

# **Mystic Keepers 1: Cayenne**

## **Aubrey Ross**

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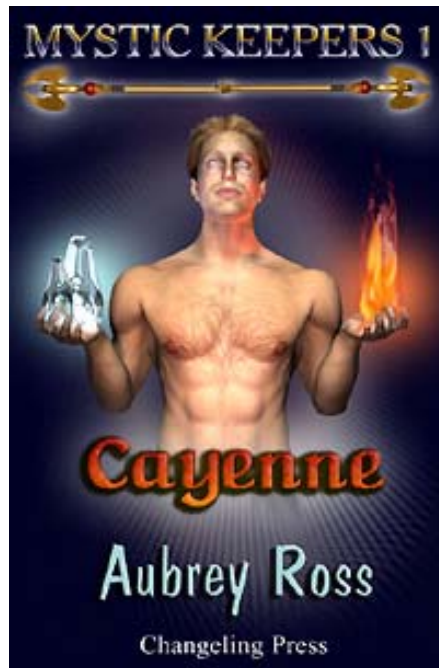
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## Prologue

Calling upon eighteen cycles of training, Malik Cendar stood proud and tall before the Matriarch of the Order of Flame. The Presentation was part of *Pim Noctar*. It must be endured if he hoped to gain approval to bond with his chosen mate, and he had chosen no ordinary mate.

Matriarch Flame moved around him in a slow assessing circle. Though countless wrinkles creased her skin, her waist-length hair remained the vivid blending of chocolate brown and fiery red shared by every member of her Order. "You are nicely formed, young Frost."

Was she too senile to remember his name? Or did she think... *Focus, Cendar!*

He snapped himself back to attention. Every eligible Frost male coveted the Flame Heiress. Her family was reputed to possess the most powerful *iede* in the dimension. Wealth, prestige, and authority were all determined by the strength of mystic *iede* and as the mate of the Flame Heiress, Malik would share in her power.

All that stood between him and his goal was the approval of this stubborn old woman. Determination surged through Malik, helping him focus. He inclined his head respectfully, acknowledging her comment.

"Please disrobe."

Unflinching, he reached for the fastenings of his tunic. A crackling fire leapt merrily in the massive hearth, mocking him with its dancing light. Smooth firestone walls surrounded them, sculpted and seamless. A cage for all but the most powerful sorcerer.

He'd suspected it would come to a full demonstration of his virility. With the future of the Order of Flame on the line, why would the Matriarch settle for anything less? But if she intended for him to perform, where were the attendants? By all the

furies of Frozen Hell, she better not intend to do it herself!

Defiant now, he faced the old woman and clasped his hands behind his back.

Matriarch Flame chuckled and turned to the smooth firestone wall. She chanted softly, spreading her hands first side to side, then top to bottom. A doorway appeared. Three young women entered, their diaphanous dresses floating and fluttering as they moved.

They lined up in front of Malik, eyes downcast.

"Which maid pleases you most, Frost Keeper?"

"It matters not, Matriarch Flame. I have already completed my purification. I will not mate again until I am fully bonded."

She smiled broadly, apparently pleased by his answer. "Your intended mate is my granddaughter. I must be certain you are compatible and worthy of this great honor before I initiate the *Pim Noctar*."

"I understand." It had taken nearly a cycle for the Flame Council to process his application. He had no intention of failing now, despite whatever tests the crafty Matriarch had in store.

A softly spoken directive from the old woman set the middle girl in motion. She knelt before him, never so much as raising her gaze.

*Here we go!* He steeled himself for the humiliation of performing like a trained animal.

The attendant stroked her warm hands up his thighs. Fixing his gaze on an invisible point directly ahead of him, he waited for the first brush of her fingers against his flaccid cock. Heat. Tingling, prickly sensations enveloped his sac and he looked down. Her head was bent, her mouth open wide, nearly touching his balls, and she was -- breathing on him!

*Damn! He hadn't counted on Flame iede.*

Warmth invaded his abdomen and swirled around his cock. The sensation passed through his flesh in a lazy spiral, drawing blood to the reluctant appendage. When he was hard and throbbing the kneeling attendant raised her head and smiled

into his resentful eyes.

"I understand your vow, but this will be over more quickly if I take you in my mouth. Would that be acceptable to you?"

Feeling less violated, he nodded, canting his hips to bring his erect cock within easy reach. She cupped his balls, massaging them gently while her wet mouth slid as far down his shaft as she could reach. Groaning, he fought against the pleasure, but gods her mouth was hot! Back and forth that silken mouth slid. Not a hint of teeth, just the firm circle of her lips and the unbelievable heat.

She pulled back, suckling the sensitive head of his cock like he would suckle a nipple. Clenching his fists against his thighs, he widened his stance. She swirled her tongue around and around. He gasped. His balls pulled up tightly, pulsing.

"Now, Mistress Flame, now!" He ground out the words between clenched teeth.

The girl quickly ducked out of the way and Malik pumped his seed into the Matriarch's waiting palm. She examined the milky liquid objectively, shooting Flame *iede* from her fingertips, creating a soft red glow.

"You are potent and compatible with our *iede*." She paused, the substance evaporating in a puff of pink smoke. "But are you worthy?"

Malik panted, bracing his hands against his knees as his body cramped with the need to -- *rut!*

Detailed images bombarded his mind and stimulated his senses. He saw the attendant's supple thighs part, revealing her glistening cunt. Bright red pubic hair cut short accented her folds, displaying her clit. She parted herself invitingly. He accepted the offer in one brutal thrust. She screamed. Pleasure? Pain? It terrified him to realize he didn't care. He pounded into her like a ravenous beast.

*This isn't real!*

But the images continued, becoming progressively more graphic. He lay on his back enthusiastically licking the pussy of one attendant while another straddled his hips, eagerly fucking him. The third guided his fingers to her sopping folds...

"No!" he shouted. "I will not be tempted! I will mate with Cayenne and not

before.”

“Out!” The Matriarch’s voice cracked like a whip and the attendants rushed from the chamber.

Malik’s senses gradually cleared. The frantic mental compulsion released, but his cock still throbbed painfully.

“Malik Cendar of the Order of Frost, I find you worthy of Cayenne Dover, Heiress to the Order of Flame. May your bonding be successful and your offspring strong.”

“I thank you, gracious Matriarch.” He managed to rasp out the traditional response. “I will not rest until my mate is satisfied.”

“That is good to hear, young Frost.” She nodded toward his raging erection. “I have set *Pim Noctar* in motion. Get thee to thy mate! You have no time to lose.”

## Chapter One

"You're a psych major," Cayenne Dover said as she poured coffee into her companion's mug. "What does it mean when a person has exactly the same dream over and over?"

"That depends on the dream."

Setting the glass carafe on the warmer, she pursed her lips impatiently. "You'll never get rich as a psychologist with answers like that."

"I plan to be a child psychologist and I don't expect to get rich." Julie smiled, blowing delicately on her steaming coffee. "Now, tell me about your dream."

"I never said it was my dream." A chuckle disrupted her protest, so Cayenne shrugged and explained. "The dream started about three weeks ago. The first one was fairly harmless, but each one that followed grew more intense."

"Then they aren't identical."

Cayenne hesitated. Julie was the only one of her three tenants she'd even consider having this conversation with. Still the erotic nature of her dreams made Cayenne uncomfortable. "Forget I brought it up." Cayenne pushed back her chair and gathered the plates. "Isn't Paul picking you up soon?"

Julie caught her wrist, returning the dirty dishes to the table. "There is no way in hell you're getting out of this. Sit back down and talk to me."

Reluctantly, Cayenne sank to her chair. Julie was three years her junior, but infinitely more experienced when it came to men. Or at least sex.

"It's only been in the last few dreams that I... you know. Before that I always woke up too soon."

Wrapping both hands around her mug, Julie stared at her with unwavering interest. "Start at the beginning. Tell me everything."

"This is some perverted fascination, not a desire to help me." Cayenne softened the criticism with a quick smile. "I was only aware of him to begin with. I can never see him clearly. I just know he's there."

"You're talking about a dream, right? You don't have a stalker or something?"

Blowing a strand of hair out of her eyes, Cayenne chuckled. "No, I don't have a stalker."

"What does he look like?"

"Do you know who Mark McGrath is?"

"The lead singer of Sugar Ray?"

Cayenne nodded. "Well, picture him in about ten years."

Whistling soft and low, Julie gave her approval. "Works for me. So what happens in these dreams, or do I even need to ask?"

"He comes to me --"

"And makes you come?" Julie grinned. "Sweetheart, it doesn't take a psych major to figure out what your dreams are about. You need to trade in your vibrator for a real live man! When was the last time you --"

"I think I hear Paul's car in the alley."

"Oh, don't get all pissy. Your subconscious is just telling you what your mind refuses to accept. You need to get laid!"

Cayenne shoved her chair back and stood. "And for this I cooked you pasta?"

Julie laughed uproariously. "Paul has got a friend that will give you the ride of your life, if you just want to fool around. He's hung like a horse, but only sort of house broken."

"Sounds charming."

"Sounds like exactly what you need for a night or two. Bet it would cure you of these bizarre dreams."

A car horn interrupted their conversation.

"You're ditching me with the dishes, aren't you?" Cayenne watched her friend cross to the back door.



"It's Paul," she said, grabbing her purse off the counter.

"Have fun."

"You too." Julie blew her a kiss and breezed out the door.

Grumbling all the while, Cayenne did the dishes -- alone.

She loved to cook, but hated cleaning up the inevitable mess. Julie generally spent each weekend with Paul as Cayenne didn't allow overnight guests. Her other two tenants had gone home for the summer, so Cayenne had her house to herself.

Her semi-playful conversation with Julie echoed through her mind as she showered, hoping to cool off before going to bed. Was she so sexually frustrated that it was affecting her dreams?

The mere thought of her dream lover made her nipples tingle and her clit throb. Closing her eyes, she faced the tepid spray. The water slicked her hair back from her face. She arched her neck.

Hot blood coursed through her veins in sharp contrast to the cool rivulets streaming over her skin. Turning the faucet, she waited for the spray to chill. The water hissed as it hit her heated flesh. Her pussy ached, hollow and needful.

The image of his face formed within her mind, rugged features, sharp gray eyes. He'd started out gentle, tender, seeming almost hesitant to touch her, afraid he'd frighten or harm her. But last night he'd -- even in her mind she hesitated over the word -- fucked her, hard and fast, dominating her with his strength, overwhelming her with his passion.

She moaned.

Cupping her breasts, she gasped. Her skin was hot to the touch, feverish. The heat was so intense her nipples burned her fingers.

*What was wrong with her?*

Julie's initial response had kept Cayenne from admitting the dark turn her dreams had taken in the last few days. Did she secretly long to be dominated by a lover? Her body had certainly responded with wild abandon in her dreams.

Her legs wobbled so badly she feared she'd slip if she tried to get out, but she'd

never been more desperate for her trusty vibrator! She raised the showerhead, keeping the cool water flowing over her as she leaned against the shower stall.

She slipped one hand between her thighs and cried out. Her clit was so swollen and sensitive the slightest caress was painful. She pressed her palm over her mound, whimpering. If it hurt to touch her clit, she couldn't make herself come.

And her whole body ached for release.

Tears blurred her vision. She pushed away from the slick tiles. Trembling and miserable, Cayenne turned off the water and got out of the shower.

She felt sunburned.

She felt empty.

The softest towel she owned abraded like sandpaper. Even the soles of her feet stung.

Naked, sobbing helplessly, she stumbled into her bedroom.

Malik caught Cayenne to his chest as she collapsed against him. He had given her as long as he dared, courting her gently through shared dreams. But his need for her sweet body could no longer be denied!

If the heat radiating off her flesh was any indication, she was more than ready for the bonding. Curving his finger beneath her chin, he brought her face up until their eyes met. Each of her deep, anxious breaths filled her with his scent and the powerful pheromones emanating from his pores. *Breathe, rijinna mi, breathe!*

Her hands moved restlessly against his chest. Pressing his aching cock into her soft belly, he studied her features.

Though she'd chosen a style far shorter than customary, the color of her hair was so glorious he didn't mind the sleek, short style. A rich blending of brown and fiery red, her hair could only belong to a Flame Keeper.

"What's happening to me?"

Her pink tongue darted out, wetting her lower lip.

He groaned. Oh, to feel that tongue trail across his belly and circle the head of his

cock!

*"Pim Noctar, Cayenne. Your body yearns for its mate."*

"That's one bizarre pick up line," she muttered, rubbing her mons against his thigh. "Am I dreaming? I must be. I know you. You're the one..." Her pupils nearly eclipsed her irises and her entire body was flushed. Though her thinking seemed muddled, she clung to him.

"What we are feeling is no simple lust, *rijnna mi*. This is a sacred bonding. Part your lips. Let me kiss you."

Her hot breath escaped, filling his mouth. She tasted of Flame *iede* and passion. He traced her lips with the tip of his tongue, teasing, nibbling, and licking, before he pushed inside. She groaned. He delved deeper, took more.

He cupped her breast, gently abrading the nipple. She squirmed. *Gods, her breasts were perfection!* He squeezed one soft mound while he circled the crest with his tongue. Gathering Frost *iede*, Malik blew across her skin.

She gasped. "That's cold. Oh, it tingles. What did you just do?"

He grinned and increased the intensity of the *iede*. "This." He exhaled his frosty breath again.

Shivering violently, she clasped his shoulders and arched her back. Her nipples gathered into jewel-like peaks, the color deepening from rose to scarlet. He carefully caught one highly stimulated tip between his teeth and applied gradual pressure as he sent a steady stream of chilly *iede* directly into the tiny openings.

She cried out sharply and trembled as he triggered a shuddering orgasm in a way only Frost Keepers could.

Cayenne couldn't remember falling asleep, but this was by far the most intense dream she'd ever had. Malik. Her lover's name was Malik Cendar. She knew it as surely as she knew her own. This was the first time she'd seen his face clearly, but his muscular body and softly accented voice had filled her dreams for weeks.

The fever subsided a bit with her pleasure. He settled his mouth over her breast

again, licking and suckling, making her tingle and shiver. She pushed her fingers into his frost-tipped hair, expecting the stiff sticky drag of too many styling products. The strands slid softly between her fingers, then sprang naturally back into spikes. How odd. How wonderful.

She was standing naked in her bedroom with a veritable stranger, and nothing had ever felt more right.

More perfect.

More preordained.

He knelt before her and she whimpered. She loved the gentle swirl of a man's tongue against her clit, so intimate, so tender. Nothing made her come faster or harder than oral stimulation.

"I hope you like this, Cayenne, because I've dreamed about having my mouth on you for over a cycle. I'm ravenous for the taste of you."

His words, so in keeping with her thoughts, sent tingles up her spine.

He lifted her leg to his shoulder and she steadied herself against the bedpost. Expecting him to dive right in, she held her breath while his gaze moved over her exposed flesh.

"Oh, *rijnna mi*, you are exquisite." He inhaled deeply, holding her scent inside his body for a long time. He parted her folds and traced her slit with his tongue, back and forth, back and forth, never touching her throbbing clit.

"Please, Malik." She arched, trying to bring his taunting caress where she needed it most.

His cool breath heightened her smoldering heat.

He eased her leg down from his shoulder and she groaned. *Why was he tormenting her?*

"Offer me your clit and I'll pay homage to it."

He had the oddest way of putting things. She hesitated, feeling self-conscious. Her body throbbed impatiently. Closing her eyes and averting her face, she reached down and parted the way for him.

He only touched her with the tip of his tongue and occasionally brushed her with his hair. Her legs pressed against the edge of the bed as his tongue circled her clit, then flicked across it. Cool and soothing, yet undeniably arousing, the sensations were incredible.

He slowed, making each pass a distinct caress. Her core throbbed hungrily. What would it feel like to have his thick shaft sliding in and out of her, stretching her to the point of pain? Another titillating circle and she shattered, unable to hold off the forceful climax a moment longer.

She sank to the bed and he helped her lie back, draped both legs over his shoulders. His mouth settled over her drenched folds and the rest of the world fell away. He was bold and demanding, licking and sucking, thrusting into her like he would with his cock.

She twisted her fingers in the bedspread. He tipped her hips up, pushing his tongue deeper. In. Out.

“Promise you won’t scream.”

“I promise.”

He thrust in with his tongue and Cayenne panicked. She’d given the promise too quickly! His tongue was ice cold! And that strange, swirling tingle he’d sent into her breast coated the walls of her cunt.

*Oh God! This couldn’t be right.*

He thrust again, deeper, colder. She shivered. Clawing at the bed, she arched. The hard, rhythmic waves went on and on. She wasn’t sure where one ended and the next began, or if he had somehow triggered one incredibly long orgasm.

Colors danced before her eyes. She laughed. They looked like rainbow-colored snowflakes. She was hallucinating! This had never happened before.

She felt him shift positions and looked down in time to see him guide his cock to her entrance. Lethargic and jumbled from her marathon release, she didn’t think to object or question. He carefully lubricated himself with her juices and held her wide open while he pushed inside.

Closing her eyes, she concentrated entirely on the feeling of his cock moving into her, filling her, stretching her. It pinched. It stung. She tried to relax, to accept him.

"Hold your legs open, *rijnna mi*." He guided her hands to the bend of her knees and showed her what he meant. This freed his hands and he immediately put them to use, stroking her breasts, belly, and thighs.

He gently traced where their bodies joined, moving her juices up to her clit, stroking her tenderly. His shaft created uncomfortable pressure inside her. She held perfectly still, clasping the bend of her knees, wondering how she'd bear it once he started thrusting.

His other hand slipped beneath her and she nearly let go of her legs. What was he doing? He burrowed between the cheeks of her ass and found her tight little hole.

"I'm not into *that* at all!" she objected vehemently, but his finger was cold, so she knew it was already too late. "Malik, I think dealing with your... This is really..."

Her protests trailed away into a strangled moan as his finger gently breached her virgin orifice. Icy sensations swirled up her anal passage, while heat flooded her cunt. Cayenne cried out. She drenched his cock with cream. She could feel it seeping out and running into the crack where his fingers played.

"Thank you," he said with a playful smile.

He pulled back slowly, his cock sliding easily now.

She was on fire!

No, she was freezing!

Her cunt burned, boiled while his thick shaft moved carefully in and out. But his clever finger was still in her ass, sending occasional pulses of chilly sensation spiraling through her entire body.

She lifted her hips, pulling her legs wide. He moved faster, deeper, more forcefully.

"I... can't... wait," he grated out between thrusts.

He gently removed his finger and grasped her hips with both hands, increasing the impact of each penetration. She tightened around him, amazed that it no longer

hurt. Driving deeper than he'd ever gone before, he threw back his head and shuddered with the force of his release.

His seed exploded inside her and Cayenne cried out. It was cold! Like his breath and the sensations he created with his fingers, Malik Cendar's semen was ice cold.

## Chapter Two

Knowing his mate was struggling to accept the reality of their bonding, Malik didn't argue when she retreated into the bathroom a short time later. He heard her activate the shower, so he sent a cleansing pulse along his naked body and conjured pants before descending the stairs to the main level of the house.

Cayenne was not the only one struggling to accept reality. Their dream wooing had been a pale foreshadowing of the feelings his mate aroused in him. Tingling aftershocks of pleasure zinged through his body. Malik smiled. He had never imagined that bonding would affect him so profoundly. He felt content, replete, yet ravenous for more. His smile broadened. The next twenty-four hours would be very interesting.

Light from the kitchen invited him into the cozy little room. Breathing highly concentrated Frost *iede* into his cupped palms, he formed a translucent ball of ice. He retrieved a specific psychic resonance from the extensive catalog in his memory and saturated the ice with the rhythm. The image of a dark-haired man formed within the ball, fluctuating, wavering as the resonance searched for its source.

Malik gradually intensified the *iede* until he could see his friend clearly. Jax Severn pushed back from a computer desk and turned to face the empty office behind him.

"Show yourself!"

"It's me, Jax. I can't come to you just now, but we need to rendezvous soon."

"Malik? Malik Cendar? Are you in New Orleans? I can barely hear you."

"Yes, I'm in New Orleans. Give me your phone number and I'll contact you through more conventional means in the morning."

Jax rattled off two sets of numbers. "What's going on? What brings you to this dimension? I figured you for the Steering Committee. Why are you slumming with the



Keepers?"

"Long story."

"Well, meet me at Café Du Monde in the morning and I'll buy the beignets."

Malik chuckled. "Will Cayenne know what that means?"

"Who is Cayenne? What's going on?"

Malik heard the bathroom door open. "What is an appropriate time?" he asked in an urgent whisper.

"How about nine."

"We'll see you at nine."

Quickly disintegrating the ice ball, he brushed his hands off on his pants and conjured a shirt. Why was he bothering to dress when he had every intention of reveling in *Pim Noctar*, of indulging every carnal instinct his mate would allow? He listened to the subtle creaking of the floorboards as she moved about upstairs. Should he wait for her to come down? Or go up after her?

\* \* \*

Cayenne shrugged into her kimono-style robe and sighed as the cool silk settled against her damp skin. Her pulse pounded. She had to concentrate just to keep her breathing deep and slow.

She'd analyzed the bizarre situation under the soothing current of the shower. There was no way she was dreaming and she didn't think she'd gone crazy. Malik was real. And he was affecting her -- stimulating her.

He was in the kitchen, waiting for her. Cayenne closed her eyes. The bond between them was growing stronger. If she could sense him, could he sense her? Probably.

She needed answers.

She needed his throbbing cock moving inside her again!

This was ridiculous. She would not be a slave to her sex drive.

Opening her eyes, she tightened the belt on her robe and headed downstairs.

Cayenne paused in the archway separating the kitchen from the dining room and

stared at Malik. She'd never seen him in the light. Or fully dressed.

Though sleekly muscled and graceful, he emanated danger. She glanced into his smoke-colored eyes and heat infused her face, her neck, her chest, continuing its persistent descent until it pooled between her thighs. His gaze followed the path of the heat as if he could actually see it.

Short blond hair, slightly longer on top, faded from rich antique gold near his scalp to silver at the tip of each subtle spike. Though interesting, the look was about twenty years out of date. His clothing, however, was the height of subtle chic. Collarless charcoal gray shirt and pleated dress slacks two shades darker.

"Don't come near me. Don't touch me. Don't breathe on me," she stressed emphatically. "Just sit down at the table and tell me what the hell is going on."

He ambled to the table and pulled out a chair. Instead of sitting, he turned it around and straddled it, folding his arms across the back. "I'll do whatever I can to help you understand."

"Did you give me some sort of drug?"

"What is happening between us is stronger than any drug. I was half-crazed when they brought me through the Veil. If I hadn't been able to find you --"

"Do you do that intentionally?"

"Do what?"

Cayenne shifted, leaning her shoulder against the archway. "Use phrases I don't understand. When they brought you through the veil? What is that supposed to mean?"

Light gleamed off the silver tips of his spiky hair as he shook his head. "You really have no idea who you are? How is that possible? Where are your parents? They should have been here to bless our bonding. This doesn't reflect well on the Order of Flame."

"Bless our bonding? The Order of Flame? Am I supposed to know what you're talking about?"

"Why are your parents not here?"

"My parents died when I was a child." She glared at him and walked fully into

the kitchen.

Malik's gaze followed her, but he said nothing for a long time. "That doesn't make sense. They were bonded Keepers. How did they die?"

"Their car was sandwiched between a tree and an SUV. No one survived the accident."

"No automobile accident can kill our kind."

"Our kind? What is that supposed to mean?"

"Did you see their bodies?"

"I was ten!"

He glanced away, pausing for a moment before he returned his gaze to her face. "Who cared for you after their passing?"

"A friend of my parents. She was designated as my guardian in their will. Look, I learned to deal with their deaths a long time ago. Why is this important now?"

More head shaking. She wanted to smack him.

"It's all wrong." He carelessly raked his fingers through his hair. "What you were told about your parents couldn't possibly be true."

"What the hell do you know about it? You don't even know me!" Her anxious steps took her quickly from one end of the kitchen to the other and back again.

"I know you, Cayenne. Apparently, better than you know yourself."

Where had he come from?

How had he infiltrated her dreams?

The heat within her body was building again, making her long for his -- cold!

"What is a bonded Keeper?" she asked, desperate for something to distract her from the desire making her pussy throb.

"That's a very complex question."

She could almost feel his lips parting her folds, his tongue circling her aching clit, blissfully cold. What he'd done with his finger! Even his cum was cold. "Are -- what are you?"

"The question should be what are *we*?" Malik rested his chin on his forearm and

smiled. "We are the same, you and I. The same and yet opposite. We are indigenous to another dimension."

"You're from another dimension?"

"We are from another dimension."

He pulled out the chair beside him and patted the seat. Her gaze never left his as she joined him at the table. "You think my parents were murdered?"

"Did you sense anything the day of the accident? Hereditary connections are very strong among our kind."

There was that phrase again. *Our kind*. One issue at a time. "The day my parents died..." Her mouth dried up, robbing her of the rest of the words.

His warm fingers closed around hers, squeezing gently. "Go on."

"I saw the accident in my mind." Blood rushed so loudly in her ears she could hardly hear her own words. "I started screaming. My teacher thought I'd lost my mind. It took the school three hours to verify what I told them, but I'd described everything perfectly. Except... they were already dead when they hit the tree."

The brush of his fingers against her cheek drew her back from the past. "I'm sorry, *rijnna mi*. I would take away your pain if it were within my power, but only a Past Keeper can erase memories."

"Past Keeper. Is that different than bonded Keeper? You have to start explaining what all this means."

"Let's go outside."

"Is the garden all right or should I get dressed?"

He flashed his sexy smile and heat rolled through her belly. "I have no interest in going anywhere that requires your getting dressed."

Unlike the famous courtyards in the French Quarter, which were encircled by the walls of the house, Cayenne's garden was out back. The high brick walls had been added many years after the original construction. Despite the historical inaccuracy of her domicile, she enjoyed the tranquility.

He held the screen door for her as she stepped out onto the back porch. Hot,

humid air wrapped around her and she groaned. How had people survived before air conditioning?

"Do you want something to drink? I'm not being a very good hostess."

"I have no complaints."

*Thank God for the darkness.* She was sure her entire body was blushing. She still couldn't believe she'd allowed him to... do everything they'd done together.

"I suppose I should warn you." He spoke in a deep, rumbling tone. "When you get excited, I can smell it and it makes me wild for more of what we did upstairs. So if you really want to talk, try not to think about it."

Mortified, Cayenne inhaled deeply. She didn't smell anything.

"Relax. Only your mate can smell it. It's a private signal telling me you want to fuck."

"We... have sex once and that makes you my mate?"

"Being your mate gives me the right to fuck you, not the other way around." Malik wrapped his arm around her, cupping her ass through her silk robe. "Do you want to talk or do you want me inside you?"

She twisted out of his hold and rushed down the stairs into the shadowy garden. Was he being a jerk on purpose? Helping her focus on an emotion other than lust?

*No.* She gave her belt a firm tug. *He was an arrogant ass.*

Plopping down in one of the padded lawn chairs, she watched him meander around the garden. He looked damn good in moonlight. She suddenly pictured him peeling off his shirt and...

He glanced at her and grinned.

"What is a Keeper?"

"Our dimension is split into two divisions with opposing purposes. Each division has separate Units. Within the Units are Orders. The Orders are devoted to specific abilities or skill sets. Both our Orders fall under the Unit of Energy. There is also Information and Spirituality."

"Wait. You're making this sound like a massive corporation."

"I guess that analogy is as true as any. I've heard our dimension likened to a military organization, a professional sports franchise, and a religion. The truth is we are all of those and yet we are none." He sat across from her, his features partially obscured by the shadows. "We are guardians. We are teachers. We listen, we observe. Do we influence the countless civilizations in which we interact or are we influenced by them? Who can say?"

"Within the Energy Unit you are a..." she prompted.

"Frost Keeper."

She shivered violently, remembering all of the sensations he had created with cold. "I should have known. Am I a Frost Keeper, too?"

"No, you're my equal and opposite. My mate. You're a Flame Keeper."

Fragments of memory flashed through her mind. The scorching heat in the shower. Countless incidents she'd dismissed as imagination. Spicy food. Too much wine. "What you do with cold I can do with heat?"

He laughed. "You damn near killed me without even trying. I'm almost afraid to teach you about *iede*."

She crossed her legs, firmly pressing her thighs together. Her mind frantically worked to assimilate everything he'd told her, while her body blazed with the need to writhe and wrestle and be impaled by him! "But you will teach me?"

"Not tonight. Tonight is for us. *Pim Noctar* will only continue until dawn. Each time we join it reinforces our bond, strengthens our connection."

"But I have so many questions," she protested.

"Not tonight."

## Chapter Three

"Come here," Malik said, scooting to the edge of his chair.

"You just told me I'm an alien! Do you honestly think I'll just shrug it off and spread my legs for you? How did you get here? Do you have a ship or does it have something to do with this veil? Are there others --"

He grabbed her chair and dragged it across the ground until their knees touched. "I will patiently answer your questions as soon as the sun rises. Has the fever left your body? It has not left mine."

A sly smile parted her lips. "A compromise, then?" Loosening the belt at her waist, she allowed the robe to gape, revealing the upper swell of her breasts. "I'll work on easing the ache, while you indulge my curiosity."

Blood and *iede* filled his cock, hard, cold, ready. He wedged his legs between hers, resting his hands on her knees. "I can think of a lot more interesting things to do with my mouth than talk."

Her palm touched his shoulder, startling him with its heat. The stubborn little *xalotte*. She had to be crawling out of her skin with desire. Why was she insisting on conversation?

He paused. If everything he'd believed about life suddenly changed, there would be nothing more important than understanding the truth.

He'd brought chaos to her door with *Pim Noctar*. Now it was his responsibility to meet her needs.

Slowly tugging on her belt, he freed it from the loops. "I have another proposition. I'll trade answers for your obedience. You follow my directives, without question, and I'll tell you anything you want to know."

Her eyes narrowed and her lips pressed into a grim line.

Trust would not come easily to Cayenne, but he could be patient. And stubborn. She must learn that he would never hurt her, that from this day on he would put her safety before his, her pleasure before his, her happiness before his. It was the way of bonded mates.

"All right."

He smiled. She sounded as if each word had pained her. "Open your robe."

She parted the material, allowing it to frame her naked body. Moonlight gilded her skin, hiding the true color of her nipples and the crimson highlights in her hair. Her crossed legs protected her feminine secrets, but he wouldn't push her, yet.

"How did you get here? Have you ever visited this dimension before?"

"There's an energy barrier we call the Veil separating our dimension from countless others." As he spoke, he placed her hands on the padded arms of the chair. "The Sacred Order of the Veil is so named because its members are born with the innate ability to perceive what transpires beyond the Veil." He paused, raising his gaze to her face. "I've never been to Earth before. Uncross your legs."

She complied, but kept her legs pressed together from ankle to thigh. A smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. She was stubborn, this mate of his.

"Then someone from this Order brought you here? You can't come through the Veil alone?"

"Only Veil Keepers can manipulate the Veil. They're the most powerful of all the Keepers. Well, Time Keepers are very powerful as well, but they work in sets of three: a Past Keeper, Present Keeper, and Future Keeper. This assures the balance of each set. Now relax and don't move your hands."

He stroked her kneecaps with his fingertips, watching her expression closely. Her eyes widened, then she hid the reaction. Dipping his thumbs inward, he eased her legs apart and caressed the soft skin of her inner thighs. He moved higher, closer to her feminine curls.

"No more questions?" he teased, a gentle reminder that she still had much to learn.



“How many Keepers are there on Earth?”

“Put your feet up here on the seat of my chair.” After a moment’s hesitation, she put one foot on either side of his hips. Her thighs opened exposing her folds, then her folds parted presenting her cunt. His cock bucked against his pants and he had to shake the chill off his fingers before he touched her. “I don’t honestly know. We can ask Jax tomorrow. I have to touch you. Now!”

He combed through her pubic curls, groaning at the moisture gathered there. Heat radiated off her flesh, intensifying the closer he got to her entrance. She was so still, so quiet. He looked at her face. Her head rested against the back of the chair and her eyes were closed. She’d caught her bottom lip between her teeth, her hands clutching the arms of the chair.

Before the night was over he would hear her cries echo in the balmy night.

Rubbing two fingers up and down between her folds, he watched her essence gather on his skin. Her scent rose all around him, stimulating, elemental. He wanted to devour her, to bury his face between her legs and fill his mouth with her taste.

He pushed his fingers slowly into her wet pussy and felt her muscles ripple.

“Will I want you this badly tomorrow?”

The plaintive cry in her question tore through him. He wanted to comfort her. Yet the possessive instinct to stake his claim, to ensure he was the only man she would ever want, drove rational thought from his mind.

“I don’t know,” he said, a subtle menace in his tone. “How badly do you want me now?”

Malik slowly withdrew his fingers only to shove them harder, deeper. Cayenne cried out, trembling.

With his fingers deep inside her cunt, he leaned forward and closed his lips around her swollen clit. She arched violently, nearly toppling her chair. He caught her hip with his free hand, while he carefully suckled, licked, and circled the sensitive little nub.

Her pussy clutched his fingers, the temperature escalating in a sudden burst of

heat. Forcing Frost *iede* into his hand, he counteracted the burn. He had to train her fast or she could do some serious damage.

He tried to pull his fingers out, but her inner muscles contracted so tightly he couldn't move. Startled, he raised his head and watched her skin sparkle, creating a scarlet aura in the moonlight. She shook and moaned, her passage rhythmically squeezing his fingers.

Flame *iede* shot up his arm, knocking him back against his chair. Heat and pleasure pulsed through his body, leaving him panting and shaken.

"Did I do that?" She sounded worried.

"This could get interesting. Your mystic levels are intensified by *Pim Noctar*, but you have no control. Do you feel better or worse?"

She fidgeted, her hands absently stroking the outer swell of her breasts. "Hot. I'm so hot."

He pulled her to her feet and cupped her breast. As he feared, her flesh seared his palm, her nipple poker hot. Urgently, he pulled her toward the glass-topped patio table. She didn't resist, but stumbled along behind him. Exhaling frosty breath over the entire surface, he said, "Lean over the table."

She touched the glistening substance, distrust obvious in her expression. The situation was more pressing than she realized. He didn't have time to argue with her. Pulling the robe from her shoulders, he lifted her to the table and spread her out on her stomach.

"It's really cold!"

"It's what you need. Let your body absorb my *iede*."

He quickly retrieved her belt from the grass, knowing she would start struggling as soon as she felt the tingle. Working quickly while she was still soothed by the chill, he bound her wrists together and tied them to the wrought iron trellis beside the table.

Her breathing stabilized and she looked back at him over her shoulder. "This isn't funny."

"I assure you, I'm not laughing."

"Whatever you breathed on this table is stinging the hell out of my skin."

"Then I must stimulate your *iede*. I overestimated your need."

"What is *iede*?" She nearly shouted the question.

"*Iede* is the basic element of our mystic power. I possess Frost *iede*. You possess Flame *iede*. The ways in which it can be controlled and manipulated are different for each type of *iede*."

"Untie my hands."

"Not yet." Malik lifted her hips. "Pull your legs up under you."

Cayenne kicked out at him once, then did as he said, folding her body into a delightfully submissive pose. Her smooth round ass gleamed in the moonlight, beckoning the firm smack of his hand. *Too soon!* He must gentle her before he taught her the pleasures found on the razor's edge between pleasure and pain.

"Open wide, *rijnna mi*. We have no time left for false modesty."

With a little wiggle, she moved her knees apart. Not nearly far enough. He took her thighs and repositioned her, adjusting the arch of her back to more fully expose her luscious pussy.

"Try not to scream too loudly."

Cayenne trembled uncontrollably. Her breasts tingled as her skin absorbed the Frost *iede* he'd breathed across the table. Raw and tender, her nipples felt as if he'd suckled and scraped too roughly against them. His cool hands caressed her hips, her back, her up-tilted ass.

Why had he chosen such an obscene position? Why didn't he take her back into the --

His teeth nipped her bottom and she yelped. The sensation stopped just short of pain. Still her smoldering pussy flared with pulses of heat. He shifted, stirring a balmy current of air. His spiky hair brushed against her inflamed folds. She wiggled and moaned. He nipped and licked, nipped and licked, from one cheek to the other, from her spine to the tops of her thighs.

“Malik! Enough. I’m burning up...”

The blissful coolness of his breath wafted over her skin, soothing the burn and leaving prickly sensitivity in its wake.

Her breath escaped in a ragged hiss.

“I want all of you, *rijnna mi*. Deny me nothing.”

*As if she had a choice!*

Even without the silk binding her wrists, her body enslaved her to his whims as securely as chains.

He pulled her hips toward him, leaving only her knees and her forearms on the table. Hot cream escaped her core and ran down her inner thigh. His cool fingers captured the rivulet and traced the wet trail back up to her pussy, teasing her engorged flesh with feather-light strokes.

Capturing her clit between his thumb and forefinger, he gently rolled it, gradually increasing the pressure and the cold. Her cunt convulsed hollowly and hot juices filled his palm.

“Anything!” she rasped out. “Take anything.”

“I don’t need your permission to take.” He shoved two fingers deep into her aching pussy, working her hard. “Invite me inside. Beg me.”

His command stirred the darkest reaches of Cayenne’s soul, unleashing a passion that made her wild. She arched her back. Her keening cry filled the night. “All of me. Take all of me!”

He spread her ass wide and circled her tightly puckered hole with his tongue. Icy Frost *iede* coated her, prepared her. She clutched the silk binding her wrists, fear insinuating itself into the tingling heat. He was huge. If he put his cock up her ass...

His middle finger pushed inside, interrupting her desperate thoughts. “Not while you’re still afraid. I can take you here without pain, but I will wait until you trust me before I show you.”

Rubbing the cool head of his cock up and down within her folds, he lubricated himself thoroughly. She held perfectly still while he pushed his thick length into her

aching cunt. Her walls stretched, eagerly accommodating his fullness. On and on he drove until finally she felt his thighs press against hers and his balls nestled against her mons.

"Don't move," he whispered. "You are so hot. I'm afraid you'll burn me if you come."

She whimpered. Having his throbbing cock impale her was what she'd been waiting for, longing for. All she had to do was squeeze her inner muscles and she knew she'd go off like a rocket.

"Relax."

"You drive me to the brink of madness, but I can't enjoy it?" Her laugh ended on a sob.

The finger in her ass pushed deeper. She cried out. Before he'd touched her there she'd sworn she wasn't into this, but someone needed to explain that to her body. Her anal passage rippled and throbbed in time with her pussy. Cold seeped through the churning heat, increasing her awareness of the dual penetration.

His finger twisted, spreading the icy sensation, while his cock pulled back almost out of her. He thrust into her pussy and pulled out of her ass, in and out, in opposite directions.

She grasped the edge of the table and braced for each counterattack.

Hot. Cold.

In. Out.

His balls slapped against her wet folds at the apex of each thrust, stimulating her clit. The warm breeze dancing across her naked flesh and playing through her hair bore his scent. There was no part of her body not attuned to their joining.

He moved faster, penetrated deeper. "Say my name," he demanded.

His arm banded her hips, pulling her up off the table as his cold seed exploded within her hot cunt. Buried to the hilt, his cock jerked and bumped against her cervix, and his hand splayed against her ass.

Held motionless in her mate's firm embrace, Cayenne surrendered to the

powerful spasms of pleasure. “Malik, *rijnna mi.*”

## Chapter Four

Midsummer sun beat down on Malik, warming his face and making the Frost *iede* in the tips of his hair tingle. Cayenne's fingers felt hot against his cool skin, but it was a natural contrast, not the uncontrollable burning of *Pim Noctar*. They had successfully completed their bonding.

"This is Jackson Square." She made a sweeping gesture toward the open area across the street from where they stood. The square was bisected by perpendicular paths. Trees lined the perimeter, and displayed at the intersection of the paths was the statue of a man mounted on a horse.

"Is that Jackson?"

"Yes. Andrew Jackson, a Civil War hero. The church on the other side of the square is St. Louis Cathedral."

He smiled. She had turned into a chatty little tour guide as soon as they hopped on the dark green trolley not far from her house. He was more interested in watching the sunlight play across her delicate features than in the Victorian architecture and the university where she graduated some years before, but he smiled and nodded attentively.

"Café Du Monde has stores all over the city now," she said. "This is the original and it never closes."

"Jax said he'd buy the beignets."

"Good. They're wonderful."

Jax was nowhere in sight when they arrived. Shadow Keepers could be tricky. Just because Jax wasn't visible didn't mean he wasn't there. Malik didn't share this information with Cayenne however. They went to an open table in one corner of the bustling room, brushed powdered sugar off the chairs, and sat.

"Who is this Jax person anyway?"

"An old friend. I'm hoping he can help us find out what happened to your parents."

Her lips pressed together and she glanced away. "Why is it so important? I've had almost twenty years to deal --"

"Eighteen years. Your parents were killed the year you should have been returned to Dimension 290-2 for training. A Keeper is given eighteen years to master their skills. Eighteen years of training with a variety of mentors and teachers. You were intentionally deprived of that opportunity. We need to know why."

"It will take you eighteen years to train me?"

He chuckled at her devastated expression. "As bonded mates I am able to transmit information in ways that conventional training doesn't allow."

She laughed. "I would certainly hope not. Either that or teaching would become the most popular profession in any dimension."

"Undoubtedly. Ah, here comes Jax."

Dressed all in black, as was his wont, Jax Severn moved through the crowded restaurant like a wraith. His angular features and jet black eyes should have commanded attention, but somehow he managed to blend into the mass, flowing with the current of humanity.

"He's only noticed when he wants to be, isn't he?"

"That's the nature of a Shadow Keeper and Jax is one of the best."

"Good morning," Jax greeted them as he reached the table. "What, no beignets? No café mocha? I'm going back to bed."

"You were supposed to be hosting this excursion," Malik reminded him.

Jax pulled a twenty out of his wallet and stopped a passing employee. She informed him that he needed to wait in line and he handed her another twenty for her inconvenience. With a beaming smile, she went to fill his order.

"Still playing by the rules, I see." Malik chuckled.

Ignoring the comment, he proffered his hand toward Cayenne. "Jax Severn."



"Cayenne Dover."

"You're a Flame Keeper? Why haven't I heard of you?"

"Exactly what we need you to find out. Until I arrived Cayenne had no idea who, or should I say what, she is."

Cayenne's gaze moved between the two men. "How did Jax know what I am?"

"Your hair," Malik said. "Everyone with Flame *iede* has hair like yours."

The young woman arrived with their food and departed just as quickly. Jax set two baskets of powdered sugar covered confections in the middle of the table and handed them each a paper cup of steaming chicory-flavored coffee. They explained what Cayenne believed about her past and Malik's approval by Matriarch Flame while they enjoyed the morning treat.

"This is the part I don't understand," Cayenne said tersely. "If Matriarch Flame is my grandmother, how could she have not known her daughter was dead? I've lived in that house since before I lost my parents, but it seems unlikely that she knew nothing about the accident. Why weren't you warned? Is there no communication between the dimensions?"

"It's a bit more complicated than dialing a cell phone, but messages are sent back and forth all the time." Jax took a sip of his coffee. "I'll summon a Veil Keeper and ask Matriarch Flame those very questions, but it will take a day or two to hear back. In the meantime, I'll start digging into your parents' accident."

"It was no accident and we all know it." Malik crossed his arms over his chest, staring at Cayenne thoughtfully. Was she in danger even now? Probably not. So, who had benefited from her parents' death? "What is the name of your guardian? Where is she now?"

"Rachel Forsyth. There is no way she was involved in any of this. She moved to a retirement community in Florida about six years ago and she never made a penny off her kindness to me."

Malik shot Jax a silent directive with his gaze.

The Shadow Keeper nodded.

\* \* \*

Cayenne was quiet on the way back to her house. All the talk of death and mystery had left her depressed and frustrated.

"Do you have a job?" Malik asked, fidgeting beside her on the hard wooden seat of the trolley.

"Not in the conventional sense. My parents left me a sizable trust fund, so employment has always been optional. After I graduated from Tulane --"

"What did you study?"

"History and literature." She laughed. "Rachel used to say I could either work in a museum or a library. But I met Julie when I was a senior and she moved in with us. Rachel moved out the following summer and I took in two additional boarders. I've had Tulane students living with me ever since."

"How do you spend your time?"

She shrugged. "However I like. I've kept in touch with some of my professors and they send me struggling students from time to time. I enjoy tutoring. I also offer research services. They give me a subject and I give them organized, verifiable information, even outlines -- for a fee."

"You're a professional student." He grinned.

"This is our stop."

They strolled up the tree-lined lane hand in hand. Cayenne's heart fluttered as she remembered the night before. Already it felt so right, so perfect to have him by her side.

"Your training will make having houseguests awkward," he began. "Where are your tenants now?"

"Julie stays with her boyfriend most weekends anyway. I can ask her to make herself scarce for a while. She'd be thrilled to oblige." Remembering her friend's advice about taking a lover, Cayenne felt a blush blossom across her cheeks.

He paused and brushed his thumb across her flushed skin. "What brought this on?"

"I foolishly confessed to Julie that I had been having erotic dreams. She'll think I picked you up in a bar or something."

"Let her think what she likes, just tell her to stay away."

Malik followed her into the kitchen and watched as she punched Paul's number into the cordless phone. She got his machine, so she tried Julie's cell. "Hi, Julie."

"Hey, what's going on?"

"What are your plans for the rest of the weekend?" Cayenne asked.

"We've got a party tonight, but I figured I'd come home Sunday. Is everything okay? Do you need me to come home now? I can miss the party, Paul wouldn't --"

"No, just the opposite. I was wondering if you could stay with Paul for the rest of the week, maybe longer."

"Okay, I'll bite. Why do you need the house to yourself?"

Cayenne intentionally cleared her throat. "I don't have the house to myself."

"Oh -- my -- God! You actually did it? You found yourself some fine young stud?"

Malik snatched the phone from her and she covered her face with her hands, realizing he could hear Julie's excited voice coming out of the receiver.

"This fine young stud isn't partial to bedrooms, so when you're ready to pick up your clothes, make sure you call before you stop by."

He hung up and Cayenne dissolved into laughter.

## Chapter Five

"Damn, woman. You burned me again."

He shook his hand and then blew on his scorched finger. Cayenne did her best not to laugh. They'd been at it for hours without a break. He was a ruthless taskmaster and all she really wanted was to tumble him to the living room floor and tear off his clothes.

"Maybe if I had something more interesting to put in my mouth, I'd have reason to be more careful."

Laughing, he shot her a sidelong glance. "You just gave me third degree burns on my finger and you want me to put something more 'interesting' in your mouth?"

"It was just an idea." She plopped down on the couch with an exaggerated sigh. "I'm tired of training. This is frustrating. It's boring!"

"Boring? Learning to control your mystic power is boring?"

"Okay, it's hard as hell and I want to do something else for a while. Is that too much to ask? Can we watch a movie? Or take a bath. Or just --"

In the blink of an eye his clothing vanished. Malik stood before her unabashedly naked, legs slightly spread, cock jutting toward her, proudly erect.

"How did you -- do that?" Her gaze fixed eagerly on his thick cock.

"This?" He stroked his fist up and down along its length. "Or banish my clothes?"

Dragging her gaze to his face, she smiled. "The little clothing trick. Even humans can manage a hard-on."

"Like this one?"

He had a point.

"I've not worn anything but Frost *iede* on my body for almost ten years now. I

can manipulate it to appear as anything I want and command it to disintegrate just as easily.”

“You’re serious? You weren’t really wearing clothes just a minute ago?”

He grinned. “You’ll be able to do the same in time. But only if you apply what I’m trying to teach you.”

“You better reconstruct the illusion if we’re going to practice some more. That’s a little distracting.”

Kneeling in front of the couch, he framed her face with his hands. “You criticized my curriculum. I’m striving to make my lessons more enjoyable.”

He pressed his mouth over hers, tilting his face to allow the firmest seal. She waited for the bold thrust of his tongue, but he circled their joined lips in silent invitation. Understanding, she ventured into his mouth with her tongue, startled by the cold enveloping her. She adjusted the temperature with her tongue, increasing the heat gradually until she was comfortable, but not hot.

“Good,” he whispered, his moist lips moving against hers. “Very good. Now let’s do it the other way around. I’ll come to you.”

His ice-cold tongue slid into her mouth and she squirmed, but he held her firmly. Concentrating, focusing, she heated the interior of her mouth. They kissed, practicing her control again and again until she was panting and lightheaded.

Without a word he stood, her face still framed between his hands. She looked up at him, half-afraid, yet thrilled that he would let her try. He leaned in. She licked her lips. Opening wide, she caught the head of his cock in her mouth, swirling her tongue around the tip.

Cold and hard, his cock was like nothing she’d ever felt before. His skin was velvety soft, yet underneath was unyielding, ice-cold marble. She sucked him deeper, watching his eyes drift shut and his muscles flex.

She cupped his heavy balls in one hand and reached between his powerful thighs with the other. His ass cheeks remained relaxed as she probed, silently encouraging her. She’d never touched a man here, but instinctively she knew Malik

would enjoy it -- revel in it.

His cock throbbed madly. She slid her mouth up and down, taking him as deeply as she could, while she searched between his cheeks for the tightly puckered hole he enjoyed tormenting.

"Oh, yes," he muttered in a harsh, hoarse voice.

Knowing he wanted her to do this thrilled her even more. She stroked his balls, adoring his cock with her warm, wet mouth. She circled his hole with her fingertip and heat discharged. Oh, God, she'd shot him with Flame *iede*.

He jerked and groaned, his cock bucking. She sucked him deep into her mouth and moved her hand to his lean hip. Rocking back and forth, he slid in and out of her mouth. She continued to massage his balls.

His hips pumped. He filled her throat with each forward lunge. She swirled her tongue around his tip as he pulled back, sucking firmly all the while. His balls tightened and drew up. He thrust deep.

With a strangled groan, he spilled his seed down her throat.

Cayenne shivered violently. His icy essence slid deeper into her body, spreading cold, making her tingle as it went.

He pulled out and bent to kiss her deeply, undeterred by the taste he'd left in her mouth. She moved her hands to his back, hugging him.

"*rijnna mi*," he whispered against her lips.

She pushed him back, looking deeply into his shining eyes. "What does that mean? I know it's an endearment. But can it be translated into English?"

"Not exactly. 'Beloved one' is as close as English gets, but that doesn't capture the spirit of *rijnna mi*. It means I value your happiness more highly than my own. It means I'll lay down my life before I see you harmed. It means you will never want for anything it is within my power to provide."

Tears gathered on her lashes. Cayenne was afraid to blink. Even if he hadn't meant a word of it, that was the most beautiful thing she'd ever heard.

He kissed her again, gently as if he could sense her vulnerability. Malik made her

feel everything so strongly she was afraid of being consumed by their passion.

Sweeping her into his arms, he carried her up the stairs and into her bedroom. He set her down beside the bed and pulled her tank top off over her head. The built-in bra came off with it leaving her naked to the waist.

"I'll be right back." She didn't give him time to ask what she needed as she rushed from the room. Her robe hung on the back of the bathroom door. She pulled the belt free of the loops and started back toward the bedroom. Being tied up and utterly at his mercy had been the most exciting experience of her life. She wanted him to dominate her again. He'd felt it necessary the night before. What if he found her desire distasteful now?

She shoved the silk belt into the pocket of her shorts and returned to the bedroom.

"Where'd you go?"

"I was... When you..."

"What's in your pocket?"

Glancing down, she saw the conspicuous bulge and realized she hadn't concealed anything. She didn't say a word. She pulled the blood red belt from her pocket and held it out to him, praying he'd understand.

"Take off your shorts."

She didn't hesitate. Kicking them aside, she stood before him naked, empty, waiting.

"What is this?" He pulled her vibrator out from behind his back.

Cayenne's hand flew to her mouth. He was the only man who'd ever been in her bedroom, so she'd never thought to hide the silly thing. It was tucked away in one corner of her headboard, partially covered by a pillow -- usually.

Her pussy rippled painfully at the familiar sight and the heat infusing her body could be arousal or humiliation, she wasn't sure. "A vibrator." Clearly he didn't recognize the term. "A sex toy."

"You pleasure yourself with this?"

"Yes. Put it back where you found it."

"No." He grinned. "Activate it."

"I don't need it anymore. I have a real lover now."

"Women who have real lovers don't use sex toys? Such is not the case in my dimension. They are fashioned to more closely resemble the appearance of a penis, but I assure you, we have these sorts of gadgets in Dimension 290-2."

"Just twist the bottom." She closed her eyes, listening as he experimented with the various speeds.

"Get on the bed."

"Put the vibrator away."

He scooped her up and deposited her in the middle of the bed. In her humiliation over his discovery, she'd completely forgotten about the belt. He pulled her arms over her head and tied her wrists together. This was what she'd wanted. Wasn't it? Uncertainty prickled through her abdomen. He secured her bound wrists to the bottom rail of her headboard and then joined her on the bed.

The menacing hum of the vibrator stopped, but he set it within easy reach. His hands glided over her body starting at her upraised arms and meandering downward. He tickled her underarms, stroked her neck, her shoulders.

She arched up to meet him as his hands reached her breasts. His cold fingers circled her nipples, drawing them into tight aching buds. He bent and blew over and into them. The mystic stream flowed straight to her clit, flicking it mercilessly.

"That's so unfair," she cried. "No Frost *iede*."

He raised his head and smiled into her eyes. "No." Scooting down along her body, he pushed her legs wide. "I'm a Frost Keeper and I will make love to my mate in any way that pleases her."

With that established, he parted her tender folds and lashed her clit directly with his *iede*-laced tongue. Spikes of pleasure/pain shot through Cayenne. She squeezed her inner muscles tightly, but her cunt was empty, hollow.

He pulled his mouth away and she cried out mournfully. Just a second or two



longer and she'd have come!

"Please, Malik. Now."

She heard him turn on the vibrator and groaned.

"Use it on my clit. Make me come. I can't take this."

Arching over her, he kissed her mouth. "You'll take whatever I give you."

Then he pushed the vibrator slowly -- too slowly -- into her throbbing cunt.

Cayenne went wild, twisting and writhing.

He grabbed the backs of her knees and pushed her legs up and back, pinning her to the bed with her own body. She tried to expel the offending vibrator, but he had lodged it too deeply. He bent over her, using his chin to push it even deeper before he went to work on her clit.

Lapping and pressing, circling and flicking, he gave her one orgasm after another. She moaned, panted, and screamed.

He turned the vibrator off, but continued to lick her clit, building another cycle of arousal. Staggered by the sensations ricocheting through her body, Cayenne cried out softly when he drew away from her overflowing pussy.

"Do you trust me?" he asked, tracing her mouth with his index finger.

"With my life."

He smiled. "With your body?"

"Yes, *rijnna mi*," she responded. "I give you everything."

He kissed her slowly, deeply. She trembled. The exotic flavor on his tongue was her own passion. She responded wildly, delving boldly. An increase in the pressure around her wrists told her he was adjusting the bindings. He didn't untie her hands, just freed her from the headboard.

Without prompting, she turned over and folded her legs under her, leaning forward on her forearms. Her inner thighs were slick with cream and her feminine folds felt swollen and sensitive. The vibrator still impaled her cunt.

"Are you sure?" he whispered.

"Yes."

He pulled her cheeks apart and she arched her back for him. His *iede*-coated tongue circled her, rubbed her, prepared her. The cold invasion of his finger came first, breached her gently. Then two fingers stretched her, intensified the tingling cold.

She trembled.

Icy, slick, the head of his cock pushed hard against her anus.

Pressure.

"Relax. Accept me."

She concentrated on her breathing, focused on the sweet, prickly chill spiraling through her. Her body relaxed. His cock slid in and Frost *iede* erupted spontaneously. She giggled. "That feels almost the same as when you come."

"Well, hold still or you'll feel the real thing. You are incredibly tight. Am I hurting you?"

"Not really."

He managed to maneuver his hand between her legs and found her clit. "Oh, Gods, you are so wet!"

Gently stroking her clit with each miniature thrust, he began to move in her ass. He worked some of her cream around his cock, allowing him to slide more easily.

The sting eased. Her body throbbed with a distinct rhythm, intensified by the incredible pressure. She braced her legs. His cock moved smoothly in and out, while his fingers flicked across her swollen clit.

Tension twisted.

Friction.

Hot and cold, pleasure and pain combined in a tempest of sensation.

Her cunt gripped the vibrator. Her ass massaged his cock. She trembled and moaned. The pleasure built.

He pushed deep with his cock and pulled the vibrator nearly out. Cayenne gasped. A violent shudder shook her. Pushing in with the vibrator, he pulled out with his cock. He moved in her, against her, completing her. She gave without reservation, surrendered without hesitation, and her orgasm finally unfurled.

His hands clutched her hips as he buried himself to the hilt in her throbbing ass. She bit back a scream, but Malik's cry echoed off the walls. He shuddered, pumping his seed deep into her body.

He collapsed onto his side, pulling her with him. They lay there for a long time, too exhausted to move, then he carefully separated their bodies and tossed the vibrator aside. She curled up against him, her head resting on his shoulder.

Cayenne was nearly asleep when a chuckle rumbled through his chest. "What's so funny?"

"Would you like me to untie you?"

Glancing down at her bound wrists with a sleepy smile, she shook her head and snuggled into the comfort of his embrace.

## Epilogue

Unable to conceal her silly grin, Cayenne ran down the stairs to answer the front door. She couldn't wait to tell Julie about Malik... well, to tell Julie how happy she had been since Malik burst into her life six days before. She had no intention of sharing all of the intimate details of her relationship, but --

Jax Severn stood on her front porch looking even more dangerous than he'd looked the morning they'd met in Café Du Monde. His black hair just brushed his shoulders and narrow, darkly tinted sunglasses hid his expression.

She managed a smile and unlatched the screen door. "Jax. Malik has discovered the po-boy. There's a sandwich shop down the street he is single-handedly keeping in business." Pushing the door open, she cautiously admitted the Shadow Keeper. "He should be back in a few minutes."

He brushed past her and into the front room of the house. "The information I have is actually for you. Do you want to wait for him or --"

"I'm in the kitchen. No need to wait." Malik's voice startled them both.

Turning toward the back of the house, Cayenne motioned for Jax to follow.

"When did you get back?"

"While you were in the shower, apparently."

Malik sat at the kitchen table happily munching on one of the mammoth sandwiches. "So, what did Matriarch Flame have to say?"

"She sent me a scathing message on Order of Flame letterhead that basically told me to butt the hell out. But she also sent this." He proffered a solid red crystal toward Cayenne.

She looked at the object for a moment before lifting it from his palm. Warmth emanated from the crystal. Flame *iede*. Malik had just begun to show her all of the ways

in which *iede* could be manipulated, manifested, and controlled.

"Did you open it?" Malik asked casually.

"And have my hands incinerated? Not a chance. She's the Flame Keeper. This was obviously meant for her."

Wiping his mouth on a paper napkin, Malik pushed the po-boy aside and came around the table. "I'll help you control it if I can, but hopefully she'll have made it easy for you. *Iede* messages can be encrypted or laced with mystic traps, but Matriarch Flame knows your abilities."

"Or lack thereof," she grumbled.

He showed her how to cup her hands, where to place the crystal. "Now breathe on it." He smiled. "That's like saying hello."

She glanced at Jax. He remained at a discreet distance, his sunglasses gone, revealing his jet black eyes. Unnerved by his assessing stare, she returned her attention to the Flame crystal.

"She's ignored me for eighteen years. Do I really care what she has to say?"

Energizing her breath, she leaned down and activated the crystal.

Heat radiated, sinking into her flesh, stimulating her power. A resonance as familiar as her own pulse throbbed within her being. The Rhythm of Flame.

The crystal glowed, pink, rose, crimson -- fire!

Cayenne absorbed the heat, accepted the flame, acknowledged her nature. "Speak, Grandmother. I am ready to listen."

The image of Matriarch Flame solidified within the crystal, tiny, yet intricately detailed. A perfect likeness. "I regret this cannot be interactive, Cayenne. But anything I do risks your safety. He is ruthless. I was so sure taking your mother from me would satisfy his thirst for blood. Such is not the case. You have not been abandoned these eighteen years. Your guardian was hand-chosen by me. Many of the people to cross your path have been Keepers. You have been observed, guarded, protected every step of the way."

Cayenne looked at Malik. The warmth in his eyes gave her courage. She fed

more *iede* into the crystal and the message continued.

"Your training will be unconventional, but the Frost Keeper I sent you is strong. He is your equal and opposite." The old woman smiled. "I suspect he will not let you forget. Concentrate entirely on your training. I pray it will not come to war, but if he continues to push me, I will be forced to retaliate."

Thinking the message was finished, Cayenne asked, "Who is 'he'? Who did she keep referring to?"

"Your bonded mate will keep you safe, but Lorrان is all alone. We must be ready when she..."

The last sentence faded away as the crystal sputtered out. Cayenne tried to reactivate it. Nothing happened. She tried again and it shattered, disintegrating into fine pink powder.

"Fabulous! Who the blazes is Lorrان?" She shot an expectant look at Jax, but he just shrugged. "Summon one of those Veil people. I want to talk to her in person."

Malik cupped her hands between his, stroking her knuckles with his thumb. "She has kept you out of this for a reason. You're not going anywhere until we know more about the conflict and you are better equipped to deal with what may come. Did you not hear the command of your Matriarch? Concentrate entirely on your training."

"But she knows who killed my parents!"

"She must lack proof or they would have been brought before the Steering Committee long ago. She knows what she's doing. She sent me to you, didn't she?"

Cayenne smiled. Her heartbeat thudded as she worked to calm her manic thoughts. "But who is Lorrان? Grandmother obviously wanted me to know about her, so how do I find out if you won't let me leave the house?"

He chuckled. "I never said you couldn't leave the house. I said you couldn't leave my side. I'm your mentor, and you are on a condensed, intensified training schedule."

Jax laughed. "Is that what they're calling it these days?"

"It's my guess that Matriarch Flame was counting on your being here to hear her

message, Jax. The letter was her official response to your inquiries, but she's just given you some crucial pieces to the puzzle."

"I'm on it, Frost." His dark gaze moved over Cayenne's face before he turned and left the room.

Malik pulled her into his arms and kissed her tenderly. "This isn't over, sweetheart. It's just beginning. When you're stronger, I'll summon a Veil Keeper and we'll find out exactly what this is all about. But in the meantime you're going to have to trust me."

"I trust you with my life." She wrapped her arms around his neck, molding herself against him.

"And your body?"

Heat erupted in all the right places.

"Always," she whispered against his mouth.

## **Mystic Keepers 2: Crystal**

A difficult and dangerous assignment -- in the Bahamas. Jax is just the man to make such a sacrifice.

Malik believes Cayenne's parents were murdered. Jax must use his skills as a Shadow Keeper to investigate the deaths of the wayward lovers. Jax finds his investigation sabotaged at every turn by an alluring Light Keeper named Crystal. He knows she's hiding something, but every time he sees her all he can think about is her flawless skin and pastel blue eyes. Can he keep his libido under control long enough to finish his investigation, or will his desire for her compromise the most important case of his life?



## **Aubrey Ross**

Multi-award-winning author Aubrey Ross writes under several pen names, according to genre. Though her stories can take unconventional turns, they're filled with passion, intrigue, and emotional realism. Whether her stories are set in Hell, Valhalla, or on an alien planet, Aubrey's sure to entertain.