

**A.O.E.M.: Snow Blind**  
**Aubrey Ross**

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## Prologue

Dezmon wrapped his arms around Sekarrah, amazed by the familiar leap in his pulse. Every time he touched her he swore it would be the last, yet he continued to succumb to temptation.

"We shouldn't do this," he whispered, his lips brushing her temple.

"So you say." She reached for the fastenings at the shoulder of his uniform top.

"You deserve more than I can give you."

She paused and looked into his eyes. "This is an affair, Dezmon. We've both been perfectly clear with our expectations. I want you, you want me, and no one is harmed by our actions."

Loyalty to his family pressured him to choose a mate from his own social stratum. Though intelligent, ambitious, and beautiful, Sekarrah was not elite. If she had been interested in a permanent joining he might have defied his family, but Sekarrah had plans for her future, plans that didn't include a permanent mate.

Leaving his shirt hanging open, she stepped back and undressed. Rich auburn hair framed her oval face and flowed to the middle of her back. Accented by thick, dark lashes, the corners of her green eyes tilted upward. Her features were arranged with such elegance she didn't seem quite real. The Sidhe were known for their beauty, but Sekarrah was extraordinary.

Mesmerized by her grace, Dezmon watched each garment fall. Long hours of physical conditioning had shaped her body with sleek strength. His gaze focused on her full, round breasts. Despite her trim torso and flat abdomen, her breasts remained lush with feminine softness. Deep rose areolas encircled nipples already drawn tight with desire.

"Are you just going to stand there? We don't have all night." She paused for a soft chuckle. "Actually we do, but I missed you."

She licked her lips, her gaze igniting with passionate promise, and his throat constricted. He was a fool to keep indulging this attraction. Every time he fucked her, the connection intensified. Casual sex would never be enough -- at least for him.

She stood before him naked, as close to physical perfection as he had ever seen. Possessiveness strengthened his desire. He wanted to hold her through the night and wake up with her scent surrounding him. His heart pounded and his cock throbbed. *End it now. She's an addiction. You'll never be able to walk away.*

Disgusted by his weakness, Dezmon shrugged out of his shirt and kicked off his boots. She was obviously willing, no, eager for his touch. This was an affair, a torrid, consuming affair. If she could accept the nature of their relationship, so could he. Shedding his pants, he pulled her into his arms and pressed her warm body against his.

She raked her fingers through his hair and nibbled on his jaw, tracing the cleft in his chin with her tongue. "Now isn't that better?"

"It will be better when I'm inside you." His cock jerked against her belly, ready for the firm grip of her pussy. Curving his fingers around the back of her neck, he covered her mouth with his. Her lips parted and she licked his bottom lip. He stroked his tongue over hers, needing the intimacy of her taste.

Sweeping her into his arms, he carried her to the bed. They usually met at inns in isolated villages. Each time he visited her cottage in D'Arcy Aiden they risked discovery. He was too well known in the bustling capital of the Unseleighe realm. But he would depart at dawn for the Karlis mountain fortress, training headquarters for the Royal Guard. He'd return as often as the rigorous schedule would allow. Still, they would be parted for the better part of the next five years.

A fire crackled in the hearth across from the bed, casting wavering shadows over her smooth ivory skin. He laid her on her back, admiring the lithe symmetry of her naked body, determined to commit every detail to memory.

"Why do you seem so... sad?" Her gaze caressed his face. "If you no longer find pleasure in my arms, we should --"

"Don't be ridiculous." He closed her fingers around his cock, drawing her attention to his jutting erection. "Does this feel like I've lost interest?"

"Then what are you waiting for?" She smiled, the gleam in her eyes an unmistakable invitation.

He joined her on the bed, contouring his body to her side. Slipping one arm beneath her neck, he cupped her cheek with his other hand. There was so much he wanted to say, but nothing would change their situation. She offered passion and pleasure without complications, so why was he discontent?

Her lips parted with the first brush of his. He pushed into her mouth and traced her teeth before curling his tongue around hers. She tasted of blackberry wine and passion, an intoxicating combination.

Trailing his fingertips down her arm and across her torso, he rubbed his knuckles against the underside of her breasts. Her nipples were incredibly sensitive and anticipation always made her wild. He circled the generous mounds, explored the valley between, avoiding contact with the burgeoning tips.

With a frustrated growl she dragged her mouth from his and pulled his face to her breast. "Stop teasing me."

He chuckled, circling the outer edge of her areola with his tongue. "I enjoy teasing you."

Her fingers tangled in his hair. "Suck on them."

The command in her tone challenged the warrior in Dezmon. He tugged her hands from his hair, ignoring the sting when she didn't immediately turn loose. Gathering both her wrists into one hand, he pinned her arms to the bed above her head. Her gaze blazed in silent defiance. Sekarrah was a warrior too.

He bent his head, trailing his tongue along the underside of her breast. Her silky, warm skin fascinated him. He'd never tire of exploring her body. She squirmed, tugging against his hold with half-hearted effort. Depriving her punished him too. He

loved the feel of her pebble hard nipple rolling against his tongue and the throaty moans she couldn't contain no matter how hard she tried. Catching one nipple between his teeth, he flicked his tongue across the tip. She arched her back, tossing her head from side to side.

"Now ask me nicely." He exhaled across her damp flesh.

"I don't want you to be nice." Tension built with her sexy taunt. "I want you to be wicked. I need that tonight." Their rendezvous were always uninhibited, but occasionally she craved something more. "Hold me down and fuck my mouth while you suck my clit."

Desire slammed into his gut as he pictured the position she'd described. Any hesitation on his part would ruin the mood. He pulled her away from the headboard, making room for his legs, then straddled her face.

He rubbed the head of his cock against her lips. She shook her head in mock protest. It was a game they'd played often. He should have recognized her mood. Making his voice rough and demanding, he grabbed the back of her neck. "Open your mouth for me. Now!"

She parted her lips and he pushed into her warm, wet mouth, groaning as she immediately began to suck. Why had the gods blessed him with such a passionate lover if they weren't meant to stay together? Struck by the bittersweet irony, he closed his eyes and savored the firm pull of her mouth on his cock and her nails digging into his ass.

Parting her thighs and canting her hips, Sekarrah reminded him of the second half of her suggestion. He pushed her knees toward her chest and rolled her hips up off the mattress, holding her in place with the weight of his body. The position allowed him access to all of her secrets while immobilizing her.

He traced her damp slit with his tongue, maintaining the smooth glide in and out of her mouth. He knew just how to touch her, where to lick, how hard to nibble and suck. She would come with a few flicks of his tongue, but her orgasm was so much stronger if he let the pleasure build.

Pushing two fingers into her, he focused on her clit, flicking, circling, and sucking the sensitive nub between his lips. She groaned, panting around his cock. When the first ripple of orgasm started, he released her and pulled out of her mouth.

"You're cruel," she whispered, her gaze ravenous with desire. "I was so damn close."

He grinned. "It's always better if I make you wait." Turning around, he placed her feet on his shoulders, bending her knees as he settled between her thighs. Her taste lingered in his mouth, bittersweet and salty. How he'd miss her in the months to come. "I love this part." He guided his cock to her opening and entered in one long, sustained thrust. Her inner muscles gripped his shaft and pleasure spiraled up his spine.

Shifting to his knees, he dragged her bottom up onto his thighs. Her ankles rested on his shoulders and her pussy caressed his cock with rhythmic pulses. He circled her clit with his thumb, watching her eyes as she neared release.

He could spend the rest of his life giving her pleasure. He wanted to spend the rest of his life... Her orgasm saved him from the sentimental thought. Her core gripped him and her back arched, her breasts quivering as her body shook. He hooked her knees over his elbows and pulled nearly out, his movement prolonging her pleasure.

His first forceful thrust dragged a soft cry from her throat. She raised her arms above her head as if she were bound. He should have taken time to restrain her; it heightened the excitement for both of them. Too late now. He had no intention of leaving her hot, wet cunt.

Making each drive a distinct penetration, he filled her again and again. She tossed her head from side to side, her hair streaming over her face. He lifted her hips, pushing deeper, delighting in her fervent response.

His balls tingled, signaling the beginning of the end, and he didn't want it to end. He wanted to extend their joining as long as he possibly could. She tangled her fingers in his hair and dragged his mouth down to hers. Her tongue mimicked the bold thrusts of his cock, driving him closer to the edge.

She cried out and shuddered beneath him, her inner muscles squeezing him mercilessly. Despite his determination to make it last, he came in violent spurts, buried deep inside of her.

Long moments passed. He couldn't move, didn't want to move. She panted against his neck, her soft breasts cushioning his chest.

Finally he mustered the strength to roll them to their sides. Brushing her damp hair back from her face, he caressed her features with his fingertips. He traced the high arch of her eyebrows and slid down the delicate bridge of her nose. When he reached her mouth, she nipped his fingers, making him smile.

"There's a reason I asked you here tonight."

He chuckled and reached for her hand. "Other than your ravenous appetite for the pleasure we give each other?"

Despite his playfulness, her expression remained serious. "I have something I need to tell you."

His heart lurched and his pulse raced. Was she carrying his child? They'd been careful, but occasionally --

"I applied to the Royal Academy."

"What?" He released her hand and sat, his gaze searching her face. Why would she do such a thing? He was the premier instructor at the Royal Academy, had been long before their affair began. His father was Chancellor of the Royal Guard. He didn't want to consider the implication, but his gaze narrowed and his throat tightened. Was this the reason she'd been sleeping with him? Did she hope he'd pave the way for her acceptance?

She sat as well, drawing up the sheet to cover her nudity. "You of all people should understand the opportunity this provides. I'm only the third female to be selected in the history of the academy."

"You were approved?" Thank the gods. She hadn't been using him, but this created complications... so many complications. "When did you find out?" He wanted



to be happy for her. As she said, it was a fabulous opportunity. Royal guards were compensated generously. Her future would be secure.

"Earlier today, right before I contacted you." She stared at him with a mixture of hope and anxiety. "I know we'll have to be discreet, but I'll be at the mountain fortress with you. I thought you'd be happy for me."

"You don't even realize what you've done, do you?" He scrubbed his jaw and sadly shook his head. All their passion and pleasure disintegrated before his eyes. "It's forbidden for the instructors to have social relationships with the cadets. I understand and support the policy. We'll be together at the fortress. I'll see you, be near you, but I won't be able to touch you."

She scooted off the bed and slipped into a knee-length robe. Tension showed in every move she made. "I care for you. You must know how much you mean to me." She paused and Dezmon looked away. Here came the *but*. "But this is important to me. I wasn't born to nobility. You've enjoyed privileges that will never be available to me."

"Why didn't you tell me you'd applied? That had to have been months ago."

"I honestly didn't think it would matter. I had no idea I'd be approved."

"You're brilliant, physically conditioned, and stubborn as hell. I'm not surprised." He paused, torn between pride and disappointment. She deserved this honor, this opportunity. "The training will be harder than you can imagine, strength and endurance exercises, high stress simulations. Your mentor will push you to the limit every single day. Who is your mentor?"

"I don't know. The message didn't say."

Trepidation ran icy fingers down his spine. Did it really matter who mentored her? Their relationship had ended with her acceptance. She might not have realized it, but she'd asked him here to say goodbye.

Curiosity nudged his mind. He glanced beyond Sekarrah and turned his attention inward. Isolating his father's telepathic signal, he asked permission to initiate a link.

*It's rather late, son. What can I do for you?* His father's deep voice manifested in Dezmon's mind.

*Sorry to bother you, sir. I was wondering if the inductees have been assigned.*

A rumbling chuckle preceded his father's reply. *You've heard about her already? This could be an interesting term. I guess there's no harm in telling you. Her aptitude tests were amazing. She scored even higher than you, so the council voted unanimously to assign our number one inductee to our number one instructor.*

*I'll be her mentor.*

*You don't have a problem with instructing a girl, do you?*

*No, sir. I just --*

*Good, because I assured the council that no son of mine would be so shallow he couldn't see beyond gender.*

*Thanks for the heads up. I wouldn't want to insult her with my surprise.*

*I'll see you when you arrive.*

Dezmon terminated the telepathic link and expelled a ragged breath.

"Were you talking with your father?" Sekarrah stood beside the bed, her arms crossed over her chest. Wariness had replaced her enthusiasm.

"Yes."

"What did the chancellor say?"

"I'm your mentor."

"But you're the premier instructor. Only the inductee with the highest scores is assigned to you."

"That's right. You have a higher aptitude than any of the other inductees." They stared at each other in stunned silence. Dezmon was the first to look away. "How badly do you want this? I'm the toughest instructor at the academy."

"Can't you request that I be reassigned? I know you didn't want to flaunt our relationship, but we're two consenting adults."

"If our relationship comes to light now it will taint your acceptance. They'll say you slept your way into the academy. And requesting that you be reassigned makes me

look like a bigot. If you really want this, there's no way out. I'm going to be your mentor."

"And social interaction with instructors is forbidden."

"The cadet is discharged and the instructor's employment is terminated. If your mentor so much as kissed you, he'd face criminal charges."

She pushed her hair back from her face, her gaze filled with frustration and regret. "As a royal guard I'd live at the palace. I'd be respected and noticed for something other than my face and form. I don't want this, Dezmon, I *need* it. Can't you understand that?"

A stiff nod was all he could manage. "I have to go." He understood her reasoning, respected her ambition, but it didn't ease the sadness squeezing his heart. "When you're presented to me at the fortress, it's imperative that you act as if we've never met before."

## Chapter One

**Seven years later**  
**Falls Church, Virginia**

Security Chief Sekarrah studied the guest list, a worried frown creasing her brow. "How many of these people do you know personally?"

Tom shrugged. "Most of them are regulars. Only the *crème de la crème* gets invited to these private parties." He tapped his foot against the barstool's leg as he watched two cocktail waitresses arranging last minute decorations.

His impatience made Sekarrah smile. Tom was a man of action. He'd much rather throw wide the nightclub's doors and bash heads together as needed than sit quietly and plan a strategy.

"Prince Lyell has been here almost every night for over a month. Why are you so antsy now?" Tom asked.

Tom was the head of security for The Carousel, if three muscle-bound bouncers could be considered security. He would have to know what was going on sooner or later, and the club opened in four hours. "Lyell's brother is in town and has decided to attend the party."

"Lyell's brother?"

Tom wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed. All the more reason not to depend on in-house security. "Lyell's *oldest* brother." She paused, waiting for realization to dawn in his dark eyes.

"Oh my God."

Finally.

"The king of the Dark Elves is coming to The Carousel?"

"The Unseleighe Sidhe have more than one king, but yes, King Gainnon will be here tonight."

A menacing growl echoed through the nightclub followed by an impressive string of profanity. Sekarrah pivoted on her barstool. One of the massive Nihelters she'd commissioned for the night crossed the dance floor with Dezmon dangling from its claw. Dezmon kicked and cursed, but the Nihelter ignored the struggle, its beast-like features expressionless.

Torn between laughter and disbelief, Sekarrah called upon her training to maintain a calm façade. She'd seen Dezmon briefly before she departed for the realm of mortals. They'd exchanged polite greetings as remembered passion smoldered in their eyes.

The Nihelter deposited Dezmon in front of Sekarrah with a final warning growl. Dezmon straightened his tunic with a violent jerk and glared at the Nihelter. "What *is* this thing?"

"The Nihelter are known for their psychic sensitivity. Once the party begins, they will construct a psychic net surrounding the club. No one will enter or exit without my knowing about it." She stood and bowed to the towering Nihelter. "Thank you. This person is no threat." At least to King Gainnon.

The Nihelter made a rumbling sound that passed for verbal communication and lumbered back across the dance floor.

"I didn't see it until it had me by the scruff of the neck." Dezmon rolled his shoulders, indignation flashing in his eyes.

"They're able to render themselves invisible. That's why they're such good sentinels. I subcontracted three from the security team on Chimera Island."

"Are we finished? I have work to do." Tom's gaze was fixed with obvious interest on the waitresses across the room.

"Go ahead. I think we've covered everything."

Tom moved off as Sekarrah studied Dezmon. Blue highlights gleamed in his long, black hair, making the sapphire shimmer of his eyes all the more intense. Gods,

how she'd missed him. His cheekbones slashed at a brutal angle while his strong jaw line hinted at a stubborn nature. So often the Sidhe were described as pretty. With his fierce gaze and air of danger, no one would apply that label to Dezmon.

"What are you doing here?" She crossed her arms over her chest. If this was personal, Dezmon's timing couldn't be worse. If Lyell had summoned him, the prince better brace himself for her ire.

"I thought it was a bad idea when King Gainnon decided to visit Lyell. When I heard he was attending this party, I decided --"

"I obviously have the situation under control." She brushed past him and headed across the dance floor. Business, always business. For seven long years she'd suppressed every lustful thought, conducted herself with the utmost professionalism. All the while her heart ached for the tenderness they'd shared, the laughter and intimacy. She knew they couldn't pick up where they'd left off. Having Dezmon as her mentor changed them both, but she'd hoped they would reassess their relationship, perhaps try again.

"Where are you going?"

"It's a formal party." She gestured toward her sweater and jeans. As she forced herself to meet his gaze, tension gathered in her chest. "I need to get ready."

Warmth and possessiveness combined in his expression. Why couldn't he be honest with himself? He remembered those long ago nights and all they had meant to each other. His visit had nothing to do with the king. He might not want her complicating his life, but he couldn't stay away.

"I'll see you tonight." His tone was hushed and speculative.

"No, you won't." She tossed back her hair and raised her chin. "Your presence infers I can't handle this, and we both know that's not true. Go home, *sir*. The situation is under control."

\* \* \*

Sekarra narrowed her gaze and balled her hands into fists. *Why was he doing this to her?* Dezmon stood across the room with Prince Lyell and King Gainnon. The Karlis

brothers wore tuxedos in an attempt to blend in with the crowd while Dezmon had donned his formal uniform. The form-fitting black material was elaborately embossed in gold. Complete with turned back cape and ceremonial sword, the outfit was anything but inconspicuous. Heads turned, people stared, mesmerized by the Dark Elf warrior.

The rhythmic pulse of the music vibrated through Sekarrah's body. Lights flashed and bodies gyrated, people lost in revelry. She touched the mind of the dominant Nihelter. The perimeter was secure, all zones clear.

"You don't seem pleased to see him."

Sekarrah glanced at Evette, the club's owner, as she joined her beside the bar. "Who do you mean?"

Evette laughed. "Lyell told me Dezmon was your mentor at the academy. He looks like he can be a real hard ass."

A smile curved the corners of Sekarrah's mouth. His ass was hard all right. She'd clutched it often as he thrust between her thighs. The unwanted memory sent tingles skittering along her nerve endings.

"I see." Evette leaned in and lowered her voice as much as the raucous room would allow. "Does Dezmon realize you've got the hots for him?"

Evette was mated with Prince Lyell. Sekarrah studied the other woman's expression. Had Dezmon kept their affair a secret all these years, even from Lyell, his best friend? Of course he had. Dezmon's spotless reputation would be sullied if their relationship were ever revealed. Disappointment tumbled through her belly. Dezmon must choose his mate from among the social elite. No matter how high her ambition took her, she would never be elite.

"It's complicated."

"It always is." Evette motioned beyond them. "He's coming this way. Would you like me to tell him you --"

"The safety of the king is my responsibility. I have no intention of hiding from Dezmon."

"I wasn't going to suggest you hide." Mischief sparkled in Evette's eyes. "I was going to suggest you slip into the break room and I'd send him after you."

Sekarrah shook her head. As tempting as she found the suggestion, she really did have a job to do. Her heart echoed the pounding music as Dezmon weaved his way through the crowd. His gaze caressed her face and heat crept up along her neck. Evette melted into the crowd.

"Are you enjoying the party?" The teasing note in Dezmon's voice made Sekarrah tense.

"I'm not here to enjoy myself. I'm here to ensure the security of the Karlis family."

"Fair enough." He leaned back against the bar, staring out over the dance floor.

"Are you trying to draw attention with your uniform? Why didn't you wear a tuxedo like the others?"

He shrugged. "If I draw attention away from the Karlis brothers, am I not ensuring their safety?" That wasn't why he'd worn it and they both knew it. She had a weakness for his dress uniform. It made him look commanding and dangerous, not that he needed help creating an impression of either. "Explain this human custom. What's being celebrated here tonight?"

She glanced at him, unsure whether he was mocking her or if he had a genuine interest in the holiday. Their gazes met and her pulse leapt. She wanted to touch him, but her pride demanded that he make the first move.

*You're on duty! And he's beyond your reach.* If she wasn't careful he'd hear her silent rambling. She cleared her throat, gave herself a mental shake, and shifted position in her ridiculous high heels.

"New Year's Eve is a night when humans gather to celebrate the year just past and reassess their priorities for the year to come."

"Have you reassessed your priorities?"

"I'm not human." She turned her face away, sweeping the room with an assessing stare.



"And if you were?"

"What do you want, Dezmon? You know full well I can handle the party. I had a good teacher. Why would you doubt my proficiency?"

The music slowed and the lights dimmed. Couples came together in a hypnotic sway.

"Dance with me." His voice was soft and low.

"I have a job to do. Ask one of your admirers." She nodded toward the group of dreamy-eyed females farther down the bar.

He chuckled and brushed her bare arm with the back of his fingers. "I don't want to dance with them. I want to dance with you."

"Disappointment sucks, doesn't it?" His confused expression made her smile.

"You've been spending too much time with humans."

"I don't know. I'm starting to like it here."

A rambunctious burst of laughter interrupted their conversation. Beyond the lustful females, a couple was drawing a crowd with some sort of risqué game.

"What are they doing?" Dezmon followed the direction of her stare.

"I don't know."

Though fully dressed, their sensual interaction had a blatant resemblance to foreplay. The woman bent slightly forward, the man standing behind her as he gathered her hair in one hand. He poured a milky substance over the nape of her neck and licked it away before it escaped along her spine.

"Looks -- interesting." The sensual purr in Dezmon's tone made Sekarrah squirm. He motioned to one of the bartenders. "What are they doing?"

"It's called Snow Blind," she explained. "Have you ever done body shots?" Dezmon shook his head. "This is a bit more complicated." She took two glasses from behind the bar and arranged three bottles beside them. "You have to add the ingredients in order or it doesn't work." She filled the glasses half full from the largest bottle, followed by a shot of amber liquid, and finally a dollop of something thick and

white. When she swirled the liquids together, a miniature snowstorm erupted in the glass. "Snow Blind. Try it."

Dezmon raised the glass and took a sip, savoring the taste. "Very nice. It's sweet but it has a definite bite. How is the game played?"

Sekarrah pretended disinterest, but her mouth watered for a taste of the exotic drink.

"You work your way through the letters in the words 'Snow Blind,' one by one. The first person says a verb starting with S and their partner names a body part starting with N. The person who said the verb applies the drink to the person who named the body part." She wiped her hands on the towel draped across her shoulder. "You alternate naming verbs and body parts until you've used all nine letters. I think they're on D and S." She nodded toward the couple surrounded by onlookers.

"D and S don't appear together in the words Snow Blind."

"There are only nine letters," she pointed out with a mischievous smile. "When you reach the D in Blind, you start over."

Dezmon nodded, his gaze taking on a wicked gleam. "So, I might start by *spreading* Snow Blind on the *neck* of my partner."

"You got it. The verb determines how it's applied. Obviously the fun part is deciding how to get it off. Enjoy yourselves." She turned away, then paused. "I hear it debated all the time, but orgasm is not a verb."

## Chapter Two

Dezmon asked Sekarrah to dance once an hour on the hour. Each time she politely reminded him she was working. Palpable excitement built as midnight neared. The revelers counted down the last ten seconds, then balloons and streamers fell in a cascade of color. “Auld Lang Syne” rang from the speakers as couples kissed or did their best to sing along. Sekarrah watched it all, aching with loneliness.

After she graduated from the academy, she’d been whisked away on a series of challenging assignments that kept her from D’Arcy Aiden. When she returned to the Unseleighe capital, she learned Dezmon had volunteered to oversee the opening of a training facility in a distant province. She looked at him now, wishing he’d approach yet dreading her reaction if he did. She wanted him, longed to be with him again. Still, her desire served no purpose. She could never be what he needed in a mate, and she was no longer interested in an affair.

King Gainnon bid a quiet farewell to Evette and retired for the evening, relieving much of the pressure on Sekarrah. Shortly after the king left, she spotted Dezmon and Evette slipping into Evette’s office. Sekarrah immediately looked for Lyell. What was going on? Had Lyell seen where his mate just went? Lyell stared back at her, a secretive smile curving his lips. She respectfully inclined her head.

*Is everything all right, sir?*

*Everything is fine. Why do you ask?*

Hadn’t he noticed -- Lyell trusted Evette. It was as simple as that. *No reason, sir. It’s just been a long night.* Sekarrah resumed her subtle surveillance of the room, embarrassed and annoyed.

Evette returned to Lyell’s side, but Dezmon was nowhere in sight. Sekarrah checked with the Nihelters to verify the perimeter was secure. No unauthorized party

had entered, though a steady stream of attendees was heading home. There was not much to do now but wait for the party to wind down.

"I hate to say this, Sekarrah, but you look like shit."

Lyell's candor made her smile. "Thank you, sir."

"Go home. That's an order. In fact, take the next forty-eight hours off."

"Home, sir?" Her heart leapt unexpectedly at the thought. "Do you mean --"

"I meant to the hotel where you've been living since we arrived. Would you like to accompany Gainnon tomorrow? I'd understand if you're ready to go home."

"No, sir. It's an honor to serve you. I'll accompany you to the Unseleighe realm when you're ready to return."

"Ready and able are two different things. Now, off with you. Get some rest."

"The Nihelters have been compensated for their time until morning. Shall I have them form a perimeter around the hotel?"

Lyell thought for a moment, then nodded. "I don't expect any trouble, but there's no reason to squander our resources."

"I'll see you tomorrow then."

"No," he stressed, "you'll see me two days from now."

She smiled. Though many were intimidated by Lyell, she'd liked him from the start. "I need my purse. Evette locked it in her office. These shoes are enough of a hindrance, and I wanted my hands free."

Sekarrah communicated the new location to the Nihelters while Evette fetched the handbag. She started to ask Evette where Dezmon had gone but bit back the question. He would return to the Unseleighe realm tomorrow and she would continue on with her life. Why should she care where he spent tonight?

The hotel lobby seemed oddly quiet after the noisy nightclub. As soon as the elevator door closed in front of her, she kicked off her shoes and wiggled her toes. The tight, strapless dress might have helped her blend in with the crowd, but it was hopelessly impractical. In the elevator, she dug out her cardkey. Shoes dangling from one hand, purse tucked under her arm, she walked down the long corridor.

Tonight had been a triumph. She'd orchestrated security for a king. So why wasn't she elated?

Slipping her cardkey into the lock, she opened the door. She stepped into the room and froze as the door banged shut behind her. Dezmon stood across the room, looking out the window, still dressed in his formal uniform. She licked her lips, grappling for composure before he turned around.

"How did you get in here?"

"It was a royal conspiracy." She heard amusement in his tone.

"Why would the hotel staff obey King Gainnon?"

He finally turned to face her, though he remained across the room. "I didn't mention the king."

"Lyell?" She considered the possibilities, her confusion mounting with each one. If they'd been in D'Arcy Aiden, Dezmon's authority alone would have opened any door, but it was necessary to conceal their identities from humans. "I still don't understand."

"Is it really so important that you do?" He unfastened his cape and draped it over the back of a chair, then reached for the buckle on his sword belt.

"You're not staying here."

With an economy of movement he'd taught her to appreciate, he drew the sword and crossed the room. "I'm your guest or you're my prisoner. You have three seconds to choose."

"Have you lost your mind?" He raised the sword, touching it to her throat. "It's not even sharp."

"Good point." With a shrug, he returned the weapon to its scabbard and pressed his palms against the door. "You're still my prisoner."

"Lyell never left the club. How did --"

"Are you going to be obsessed with this until I explain how I got in here?"

"Yes."

He chuckled. "You were always the curious type. Evette got the cardkey out of your purse and sent me here with one of her waitresses. The waitress returned to The Carousel and slipped the cardkey back into your purse."

Sekarra stared into his eyes. This is what she'd longed for all evening, a definitive show of interest, a seductive display. She smiled inwardly at the understatement. She'd longed for Dezmon for the past seven years. Was he here for the night or... "You asked Lyell to send me home, didn't you?"

"My deception knows no bounds."

She pushed past him, setting her purse on the nightstand and tossing her shoes in the general direction of the closet. "Why go to all this trouble? What do you want from me?"

"It's New Year's Eve. I want to celebrate the past and reassess my priorities."

"It's technically New Year's Day and those are human traditions."

"Keep this up and I'll throw you on the bed and ravish you." The gleam in his eyes assured her he meant every word.

She pictured her gown in tatters on the floor and Dezmon's big body pressing her into the mattress. He'd be so desperate to claim her he wouldn't undress, but his hands would tremble as he touched her. Did he realize how long it had been since she'd given herself to anyone?

He slipped his fingers inside the front of her dress, firmly grasping the embroidered fabric. "Is that what you need tonight? Shall I ravish you?"

"No." She dragged in a ragged breath. "I don't know what I need."

"Let's figure it out together." His fingers lingered in her cleavage, not caressing exactly, just absorbing the warmth of her flesh. "Turn off the lights. I want to dance in the moonlight and feel your body sway against mine."

She'd been satisfied with passion before. Was it fair to expect more now? He'd hinted that he would defy convention if she were interested in a permanent joining, but that had been so long ago. They were both different people now.

He bracketed her face with his hands, his gaze caressing and tender. "Don't. Don't ruin this with speculation. Tonight is for us. We'll lavish each other with all the affection we've denied ourselves for seven years. Tomorrow will still be there in the morning."

Crossing the room, she flipped off the light, then returned to his arms. She pressed her face against his throat and inhaled his scent. Clean, faintly spicy, with just a hint of musk. She'd always loved the way he smelled. He pulled her body more snugly against his. It felt right, familiar, secure.

"Why wouldn't you dance with me while there was actually music?"

"I was on duty."

He eased her back, looking into her eyes. "You were afraid."

She twisted out of his embrace and crossed her arms over her chest. "I can't do this, Dezmon."

"You can't do what? Touch me? Allow me to touch you?"

"I spent seven years trying to forget you. I don't want to go through this again."

"It won't be like it was before. You have to trust me."

Grief squeezed her heart. She wanted to believe he could change the social reality of their world. She wanted it more than anything. Her lips trembled and regret filled her voice. "You can't make me elite."

He didn't argue the point. There was nothing he could say. She would never be accepted by his peers and they both knew it. He crossed to the switch and reactivated the lights.

"Any relationship involves trust and compromise." He clasped his hands behind his back, looking every inch the seasoned warrior. "If you offer me trust, I'll offer you compromise."

She narrowed her gaze, trying to slow the flutters in her belly. "What sort of compromise?"

His smile was slow and sexy, melting her inhibitions. "Things will be different this time, but that's all I'm going to say until you demonstrate your trust."

"I trust you with my life."

"Not good enough. You have to trust me with your heart."



## Chapter Three

Dezmon watched Sekarrah's face as she contemplated his offer. She'd seldom left his thoughts over the past seven years, but even the most vivid memory couldn't do her justice. Her features demanded attention and her body tormented his senses, but her indelible spirit held him spellbound. She was his equal, regardless of social convention. And if he had anything to say about it, she would be his permanent mate.

"What did you have in mind?" she asked after a long pause.

"Snow Blind."

"The drinking game?"

"You can't tell me you weren't intrigued by what they were doing."

"I'll admit it. The couple was certainly enjoying themselves, but I don't want to go back to The Carousel. Besides, how does a drinking game prove I trust you?"

"I brought the ingredients with me and I've made some adjustments to the rules. You will name the verbs and I will name *your* body parts."

"Meaning all the Snow Blind goes on me?" He nodded. "That doesn't seem quite fair." The sparkle in her eyes belied her protest.

"This isn't about fair; it's about trust." He arched his brow. "Do you trust me with your body?"

She met his gaze, her expression serious. "I trust you."

He pulled her into his arms, covering her mouth with his. Excitement and relief drove the kiss. If she'd refused him tonight, it would have left him no option but to return to the Unseleighe realm and plan a new strategy. They'd been parted too long already. He didn't want to spend another day without her.

"I thought we were going to play the game," she whispered against his lips.

"We are." Reluctant to release her, he brushed his lips against hers. "You're as intoxicating as any drink."

"Did she tell you what's in each bottle?"

"The clear liquid is vodka, the other one is rum, but the white substance is a mixture of coconut, pineapple, and several ingredients the bartender wouldn't reveal. She assured me there was nothing illegal in the concoction."

Sekarrah smiled. "With a name like Snow Blind, that's good to know."

"I don't understand the significance." Sekarrah had only been in the realm of mortals for six weeks. He was amazed with the information she'd assimilated in that time.

"Cocaine, a highly addictive narcotic, is sometimes referred to as snow."

"I see. I don't think that's what we're dealing with, but we'll partake sparingly just to be safe." He moved to the table where he'd laid out what they'd need for their late night entertainment. Following the bartender's instructions, he added each ingredient in order. When he swirled the contents in the glass, the white mixture burst as it had in The Carousel, creating a miniature snowstorm.

"That's so cool. Do I get to taste it before you start smearing it all over my body?"

"Smear." He chuckled. "Is that your first verb?"

He handed her the glass and she sampled the drink. "It tastes sort of like a Piña Colada."

"Having never tasted a Piña Colada, I'll have to take your word for it. Now back to the verb." She returned the glass to him. His fingers brushed hers and his heart leapt. If touching her fingertips sent his pulse racing, how was he going to survive the night? "Would you like to be smeared with this mixture or would you prefer another method?"

"Smear, slather, spread." She shrugged. "It all amounts to the same thing. Do I need to undress?"

"Only if you're anxious to be naked in front of me." Heat swirled from his chest to his abdomen. His cock thickened and lengthened, demanding the firm grip of her

pussy. He wanted her naked and moaning as he thrust between her thighs. It had been so long since he touched her, so long since her nails dug into his back. He was determined to keep this playful, but the urge to reestablish his claim nearly overwhelmed him.

"Your letter is N," she prompted. "Smear away."

He closed the space between them, his gaze fixed on her mouth. Dipping his index finger in the glass, he absently stirred the mixture as he contemplated his options.

"You better not put that stuff on my nose."

He laughed. "I can think of infinitely more interesting body parts." Painting a sticky trail from her earlobe to her shoulder, he handed her the glass and went to work. He started with a slow sweep of his tongue, then scraped his teeth against her neck. "I could have said navel or nipple. I'm letting you off easy."

"For now." She sighed as he continued his descent to her shoulder, licking and nibbling as he went.

She was flushed and breathless by the time he raised his head. He brushed her lower lip with his thumb, staring into her eyes. "Do you realize how special you are, how rare, how wonderful?"

Her lips parted as if she would reply, then her gaze clouded and she looked away. Her reaction saddened him. She had fought so hard, accomplished so much, and she still longed to be elite. He might not be able to make her elite, but he could prove to her that it didn't matter.

He shed his jacket and unfastened his shirt, leaving it hanging loose from his shoulders. She reached behind her, but he shook his head. "If you undress, we won't finish the game, and I'm having fun."

"I can't think of a verb that starts with O."

"Offer can be a verb."

"And what shall I offer you? Your letter is W." She took another drink, waiting for his decision.

Waist? No, he really wasn't ready for the temptation of her naked body. A thought occurred to him and he grinned. "The second time through O will be the body part. You'll have to offer me your firm, round orbs. Or I can offer you my obelisk." She laughed so hard he had to take the glass from her hand.

"Obelisk?" She pressed her chest, gasping for breath. "I've heard it called some ridiculous things, but obelisk?"

He couldn't remember the last time he'd seen her laugh. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled. "I'll ogle your orbs as I thrust my obelisk inside your orifice." He paused for a chuckle. "In fact, you've got more than one orifice I'd like to orbit with my obelisk."

"In your dreams." Her laughter abated, but a smile still bowed her lips.

"In my dreams, and fantasies, for seven long years."

"I offer you my mouth." She gazed into his eyes and waited.

Setting the glass aside, he wrapped his arms around her. He fit his lips over hers and cradled her neck in the bend of his elbow. Her mouth slowly opened and he eased his tongue past her parted lips. Warmed by her body, the Snow Blind was even sweeter and more evocative. He savored the taste and the intimacy of sipping it from her lips. Her tongue curled around his, then pushed into his mouth.

He groaned and separated their lips. "As much as I enjoy kissing you, my letter was W."

"Details."

"I think we should get you out of this dress now."

Sekarrah turned around and Dezmon unzipped her dress. "Did you really dream about me?" With a little shimmy, she sent the gown sliding down her body to pool around her ankles.

He rested his hands on her shoulders, ignoring the urge to overwhelm and conquer. She needed tenderness, not dominance -- dominance could come later. "How can you doubt it?" Had she noticed the conspicuous hitch in his voice?

"After I graduated from the academy, I thought we would..."

Turning her to face him, he framed her face with his hands. "You had worked so hard. I knew you needed time to build a reputation without my interference, and I knew the only way I could keep my hands off you was to be in another province."

"So you volunteered to oversee the construction project."

"Do you honestly think I wanted to spend two years in the wilderness?"

She licked her lips and rubbed her cheek against his hand, her long lashes shielding her eyes. "I didn't know what to think. I was so glad to be back from my assignments, until I found out you were gone."

He raised her chin until their gazes locked. "Tonight is for rediscovery. We're together. Let's celebrate."

"Are we on B?" He nodded. "Brush or bathe, depending on where you plan to put it."

"This could get messy. I'll go grab a towel. Why don't you finish undressing?"

Sekarrah stood there stunned and uncertain. Why was she doing this? Tension coiled through her belly. If she offered him trust, he would offer her compromise. But what did that mean? She'd spent the past seven years building a life without him, proving to herself happiness didn't rely on Dezmon or any man. Her life had purpose. She was respected...

He emerged from the bathroom and her thoughts scattered. Her happiness didn't rely on him, but what was to say she wouldn't be happier with Dezmon in her life? The tension gripping her abdomen released in a warm, melting rush.

He crossed the room, several folded towels balanced on one hand. His slow, sexy smile did cruel things to her senses. Her nipples gathered against the lacy cups of her strapless bra and the rhythmic pulse of her feminine core made her imagine his cock filling her, claiming her.

"You were supposed to finish undressing." He unfolded the towels across the bed and shrugged out of his clothes.

"If you want me naked so badly, why don't you do something about it?"

Never one to resist a challenge, Dezmon reached her in two long strides. His gaze bore into hers as he unclasped her bra. "I want many things from you. How many are you willing to surrender?" He tossed the bra aside and cupped both her breasts, expelling an audible sigh. "What letter are we on? There must be a B or an N in there somewhere."

He lifted her against his chest, pressing his face between her breasts. She wrapped her legs around his waist and urged his mouth to her nipple. To hell with the game. She needed him inside her, longed to be joined with him.

His mouth moved over her breasts. He caressed her firm flesh, suckling each nipple in turn. The escalating sensations accented the ache between her thighs. She cupped the back of his head and pressed him closer, rubbing her mound against his flat belly. Tenderness and impatience crashed over her in opposing waves. She wanted to press her face against his chest and listen to the comforting rhythm of his heart, but she needed his strong, hard body moving against her, holding her down.

He carried her to the bed and placed her on the towels. "Lift your hips." She did and he dragged her panties off, tossing them over his shoulder with a rakish grin. "Now lie back. I'll just be a minute."

"Where are you going?" Shocked by the desperation in her own voice, she sank back on the bed and closed her eyes.

"We are only on B, sweetheart, and I think bathe was your chosen verb."

"I'm bored with this game. Just make love to me."

"The game is about to get a lot more interesting, and you know it's better when I make you wait."

She groaned, propping herself up on her elbows. "I've been waiting for seven years."

He knelt beside the bed, a freshly mixed drink in one hand and a glass with the thick white substance in the other. "Scoot back just a bit and put your heels on the edge of the bed."

If whatever he had planned necessitated his face being between her thighs, she was willing to cooperate. Memories of his mouth pressed against her sex and his tongue stroking her clit had gotten her through more lonely nights than she cared to remember. Lying back, she bent her knees and spread her legs wide, shameless in her desire.

*I'm yours, silly man. Fuck me.* Why did he hesitate? She lifted her head and smiled. His features were taut with desire, his pupils fully dilated.

He drizzled Snow Blind down her leg, catching the rivulets with his tongue. The heated stroke of his tongue contrasted with the cold, wet liquor, sending chills up her spine. He moved closer and closer to the apex of her thighs. She arched, helpless to conceal how much she wanted his touch, his kiss on her pussy. With a wicked chuckle, he avoided her mound entirely and worked his way up the other side.

Panting with frustration and need, she glared at him. "Do you have any ideas for I? I'm all out of verbs."

"Insert?" He pushed his middle finger into her. Sekarrah tightened her inner muscles, needing more than his finger. "Impale?" With a twist of his wrist, he thrust another finger inside her. "How about inundate?" He dripped Snow Blind onto her lower abdomen, but licked it away before it reached her delicate folds.

"Oh gods, Dez, you're killing me."

"I thought the alcohol might sting, but how does this feel?" He smeared her clit with the white paste-like substance and Sekarrah whimpered. "Does that burn?"

"No. I need your mouth there. Please. No more games."

He painted her slit with the mystery ingredient, then her nipples and her lips. "Don't lick your lips. That's for me not you." She nodded as he draped her legs over his shoulders and lifted her pussy to his mouth. With long, thorough strokes, he explored her sensitive flesh. The flat of his tongue parted her folds and his tongue tip flicked her clit.

Familiar sensations gathered deep in her belly. Would he let her come? So often he took her to the brink, then made her wait until he was inside her. He traced her slit

over and over, circling her opening, then flicking her clit and teasing her folds in between. Each stroke accented her need, made her core ache and her clit throb.

She clasped the bedcovers and flexed her bottom. *Please, don't stop. Let me come.*

*We've waited for seven years. Not even I am that cruel.*

She hadn't intentionally sent her thoughts, but his response sounded in her mind as his tongue settled over her clit. He pressed and flicked, sucked and nibbled until her orgasm burst with breath-stealing intensity. Letting her legs slide down to his elbows, he thrust into her cunt, prolonging the spasms of pleasure. Sekarrah arched, taking him deeper, squeezing him tighter than ever before.

Finally! He was back where he belonged.



## Chapter Four

Dezmon groaned as Sekarrah's tight, wet body closed around his cock. The salty, sweet taste of her passion lingered on his tongue. He rocked back and thrust deep, clenching his teeth against the pleasure. He needed to relax and savor this, or it would be over before he was ready for it to end. Watching her beautiful face, he realized no matter how long he made it last, it would be over too soon.

Rolling her hips up and spreading her thighs wide, he bent to her breasts, sucking the sticky, sweet coating from her nipples. They tightened and flushed so enticingly he continued to suckle long after the glaze was gone. Her core caressed his cock as he lavished attention on her breasts. Working his way up along her throat, he turned his attention to her mouth.

"Are these lips as sweet as your other lips?" He nipped her chin.

"There's only one way to find out."

He traced her mouth with his tongue, then paused. "Your whole body is delicious."

They kissed, sharing the taste of the Snow Blind and her pleasure as he moved between her thighs. Each forceful thrust drove them closer to the edge, intensified the sensations building within them. He released her legs, needing to hold her close as they reached the summit. She clutched his back and arched into each thrust.

Anticipation heightened their pleasure. They had been denied too long. She gasped and dug her fingernails into his back. He welcomed the pain, answered her aggression with several violent thrusts. Nothing stood between them now. They would never be parted again.

He threw back his head and cried out, coming in hard, shuddering waves. She wrapped her legs around his waist, her inner muscles echoing his pleasure. They clung together, trembling, shaken by the sheer intensity of their release.

Shifting to his knees and forearms, he supported his weight without separating their bodies. "I missed you." He brushed his mouth over hers.

"I missed you too."

"Would you like to sleep for a while, or shall we go soak in the tub?"

"A bath sounds wonderful."

They showered first, washing each other with teasing hands as warm water ran over their bodies. He pushed her hand away from his cock for the third time with a playful growl. "You better stop or I'm going to fuck you against the wall."

She laughed. "Is that supposed to frighten me?" Sinking to her knees, she batted away his hand and grasped his hips. "You had all the fun before. Let me play."

Her lips closed around the tip of his cock and he slipped his fingers into her hair. She circled him with her tongue, exploring his opening and sucking him deeper. His heart hammered in his chest and he adjusted his stance, bracing his legs farther apart.

He watched as well as felt her hands caress him and her mouth tease. She cupped his balls with one hand while her head bobbed, sliding her mouth up and down his shaft. Clenching his jaw against the urgency, he slowly rocked his hips. She raised her gaze and he groaned. Desire burned in her eyes. She wasn't doing this out of obligation, she genuinely enjoyed pleasuring him.

"Enough." He pulled out of her mouth and helped her to her feet. "I don't want to come like that." Turning her around, he nudged her legs apart, and drove into her from behind. He cupped both her breasts and whispered into her ear, "You can't say I didn't warn you." She braced herself against the wall, her cry of pleasure echoed by his. He moved one arm to her waist, lifting her hips as he found her clit with the middle finger of his other hand.

"Come for me. I want to feel your cunt squeeze me." Moaning, she arched her back, water streaming off her hair. He plucked at her nipples and rolled her clit

between his fingers, keeping his cock deep inside her. Rising to her toes, she canted her hips, and rested her forehead against the wall. He carefully pinched her clit and deep pulsations erupted in her core. *Oh yes.* She did that so well. "My turn." He grasped her hips and slammed into her hard and fast, amazed when his release triggered another orgasm.

"Now we... have to start all over," she whispered.

The second time they managed to shower and immerse themselves in the tub without losing control of their desire. Her back pressed against his chest, her bottom teasing his ever eager cock. He caressed her breasts and she massaged his thighs.

"You said it would be different this time. What did you mean?"

She'd offered him her trust. She'd earned the compromise. "The university has offered me a position, and I've decided to take it." He paused. They couldn't build a future on half-truths. "Actually, I ruthlessly pursued this position because I wanted out of the Royal Guard."

Easing away from him, she pivoted, looking into his eyes. "Why would you want out of royal service? Your family has served the crown for generations. Won't your father be furious if you take this position?"

"He will, but I don't care. There is a certain hotheaded royal guard who I want as my permanent mate. We can't be mated so long as we both serve the crown, and I won't ask her to sacrifice all she's worked so hard to achieve. I have more options than she does."

She pressed her lips together, but they still trembled and tears pooled in her eyes.

"I love you, Sekarrah. I always have."

"But I'm not elite. Your family will never --"

"My father is one of your biggest fans. He's amazed at your intelligence and skill. If my father accepts you, no one will dare contradict him."

"But according to the elite, I will weaken the bloodline with my --"

"With your fierce spirit, shrewd intellect, and physical perfection?"

"My body is not perfect."

"It is to me."

Pushing her wet hair off her brow, she turned and knelt facing him. "You're serious about this? You intend to leave the Royal Guard and mate with me?"

"Say the word and I'm yours -- permanently."

"Yes."

She might have meant to say more, but he closed his arms around her and claimed her mouth with a passionate kiss.

After a long moment, she eased away. "I never dreamed it could be more than an affair with us. I never let myself hope. I love you so much. I just --"

He pressed his index finger to her lips. "It won't be easy. The elite will resist you, but they will see how much I love you, how much my father respects you, and have no choice but to appreciate the woman you've become."

A speculative smile parted her lips and mischief sparkled in her eyes. "You know, if you become a professor, your position with the Royal Guard will be vacant."

Dezmon chuckled. "That's one of the things that amazes me about you. You're convinced you can do anything, and so far you've been right. You better apply for the position before we announce our engagement or they'll say you traded sexual favors for the job."

"I don't care what *they* say. I never have. If you love me, we can work out the rest together." She turned back around and settled against his chest. "It's going to be a fabulous new year."

**The End**

## **Aubrey Ross**

Multi-award winning author Aubrey Ross writes an eclectic assortment of erotic fiction. From sinister power struggles between demonic clans to adventurous Mystic Keepers and her frequent visits to the Seileighe and Unseileighe courts, her books are filled with passion and imagination. Release your inhibitions and let her stories take you where only dreamers dare to soar.

You can visit Aubrey's website at [www.aubreyross.com](http://www.aubreyross.com) or join her news group at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Anything-but-Ordinary>.