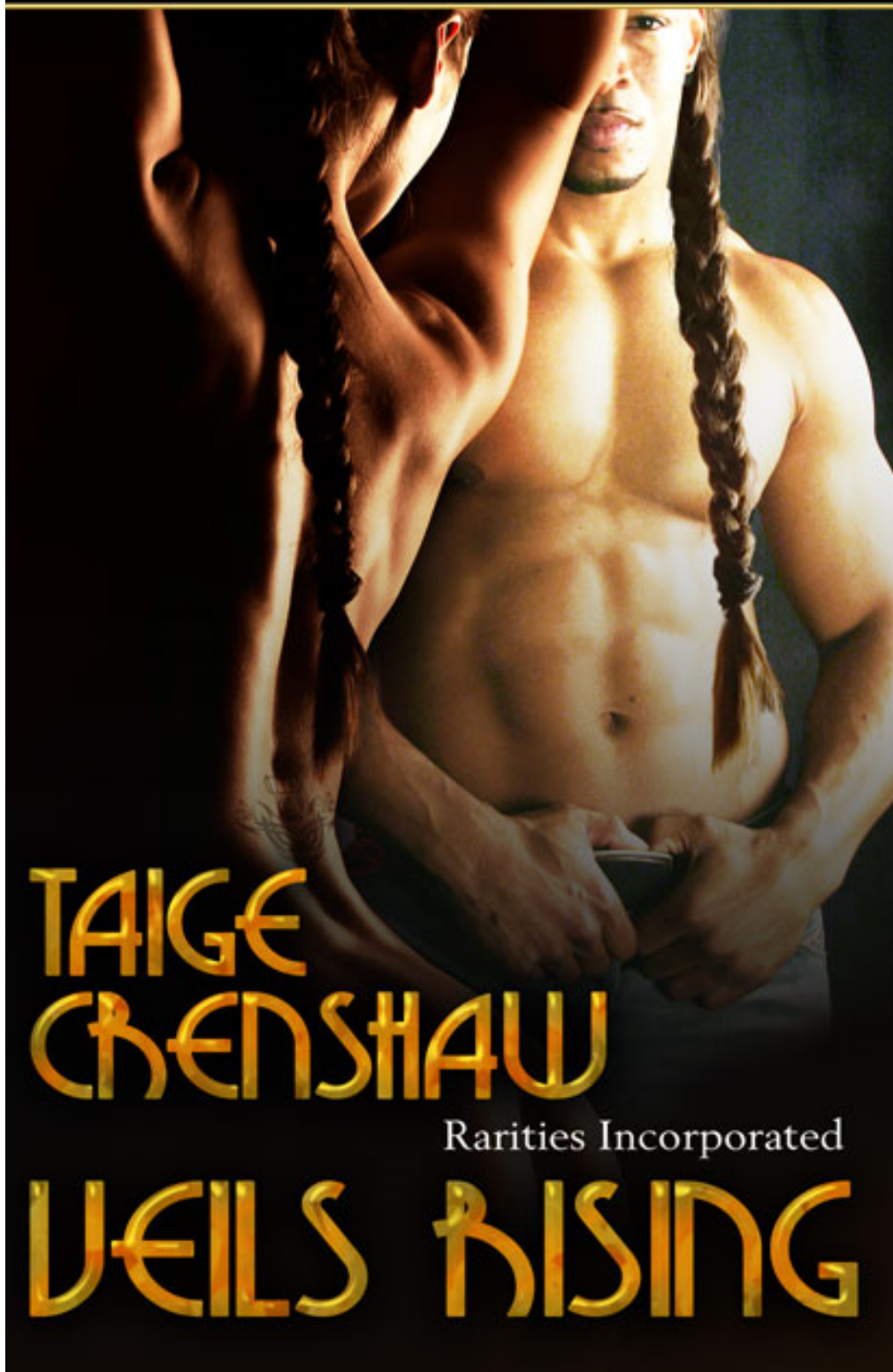


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



TAIGE
CRENSHAW

Rarities Incorporated

VEILS RISING

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Veils Rising

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VEILS RISING

Taige Crenshaw

Dedication

To my mother who has always been my number one fan. Although you are no longer with me I know you are smiling down at me every time I get published.

To Marilyn, my sister and second mother, who has always believed I would be a success.

To my lunch buddies, who listen to me ramble on about my writing ideas.

Trademarks Acknowledgement

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Palm Pilot: Palm, Inc. Corporation

Chapter One

"All I want for Christmas is a sexy man," a chorus of female voices sang loudly.

"Hey, what about a sexy woman," a gruff male voice interjected.

"All I want for Christmas is a sexy naked man under my Christmas tree," a chorus of female voices sang even louder.

A set of male voices interjected, "All I want for Christmas is a woman with a bodacious body under my Christmas tree."

"All I want for Christmas is a sexy, well-hung naked man with a..."

Standing at the window in her office, Dilana Storm blocked out the combating songs before it could get too raunchy. She wished she could cut off the memories invoked by the revelry of the annual Rarities Inc. holiday party happening in the outer offices. Last year she had been half of a couple but this year it was just her. The pain of betrayal was still fresh even though it had been almost a year.

A year since her well planned, normal relationship had ended. Dilana dropped her head against the cool glass as she admitted to herself that "ended" was too tame a word for how things had finished between her and Brett. Tall, dark and scrumptious Brett, whom she thought she would be married to by now. He had proposed at Christmas and she had asked for time to think about it. It had been a lie. She didn't need time to think, she needed time to figure out how she could tell him about what she was. With her decision made, she had decided to tell him on Valentine's Day. To her surprise, he said he was fine and, although all her instincts and senses told her he was lying, she ignored them and accepted his proposal.

"Stupid, stupid. You're so fucking stupid." Dilana's voice echoed in the empty office.

They had decided to make it special and wait until Christmas to be wed. By November she was knee-deep in final preparation for their wedding but she knew something was wrong. Dilana's fist clenched and she raised it and thumped it against the glass, picturing it was Brett's head. For so long she tried to be normal and have a normal relationship that she turned a blind eye to all Brett's faults. At any time she could have used her power to ferret out the truth but, not wanting to betray his trust, she hadn't. Too bad he didn't have the same beliefs as her about trust.

"I hate Christmas," Dilana growled.

She didn't want to think about the disaster her non-wedding day turned out to be. She was powerless to stop it. She could see herself walking down the aisle to Brett with the smell of holly and Christmas all around. Suddenly a staggering rush of images flooded her mind of Brett having sex with so many different women in so many different ways that she felt she was in the midst of an orgy. The same sick feeling she had then gripped her now. She had continued down the aisle to Brett as memories flooded him—his imaginings about doing her bridal party and any woman he met on their honeymoon.

Looking back, she now knew why the prick had asked if she would read his thoughts. She had told him she wouldn't read them. He hadn't asked if she could. He must have thought he was safe with his own thoughts. When she reached him, she kept going, leading with her right fist. She decked him, not pulling her punch. He flew across the room, then through the wall. Knowing she wasn't strong enough to send him through the wall, she had glanced at her bridesmaids, at the closed expressions on the faces of her partners in Rarities Inc. Zarya Burke, Jordis Malik and Daphna Scorpio. She nodded her thanks, knowing that they had helped Brett through the wall. Her sister, Kali Storm, had looked livid and started toward the wall after Brett. She had stopped her and they had walked out of the church along with all her family and friends.

Clenching her fist, Dilana thumped the glass again. "I hate Christmas. When will it be over?"

“In ten days, on December 26 at midnight.”

Dilana stiffened at the sound of the unfamiliar male voice that rolled over her like a silken caress. Turning away from the window, Dilana locked eyes with warm whiskey amber eyes with flecks of green. Her first impression was of restrained power. The stranger had to be at least six inches taller than her own height of five-eleven, making him six-five. His face was a sensual array of panels and sharp angles. He surpassed being handsome, being well into the devastating category. His full lips quirked with a hint of laughter while his dark brown hair was slicked away from his face. The end of a braid rested over his shoulder, curling against his chest.

With a glance down, she took in his light brown shirt and dark brown slacks that complemented his light sienna skin while fitting his body impeccably. Despite his clothing she could see he was rippling with muscles.

“However, the holiday season doesn’t officially end until January 2 at midnight.” His voice reminded her of Cajun gumbo—hot, thick and spicy.

The hint of mischief on his face was at odds with the intensity she felt coming off him in waves. A flash of desire seemed to go over his face but was quickly suppressed. When he moved forward closer to the desk with sensuous grace, she felt the raw animal magnetism surrounding him race up her arm along her skin. Stifling her gasp, Dilana continued to watch him. He came around the desk and lifted his hand. Without any conscious thought, her hand flashed up to stop him from touching her. She felt the strength of the muscle in his arm before a vision crashed over her.

The man was talking in the flowing patois of Cajun French. Not the one she had been taught in school. The dialect was different, more earthy. She was able to interpret a few words. Heritage, lost and danger were the predominant ones. She couldn’t see whom he was speaking to.

Time rushed forward.

The man smiled with an intense look of a hunter. The look of lust on his face made her quiver in desire and a little fear. He circled a woman. She saw the woman’s face was

turned away, her breathing was harsh and shuddering. Glancing down, she saw the woman wore a delicate necklace she couldn't make it out completely. It seemed to be just out of sight. Looking lower, she saw the woman was bare except for jewelry. The brilliance of the gold, white gold and precious stones shone against the woman's rich, dark caramel skin.

A diamond and ruby lay side by side as they covered each nipple clamp while one chain of white gold offset with flecks of diamonds and another gold chain offset with flecks of rubies fell down on one side. A glance showed her the other side was the same. The chains led down to attach to various chains intersecting around the woman's waist. The chains alternated between one row of chains made of white gold with miniature diamonds hanging from them and a row of gold chains with miniature rubies hanging down. The chains stopped just above her hips with a diamond and ruby fused together covering her mound. The woman moaned, drawing her attention.

Glancing up, she locked eyes with dark gray. She gulped, realizing she was looking at herself. A vibrating feeling hit her clit and as she looked on she and her future image shuddered and moaned simultaneously. An orgasm started to build from deep within, ripping outward. The woman bowed as she bowed.

Wrenching herself out of the vision, Dilana jerked her hand off his arm. She watched as the man stepped back. She tried to control her breathing as the feel of the golden chains against her skin slowly faded.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to crowd you," the man said stiffly. "I'll just leave this with you." He put down the folder he held and the card. He turned and left before she could get her wits about her to say a word.

Dilana took a deep breath cursing herself and reached for the folder. Pulling out her chair, she took a seat as she opened the folder. Her breath stalled. "Shit."

Dropping the folder as if burnt, she stared as the pictures of the jewelry she had seen in her vision spilled out. She swore viciously, then picked up the phone and

punched a number as she looked at the photo. She already knew she would be taking the case.

When the phone was answered, she spoke tersely. "I need everything you have on the Veils of the Burning Touch." She hung up before they could reply.

Taking up one of the photos she looked at the Veils of the Burning Touch. Dilana flipped it over to read the notes on the back. She couldn't believe she didn't recognize it in her vision. Although it was believed to be a myth, it was one of the most sought-after artifacts. It was thought to date back to before King Arthur's time. It was considered the only artifact left which predated Atlantis.

Turning back to face the window, she tapped the photo against her finger. Smiling grimly, Dilana figured this would be a good excuse to get the hell out of New York. She shuddered. Too bad it wasn't someplace warm. Then again, she might go knock on Santa's door and tell him to get Christmas over with. Writing a brief note for her assistant, Dilana gathered up the pictures and info, then stood up, picked up her long caramel-colored leather coat, shrugged into it, grabbed her bag and headed out the door. A feeling of anticipation filled her. She was on the hunt for lost treasure.

* * * * *

Slamming into his office, Magni Taggart glanced down at his bulging pants. He was hard enough to cut bricks.

"What's the matter with you? You usually have better self-control than this." He sighed.

He stalked across the room to his desk, went behind it, pulled out the chair and sat. He should have listened to his family about making an appointment with Rarities Inc. instead of just going over.

Since when do you follow what others have to say? Smiling grimly, he knew it wouldn't have mattered what anyone, said he always trusted his instincts. They had saved his butt more than once. His gut had told him to go over to Rarities Inc. instead of waiting.

Instinct had led him to go through the throng of people celebrating the upcoming Christmas season into the office way in the back. When he had stepped into the room, he was captured by the picture she made standing at the window with her head pressed against the glass.

Her hair had hung down her back in kinky curls. Her nicely rounded shoulders filled out her burgundy shirt and her matching slacks curved around her rounded ass. She looked curvy and tempting. He hadn't even seen her face and had already been attracted. When she had griped about Christmas, he couldn't resist answering her. She had stiffened but turned and tilted her face in a give-you-hell way he found very appealing. At the sight of her slightly tilted exotic gray eyes in a roundly curved face that was made to make a man think of sex, instinct had flown out of the window and need had grabbed him.

Giving in to his more basic need and going around the desk with the intention of touching her was his first mistake. For a man who prided himself on not making mistakes, that was unforgivable. Actually following through and reaching up to touch her was his second mistake. For one who believed being in control, he had committed a cardinal sin.

That's what she is. Sin in a suit, Magni thought as he rubbed his shirt in the place on his arm she had touched. He could still feel her fingers on his skin, which he shouldn't have since there had been cloth between them. It had only been a few minutes but had felt like a lifetime. On some primal level, he knew her. A part of him was crying out that she was already his. That thought had shaken him so much he had retreated. It infuriated him. He didn't break a sweat when conducting multibillion-dollar business deals but he ran when confronted with a woman who, by all his instincts, he recognized as his.

He wasn't one to sit idly waiting for action. Knowing what he had to do, Magni stood and headed for the door.

Before Magni could reach the door it opened and his brothers, followed by his sister, blocked his way. Without breaking stride, he motioned for them to follow him. They didn't even question him, just matched his stride.

"I can see the meeting went well," Rossi Taggart stated dryly, as was his way.

"I don't know why he went to Rarities Inc. in the first place. They only find, protect, restore or create. We already know the locations to look for the Veils of the Burning Touch and it doesn't need protecting. It is in prime condition and we don't need a new one made." Kyrian Taggart paused then continued. "Hell, I can go and get it. Damn Auntie King for hiding them, she is nothing but a pain in the —"

"Watch it," Sinai McKingley Taggart interrupted in a deceptively soft tone.

Magni looked over at her grave, arrestingly gorgeous face. Silently, he and his brother exchanged looks.

Sinai glared at them one by one. "What?" Her tone was belligerent. "You need to learn respect for the dead. She was our aunt and the last link we had to Mom. And you know the veils are only Magni's to retrieve. We will all have our own part of the legacy to retrieve." She paused and then said in a soft voice, "Since Auntie King is no longer here to help us track it down, we will have to get together with her children after they have found their parts to retrieve her part together."

They didn't say anything, knowing it wasn't necessary.

Sinai continued. "At least she hid the Veils of the Burning Touch before she passed."

Reaching the elevator, Magni pushed the button. The doors opened and they all stepped in.

Kyrian Taggart waited until the doors closed before saying softly, "What if she's not dead?"

Sinai looked at him, a look of stark grief on her face. "She is or I would be able to feel her."

Magni reached out to touch Sinai's shoulder. She shrugged away, turning her back on them. Understanding she needed a minute to herself, Magni left her alone.

"So what happened?" Rossi Taggart asked impatiently.

Magni looked at him and didn't reply. Rossi's amber-colored eyes narrowed. A phone rang, interrupting them. Magni took out his cell phone.

"Taggart."

"Afternoon. May I speak with Magni Taggart, please?" a husky female voice asked.

His body clenched at the sound. It was her. "You're speaking with him."

"Mr. Taggart, you left some information with my sister Dilana earlier." The voice continued to speak as he smiled at finally knowing her name. It suited her.

"Dilana decided to take on your case, however, we need the paperwork signed and the retainer."

His hand clenched on the phone. "I'm on my way back down now."

"Good, I will have my assistant waiting for you when you arrive. I w—"

Cutting her off, Magni asked. "Who are you? I deal with Dilana or no one else."

A brief silence passed, then the voice replied in a cold tone. "I'm Kali Storm and if you want to deal with Dilana, too bad. She has already left to get started on your case."

Kali's voice got even colder. "Which I can see is a mistake which I will rectify in a few moments. We did not come to you, Mr. Taggart. You came to us. We do not need your business. R—"

He cut her off again. "The contract will be signed and the retainer in your hand within the hour." Snapping the phone shut, he put it back into his pocket. Reaching over, he pressed a few buttons on the panel and rerouted the elevator to the roof.

His siblings watched him silently. He said nothing as the floors flew by. The door opened and as he strode off, Magni fired off directions.

"Rossi, take a check and go over to Rarities Inc. and sign the contracts. Ask for Kali Storm. She was pissed, so smooth her ruffled feathers." Magni stopped and looked at

the incredulous looks on Kyrian's and Sinai's faces, then the sardonic smile on Rossi's face. "Okay, try to be nice." Rossi made a rude noise, which he ignored.

"Kyrian, check the files and send everything we have on the VBT—Veils of the Burning Touch—to my email. Have it encrypted. Sinai, check with Cousin Tariq and Cousin Lenox." He heard her gasp.

"Yeah, yeah, I know. Suck it up. You're the only one they are currently talking to. Check with them and see if their mother told them or any of their other brothers anything." Striding forward, Magni opened the door and got into the helicopter. Magni hooked in, put on his helmet and went through his flight check. Outside the helicopter his siblings each had their specially made Palm Pilots in their hands along with the earpiece. Their Palm Pilots could tap into any electronics as well as do many other functions.

He heard them ask, "Where are you going?"

With a grin he knew was devilish, he lifted off as he replied, "Hunting."

* * * * *

Dilana moaned, then arched as his tongue swept down her body. He knew what to do to make her crazy. His chuckle vibrated against her aching nipple. He traced the familiar curve with a sensuous stroke he knew that drove her out of her mind. He continued his path down her body, laying lush licks and wet kisses down her between her breasts, her stomach and then right above her clit. He stopped as he usually did. Opening her eyes, she watched as he looked up at her with intense amber eyes. His soft Cajun whisper tickled her clit as he whispered, "Dilana."

Keeping his eyes locked on her, he gave one long lick along one side of her weeping slit, not touching the flushed center that cried out to be eaten. "Dilana," he whispered again as he licked along the other side, still leaving her clit untouched. Shuddering then shifting to bring him where she wanted him, she felt his hands grip her hips firmly, holding her still.

"Magni," Dilana pleaded in a husky voice she didn't even realize at first was her own.

Magni looked at her and whispered, "Mine." He sank into her.

The scent of sex surrounded Dilana as she jerked awake, still feeling his touch. Her hands shook as she pushed back her hair from her face. Closing her eyes briefly, she shook her head. The dreams were getting more graphic. The first had happened six days ago when she was on her way to Alaska. Thankfully, she had decided to take the Rarities private jet and no one had seen her awaken from a roaring orgasm. Each time she slept, it had gotten more intense.

Dilana rose from the bed, absently noting the bunched-up covers. She made her way through the dark room, skirting around the various pieces of furniture until she arrived at the open doorway leading to the balcony. Stepping outside, Dilana went to the waist-high brick-inlaid wall topped off by stone carvings along the railing. She leaned against it and stared out at the beautiful starry Caribbean night. Taking a deep breath, she inhaled the lush smell that only this island had. It wasn't until she stepped off the plane two days ago in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, that she realized that her family and friends were right. There was no place like St. Thomas. She had been to other islands but never this one. Now that she was here, she didn't want to leave.

By the moonlight, Dilana clearly saw the rolling expanse of tropical vegetation below. Rolling hills of lush flowers and swaying coconut trees separated the private beach from the rock-covered pathways curving down to the sand which in turn led down to the beach behind the house. Tilting her head, Dilana listened intently to the soft lapping of the waves against the shore. It was soothing. A cool breeze blew against her heated skin, trailing her naked body, calming her.

Dilana could feel fatigue weigh on her body. In the four days before landing in St. Thomas she had been in Alaska, Hong Kong, New Zealand and a few places in Europe. The thought of her extensive travel tired her even more. She looked down at the gold bracelet encircling her wrist. It was engraved with various symbols and had a ruby

stone in the middle of it. Dilana admitted silently she was thankful that her sister Kali and Zarya Burke, her partner in Rarities Inc., had insisted on sending it.

Frowning, Dilana remembered it was more like they had threatened—that if she didn't take it to travel quickly between the places she needed to go, they would come and get her. They had also given her the ultimatum that she would have to be home in time for Christmas or else. She didn't plan to listen to them and, since Christmas was in four days and she still wasn't any closer to finding the Veils of the Burning Touch, they would just have to have Christmas without her. Dilana knew she should have left for the next place by now but a feeling was telling her the veils were here.

She had searched in the back hills of Savan and the winding steep areas of Crown Mountain. She still had a lot of areas to search.

Although she had initially stayed at Frenchman's Reef Resort, she had moved today to the private home Rarities Inc. owned just off the resort for more privacy. She had checked the surrounding area but hadn't gotten any feeling from it. In the two days Dilana had been on the island, she had rediscovered the love of Christmas. She now understood what one of her other partners, Jordis Malik, who was a native of St. Thomas, meant when she had said numerous times, "There was nothing like a St. Thomian Christmas."

The scents of Christmas were different from "Stateside" as the islanders liked to call it. The smell of johnnycakes, carrot cakes, tart and sweet bread filled the air. People were friendly and happy. The friendly rivalry that took place in Emancipation Garden in the Battle of the Christmas Carols was talked about all over town. Although from what she had learned, the non-carolers who were headed by a radio personality also caroled for fun and frolic despite not being able to carry a tune. The first time she had heard the steel pan she was enchanted. Then when she heard it play a Christmas carol, she realized there was no sound like a steel pan playing a Christmas carol. Even the Caribbean carol she had heard was different. Dilana started to hum it as she thought of her plans for the next day. "Mama, bake a johnny cake, Christmas coming. M—"

The phone rang, disturbing her singing. Dilana decided to ignore it and continued to hum. It continued to ring.

"Ow," Dilana said as she looked down at her burning hand and the cell phone now in it. Growling, she debated about throwing it over the balcony.

"Don't you dare," a voice growled from the phone.

Putting it to her ear, Dilana growled right back. "Screw you, Jordis. That hurt."

Jordis Malik replied, her slightly St. Thomaian-accented voice cool. "Next time pick up the phone."

"Why can't you all leave me the hell alone?"

"Because for some asinine reason we love your rude behind," Daphna Scorpio answered in her distinctly gravelly voice.

"Oh Christ, it's both of you. What do you want?" Dilana asked in a combative tone.

"You *really* don't want us to come down there," Zarya Burke replied, the threat clear in her smoky voice.

"She has four days and then we go and get her," Dilana's sister Kali interjected.

"Damn it, why did they sic the four of you on me? Forget it, I don't want to know. What do you all want?" Dilana asked.

Kali replied, "I know Mom taught you manners. A polite 'Hey, what's up' wouldn't kill you."

Dilana sighed. "Tell me or I'm hanging up the phone."

"I can see you want the burn mark to be permanent. Maybe between the eyes?" Jordis asked in an inquiring tone.

"Forget it. It would only add to her excuses to act like a hermit," Daphna added.

Dilana absently listened to what they were saying as they went back and forth making various comments. Used to them, Dilana waited them out until they got to the point.

"What are you feeling?" Zarya asked.

Dilana straightened in reaction to the intensity in her tone.

Chapter Two

It wasn't the words Zarya asked but what she didn't ask that made Dilana uneasy. Closing her eyes, Dilana blocked out all the sounds around her, peeling away everything until there was nothing but the white silence. She tilted her head and listened, not with her mind, but her soul.

Dilana opened her eyes then answered, "Nothing."

They were silent. It made her uneasiness grow.

"What is going on?" Dilana demanded.

"Tell us exactly what you felt?" Jordis asked.

"I told you, nothing."

They were silent again.

Kali broke the silence. "Something woke me tonight. A fear so great I felt like it was eating me alive. Then pain like I have never felt. I could feel myself dying then I saw you in a pool of blood with tears running down your face. Before I could call you, the others called me with the same feeling. Something is muffling your senses." Kali paused, then continued, anguish choking her voice. "Lana, I am afraid for you, please come home now. We can send Sari through the portal for you."

Dilana gasped. For them to want to send Sari, she knew they were terrified. And she knew they would only offer if Sari had agreed. Sari hated using the most frightening of her powers and only did when absolutely necessary.

"Dilana, please," Kali begged.

Closing her eyes, she ached with her sister's pain. "Oh, Kali, I can't. I have to see this to the end."

No one said anything for a little while.

“We knew you would say that, Lana. Please be careful,” Kali said softly.

“Go inside, Lana,” Zarya said solemnly.

Dilana didn’t question her, just crossed the balcony and went inside. As she entered the doors she saw the glowing light surrounding the bed. Crossing the room, she put down the phone as she picked up her discarded robe from the back of the couch and put it on. She took up the phone again as she continued on to the bed. On the bed lay a piece of cloth of golden brown. The white light continued to swirl around the bed then formed into four items in the center of the cloth on the bed. Dilana looked at each of them, humbled by their thoughtfulness. Placing down the phone on the nightstand, she approached the bed.

She picked up the first item and tested its weight. She knew that this was Jordis’ contribution. Lifting it up, she watched as the light caught the rubies in the handle of the dagger. The blade was as she expected it to be—it was sharp. Running her hand over the base, she watched as it glowed briefly then changed to a full-length sword. Retracting it, she placed it back on the bed then picked up the next item, which she knew was from Daphna.

It was a small rectangular box. From her knowledge of gemstones she could tell it was made from onyx. Dilana tapped the side of the box against the Rarities emblem. The box got warm then the shape flowed outward, split in two then encircled the flesh from her wrist and up her arm to her elbow. It shifted, then fitted to her arms, forming a gauntlet on each. It continued to shift until symbols formed along its surface. Then it got hard. Dilana realized she couldn’t remove them. Deciding to address it later, she continued on to the next item.

She picked it up and saw it was two pieces—a pair of pants and a vestlike top. When she looked at the color closely, she could see it was a red so dark it looked almost black. Touching the material, she could feel Kali’s love, strength and protection pouring off it. A light flashed, then another item formed. Placing the clothing back on the bed carefully, Dilana looked at the final piece. The light glinted off a white gold necklace

wrought in a delicate interwoven filigree design. The pattern crisscrossed with various rows forming a weblike shape. In the last row in the middle was a rich, blood-red ruby. It was beautiful.

Dilana was afraid to touch it, knowing what it represented. She moved to the nightstand and picked up the phone. "Why, Zarya?"

"Put it on," Zarya replied.

"No. Why would you be so cruel?" Dilana asked.

"Put it on!"

Ignoring her, Dilana asked again. "Why would you send me a *Zerquel* now? I asked you when I was about to marry Brett why hadn't I been given one and you said it was a myth. You said it was a foolish thing of the olden ways. Why, Zarya?"

"It wasn't time for it yet. I can only create it when it comes to me. It didn't then and it has now."

Dilana looked at the *Zerquel* again, then replied. "I might possibly die and now is when the *Zerquel*, my supposed bridal necklace, happens to show up? Why do I find this hard to believe? Do you think this would make me take more care so I live? Li—"

Zarya interrupted her. "No. I believe we all have to make our own choices. I believe it is time for the *Zerquel* to show up." Zarya paused, then continued in a vicious tone, "How dare you forsake this gift? You're the first of our kind in over seventeen generations that the Zani and Qeru have chosen to honor with this. Do you think it has been easy for me, knowing that this might be another generation in which the females and males would not feel the honor of the *Zerquel* or *Qerquel*? That, despite all I can do, I was powerless in this." She stopped, then demanded, "Have you nothing to say to me?"

Shame choked Dilana, she knew how hard it was for them all. "I'm sorry, Zarya, I'm sorry. I know that you all are suffering. All of us are going through this."

"Fuck you, Lana. You have given up on the most sacred of things we hold dear." Zarya spoke the ancient words they all learned from the day they could speak. "*Oro*

deuos queis masa ie kansa e ouos. Vei wekl kime ie moko rue iles ie res numes kime fi u les zerus diums kil jures l les the masaies l bieles quei res sious."

As she spoke, Dilana interpreted the words silently. *"With two hearts joined we beat as one. Never more will we fear for all we are and will be. In our power lies the truth of the joining of body, heart and soul."*

The necklace started to glow at Zarya's words. Dilana gasped. The glow faded slowly.

Dilana gulped. "Don't do that again!"

"Do what?"

Dilana waved her hand. "Make the necklace glow like that. It is freaky."

Zarya sighed, then replied, sounding older than her twenty-eight years, "What am I going to do with you, child? The *Zerquel* does as it pleases."

Since she was older than Zarya by three years, Dilana decided to leave the comment alone. Tucking the phone in the pocket of her robe, Dilana moved carefully as she approached the bed, removing the other items beside the necklace. Taking the edges of the cloth, she folded it together until it was in a neat square package. Then she crossed the room to the dresser and placed the bundle and items in the top drawer. Closing the drawer, she took a breath.

She heard talking from her robe pocket. Taking out the phone, she put it back to her ear in time to hear Zarya say, "Yes, Kali, I know how stubborn Lana is but the *Zerquel* does not like to be denied."

Kali replied, "Like someone else we know."

Zarya sucked her teeth. "Bite me."

Before they could get started bickering, Dilana interrupted. "I have to get some rest so I can be fresh for tomorrow. Daphna, how do I get the gauntlets off?"

Daphna told her and she, Zarya and Jordis murmured goodnight and cautioned her to be careful and hung up.

Kali spoke. "Lana, promise me if you need me you will call me."

Knowing she didn't mean by the phone, Dilana replied, "If I need you I will call. I'll be careful, Kali. I promise. Night."

"Night." Kali hung up.

Closing the phone, Dilana slipped it into her pocket and stared at the closed dresser drawer. With Zarya being able to make the *Zerquel* after all this time, she knew what its return meant for them. It reawakened hope that other females would be blessed with a *Zerquel*—the bridal necklace—or the males would receive a *Qerquel*—the groom chain—which only came when the time was right for a *Zuri Maji* to meet their soul partner. Until now, there hadn't been one in over four thousand years. Many *Zuri Maji* had written it off as myth and those who actually believed had lost hope.

She had felt the knowledge bounce from all of the *Zuri Maji* and knew they would wonder what would happen. She couldn't deal with it now. But she decided she would first have to deal with whatever danger was coming. Looking down at her arms still covered in the gauntlets, she murmured, "*Ruitel*." The gauntlets disappeared, leaving behind a ring of symbols around each of her wrists. Then they faded too. She walked back to bed, rubbing her arms.

A knock sounded on the door. Frowning, she strode to the door, yanked it open and said, "Sari, I told them f—" She stopped as she locked eyes with intense amber.

Dilana took in the man she knew as Magni Taggart from the business card he had left. She had only met him once but felt like she knew him. His light sienna skin had a fine coating of moisture while a stray curl escaped from his loose braid, trailing down the side of his face. Seeing him now, she realized that her imagining hadn't done him justice. He smiled, a predatory twist of his full nibbilitious-looking lips. Her feminine instinct made her want to take a step back but her pride would not let her.

"How did you get in?"

Magni's brow quirked. "The door."

His tone was mild, contrasting to the intensity of his gaze and on his face. With a confident stride, he stepped forward. Dilana stepped back to avoid touching him. Magni came into the room, took a glance around and walked over and sat in a chair facing her. He steepled his long masculine fingers under his chin and watched her.

"Mr. Taggart, even if you are a client, breaking into this compound is against the law. If you are here for an update, contact me in the morning."

He smiled again a slow preparatory grin. "Magni. You don't want me to leave. You're a hard woman to find, Dilana."

Despite his slightly accented voice rolling over her like rich molasses his confident tone got her back up. Dilana stalked over to him, stopping just before she reached him.

Dilana gritted out from between clenched teeth, "Yes I do. Get the hell out, *now*."

He stood up with barely restrained force, taking a step forward. Dilana stepped back before she caught herself and stubbornly stood her ground.

"We'll talk in the morning. You can have an update then," Dilana said, trying to hold her temper.

"You. I'm here for you, Dilana." His voice was sensual yet lethal.

Chapter Three

The tempo of Dilana's heart increased and she could feel her eyes widen. Deliberately narrowing her eyes, she crossed her arms under her breasts and tapped her foot.

"As I've said we'll talk in the morning about your case. Now get out."

Magni replied in the same tone as before. "You know exactly what I mean, Dilana. You're not a stupid woman."

Cocking her head to the side, Dilana watched the heated look on his face. She saw his hunger for her.

Magni continued before she could speak. "Acting oblivious is insulting and beneath what I expected of you. Especially after I had to chase behind you."

Dilana couldn't decide if she was angry or amused. Anger won. "Chase behind me? What the hell are you talking about?"

She listened in disbelief as he categorized his trip. He had followed her to all the places she had been but was always a step behind. Rubbing her finger on the bracelet, she was even more grateful that she had used it to jump from place to place, missing him.

Magni scowled stepping closer. "How the hell did you get through those places so fast?" He folded his hands across his chest and stared at her as if waiting for her answer.

Before she could form an answer he continued. "It doesn't matter. I'm here for you, Dilana. What are you going to do about it?"

Dilana knew she had a few choices she could make. Continue to act oblivious or confront the situation. She chose the latter.

"So what, you want to fuck me? Am I supposed to drop to my knees and say 'any way you want to'?" Dilana waited for his response.

He watched her, a weird look on his face. She made an "answer me" gesture with her hand.

"If you want to," Magni replied in a reasonable tone. Dilana narrowed her eyes. Before she could say anything he continued. "I don't want to fuck you, Dilana." Magni's look was steady and appraising. "Fucking is about singular, solitary pleasure. It is too tame a word for what I want to do with you." He leaned in, putting his face next to her cheek, inhaled deeply, then continued, his voice softer. "I want my name to be the only thing you know in your dreams or fantasies." He licked, one slow, wet lick along the side of her face. Her eyes closed in self-defense and her slit started to ache. "In your thoughts." He bit gently on her ear. She shuddered, fine goose bumps rising all over her body.

"Le miel, me regarder." His voice was a dark velvet. Weakened with wanton lust, Dilana was barely able to understand what he said. She opened her eyes and looked at him as he asked. His face was etched in harsh lines of intent as he looked at her. His head lowered until their lips were barely a hairsbreadth apart. Her lips parted, taking in each word he spoke.

"Je vais graver ma touche et mon odeur dans tu écorchent, Dilana, pendant que je fais tu cris et mends la pitié. Et j'espère que tu me retournes la faveur."

As he spoke, Dilana interpreted what he was saying. "I'm going to etch my touch and my scent into your skin, Dilana, while I make you scream and beg for mercy. And I hope you return the favor." She quivered.

He paused, leaned in and took her bottom lip between his strong teeth briefly, then let go. Magni pulled back, continuing in his darkly sensual Cajun voice, "Fucking is not even close to what I want. Do you want this, Dilana?"

Dilana's tongue felt sluggish as she spoke. "I'm a *Zuri Maji*."

"I'm Cajun," Magni fired back.

Shaking her head, Dilana replied. "No, I'm more than human, a *Zuri Maji*. We have powers that —"

He put his finger against her lips. "Is this something that will make me want you any less?" He removed his finger.

Dilana looked at him. "Maybe."

Magni shook his head. "No, I don't care. We'll deal with it tomorrow." He stopped and glanced at her. "Maybe the day after that." A look of raw hunger sharpened his face. "Do you want this, Dilana?"

Dilana went with her instincts. "*Oui je graves tu touche et tu odeur dans ma peau pendant que je crie et mendie la pitié. Et quand c'est mon virage est préparé à mendier la pitié.*" She saw his surprised pleasure as she moaned her reply against his lips.

Magni sealed his lips to hers as he repeated back what she said. "Yes, etch your touch and scent into my skin while I scream and beg for mercy. And when it's my turn, I will be prepared to beg for mercy."

Looking into his gaze, she felt as if the very air around them was electrified. The need she was feeling for this man was like nothing she had ever felt. Lifting her arms, he placed them around his head. She gripped his hair and it came loose from the braid. Her moan traveled down the back of his throat to meet his own groan of desire.

His tongue stroked with sensual precision along each sensitive nerve ending in her mouth. All she could do was whimper with the flood of pleasure that overcame her while he ate at her mouth. Tightening her hold on his hair, Dilana felt every lick, tug and pull as if he was stroking her weeping slit. The need to be closer to him made her move against him. He held her tightly, stilling her movements.

A moan of denial rose from her and she raised her left leg along his hip, curving her leg around his back. Trusting him to hold her, she pressed herself against him. She was soaked. He growled. She wanted his bare skin against her now. In tune with what she wanted, Magni ran his hand down her hip covered by her robe until he reached bare skin. His touch was hot against her, drawing a gasp. He reversed his movement,

pushing her robe back. The feel of cool air hit her naked butt, contrasting with his heated body pressed against her front. His arms tightened as he lifted her up. Following his silent urgings, Dilana wrapped her other leg around him, bringing his still-clothed hard length flush against her heated core.

She gasped as he pulled his lips away from hers, groaning harshly. Grabbing his hair tighter, she pulled his head back, licking along his lips then plunging her tongue into his mouth. Magni tightened his hold on her hips as he turned and crossed to the bed. With each step he created sweet friction against her aching core. Tightening her legs around him, Dilana slid up then down along his cloth-covered hardened shaft.

In a smooth motion, Magni loosened the knot of her robe, jerked it off and lowered her to the bed. The coolness of the sheets was a shock against her bare, heated skin. Magni stood back and quickly removed his clothing, then glanced up at her with so much wanton hunger in his eyes she felt scorched.

Dilana leaned back against the burgundy-colored pillows to take in the view of his delectable chest, broad shoulders, hard abs and washboard stomach. Glancing down at what made him a man, Dilana's breath caught. His erection pointed straight out from his body, bobbing at her. It was long, thick with a vein running from just below the head to the base filled with his thick sap. A curling thatch of hair covered the base. As she watched, he thickened, extending even further.

Dilana couldn't wait to feel all of him inside her. She licked her lips. With a glance up at his face, Dilana was arrested by the smoldering look in his amber gaze. She smiled softly and leaned back onto the bed to wait for him to come to her. Instead, Magni went to the foot of the bed then motioned for her to lie down fully. Narrowing her eyes, Dilana decided he was too much in control. Wanting to drive him crazy for her, she slid sensuously along the cotton sheets, positioning herself. She spread her legs and lifted her hips in invitation, watching him.

From a distance she heard the distinct sound she had come to equate with the steel pan. It was playing a melody that she didn't recognize but it matched the fever that was racing through her blood. Her eyes dropped to half-mast as she watched Magni.

A wolfish grin spread across Magni's face. Then he placed one knee on the bed, then the other, slowly coming toward her. The sway of his body and cock made her flood with sensual fire. Reaching her ankles, he pushed her legs farther apart, making space for his body. Magni leaned in, inhaling deeply as if memorizing her scent. He growled, a low rough sound in his throat. She arched, her eyes slammed closed in anticipation of him tasting her. A soft kiss, then the sting of a bite on the inside of her right thigh made her jump.

His tongue lapped at the bite, taking away the sting. He repeated the caress on the left thigh then back and forth between the right and left. With each swipe of his hot tongue Dilana's hands clenched, gripping the sheets. It was sensation overload.

"Yesss... Pleeassse," she cried out harshly as his tongue plunged deep into her aching canal, then came out in a long, sensual slide. She grabbed his head and held it tightly against her as he licked and sucked on her aching clit with tantalizing pressure. Strong hands reached up, interlaced with hers, then pressed hers back into the bed. Struggling against his hold, Dilana opened her eyes. His eyes met hers as he continued his sensual assault. The sight of him was her undoing. A tingling heat started from the top of her head, spreading down to her clit. He stopped, pulled away while keeping eye contact, then blew a breath across her wet pussy. Her eyes rolled back in her head as her back bowed off the bed with the power of the orgasm ripping through her.

"Yessss... Ohhhh...hee..."

His body blanketed hers, then he impaled her with his cock in one thrust. She screamed, feeling him pleasantly stretch her as he continued probing deeper and deeper into her. The smooth heat from his penis scorched her walls, sensitizing them to a fever pitch. She tugged her hands, but his grip on them tightened. Frustration that he still wouldn't let go of her hands ate at her. Dilana locked her legs behind his back, pulling

him in faster. Finally when he was in to the hilt, Dilana sighed at the sensation of being pleurably stretched. Magni stilled. Gripping him with her legs, Dilana tried to move him but he didn't budge.

"Move," she grunted.

Still, he didn't move or twitch. Opening her eyes, she looked at him. His mouth was tight with purpose while sweat ran down his face.

His voice rumbled out of his chest against her aching breast as he spoke. "How?"

Dilana looked at him in disbelief. She couldn't believe he could even think at a time like this, much less expect her to. He watched her silently.

"Move, Magni." Pulling her hands from his loosened grip, she ran her hands along his sides. He quivered. "Hard and fast then deep and slow." Breathing deeply, she pulled in the scent of Magni. Looking him deeply in the eyes, she leaned forward and breathed close to his lips. "Make me scream your name."

Dilana could almost hear his control shatter at her words. His kiss was that of a man possessed, then he moved. He rolled his hips in a sensual stroke, going even deeper than before. Arching to meet him, Dilana felt his cock scrape her womb. Contracting her inner muscles around his penis, she enjoyed the sound of his pleasure. She sucked at his tongue in the same intense rhythm with which he was taking her. Deep, a slow glide out, swirl, followed by another even deeper thrust.

She could feel the orgasm tightening inside her. Closing her arms around Magni, she instinctively rolled her hips to meet him, striving for something just beyond her reach.

"No," Magni muttered, his voice a deep growl.

With an agile move, Magni rolled them over, distracting her. Opening her eyes, she saw the hunger on his face. He grabbed her hips firmly in his hands and pulled her into a pounding rhythm. Bracing her knees on either side of him, she rotated her hips, she

curled into his body and kissed his lips. He arched, drawing another gasp from her. Withdrawing from the kiss with a wet sound, Dilana placed her hand on his chest for leverage, pushing him down as she pushed herself up. Seated firmly on him, she looked down at his face carved with heat and slumberous eyes. Watching his expression, she moved her hips in a swirling motion. His eyes rolled back in his head and the cords in his neck bulged.

"Shit." His voice echoed around the room.

A smile curved her lips and his mouth curled in response.

Watching the heated look on Dilana's face, Magni waited to see what she would do next. She rotated her hips again in a move that almost made his heart stop with pleasure. He gritted his teeth from the pleasure of her undulating around him. He thought he had known what being with Dilana would be like, however, he was wrong. There was no way to describe the devastation Dilana wrought to his senses.

Dilana arched her back, taking him deeper into her wetness. An involuntary groan ripped from his throat as she rode him. She took him with such delicious greed and demand. She arched backward, her head almost touching his legs. With a harsh inhalation, Magni used his legs to spread her wider, then held her waist as he pumped into her. Her passage slid over him hot, moist and lush, sucking him in.

He looked down. Absently he ran his finger along the tattoo symbols his hands were resting on then he continued glancing downward, watching as he slid into her again. She swirled and his head arched back as a groan ripped from him. Pressure built around his cock. Tightening his hold on Dilana's waist, he felt her contraction on his cock then the sinuous motion of her hips and they went over together into a rolling orgasm. His hearing faded and he went blind as his release overtook him, the walls of her pussy clenching around him, draining everything he had. She collapsed on his chest. Her breathing was rapid. His heart thundered in his chest and after a while as his hearing returned, he realized hers was racing too. Still embedded inside her, Magni felt

her pussy continue to contract around him. Trying to get his breath and heartbeat under control, Magni stroked her back slowly.

After a while he said softly, "Dilana."

She glanced at him, a slumberous look on her face. Unable to resist, Magni leaned down and kissed her softly. She moaned and snuggled into his body. The kiss deepened and Magni wondered if they would kill each other before they had their fill.

What a way to go. Pulling her closer, he rolled her over and started all over again.

* * * * *

"What is a *Zuri Maji*?"

At Magni's question Dilana heart thumped. She had been wondering when he would ask. They had been locked in the room for two days. They had sex, ate and talked about everything and anything but that. The one time she tried to bring it up, he had said he would ask when he was ready. Since she wasn't ready to face his reaction she had taken the cowardly way out and let him change the subject. As she waited for him to approach her on it, she had wondered how much she would tell him and why he hadn't asked. She remembered when she had told Brett, he had only wanted to know if she could read his thoughts and nothing else. Now she could see he was only humoring her and hadn't really believed her.

Since they had emerged from the house today, she and Magni had spent the day combing, as the locals called it, "country" areas of St. Thomas. They had gone all around the Smith Bay area then ended their search at Magens Bay Beach before heading back here to Savan. After checking the places over again and still finding nothing, Magni had suggested they get a drink before they continued their search. She hadn't wanted to stop. Something was pulling at her, just at the edge of her senses. She couldn't get a clear feeling of what it was. She had grudgingly agreed and now the way that certain patrons of the bar were acting was making her regret it.

Narrowing her gaze, she watched over Magni's shoulder as another woman moved closer to their table. With a glance around the room, she took in the various women in the bar who had moved closer, all their attention on ogling Magni. An hour ago when they first walked in, she had thought they stared because Magni was, after all, a handsome man but their continued looks were pissing her off. If they kept at it she would be having a conversation with a few of them. Magni was with her.

Dilana knew she was jealous and hated it. She had never had this feeling before. Another woman by the bar took up her drink and came to a table right across from them. She looked like she was imagining Magni naked. Dilana gave the woman who had just moved closer a hot glare, and the woman didn't even glance at her. The woman's attention was focused on Magni. Sucking her teeth, Dilana looked at Magni.

The arrogant smile on his face made her even angrier.

"What?" She could hear her tone was belligerent.

Magni chuckled. "*Bien-aimé*, the look on your face would make you end up in jail."

Her lips twitched in response to his chuckle. A thump made her look around. A woman was picking herself up off the floor. Confused at how she ended up on the floor, Dilana watched her, then glanced back at Magni. He was looking at the lady, then he turned to look at her and grinned.

"That happens a lot," he said, gesturing to the woman.

Watching the woman, then looking back at him, Dilana snorted. "Yeah, right."

He shrugged then asked. "Tell me about a *Zuri Maji*. Are you human? What did you mean by 'more than human' and 'powers'?"

Dilana waved her hand and watched as a silver sheen sparkled in the air then was gone. Reaching out with her senses, she felt the privacy shield that enclosed them and stopped them from being overheard by the other people in the bar. Absently, she noted that the women turned away, going back to what they were doing. Taking a deep breath, she proceeded to tell him about the *Zuri Maji*. "Yes, I am human but more. I age slower and am harder to kill."

Magni frowned in confusion. "How old are you? Twenty-five?"

Surprised, Dilana realized that age was another thing they hadn't discussed. "Seventy-five," Dilana replied, stifling a grin.

Magni watched her, then grinned and winked. "I've never dated an older woman before." He paused, then leaned in and said wickedly, "You must have a few nice tricks to share."

Dilana shivered, then pushed him back. "I'm kidding. I'm thirty-one."

"That's okay. I'll teach you a few things." Magni smiled, a wicked curve of his lips.

"What about you?"

He took a sip of his beer before replying. "Thirty-six."

Glancing at his face, Dilana was surprised. She had assumed he was just turning thirty. Magni grinned then gestured that she continue.

"I'll give you a short version. *Zuri Maji* have existed for millions of years. We have been called everything from witches to shamans, which is not exactly true. I am human but I have an affinity to *makales*—magic. When I turned fifteen I went through a sort of growth that unlocks my *makales*. After this change, I age slower than a normal human would, am not easily hurt and even harder to kill." Dilana stopped, not going into any more detail about the rest of what her race had to go through.

Magni watched her silently. Dilana waited for him to say something. He didn't and continued to watch her as he took a drink from his beer.

Unable to stand his silence, she asked, "You don't have any questions?"

"Nope."

His answer had a ring of truth so she believed him. Rubbing her fingers together, she saw the flash of white as she took down the privacy shield. Dilana sat back, then seeing movement, watched over his shoulder as the women at the bar turned to them. A glance around showed that all the women were staring at Magni again.

Magni spoke, drawing her attention. "I figure there's a lot more than you told me but I'll find out over time." He shrugged, then glanced around the room again. From his tone, she knew he was okay with what she had told him. Dilana couldn't believe he was taking this so well.

Magni looked back at her and smiled. "Aunty King and Mom were also like that. They didn't want to talk much about their being ex-Sirens. I know all about keeping your differences a secret."

Chapter Four

It took a minute for what he said to register. Viciously Dilana mumbled. *"Remcious, remrous."*

The air around them sparked a bright orange then changed to red. Knowing that her spell to snatch the words out of the air before they were heard by anyone, human or inhuman, worked didn't calm Dilana's anger or fear. She pushed back her chair and stood in an angry motion.

"You fucking lied to me."

There was shock quickly followed by anger on Magni's face as he stood. "What?"

She cut him off. "Quiet. Let's go."

Dilana turned and walked away. She heard Magni's footsteps behind her. Once out the door, she glanced around. Turning to Magni, she briefly saw the anger on his face. Stepping closer to him, she glanced down at the bracelet on her wrist as she pictured the bedroom in the Rarities house. She felt the tingle that came with displacement travel, grabbed his hand then felt her body dissolve then reform.

With a glance, she saw they were in the bedroom of the Rarities house as she had desired. With a thought, she activated the protective circle that was poured into the base of all Rarities dwellings, then she reinforced it with a silence spell, keeping anything said from being overheard by anyone. She looked back at him as she let go of his hand. Magni shook his head, looking around him a look of disbelief on his face. Dilana saw that he wasn't even sick as he should be if he was a normal human. The first experience of displacement travel wreaked hell on the human system.

Magni looked back at her. "I assume there is a reason for that little show of power." He stepped into her, put his face close to hers. "What is your problem?"

Since she knew the spells she had done were invisible to the human eye, she knew he was talking about her bringing them to the Rarities house.

Dilana took a breath, trying to calm her anger. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"About what?" He looked confused.

Watching him, she couldn't believe his being so obtuse. "Your mother was a Siren."

He looked at her then laughed. "God, is that what has you acting so prickly? She wasn't a Siren when she died."

She saw the pain flash on his face as he spoke of his mother. He had told her about his mother dying hours after his father. The tension she felt relaxed. Dilana felt foolish she had misheard. She knew that Sirens were extinct. All the supernatural community knew that.

Dilana opened her mouth to apologize. "I—"

His next words stalled what she was about to say.

"She gave up being a Siren to become human for Dad." The pain was tangible in his voice, almost making her miss what he said.

"Your mother was a Siren." She roared it in his face.

Magni answered, the exasperation plain on his face and in his voice. "Ex-Siren. Both she and Aunty King decided—"

"Christ, your aunt and Mom were both Sirens." He had also told her about his irreverent aunt who was also dead.

Magni sighed. "Ex-Siren. You keep missing the ex part. Why are you hung up on this?"

Dilana could see that he didn't know what the ramifications of this would mean. "You should have told me." She thought about something else he had said. "Wait a minute, you said you have siblings and cousins."

"Yes, three brothers, a sister and six male cousins from Aunty King."

Remembering the history on Sirens Dilana shook her head. "Sirens have only female children. And only one child each."

Magni nodded his head. "Yes and no. Sirens have as many children as they choose to."

Dilana thought about what he said, then replied. "Then it isn't possible that your mom or aunt was a Siren."

"They *were* Sirens. Mom gave up being a Siren to marry Dad and Aunty King gave it up too. She never told us why. After they gave it up, they were both human. This is not a big deal." Magni said it in such a matter-of-fact way she knew that he didn't understand.

He reached out to touch her. She slapped his hand away before he could and stepped back. She wrapped her arms over each other around her waist.

"This is a big fucking deal, Magni. You should have told me. Hell, sometime in all our conversations in the last few days you should have said something."

"Why? This has noting to do with us or the search for the veils," Magni growled.

Dilana rubbed her fingers along her arms. "There is no 'us'." She paused. His look was furious. Ignoring it, she continued, "This has everything to do with the veils. This is something I needed to know."

"Fuck that. There is an 'us'."

"No, there isn't. Sirens only interact with their own kind."

"No."

"Yes," Dilana insisted, then watching his confusion, she felt some of the anger leak away. "Sit down, Magni. Please."

She waited until he sat before she continued. "Your mom and aunt being Sirens is something you should have told me. Other beings in the community either revered or feared them."

“Why? My mom and aunty told me the myth that Sirens leading people to their deaths was not true.”

Dilana nodded. “No, it isn’t true. That was a myth spread by other beings. Although Sirens aren’t talked about much anymore, from what I’ve learned from various places, Sirens are considered the first of the immortal beings. They hold the true meaning of being immortal. Sirens were here even before the mer-kind of Atlantis and even before the first of the other beings were born, formed or created. Sirens are considered the peacekeepers or assassins of the other beings who forsake their kind and became evil. They were seductive and deadly all rolled into one. Have your siblings or cousins been in law enforcement or do they have an affinity to weapons or such?”

“Yes.” His answer was quick then he looked like he was thinking about it.

Dilana figured they would. It was in the Siren makeup to seek justice. “Yes, that fits. The other races used Sirens as their executioners so their hands wouldn’t get dirty. Others longed to experience an *Ecudes*—a true Siren seduction. This continued belief that Sirens held the key to death or unimaginable sexual fulfillment led them to become secretive and only to interact with their own kind. No Sirens have been seen or felt for almost a thousand years. They are extinct.” She looked at him then amended. “At least until now.”

Magni reply was short and concise. “Sirens are extinct. Mom and Aunty King were the last of the Siren line. I’m human and this still has nothing to do with us.”

Anger that had abated blasted through Dilana. She said once again, “There is no ‘us’. There can never be any us. Sirens only mate with their own kind.”

He looked at her. “Ah, so that’s the problem. No matter what my mom or aunty was I am still human. Even if by some fluke I wasn’t, I do what the hell I want. I want you, Dilana.”

Dilana shuddered. His voice seemed to reach out like a caress and touch all her sensitive areas.

“Stop it.”

"Stop what?" Magni stood and came toward her.

Dilana held up her hand. "The voice thing."

He stopped his advance and looked at her. She could tell he was thinking about it then he grinned, a wicked tilt of his lips.

"That explains it. Wait until Tariq hears about this," Magni chuckled.

Since he had told her about Tariq, his oldest cousin, she figured he was speaking of Tariq being a hermit out of self-defense against all the women who kept throwing themselves at his feet.

When Magni had mentioned about his cousin she had wondered how anyone could be more sexy than Magni. Dilana would never have guessed the reason Tariq avoided the public or that the women trying to get Magni's attention was due to them being Sirens. The vibe he gave off was that of a human. She had thought the women at the bar who tried to capture Magni's attention were due to them being attracted to his devastating good looks as she was.

He locked his intense gaze on her.

Shaking her head, Dilana got back to the point. "You lied to me. I can't be with you knowing what I know about your kind," Dilana stated.

"The human kind. You had no problem before."

"You know what I mean." Dilana frowned.

"This isn't what this is really about," Magni replied in a calm, reasonable tone that only fueled her irritation.

Pacing back and forth, Dilana asked, "What are you talking about?"

"You're trying to find a reason to push me away."

Dilana opened her mouth to reply. Magni's next words stilled what she would have said.

"I love you."

Shocked, Dilana stopped pacing and stared at him. "You can't."

He answered the same way he looked. Calmly. "I do."

Staring at him, Dilana could see he believed it. "We've only known each other for two days. You're a Siren, for God's sake."

The intensity with which Magni watched her made her shift. "I'm human. Wouldn't you be able to tell if I wasn't?"

Reluctantly, she nodded.

"Find out." Magni sat in the chair, a challenge on his face.

Turning to him, Dilana reached out with her other senses. Watching him through her astral senses, she saw only the calm blue of humanity. Closing it down, she watched him, saying nothing. He didn't even ask.

Magni's tone was a silken Cajun caress. "Since the first time I met you, I knew what I wanted. In these last two days, we have shared more than many couples have in years of knowing each other. It wouldn't matter if I told you tomorrow or six months from now, you would still have the same reaction." Magni paused then stood and walked toward her. "I love you, Dilana, and that's not going to change." Stopping before her, his now-familiar hands slid along her face to cup her cheeks. "My love will not change.

The breath she didn't even realize she was holding shuddered out. The intensity she only equated with Magni surrounded her as he leaned in and kissed her. Closing her eyes, Dilana braced herself for his hunger. He undid her with his tenderness.

The softness of his kiss rolled over her, taking her under with the same strength as a hurricane. In that instant, Dilana knew if she wasn't careful she would be lost. His tongue touched hers with a soft caress, stroking along all the sensitive areas. Her body clenched then dampened in response. She was used to the fiery passion Magni inspired but the soft sensuality of his kiss was overwhelming. He murmured something she was unable to make out. The taste of him filled her up. The need she always felt at his touch took her breath away. This kiss was a devastation of all her senses. His touch was gentle

as he held her along his tall, rigid body. The feel of his arms around her was heaven and hell. She knew what he wanted and feared she could not give it to him.

Sinking her hands into his silken hair, Dilana felt it loosen from its binding, spreading out, tickling her hands. Magni slowly withdrew and looked at her. Slow to come out of the daze of passion his kiss had created, Dilana opened her eyes. He looked at her, a tender smile on his lips.

"I love you, Dilana, and you'll have to get used to it. I'll give you some time but I can't promise you too long. I'm not a patient man." Magni brushed his lips over hers, let her go and turned away, going across the room into the adjoining bathroom.

Dilana turned away as she heard the sound of water start to run in the bathroom. Wandering to the balcony, Dilana looked out while her thoughts turned inward. With all that had been going on in the last few days, she wondered how she could deal with these new developments. Magni loved her. His mother had been a Siren. And most importantly, she wasn't sure if she could cope with loving anyone again. Although, due to his own heritage, Magni seemed to understand about her being a *Zuri Maji*, experience had taught her that understanding and accepting were separate issues. He would also have to face what being an offspring of a Siren or ex-Siren meant. Once they left the island and went back to their real lives, things could change.

A heavy feeling filled Dilana at the thought of what the real world would bring. They had a lot to contend with. He would meet her family, she would meet his, he would meet the rest of the *Zuri Maji* and over time he would be exposed to the other beings. His being part-Siren wouldn't help him one bit to adjust to her world. There were so many complications it would be crazy to even consider —

Dilana's thoughts stopped as she realized that she was considering Magni being a part of her life. With a shake of her head, Dilana turned away from the balcony and went across the room to the bathroom.

Dilana glanced around the exquisite bathroom, briefly noting the cream-and-burgundy tiles with burgundy marble his-and-hers sinks. She saw he had lit candles

around the room. Bypassing the enclosed glass shower, she went to the large sunken bath. Magni glanced up from where he sat in the lapping water. He watched her as she approached. Stripping off her clothing, Dilana stepped naked into the tub.

"I can't say the words back to you. Not yet. But I'm willing after we leave here to try to see where this will lead." Dilana waited for him to reply.

Not saying a word, he held out his hand to her. Knowing he was asking for her trust, Dilana accepted his hand without hesitation. Magni's lips quirked and a look of raw hunger filled his eyes and came over his face. Dilana leaned in to kiss him.

He stopped her. "Not yet."

Pulling her gently to him, Magni moved back, then pushed her gently until she was lying down. He turned then knelt as he took the cloth he had on the side of the tub. The sight of his smooth chest made her ache to taste him. She motioned for him to come closer. His eyes twinkling, Magni shook his head. He dipped the cloth into the water, squeezed it out and ran it along her face. He dipped it again and rubbed it down her neck, chest and then around her breasts. He dipped the cloth, then continued cleaning around one breast until he reached her aching nipple. He rubbed the cloth across her nipple, causing it to bead even more. He repeated the same process with the other breast. Dilana gasped at each movement of the cloth.

Her back arched as she tried to get closer to the cloth. He stopped, wet the cloth, then proceeded rubbing it gently down her torso, across her belly and down, stopping just before her pussy. Restless, Dilana watched him as he wet the cloth then continued. Instinctively, Dilana parted her thighs.

Magni leaned in and inhaled deeply. "Hmm. You smell wonderful, Dilana."

Her eyes slammed closed as her pussy creamed in reaction. The cloth stroked along her outer lips, avoiding her where she was wet and aching. A moan rippled from her. Moving her legs farther apart, she circled her hips in counterpoint to the cloth. It stopped. Opening her eyes, Dilana saw him shudder.

"Take me," Magni demanded, a dark invitation in his voice playing along her skin like silk. Getting up, Dilana braced her knees on either side of him, then holding his hot length, she positioned him against her aching slit and sank onto him until he was deep inside her. Her breath left her in a rush at the sensation of him filling her up and up. He arched. Pushing him away, she used his chest as leverage and pushed herself backward until he almost escaped her wetness, then coming forward, she seated herself firmly on him. From a glance at his face, stark with need and his eyes semi-closed, Dilana felt the heat they shared build. Looking deep into his amber gaze, she raised herself up almost off him again then sank back down, enveloping his hard cock with her aching pussy.

"Yes." Magni's voice rippled around the room.

Dilana smiled. It was her mission to drive him out of his mind. His lips curled in a devilish grin in response.

At the look of intent on Dilana's face, Magni felt himself harden even more and shudder. Stilling himself, he gritted his teeth from the pleasure of her contracting around him. Instinct made him want to take her as hard and fast as he could but he wanted her to remember it was she who took him after he said he loved her. A pang of longing rippled through him as he wished she could say the words back to him. Knowing it would take her time, he pushed it aside for now and focused on the pleasure she was giving him.

Dilana arched her back, taking his cock into her wetness. An involuntary groan ripped from his throat as she rode him. Her beautiful breasts bobbed in front of him. Magni sat up, catching her nipple with his mouth. The sweet taste of her skin made his penis thicken. Steadying her, he ate at her breast, sucking it strongly. Her whimper played in his ears.

Biting down gently on her nipple, he heard her heart skip a beat then speed up. He sped up his pace to match hers as Dilana's channel contracted around his penis. Molten fire licked through his veins, heating his body to an unbearable pitch. Bringing her closer to him, he used his knees to spread her legs wider. She gasped and rode him

harder. Throwing his head back, Magni lifted her off him, feeling every wet inch of her along his cock as he withdrew until only his tip was inside her pussy. Pulling her back firmly, he changed speed, increasing the rhythm of his thrusts. Their movements became more frenzied.

Her screaming of his name echoed off the walls. His eyes locked on the floor-to-ceiling mirror adjacent to the tub. Her back gleamed with a slick sheen of sweat, making her caramel skin glisten. She rotated her hips and the intricate tattoo at the small of her back rippled as she moved. The sight of her was intoxicating. Trailing his hands down her firm back to the small of her back just above her butt, he traced the tattoo with his finger. Dilana shuddered and her hot mouth bit his ear. Shivering in return, Magni watched her in the mirror as she took him.

Dilana swiveled against him, then grabbed his head, pulling him to her. She sank her hands into his hair, holding him steady for her voracious kiss. Countering her movement, Magni felt her body ripple. Taking over the kiss, he ate at her lips, drinking in her cries. Her body stiffened then quaked as her orgasm ripped through her, sending him over the edge with her. Roaring in return, Magni continuously pumped against her as his body released within her sweet cavern. Dilana slumped against him, her head nuzzling into his shoulder. Not wanting to be separated from her, Magni held her tightly. Trying to catch his breath, Magni stroked her back slowly.

After a little bit he said softly, "Dilana."

She looked at him. Kissing her softly, he felt himself quicken again. Dilana's body clenched, then she laughed, deepening the kiss.

* * * * *

With a gasp, Dilana woke drenched in sweat. Glancing toward the open balcony, she felt something just beyond the reach of the protection shield she hadn't taken down. She tried to calm her breath and racing heart.

Magni's arms circled her from behind. "What is it?"

She turned to him, barely seeing him through the purple haze clouding her gaze. He gasped as he looked at her. Dilana knew her eyes had changed to deep purple. His arms pulled her closer.

“What’s wrong?” Magni asked again.

“The Veils of the Burning Touch are calling me.”

Chapter Five

Pulling away from him, Dilana got out of the bed. Glancing absently at the clock on the bedside table, she noted it was a little after midnight.

She skirted the various pieces of furniture as she crossed the room. Suddenly she heard a humming sound that seemed to echo across the air. Cocking her head to the side, she listened to the sound of the veils calling her. She wanted to run over to the balcony and vault over it and run to the veils. She stilled herself, knowing something was wrong. Although her specialty at Rarities Inc. was finding the obscure pattern to track down items, it had never been like this.

Dilana took a breath and focused, clearing the sound out of her mind. She opened the dresser then reached in. Her hand paused over the *Zerquel*, knowing that besides being her bridal necklace it could also be a powerful weapon. Shaking her head, she left it and took out the outfit and dagger. Quickly, she pulled up her hair into a ponytail then donned the outfit and fitted the dagger into the sheath at her waist. Going to the closet, she took out her boots and, sitting, she put them on. Tracing them from the ankle to just above her knees, she felt the symbols she had etched into the boots as she had made them. She pulled on the gauntlets. Turning to Magni, she was arrested by the look on his face.

He looked at her and grinned. "You've got to wear that later."

Dilana glanced at the mirror to her right. Her eyes widened as she took in how she looked. Her rich dark honey-toned skin was offset by her kinky dark brown with gold highlights hair pilled high atop her head, swinging in a ponytail that fell down her back. Her eyes glowed a deep purple, making her face seem eerie. The red-so-dark-it-seemed-black silken, almost-leatherlike material hugged her curves. The vest stopped

just before her navel and the matching pants were low on her hips, below her navel. The boots with intricate markings came up above the knee.

Turning back to Magni, she grinned. "You wish."

He laughed, then took out a gun from behind his back and checked it. He slammed it closed and tucked it away behind his pants. She saw he was dressed in a skintight black t-shirt and black slacks. He wore a set of boots of his own. She didn't try to dissuade him from accompanying her, knowing from experience it was a useless argument.

"Follow me and do as I say." Dilana turned and went out the door.

"Yes, mistress," Magni replied.

"Stop it." Striding down the hall, Dilana turned left before entering the other wing of the house and went down the stairs. At the bottom, she crossed the expansive living room and went out the door. Taking the stairs down to the ground, she took three steps off the last stair, then stopped before the circle of protection. Reaching out with her senses, Dilana heard the humming of the veils. Glancing at Magni, she motioned and then stepped through the protection, breaking it. The humming increased, drawing her. Turning right, she followed the sounds of the veils.

She lost track of time and how far she traveled. She changed directions as she climbed hills, walked across valleys and trekked through caves. Slowing, she glanced to her left and saw Magni was with her and wasn't even out of breath. Dilana nodded to him and motioned to the cove just up ahead of them. Stepping around the rock formation, Dilana gasped. Before her in a glass case stood the Veils of the Burning Touch. They were even more beautiful than she had seen in her vision and in the photos. The moon glittered off the gold while the diamonds and rubies glistened.

Taking a step forward, Dilana hissed and dropped to her knees. Magni groaned and dropped beside her. The malevolence in the area choked off her air. Dilana swore at herself for being so careless, then hastily erected a protective shield around her and Magni. Even through the shield she could feel the hate and evil pouring around the

area. Thin ribbons of dark green streaked around the area, filling it. Figures started to materialize out of the air. Watching the figures come together, Dilana counted and saw there were six of them.

"Santa and some elves. Now that is just wrong," Magni said what she was thinking.

"That's not Santa," Dilana said firmly.

Since she knew Santa personally, Dilana knew it wasn't him. Taking her right hand, she curled it into a fist, then brought it to her lips. She blew into it and murmured. "*Driguos.*"

Opening her hand, she waved it toward the false Santa and elves. Golden dust rained in the air then a loud boom rent the place, light crackled and the smell of sulfur filled the area. Dilana reinforced the shield around her and Magni. There were only a few beings that accompanied that smell and they were all a bitch to kill.

The dust was made to bring down their disguise. She took in the five women and the one man. Three of the women looked decayed with paper-thin skin and two were beautiful, their hair hung almost to their feet. Knowing that they were not the threat, Dilana looked at the man who still looked like Santa. The dust hadn't affected him.

He waited until she looked at him, then hissed. "*Magi.*" Then he dropped his disguise. His face was perfect—high cheeks, broad forehead, straight nose and full mouth—until they saw his eyes, which were red pools with a flicker of fire. His hair was white and hung to his feet in a curling braid. Dilana had an idea of what he was but it shouldn't have been possible.

She turned to Magni. "I thought you said your mom and aunt were the last of the Siren line."

Magni looked at her, shock on his face. "They are Sirens."

The man threw back his head and let out a high-pitched wail of anger. His white hair flowed around him like it was alive, crackling with energy. The women threw their heads back and echoed him. The sound hurt her ears.

She shook her head. "No, Banshees."

"Oh shit," Magni said.

Dilana didn't have time to wonder if he knew what havoc Banshees could cause. She cursed her luck. She should have figured that if Sirens still had been around then Banshees, what Sirens turned into when they went evil, would be also. Shaking her head, she wondered what evil bastard had deemed her to be the one to find creatures that shouldn't exist.

She could feel the power of the Banshees crawling over her skin, trying to push through the shields she had around her and Magni. Throwing up a stronger shield, she prepared for the battle. The Banshees stopped their wailing and the male waved his hand.

The air shimmered and a woman enclosed in dark green ooze appeared. Looking closer, Dilana saw that the ooze wasn't touching the woman but circling a protective shield around the woman. The woman raised her head and her amber gaze blazed. The woman was lovely and looked to be in her late thirties. Her caramel skin glowed with some kind of inner light while her dark reddish-brown hair curled, hanging down her body past her hips. The woman impatiently pushed her hair behind her ear, then turned and glared at the Banshee.

"Aunty King," Magni cried and started to stand. Dilana reached over and stopped him. He subsided.

"Kieve, you old goat. You'll never get the Veils of the Burning Touch," Naila McKingley Z'eleca said in a melodious voice.

An unpleasant grin curved the male Banshee's face. "Your stubbornness has made this harder than it needs to be. I will kill you for this insult."

Aunty King snorted. "I keep hearing promises but no action, buddy boy."

The Banshee wailed then turned and sent a blast of power at Aunty King. She didn't even look fazed. The power circled the bubble then disappeared.

Aunty King laughed mockingly. "How much was that, seven million, twenty-six times? Try another channel already. Give it up, Kieve. It won't work."

Kieve, the Banshee, sneered back. "I still have you captive. You can't get out and I can't get in but I will eventually." He shook his fist at her. "Then you are mine."

She flapped her hand at him. "Yeah, yeah. I'm so scared." She shivered mockingly.

The energy surrounding the Banshee increased, choking the air. Dilana could feel it eating away at the shields. The Banshee looked at her and Magni, then smiled.

"Ah, I might not have you yet but I will have your kin."

Kieve and a female Banshee started to advance. Swiftly, Dilana moved her hands in rapid, intricate designs, carving gold symbols in the air. The Banshees stopped their deadly advance for a split second, then shook it off and continued forward. Dilana reached behind her back and touched the tattoo on the base of her spine. She felt it heat, then there was the cold brush of metal against her hand. Taking the small circle throwing disks, she infused them with power then threw them one after each other at each of the advancing Banshees.

The decaying three disintegrated as her disk hit each of them. They were the weakest. One of the beautiful-looking Banshees shrieked as the disk hit its shoulder. She saw thick blood ooze out. Grabbing another disk, she threw it and the injured Banshee shrieked as it died. The other female Banshee and Kieve were untouched. They were the most dangerous.

In a supplicant tone the uninjured female Banshee said, "Maji, you will die and the male Siren will be mine to mate with. I will expand our race and hunt your kind and bathe in your blood." Gracefully, the woman came toward her in a roll of power.

Smiling, Dilana levitated off the ground to face the woman. The female Banshee flew through the air to meet her.

"*Veitenos*," Dilana screamed.

The gauntlets flowed out of her wrists and up her arms covering them. Raising her arms up, she blocked the Banshee's nails from raking her. In a blur of motion too quick to be seen, the Banshee swiped again. Her nails penetrated the shields, making them drop. Swearing, Dilana somersaulted in midair out of the way before evaporating into smoke.

Reappearing behind the woman, Dilana watched as she looked for her. The woman looked at Magni and started for him. Magni brought out his gun and fired. The woman shrugged it off and kept going. Magni continued firing. Opening her hand palm outward, Dilana threw a bolt of energy. The woman ducked, drifting away from her across the clearing coming to rest against some trees. Focusing on the vines, Dilana made them slither downward to enclose the woman. Dilana concentrated on keeping her restrained as she settled back onto the ground.

"No," Aunty King screamed.

Turning, Dilana saw that Kieve was hacking away with power at the shield around Magni. Dilana felt a swell of power.

Aunty King dropped her shield and screamed. "*Gurnonileds.*"

Dilana was knocked off her feet as she felt the swell of power release. Kieve turned, opened his hand palm up and threw a bolt of black energy at Aunty King. Aunty King flew backward, then was still. Sitting up, Dilana felt power spread through Magni, his siblings and his cousins. Knowledge spread through the other beings in the community. Kieve turned back to Magni and smiled. Dilana jumped up straight into the air, flew across the space and landed, one leg bent and the other straight out, in between Magni and Kieve. Magni came and stood next to her. Without taking her attention from Kieve, she willed her dagger into Magni's hands. Murmuring, she made it into a sword.

Smiling at Kieve, she asked. "Did you really think it would be that easy?"

Raising her arms over her head wide apart, Dilana started to build power between her palms. Pure white energy crackled filling her as she drew on the resources of the center of the Earth. Kieve, realizing his peril, threw bolt after bolt of black lightning at

her. Magni got in front of her. In a blur of motion, he deflecting each one with the sword she had given him. Dilana watched calmly as she continued to build the energy. Desperate, Kieve shrieked. Dilana cut off his voice with a thought. Kieve shimmered to retreat and with her will Dilana brought him back.

Roaring in anger and fear, Kieve sent fire toward them. Dilana opened her mouth and blew a cold breeze to stop it. Feeling Kieve's desperation, Dilana whispered, "Now."

Fear leached across Kieve's face, as he knew he was about to die. With her mind, Dilana threw the ball of energy at Kieve while Magni pitched the sword at him. Kieve tried to run but was held still by Dilana's power. The energy ball hit Kieve in the chest and he disintegrated. Sulfur filled the air. Turning, Dilana glanced at Magni and smiled. He grinned, then his eyes widened. Turning quickly, she saw the woman break free then throw three dark green bolts at her, then disappear. From their color, Dilana knew they were soul-eaters and she had no way of stopping them.

The bolts reached her and Magni jumped in front of her. He collapsed under the strength of the power. The bolts sucked into his body and rolled through him, searching for escape. She could see the heat from the bolts rolling around his skin. Dropping to her knees she gathered him in her arms and screamed, "Magni!"

He whispered, pain in his voice, "God, that hurt. How bad is it?"

Tears blurred Dilana's vision as she watched the bolts start to suck out his life. "Damn you. Why did you go and do that? I can't live without you."

He reached up and touched her face. "I love you, Dilana."

His breathing grew labored. Dilana threw back her head and screamed. "Sari!"

A light flashed, then gold smoke formed. From within the gold smoke stepped a devastatingly beautiful woman. Her skin was onyx, her hair was silver piled atop her head in a ponytail that fell down her back. Mirrored shades covered her eyes and rested against sculpted cheeks. She took them off and her catlike green eyes gleamed while her full lips parted in a blood-red smile. A red floor-length coat covered a silver skintight

leather vest which stopped above her navel and her matching skirt started below her navel, flowing from her hips to mid-thigh. Her boots were red like her coat. She cocked her head and sniffed the air. A shudder rippled through her.

She turned back and looked at Dilana. "Death." There was a pleasure on her face. She circled the clearing, sniffing the area.

Dilana said nothing as Sari struggled with her nature. Sari turned back to Dilana, her face cold and eyes blank. Sari looked around and took in everything. She turned and headed for Aunty King.

"No, save Magni," Dilana demanded.

Sari didn't stop or look at her. "She has a more immediate need." Sari stopped over Aunty King's still body and said, "Live."

Aunty King gasped, then sat straight up. She looked up at Sari. Sari looked back at her.

Aunty King nodded, "Thank you."

Sari looked at her, tilted her head and asked. "You do not fear me?"

Aunty King laughed and replied, "Blunt, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"No, I don't fear you," Aunty King answered Sari's original question.

Sari laughed, then put out her hand. Dilana was surprised, Sari didn't touch anyone she didn't know very well or trust and even then it was a rare occurrence. Aunty King looked surprised, then took her hand and stood. They looked at each other and something passed between them. As one, they turned and walked over to Dilana.

Sari stood next to Magni as Aunty King kneeled. Sari looked at him. She did nothing.

"Help him."

Sari looked up at Dilana and replied, "I can't. He's going to die."

Chapter Six

"No. You have to help him."

Sari watched, her a cold look on her face. "I can't."

Dilana watched her in disbelief, then anger overcame her. Putting Magni down, Dilana stood and stepped into Sari's personal space, looking directly into her face. Sari didn't change expression. Dilana grabbed her by her coat and jerked her forward.

"Help him before I kill you," Dilana growled.

Sari didn't change expression. She looked over Dilana's head, pushed Dilana's hands up, broke her hold and swung her to her side, all in one motion. Dilana watched as more dark green soul-eater bolts raced to them. They hit Sari in her chest. The bolts circled her then a sucking sound came and it was gone. Sari looked over at the female Banshee.

"Die."

The Banshee screamed then rent apart and was no more. Sari turned back to Dilana.

"Where were we?"

Dilana shook her head. "Never mind. Please, Sari, help him!"

"I can't," Sari repeated.

Dilana dropped to her knees beside Magni. Taking him from his aunt, she held him close. He looked up at her, his eye glazed with oncoming death.

Sari continued, "You can help him."

Dilana looked up at her. "What?"

"You can save him."

"I don't have the power to heal soul-eater attacks, Sari." Dilana shook her head.

Sari shrugged. "Zarya said to tell you life is about living and death will follow without it."

Dilana's eyes narrowed. One of Zarya's powers was that of a seer and she loved to talk in obscure terms. As she thought about Zarya's message, Dilana reached up to push her hair back from her face. When her hand ran along the side of her neck, she felt a burning sensation. Looking down, she saw the *Zerquel* around her neck. She hadn't put it on or called it. Suddenly she remembered what Zarya had said, the *Zerquel* did as it pleased.

Instinctively, she leaned over Magni and kissed him, passionately eating at his mouth. She could feel something coming out of his mouth and into hers. Leaning back, she threw her head back and gulped it down and felt it burn her throat. The *Zerquel* heated, then the feeling was gone. A firm hand touched her cheek. Looking back down she saw Magni's clear amber gaze watching her.

He smiled. "Ah, *cherie*, give me the words."

"I love you." Dilana was surprised at the raw texture and deepness of her voice.

Magni drew her head down to her and kissed her. Dilana sank into him and kissed him back. She lost herself in the lush wetness of his mouth.

A hand tapped her on the shoulder as a voice said, "There will be enough time for that later."

Jerking away from Magni, Dilana looked up and saw his Aunty King standing next to Sari, grinning.

Magni laughed and said, "Aunty King, Dilana. Dilana, Aunty King."

Magni sat up and stood in a fluid motion. He put out his hand and helped her up. He rolled his head then put his arm around her.

Sari said, "The *Taremolgnoc* must be told."

"I'll take care of the stuffy supernatural council. They owe me a few things," Aunty King said as she came over and kissed his cheek then Dilana's, then stepped back beside Sari.

"The choice has been made," Aunty King said.

Magni grinned and said, "See you at Christmas."

Aunty King waved her hand and Dilana looked around, realizing that they were back on the beach close to the Rarities house.

Magni laughed then looked at her. Dilana knew things had changed now that he was a full Siren.

"No, I'm not."

Dilana eyes widened as she realized he could hear her thoughts.

"Not all of them, just some," Magni said, confirming. "As soon as I get this under control, I'll stop reading your thoughts."

Dilana looked at him. "That's okay. It might come in handy."

Magni laughed. "Dirty mind, dirty mind." He pulled her close and they strolled down the beach. "I'm not a Siren."

Dilana touched him with her senses. Her eyes widened as she realized that he was still human, albeit with some Siren powers.

Nearing the house, Magni asked. "Do you know the history of the Veils of the Burning Touch?"

"It predates Atlantis but I don't know anything else," Dilana answered.

Magni nodded. "Yes, it does but it has a more special place." They walked up the stairs to the house. He stopped her as they reached the door. "When Aunty King gave us the power, she told us what was done. Since she and Mom were the last of their race, the council wanted them to do as all Sirens have done. Mete out justice. They refused. When they did, an edict was passed down that their kids' power would be bound but

Aunty King and Mom could regain their power. Mom was immortal when Dad died but chose to die with her soul mate. Aunty King hasn't found hers yet or so she claims."

He paused and looked out at the sun coming up. "When the Banshee attacked Aunty King, she knew it was time to tell the truth. According to their birth and their family, each Siren has a special piece of jewelry that is theirs to give to the other half of their soul. Aunty King was the keeper of these pieces for her kids and us at least until the Banshee tried to take them. She had to encase them in protection and lose them. She couldn't take the chance the Banshees would find out where they were. She just sent them out without knowing where they would end up." He opened the door and drew her through it into the living room.

Dilana gasped as she saw the Veils of the Burning Touch floating in front of the window as the sun came up.

Magni continued. "The Veils of the Burning Touch is passed down to the first child born of Siren of the Taggart House. The veils are just a pretty piece of jewelry except when worn by the mate chosen by the firstborn. Will you wear the veils, Dilana?"

Magni watched her silently, waiting for her decision. Dilana knew what he was asking without him saying a word.

With a soft smile Dilana touched his cheek and looked at him. "Yes."

Watching the sensual smile that spread across his lips, Dilana's nipples tightened. Magni took her hand from his face and kissed the center of her palm. Letting go of her hands, he gently undressed her. Dilana saw that the veils had floated closer to them. Magni held out his hand and the veils pooled gently in his palm. He knelt and waited as she stepped into the veils. Dilana looked down at the top of Magni's head and heat scorched in between her legs where she was aching for him. Taking a step into the chains, he pulled them up, then settled them around her. He stood and Dilana saw he held two bracelets with the same design as the veils in his hand. He attached one to

each of her wrists, letting the chains running from them to hang down, trailing along the floor.

Magni stepped back and took the chains dangling from the veils around her waist. He watched her as he attached the nipple clamps to each of her breasts. Dilana moaned at the slight pain. He walked around her. Dilana heard the rustle of his clothing—then silence. The feel of his hands along her waist made her jump. He pulled her back into his body, cradling her against his arousal. Lightly, he rubbed against her. More wetness pooled between her thighs, running down her legs.

A fierce need filled her. She tried to turn but he held her in place. His hand skimmed down the side of her neck to her torso, before settling on her covered nipples. He tugged lightly on the chain. Dilana arched at the feel of her nipples being pulled taut. Suddenly the chains around her wrists rose off the floor up to the ceiling, stretching her hands above her head. Looking up, Dilana saw they were suspended in midair with nothing holding them. With a motion she tested them and realized she couldn't budge them. A delicious decadent feeling warmed her belly.

Magni's hand continued to wander down the front of her body, leaving sparks of heat in its wake.

"Look," Magni whispered against the side of her neck.

Looking across the room, Dilana saw a mirror float into the room before them. They looked as she had seen when she first touched Magni, sinfully erotic.

Magni rolled his eyes up to lock with hers. His amber gaze blazed with heat and his face was rigid with desire. Magni pushed her forward slightly and Dilana felt the chains draw her higher off the floor.

Magni whispered in a tightened voice. "The *Ecudes* isn't a Siren seduction. It is only with your mate that this is possible. It's the difference between going from semi-aroused to—" Dilana felt a weird sensation, then an electric current raced through her. All her nerve endings sensitized. Her pussy pulsed, her nipples felt like they were on fire and her body shook with desire.

Dilana threw her head back and screamed as pleasure racked her, taking her over the edge. It was continuous, bordering on that thin line of pain and pleasure. Magni's hand widened her legs and Dilana felt him probe her wetness. His growl rumbled against her neck, invoking even more ribbons of pleasure. Dilana could feel the orgasm increasing right there and ground her hips against the hands cupping her mound. Rotating her hips against his erection behind her, she fought to come. It wasn't happening. Impatient, she grabbed the chains above her head and raised herself more. Widened her stance more. It didn't help. Frustrated, she whimpered. Magni bit her neck gently and whispered, "I control your being able to find pleasure."

As he said "pleasure" tingles racked Dilana. He continued to stroke his fingers in and out of her aching core. Dilana felt him rub against her behind. She gasped. Rotating her ass against him, she was gratified to hear his groan. Magni grabbed her around the waist, bent her forward more and impaled her in one thrust.

"Come," Magni roared.

Explosions of pleasure racked her body as he pumped fast and furiously in and out of her. Grabbing on to the chains tighter, Dilana wailed as an orgasm hit her. Tremors racked her body, making it buck against his pumping hips. Magni's arms contracted tightly around her. Gasping, Dilana held on to the chains. With one finger he tapped each nipple clamp and Dilana felt a sizzle hit her aching nipples. Sounds of pleasure ripped from her throat as another orgasm overlaid the first one, continuing on without end.

Magni felt Dilana contracting around him as she continued to orgasm. Holding her hips, he pumped into her. Grunting at the feel of her walls sucking him in, the sound of her whimper spurred him on. Withdrawing until only the tip of his cock was in her, he looked down as he sank back into her slowly to the hilt. She bucked against him. Reaching around her, he burrowed his fingers between her wet, hot pussy lips, firmly stroking her clitoris. She rotated against him in countermotion. A groan ripped from

deep within. Stroking his fingers up and down her clit, he felt Dilana clench, then tumble over the edge again.

As he felt her go over he focused all his energies then pulsed.

“Mag—” she cried before it became soundless. Linking with her, he shared in the feeling of his penis erupting inside her. His cry mingled with hers as she got her voice back. Her cries of pleasure came from deep within, continuing as he continued to stroke her in a fiery crescendo. Her legs gave out and he tightened his arms, holding her in place for his taking. In and out he stroked her, touching her core, bringing her to fulfillment over and over again. Hoarse shouts rippled from her. With a roar, Magni felt the orgasm tighten his cock and pour out of him into her. Growling, he pulsed, continuing to ravish her.

As his hot seed continued to fill her body, Magni slowed down. With tender thrusts of his hips, he let her rest, knowing that there was a long day ahead. Dilana glanced over her shoulder, her gaze slumberous.

“More.” Her voice sounded raw from her screams.

Smiling, Magni kissed her as she came. He swallowed her screams.

* * * * *

Looking down at Dilana still wearing the veils, asleep, curled under the large bay window in the living room, Magni felt his cock stir again against his loose white pants. Striving for control, he looked out the window at the inky black night. After the last delicious bout of sex they’d had, they had taken a bath together. Then Dilana put the veils back on and they had sat in front of the window for a while before falling asleep. Glancing back at her, Magni smiled then kneeled.

He kissed her softly. She moaned and awoke, kissing him with a ravenous hunger. Drawing away, he looked at her and saw the same hunger he was feeling.

Shaking his head, Magni stood, drawing her to her feet. She stood, the veils tinkling around her.

"I have something to show you, Dilana."

"What?"

Magni smiled at her quizzical expression. Turning away from her, he went to the chair and picked up the dress he had there. She gasped and took a step toward him. Her hand reached out and stroked the rich burgundy fabric.

"Where did you get this?" Dilana asked as she took the dress from him.

"When I went upstairs, it was on the bed."

Dilana glanced at the dress then said. "Only Kali, my sister, would know me this well. It must be one of my Christmas gifts and her way of saying come home."

He stepped forward to help her put on the dress. It slid over the veils perfectly. The neckline was rounded, showing off the *Zerquel* and the tops of her full breasts. The sleeves were long and flared while the rest of the dress cascaded to the ground, flowing into a soft flare. It hugged all the right places. Taking her hand, Magni kissed the center of her palm. She smiled. Lacing his fingers with hers, he drew her up the stairs, down the hall, into the bedroom they shared and in front of the closed balcony doors.

Stopping, Magni watched Dilana, taking her other hand in his, and said. "Marry me, Dilana."

She smiled softly. "Yes, Magni, I'll marry you."

Pulling her to him, he lifted her off her feet and kissed her passionately. Putting her back gently on her feet, Magni turned and opened the balcony door. Dilana gasped and shock covered her face.

In disbelief, Dilana took in all the various beings in front of her and the beautiful decorations. "How did you do this?"

Magni laughed. "Aunty King is a hell of a planner."

"Congratulations, my daughter." Aunty King stepped up to her and kissed her cheek. As she stepped back, Dilana noticed that Aunty King was wearing the robes usually worn by the *Taremolgnoc*—the supernatural council members. Aunty King

winked. One by one, Magni's family greeted her. Suddenly a ferocious-looking man stepped forward and he glared at her. Not putting up with any nonsense, she glared back.

Suddenly he grinned and his face transformed to become devastating. "She'll do." His voice had a roughness that was strangely compelling.

"I don't need your permission, Tariq," Magni replied.

Tariq grunted and stepped away. As one, Magni's family walked away. Kali stepped forward, hugged her, then stepped back.

Dilana gripped her sister's hands. "Thank you."

Kali smiled then touched her arm. Dilana felt her clothing heat then, looking down she saw it had changed to iridescent silver. Kali turned and walked away. Stepping out onto the balcony with a glance, Dilana saw that each of the various beings had sent a representative. It was an honor. Her own people, the *Zuri Magi*, were present in great numbers. Turning, she viewed the shimmering platform of light leading from the balcony down to the beach. It was covered with holly, various colors of poinsettia and hibiscus—the local flower. Reaching over, she linked her fingers with Magni's.

They walked forward and stepped onto the shimmering platform. As she stepped onto the platform she saw K'laian, the Mer King, standing at the end of the platform. He caught her attention as he gestured with his hand, then haunting music started to play as out of the sea rose a platform with musicians. Dilana could see some of K'laian's people floating in the water and still others walked on land.

Looking at the crowd waiting for them below, Dilana saw that she was wrong. The other races didn't just send a representative, the leaders of each came, the council members were all in attendance and some of the rare creatures who didn't socialize had also come. Turning to Magni, she knew it wasn't just for her they came. They came to see the first male born of a Siren.

Releasing his hand, she placed her palm in the middle of his chest. The center of her palm burned. Removing it, she watched as the light glittered off her gift to her future

husband. The medallion hung on a thick chain and on the medallion was her emblem, a declaration that he was hers. Taking his hand again, Dilana walked with him down the platform until they reached the three people standing at the edge of the sea.

The real N'ic Kolas Klaus was standing closest and he grinned at her, then winked. He turned with a sensuous grace and walked away. Dilana watched as his lithe body disappeared into the crowd. Turning back to the other two people, Dilana saw that Zarya wore the robes of blessing, as she would expect. The other person was Ja'rul, the head of the *Taremolgnoc* and his presence surprised her. Deciding not to question it, Dilana turned to face Magni as the marriage chant started. Repeating her vows and listening to him repeat his, Dilana felt her love well up in her. The sound of sleigh bells echoed in the air, signaling the arrival of Christmas. Magni said the words she knew would be special to her always.

"Merry Christmas, my wife."

Looking up into Magni's eyes, Dilana replied, "Merry Christmas, my love."

Magni leaned in to kiss her as fireworks lit the sky.

About the Author

Taige Crenshaw has been enthralled with the written word from the time she picked up her first book. It wasn't long before she started to make up her own tales of romance.

Her novels are set in today between people who know what they want and how to get it. As well as in the future of vast universes between beautiful, strange and unique beings. There is lots of spice and sensuality added to her work.

Always hard at work creating new and exciting places, Taige can be found curled up with a hot novel with exciting characters when she is not creating her own. Join her in the fun, frolic, interesting people and far reaches of the world in her novels.

Taige welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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