exactly what he had been wishing for so long.

Before he'd met her, celibacy had been difficult, but not insurmountable. Since he'd met her, he couldn't imagine going one hour without plunging into her wet depths, seeking and achieving his release.

He sat up in bed suddenly, a painful hard-on tenting the front of his boxer briefs as he flung off the covers and threw his feet over the side of the bed to land on the floor with a muffled thud against the plush gray carpeting. Alex had a big day ahead of him. He needed to go to work—would not let those who had killed his father scare him away from his routine—and formulate a plan, stay alive long enough to get revenge on those who had robbed him.

He had sensed Genesis' initial appreciation of his bloodthirsty mien, then her later retreat when she'd said they would discuss the situation in more detail in the morning.

Well, the morning was here.

Alex took a quick shower, urgently, vigorously jerking off and washing his body in short order. He was clad in a fresh pair of boxer briefs and drying his hair with a towel by the time he went to the living room to check on Genesis.

She slept soundly, like the dead actually, and that worried him since she was supposed to be some kind of bodyguard here to protect him.

"I am not asleep."

Alex started, stood straight and stepped back as Genesis sat up on the sofa rubbing her eyes with her knuckles.

"How could I, with all the racket you make?"

"'Racket?"

"I am a very light sleeper. When you were in the shower I heard---"

Alex cursed, felt heat rising to his face. He hadn't thought he'd been that loud, had barely released a groan upon his release, yet she'd *heard* him. Maybe she hadn't actually heard him as much as read his mind while he'd been masturbating. Shit, she probably knew he'd been fantasizing about her naked and him coming deep inside her hot cunt while he'd fisted his hard dick and jerked his seed down the tub's drain!

"It's your fault," he finally mumbled.

She didn't bother to defend herself, simply stood and brushed by him on her way to his bedroom. "Get some breakfast ready while I shower."

"Please."

"I will see you when I am done."

Her bossiness made him instantly hard again, despite his brain telling him that he didn't like her attitude. Alex wasn't used to anyone telling him what to do, had always been one who worked better without supervision or anyone telling him his responsibilities. From a young child he'd been very mature and independent, depriving his mother of the sort of coddling and bonding that a more reliant child might have afforded her.

He felt guilty all of a sudden at the thought, wondered how much more he had deprived his parents being the distant and undemonstrative child that he'd been. Alex shook his head as if to rid himself of the thought, went to the kitchen to start breakfast as he'd been "ordered" to do.

By the time Genesis emerged from the shower, clad in a new leather outfit--this one in burgundy, but no less form-fitting or revealing--Alex was placing a plate of buttermilk pancakes on the island beside a plate of sausages and a few cheese omelets.

"Thanks for cleaning up the mess," he said.

"The least I could do," Genesis mumbled.

"I take it you got the blood out of the carpet with your little blue magic light."

"Something like that."

She seemed uncomfortable talking about what happened last night. Maybe she didn't want to be reminded of his injury or her part in its occurrence, so Alex decided to drop the subject. Far be it from him to unsettle the great warrior goddess.

He watched her pile her plate and thought that the events of last night certainly hadn't affected her appetite at all. He didn't know why he expected her to nibble and play with her food when he knew she would have to have a hearty appetite to sustain a dynamite body like hers. Still he was surprised when she finished a five-tier stack of pancakes, five sausages, two omelets, and reached for seconds before Alex had gotten through his first serving.

Genesis paused as she reached for her glass of orange juice and looked at him staring at her. "What?"

"I guess sex isn't the only way you feed your body, huh?"

"No, but it is one of the most desirable and enjoyable ways." She guzzled her juice, put down her glass and wiped her mouth with her paper napkin. "My people have a healthy appetite for all things."

"So I've noticed."

"You disapprove."

"You are what you are."

"So are you."

Alex coughed and sipped some of his own juice before wiping his mouth with a napkin and standing beside the island. He took his suit jacket from the back of his chair and put it on. He didn't want to stand here and discuss his dubious ancestry with her. He was having a hard enough time coming to terms with all that she'd told and shown him about "his people."

"You are leaving?"

"Have to get to work."

"As I told you last night, I do not believe that is the wisest thing for you to do. You will be leaving yourself vulnerable to attack."

"According to you I'll be leaving myself vulnerable here or there. I'd rather they come at me on my terms."

Genesis took a last bite of pancakes, wiped her mouth and stood. "I will go with you."

"It's not Bring Your Succubus to Work Day."

She gritted her teeth. "I wish you would stop using that revolting term."

"You're insulted?"

"What makes you think you can insult me?"

"The same thing that makes me think I turn you on," he murmured and watched as she predictably blushed. "For a powerful ancient and long-lived being, you blush easily."

Genesis sputtered as she followed him to the living room where he retrieved his trench coat and keys. "Should you not be staying home to mourn?"

"Nice try, but I've mourned enough." He needed to act, not sit around grieving over his father's useless death when *he* had been the target.

He should be dead, not the decent and loving man that his father had been.

Alex needed to get to Emsharra, but Genesis had clammed up when he'd mentioned her taking him there to meet his ancestors and confront his enemies. And when he'd asked for the location, she'd told him simply that it was in a universe parallel to this one, not somewhere to which he could just hop in his car and drive.

Okay, so he needed her help in order to get there and find it.

Alex intended to work on her today. "Will you be teleporting or commuting with me?"

"I need to stay as close to you as possible from now on."

"I guess that means commuting with me."

They rode down to the lobby in silence, the sexual tension nearly suffocating him before the elevator dinged, the door opened and Alex rushed off. He'd made light of Genesis going with him, being with him for the day, but Alex couldn't think of a worse case scenario for someone in his heavy state of arousal; it was like putting a starving man in front of a feast and telling him he couldn't eat anything.

All he could think about was throwing her across his desk and fucking her in his office, something that just couldn't happen. Before yesterday, however, having sex with a beyond-hot, alien Amazon protector had not been a viable option in his world either.

Alex slowed as he passed the reception desk and noticed Kevin Meyers manning the front doors. As early as he left in the mornings he was used to witnessing the shift change, Tommy usually still on duty but awaiting his replacement. "Hey Kevin, what happened to Tommy? He take off already?"

"Ambulance rushed Tommy to the hospital."

"What happened?"

Kevin leaned in as if to share a national secret. "Manager did a spot inspection this morning and found him sleeping at the desk. At least they thought he was sleeping until they tried to wake him up and he didn't respond."

"Was he dead?" Alex whispered, tried to hold his temper as he peered at Genesis from the corner of his eyes, and noticed her head turned from him while she quietly whistled and glanced into the distance.

"Nah, turns out he was in some kind of coma."

"So he's going to be okay then?"

"Looks like it. I heard he came out of it a couple of hours after arriving at the hospital. Touch and go for a while there though."

"A coma..." Alex turned to face Genesis full, and she glanced back at him with not a bit of remorse in her expression; in fact, her jade eyes glinted with defiance.

If he put a hand on her now he didn't think he'd be able to stop at just dragging her to his car for a friendly chat about her feeding habits. Instead, Alex hastily thanked Kevin for the information, turned on his heels and headed out the front doors with Genesis on his heels.

"Alex."

He didn't stop; stalked across the street to retrieve his car.

* * * *

The silence in the car was interminable; the forty-five-minute ride to Alex's office downtown seem a thousand times longer. And it wasn't just the irritable lack of words, but the silence from his mind. Genesis pushed and prodded, but no matter what she did, she could not garner his thoughts, his mind locked tight against her.

Nice trick, Merlin.

His words from the night before came back to her, making her smile. And what did she

do *that* for?

"I don't see any humor in the situation."

"I am not smiling at the situation." Did he not understand what she had done last night was written in her DNA; that taking to survive was her nature? She did not necessarily enjoy the side-effect of her joinings, but neither did she regret doing what she needed to stay alive. The sooner Alex understood this, the better.

Alex, however, evidently had no intention on hearing her arguments. He was too busy seething and keeping his eyes glued to the road until he parked and they alighted from the car in an underground garage.

They took the elevator up to his offices on the twentieth floor overlooking the Hudson River and Staten Island Ferry station. It was a view to which Genesis had become accustomed. She had perched on the ledge outside his window in hawk form during the days when he had worked on mechanical drafts and drawings and did not go out to do field work with his father, Genesis swallowed at the thought of all her long lonely days of sentry duty. She had thought once she'd made contact with her charge, the loneliness would end, but it seemed her solitary days of silence were just beginning.

Alex was immediately engulfed by the condolences of his co-workers and partners as soon as he and Genesis exited the elevator, everyone he past giving him a firm hand shake or hug, expressing their sorrow at his loss and wondering why he had come back to work so soon. He dispensed with his thank yous as quickly and efficiently as possible without seeming rude, then caught her by a wrist, dragged her to his office and closed the door behind them just short of a slam.

Genesis stood inside the door, trying not to fidget as Alex hung up his coat and threw his leather satchel into a corner of the office's brown leather sofa. She dreaded his wrath like a candy-gorging human child might dread a visit to the dentist's office. When he whirled on her, she actually cringed.

She took one look at the rage in his eyes and immediately felt her defenses rising again. Who was he to judge her? And why should she care what he thought? She had him by almost two hundred years. That was two hundred years of evolution, wisdom and strength. She came from a race of superior beings who used his kind for food.

She should not care *what* he thought, but, Lilith help her, she did.

"And you wonder why I call your race vampires? You nearly killed a man."

"Waited the entire trip just to get that out, did you?" She had always had a flippant tongue, used to get into trouble in Emsharra for it all the time as a child. Her irreverence, however, seemed even more on display since she had revealed herself to Alex. Was he rubbing off on her, or had she rubbed off on him?

"Why?"

Genesis' impassive façade nearly crumbled beneath the weight of that one word delivered with such innocent sincerity. She dared not look in his amber eyes or she would surely crack.

But Alex would not let it go. He put a hand under her chin, lifted her head to look into her eyes. "Why, Genesis?"

"I had to! Do you not understand? After you—"

"After me?"

"After I defended you from Kate and fed you, I was depleted. I---"

"Fed me?"

"Yes, fed you Alex! I gave you my energy to heal you. Did you think you had miraculously healed on your own?" she snapped.

"I didn't think—"

"Yes, well, there is more to what we do than just feed on your kind and taking life. We can also save it."

"But how many times have you performed the latter, really?"

Genesis huffed and threw up her hands. Why did he insist on following this useless train of discussion? Why did he continue to ascribe human morals to what her kind did? The mindset was useless and beyond her. She could not save the one life she had wanted to, so what did it matter to her if a human male died here and there? Tommy-the-doorman was lucky to have survived his encounter with an exhausted and famished Inanna at all!

"It does not matter what I say. You are going to believe the worst of me anyway."

"It's not like I want to."

"Then do not." At his silence she came closer, afraid to touch him as he had touched her or she would be lost, would not be able to stop at just a touch or caress. "You think demonizing me separates us, separates you from your heritage?"

"Don't *you* understand? I had enough to deal with just being a telepath, was different enough to begin with. Then you burst into my life telling me that I'm some half-breed incubus—*cambion*--whatever the shit I am, and I'm supposed to accept it no questions?"

She felt his pain, a young boy ostracized by his peers, by himself, keeping his gifts secret from anyone and everyone who cared about him. His gifts should have been something he could share, rejoicing in them with the ones he loved. Instead he had had to hide them like a deadly communicable disease. Genesis' heart constricted at the rejected little boy who had grown up into the detached and emotionally scarred man before her.

"You are what you are, Alex. Do not kill the messenger."

"Thanks a lot smart ass."

She grinned. "It is not like I want to be in this situation any more than you do. You are not the easiest person to keep track of and protect."

"Then why do it?"

"I made a promise to a friend," she murmured.

Alex nodded and slowly lowered his head.

Genesis had a moment to close her eyes and press a palm against his erection before his lips touched hers, first gently, then firmly as he plunged his tongue into her mouth and she eagerly greeted it with hers, right before someone knocked on the door. Alex quickly ended the kiss and separated from her before bidding the person to enter.

A white-haired man opened the door and came in, a solicitous smile pasted on his lips and genuine affection shining out of his blue eyes.

Genesis did not trust him on sight. She kept her eyes glued to him like her shapeshifter's spirit the entire time he commiserated with Alex and shared his sympathy over his partner's and Alex's father's death. They exchanged some ideas about several architectural projects the firm had on the burner, then chatted companionably for several moments. Alex asked after the gentleman's wife and kids and accepted an obligatory invitation to dinner at the man's house. Alex paused only to introduce her as a cousin who was visiting from out of town before he led the man out of the office, and closed and locked the door in his wake.

"You can't suspect Roger Corbett of anything," he said when he came back to Genesis standing in the middle of the carpeted floor and noticed her glaring at the door.

Genesis did not know whether he had read her mind, or whether her suspicions were written on her face; she did not care. He needed to understand the urgency of his situation; that his life had irrevocably changed. "Everyone is suspect at this point. We cannot trust anyone."

"He's my dad's oldest friend. They went to junior high school together."

"That will not matter if the Inanna or Sebitu get to him the way they got to Kate."

"Corbett is not Kate."

"Meaning what? That he cannot seduce you with his body or charms so he is safe?"

"Meaning this entire conversation is ridiculous and I'm not going to have it anymore."

"From now on, you do not have any friends."

"Except you."

Genesis started when she realized he had covered the length of the room to stand no more than a foot in front of her. If she did not know better, she would think he was full-blooded Sebitu, moved with the silent grace and speed of Inanna's greatest nemesis. "I would not exactly call myself a friend."

"You're not an enemy." He stepped even closer.

"I am your bodyguard. Nothing more, nothing less."

"Mmm-hmm. You don't look like any bodyguards I know."

Genesis stepped back, unaccountably nervous, eyes darting as if for an escape.

He is Kalika's son!

So? He is a man, unrelated to you by blood, and if he were, that would not make a difference to you, should not. But, probably most importantly, he possesses the spirit-boost...

She was being plain greedy. She had fed not more than six hours ago, did not need another repast for a while.

Did not need, but she wanted, hungered. Craved him.

"I want you," he whispered, "and you want me too."

"You are awfully full of yourself."

"I'd like you to be full of me."

She stumbled back at the cliché, nevertheless surprised by his bawdy riposte.

"Don't tell me you're not used to risqué talk. Or do you just whip-bam-thank-you-man with all your vic—all your partners?"

She smiled at his automatic correction. At least he was trying not to insult her; that was progress. But this still could not happen.

He closed the space between them and despite the large size of the well-furnished and eclectically outfitted office, Genesis found herself against a wall.

Alex placed a palm against the wall on either side of her face.

"I have something for you," she blurted.

"And here I thought I had something for you."

"I am serious." She ducked from under his arms and took several steps away as she pulled the pendant from beneath her bustier.

Alex followed her, staring at her breasts and making the nipples stand at attention before he lifted his eyes to the pendant. "What is it?"

Genesis lifted the chain over her head, stepped closer to put it over Alex's head as he dutifully leaned forward. "It is Inanna's knot. Your mother wanted you to have it. I have been holding onto it until the time was right."

Alex reverently touched the pendant, slowly raised his eyes to her. "And you thought now was the right time?"

She nodded, his grin shooting sparks straight to her center, setting her cunt on fire.

"It's beautiful."

"It is a sacred symbol of my people."

"Is that why you don't want to fuck me?"

"What!"

"Because of the promise you made to my mother and she was your friend?"

"That has nothing to do with anything."

"Sure it doesn't."

Genesis glared. "If I wanted to fuck you, I would."

Alex raised a hand to caress her cheek with his knuckles. "Let me make this a little easier for you, Gen. I'm no longer a baby you have to protect. And we're not blood."

He did not have to tell her that he was no longer a baby. She could see this quite clearly, gaze roaming from his head to toes, taking in his wide shoulders and hard chest beneath the pale blue dress shirt. Her eyes lingered on the impressive erection pushing against the front of his designer navy pants and she licked her lips, enjoying the sensual view.

Genesis did not know what made her stall. Had he been any other male, she would have taken him by now and been ready for any seconds to be had. Lilith, she had never not been the aggressor! Never bowed or deferred to any male, never mind trusted a human male with her thoughts or desires, had never had the need to. Why open up and trust someone who would ultimately not remember the experience he had shared with you, that is if he survived at all? It would be tantamount to confiding in a pet house cat or dog.

He was not a pet, however, and not just any man. He was Kalika's son.

And he was all grown male, gorgeous and virile and everything she looked for when she hunted. And there was something else, that unknown mysterious quality of his mixed blood, the legendary spirit-boost that flowed through it.

Genesis' hands shot out, grabbed his shirtfront and instantly switched places with him, pulling him forward before pushing him back against the wall. She stood on her toes as he bent his head, kissed him with brutal force, driving her tongue into his mouth as he met her with equal enthusiasm, grabbing her ass in both hands, roughly pulling her to him and grinding his rock-hard cock against her slit.

"Too many clothes," he mumbled against her lips.

Genesis moaned, tacitly agreeing, too busy kissing and fondling him to do anything about it. She sucked his full bottom lip into her mouth, relishing its firmness and sweet-salty taste before gently sinking in her teeth; it took everything in her to stay gentle with him, swallowing his desperate moans and making them her own.

She guided him towards the sofa and pushed him down onto it, watching him watch her with those vivid amber eyes, their intensity making shivers ride down her spine. She reached for the front of her bustier, pulled one string loose to make the entire front fall open. She did not have on a bra, never wore one and could tell that the absence met with Alex's approval when she saw him lick his full lips.

She scented him through his clothes, the strong male musk of his arousal seeping from his pores, making her nostrils flare.

Genesis discarded her top, slowly made her way to the sofa. "Take off your clothes."

Alex's hands flew to his shirt, ripping the buttons off before he pulled his shirt out of his pants, snatched his arms out of the sleeves and dropped the shirt on top of Genesis' bustier. He toed off his shoes, and got out of his socks, pants and boxer briefs in short order.

Genesis lost patience with manually removing her clothes, instead used enchantment to make her pants and boots disappear. She went to him on the sofa in just a pair of burgundy lace thongs.

Alex sat on the edge of the sofa as she approached. She paused, standing astride one of his legs before she bent and planted a knee against his erection. He moaned, pulled her closer and ran a palm from her crotch up to her plump breasts, pinching each hardened nipple in turn before he lowered his face to her center and took a deep breath. "You smell like sex," he whispered before burying his face in her satin-covered folds.

She pushed him back, the thong mysteriously disappearing as had her clothes before it. "Eat me, Alex. I want to feel your tongue in my cunt." She thrust her hips at his face.

Gracie C. McKeever

He groaned and drew his arms around her, cupped her ass cheeks and pulled her flush against his mouth to do her bidding.

The first touch of his tongue sent heat spiraling down from her chest to gather in her pussy in a pool of liquid fire. Feminine juices trickled down her thighs as he sucked her engorged clit into his mouth. Genesis arched her neck and buried her fingers in his close-cropped waves, reveling in the silken caress of curls against her palms as she fisted his hair.

He spread her with his thumbs, nibbled and sucked her labia, then closed his mouth over her, and buried his tongue deep before pulling out to stroke her soaked folds like a painter. Tremors violently rocked her body and when he replaced his tongue with two thrusting fingers and went back to sucking her clit in the rhythm of his plunges, Genesis flung back her head and softly keened. Alex reached up a hand too late to cover her mouth.

The taste of herself on his hand drove her wild, and before either of them knew it, she had him on his back straddling his hips, the blue light of her spirit ignited and encircling them both in a wavering glow. Genesis caught his hard shaft in one hand and guided it to her pussy, rubbing the mushroom head of his cock up and down her slit until it was thoroughly coated in her cream.

"I need you inside me, Alex. Now."

He circled her waist with both hands, and pitched his hips up as Genesis impaled herself on his shaft.

They moaned, began moving together. Genesis rode his dick, and Alex thrust inside her and rolled his hips for several long silent moments.

"Shit," he hissed. "I don't want to come yet."

It was the only provocation Genesis needed to squeeze her vaginal muscles tight, and milk his cock.

"I want you to," she whispered and leaned down to cradle her mouth against his throat. "Come for me, Alex. Come now."

She sank her fangs into his neck, felt his blood spurt into her mouth at the same instant that he shuddered and spurted his semen deep inside her cunt. Her spirit light shimmered around them before Alex's, bright and deep red, rose from his body to fuse with hers and form one purple light that surrounded them.

"Oh, God...Oh...God!"

"Yes. That is it, Alex. Give me all. Give yourself to me. Yessss..." Genesis mindlessly arched her back, fingernails digging deep into Alex's shoulder blades as she planted the heels of her hands into his collarbone for balance when his *kundalini* blasted into her body. She rode the wave of her climax for several long minutes, Alex panting and thrashing beneath her before she realized what she was doing.

Lilith, no!

Genesis immediately stopped moving, felt Alex convulsing between her legs, his fingernails driving deep into her hipbones where he held her fast.

It is not too late, cannot be too late. He is alive. He is not a dry empty husk...

She glanced down at him as his shudders subsided, shocked when she saw his face

changing from feline to human to feline and finally back to human again. She looked further to see fine, shiny black fur receding back into his upper body, the hair on his head withdrawing back to its original close cropped length.

Genesis put her hands on his shoulders and shook him when her shock subsided. "Alex!"

He opened his eyes, a beatific expression shining out of their amber depths as he stared at her and rasped, "More, Gen. I want more of you. I need more."

CHAPTER 4

Alex caught her shocked expression, wondered if during their lovemaking he had somehow grown a second head. "What?"

"You are...you are well?"

"Is that a question or a statement?"

"I thought I might have...that you were..."

"I'm fine." He grinned, reaching up to palm her breasts and leaning in to lave and bite each nipple in turn before he raised his head to leer at her. "In fact, I'm more than fine." He waggled his eyebrows at her and Genesis stared. "*What* is the problem?"

"Have you...have you ever...?"

"Have I ever what, Gen? Spit it out." He felt her confusion, knew how much it unnerved her that the shortened version of her name flowed out of his mouth so easily. He knew from her thoughts that no one since Kalika called her Gen and he knew how much she missed Kalika.

"Gen...?" He touched her hand and she started. "Have I ever what?"

"Shapeshifted before?"

"What?"

"I thought I saw you...change when we were..."

"Isn't that something I'd be aware of?"

"Not necessarily. Especially if it was just for an instant, or your first time."

"I assure you it wasn't my first time...Ow!" Alex rubbed his shoulder where Genesis had slugged him.

"Stop being so silly."

"I thought silly was the order of the day. This entire situation is silly to me."

"You had better start taking it seriously, because it is a serious matter."

Usually he was the one dispensing directions and orders, walking around in a dour mood that made the secretaries and other support staff around the office give him a wide berth. It was a brooding look he had perfected over the years, and something he was totally unaware of unless someone brought it to his attention. Usually that someone was his worried-for-her-son's-mental-well-being-and-happiness mother.

Whenever she used to catch him in the house studying while other kids were in the house playing video games or watching TV, or outside playing, she warned him that he was too serious for a little boy; that he needed to lighten up and have a little well-deserved fun.

Alex never thought so, too busy rushing to grow up and join his father in his architectural firm, too busy wanting to dig into the daily grind with the business that was in his blood and which he loved to worry about little league games and stickball in the streets. But Genesis was serious enough for the both of them; her serious, life-and-death, sky-is-falling demeanor bringing out the fun-loving side that his mother had always known was in him.

Alex froze when he realized what she had said earlier. That she had thought she'd seen him shapeshift.

Into what?

"Does this shape shifting add to the experience?" he suddenly asked.

"Your spirit-boost adds to the experience," she blurted then gawked as if she'd let something slip that she totally didn't want him to know.

"Spirit-boost? Is that some Inanna euphemism for parts of the male anatomy?"

"It is a special kind of kundalini, energy. Very elusive, very rare, much sought after."

"Ah." Alex nodded as if he understood what she was talking about when he really didn't know anything at all, unless she was trying to tell him that he was some sort of freak of nature, and he had thought they'd already covered that ground.

She moved to dismount him and Alex released her, reluctantly saying bye-bye to the warmth of her pussy and the most gorgeous breasts he had ever had the pleasure of sucking and fondling before she sat on the sofa beside him.

"So tell me more about this spirit-boost," he whispered.

She glanced at his lap then quickly averted her eyes as if the sight of his semi-erect cock offended her.

"Don't tell me you're suddenly bashful around me after what we just did."

"Do not be ridiculous," she scoffed.

"Then what is it?"

Genesis stood, waved her hands in front of her body from head to toe and when she was done, her burgundy leather outfit was on again, just as slamming and tight as ever.

"You should get dressed. We have much to do, much to discuss."

"I was just going to—" Alex had a second to glance down at his body before he was fully

clothed right down to his shoes. "Bet that comes in handy for a quick getaway."

"I would not know."

Alex grinned, holding in a laugh. If she put her nose in the air any higher, a low-flying jet would be flying into it any minute.

"So, this spirit-boost...?"

"It is as I told you, something special in your blood, your life-force."

"Blood..." He suddenly remembered that bite, reached for his throat where he'd felt the distinctive prick of her fangs before he'd come harder than he could ever remember coming in his life, vaguely aware of her sucking blood from his throat while her pussy had forcefully milked his cock dry.

Shit, he'd been kidding when he'd called her a vampire. Well, at least half-kidding.

He gingerly fingered his neck, found nothing but smooth unscarred skin all the way around. Could he have mistaken the bite? No, no way. He had been pretty far gone in his climax, but he knew a bite when he felt it, especially one that had punctured skin and bled him.

"But you—"

"Used my spirit light to heal it."

He was going to have to get used to someone other than himself tooling around in his head, answering questions he hadn't even had a chance to ask. But at the same time, he kind of liked having Genesis up there. It wasn't as invasive as he thought it would be. Probably because he could just as easily cut her off if he chose to, and could just as easily read her.

It was more a sharing than invasion. "Did we exchange energy?"

She frowned, looked confused, but only for a moment before saying, "I believe we did."

He sensed her distaste at having to admit that, the possibility of giving up energy and not just taking it probably unheard of to her kind. "That's never happened to you before, has it?"

She silently shook her head, still frowning.

From her reaction, she didn't seem too happy about the exchange either.

"About this spirit-boost?"

"Why do you keep coming back to that?"

"Wouldn't you if you found out you have---?"

"Alex, I do not wish to talk about this."

"Tough, because this is something that concerns me, that I need to know. This is my life."

"Do you not understand? The life-force you possess makes you more of a target!"

His eyes widened at her tone. She sounded like the idea bothered her. Was that because it made her job of protecting him tougher? Or was it because she genuinely cared for him and didn't want to see him any more at risk than he already was?

"If LaMia or her cohort Xaphan find out—"

"Who the hell are they?"

"Most likely the ones behind the attempts on your life."

"They're working on their own? Or are they sanctioned by the Inanna?"

"I do not believe Nahemah knows about your existence, and I do not believe she would sanction your assassination if she did."

"Nahemah?"

"She is *Quna*, the Highest of our province and ruler of Emsharra. She is also your great-grandmother, Alex."

"My...?" His head was starting to spin with all the information. She was telling him he came from some royal lineage?

Yesterday he'd been a talented architect and partner in a fairly successful company. Up until a week ago he'd worked with his father and loved it. Yesterday, he'd been mourning the death of his father to an unfortunate construction site "accident," only to discover that his father had died in lieu of him.

"No." Genesis shook her head, a thoughtful look on her face. "I do not believe Nahemah knows. I am certain that LaMia and Xaphan are working on their own, with perhaps a small band of Inanna and Sebitu followers to round out their insurrection."

"Sebitu?"

"Twenty-eight years ago they were our enemy. Kalika, your mother, was working to change that. She and Nahemah were functioning through the assembly for an accord between Inanna and Sebitu. Combined, the two governing bodies would come up with a viable solution to the human conservation issue. That was the plan anyway."

She was talking about the survival of his race in terms of political ideology, as if peoples' lives weren't being threatened every day by her kind. As if her kind were gods and had the right to decide how many of his people lived and died, and the manner in which they would.

But didn't his own government do the same thing, declaring war, and sending men and women to die on foreign soil every day?

The politics of her world would have been fascinating but what she was outlining didn't tell him squat about his predicament, this spirit-boost or energy exchange. The more he knew, understood, the better he could prepare and protect himself, possibly prevent another attack. He didn't want to count solely on Genesis to protect him, as skilled and powerful as she was. He didn't want her risking herself for him, was growing too fond of her to see her hurt. He was sure she would scoff at his tender-by-her-estimation feelings.

Who was he kidding? Tender? He was most likely in love with her, probably had fallen from the first moment he'd become aware of her in his dreams until they'd made eye contact at the cemetery. She was beautiful, intelligent, tough, and despite her hard-ass pose, he knew deep down she was soft at heart.

Now to get her to admit that she was protecting him because of more than a promise and that she might have a modicum of the feelings he felt for her. "Why do you think my...kundalini

makes me more of a target?"

Gracie C. McKeever

"It is not just your energy. It is the spirit-boost it contains. It might be the key, Alex." She looked at him, jade eyes glittering with foreboding. "If your enemies found out that you possessed it, they may not just stop at killing you."

What the hell was that supposed to mean? What was worse than or beyond death? Alex wondered. Then he remembered the visions he'd received from Genesis' mind and swallowed hard at the torture she and Kalika (he could not yet allow "mother" in conjunction with the woman) had endured.

"If Nahemah and the rest of the assembly knew on the other hand..." Genesis began pacing the office, determination emitting from her in waves before she came to stand in front of him with a devious grin lifting her lips.

The look sent his heart spiraling to his stomach. "Where are you going with this?"

She began pacing again, mind obviously clicking five miles a minute. "I think we may have solved the conservation issue. Your *kundalini*, your blood and its restorative powers may make it possible for Inanna and Sebitu to feed repeatedly from the same source without harm..."

She stopped in front of him again, eyes widening when she realized what she had said. Then she continued as if she hadn't just been talking about human beings like laboratory mice. "The problem will be how to duplicate and mine it."

"You could ask me what I think about it, especially since you're talking about bleeding me and mining my blood."

"Oh please, Alex, get over it. This is the way things are. This is who you and I are. And if your life-force can make the assembly come to its senses and see things Kalika's way, then you are obligated to do everything in your power to get to them and begin the work. And I am obligated to get you there."

"I don't think I like the idea of being a guinea pig."

"I do not think Kalika wanted to die so soon after holding you, but she sacrificed motherhood to save your life."

When she put it that way, she just made him feel like a big wimpy jerk.

"Come. We must go." She caught his wrist and led him to the door.

Alex pulled up short. "Where?"

"You wanted to go to Emsharra. You will get your wish."

Alex jerked his hand out of her grasp.

Genesis stopped and turned back to gawk at him "What is the problem now?"

"I can't just up and go at the drop of a hat. I have responsibilities here."

"Do I need to tell you how insignificant your responsibilities here are when compared against your responsibilities to the entire human race? To your people in Emsharra?" She put her fists on her hips and glared at him with an expression that was plainly meant to intimidate and shame him.

He held her stare, refused to let the idea of her superior nature and race cow him, despite wanting to fidget and melt as a lesser man might have. Luckily for her he wasn't a lesser man. "I

don't even know my people in Emsharra! They're not 'my people'."

"They are, whether you want to acknowledge them or not."

"What if I don't?"

"Have you changed your mind about going to Emsharra? About wanting to see the people who killed your parents punished?"

He swallowed, ambivalence running rampant through him; his primitive need for retribution and the alien responses of his Inanna ancestors warred with the compassionate, civilized and innate responses of his human ancestors. The latter were responses with which he was well acquainted, responses with which he was used to dealing, while the former had him wondering what sort of violence he was capable of.

"I haven't changed my mind," he murmured.

"Then we will go." She reached for his closest hand and Alex let her take it.

"Where?"

"To your apartment for supplies. Then I will take you to the portal."

CHAPTER 5

Genesis watched and waited as Alex made his excuses to his staff and partners, bravely weathering the concerned, questioning looks all over again as he kept his explanations to the barest minimum. Not that he needed to say anything at all. He was one of the afore-mentioned partners, and had just lost his father. Genesis felt the acceptance all around them as she and Alex exited the offices; she felt the quiet strength and power he wielded, the respect he elicited. It was obvious his authority in the hierarchy of *Ryan and Associates, Inc.* was securely established among the executive and support staff.

They were silent in the elevator on the way down, standing shoulder to shoulder, as close as two people could get without touching. Genesis felt his body heat. His scent and aura wafted out to her over the tiny distance, simultaneously lulling and arousing her. It took everything in her to keep her hands off of him. The threat of being caught in a clinch at Alex's place of business was not nearly enough to keep her away from him. They had just gone at each other like animals in his office, after all.

No, it was not fear of embarrassment, but alien uncertainty—about how she had finagled Alex's agreement to leave, and the reception they would get once they arrived at the portal – that had her thoughtful. She had been unfair to throw so much at him so soon and expect him to deal with leaving everything he knew without any qualms or reservations. He had a life here, a human life that did not involve her or her people; would continue to have a life, albeit under the threat of assassination at every turn were she in his life or not.

It was the thought of not being in his life that made her chest uncharacteristically tight, as if her heart were expanding with...some sort of unknown emotions better left unknown and unacknowledged. It was ludicrous to feel this way, to have this sense of entitlement, *attachment*, to a human. They could go nowhere, their disparate world views dooming them to failure.

She would be better off setting her sights on an Inanna or Sebitu. At least she was the same species, shared their same ancestors, their same culture and moral principles. She would not have to justify her actions to an Inanna or Sebitu; she would not have to explain her feelings because they would be her mate's feelings too.

Problem was, she had never met an Inanna, and certainly not a Sebitu, that truly sparked her interests, either physically or mentally. She had never met an Inanna with whom she wanted to spend the rest of her long life. Sure, she could salve her Inanna conscience and sense of purity with the fact that Alex was not full-blooded human; that at least half of her heritage's blood running through his veins. Small consolation when the man had a bounty on his head, the very nature of his conception and birth rendering his existence unlawful in her world.

Genesis peered at him from the corner of her eyes as they exited the elevator in the underground garage. She reached for one of his hands for nothing else than to ground herself in his reality, make sure he stayed close to her. Not because she liked touching him, not because she liked the feel of his big warm palm enclosing hers, but because she needed to be close to do her job. She was protecting him; this was all.

When the first susuration reached her, Genesis barely recognized the sensations of danger competing with the tumultuous lust rampaging through her bloodstream. She had just enough time to jerk Alex's hand and fling him back behind her as the first bolt erupted from the darkness directly at them.

Genesis automatically erected her shield, enclosing Alex with her in a spherical blue light that deflected the fulguration. Three more strokes of lightning came from the same direction in quick succession, instantly sizzling and bouncing against Genesis' spirit light with enough force to send her and Alex back a couple of steps. At this rate, she would not be able to fend off the attack much longer, not having to protect herself and another. She was exerting too much power already just keeping up her shields.

"We have to get out of here now!"

"Good suggestion," Alex said.

She backed up, Alex following her lead, eyes peeled for any more movement in the dark recesses of the garage in front of them.

Measuring the power and trajectory of the bolts, Genesis estimated the attacker attackers?—to be about twenty to thirty yards ahead—far enough for her to effect evasive maneuvers but not far enough for the bolts not to do damage to her shield. She was not concerned with sending out a spirit signal since her enemies had already located her.

"Can't you retaliate?" Alex asked.

"I would be shooting blind."

"Estimate! It's better than no action at all."

Of course he was right.

Another several fulgurations exploded out of the darkness, striking her radiant armor fullforce and making it shudder around them; it was a wonder her shield had not been breached.

While her shield was engaged, she could not teleport. Plain old regular walking was the only way for them to get out of here without taking the chance to de-shield, even for a second, and teleport. She could return fire through her shield, however; had to if they were to have a chance. Not that she would do much damage if their attacker had up his or her shields also, which he or she probably did.

Gen, just shoot!

She felt Alex's agitation nudging against her brain, heard his command and took aim, berating herself for not moving faster. Never had she spent so much time *thinking* on something before acting; usually she acted and took names later.

Her bolt lit up the dark area, gave her a brief glimpse of their assailants. There was more than one that she had seen, at least four. Not good odds. Now that she had narrowed down the location, Genesis fired off several thunderclaps in rapid sequence. From the sounds of them, she had hit her marks but was sure she had been as unsuccessful as her attackers in penetrating the enemy's shielding.

She backed Alex towards the elevators, and when the doors slid open, another bolt fired from the dismal garage, striking the concrete surrounding the elevator to the left of them. A scream sounded from the ivory and metal interior and Genesis used the moment to de-shield and drag Alex into the elevator with her.

"What was that?"

Genesis had a moment to look at the frightened occupant before responding with a reassuring smile just short of enchantment. She did not want to go as far as turning on her magic any more than necessary. Not that it made any difference when Alex had taken the trembling woman's hand in both of his, squeezed it and silently grinned down at her.

Lilith, she could not have done better herself *had* she performed enchantment! The woman looked like she was about to melt as she glanced up at Alex with big doe eyes and batted her lashes, her brush with death all but forgotten. Genesis smirked and turned her back on the display, eyes following the upward progress of the elevator dials before they reached the lobby and the doors slid open.

Not a moment too soon either, because she did not think she could stand a minute more of the woman fawning all over her man without ripping out the woman's eyes.

My man? Where did that just come from?

First shyness, now jealousy? She had to get this man to safety as soon as possible and *away from her*. His presence was turning her into a weak and emotional...female!

Genesis exited the elevator first, blocking the exit and scanning the lobby as surreptitiously as she could before allowing Alex and the woman to exit.

"One of the overhead fluorescent lights came down, actually just missed us," Alex said by way of explanation to the woman.

"Oh my, do you need me to report it to building maintenance?"

"Don't worry, we'll do that."

Genesis and Alex hung back as the woman nodded and walked towards the glass doors to exit the building.

"Quick thinking," Genesis admitted.

"You seemed a little preoccupied."

"I was, trying to keep us alive. And my job is not done yet." She caught him by an arm

and led him towards the back exit before Alex pulled up short. "You do that a lot and it is starting to annoy me."

"What are we going to do about transportation?"

Good question, Genesis thought. She stood for a moment biting her bottom lip, going over her choices. Teleporting immediately came to her mind but she just as quickly disregarded it for its unpleasant side effects and risks. It was not the most enjoyable or safe act of conveyance, and Genesis only resorted to it when absolutely necessary, did not like the inevitable nausea and power drain that occurred directly after, indeed could not afford it. Not to mention, she had never done a multiple before. However, it was either teleport, or walk, another risk in itself, leaving them out in the open and too exposed for an extended period of time.

"Come." She took his hand more forcefully this time, dragged him out the back door onto the near-empty street. She hoped his anatomy fared the process much better than hers usually did; she would not wish the inherent motion sickness on her worst enemy.

Alex put his fists on his hips and faced her. "What now?"

Genesis wordlessly closed the distance between them until she stood flush against him.

"This isn't the time for—"

"Shush!" She wrapped her arms around him, admitted this part more pleasant than any of her other teleporting experiences. Maybe this would not be so bad after all. "Hold on to me tight," she said and Alex immediately obeyed, wrapping his arms around her and letting her pull him closer, until she could feel his heartbeat against her breasts.

Genesis' heart furiously pounded in concert as she closed her eyes and concentrated, her spirit light instantly encompassing them in a cyclone of energy, spinning them around like debris in a twister for a brief moment before they finally dematerialized and disappeared from the street to rematerializing in the middle of Alex's condo living room.

Alex sunk to his knees and threw up on the carpet, which just about summed up Genesis' sentiments even if she did not vomit right next to him. Though her body had become accustom to the process over the centuries and she had learned to control the urge to retch, she did stumble to the sofa to sit down.

"You couldn't have warned me?" Alex rasped.

"There was no time."

"There ought to be a law against moving anywhere that fast."

"It is not my preferred mode of transportation."

"That's nice to know."

"But it works in a pinch." She stood and knelt down beside him.

"I don't think that's such a good idea, baby. I'm not sure if I'm finished yet."

She smiled at his endearment, heart filled to bursting. His human emotions were starting to rub off on her and get in the way of clear thinking. She did not have time for this folly! Had she been concentrating on her duty in the elevator and not focusing on her loins and the hot way Alex made her body feel, she might have been better prepared to protect him.

Genesis got up, went to the bathroom and ran cold water into a cup and then over a wash cloth before bringing it back to pat down Alex's feverish face. "Are you well enough to stand?"

"I think so." He took the hand she offered him and let her help him up. "Damn, I feel like such a wimp."

She handed him the cup of water and watched him drain it before she said, "There is nothing wimpy about your reaction. I threw up my first time."

"You're not just saying that to make me feel better?"

She grinned, knew that she would do anything within her power to make him feel better.

Anything except... "I do not lie."

"Not even itsy-bitsy, teeny-tiny white lies?"

"No."

"Never?"

"Ever."

He placed the empty cup on one of his nearby glass end tables, peered at her for a long silent moment before finally nodding as if satisfied with her veracity.

"We should get moving."

"Where are we going?"

"I told you. To the portal."

"You haven't exactly told me where that is."

"It does not matter as I will be taking you. I am your guide." Genesis marched to his bedroom, Alex close on her heels.

"I don't enjoy being blindly led around, Genesis."

She understood his need for control, especially now when everything around him was out of control; especially when the most important facets of his life, his very existence, and everything he had come to know, lay in someone else's hands.

Understanding it and changing her plans to accommodate macho power trips were two different things, however.

Genesis turned on him, one fist on a hip. "I perfectly understand this human male arrogance that pushes you to question my authority and tactics, but I have neither the time nor the patience to indulge it, Alex. We do not have the time."

"Are you through?"

"Not qui—"

He descended on her, both lips blazing and setting her mouth on fire, his hunger a living breathing thing, tongue sensually dipping, foraging, invading until it found and tangled with hers; until it subdued hers.

Genesis put a palm against his chest in a token protest, knees weak and making her slump

toward him for strength, a mistake that brought her in closer contact with the hard erect part of him that she craved to be inside her. Her mind told her they could ill afford this encounter, had no time to waste. This condo was the first place their enemies would come looking for Alex. Genesis was surprised she and he had not already been waylaid. It was just their good fortune that their enemies had not yet intercepted them.

Fortune would not last forever.

Genesis heard herself moan, her pussy leaking hot juices into her thong when one of Alex's hands went to a breast and firmly cupped it.

"We need this," he murmured between kisses. "We need the energy exchange."

What did he know of it? He had swapped with her once and now he was an expert on their needs? On *her* needs?

"Just say you want to fuck me, Alex. Do not use lofty justifications to get me into your bed," Genesis said coolly, trying to keep her composure, erect some distance, show him that he meant nothing more to her than a responsibility and a promise.

She did not *need* him, her body did not ache for him, her pussy was not throbbing with anticipation, eager for another incursion from his hard cock. No, no, not at all.

For all her concerted denials, Alex only smiled against her mouth, a deep chuckle reverberating in his chest.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Your tough act."

"It is not an act."

"Mmm-hmm." He moved his hand to slide under her bustier, no mean feat considering its

snugness, and managed to brush her hardened nipple with his thumb.

Genesis growled deep in her throat and pushed him back onto the couch, fingers hurriedly working at the knot in his tie before she realized she could undress him by other, quicker means.

Alex caught her hands in his and said, "Take it slow." as if reading her mind, and she suddenly realized that he very well might have; she realized that she might have been broadcasting again.

She wanted to argue with him, flip him down onto his back and take him, but something in his tone, in his eyes, stilled her. Some strange longing, more primal than her usual urges, made her want to follow his lead, see where he took her.

He pulled back to stare at her. "For your information, getting you into my bed and fucking you, as you put it, is only one among many things I want to do to you."

"I could take you if I wanted," she said without much conviction.

Alex nodded. "I know."

She returned his solemn look, for the first time in a long time at a loss for words.

He must have taken her silence for acquiescence for he stood with her in his arms, carried

her through the house to his bedroom as if she weighed nothing. He gently tossed her into the center of his king-sized bed before stalking her on his hands and knees across the firm vast mattress.

Genesis paused at the head of the bed to confront him. "The quicker we do this, the better. We have much to—"

"I'm not going to let you rush me." He caught her by an ankle and pulled her back to him across the bed, wrapping an arm around her waist as he held her firmly against him. "Like you said, the quicker we do this the better. And it will go a lot quicker if you don't fight me on this. Just let me make love to you the way I want to."

She shuddered at his use of the word "love," everything in her Inanna soul telling her to reject it, ignore it, that it was wrong for her to enjoy hearing it, hearing it from a human no less. Then she felt his erection pressing against her ass, insistent and hot, even through the barrier of their clothes, knew that she would go wild once she had him inside her; knew that she would lose control if she allowed it, love or not.

She could not allow it. No matter what he did to her, no matter how much he set her spirit and body on fire. No matter how much she liked what he did to her, no matter how much she liked him, she could not lose control; there was too much at stake.

Genesis felt him touching her mind, mental fingers persuasively caressing, requesting entry before he confirmed what he was doing with a whispered, "Open up to me, Gen. Let me know what you're thinking, what you're feeling."

The temptation to have her own pleasure echoing back to her from him, to experience his completion from his point of view, was much too great. Without thinking about it, Genesis made both their clothes evaporate, reveling in the feel of his suddenly bare skin against hers, the pearl of pre-come seeping from the head of his cock, moistening the crease of her ass as he rubbed himself against her.

"I'm going to take you from the front and the back, Genesis. I'm going to take you as many ways as I can. And when I'm done, I'm going to take you again."

She trembled at the tacit command in his voice; shuddered at the threat. She wanted him to take her, claim her, own her.

Lilith, what was she thinking? Never had she experienced such submissive longings. Inanna were takers, ravagers. They did not bow to any ma—

Genesis gasped when Alex flipped her onto her back and lowered his head to her pussy. She felt her core quiver in anticipation, cream slowly flowing, her own musky woman's scent filling her nostrils as Alex expertly tongued her clit. Lilith, that felt amazing! More amazing than the first time. She had not imagined sex with Alex could get any better. And he had not yet penetrated her.

"Stop thinking so much, Gen. Just feel," Alex murmured against her right before plunging two fingers deep into her cunt, thrusting and scissoring them until she was madly writhing beneath him and speaking in her native language.

Alex's mouth joined his fingers, licking and sucking and nibbling every hot, wet and scented organ in his path.

She felt her engorged clit throbbing against the tip of his tongue, closed her eyes tight, helplessly buried her fingers in his hair and held him in place as his magical mouth worked.

His tongue was voracious, merciless, and an orgasm soon swept over her. Her entire body convulsed as Alex latched onto her center and sucked her until there was nothing left of her essence pouring out.

When she opened her eyes, the purple sphere of light encompassed them both and she knew that they had indeed exchanged energy; he had taken from her and given to her in equal measure. Well, maybe not exactly equal measure. She had yet to give him anything close to the pleasure he had just given her.

Before Genesis could catch her breath, Alex flipped her onto her stomach and dragged her back so that he cradled his rock hard penis against her ass, a reminder that he was not yet finished with her, as he covered her body with his. He gently nudged her back hole with the head of his cock, using her own juices to ease his initial invasion.

"Alex..." She hated that the word came out on a whimper, but could not muster demanding and firm when he was on top of her like this; when he was sliding a finger into her anus and sensually stroking the delicate bundle of nerves inside and making her pussy weep as he prepared and opened her for him.

Over the centuries, Genesis had taken all manner of men, from big bad truckers, to jaded vice cops and homicide detectives. She had bedded multi-million-dollar athletes and captains of industry, and brought powerful generals and politicians to their knees with expert fellatio. There was very little in her life that she had not done, very little that she had not seen, very little that shocked or frightened her.

But this—prostrating herself, relinquishing power, trusting a man so implicitly and letting him take her from behind—she feared.

"You want this."

Genesis moaned at the statement. He was not asking her, did not need to. Her arousal floated on the air and gave her away with its piquant concentration, cunt gushing anew at her subjugation, blue spirit glow intensifying around them.

Alex caught her wrists above her head and held her fast as he drove past her virgin rosette, buried himself balls deep then stopped. "Are you okay?"

In answer, Genesis silently pushed her ass back, lewdly wriggling against him.

He leaned close to sink his teeth into the flesh connecting her neck to her shoulder, holding her in place as he slowly circled his hips and pistoned against her.

"Oh, Lilith...Yes. Alex, yes! Take me...take me!"

And he did. From back to front and back again as he had promised, until they were both paradoxically energized and spent, cocooned in each other's arms and a ball of purple light.

CHAPTER 6

He watched her sleep, itching to run his fingers through the long titian waves spread across the pillow beneath her head, but caution stayed his hands. Now would be the time when both of them would probably be up and fleeing the scene of the crime. There was no time for pillow talk and tender mercies. There was no time for declarations of everlasting affection and trust. There would be no false promises to stay in touch.

Maybe if she had been awake, she would have been leaving, the only thing keeping her in place her exhaustion and a promise. He wanted there to be more between them, wanted her to stay with him, be with him, because she wanted to, because she wanted *him*. He wanted her to stay because she found his sense of humor infectious and his lovemaking an irresistible force of nature that she absolutely could not live without.

He wanted her to love him as he loved her.

Damn, could he get anymore sappy?

Genesis moved closer in her sleep, hands outstretched as she blindly reached for him.

Alex grinned as a hand landed in his lap. His cock, like a playful young pup, anxiously, instantly leaped to attention beneath her palm.

"Mmm," she murmured, firmly wrapping her fingers around him before opening her eyes to stare at him. "I want you."

"As you can see, the feeling's mutual."

"You could never want me..." she leered at him as she bent her head over his crotch, "as much as I want you."

He would have argued with her, but his brain was too busy processing the fact that she had closed her hot little mouth around the head of his penis and was proceeding to stick her tongue into his slit and lap at the tiny bead of pre-ejaculate there.

"I need to taste you once more before we go," she said around his hard flesh, then lowered her mouth to the base of his shaft, fondling his balls with one hand as she planted the other in his chest and pushed him back to lie on the bed so that she could better devour him. For long moments, there were just the sounds of his hoarse groans mixed in with the noise of Genesis' dauntless slurping before Alex finally stiffened beneath her and cursed as a fierce climax tore through him.

When he came back to the world and opened his eyes, it was to the luscious sight of Genesis leaning on one elbow, staring down at him with a completely sated look on her face as she licked her lips.

"That wasn't fair."

"It was as fair as your taking me as it pleased you."

"And you're not used to that, are you?"

"What I am used to is of no consequence." Genesis dismissively waved a hand and moved to rise from the bed before Alex caught her wrist.

"Don't run."

"I am not running. Why would I need to?"

"My question exactly. You could take me with two hands tied behind your back if you wanted to. What are you afraid of?"

"I am not afraid."

He had felt it earlier when they had bonded, sifting through the complex network of her mind before finally finding the area that held her emotions. It was there he had first registered her fear, her confusion, her denial and something else that she couldn't hide, not from herself, not for long...her growing affection for him.

Alex didn't even want to consider that it could be love, much more that she'd ever admit it to him out loud. It was enough he felt love for her and wasn't able to say it. For two people with the ability to communicate in so unique a way, without words, they seemed to find all sorts of reasons to not communicate at all. They threw up barrier after barrier, locking doors in the mind to keep the other out. Alex knew he was as guilty as she. He was unaccustomed to having someone in his mind and automatically put up defenses against her intrusion; automatically put up defenses despite enjoying the concept of her like abilities.

"Let me go."

"What if I don't wan-?"

With lightning speed, Genesis extricated her hand, wrestled Alex to the mattress, planting a forearm against his throat.

"Does roughing me up make you feel better?"

"Yes it does."

"You can't choke the truth into oblivion, Gen. Even once I'm gone, it will still be there."

"Gone? What are you talking about? You are not going anywhere, not without me."

"Would you care if I did?"

She huffed, releasing him as she leaped from the bed and began to agitatedly pace.

He watched her intently, salivating at the way her round generous breasts swung back and forth as she stalked. She was so smooth, so full and inviting...Damn, he wanted her again!

"Why do you insist on turning our after-sessions into the Spanish Inquisition? You are here and I am here, and we enjoy each other's bodies. That is all."

"That's not all."

"Do not try to make this into some grand love affair."

"You said it, I didn't."

"Lilith, why are human beings such *romantics*?" she sneered. "It is just a great waste of energy and serves no purpose."

Alex got up and went to her, smiling at her derogatory tone, her cynic's heart. He tentatively reached for her face, half-expected her to put him in another chokehold. When she didn't retreat or make any aggressive moves, he decided to push his luck and palmed a silken cheek. "Who hurt you so bad that you would frown on such a basic human emotion?"

"No one *hurt* me. Besides, I am not human. So to impute your emotions to me is a useless enterprise."

"Don't tell me you've evolved so far on the food chain that romance and love mean nothing to you, because I won't believe you."

"That is your choice, an unwise one I might add."

"What about my mother...?" Alex swallowed hard at the memory of the torture Kalika had suffered before her death—for following a pipe dream, for having *him*—and couldn't imagine so restrictive a society to outlaw basic freedoms and emotions; to outlaw a child. "She loved my father, didn't she?" He peered at her as she hesitated, reached for her with his mind and found hers shut tight against him.

"Do not, Alex."

"Don't what?"

"Kalika made an error. It is one I do not intend to duplicate."

He stepped closer, crowding her in, chest to breasts, and she did not retreat, only tilted back her head to stare him down with those magnificent jade eyes. "Do you think I was an error, a mistake?"

"You were..."

He watched her, felt the confusion steeping beneath the surface despite not being able to read her mind. He could read her body, her heart and knew she had taken the double meaning of his question literally; he knew because that was the kind of forthright being that she was. He saw the tears in her eyes that made them glitter more than usual, saw the entreaty. She wanted him to stop, but would never say it, would never beg him, would never beg anyone, especially not a lowly human.

She put a palm against his chest and Alex could swear he felt his heart heat up and squeeze in his chest as if she clutched it in her hand. And maybe she did. "To pursue this line of discourse any further would not be wise, Alex."

"You don't scare me, Gen."

"I should."

"Why, because you have blood on your hands?"

"A lot of it."

"You don't scare me," he repeated.

Genesis shook her head, chuckling as she fell back a few steps. "You are so like your mother," she muttered. "Stubborn, stubborn, stubborn."

He grinned. "But you loved her anyway."

"Not that it did any good."

"Of course it did. She had you there with her in the end. Don't think she didn't appreciate and love you more for that."

"You speak of it as if you were there."

"I was, remember?" he said, tapping his temple with an index finger. "You showed me, Gen. Not just the bad, but the good. You showed me how important my mother was to you. How important it is for you to keep me alive, protect me."

"You make me sound like some sort of saint."

"No, just human."

"Perish the thought."

"And a flawed one at that."

"Now you push the insults too far."

Alex chuckled at this and grinned when Genesis joined him, the first time since they'd met that they had something to laugh about. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close for a deep kiss, invading her mouth with his tongue until she pushed hers out to meet his, sucking and pulling it in before pulling back to nibble his lower lip.

"Don't be insulted. Didn't you know flawed humans are the best kind of humans?"

"I know they have the richest flavor and energy." She stood on her toes to lick the side of his neck. "Although nothing matches the taste of your spirit-boost," she murmured.

"Serve me up on a platter, why don't you."

Genesis lecherously grinned, leaned in to suck and nip the spot she'd just licked, then pulled back when someone rang the doorbell.

Alex stepped away, grabbed his jeans from the foot of the bed and headed out of the bedroom to answer the door, got within two feet of it before Genesis caught him by an arm and pulled him back behind her.

"I was going to look through the peephole, Gen."

"That will not do any good if it is one of my people. Their bolts will go right through the door." At this, she pushed him aside, out of the range of the door. "I will see who it is."

He understood her caution, but didn't like her continually shoving him aside as if he was a child who had no sense and couldn't defend himself. Sure, she'd saved his life more than once and he owed her his trust and loyalty, but when did the big bad warrior goddess act end?

"When you are safe."

"I wish you'd stop doing that."

"I will, when you do. Now shush." Genesis stood on the right side of the door, already clad in what Alex liked to think of as her "guardian seductress" gear, as she waved her arms in front of him and outfitted him in the jeans he was holding before asking, "Who is it?"

"It...it's Kate Summer. Is Alex there?"

Genesis quickly covered his mouth as he opened it to answer. "Are you insane? We cannot let her know you are here."

Alex caught her wrist and removed her hand. "She already knows someone's here," he whispered. "She'll know something's wrong if I don't answer."

"Let her. I refuse to let her in."

"Alex...Alex, are you there? I really need you."

At Kate's pitiful whimper, Alex tried to move past Genesis to open the door, but she planted a forearm in his chest and pushed him against the wall. "Do not be so gullible, Alex. Isn't it obvious that she is part of a trap?"

"The only thing that's obvious is I have a friend on the other side of that door that needs my help and you won't let me go to her."

"What makes you think she has not led them here to us again?"

"I'm willing to take that chance."

"I am not."

"Gen..." He put a hand on her cheek, held her glare with a calm, patient look. "I can't go around distrusting everyone. That's no way to live."

"That is where you are wrong. It is the only way for you to live now."

"Alex...please..."

"You can keep me away from the door, but what good will that do? Doesn't look like she's going away any time soon."

Genesis sighed and closed her eyes. "Alex..."

"I'm wearing you down. Admit it." He removed her arm from his chest, brought her hand to his mouth and kissed her palm as he went to the door.

He looked through the peephole, took a deep breath before opening the door.

"Alex!" Kate flung herself against him, tears rolling down her face as she wrapped her arms around him and held on tight.

He looked down both ends of the corridor and pulled her into the apartment before closing and locking the door behind them.

"Kate, tell me what's wrong."

"Oh God...I don't know."

"I do not feel comfortable with this, Alex."

Alex caught Kate by the shoulders and set her away from him to stare at her face. Her eyes were bloodshot as if she had been crying for hours, not just in the last few seconds when he'd opened the door to her.

"I feel like I should apologize to you for something, Alex. But I don't know what. My head...the last couple of days I've had this pounding headache that won't go away. It's as if there's someone in there trying to get out. And the more I try to fight, the more it hurts. I just...I'm so tired, Alex. I just want to rest...give in..." She passed out in his arms and Genesis quickly insinuated herself between them to take hold of the woman's dead weight.

"Let me." She lifted Kate into her arms and carried her to the bedroom much as Alex had carried her a few hours before.

"What's the matter with her?" Alex asked, on Genesis' heels as she gently laid Kate across the bed and pushed stray blond tendrils from her face.

Who'd have thunk it?

Genesis stood to stare at him. "I am not sure, but I think she is under an enchantment spell. Or would be if she was not fighting it."

Alex's heart pounded with anger, hatred for the people who had killed his parents and were causing Kate such pain, quickly filling him. He clenched his hands into fists and gritted his teeth. "What are they doing to her?"

"They are trying to make her do their bidding. And I am sure I do not have to tell you what their bidding is."

"No, you don't."

Genesis reached out, put a palm against Kate's forehead for several long silent moments.

Alex watched as her familiar blue light glowed and Kate winced and sobbed before falling silent beneath Genesis' touch, a serene look on her pale face.

"She will sleep now."

"What about your friends?"

Genesis stood up to face him. "Make no mistake about it, Alex. They are not my friends. Far from it."

"What did you do? Counteract their spell?"

Genesis nodded. "By putting her in a deep trance, I have made it difficult for them to reach her. Difficult, but not impossible."

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"So what are you saying? They can still—?"

"Not as long as I keep her asleep."

"How long can you keep her asleep without doing any damage to her?"

"As long as we have to."

CHAPTER 7

Genesis saw the doubtful look cloud his handsome sculpted features, understood its source, but this understanding did not prevent her indignation from growing. And with all this, she still rushed to reassure him. "Alex, I will let no harm come to your friend." Despite wanting to ring the beautiful, blond, blue-eyed woman's neck for trying to kill him.

Sure, Kate had been under a spell, at the mercy of Inanna and Sebitu dissidents. This mattered not to Genesis when she remembered all the blood that had been spilled, all the pain she had felt when healing Alex, all the energy she had expended...Genesis choked up at the idea that she had almost lost him at this woman's hands.

"Genesis, it wasn't her fault."

She shook her head at his murmur, trying to clear all the unwanted emotions—especially the hate. As she had told Alex earlier, it was a waste to expend energy on such useless emotions like love and hate.

"You're just not used to feeling them. It doesn't make the emotions useless."

Genesis rolled her eyes and stepped away from the bed. "We should be going now."

"What about Kate?"

"She will be fine here. I will bolster the spell before we leave. She should stay asleep for several hours. That should give us enough time to get to the portal."

"What happens when the spell wears off?"

"She will wake up."

"You know that's not what I mean, Gen. Will she be...herself?"

"She will be herself, minus a few memories, more specifically the bad ones."

Alex nodded. "We have to stop them. I don't like the way they've invaded my life, the way they keep hurting the people I love and care about."

Genesis abruptly blocked her thoughts, and wondered if that meant he loved Kate, her

heart twisting with unaccustomed jealousy; at least it used to be unaccustomed before she had met Alex, before they had made love. Lilith, she hated feeling this way, hated this confusion and uncertainty!

Alex grabbed a black T-shirt from the foot post of his bed, yanked it on over his head and pulled his arms through the sleeves, animosity and frustration punctuating his every move, his every thought.

Genesis went to him, put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed. "Your feelings of rage are understandable, but not constructive."

"Are you telling me how to feel?"

Genesis calmly shook her head. "I am telling you what you need to do to help your friend. To help yourself."

Alex arched a brow. "And that is?"

"You need to be calm. Channel the negative energy into something positive. Channel the anger into determination, *use* it; think about and see the end of this conflict."

"Is that how it works for you? How you can go through your entire existence not feeling anything for anyone except for what they can provide you? What you can take from them?"

"I am not going to get into another theological argument with you again, Alex. We are different, see things differently; that is just the way it is and we do not have ti—"

He caught her around the biceps and pulled her close. "There's never any time with you! No time to make love, no time to mourn and grieve. Only to time take and to fight and to—"

"Yes, Alex, yes! Be angry! Be vengeful! Now just direct that anger and rage where it belongs. Not at me. I am here to help you."

"Fuck you, Genesis."

He said it so quietly and stoically that she almost did not hear him. But she felt him. Felt his aura cloudy and dark with vindictiveness, unlike any sensations she had experienced from him before. She had felt him sarcastic, forgiving, passionate, humorous, and, yes, she had felt him loving her, as much as she wanted to deny it. But never had she felt this black rage and revenge.

Alex suddenly plopped onto the bed beside Kate. "She didn't do anything to deserve this. Neither did my father...nor mother." He reached a hand out to stroke Kate's face and smooth her hair, his mood so reverent, his touch so gentle, Genesis choked back a sob.

What was wrong with her!

"There's nothing wrong with you. You just have feelings."

"If it makes me vulnerable and weak, then I do not want or need them."

"That's not the way it works, Gen. You have to take the good with the bad. For all the hurt and pain there's ecstasy and pleasure. For all the anger and revenge, there's forgiveness and peace. For all the disgust and hatred, there's love."

"No..." She backed away from him—knew where he was going with his discourse, what he was going to say if she let him. She could not let him, hated her cowardice but could not stop

her feet from retreating. She could not stop the fear that leaped to her heart when he got up and followed her. She had to escape his solace and succor. She did not need them. She did not *want* them!

"Yes." He caught her against him and, unbidden, the tears came, his and hers, fast and furious, great racking sobs bubbling up and out of them like thunderclaps in a storm. Drawn from them until they had no choice except to come together and express their grief and loss in the only way open to them, the only way they knew how, desperately clinging to each other, hungrily kissing, tasting each other's tears—hot and salty, cathartic and aphrodisiacal.

After several long moments, Genesis pulled away from him and took a deep shuddering breath as she swiped at her tears with the back of a hand. "You are right. They did not deserve what happened to them, or what is happening. None of them did."

Alex nodded and went to his closet to retrieve a black leather jacket.

She still felt his rage and vengeance—not for her, but for their enemies—simmering just below the surface. It was so alien, not his nature, and she did not like thinking that this situation had changed him for the worse, had changed him into her, a cold hearted being that could take a man's energy and life without a backwards glance.

Not totally without a backwards glance; it was catching up with her, all the centuries of using and killing. Alex had caught up with her.

She inched behind him as he donned his jacket, slid her arms around his waist and hugged him, as if this contact, holding him in place, could keep things the same; could keep him from dying and leaving her the way her parents had; the way Kalika had. "Do not change, Alex."

Do not become me!

He pressed his hands against hers on his abdomen as she leaned into him, cradling her chin on his shoulder. "It's too late, Genesis. I already have," he murmured.

* * * *

They waited several hours for nightfall to arrive, nerves on edge, each jumping inside their skin at every bump or raised voice in the corridor. They were ready to go on the defensive if they had to, but preferred to be on the offensive and away from the condo where they could fight out in the open.

Right before Alex packed up the last of the provisions he thought they would need for their trip into a large Nike backpack, Genesis reinforced the spell she had implanted in Kate and followed him to the front door.

For one of the few times since they had been together, she let him lead, though he knew it would not last long, since he had absolutely no idea where they were going.

They took the elevator down to the garage level, Alex trying his damnedest to penetrate the mental shields Genesis had erected since right after that scene at the closet; it was as if she couldn't stand to be so open to him and unguarded for too long. And he was too drained by everything they had experienced in the last few hours to make any real effort to get through her shields. He decided to allow her fallacy of autonomy and omnipotence full reign.

He wondered how she did it, how she kept going and going, like the Energizer Bunny

with no end in sight to her stamina and resolve. Except for the rare couple of times she'd succumb to some very human emotions that still left him in awe, she was emotionless. Still too rare and far between for his tastes, but there was hope.

"Hope for what?"

Alex started, realized, unlike Genesis, he'd left himself open to her, at least partially enough for her to catch some of his thoughts. "Pilfering, are we?"

She actually blushed, a beautiful shade of red coloring her copper-tone cheeks and making him rock-hard behind the zipper of his jeans.

Would there ever come a time when he did not want this woman?

"I only took what was offered."

How could he deny the truth of that when he had been offering himself up to her like the proverbial sacrificial virgin to the gods since he'd met her? And what would he do without her once this was over, if he lived through it?

If Genesis had her way, he'd be some hybrid lab rat, his body and blood at the disposal of the Inanna to analyze and study for the sake of each of their race's posterity. If this sort of life kept him close to her, he'd gladly give up his comparatively dull and staid existence in the human world. He'd gladly give up his "freedom," to be an Inanna experiment where regular bloodletting would be a small price for him to pay to have Genesis in his life, to be in hers.

And it looked like sacrificing himself for the better of her community, for the preservation of his people, might be the only way he would get and stay close to her.

Such lofty goals. Would that he could actually live up to the selfless image that Genesis had drawn. He was nowhere near as heroic or altruistic as she, energy- and soul-siphoning notwithstanding. He regretted ever making her feel less than worthy or uncivilized for being what she was, for doing what came naturally to her.

They reached the garage level and Genesis gently shoved him aside when he would have alighted from the elevator before her. She poked her head out when the doors slid open, glanced left, then right, before she allowed him to follow her out into the cold hollow confines of the garage.

"Why are we leaving through here? My car's—"

"At your office garage. I know. We are not just leaving from here. We are going to acquire a car from the many at our disposal here." Genesis waved her hand in front of her with a flourish and smiled.

"You're going to steal one?" he blurted, instantly wanting to kick himself for his naiveté.

"Do you have a better suggestion?"

"Not a one."

"Besides, I am going to do everything in my power to keep you safe and get you to Emsharra. I owe Kalika that much. And if it means procuring one of your human vehicles, then that is what I will do."

Nice speech, Alex thought, but heard nothing much past the "I owe Kalika that much"

part that made his heart twist in his chest. Was that still the only reason she was doing this? For his mother and not because she cared about what happened to him?

He hated to sound like a bratty lovelorn teen, but when it came to Genesis, detached logic was not his strongest quality; he doubted that it would ever be, that he'd ever be able to think clear-headedly enough to separate his heart from his mind where Genesis was concerned. And this attitude was going to be a big drawback if he didn't get a handle on it soon, rein in his hormones and emotions before they brought him and Genesis both down. Rein them in like his favorite bodyguard did so well.

Alex hung back to watch her walk a bold feminine strut that made his cock jump in his jeans, pressing for release at her untamed aura. If he didn't know her, hadn't intimately touched her and tasted her musky raw flavor, would he react this way, be so attracted? If she had been a stranger on the street, or a woman he had met in a bar and their pasts weren't so tragically intertwined, would he still feel this need to belong to her and possess her in the same breath?

Alex knew the answers already, a resounding yes to all of the above. Because no matter where they were, or where they'd met, that sexual connection, that soul link, would still exist, the feral need would still consume him. Maybe the need was in the blood, the blood of her people, the blood of his people. The need called out to him, called out to his blood, and everything that was Inanna in him responded.

His cursed, mixed blood that had gotten his own mother and father killed.

"You have been awfully quiet since we left the apartment."

He glanced at her with a start, hadn't realized that his feet had carried him to stand right behind her as she worked on the car door with her magic and got the driver's side open. "I don't have anything to say."

"Because you are too busy thinking so much. Too much."

"And you don't like the fact that you can't read my thoughts. Turnabout hurts, doesn't it?"

She scoffed at this with a do-not-be-ridiculous wave that made him feel just that: like a ridiculous petulant child.

Fuck it, he didn't need to reach out and touch her, mentally or physically, did not need her to touch him. No, he didn't need this whole assassination conspiracy that she'd laid at his feet, which had left him parentless and turned what was left of his life upside down.

"I do not need to read your mind to know what you are thinking, to know that you are feeling sorry for yourself. And I am here to tell you now: do not feel sorry for yourself, Alex. Kalika would not have raised you that way; she would not have allowed it."

"She's not here now, is she?"

"I am her delegate, and I am telling you the way you are feeling is not acceptable."

"I thought we covered this back at the apartment. I don't like you telling me how to feel."

She turned to face him full, her look softening from the hard-core but tactical general in charge to the tender woman he knew beneath.

"Maybe I don't care what my mother would think, Genesis. Shit, she didn't stay around long enough to make sure how I turned out one way or the other."

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"That is not fair." She peered at him, a grim frown curving her full mouth as she shook her head, went to him and slid her arms around his waist.

He didn't return the favor, left his arms uselessly dangling at his sides as he fought not to fold, not to cry...not to admit he was wrong.

Fair? Life wasn't fucking fair and he should know this better than anyone, especially her.

He would not shed another vain stupid tear. He would not feel sorry for himself. Remorse and tears were for babies and fools. He was not either. Not anymore. He'd seen the light since Genesis had come into his life. He knew where he stood in the grand scheme of things, where he stood in the world, and this was alone.

"Do not hate Kalika, I will not allow it."

He shot up his eyebrows. "You will not allow it?"

She nodded, grinning now. "That is right. I will not allow you to hate or feel pity for yourself or your mother."

"Genesis..."

"She led a full life, Alex, fuller still because of you."

"She never knew me. Why did she care so much?"

"Kalika loved you with all her heart from the moment you were conceived. It was not just about the war and conservation issue. She saw much further than that, to the man you would become. Someone she would be proud to have leading our people into the next millennium and beyond. Someone she did not mind dying f—"

"Please stop..." Alex choked back a sob, stopped short of moaning at his losses.

Why was he feeling so much grief and crying over a woman he barely knew? And what he did know? All provided to him from the memories of some alien being he hadn't believed existed before Genesis set foot in his door with her fantastic tales and fantastic powers.

"It is all right to care, Alex." She pulled him close, inviting him to return her hug and when he finally, reluctantly did so, she sighed and leaned her head against his chest. "Your emotions are refreshing. Do not lose them. Do not become like us, unless it is to be like your mother: loving and strong."

"Refreshing, huh?" He chuckled, glad for the chance to bury the sadness and tears in the facsimile of a normal conversation. "I thought you detested feeling vulnerable and weak."

She pushed away from him to stare up into his face. "That has not changed. But every once in a while I can take a...respite from the—"

"Tough act?"

Genesis opened the door and directed him to slide into the driver's seat. "I will guide you to where we need to go," she said then circled around the front to get into the front passenger seat. She pointed her finger at the steering column, her blue spirit light arcing in a small bolt of electricity that started the car. "And for your information, as I told you before: it is not an act."

Alex tried to hide a grin but knew he had failed miserably as he checked his mirrors and pulled out of the garage.

Once they hit the I-95, leaving Manhattan proper en-route to upstate New York, however, neither he nor Genesis had time for smiles and jokes or noticed the vehicle tailing them, several car-lengths behind.

CHAPTER 8

Genesis did not know how she felt about going back and seeing her home for the first time in almost three decades. How would she react once reunited with her Sisters? How would they react? Would she even be allowed back into Emsharra proper, or killed on sight before she reached *Quna* Nahemah?

Only for Kalika's memory was she willing to risk everything to find out. She would never have left Kalika alone unless she had had to, but it had been Kalika's life or Alex's and Kalika had been adamant that Alex should live.

Kalika had intended for Genesis to raise him as her own, but Genesis had never intended to leave Kalika alone to face what she had done birthing a *cambion*. As soon as Genesis had found a safe place for the babe, she had rushed back to Emsharra.

Just in time for Inanna sentinels to take her into custody.

Genesis closed her eyes at the memory of Kalika's stoic face, her growing alarm and disappointment at seeing Genesis back in Emsharra. She felt Kalika's curiosity and fear regarding the whereabouts of her baby.

She had tried her best to impart that the child was safe, that Kalika had nothing to fear. But soon Kalika and Genesis had been beyond caring about the babe, both too immersed in their own pain and suffering.

Genesis tried to reassure herself that things had turned out exactly as Kalika had meant them to, exactly as destined. Had she raised Alex, been his "mother," this desire she had for Alex would have been more of an abomination than his own birth, more than a mere snag in her plan to keep him safe. More for the human man she was sure, than for herself. Inanna had no such qualms or laws against incest; indeed, the ideology did not exist in her world as it did in the human world.

Why she was developing all these human neuroses was beyond her. Obviously, she had been around them too long, more comfortable among them than her own people. She existed between the two races, belonging to neither, belonging to no one.

Genesis turned her head to watch Alex's profile as he drove, admiring the sturdy determined line of his jaw. Her gaze traveled down his arms to take in the long capable fingers wrapped around the leather steering wheel. The sight made her pussy instantly moisten. The memory of those same fingers penetrating her with infinite finesse made her core quiver.

She shook her head, trying to focus, thought that she had so much more in common with him than she could have ever guessed. For one, they both seemed to be insatiable for each other. For the other, both of them were outcasts, abandoned and alone in the world. She belonged with Alex Ryan, belonged to him and was beginning to see what Kalika had known from the very beginning.

Before meeting Alex, she had just accepted Kalika's theories and beliefs at face value because Kalika was her Sister and she knew that Kalika would never steer her—their people the wrong way. But Genesis had never sincerely believed in the changes Kalika wanted to enact between the Inanna and Sebitu. She had continued to kill men during and since Kalika's campaign with not much remorse.

Now, after meeting Alex and getting to know Kalika's son for the man he was, she realized humans were more than "food" or "pets." Humans were more important to the Inanna and Sebitu than as a source of energy and sustenance, more than the primitive self-destructive beings portrayed by the elder Inanna over the centuries; they were beings worth the sacrifice of changing the old ways. He had touched her, touched her soul and her heart in so many ways since she had revealed herself and saved him. He had brought about her humanity.

"Are we almost there?" Alex asked, jerking her out of her reverie.

Genesis glanced out the windshield, acclimating herself to their surroundings as Alex slowed. "Yes, we are almost there. It is another ten or so miles, not much further."

"Speak for yourself. I'm the one who's been driving for the last couple of hours without knowing where I'm going."

She grinned, impulsively slid an arm around his waist. "But it is a beautiful night out, and a nice drive, is it not?"

"If deserted dark stretches of highway are your idea of beautiful, yeah, then I guess it is."

"Do not be such a spoilsport."

"You're going to have to tell me one day where you've picked up all these colorful little human terms."

"Maybe I wi—" Genesis froze, vigilance stepping into high-gear a second before they were violently rear-ended.

"What the—?" Alex glanced at his rearview, then turned his head and glanced back as if to confirm that he was not imagining things and someone had intentionally run into them.

"It is them!"

Another bump, this one even harder than the first, jarring her teeth in her jaws as she clenched them, already braced for the impact.

"We have to get off this road."

"Gee, ya think?"

"Do not be such a wise-ass, Alex. Not n—!"

The car pulled up on their right.

Genesis read their speedometer, and knew the other car was going at least ninety to keep up with her and Alex. Alex pressed his foot to the gas, pulling ahead at a hundred-miles-an-hour to evade the other driver.

Genesis got a glimpse of the other driver's face as he jerked the wheel of his car hard left and sent his vehicle smashing into the side of theirs. All she saw was a dead-eyed, dazed look.

"Can't you paralyze him like you did Kate?"

"I am flattered that you think so highly of my abilities, but they do not work that way. I cannot do something like that at these speeds or through the metal barrier of the vehicles."

Alex glanced at the other driver, saw his shoulders bunched as he prepared to turn his wheel again, and stepped on the brake.

The other driver screeched to a stop several yards ahead of them before backing up.

Alex stepped on the gas, made a sharp left turn intending to go around and speed past the other vehicle, but the driver rammed his back bumper into their front. He turned the wheel as far right as it would go, and passed the other car on the left amidst scraping metal and flying sparks.

Panting, he glanced in his rearview and cursed when he saw the other car quickly gaining. "I don't know why I thought he might give up."

"Not likely. Not until we stop him."

The other car pulled up on their right side again, and rammed into the side of their car, caving in the passenger door.

"We're sitting ducks in here. Eventually we're going to—"

"Alex, look out!" Genesis watched as his eyes widened at the approaching tractor trailer, headlights glaring and horn blaring like a death knell.

His reaction was almost instantaneous, but not quick enough for Genesis.

Before Alex yanked the wheel to the left, steering the car towards an overgrown ditch and out of range of the car and the truck, she grabbed hold of him, closed her eyes and zapped them out of the car. It was one of the roughest teleports she had ever executed, both she and Alex landing just several yards from their now-stalled, upside down car. They tumbled head over heels before they finally stopped at the base of a large oak tree.

"Shit, you should have told me to buckle up for the bumpy ride!" Alex came to one knee, shaking his head and grasping it with one hand, resting the other palm on craggy bark.

"I am sorry."

"We've got company." Alex peered past her and Genesis turned to see the driver of the other car marching towards them.

She leaped to her feet, hands outstretched, firing a bolt of blue light that stopped the man in his tracks before completely encasing him in a warm glowing sphere.

"God, I love the way you do that when you do it!" Alex sidled behind her, put a warm

hand on her shoulder and squeezed. "So he'll stay like that until you release him right?"

"Yes." She glanced at him over a shoulder. "What do you have in mind?"

"Just checking." Alex shrugged. "I want to make sure he doesn't follow us when we hit the road." He left her side, headed back up the hill towards their car.

Genesis quickly followed, arriving two seconds after to watch him retrieve his backpack from the backseat. He opened it to take out a flashlight and bottle of water before zipping it up, sliding the straps over his shoulders and turning to her.

Alex opened the plastic bottle and took a healthy gulp before he extended the bottle to Genesis who declined it. "I guess we're on foot from here on out. Unless you can right the car?"

"Testing me?"

"Figured I'd give it a shot."

"My powers do not work as effectively with inorganic materials as they do with organic. Starting an undamaged vehicle, that is in my realm. This..." Genesis let her words trail off, eyeing the broken upturned car and reluctantly shook her head. She was too weak to risk it, needed what little energy she had left for whatever confrontation awaited them at the portal. She could not dare share any of this with Alex, however, did not want to concern or disappoint him, especially after all they had gone through to get here.

"Gotcha." Alex flicked on the flashlight and motioned for her to lead the way

"You do not need that. I see very well in the dark."

"Unfortunately, I don't, and if I'm going to follow you, I need to see you."

"Oh, right." Genesis led the way, Alex's light at her back as she trudged back up to the road past all the underbrush and hoped that she was not leading them both to their deaths.

* * * *

They walked silently for almost an hour, Alex taking periodic sips from his water and offering the bottle to Genesis who inevitably refused it.

"You think I have cootie bugs?"

"Cootie bugs? What—?"

"Never mind," Alex muttered, shaking his head. "I was just trying to lighten the mood. Obviously I failed."

"I am sorry I am not the best company right now."

He lowered his backpack to the ground, went closer to wrap his arms around her. "You're the best company any man could hope for in a situation like this."

"Really?"

Her tone sounded so dead, beaten and it scared the shit out of him.

"I wouldn't want to have anyone else covering my back besides you," Alex assured her.

She gave him a sad grin. "That is comforting."

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He pulled back and caught her by the biceps, really looked at her for the first time since they'd left the crash sight.

She didn't look well. Her usually glowing copper skin waxed pale with every passing second beneath the dawn light.

He knew if he asked after her she'd wave him off with an "I am fine," denying any infirmity. He was sure she had over-extended herself back at the crash, first teleporting them out of harm's way and under duress, then stopping their attacker in his tracks with her shield. And she had earlier used her powers to put Kate into a trance, no mean feat he was certain. Who knew how much more energy she had to spare before she finally just gave out?

As if in answer to his thoughts, Genesis stumbled against him as he bent to retrieve his backpack.

Alex immediately dropped the bag to tend to her, catching her in his arms and gently lowering her to the ground before she fell into the grass on her butt. He offered her the water again, commanded, "Drink."

This time she did, taking a small sip before pushing away the bottle.

"It is not water I need."

Alex nodded, knew what she meant, but also knew they didn't have time, not for the way they went at each other. He could tell from the stern and forbidding look on Genesis' face that she would rebuff any overtures in their tracks.

"I can make it. We are almost there. It is just fifty or so yards. I think."

"You think?"

"The portal is not easy to pinpoint. It constantly shifts location. That is why I did not teleport us. I need an exact position in mind beforehand or things could get messy."

Alex nodded. He'd had a taste of her messy twice already and didn't want to experience it again. "But we're close?"

"Yes." Genesis ignored the hand he offered and staggered to her feet. She lifted her wrist to glance at a gadget that could have been a watch except it was much larger and more technologically advanced than a regular old timepiece. Alex wondered why he'd never noticed it on her before. She turned some dials on the thing and instantly brought it to glowing neon life.

He retrieved his backpack once again and watched her study the illuminated green dials for several moments. He thought the face of her little doohickey looked like an air traffic controller's control panel. He only hoped it was as accurate.

"It is this way." She walked ahead of him in a northeasterly direction, led them half a football field down the road before stopping to consult her wrist again.

That's when the group appeared several feet in front of them, two men and two women, all his height or towering above him by several inches, even the women. They were all clad in a deceptively simple style of dress that consisted of white linen tunic and slacks trimmed in gold.

Alex knew in an instant that these were Genesis' people, thought her tiny by comparison.

They moved forward as one, a wormhole of light shimmering behind them.

One of the men spoke, his voice deep and gravelly as he clearly enunciated each word. "You are not welcome here, Genesis."

"Who sent you here to stop me? Was it LaMia Enlil? Xaphan Pazuzu?"

"That is not your concern."

"Can they not fight their own battles?"

"Give him to us."

Alex's breath hitched in his chest as Genesis stepped in front of him, blocking his view.

"I will not."

"Then we will take him."

The group broke up to circle them, and Genesis immediately got into a fighting crouch, keeping Alex behind her as she visually followed their assailants.

"You will have to go through me."

"Very well," the leader said before sending a lightning bolt in their direction.

Genesis simultaneously erected her shield around herself and Alex and fired with both hands, several bolts flying in each assailants' direction.

She was fast, her true skill shining through here in the daylight and out in the open where she could face her enemies. She struck two of their attackers dead-on before they could raise their shields, critically disabling them.

That left two, wary and cautious now that their numbers had dwindled by half.

They fired their bolts simultaneously, mercilessly pummeling Genesis' shields before finally finding a small chink.

It was enough, a powerful fulguration striking her in the right side.

She gasped, stumbled to her knees and her shields wavered.

Alex stepped forward, bent to grab her and she screamed, "Stay back!" as their two assailants approached and lowered their shields.

They assumed the injury had rendered her out of commission, as had Alex, a mistake on their part. When they got within two feet of Genesis and Alex, she went on the offensive, releasing a barrage of lightning bolts that took their haughty enemies completely off-guard.

Each strike hit its target true. The remaining man and woman collapsed to the ground in a heap of wails and sizzling flesh.

Genesis' shields faded until they were completely disengaged, leaving Alex to wonder if she had turned them off willingly or had they just succumbed to the energy drain.

Alex put down his backpack, knelt beside Genesis' supine form, put her head in his lap for the second she allowed him before she sprang to a sitting position, panting.

"We must go through the portal before—"

"It is already too late, Genesis Enki."

In unison, Alex and Genesis turned their heads toward the wormhole at the deceptively seductive, soft voice and saw...

God, it couldn't be, but...it was his mother!

CHAPTER 9

Alex shook his head, wouldn't have believed his eyes if Genesis hadn't shown him that the impossible was indeed possible more times than he could or wanted to count over the last couple of days.

Had it really been less than a week since she had popped into his kitchen to save him from a knife-wielding Kate? Had they only known each other a mere two days?

A lifetime.

"It is not Kalika."

"Then who-?"

"LaMia Enlil." The woman stepped forward, had the same sexy rolling gait that seemed to mark all the females of Genesis' race, extremely confident, catlike in its boldness and grace But he could detect no good in this woman, not an inkling of nobility or self-sacrifice or compassion as there was in Genesis, just cold darkness.

"And you must be Kalika's precious cambion, the abomination."

Alex shivered as she aimed frosty hazel eyes at him. He stepped forward, inadvertently reached out and touched her mind. He flew back several feet before landing on his ass when she struck out with a mental backhand, stunning him.

"Stop it!" Genesis struggled to her feet, but LaMia caught her by the hair and jerked her head back, painfully arching Genesis neck.

"I see Kalika's spawn has a few tricks up his sleeve too. Luckily I expected this." LaMia shoved Genesis to the ground and snapped her fingers. "This is why I did not come alone."

Alex watched as a man emerged from the wormhole now, mahogany-skinned, sleekly muscled, jutting toward the sky at an imposing 6"7, and clad, like LaMia, in black leather from head to toe.

He swallowed hard, just short of a gulp, heart dropping with despondency though he tried

not to show his fear. He was sure he and Genesis were not going to get out of this latest snag alive.

LaMia bent over Genesis' prostrate form and Alex wished for just one more lightning bolt, just one more stroke right at the cold bitch's heart.

"You kill your own kind for an abomination!"

"He is not an abomination."

"So, you have succumbed to Kalika's rhetoric?"

"Not rhetoric, just common sense. He is—"

"You have slept with him!" LaMia reared back, eyes wide. "You have tasted his essence."

"Leave her alone!" Alex stood and charged forward like a bull that had seen red, instantly stopped in his tracks by LaMia's glowing green energy field.

The sensation was the weirdest thing, not what he'd expected at all. He could hear and see everything clearly, could still move his limbs within the confines of his bubble prison. He wasn't sure why LaMia's field affected him differently than had Genesis' field affected Kate and the guy in the car. He thought it might have been because of his Inanna blood and hybrid status but didn't really give a shit when he couldn't get out, couldn't get to and protect Genesis when she needed him most. What good was he?

"I never thought I would see the day when the mighty Genesis would fall for a human." LaMia sneered down at her, then turned and pointed at Alex. "Look at him! He is weak; a fragile being not worth the time it would take Xaphan or me to crush him beneath our boot heels." She turned back to Genesis. "What makes him so special, this ill-favored mongrel? What does he have that other humans do no—" LaMia cut herself off, gawking. "He has spirit-boost!"

"No..." Genesis adamantly shook her head then gasped and clutched her burned and bleeding right side as she tried to stand.

Alex threw himself forward against the green capsule and bounced off of it and back into the rear wall, dazed. He shook his head, tried to clear the fog, banged on the barrier with his fists. "Let me the fuck out of here and get away from her!"

LaMia laughed. "Oh, this is rich. So rich." She tittered, clapped her hands and jumped up and down a couple of times before bending to jerk Genesis' head back again.

"Enlil, you are wasting time with this. Finish them as we planned and end it."

"Oh, but I am having so much fun."

Xaphan rolled his eyes like a teen impatient with his interfering parents.

LaMia turned to Genesis. "I am right, am I not? He has the spirit-boost? The most elusive and sought-after of all *kundalini*?"

"No, he does not."

"She's lying! I have it. I have exactly what you're looking for and if you let me out of this cage, I'll show you." *Right before I try my best to rip your heads off.*

"Lilith, he is a lively one. I can almost understand what you and Kalika see in these

human beings."

"He does not have it," Genesis insisted.

LaMia nodded. "Oh, but I believe he does, and I believe you have tasted it." She leaned close to say, "I do believe there is hope for you yet, Genesis."

"Please let him go. He is as you said, a fragile human. He poses no threat to you. Just, please...leave him here in his world and let him be."

"A fragile human with spirit-boost and if this is so, then I must sample it for myself. I must see if he will be a suitable slave."

Alex wasn't as worried for himself as he was for Genesis. It was hurting him more seeing her battered and kneeling; hearing her resort to begging and lying for him. Not his warrior goddess. Not his guardian seductress.

He watched as LaMia stood to leave Genesis' side, unconsciously fingering his pendant. He felt the sudden heat against his palm as it radiated red in his grasp and LaMia's shields fluctuated before his eyes.

Had he done that?

When LaMia got to within a few feet of him, Alex was ready to take advantage of any breach in her armor, clasping the pendant tighter. From the corner of an eye he saw Genesis leap to her feet. He knew it had taken the last of her energy to get up, and winced as he watched her go after LaMia.

LaMia suddenly pivoted, fists on hips, and waited.

"I cannot let you harm him." Genesis raised an arm but Xaphan was faster and struck her in the chest with one of his thunderbolts.

Genesis went down where she stood.

"You coward! You son-of-a-bitch!" Alex threw himself against the capsule and this time he broke through, felt his muscles and bones shifting and rearranging in his body as he trampled LaMia en-route to Xaphan.

By the time he got within a few feet of the larger Sebitu, he had fully shifted, his thoughts barely human, a jumble of mindless animal ferocity. He was vaguely aware of being on all fours, growled deep in his feline throat, emitting an alien bestial roar as he launched himself off of his powerful hind legs, flying through the air in a flurry of sleek black fur and sharp protracted claws. He landed on Xaphan's chest on all fours, knocking him to the ground.

The man tried to fend him off, arms raised to protect his face and neck, too shocked to mount an effective defense against the full brunt of astounding, two-hundred pound panther rage.

"Get him off of me, LaMia! Get him off!"

LaMia was more stunned than her cohort, too stunned to help him.

Alex swiped at the man's arms with one paw, slashing open skin, and planted the other paw in the man's chest before leaning in, and sinking razor teeth into Xaphan's throat. He bit down as hard as he could, easily slicing through bone and tendon as blood spurted into the air to stain and blend in with his shiny black coat.

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Xaphan gurgled, trying to take his final breaths before Alex viciously jerked up his head and ripped out the Sebitu's throat.

He turned to LaMia, Xaphan's flesh still in his mouth, blood and gore dripping from his lower jaw, and stalked towards her as she gaped and backed towards the wormhole.

She turned and ran, stumbled to her knees before crawling and leaping through the portal. The barrier instantly slammed tight behind her and Alex smashed into it full-force, yelped and crumpled to the ground with a loud feline whimper of pain.

He lay on his side panting, trying to gather his senses and memories, almost panicking when he realized he might not be able to change back to human form.

Would that be so tragic when there was nothing to go back to? When Genesis was...

Alex sobbed, but it came out more like a howl as he slowly got to his feet and went to her deathly still form.

He nudged her face with the soft pad of his paw, claws retracted, but she didn't respond.

Genesis! Get up! He yelled at her with his animal mind, but still she didn't respond.

Gen, please... Alex put one big paw on her shoulder and shook her. Nothing, except...

He stood at her side, silent and vigilant for several long moments before he saw the tremulous rise and fall of her chest, motion so delicate, he barely noticed it.

She's alive. Thank you, God. Thank you!

Alex curled his front paws beneath him and lay beside her on the ground, nuzzling her cheek with his snout, periodically whining as he tried to will his human form.

Stay with me, Genesis. Don't leave me. Please don't leave...

* * * *

Alex woke in human form a short time later, Genesis still unconscious by his side.

He jerked to a sitting position, his first instinct not to cover his nakedness, but to get Genesis medical attention.

How? Where? And how far would he get in his condition?

The wormhole.

His ears perked at the voice. It hadn't belonged to Genesis, so who?

Alex stood, dusted grass and dirt from his hair, and went in search of his backpack. He needed food. He would be no good to Genesis in his current condition. He needed to replace the energy he had burned shapeshifting and needed to do it fast.

Alex hadn't known exactly what he'd be facing, where Genesis had been taking him when they'd left his condo earlier, but his mother had always taught him to be prepared.

Along with the bottled water he had packed a couple of sports drinks, and almost a dozen ham and cheese and turkey and cheese heroes for the journey, each liberally slathered with mayonnaise and trimmed with spinach leaves, tomatoes, onions and pickles. When he had made the sandwiches, he hadn't been thinking nutrition as much as taste. Now he hoped that he had

mixed the proper amount of carbohydrates, proteins and fats in order to at least sustain his vigor if not replace it.

Alex ripped open a sandwich bag, the bread slightly soggy and the sandwiches mashed, but otherwise edible. He gorged himself on half his supply, about five six-inch heroes, before washing the food down with a twenty-four ounce bottle of Gatorade.

Now he knew how Genesis must feel after she used her powers and needed to refuel. He couldn't get enough, felt as if he had lost at least ten pounds shapeshifting.

Alex started on the other half of the heroes, stuffing them into his mouth one behind the other like a contestant in a Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest and washed this batch down with the second bottle of Gatorade.

He had a sudden flash of Xaphan, how the Sebitu's throat had felt in his mouth, how his blood and flesh had tasted, and almost upchucked everything he had just eaten.

He had never killed anyone before, had never thought that he'd ever need to. He hadn't done a lot of things until Genesis had come into his life, yet he wouldn't change a thing if he could, couldn't imagine his life without her.

So get over it already! You did what you had to do. Just as Genesis did.

As soon as he finished his last swallow of food and drink Alex returned to her, tried one last time to rouse her, to no avail.

He needed to get help!

The wormhole, Alex.

It was the voice in his head from before, gentle and soothing, but with an underlying rasp of demand and urgency to it now.

Alex stood before the barrier with the pendant clasped in his hand, glad that the portal was in a relatively deserted field, could just imagine the sight he made, naked and shivering in the cool dawn morning as he closed his eyes and concentrated on opening the barricade.

He tried to recapture the moment when he had broken through LaMia's shields, tuning back into his mindset at the time, the rage that had flowed through him. The pendant suddenly heated and glowed red in his palm moments before the wormhole shimmered and appeared before him.

Alex went back to Genesis, lifted her in his arms and carried her to the entrance. He paused for the moment it took him to pull in a deep breath before he stepped through.

Liquid cold suffused him and he held Genesis closer, as if he could keep her leather-clad form warm with his nakedness. He shivered as he advanced several steps, teeth violently chattering, dogged by the chill and dizzying force that sucked him forward.

They landed on the other side none too gently. Alex stumbled to his knees, holding onto Genesis and the food in his stomach by the grace God.

When he opened his eyes, it was to the sight of a tall, raisin-brown woman towering before him. She was clad in a militaristic version of the tunic and slacks he had seen on the other Inanna, hers in red with gold trim.

"I am Xevera, one of the sentinels to the Highest. And you are?"

Her voice was rich with authority, glance neutral and totally unaffected by his lack of clothes and bedraggled appearance. She acted like someone used to dealing with anything and everything on a daily basis, even a strange naked man showing up at her post in the middle of the day.

He felt silly introducing himself—kneeling before her, naked and with an unconscious woman in his arms—but he did. "I'm Alex Ryan."

She stepped forward, arms outstretched. "You may give her to me."

"No wa—"

"I will take you both to Quna."

"Nahemah?"

Xevera solemnly nodded. "Your great-grandmother."

Alex stopped himself from cheering, stood and quietly made to pass Xevera before she put a hand on his arm.

"I will take her. We take care of our own."

Light-headed and near collapse, he saw the wisdom of her command, but couldn't obey. "So do I," he murmured.

"Very well," Xevera said after an interminable moment. She turned and led the way through a luxurious forest that comprised species of flora and animals Alex had never seen before and didn't have much time or interest to enjoy now.

Maybe later, once Genesis had recovered.

He was being overly optimistic, he realized, but couldn't stop himself from hoping for the impractical because even if she did survive, they couldn't be together. They were too different, came from different backgrounds and worlds. The woman couldn't use a contraction when her life was in danger, for Christ's sake! Not to mention the most important of all: she didn't love him.

Xevera paused several feet ahead of him, met with another small party of Inanna.

Alex had to force himself not to run forward when he recognized Kalika's grandmother immediately. At least his heart recognized her.

She wasn't as tall as the other three women in her group, about Genesis' height, maybe even a couple of inches shorter, but her regal stance and royal blue and gold-trimmed outfit easily made up the difference. Her face wasn't the face of what he thought a great-grandmother's face should look like, pecan skin smooth and unwrinkled but for a very few crow's feet. Her shiny black hair was pinned at the nape of her neck in an elegant but severe chignon that added to her air of power.

When she stepped forward, passed Xevera to come to him, Alex took a step back, not knowing what to expect.

"We will not harm you, Alex. We would never harm you."

He recognized her lilt; it was the voice from his head! "You know my name."

"I know everything about you." She smiled in that indulgent, serious way that reminded him so much of Genesis.

At the thought, she stirred in his arms for the first time since being struck down by Xaphan's lightning bolt, but he knew she would die if she didn't get help soon.

Nahemah pushed titian hair from Genesis face, lovingly glanced down at her and gently stroked her cheek. "My poor sweet Genesis. You have been through so much."

"You can save her, can't you?"

She looked at him, her impassive pecan face giving nothing away but Alex knew.

Genesis was dying.

Two of Nahemah's party stepped forward to take her.

Alex stepped back, shaking his head.

"Please, child. Let them unburden you."

"She's not a burden," he murmured.

"Nevertheless, we must lighten your load and ease this suffering you feel."

Alex choked back a sob, helplessly let the two Inanna take Genesis. He watched as they led the way through the forest, Xevera and the fourth in their party following.

Nahemah slid an arm around his back and gripped his shoulder. "You and I have much to discuss, Alex. I must learn more about this spirit-boost you possess. And then, I have much to tell you about your mother..."

CHAPTER 10

Emsharra Settlement—Two Weeks Later

Genesis woke among a pile of downy pillows and immaculate royal-blue and gold striped sheets and fluffy comforter. She jerked to a sitting position, incredulous as she recognized the imperial color scheme and opulence of the room.

She was in the dwelling of the Highest!

Had she died and gone to *An* she could not have been more pleased...or more anxious and confused. What had she done to merit such a privilege?

"You saved my life, remember?"

Genesis almost broke her neck turning to see Alex sitting in a royal-blue and gold striped upholstered Chippendale chair, one ankle resting on the opposite knee as he leaned forward and took one of her hands in both of his.

"I thought you'd never wake up, Sleeping Beauty."

"You are being romantic again, are you not?"

"It's in my blood. I can't help it."

"How long was I unconscious?"

"Long enough to miss all the fun."

Genesis winced as she sat up, and Alex stood to fluff the pillows behind her head.

"You sure you want to do that? You were pretty badly injured."

"I know. I was near death. I saw Lilith—" She broke off before she mentioned that she had visited the Great Below and seen Kalika in her travels through the Seas and the Abzu. Instead, she peered at him. "How did I...? How did you...? How did we...?"

He squeezed her hand. "It's over."

Genesis closed her eyes, not daring to hope her duty had finally been fulfilled, not daring to hope her journey was over, not daring to hope she had paid her debt to Kalika.

What would she do now?

"I can think of a few things, and they don't have anything to do with duty and debt," Alex murmured and leaned in to kiss her, dipping in his tongue to tangle with hers for a brief second before retreating to suck and lick her full bottom lip.

"You are taking advantage of my weakness. Were my shields up..."

"Ah, but they're not up. I have to use whatever advantage I have where you're concerned."

"Alex, seriously..."

He arched a brow, and waited.

"What happened?"

He lowered his eyes and she immediately sensed his repentance and discouragement, the two emotions mingling until they were one. She was not sure why he was feeling either, then she caught a flash of Xaphan's mauling at the teeth of a black panther.

"He is dead?"

Alex silently nodded.

"And LaMia?"

"Has been appropriately dealt with." Nahemah swept into the room on a cloud of patchouli, clad in the simple purple and gold-trimmed tunic and slacks of an Emsharra assembly member. As both royalty and a member of the assembly, she had the choice of wearing the colors of either body. And looked good enough to hug in any color or outfit, Genesis thought.

"You are too kind." Nahemah laughed and bent to do Genesis' unconscious bidding, hugging her to her breasts for several silent moments before she sat down on Genesis' other side.

"When you say 'appropriately dealt with,' what exactly do you mean? You did not have her killed, did you?"

"After what she did to you, why do you care, child?"

"I would be no better than her if I did not. Besides, I do not think Kalika would approve."

"I believe you are right. And you will be comforted to know that 'appropriately dealt with' means only that we imposed a punishment of permanent exile. Not nearly as serious as what she deserves, but we are after all trying to initiate a kinder and gentler regime."

Genesis let out the breath she had been holding.

"And now that we have cleared that up..." Nahemah clapped her hands and rubbed them together with glee. "Has Alex told you the news?"

"Really, GeeGee, it's nothing that can't wait until she's better."

"GeeGee?"

Nahemah, at over a thousand years old, did not look a day over forty, nor old enough to have a great-grandson, but at Genesis' question she giggled and blushed so, she looked more like a school girl than a middle-aged anything.

"Quna?"

Nahemah dismissively waved and chuckled. "It is just a little nickname Alex has for me. Short for Great Grandma."

"Grandma!" Genesis sputtered.

GeeGee? Grandma? What was next? Big Macs and McNuggets in the royal dining room? Not that there was anything wrong with that. She liked her fast food as much as the next modern human female, just that... "What is this news that you mentioned?"

"Ah yes, so very exciting it is."

"GeeGee, you're embarrassing me. Besides, it's nothing."

Genesis arched a brow, looked from one to the other, waiting for an answer as she folded her arms across her breasts and held her breath.

"It most certainly is a sight more than nothing."

"GeeGee—"

"Will someone please tell me!" Genesis threw up her hands.

Nahemah looked at her as if ready to burst, finally blurted, "Alex saved your life with the spirit-boost from his blood. It healed you. Without it..." Nahemah shook her head. "I do not like to think about almost having lost you."

Neither did Genesis.

Nahemah suddenly brightened again and continued, "We have learned to extract the dominant curative qualities of spirit-boost, or what Alex calls SB, and harvest it for use. In fact, Alex has already led one joint harvesting mission with the Sebitu. The missing yielded surprising and rewarding results that will more than likely lead to a solution for the conservation question. But you will get all of the particulars of what strides we have been making once you are recovered. I expect you to be a vital part of the harvesting missions and program."

Lilith, how long had she been unconscious? She had missed more than all the fun; she had missed Inanna history in the making.

Harvesting spirit-boost? Harvesting missions and program? A solution to the conservation question?

Genesis felt a lump quickly growing in her throat, closed her eyes right before hot tears slid down her cheeks. It was all so much, everything Kalika had ever hoped for and more.

Nahemah took her nearest hand and gently squeezed. "She would be proud of you, Genesis. I know I am."

Genesis bowed her head. "Thank you, Quna."

"And stop calling me Quna. You may address me as—"

"Not Gee-Gee!" Genesis looked horrified.

Nahemah giggled and pat her hand. "Nahemah will do for now. You have earned that. And now..." She let go of Genesis' hand and stood to leave. "Now I shall take my leave so that you two can discuss your own issues."

"Issues?" Genesis and Alex chorused.

Nahemah nodded, crossed the room towards the ornately carved, white and gold-trimmed door. "And you both know very well the issues of which I speak." With this, Nahemah opened the door, backed out of the room, head bowed low and closed the door in front of her.

The resultant silence brimmed with so many unsaids, too many on Genesis part.

She needed to tell him where he stood, tell him how she felt and put Alex out of his misery. She knew now why he had been feeling such sorrow earlier. It was not just because of his having to take a life. It was his uncertainty about her feelings for him.

Silly human male! She loved him. How could he not know that?

"Maybe because you never told me."

"I wish you would---"

"Stop doing that. I know."

She huffed, folded her arms across her breasts again and glared at him. "You never said you loved me either."

"Maybe I was waiting for you to read my mind like you were waiting for me to read yours."

"Maybe," she muttered, glancing at him through lowered lids and thinking that no Inanna had ever looked as scrumptious and sexy as Alex did in the royal blue and gold-trimmed tunic and slacks of Enlil royalty.

This was ridiculous! She should be leaping into his arms and rewarding him with the fervent kisses and hugs he deserved; she should be rewarding him as befitted a conquering hero. That's what he was to her, after all—her hero.

It had been so long since she'd had a hero, someone to look up to as well as look out for. Kalika had filled this role in her life quite neatly after Genesis, like many Inanna her age, had lost her parents to the border wars. Orphaned to the same wars and a kindred spirit, Kalika'd shown Genesis that life went on. Kalika's hope and passion for her conservation campaign had shown Genesis that life not only went on, but that caring about a greater cause than selfpreservation, for self-preservation's sake gave life purpose and meaning. Kalika's love and passion for Alex's father and the child she bore, had shown Genesis that living without emotion, without love, was as good as being dead.

After her parents' death, she had been numb, had thought that she would never feel anything close to affection for anyone again; she had thought herself incapable of love. Kalika had proved her wrong.

Kalika and her son.

How could she squander her friend's gift of forgiveness and love, ignore the legacy that Kalika left behind, by not admitting her feelings for Alex?

Never in her life had she backed down from a challenge, at least not until very lately and all of these recent retreats had to do with her fear of Alex. Not exactly fear of him, but fear of a hotly sought relationship that could never work. But now after all that had happened—Alex so thoroughly entrenched in her world, and Nahemah so thoroughly enchanted with Kalika's son—there was no turning back.

She wanted him in her life, sarcastic dry humor, human blood and all. If he would have her, that was. "Alex..."

"I accept."

"I have not even asked you anything yet."

"You were going to apologize for being so pig-headed and blind and then you were going to ask me to forgive you. I accept and I forgive you."

"Wretched telepath," she mumbled.

"Takes one to know one. But you know what else?"

"What?"

Alex slid into the bed beside her, took one of her hands in his and lifted it to his lips to gently plant a kiss on her palm. He pulled back then to examine and trace the lines inside with the fingernail of a forefinger. "You have a very long lifeline here."

"What do you know about palmistry?" She was quickly becoming wet listening to his deep voice, his touch like fire against her starving sensitized skin.

"Not a thing. I just know what I know." He slid his free hand down her body, down, down, just brushing her hardened nipples with a thumb, lightly circling her pierced navel with a fingernail, before finally reaching her panties. He played with the waistband for several moments before easing his hand inside.

"Alex..." Do not make me wait. Do not make me say it first.

"You want me to let you off the hook?" He dipped first one finger, then another inside her wet heat and Genesis pitched her hips toward his hand, grinding her pelvis hard against the heel of his hand, silently begging him to plunder. "Am I hurting you?"

"No, not at all," she gasped, closed her eyes and licked her lips, a shameless wanton at his mercy. "Please..." She moaned as he scissored his fingers inside her and drove her near the edge.

"I'll do anything you ask of me, Genesis. Just don't ever scare me like that again."

"No, never."

He leaned in to kiss her lips as he thrust his fingers deeper, then pulled them out and made her whimper as he licked them with relish.

"Do not torment me so, Alex."

"No, never." He plunged his fingers back into her, brushing quivering tissues in his wake, rhythmically teasing her swollen clit with his thumb until her pussy gushed and spasmed.

"Alex!" She clutched his shoulders hard, her nails digging half-moons into his back as she shuddered in the grip of an explosive orgasm.

He nuzzled her nose with his, watched her come down from her climax, kissing her face all over as if he could not get enough of her. "Are we sure GeeGee locked the door?"

"Anyone ever tell you that you have a wicked sense of humor?"

"All the time."

"Mmm..." She nuzzled him back, reveling in the rough-silk feel of his five o'clock shadow, the clean male scent of him. "Alex?"

"Yes?"

"I do love you, so very much," she whispered.

"Do you know how long I've been waiting to hear you say that?"

"No. How long?"

"Forever, my guardian seductress. Forever."

GUARDIAN SEDUCTRESS

Sisters of Emsharra, Book 1

THE END

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*Abzu: The Abzu is considered to be the remains of the primordial father god, Abzu, slain by Enki and interred on Earth. Consisting of sweet water beneath the surface of the ground, the Abzu provides water for the rivers and for all growing plants.

Alu-demon: A hybrid female born of a human and Inanna or Sebitu.

*An: Heaven. The top layer of the Universe situated directly above the Earth.

Athame: A double-edged blade. It is sometimes referred to as the black-handled knife. It is a ritual tool used as an extension of the Occultist's will.

Bashta: An Inanna curse, equivalent to bullshit.

Cambion: A hybrid male born of a human and Inanna or Sebitu.

Datma: Inanna curse, equivalent to damn it.

Emsharra: Province of the Inanna existing in the Universe of the Great Above.

Enlil: Royal family of Emsharra.

Fah: An Inanna curse, equivalent to fuck.

Gaiam: Province of the Sebitu existing in the Universe of the Great Above.

***Hubur**: A river that flows into the Netherworld.

Inanna: Ancient superior race of beings that subsist on the energy and life-force of humans. Enemy of the Sebitu before the Alliance and New Regime.

Inanna Tracking Practice: System by which Inanna locate their kind.

Ishara: Goddess of the Great Above, worshipped by the Sebitu.

Kundalini: Inanna term for energy; life-force.

Lilith: Goddess of the Great Above worshipped by the Inanna.

Mishva: Inanna term of endearment meaning "my love."

Nahemah: The Highest and Quna of Emsharra.

Quna: Female royalty. Inanna term for Queen. The Highest and Quna are one and the same.

Shasta: An Inanna curse, equivalent to shit.

Shimsa: Sebitu term of endearment meaning "sweetheart."

Sister: Female inhabitant of Emsharra.

Sebitu: Ancient superior race of beings that subsist on the energy and life-force of humans. Enemy of the Inanna before the Alliance and New Regime.

Spirit-Boost: A rare, regenerative component found in some human life-blood, or life-force. Much sought-after by Inanna and Sebitu alike for its aphrodisiacal and intensely orgasmic qualities.

Spirit Signal: A distinctive tracking beacon that each Inanna emits whenever they use psychic energy. Some psychic activities emit more of a signal than others (i.e., erecting a force-field, shapeshifting, telepathy and using one's spirit light emits more of a signal than say feeding on and siphoning from a human.)

Spirit Light: An Inanna's primary power source used to attack, defend or feed (i.e., discharging a lightning bolt, erecting a force-field, siphoning human energy, or teleportation, among other activities.)

Supreme: Leader of the council and ruler of Gaiam.

Tenebrion: Supreme of Gaiam.

***The Great Above**: Includes everything between the surface of the Earth and the bottom of Heaven, a domain presided over by Enlil, Lord of Air. The Earth is the bottom layer and part of the Great Above.

***The Great Below**: Includes everything beneath the surface of the Earth. Besides the depths of the seas, it consists principally of two layers: the Abzu and the Netherworld.

The Highest: Leader of the assembly and ruler of Emsharra.

***The Netherworld**: Referred to as "The Land of No Return." It is located underground beneath the Abzu.

***The Seas**: Considered to be the water remains of the primordial mother goddess. Consists of saltwater and surrounds the land surface of the Earth, the seas is considered inherently hostile and dangerous to humans.

*Uruk: A city leading to the Netherworld.

*From The Sumerian Universe, Ancient Sumeria "In the Days when Gods Walked Upon the Face of the Earth" by James W. Bell © 2002-3 http://www.jameswbell.com/m001universe.html

AUTHOR'S BIO



Gracie McKeever is an author from the Bronx, and aside from several side trips along the way, has lived and worked her entire life in the New York City area. She has been writing since the ripe old age of seven when two younger brothers were among her earliest, captive audience for various short story readings and performances.

An eclectic and voracious reader whose audience has grown outside of the supportive family members, she's had the great fortune of being able to incorporate two of her favorite passions and talents—reading and writing—as a book reviewer for several online e-zines, both as a regular staff member and freelancer.

Her short stories, novellas and poetry have seen exposure in various lit and art magazines and other venues—online and in print. Of particular note, heard over the airwaves on KFJC's morning show, Dancing In The Fast Lane With Ann Arbor (Unbedtime Stories) out of Los Altos Hills, CA (*New Life Incognita* was the story of the month for March 2000). She's also proud to be a member of the ("Worlds' Oldest Active Homeless Paper") Street News family and has seen numerous articles, poems and novel excerpts published within its pages as well as having had a poetry reading on Pseudo On-line Network (Street News Review).

In 2001, Gracie caught the erotica bug, sinking her teeth into her first erotic e-book for a review, and hasn't looked back since, an instant affinity for the genre spawning her first erotica title, *Beneath The Surface*, published in 2006 by Siren Publishing, Inc.

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Other books by Gracie C. McKeever at www.sirenpub.com/graciecmckeever.com



The Matchmaker

Sisters of Emsharra



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