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Last Strathulian Standing

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LAST STRATHULIAN STANDING

Daisy Dexter Dobbs

Chapter One

In the Distant Antediluvian Past, When the World Was Young

The waning sun seared the horizon with liquid shades of red and orange, burnishing the forest with tones of gold. Aydon surveyed the land, eager for tendrils of the night sky's deep purple to descend, providing a measure of asylum from those in pursuit. As he neared a clearing, the stench of days' old death mixed with smoke assailed his nostrils. Layered over the sounds of crackling fire, he heard a woman's voice raised in entreaty.

Aydon crept closer, employing well-honed hunter skills avoiding any noise that might signal his presence. The dense brush provided adequate cover as he crouched, spying the scene of abject grief before him. While hardened by recurrent confrontations with death, the mournful wailings of a female grieving still touched what was left of his battle-scarred heart.

"O great Shorana," the woman cried to the heavens. "Goddess of the spirit world, ruler of the dead, receive Runako into your fold. Keep this good and venerable man close to your breast. Let him suckle your soothing milk of tranquility to ready him for his journey to Niranjana."

As near as Aydon could tell, the bloodied figure of a young man lay in the midst of dry brushwood, arms—what was left of them—crossed over his chest. The woman, who held a blazing torch in one hand, became almost inaudible as she leaned in close, speaking words that Aydon imagined were loving and tender.

Before she could set the kindling alight, a heinous roar pierced the air. From the other side of the clearing, a pair of ragged, hairy giants raced toward her, brandishing crude weaponry. The cold malevolence in their eyes was clearly visible to Aydon, even from a distance.

The gray cast to their flesh, raised purple veins pulsing beneath their skin and third eye in the center of their foreheads clearly delineated the formidable duo as Pushgans.

The woman sprang to her feet with swift, catlike precision. Aydon expected her to run but she stood firm, chin raised in defiance.

“By gods, can I not even be allowed to send him to Niranmar with a proper farewell before you do your evil bidding?” she yelled with unconcealed bitterness, motioning to the man’s body with her torch.

The pair, whose visages seemed devoid of the light of intelligence, spared a brief glance at each other before continuing to lope toward the woman.

“We thought we finished the job,” one of the men said as he reached her, dragging her close and knocking the torch from her hand. Though dwarfed by his mass, she fought valiantly, kicking, elbowing, punching and scratching.

“She must be a witch to have survived the onslaught,” the other man said.

“Then we’ll fuck her witch cunt and burn her,” the first man said with unfettered zeal. His fingers went to his breeches.

Acting on impulse long ingrained, Aydon broke through the brush, his long sword held high as he let forth a battle cry. All three became motionless for an instant, caught in surprise. The Pushgan who sought to overtake the woman seized her, clamping his arm in front of her neck and holding a knife to her flesh.

The other behemoth growled and headed for Aydon, a knife in each meaty hand. While regarded as a man of considerable height, iron muscle and intimidating presence, Aydon was no physical match for the monster-man’s bulk. However, quicker, lighter on his feet and unquestionably more clever, Aydon proved to have the advantage.

In little time and sustaining only a few bloody gashes to his arms, chest and legs, Aydon had conquered the Pushgan. With one mighty disemboweling slash of his sword from skull to groin, he split the giant open like a plump sheep, sending him straight to the pits of hell where he belonged.

"One step in her direction and I'll slit her open, just as you did my brother," the other man threatened, his voice warbling with emotion as he eyed his fallen kin sprawled atop a grim heap of bloated corpses.

His knife point was pressed firmly enough against the woman's neck to draw a trickle of blood. Though she maintained incredible calm, Aydon knew the woman had little chance to free herself. Her captor's blade could easily sink into her flesh, severing her head with a swift sidelong stroke.

"Release the wench and come face me like a man," Aydon goaded. "Or are you fearful that I'll spill your innards all over the earth just as I have your dull-witted brother's?"

A corner of the Pushgan's mouth curled into a foul smile as his eyes locked with Aydon's. With his free hand he fumbled with his breeches.

"So, you are eager to taste the point of my blade, puny one," he said to Aydon. "Fear not. Your turn will come, as soon as I satisfy myself in this wench's hot hole. Then I'll let her watch as I slice your belly wide."

The woman's eyes widened briefly. She guarded her fear well. Aydon gazed at the pair, focusing his attention on the woman, who looked as filthy, matted and unkempt as her subjugator and his dead brother. But, grime aside, he sensed she possessed some sharpness of mind – more than the other man, at least.

"Go ahead, take her," Aydon bluffed. "She is no concern of mine."

His gaze on the woman intense, Aydon inclined his head to the right with a slow movement, hoping she'd understand his intention. He watched as she too, slanted her head, gradually enough to avoid alerting the man.

As soon as there was enough clearance, Aydon whipped the small knife from its place at his side. With a singing arc it careened through the air until it met its mark – the eye in the center of the man's forehead. Sunk to the hilt, his knife adorned the Pushgan's skull as if he had been born with a knife handle as a horn.

As the giant fell, the woman let forth with a small cry. She fell to her knees, head lowered and shoulders shaking.

Aydon went to the smoldering torch first, snatching it from the dirt and sticking it back into the fire to light it once more. With the flame strong again, he strode to her side, lifting her to her feet with a gentleness he thought long gone.

"I will stand guard as you light the funeral pyre for your dead husband...or was he your lover?"

"My brother," the woman said, raising her eyes to Aydon's as she accepted the proffered torch. "You have saved my worthless life. I am forever in your debt."

"That's not necessary. I release you from any such allegiance. Just see to your brother quickly and then be gone so we can avoid further attention and I can be on my way."

The woman looked kindly upon the visage of her brother's corpse, chanting softly as she touched the blazing torch to the brushwood. It wasn't long before his broken body was consumed by flame.

She picked up the short sword at her feet and strode back to the body of the newly horned heathen whose open eyes were fixed in a death stare. "In my brother's name, with my brother's sword, Pushgan, I cast the final blow to your vile body and pray that your worthless soul be hurled straight to hell."

Lifting the sword high, she plunged it into his chest, drew it out and then thrust it again, this time at the juncture between the dead man's thighs. Aydon winced, his hand instinctively cradling his own cock as he watched the sword meet its mark.

Bending over the Pushgan, she grasped the necklace he wore, yanking it over his head and affixing the dangling charm to her own neck.

She tramped to the gutted corpse of his brother and repeated the plunge of pointed steel into chest and groin. "May you join your brother in eternal agony, you foul, despicable Pushgan dog."

Aydon wholly understood her actions and apparent state of mind, for he'd been there countless times himself. He found it surprising and admirable that a lone woman besieged by brutal carnage embodied such spirit. Most women would likely be cowering and babbling in hysteria by now.

After finishing the gruesome twin acts of finality, the woman wiped the bloody sword on the heathen's garment and then sheathed it at her side.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" she solicited Aydon. "I know what it is you want. Come on then," she urged, her stance firm and proud. "You may as well get it over with and be on your way. I have no fight left in me."

Something inside Aydon's chest coiled tight at the realization that she was offering herself to him.

He found it challenging to look in the woman's eyes, for her gaze was impossibly bleak, as if she bore the weight of the world upon her small shoulders.

With all the gentleness he could gather, Aydon answered, "I assure you, I want nothing but your safety and well-being." He managed a smile meant to ease her qualms. "Night falls soon. Off with you quickly now. Go back to your people and take refuge."

Before responding the woman cocked her head, giving him a strange look, as if trying to detect his true motives for rescuing her.

"I have no people," she said, her shoulders slumping, her voice weary. "These were the last." She motioned to the grim horror of corpses around her. "I am the last of my tribe. The last Strathulian standing."

"You are from Strathul? What are you doing so far from your city?"

She appeared to be in the midst of an internal quandary, studying Aydon while trying to decide whether or not to converse with him.

"By Tordanuk of Pushga's decree, Strathul was annihilated," she explained. "Every structure demolished. Men, women and children violated and slaughtered with a sick

sense of jollity. The survivors fled, only to be tracked down to face a bloodbath where we now stand."

She breathed a sigh. "The Pushgans you've just slain were part of the horde that attacked us. That one," she pointed to the horned and castrated corpse, "is the fiend who slew my brother." She fingered the silver charm at her throat. "He took this from around my brother's neck after plunging a sword through his heart."

Aydon took in the butchery around them. "How did you manage to survive?"

"After several of Tordanuk's cutthroats violated me, they turned their attention to others. Ravaged, I had no fight left in me and crawled away like a coward to hide my bruised and bloodied body among the lifeless remains of my people."

A single tear coursed down the woman's dirt-covered face, leaving a trail of surprisingly fair skin through the caked brown mud. Aydon winced at the thought of this young female being desecrated by a ruthless band of soldiers, drunk with the revelry of butchery and sex. He lifted her chin with his knuckle and smiled.

"What is your name?"

"I am called Jia-Nian."

"No, you were not a coward. Hold your head high, Jia-Nian, and leave here knowing you did all that you could to brace against Tordanuk's men. A young woman is no match for such brutes."

"Young." Jia-Nian spat a humorless laugh. "Yes...I remember a time when I was young and innocent. A time when I had faith and hopes and dreams. But that has taken leave along with my virginity and everything I ever loved. Today I sent my older brother to Niranmar. Three days ago, to no avail, I fought a man who defiled my mother and then hacked into her heart with his axe."

Jia-Nian's eyes filled with tears. "As I lay pinned by a captor invading my virgin channel, I watched my father's head severed as he battled to protect my younger brother and sister. And then I saw those Pushgan beasts violate both my brother and sister, mere children, before hacking them to death."

The expression on Jia-Nian's face spoke of dark, evil, unthinkable atrocities that no woman or child should ever know of firsthand. Aydon's heart softened. It was no wonder she had great difficulty in choosing whether or not to trust him.

"No, I am no longer young," she said. "I feel as old as the blood-soaked earth beneath my feet."

"There is a small village called Farkol less than a day's journey past those rocks," Aydon said, gesturing to the craggy rock formations. "Go there. They are good people. You will be safe there."

"No." Jia-Nian shook her head. "I am coming with you. I am your slave to command at will. Forevermore I will serve you, do my best to protect you, use my healing skills on you after you return from battle."

Aydon grasped her shoulders, looking down into her determined face and he smiled. "Jia-Nian—"

"What is your name?"

"I am Aydon the Bold, Guardian of Zalvanus."

"Zalvanus...that's where my people were headed before Tordanuk's men caught up with us. In fact, Zalvanus is the reason Tordanuk loosed his vengeance upon us."

"He tried to convince the Strathulians to join his cause against Zalvanus," Aydon easily surmised.

"Yes. We refused. The Zalvaneans have always been kind and good to us, seeing that we were never without food or medicine when needed. Their healers saved our people from plagues and restored men torn in battle. No, there was no way we would ever consider joining forces with that madman Tordanuk to aid his quest to conquer Zalvanus."

Jia-Nian's shoulders straightened. Her chin thrust high. "The people of Strathul made the decision to fight to the death. And that we did...except for a lone survivor."

Aydon's eyes narrowed as his gaze fell on the heap of corpses. "How did the bodies come to be gathered in such a manner? Surely Tordanuk's men weren't so orderly."

"I did it," Jia-Nian said, great sadness in her eyes as she looked to the fetid pile of flesh. "One by one, I dragged each of the dead out of the brush and into the clearing so I could make a communal funeral pyre for my people. Each of them deserves the traditional ritual farewell that I gave my brother."

Aydon was taken aback, his admiration for the woman mounting. "For any man the grisly feat would have taken great strength and resolve, but performed by a woman so slight? You amaze me, Jia-Nian."

She gave a resigned nod. "I prayed to the great Ko'Loran for strength and he graced me with the vigor I needed to complete the task. I have learned that even someone small becomes capable of surprising feats under unforeseen circumstances." She drew in a deep breath, releasing it with weighty measure.

"You have already done so much for me, a mere stranger, Aydon. Your lack of selfishness fills my heart with gratitude. I am truly blessed to have the good fortune of being rescued by one of the legendary Guardians of Zalvanus."

"I thank the gods that I happened by at the right moment," he replied.

A nearly imperceptible smile played at her lips as Jia-Nian looked up at him. "I-I hate to be more trouble than I already have, but I fear I have little strength or stamina to see to the rest of the task myself. Would you mind helping me..." Her voice trailed off as she gazed at the bodies.

"There is ample kindling around us," Aydon answered, fully comprehending her unspoken need. "We will gather and position it together and then set it aflame while you speak the necessary words."

"I am grateful, thank you. The thought of leaving my people to the buzzards and vermin is just too overwhelming. If I may ask just one final favor, Aydon?" Jia-Nian looked up at him, her weary gaze suddenly firing with the heat of anger.

"Name it."

Wordlessly she gestured to the giant Aydon had gutted. "The Pushgan is too big for me to move. Will you drag him away? I refuse to include him as I honor the Strathulians."

It was an undertaking Aydon was glad to manage. Before too long the mound of bodies were ablaze. Jia-Nian gathered up her satchels, stringing them over her head and across her shoulder. It was clear to Aydon that she was as eager to flee the overpowering smell of burning flesh as he.

"Come, I will give you a ride to Farkol. You need rest and recovery, Jia-Nian."

"A ride? On your shoulders?"

Aydon laughed. He positioned two fingers at his lips and whistled. "Danior!" In a moment a fine, sleek brown horse burst through the bramble, galloping to its master's side.

"What a magnificent animal," Jia-Nian breathed, smoothing the horse's mane. The horse responded with an affectionate nudge to her breast.

"Behave yourself, Danior." Aydon glanced at Jia-Nian and smiled. "It's been a long time since Danior received praise from a woman," Aydon explained.

Aydon patted one of the goatskin pouches slung over the horse's back. "I regret that I cannot offer you water or wine, Jia-Nian. My supply is dry and needs to be replenished."

"That's all right." Aydon watched the tip of her tongue peek out to traverse lips that appeared bone dry. "Thank you. I appreciate your concern. Where are you headed?" she asked.

"Zalvanus."

"You don't resemble a Zalvanean with their slender, lithe forms," Jia-Nian noted, giving him a thorough once-over. "And your voice bears a different sound from theirs."

"I am from Yassaria," Aydon explained. "Our tribe was also aided by the wise, generous and capable Zalvaneans. Generations ago they bestowed upon our people

added physical strength and inborn survival skills. We have gladly used those gifts in service to them and have since earned the honor of becoming sanctioned Guardians of Zalvanus."

Jia-Nian nodded. "I have heard only good things about them. Do all the Yassarian men become guardians?"

"Willingly. Every male is trained from the age of twelve. At sixteen they proudly bear the title of Guardian. We have pledged our loyalty, our might, our hearts and souls to keep Zalvanus safe. It is a good and worthy life we live."

A familiar flapping of wind caught Aydon's attention and he glanced skyward. Though still far in the distance, the flying beast was instantly recognizable.

"A dragon approaches," he said. "Probably one of Tordanuk's. There is no time to spare, Jia-Nian. No more time for conversation."

"You will take me to Zalvanus with you," Jia-Nian stated, "so that I too, may offer my services there. Now help me mount this great beast of yours, Aydon the Bold. We must make haste."

"Jia-Nian, I already told you —"

For one so small, her sigh of frustration was mighty.

"I have already told you what I have been through these past days, Aydon. Do you truly believe that I will be deterred by your protests? If so, think again." She glared up at him, eyeball-to-eyeball.

Aydon admired her resolve but the last thing he needed was a woman slowing him down. Especially a grieving woman. He looked at her garments. They were ragged and the same mud-color as her face and hair. Her limbs were caked with dirt and blood and the gods only knew what else. Dung, from the smell of her. The woman was in sore need of a thorough soaking in the river.

The good people of Farkol would see to her cleanliness needs as well as provide sustenance. The scrawny woman could do with some meat on her bones.

"Traveling with me is not safe, Jia-Nian. I am targeted for death by Tordanuk. Your life is at risk as long as we remain together, which is why —"

"Which is why you need me with you to protect you, to see to your wounds." She feathered a touch around the gash on his biceps and circled the one on his chest. "I can tend to your torn flesh, Aydon. I learned healing skills from my mother and grandfather. He was a Zalvanean, schooled in the healing arts." She gazed upon him intently, gripping his forearm. "You *need* me."

Aydon noticed then that her eyes were gray. Like stormy seas. Like the sky before thunderous rain. She was so firm, so unwavering. The little bit of a thing honestly believed she could be an asset to him. Were it not for the fact that it would insult her, Aydon would have let loose with laughter.

"You waste precious time with the dragon fast approaching," Jia-Nian continued. "Like it or not, I am yours. If you abandon me to some village or under the stars while I sleep, I will track you. I will find you. I will adhere to you like mud adheres to brick in the hot sun. I swear to you, Aydon, I will —"

Aydon lifted the woman by the waist, setting her atop Danior. She let out a gasp of surprise.

"If for no other reason than to give me sweet respite from your unceasing chatter, I will allow you to accompany me." He mounted his horse, settling behind the woman, hoping for a shock of wind to come blow the stink from her.

"We will find a place to sleep." He caught a substantial whiff as she turned her head to offer a smile of thanks. "Near a river," he added.

Chapter Two

With her back nestled firm against her valiant rescuer, Jia-Nian felt safer than she had in days. If the big brave barbarian hadn't emerged from the forest in a burst of fury, assailing the hulking twin foes, she would be dead by now. Or worse.

Even before he told her he was one of the elite Guardians of Zalvanus, Jia-Nian somehow sensed that Aydon was principled, honorable. Or perhaps it was no more than wishful thoughts calming her soul as he spoke to her, assuring her his only interest was for her safety and well-being. In any case, it seemed as though a lifetime—a grueling, horrific lifetime—had passed since she'd felt safe and secure in the company of a male.

An indulgent sigh escaped her lips. If only the time and circumstances were different. She'd dreamed so often of one day meeting a man like Aydon the Bold. A handsome, dark-haired stranger with bronzed skin and eyes the color of the sunlit sea. Of being swept up in the arms of a broad-shouldered warrior with a wide chest and narrow waist. Of feeling well-muscled arms and thighs close around her as he claimed her and made her his own.

Her feminine core throbbed at the thought and damp desire settled between Jia-Nian's thighs. Odd how even after all of the carnage, all of the grief, the fear, hate and despair, her body still responded to the romantic notion of a more innocent time. A time when she was young and carefree and eager to be bedded for the first time by her husband.

That magical night she would offer the prize of her virginity to the man she loved.

Looking blindly ahead as Danior trotted through the forest, Jia-Nian sneered. Her naïve dreams and fantasies had been cruelly snatched away, replaced by the stark, repulsive ugliness of reality.

She all but sighed as Aydon's strong arm wrapped around her belly in a protective gesture as they rode. Her eyes closed as she held her hand against his. There was a blessed inner knowing that she had no need to fear Aydon's touch.

Perhaps for their brief ride together she could pretend. She could imagine that she was still innocent and lighthearted and that Aydon was transporting her to his house. To their marriage bed, where they would begin a happy life together.

Jia-Nian's eyes popped open. Such thinking was foolish. Stupid, pointless and irrational.

Remembering the oft-repeated teachings of her mother and grandmother, Jia-Nian was well aware she no longer possessed anything of value to offer a good, fine man like Aydon. Sullied and robbed of her virginity, her future held no hope of love or a husband who would love and respect her.

All she was good for now was securing a role as a concubine...or hiring herself out as a whore.

The bleak idea chilled her, until she thought of Aydon and his needs. A reassuring inner voice whispered to her that it would be different with him. There would be no cruelty, no ugliness when he touched her. She felt certain.

She owed her life to him. Perhaps he would welcome her services as a concubine. A frown took hold as Jia-Nian imagined standing by and watching as he one day took a sweet virginal wife. He'd cherished her, treat her like gold, while he satisfied his carnal urges by fucking his concubines simply for the sake of fucking.

After she had set her brother's funeral pyre and that of her fellow villagers alight, Jia-Nian feared Aydon would refuse her company and deposit her in the hands of the kind villagers of whom he spoke. And what would come of her then?

There could be no pairing or wedding. No birthing and nurturing her man's babes. No tending her husband's abode as a good wife should...

It was just as well, Jia-Nian decided. After surviving one heinous bloodbath after another, she was probably no longer capable of providing such gentle, womanly

comforts as a soft lap for babes or to tend to garment repair or see to the preparation of meals.

Perhaps once, but no more.

No, Jia-Nian felt certain it was her destiny to reach Zalvanus, as her people had strived to do before their slaughter. While she may not be constructed of sinew and muscle like Aydon the Bold, who could no doubt slay great throngs of Pushgans, she would proudly represent the Strathulians. Her skills at healing would be welcomed during a siege. And she already knew how to use a knife and short sword, how to wield a spear and manage a bow and arrows.

She may be dishonored and alone in the world, but she still had value. Worth. She was needed. The Zalvaneans needed her and she'd make damn well certain Aydon the Bold realized he needed her too.

"I am familiar with this spot," Aydon said from behind her, drawing Jia-Nian out of her reverie. "A small river flows to the right and there are stunted rock formations to provide adequate cover while we slumber. We should be relatively safe here for the night."

"Is the water drinkable?" Jia-Nian asked as he brought Danior to a halt. "My throat is so parched. I can't remember the last time I had anything to drink."

"Safe to drink...as well as for bathing," Aydon answered, looking away from her. "Should you be so inclined."

Jia-Nian laughed at that. It was the first time in days she'd felt so much as a speck of good humor. She could well imagine her soiled appearance, not to mention the smell. The stench of death that she feared would never wash off.

"What a foul and filthy eyesore I must be. My apologies, Aydon. Tending to personal cleanliness has not been primary in my thoughts these past days. Will you stand guard for me as I bathe and wash my garment? I won't take long."

"I will. Take all the time you need," Aydon responded with a smile. "Please."

After giving the site a broad check, certain it was reasonably safe, he led Jia-Nian to the river. The air was balmy. A brush of his fingers through the water proved it to be temperate as well.

As Jia-Nian stepped into the water, fully clothed, Aydon watched, wondering what might be beneath that crust of muck covering her from head to toe. It was probably too much to hope that she was mildly eye-catching, through he certainly wouldn't mind sitting across a fire from an appealing woman. It had been far too long since –

“Oh, Aydon, never have I felt anything so wondrous, so life restoring,” Jia-Nian called, interrupting his lusty recollections. “The water is just right and so refreshing. You must come join me so I can clean your wounds.”

“It's best if I remain on the riverbank to keep watch for intruders,” he said, smiling at the spirited sound of her voice. He knew the feeling of a good soaking after staring in Death's grim face.

He focused on the woman as she ducked under the water. She remained beneath its surface for so long he became concerned. Just as he stirred from his spot against a tree to come after her, Jia-Nian's naked form sprang up. Her arms outstretched, she held her garment in one hand. She'd clearly taken some time to scrub her face and hair, not to mention her torso.

By Ko'Loran, Aydon had never expected such a sight. The woman he beheld was lithe and shapely. In the milky glow of moonlight her pale limbs were like alabaster, her countenance the loveliest he could remember. And her breasts, ah, her breasts were generous handfuls with dusky nipples from which water beaded and dropped.

As Aydon gaped, his cock grew hard. Anticipation to glimpse her cunt uncoiled with a slow burn through his loins. He shifted his stance, the soft buff-colored leather of his breeches molding tight against his expanding dick.

“Come in, Aydon. You must experience the soothing tonic these waters provide.”

A lifetime of guardian training seemed to flee his senses as he stood watching her, wanting her. It was madness. Lunacy! The woman had just set a funeral pyre for her

dead brother and the rest of her people. What sort of man would be fixed on the idea of filling a grieving woman's cunt with his cock?

Jia-Nian scrubbed her clothes together, alternately rinsing and wringing. Aydon found he was unable to shift his gaze from her breasts, which bobbed in the water like ripe fruits as she rubbed the garment, plunging it in and out of the water.

"I could have slit your throat from ear to ear before you even realized it," a voice came from behind Aydon, startling him. "Look at you with your lust-fogged expression. Guardian indeed."

"You," Aydon said, looking over his shoulder. "Is it that time already?" He looked to the sky and its full lustrous moon before returning his attention to the lush woman in the river. "I know. I've been lax. Foolish. But can I be blamed? She's a beauty, isn't she, Danior? Who knew that under all that filth a goddess dwelled?"

"She has my cock hard as granite," Danior replied.

"Mine as well," Aydon admitted. "But she's grieving the loss of her brother and her tribe. This is no time for us to be—"

"Look at her," Danior coaxed. "She's so beautiful and all but offering her ripe, womanly gifts to you, Aydon. Anyone can see she's in need of a man's strong arms, a few tender words whispered in her ear, broad fingers stroking her flesh, seeking her soft, wet cunt."

"If I as much as touch her I doubt I'd be able to control myself," Aydon said, hating to admit the weakness, especially after he'd come face-to-face with more than one evil sorceress in the form of a seductress. He should know better. He should have more control over his wayward cock. The ill-disciplined appendage would be his downfall yet.

"I have a feeling she'd welcome the flesh-to-flesh contact, my friend."

"A comforting, companionable squeeze, perhaps," Aydon said. "The way my loins smolder at the sight of her I'd be more like to pounce, ravaging her."

"Gods, Aydon, it's been near an eternity since I've been gloved by a woman's hot core. Think of it...you in front and me in back. At least the first time. We'll take turns. We can keep at it all night, until the first light of dawn when I am no longer human."

"She was a virgin, Danior. Tordanuk's men despoiled her just days ago," Aydon explained.

"Pushgans...callous, merciless scum," Danior said. "If I could only have one night of battle with them, I'd gut them and stuff their mouths with their own cocks."

"I'd like nothing more than to face them in battle with you at my side again, Danior." Aydon clasped the man's shoulder, giving it a hearty squeeze. "We always made a formidable team."

"That we did," Danior agreed.

"As for our naked little goddess," Aydon cautioned, "before we come to the point where we're courting any notions of thrusting into her warm, wet slit, there's the matter of explaining *you* to her, Danior. Have you forgotten that?"

"She likes me already," Danior boasted, a satisfied grin evident in his voice. "She said I was a magnificent animal."

"Aydon, please, won't you join me?" Jia-Nian called.

Aydon saw her eyes widen as she spotted Danior, wearing the furs that served as his saddle earlier. She lowered her body into the river until only her head was above the rippling water.

"Are you all right, Aydon? Do you need me?"

Her question brought a smile to Aydon's lips.

"The sprite strives to be your protector," Danior noted with a chuckle.

"She has spirit. Fortitude," Aydon answered. "A braver woman I've never met." He called to Jia-Nian, "All is well. There's nothing to fear. This man is a friend. A fellow Guardian of Zalvanus."

Jia-Nian's arms came up high as she slipped her drenched garment over her head. Standing tall, she clasped her long wet tresses, wringing the water from them before wading for the shore.

"Pity to have those glorious tits cloaked," Danior told Aydon.

"We'll have to coax her out of that sopping garment," Aydon said. "For her own good, of course."

"Of course," Danior agreed.

"She'll succumb to the night air if she stays like that." Aydon looked at his friend. "You'll give her your furs to keep her warm."

Danior's eyebrow arched. "And what will I wear?"

Aydon's gaze dropped to the considerable bulge at Danior's groin. He reached up, plucking a slender olive leaf from the tree they stood under. Sporting a devilish grin, he offered it to Danior.

Danior's laughter was full and deep. "You'd best secure an entire branch of leaves to cover what's under these furs." He patted his groin.

"Your garments are where they always are," Aydon said, thumbing toward his saddle bags. "These," he fingered the furs slung over Danior's shoulder, "will be warmer for Jia-Nian."

"It's good to meet another Guardian of Zalvanus," Jia-Nian said as she neared the pair. "If it were not for Aydon's brave intervention, I would be drifting among the shades now, with little hope of safe passage to Nirranjan."

Danior took one of her hands in his, smoothing his thumb across her knuckles before kissing them. "It's good to meet you as well, Jia-Nian. Finally."

"Finally?" Her brow furrowed. "I don't understand."

"Do you know of Shivrane?" Aydon asked. "Tordanuk's evil—"

"Sorceress," Jia-Nian finished, clutching herself as if a sudden gust of northern wind had chilled her blood. "Yes, I have had the great displeasure to be in her malevolent presence."

"So have I," Aydon said. "And so has Danior." He gestured to his friend.

Jia-Nian frowned again. "Danior...but that's the name of your—" Her eyes widened with comprehension as she eyed Danior and gasped.

"His horse," Danior completed her thought. "It is my hope, Jia-Nian, that you find me as magnificent an animal in human form as you did when I had four legs." He offered a charming smile.

"Shivrane of Pushga did this to you? Why?"

"It was during an escape from Tordanuk's dungeon," Danior said simply.

Aydon's arm came up and around Danior's shoulder, clasping it. "Danior and a small band of guardians found a way inside Tordanuk's fortress. They saved not only me, but three other guardians and near twenty villagers from nearby lands. We were torn, bloodied and near death after days of torture. Danior carried me on his back to safety."

"And I'm still carrying him on my back," Danior quipped, rubbing his spine.

"Is that when Shivrane discovered him?" Jia-Nian asked.

Aydon shook his head. "No, it was on Danior's third trip back inside to carry out the last of the survivors. By that time at least one of Tordanuk's guards had revived and gone to seek help. Hearing the guard's account, Shivrane materialized in the dungeon. Before Danior and the others could escape, the sorceress had worked her wicked magic, cursing Danior and the guardians who helped him by turning them into shapeshifters."

"One of them was my brother, D'Akola," Danior said, his jaw muscle clenching.

"Another horse?" Jia-Nian asked.

"A dragon," Aydon told her.

"Oh..." She looked at the ground, nudging fallen leaves with her toes and clearly at a loss for words at hearing such heinous news.

"I'd like to think he's a good dragon...if there is such a thing," Danior offered."

"Yes...I'm sure he is." Jia-Nian patted his arm. "Have you seen your brother since Shivrane's curse?"

Danior shook his head. "It's been three years now."

"Tell me about your own shapeshifting, Danior," Jia-Nian changed the subject.

"It is only by night, at the light of the moon, that I can take human form," he explained. "I have the ability to shift back into horse form at night if needed, but by day I remain a horse, no matter what." He gave a wry smile. "At least the bitch didn't turn me into a centaur. I would have hated that." Danior shuddered.

Aydon thought he saw a tear glistening in Jia-Nian's eye.

"You are as brave, mighty and selfless as Aydon the Bold," she said.

"Danior is a far better man than I," Aydon claimed. "He has more than earned his title Danior the True, for a man could ask for no truer friend. Because of his noble deed—because I was foolish enough to be caught by Tordanuk's men—Danior is cursed for life. It is evil and unjust. It should be me," he pounded his chest, "bearing Shivrane's hateful curse."

"Three years," Danior said, rolling his eyes and looking to the heavens. "Three years I've had to put up with Aydon's whining. How many times do I have to remind you, thick-headed one," Danior rapped on Aydon's skull with his knuckles," that you would have done the same for me if the situation had been reversed?"

Jia-Nian rested her hand on Aydon's biceps. "Danior is right, Aydon. I saw you in action today. You're a hero if ever there was one. If it were Danior in captivity, you would have done the same for him. You're not to blame because Shivrane spouted those evil words."

"Aydon forgets that he has saved me more times than I can remember these past three years," Danior said. "I've had my horse legs, rear, neck and belly pierced by arrows, gashed by spears and otherwise wounded as Aydon battled the Pushgans."

"As you bravely carried me on your back into the midst of chaos," Aydon added.

"While other horses lay dying on the battleground," Danior went on, "their riders long gone in search of safety, Aydon remained, tending to my wounds. At the light of the moon when I took human form he would carry me to shelter until I was well enough to stand and gallop again."

"You're both heroes," Jia-Nian stated. "And stubborn ones at that. Aydon, you saved me from certain death at the hands of Tordanuk's fiends. Danior, you saved me from further harm by carrying me on your back to safety. I am eternally indebted to you both and forever in your service."

She kissed Aydon's cheek and then Danior's.

"You need to get naked," Danior said.

Jia-Nian's eyes widened. Her jaw clenched and her body stiffened for a moment before she recovered her composure. "Of course," she said. "If that is what you wish." She reached for the sopping hem of her tattered garment and Aydon stilled her hand.

"He means you must get out of your wet garment before you become chilled to your center," Aydon explained. He went to the satchels on the ground that had been secured to Danior's back earlier and drew out a tunic and leather breeches, similar to the ones he wore. He tossed them to Danior.

"He can wear that while you wear his furs," Aydon said. "They'll keep you warm as the night blackens."

"Thank you." Jia-Nian rubbed her arms and shivered. "The night air fast obscures the balmy day breeze, shrouding us in its cold. It would be good to get into some dry garb."

Aydon's gaze went to the wet cloth plastered to her skin. Her nipples stood out in pebbled relief. The outline of her cunt perfectly etched. His cock reacted accordingly to the enticing sight.

Danior went to the place where Aydon picked up the satchel and grabbed a length of narrow rope. "You can belt the furs with this," he said, offering it to Jia-Nian. "I'll build a fire for light and heat. Then Aydon and I will see what we can track down for dinner."

Jia-Nian closed her eyes and smiled, her hand resting on her belly. "That sounds wonderful. I haven't eaten in...since I can't remember when. After we eat I'll tend to your wounds with my healing herbs and poultices. Then we can keep each other warm while we sleep by huddling close, body to body. That's what we always did at home to contend with the brisk chill of night."

Aydon and Danior exchanged glances at Jia-Nian's innocent suggestion. Aydon felt sure the lustful spark of hunger in Danior's eyes was just as keen as that in his own.

"One of us will stand guard while the other sleeps," he told Jia-Nian. "Danior and I will take shifts."

"Then we will take turns clustering," she said. "I will keep whichever of you is not on guard warm while you sleep and then abolish the chill from the other when his shift ends."

Aydon immediately recalled Danior's earlier words, *Think of it...you in front and me in back. At least the first time. We'll take turns. We can keep at it all night, until the first light of dawn when I am no longer human.* A quick glance at Danior told Aydon he wasn't the only one reminded of that suggestion.

"I've always been in favor of taking turns," Danior said, his lips curling into a smile.

"Good," Jia-Nian said with a nod. "It will be a comfortable night for us all then." In the next instant she peeled her soaked garment from her body and draped it over a large rock.

The glimpse of her pale, naked buttocks had Aydon growing even harder and the leather ties of his breeches cutting into his rigid flesh. He yearned to reach out, molding the rounded flesh with his hands, exploring the crease and dark channel with his thumbs.

Jia-Nian turned back to them, standing with nipples hard, crinkled and highlighted by the soft light of the moon. Her mound was covered with curls that looked as soft as a bird's down.

Deep, twin masculine groans pierced the air as Aydon the Bold and Danior the True grappled with their carnal urges.

Aydon feared he'd let loose his seed then and there, shaming himself for his utter lack of self-control.

"May I, Danior?" Jia-Nian said, her arm outstretched, her fingers extended and beckoning.

Aydon noted the lump in Danior's throat as the man swallowed.

"I am at your command, sweet lady," Danior said with a slow lick of his lips. "What is your bidding?"

"If you don't mind, I'll accept those nice, dry furs from you now," she told him. "My skin is chilling fast."

At her words, Danior's gaze became glued to Jia-Nian's skin as he stood there mute and lifeless like a hollowed tree stump.

"Danior?" she said, snapping him out of his reverie.

He stepped into his leather breeches, hiking them up over a cock that must have ached as mightily as Aydon's, then removed the furs, handing them to Jia-Nian.

As she affixed the furs to her body, belting them with the rope, Danior turned to Aydon. "If we make it to the morning without succumbing to madness," he muttered quietly, "it will be only by the grace of the great Ko'Loran."

Aydon's gaze fell to Jia-Nian, who looked every bit as desirable garbed in the bulky furs as she had naked. "May it be so," he said, gravely doubting their chances with a prize as succulent as Jia-Nian in their midst.

Chapter Three

Ko'Loran, the almighty god of sun and sky, had not yet made an appearance when Jia-Nian awoke. While the ground had been hard and unyielding as she slept, a secure feeling of well-being more than compensated for any discomfort. She sighed quietly at the inviting feel of the strong masculine arm draped over her. Aydon's arm.

It had been wonderful snuggling close alternately to him and Danior throughout the night. Any misgivings she'd had about being alone with the men were allayed by that same comforting inner voice that had convinced her to put her trust in Aydon after he rescued her. Cuddled close all night, she had a distinct impression of well-being, something akin to being with her family, but...decidedly different.

Now, once her eyes became accustomed to the dark, her gaze traveled to the large, gnarled olive tree and the figure leaning against it.

Careful to slip from Aydon's arm without disturbing him, Jia-Nian walked to Danior, desiring to spend some time and have a few words with him before Ko'Loran's arrival had him shifting back into stallion form.

"Your quiet footfalls are like those of a small prey animal, Jia-Nian," Danior said, without turning as she approached from behind. "One who is accustomed to being stalked by predators."

"I have had my share of such experiences these last days," she acknowledged, reaching the tree and placing her hand upon his shoulder. "I wanted to spend some time talking with you before you shift, Danior."

Danior held up his hand. "Listen. The sounds of life begin in the forest." He sniffed the air. "Ko'Loran approaches soon, Jia-Nian. Our time for talk is short."

She came around to stand face-to-face, or, rather, *face to chest* with the guardian. It was then that she realized Danior stood naked before her.

"Oh!" Her eyes instinctively flew to his cock. It expanded before her eyes and she experienced a brief resurgence of the fear she'd had when the Pushgans had forced themselves upon her. "You're naked," she said, foolishly stating the obvious, but at a lack to say anything of more intelligence at the sight of his manhood.

"My apologies." Danior's hands covered his cock. A pained expression crossed his features as he gazed into her eyes. "Please, there's no need to fear me. As a Guardian of Zalvanus, I swear to you on my life, Jia-Nian, I have no intention to harm you now or ever."

Before all the words had even left Danior's lips, Jia-Nian knew without a doubt that he spoke the truth. It was that same inner knowing that had made itself known ever since she'd met Aydon the day before.

Expelling a deep breath, she smiled up at the guardian. "I know, Danior. I trust you and Aydon both."

"I've learned the hard way," Danior told her, "that it's better for me to disrobe before shifting into horse form. I've gone through more shirts and leather breeches that way." He laughed softly and Jia-Nian found herself admiring Danior's ready humor, especially in the face of cheerless circumstances.

He and Aydon both had skin deeply tanned, hair inky black and tall, powerful, well-muscled bodies. But while Aydon's eyes were the color of the sun-drenched sea, Danior's were the same soft brown as his sleek horse hide.

A pair of more stunningly handsome men she'd never encountered.

"I was wondering, Danior, can you comprehend human speech while you're in animal form?"

"Much, though not all. It seems that my human half and my animal half each strive to dominate. The human part struggles for full awareness. But the horse part resists abandoning the free, wild pleasures that come with four legs and great speed."

"Do you have feelings like fear or happiness while you're in horse form?"

Danior gifted her with a full smile as he gazed into Jia-Nian's eyes. With a brush of his knuckle to her chin, he tilted her face upward and answered, "Yes, Jia-Nian. I feel both. Human and animal each take delight in the feel of a beautiful woman riding me."

Jia-Nian felt her cheeks heat at his compliment.

"During the day, my animal side is glad to be relieved of the tension and hatred man brings upon himself. The only fears come from the innate understanding that a horse is a prey animal, rather than a predator. And because of my close bond with Aydon, I experience fear for him as we ride into battle."

"Not for yourself?"

Shock coursed through Jia-Nian as, before Danior could respond, she glimpsed his form wavering as the night sky lightened. Her hand flew to his head, stroking his hair in a soothing fashion. Enthralled, she watched the magical shift from human to animal.

Of all the incredible changes she witnessed, Jia-Nian felt sure it would be the sadness in Danior's eyes as he held her gaze that she would not soon forget.

"I will talk to you during the day, Danior," she pledged. "And I will eagerly await the time when Ko'Loran departs and Ivarus, goddess of the moon, sheds her life-giving light on your form again."

Soon she realized she was no longer stroking his shoulder-length locks, but his silken stallion's mane. In awe of his beauty in either human or animal form, Jia-Nian rested her head against Danior's long neck.

"You *are* a magnificent animal, Danior," she said, running her fingers down over his powerful muscles. A single tear coursed down her cheek. Her heart ached for Danior and the mighty injustice done to him by Shivrane.

"After three years, I'm still amazed when Danior shifts form," Aydon said from behind.

"It's so unfair." A new set of tears spilled from her eyes as she turned to face him. "Isn't there anything that can be done?" she asked, already knowing the answer.

Shivrane was not known for casting spells or otherwise performing magic that could easily be amended.

"I doubt it," Aydon answered. "But still, I make it a point to visit every good wizard, magician and even a few witches and hags as I travel from village to village, in hopes of finding one who can undo Shivrane's evil magic."

"Perhaps once we arrive in Zalvanus, their healers can put things right," Jia-Nian offered.

Aydon nodded. "If any people have the power to thwart Shivrane's merciless magic, it would be the Zalvaneans." He looked to the sky. "It will be fully light soon. We must be on our way."

"I'll change into my garment," Jia-Nian said, removing the furs and slipping her slightly damp clothing over her head. It was interesting, the look of deep concentration on Aydon's face as she dressed and undressed. She had noted the same intense expressions on both his and Danior's faces last night.

And then this morning Danior had all but referred to her as a beautiful woman. The thought made her smile. Could it be possible that these two magnificent barbarian warriors found her physically appealing? Perhaps even enough to consider making her one of their concubines? Hope stirred in her heart.

She became aware of a sort of melting sensation throughout her entire being as she felt the last vestiges of fear and anxiety disintegrating. Once again Jia-Nian's inner voice spoke to her from deep inside, soothing her, calming her, assuring her that it was not only safe but desirable for her to embrace her growing attraction to these men. These *good and honorable* men, so vastly different from the heinous Pushgans.

Jia-Nian watched Aydon dress Danior with his saddle of furs. Giving her stifled emotions free rein, she found her thoughts conjuring up most delightful scenarios. Flesh pressed against flesh, lusty kisses and whispered endearments. She even wondered for a moment what it might feel like to ride Danior naked—him without his furs and she without her clothes.

It was a lovely thought – a most enjoyable one. She silently thanked the gods for the generous healing they'd performed, freeing her from the clawing grips of fear, dread and constant apprehension.

She closed her eyes briefly, envisioning herself wild and naked and carefree atop the magnificent horse as he galloped like the wind until they were both breathless.

Jia-Nian's clit pulsed and wetness seeped from between her thighs. Why such a thought prompted a pleasurable response at her cunt was beyond her understanding.

"What are you thinking about?" Aydon asked, surprising her from her wanton daydreams.

"Nothing important. Why?"

He smiled. "Because your cheeks have colored and your eyes have darkened."

Jia-Nian felt herself flush and she watched Aydon's smile grow wider.

"Yes, just like that," he said, stepping close and clasping her hot cheeks in his cool hands.

"I-I was thinking about how happy we'll be once we reach Zalvanus," she lied. It was difficult to think clearly with Aydon holding her face like that. Standing so close she couldn't resist taking in a whiff, appreciating his masculine scent. Like Danior, Aydon had bathed in the river last night while their fish roasted in the fire and now he smelled like the forest. Fresh, earthy, herbal and inviting.

She filled her nostrils with his scent again.

"We still have a few days ride," Aydon told her, finally releasing her cheeks, but running his hand up and down along her arm, which sparked prickles of heat through her core.

"The journey won't be an easy one, Jia-Nian. There are several known encampments of Pushgans along the way. They've engaged village after village in battle, conquering them all in their quest to claim the territories around Zalvanus in Tordanuk's name."

"Why is that tyrant so set on claiming Zalvanus?" Jia-Nian wondered. "He already rules over a vast realm, why must he have theirs as well?"

You are familiar with the old Zalvanean prophecy?" Aydon asked.

"From my grandfather, yes. It is so lengthy, of which part do you speak?"

"Wherein it tells of Zalvanus one day ruling all the earth with peace and harmony," Aydon clarified. "As a warmonger, that notion no doubt stirs Tordanuk's bile. His interests are power, wealth, acclaim, not peace. The usual spoils that fuel a tyrant's maniacal greed. It is said the Zalvaneans came here from another world, that they hold the secrets of the stars and the gods and life and death. Imagine what Tordanuk could do with that knowledge."

Jia-Nian nodded, remembering the stories her Zalvanean grandfather had told her as a child. "I've heard the same. My grandfather claimed his people came here in the belly of a great bird from a distant star because their home was dying. I never knew whether he was speaking the truth or spinning imaginary yarns meant to amuse a child."

"All I know," Aydon said, "is that the Zalvaneans have ways unlike those of any others I've ever known. They have advanced knowledge and yet a clear fragility that prevents them from being able to fully protect themselves."

Jia-Nian nodded in accord. The thought of those kind, giving people being enslaved and tortured by Tordanuk filled her soul with dread.

When her gaze met Aydon's again she glimpsed a curious expression. "Why do you look at me so, Aydon?" She smoothed her fingers down her cheeks. "Does my face bear the imprint of my olive leaf pillow?"

Aydon smiled. "It does, faintly, but that's not what caught my attention. This," he said, threading his fingers through her hair and lifting it from her shoulder. "I wouldn't have expected it."

"What?" Her hand went to her hair, searching for a burr or cluster of wayward leaves. When her fingers met Aydon's, he closed his around hers and his gaze intensified.

"This treasure hidden by yesterday's thick cloak of mud," Aydon answered. "I am not the first to run my fingers through your tresses, Jia-Nian. The strands of burnished gold among the amber are surely evidence of Ko'Loran's fiery touch." He leaned in close, palming her neck, and Jia-Nian's heart danced at the feel of Aydon's hot breath against her cheek.

Danior gave Aydon's arm a firm nudge, then turned his head and snorted.

"He senses danger," Aydon said. "Quickly now." He boosted Jia-Nian onto Danior's back. "We must make haste." In the next moment Aydon was seated behind her and they were riding fast, with his arm wrapped firm against her waist.

"If we encounter Tordanuk's men or other dangers," Aydon said, "I want you to run for cover. Once the battle is over and Danior and I are victors, I will call for you and we will ride again. But if we are felled, then you must take care and find your way to a safe haven where you will be protected."

She opened her mouth to protest but thought better of it. As if she would even for a moment consider abandoning them in the midst of battle. Creeping off like a coward to whimper in the bushes as they fought. Why the very idea!

"Jia-Nian, do you hear? Promise me."

She looked over her shoulder into his firm, earnest gaze. "Yes, Aydon," she said meekly, the way men expected women to behave—helpless and subservient. "I promise."

As Danior galloped, Jia-Nian felt the wind in her hair and the weight of her brother's sword sheathed and resting on her thigh. Indeed, fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with Aydon, she'd put the weapon to good use against those worthless, ugly Pushgan heathens.

* * * * *

"By all that's holy, woman, do as I say!" Aydon barked as he hacked left and right, combating the small band of Pushgans surrounding them.

"Save your breath. I'm not leaving you, Aydon." A second later Jia-Nian was dragged from Danior's back. She struck one fiend in the throat before piercing another in the back, retrieving her sword quickly enough to lop off the arm of a third brute about to slice open Aydon's thigh.

Leaping from Danior's back, Aydon was at her side.

In a flash of movement, Jia-Nian spotted Danior's hoof delivering an agonizing blow to the groin of the brute who had dragged her from him.

Her days had been so quiet, so common, so...mundane before Tordanuk's army of evildoers transformed her life into one of spurting blood, mortal screams and the ever-present stench of death.

When she was finished slaying these dogs, she would have to find time to reflect on the pleasant, uneventful mornings when her mother taught her to create torches by soaking the pithy core of reeds in molten tallow. Or the lazy afternoons when she and her grandmother would make soaps from fragrant cassia oil.

She remembered her mind wandering as she helped prepare the family's main meal each day. How she'd yearned for less tedium and more adventure in her life as she formed fragrant millet-onion cakes. Seemingly impossible romantic notions filled her girlish mind as she steeped mustard greens in fermented wine vinegar with honey and herbs.

Had anyone suggested that all too soon she'd be the last of her people, struggling to survive and to aid the two men who had saved her from certain death, she would have scoffed.

The stinging swipe of a heathen's blade against her shoulder put a stop to Jia-Nian's roving thoughts.

"Jia-Nian!" Aydon cried.

"I'm well, Aydon. Keep your focus on the conflict!" Swallowing back a cry of pain so as not to further distract Aydon, a mere somber moan escaped Jia-Nian's lips as she swung her sword, tearing a gash in the well-fed belly of her attacker. Pain threatened to overwhelm her as the taste of bile rose in her throat and she fought to keep from succumbing to a faint.

Clearly Danior had seen the fiend's attempt to slay her because the next thing Jia-Nian knew, the magnificent brown beast let forth with a formidable sound. She watched him rear up on his hind legs and come down hard on her attacker, trampling him with a vengeance.

After running through the last of Tordanuk's men with his sword, Aydon bellowed a mighty growl, joining Danior's mission of retribution. With a swift, exacting blow, he severed the head from the bludgeoned body of Jia-Nian's attacker.

A battle cry welling strong in her breast, she struck a final blow, shouting as she plunged her sword into the Pushgan's groin.

Sword in hand, its tip touching the ground, Aydon surveyed the scene.

The ground was purple-red with Pushgan blood and strewn with their repulsive three-eyed, gray-fleshed corpses. Danior seemed relatively unscathed and Jia-Nian...by the gods, Aydon wanted to throttle that willful, mulish woman.

Why hadn't she listened to him and retreated when he'd instructed her to do so? He'd never encountered a woman so foolish and obstinate.

Or so incredibly brave and daring.

Not to mention exceedingly alluring.

He stared down at her as her breasts heaved while she sucked in life's breath after their exhausting battle with the Pushgans. She too held her sword at her side, assessing their surroundings. Then she lifted her stormy gaze to his.

"You rash, reckless, foolhardy little wench," Aydon growled. "You gave me your word. You swore to me you'd stay clear of danger. You could have been killed."

"As could you or Danior, had my sword not joined yours in battle," she retorted, giving him a determined, defiant look that made him want to grab her, spank her and fuck her senseless.

"We can take care of ourselves," Aydon said. "We don't need a fragile woman slowing us down, hovering over us and fidgeting with worry as we fight. Especially a woman inexperienced enough in battle to be wounded as you were." He nodded to her shoulder.

Aydon saw her wince at that. He knew it was a low blow. Jia-Nian fought as bravely and well as any man he'd accompanied in battle. But she had to learn her place. A woman's place. She had to listen to him, to allow him to protect her. In the short time he'd known Jia-Nian, he knew he didn't want to lose her.

Her jaw clenched and Aydon could tell she was fighting back tears from the sting of his harsh words. The knowledge made him feel worse than swine.

"You *need* me, Aydon," she insisted, refusing to give in to weeping. "You and Danior both. Like it or not, I will be at your side during every battle henceforth, so get used to it. As for my wound, it is no more than you or Danior endured during the clash. It will heal. I am not a delicate babe in need of coddling."

They stood staring at each other and filling their lungs with breath until Aydon could no longer stand the torment.

Closing the distance with one long stride, he wrapped his arm around Jia-Nian's waist, yanking her hard against his body and capturing her lips in a deep, plundering kiss. He gave no thought to what she wanted, only to the ferocity of his own consuming need. It seemed she was as hungry as he, for she met Aydon's crushing kiss with eagerness as he pressed his erection against her belly.

Jia-Nian's lips were soft as they moved against his. Her supple flesh tasted of salty sweat, coppery blood and dirt, but her mouth...ah, her warm, wet mouth offered nothing but the sweetest nectar as her tongue warred with his.

Encouraged by the needy mewl of Jia-Nian's moan, Aydon intensified the kiss. This was no long, lazy, gentle melding of lips. It was a fiercely carnal kiss, laced with passion, need and a sense of desperation, as if this might be the first and last time their lips would have a chance to meet in this lifetime.

Aydon felt her short nails dig into his shoulder as Jia-Nian ground her belly against him, fueling the raging fire that soared from his balls to his cock. Each wet glide of her tongue against his, each panting breath she took, had his desire mounting until nothing but the feel of her hot cunt sheathing his cock would suffice.

"Please, Aydon," she said, breaking their kiss and looking into his eyes. "Take me...fill me. Make me feel alive in the midst of all this death."

The rational, controlled part of Aydon surfaced long enough to ask, "Are you sure, Jia-Nian? Be certain, sweet one, because once I start, I doubt I'll be able to stop."

"I've never been so sure of anything."

About to tear at the laces of his breeches, Aydon spied the carnage around them. The severed limbs, split bellies, decapitated heads.

"Not here," he said, more than a bit surprised he had the presence of mind to keep himself from thrusting into her where they stood to appease his aching cock. She looked around them, as if almost forgetting they were in the midst of a bloodbath, and nodded. He sheathed his sword, motioned for Jia-Nian to do the same and then lifted her onto Danior's back.

"The sun will soon set," he told her. "We must find shelter for the night before that." Her compliant little sigh almost did him in. As they rode, Aydon reached his hand in front of her but instead of clasping her waist as he usually did, he searched between her thighs. She was already wet for him.

He brought his fingers to his nose, sniffing her earthy perfume and then licking her taste from his flesh. "I can smell the womanly scent of your desire, Jia-Nian. I can taste it." She whimpered and his craving for her nearly made him shudder.

Aydon's jaw clenched against the searing need at his cock.

Control. He must maintain control...master his emotions...be in command of his lust-driven thoughts. The spirited wench had no idea the seductive power she wielded over him, and he wasn't about to let her know.

He wasn't a patient man, but patience was all important now. Their coupling would be like every other cock-to-cunt encounter he'd had, and the gods knew there had been many. Once he fucked Jia-Nian, the potent lure would end. He'd be free of the wild carnal hunger that threatened to consume his thoughts. It would be easier to keep her in her place, to subjugate her feisty bravado.

His finger slipped beneath her clothes again and found her clit.

Jia-Nian's thighs clasped together instinctively and she moaned. It was the sweetest sound he'd ever heard. Aydon rubbed the erect little nub with his finger, making slow circles as she writhed atop Danior's saddle of furs.

"Oh gods, such a stir you cause within me, Aydon! You make me feel quite unlike I have ever felt before." Her voice, thick and husky with a desire, had his cock so hard Aydon feared it would never recover. "My secret places are wound tight and yearn for release," she told him, leaning back against his chest.

His finger still busy at her sweet spot, Aydon lifted his other hand, the one clutching Danior's reins, to her chest. Cupping one of her breasts, he rolled the nipple between his thumb and forefinger.

Jia-Nian indulged in a melodic chorus of passionate utterances as her body tightened. It gave him greater satisfaction than he had anticipated to send her spirit on the mystical journey between the world of the living and the dead, where bright colors shone, pain was nonexistent and the body was treated to unspeakably pleasurable delights.

Releasing her nipple after her quivers subsided, Aydon's hand rested against his cock, desperate to unfasten his breeches and relieve the increasing ache. But he closed his eyes for a moment, willing himself once again to summon patience, for there would be no need to bring himself to release with his rough hand tonight.

Not with a warm, willing, sensual woman like Jia-Nian to hold close and fuck until the light of dawn.

Chapter Four

The attack and lengthy clash with the Pushgans had cut the light of day short. Mere moments after the trio found suitable shelter, night cloaked the sky in a veil of stars and the moon shone bright.

"Damn you, Aydon," the naked Danior growled as soon as he'd shifted to human form. Fisting Aydon's tunic, he yanked him up from the fire Aydon had just built. "Do you have any idea what that was like for me? What that did to me?"

Aydon scowled at the fierce, accusatory expression across his friend's face. "Since when am I a seer?" he responded, removing Danior's hand from his tunic. "State yourself plainly, man, so I have a notion of your grievance."

"This!" he said, yanking his furs from the ground and shoving them under Aydon's nose. "I speak of this!"

One whiff of Jia-Nian's musky scent of desire imprinted on the fur brought Aydon immediate understanding.

"Yesterday you cautioned me," Danior went on, "told me we had to go slow with her." He gestured toward a wide-eyed Jia-Nian. "Because she'd been despoiled just days before by Pushgans."

Aydon waged war with the fingers of guilt threatening to tear at his soul. He'd been so crazed with lust he'd all but forgotten about Jia-Nian being ravaged by the heathens. He gave a curt nod. "I recall the conversation."

"Yet today," Danior spat, "with my senses heightened in animal form, you tormented me. As I carried you on my back to safety, my world was besieged by the rich aroma of Jia-Nian's seeping nectar as you pleased her. By the soft mewling sounds of her satisfaction at your hand."

Her hand cupping the residue of the herbal poultice she'd prepared and applied to their wounds, Jia-Nian gasped, backing away. Aydon spared her a quick glance before returning his attention to Danior.

Danior buried his face in the furs, deeply breathing of Jia-Nian's womanly scent. Locking gazes with Aydon, he cried, "Gods, man, what a cruel predicament you inflicted upon me!"

Thick and overt, silence hung between the men. Struggling with his thoughts, Aydon refused to allow his simmering anger to surface. Again he reminded himself that his own ineptitude had sealed Danior's cruel fate and caused this uneasy predicament.

"You're right," Aydon admitted finally. "I confess to giving you nary a thought as we rode. My mind was a blur, a weighty shroud of lust, of need, and my only focus was Jia-Nian." He placed his hand on Danior's shoulder. "I was less than a true friend today. I regret my selfishness and impatience, Danior."

Gazes still locked, Danior's eyes were intense. Even Aydon, certainly no expert in sensitivity, could recognize anger married with frustration and sorrow swirling in the brown depths.

As they stood, the turbulent darkness leached from Danior's gaze. He closed his eyes briefly and nodded.

"I know...I know, Aydon." He looked up, calmness washing over tension-strained features. "It's not your fault. Were I in your place, I would have done the same." He glanced over at Jia-Nian and smiled. "Our feisty Strathulian is most enticing."

Her cheeks coloring, Jia-Nian's lips curved into a tentative smile.

"It's just—it's just hard fighting with my two selves, yearning to break free of the damn horse's way of thinking. Longing to stand on two human legs by day, to be a man and partake in a woman's sweet fruits."

"I'm so sorry my selfish actions caused you grief," Jia-Nian said from her position against an old olive tree. "Forgive me, Danior. I will rein in my needy feminine yearnings in the future."

Danior strode to the tree and Aydon followed.

"It's not your fault, little warrior," Danior said, cupping her chin and planting a soft kiss on her lips.

"Listen to him, Jia-Nian," Aydon said. "He's right. You have done nothing wrong."

"And it's not Aydon's fault either," Danior added. "It's Shivrane, that fiendish three-eyed bitch from the innermost depths of hell, who is to blame for my anguish."

Jia-Nian stroked both Danior and Aydon's jaws with her fingers. Such valiant, heroic souls they were and how fortunate she was to have them in her life. The delicious look of them, the deep resonance of their voices, the feel of their hard muscles, was like sunlight shedding warmth on her solitary existence.

At a time most bleak and sorrowful in her life, her warriors had restored Jia-Nian's hope, her faith, her belief in the magical, romantic notions she'd held dear to her heart for so long. Was it any wonder she found herself enraptured by their very presence? That her breasts tingled and her womb trembled at their touch?

It was her turn to give back to them. To give freely of what little she had left to offer.

"We lose time," she told them. "Remove your garments, Aydon. I want you both naked." She watched the men exchange quick glances before looking at her again.

"If we three are to fuck," she explained, "then we should make haste so as not to waste the precious night. Would you not agree?"

That two such bold, brawny men could look like a pair of confounded little boys brought an amused smile to Jia-Nian's lips. Gods but they were handsome specimens of manhood.

"Must I repeat myself?" she asked, fisting one hand on her hip while gesturing to Aydon's tunic and breeches with the other. As it was, Aydon undressed so quickly she'd barely have time to repeat her instructions in the interim.

Jia-Nian slipped off her own garment, letting it drop to the mossy forest floor. The lusty, appreciative looks from her men emboldened her. She rubbed her palms together, spreading the last of the herbal poultice over her hands.

"Now bring those magnificent guardian cocks to me so that I may get to know them better," she instructed, reaching out to them with both hands and wiggling her fragrant, oiled fingers.

With dazed, hungry looks, Aydon and Danior wasted no time in obeying, presenting her with two of the most glorious male appendages she'd ever seen.

"And don't look so surprised," she added, slipping her hands around each long, thick shaft and squeezing gently, loving the feel of expanding flesh beneath her fingers. "While I may have been a virgin of late, I was not unfamiliar with the bodily structure of males."

"She had brothers," Aydon explained to Danior through a groan matched by Danior's as her fingers massaged them.

"True, but I don't speak of my kin. As a healer among my people, there were many times I tended to men sorely wounded in battle. A good daily cock rubdown with herbs and oils until their hot cream spurted forth was a great help in restoring their health, vigor and vitality."

"Oh, I can well imagine," Danior said with a devilish smile.

"No doubt you had many village men coming to you with merely a scratch or two to partake of your healing fingers," Aydon said. "I know I would. In fact, I'd make sure to get injured as often as possible." His smile looked every bit as wicked and teasing as Danior's.

"Shame on you both for your tainted thoughts," Jia-Nian chastised with mock reproach. "The healing arts were valued and respected among the Strathulians. As were unmarried virgins. The men I speak of were gravely wounded and clinging to life as the cold fingers of Death sought to claim them. Each curative cock rubdown was attended by one of our tribe's holy men as well as the ailing men's wives if they had them."

The men chorused another pleased groan at her expert touch. It was the first time Jia-Nian had performed the healing Zalvanean method of massage for purely carnal reasons. And the first time she'd been so passionately affected by the experience.

Their cocks continued to swell in her grasp. She felt them pulse and jerk as her fingers slipped back the foreskins to explore the dark rosy cock heads. Firm but resilient, they reminded her of sturdy swords swathed in layers of soft, silken fabric.

Jia-Nian glanced down at her breasts, alerted by their tight, swollen ache. Her nipples stood erect, begging to feel —

As if perfectly in sync with her needs, Aydon cradled one bare breast in his hand, his thumb rubbing over her hard nipple, while Danior caressed the pebbled tip of the other breast.

Closing her eyes, Jia-Nian sighed with pleasure, only to gasp at the feel of their mouths suckling. Aydon's mouth worked gentle and steady, laving the beaded tip, teasing it with his teeth and tongue. Danior sucked roughly, urgently, biting and pulling.

Equally agreeable jolts of pleasure prickled her breasts.

She'd never experienced the feel of her nipples being sucked. And earlier, as they rode to seek shelter, was the first time she'd felt a man's fingers pluck and roll her nipples. The dual erotic sensations of Danior and Aydon's mouths converging at her breasts sent liquid cords of pleasure, hot and relentless, coursing from her tits to her cunt.

Jia-Nian's eyes flew open and her breath hitched as she felt fingers slipping between her cunt lips. Danior pierced her wet slit with one finger, then two, gliding in and out, never neglecting her nipple as he worked.

Aydon's rough fingers raked gently down her belly until his thumb slipped in front of Danior's hand, almost immediately finding her clit and circling the pleasure nub.

Jia-Nian felt her spirit slipping from her body, preparing to take another magical journey to the place of utmost ecstasy Aydon had brought her to earlier. Mindful of her

own task, she increased the pressure at both men's cocks, making that long, firm glide from root to tip that men so enjoyed. All the while she deeply tapped her fingers along the sensitive undersides of their cocks, as if playing a flute.

"By gods, Jia-Nian," Aydon breathed, while Danior let out a harsh gasp.

As her womb fluttered and her cunt flooded, Jia-Nian's highly pleased body barely felt as if it belonged to her. "Now," she said. "The three of us together." That said, she gave each cock a purposeful twist and pressed thumbs and forefingers deep against the certain spot at the base she knew would send their spirits soaring along with hers.

Grunts and moans were quick replaced with untamed roars of satisfaction as the three trembled together, the men pressing their big, hard bodies into her until her back was surely imprinted with the tree's bark.

They remained that way, damp hot flesh against damp hot flesh, sweat mingling with spilled male essence as they recaptured their senses, their breath, their vigor.

"In all my days," Aydon said, utter contentment lacing his words, "I've never experienced anything like that. Your magical fingers brought forth feelings in my cock I've never known before, Jia-Nian. And, believe me, I know my own cock damned well." He laughed.

"That was amazing," Danior agreed. "If I didn't know better I'd swear you were a witch." She gasped at his words. "The good sort," he quickly amended.

"And the two of you treated me to ecstasies I've never before known," Jia-Nian told them. She raised her hands, studying the cream cascading down her fingers and palms to her wrists. Remembering how Aydon had tasted her nectar earlier as they rode, Jia-Nian smiled.

Bringing one hand to her mouth, she licked, curling her tongue through Aydon's salty essence. She spent time tasting him, letting the fluid coat her tongue. "What a unique flavor," she said. "Like sea air mixed with just a touch of honey."

She tasted Danior's cream next, expecting it to taste identical and surprised to note subtle differences. "You each have a distinct flavor. As if the same savory recipe were prepared by two different cooks using slightly different herbs, oils and spices. You're both quite delicious."

One hand braced against the tree over Jia-Nian's head, Danior looked down at his cock and gave a soft laugh.

"Mine grows hard again too," Aydon said, cupping his cock and apparently understanding Danior's amusement.

"That's a first," Danior said. "It's never happened that fast before."

"But then, we've never been tended to by Jia-Nian's healing hands before," Aydon noted.

"Or the show of her little pink tongue greedily licking our seed from those magic fingers," Danior added. "Are you quite certain you're not a good witch?" He winked at her before leaning close to kiss her chin and swipe a lick up her cheek.

Jia-Nian rested her hand on his chest. "If I were, dear Danior, you can be assured I'd work tirelessly until I found a way to reverse Shivrane's evil magic."

"Tell me, sweet one," Aydon asked, so close to her ear she felt the heat of his breath, "do you feel ready to have your cunt filled or is it too soon after..."

"No matter how difficult it is for us," Danior said after Aydon paused, "we pledge to be patient, so don't be afraid to be truthful. We wouldn't want to force you into anything you're not ready for."

Aydon's knuckle trailed a path up and down her cheek close to her ear, making her shiver. "We want nothing more than to give you pleasure, Jia-Nian. We won't do anything without your permission or before you're ready."

Jia-Nian felt her eyes well with tears. How wonderful and compassionate they were. "Who would ever expect two such mighty warriors to be so gentle, caring and considerate of a woman's feelings?"

Danior shrugged. "I, for one, never would have expected it—until I met you, Jia-Nian." One of his eyebrows shot up. "Even if you are the most mulish woman I've ever known. It makes my blood boil to think of how close you came to being slain today."

"Gods, but truer words were never spoken," Aydon agreed. "You're stubborn and strong willed, disobedient and annoyingly persistent." Aydon's head dipped until he tongued one of her nipples, awakening the tingles at her clit. "But," he went on as she moaned, "you're also the most succulent bit of sweetmeat I've ever set eyes, hands or mouth on."

"Perhaps the Strathulians were remiss in teaching their girl children about a woman's proper place and that a man's word is law," Danior said.

"Once we instruct her," Aydon suggested, "and she abides by our commands, Jia-Nian will be perfect."

"Instruct me? Hah!" Jia-Nian folded her arms across her breasts. "Jesters, the both of you. If blindly obeying men like a mindless insect is what it takes to make me into a perfect woman, then I'm quite happy to remain blissfully flawed."

"Well, she does have good hands," Danior said to Aydon.

"True, we can't deny that. Perhaps the disobedient wench isn't a lost cause after all, eh, Danior?"

Jia-Nian wiggled her fingers. "This disobedient wench's skilled hands are ready to perform a lively round of entirely new magic tricks. That is...if those tired cocks of yours are hearty enough to endure the intense pleasure."

"I'll let you decide," Aydon said, fisting his erect cock with both hands and smiling at her. "Does that look hearty enough for you?"

"Even heartier than before." She nodded and then glimpsed Danior's bold and ready cock, rigid in proud greeting. "Yours too, Danior."

"You didn't answer our question, Jia-Nian," Aydon reminded her. "Are you fully ready to be with a man yet?"

Had Aydon asked her that question the day before, she would have shuddered at the idea. For days she'd been besieged with visions of repulsive gray-fleshed beasts with hideous roving eyes in the center of their foreheads grinning down at her while they assailed her most sacred, private flesh.

The horror, the wrenching sadness, the loss of all hope that she'd felt as the fiends pummeled her, one after the other, revisited her thoughts.

Then Jia-Nian focused on the gallant, fine-looking Guardians of Zalvanus before her. Her eyes traveled their naked, battle-scarred bodies. Far too intimate with carnage, they were war torn and surely weary of unending battles. These proud men were like gods while Tordanuk's men were like filthy swine.

The Yassarian men who stood here symbolized goodness and light, while the Pushgans embodied malice and malevolence.

Jia-Nian looked down at her body, noting the trickle of juices from between her thighs. When she lifted her head, she saw they had both followed her gaze to the moisture dribbling down her legs.

"Both my mind and my body are ready and willing to lie with you," she replied. "I have never yet felt a man inside me. Not a *real* man. I look forward to the experience with great eagerness."

"When the Pushgans violated you," Danior began with hesitancy, "was it...was it solely in your cunt?"

Although disheartened by the question, a humorless laugh spilled from her lips. "It was everywhere I had an opening, save for my ears," she replied. "I fear I have no virgin territory left, Danior, not my cunt, my dark, forbidden passage or my mouth." She was reminded then of how different Pushgan essence tasted. The stuff was vile and putrid, just like its despicable hosts.

Aydon let loose a curse, pounding his fist against the tree.

She wasn't surprised at his appalled reaction. She only hoped he didn't regret the breathtaking sexual encounter the three of them had just shared. The idea that focusing

on the subject of her unclean body might serve to taint Aydon's memory nearly made her weep.

"I wholly regret that I have nothing untouched, nothing clean or of importance to offer either of you fine, deserving men. I sorrow that I cannot freely present you with a woman's most cherished prize."

She watched them exchange glances. Of course, now that they'd heard the whole ugly truth, she had no doubt they were trying to decide if her Pushgan-violated body was too disgusting even to fuck.

"I am tried and worn like an old shoe," she continued. "I am no longer worthy of any respectable man. But I can still provide comfort, a healing touch. I can be your fellow warrior by day and your willing concubine...or whore by night, if you'll allow me that privilege."

"What is this you speak of, Jia-Nian?" Danior asked. "Your most cherished prize—is this some Strathulian dowry? We're not interested in your lack of gold or treasure or a flock of sheep."

Jia-Nian straightened her shoulders, lifted her chin and looked her warriors in the eye. "If this is your idea of wit, I do not find it amusing," she said. "Surely you realize I speak of my virginity. An unmarried woman without it is unfit."

"Unfit for what?" Aydon asked, frowning. "For who?"

She couldn't stand it another minute. The tears long threatening to flow came now with a vengeance.

"For anyone, for anything!" she sobbed. "What decent man would even for a moment consider a sullied woman like me for his wife? For the mother of his babes? I am only good for a sound round of fucking now and must learn to be grateful for a few coins or a meal in return. I challenge you to stand there and refute that."

"Decent man..." Aydon said. "You don't find me decent, Jia-Nian?" In question, he clapped his hand against his chest.

"Of course I do." She swiped harshly at her eyes with her fists, angry with herself for giving into the womanly weakness of tears when she longed to maintain a last shred of pride. "What has that to do with anything?"

Aydon smoothed the hair from her eyes and kissed her damp cheek. "If I were a marrying kind of man, I would gladly take you for my wife," he answered softly. "I've never met a more worthy woman."

Danior took her hand and brought it to his lips, feathering a tender kiss across her knuckles. "Ah my poor misguided Jia-Nian. You're beautiful, kind, brave, intelligent and such a sweet, innocent temptress you make my balls tighten just looking at you. Your virginity, or lack of it, is of no significance to us. As with Aydon, if I were a villager looking to settle down with a good woman for my wife, you would be my first choice."

"Great Ko'Loran help us if we ever become so pigheaded and intolerant," Aydon added. "I think it detestable that you were taught to believe such idiocy. Your worth lies not in your cunt, Jia-Nian. It is here." He tapped her temple. "And here." He covered her heart with his hand.

"Was it your fault Tordanuk's fiends raped and abused you?" Danior asked. "Did you coyly issue those repulsive three-eyed giants a seductive invitation to plunder your slight body?"

Jia-Nian looked up at them and quietly shook her head, mouthing a silent *no*.

"Then there will be no more of such twisted talk," Aydon said.

A spark of gladness fluttered deep in Jia-Nian's breast. With a small smile, she asked, "You will accept me as your concubine then? Or even as your traveling road whore to discard once you have had your fill of me? I will gladly agree to either fate."

Aydon and Danior exchanged lengthy glances, mightily chorusing what sounded like frustrated groans. Her smile faltered. Perhaps she had misunderstood their well-meaning lecture. Maybe they didn't mean what they'd said.

Danior bent to the ground to pick something up. "For one so stubborn, pigheaded and determined, Jia-Nian, you have all the confidence of this shriveled olive." He held the fallen fruit beneath her nose before flicking it away.

"We don't want you for a concubine," Aydon said, and Jia-Nian felt her heart crush.

"Or a whore," Danior added, causing her to emit a forlorn sigh.

"We want you as our woman," Aydon explained. "As our brave, beautiful, proud and feisty partner on this perilous journey we take to Zalvanus."

"We offer you the vast sexual pleasures of a threesome," Danior further enlightened her. "Two sets of eager hands, two hungry mouths, two impatient, commanding cocks to bring you joy such as you have never dreamed. In return," he cupped her breasts, admiring them, flicking his thumbs over her beading nipples, "our hearts soar at the thought of the erotic delights you have kindly offered to share with us."

"Our union will be built on communal respect," Aydon added. "And pride." He thumped his broad chest. "Already I swell with pride at the thought of having you for my woman, Jia-Nian."

"*Our* woman," Danior reminded him.

"Of course." Aydon grinned. "So what say you, sweet one? Are you ready to minister to your men's cocks while we treat your lush body to untold bliss?"

Jia-Nian's heart took flight, soaring to the heavens and crying out her elation to the gods.

"Take me," she said, spreading her arms and offering her most inviting smile. "Show me. Teach me what it feels like to have my body glove your beautiful cocks at the same time."

Chapter Five

As she lay naked, spread on the soft saddle of furs not far from the fire, Jia-Nian's gaze journeyed to the pair of remarkably constructed warriors kneeling beside her. More specifically, she hungrily eyed the jutting duo of cocks. So inviting. So generous in dimension.

Her initial trepidation melted and disappeared as they spoke tenderly, describing in detail what they wanted to do to her. All the while they massaged her aching limbs with deep yet gentle strokes of their fingers, dissolving all tightness and tension in her body.

The darkly erotic actions Danior and Aydon proposed thrilled her. Mysterious, fascinating...forbidden.

By the time they had finished spinning their enticing tale of coming delights, Jia-Nian's cunt was moist with craving.

In a slow dance, Aydon's hand swirled from her throat, over her breasts and down her belly, resting atop her mound. One finger dipped inside her slit and he turned it, coating it with her juice.

"Look how her eager cunt glistens with moisture," he said, holding his wet finger aloft as the flickering flames of the fire illuminated the evidence of her desire. Aydon brought his finger to his mouth, locking gazes with Jia-Nian as he clasped it fully with his lips, drawing it out slowly with a satisfied groan.

"Taste her," he said to Danior. "Sample the exquisite flavor of our Jia-Nian's essence...of her passion."

Her breath quickened as Danior's gaze fell to her cunt. He nudged her thighs open further and stroked the wet curls at her slit with his thumbs as he studied her. She awaited the feel of his finger between her lips, but Danior had something else in mind.

She watched his eyes glint as he lifted his gaze to hers, just before he lowered his head and licked her cunt. A reckless tremble began between her thighs as Danior's masterful tongue went deeper, swiping fast and firm across her clit.

Clutching the furs beneath her, Jia-Nian gasped, or moaned or sighed...perhaps it was all three. Never had she imagined such wild sensation. She wanted it to stop before she vaporized from the thorny intensity. No...she wanted it to last, to go on forever!

As her spirit climbed the precipice to what promised to be a glorious orgasm, her senses were wondrously assaulted by the unexpected sensation of Aydon's teeth and tongue at her breast.

"Great gods, this is too much," she cried, writhing, basking in sheer erotic bliss as Aydon and Danior bit her at the same time. Pulling, tugging, nipping, rolling...it was beyond sublime.

Her breath coming in spiky gasps, Jia-Nian clutched Danior's long hair, then Aydon's, keeping their skilled mouths close to her ravenous need. Shameless, wanton, greedy with desire, she arched her body, pressing in to them in search of maximum pleasure.

In a feral gust of utmost ecstasy, she screamed out her rapture as her warriors brought her to that cherished place of elation. For an instant she wondered if she'd died and had been swept into the heavens to shine eternally as a bright, glittering star, signaling its great pleasure and satisfaction to all of mankind below.

"You were right, Aydon," Danior said a moment later, his voice connecting with the outer reaches of Jia-Nian's awareness and drawing her back. "Her taste is indeed exquisite." A slow smile taking hold, Danior licked his lips and gazed down at her. "See for yourself, little warrior." He bent down and kissed her, deeply.

How curiously unique...how completely unlike any other experience... As she tasted her tang mixed with Danior's own flavor, the word *forbidden* again surfaced, but only briefly. Intuitively Jia-Nian knew that nothing she could ever experience at the hands of her beloved men could possibly be wicked or sinful.

She moaned into Danior's mouth as he sucked her tongue, clutching him close.

"Such zeal," Danior said after breaking the kiss. "Aydon, I do believe our choice of woman was most wise. She promises to be a more than suitable bedmate."

When Aydon's gaze fell upon her, it was solemn, without a trace of humor. His expression conveyed hunger, want, longing.

"My cock aches, heavy with the need to feel the warmth of your wet cunt clasp it, Jia-Nian." He rolled her to the side and stretched out atop the furs in her place. "On your knees, facing me," he commanded her. "I want your thighs spread wide, your cunt positioned over my cock and your tits dangling where I can play with them."

Jia-Nian's cunt released a new gush in response, bathing her inner thighs. As she obeyed Aydon's directive, he looked to his fellow guardian. "Danior?" he asked simply.

"Not yet. It's too soon for her to accept us at the same time." Danior grasped his cock and groaned. "I want nothing more than to fill her little white ass this very instant. To feel her tight channel squeezing my cock until my prick erupts deep within." The sigh he let out was gargantuan.

Jia-Nian trembled at the profoundly erotic image engraved by Danior's words. Her veins all but boiled with the stinging hot lava of desire.

"But I will wait until she's ready. Until then, I'll prepare her hole for my entrance." His hand covered the small of her back, fingers dragging downward until they slipped in the dark divide between her cheeks. "The healing oils in your satchel," he said. "Which one should I use?"

"The olive oil," Jia-Nian told him, swallowing hard to prevent her skittering heart from leaping wildly from her throat. "The largest of the three oil pouches." She watched as Danior rose and went to the pile of bags he'd carried on his back as they rode.

"Danior," Aydon called, his voice tight and strained. "You can take Jia-Nian first. I-I owe you that much, brother guardian."

Danior walked back to them, the oil pouch in hand. He nodded at Aydon, a smile at his lips. "What, and let you be the more noble of us? I think not. I'd never hear the end of your woeful tale of sacrifice for the rest of my days," he quipped. "The only thing you owe me, Aydon, is to ensure Jia-Nian is well-and-happily fucked...while I watch with rapt attention, of course." Danior's smile was broad and easy.

Tears of gladness and gratitude brimmed in Jia-Nian's eyes. The strong camaraderie her men shared was greater than the bond some brothers-by-blood enjoyed. Their friendship was as true as their sense of honor, as robust as their warriors' might. However had she managed to find herself in this enviable position? To be treated with such great care by the two most appealing men in all the land?

"That I can do," Aydon agreed. "Jia-Nian, look at me," he ordered, his hands clasping her waist. "I want to see those storm cloud eyes of yours as my cock pierces your channel for the first time. As your sweet cunt sucks my flesh deep."

The cool night air washed over her damp slit, making her shiver, not from the cold, but from the delicious anticipation. A great sigh of longing escaped Jia-Nian's lips, put to rest as Aydon lowered her onto his great cock. He held her tight as his rigid column united with her opening.

As he entered her passage, Jia-Nian's head fell back and her eyes closed at the sweet sensation.

"You're so wet for me," he said. "Your cream already bathes my cock." His fingers dug into her flesh. "Jia-Nian, look at me!" he reminded her.

The feel of him stretching her opening was so breathtaking, it was difficult for her not to drift into reverie. "More," she said, looking directly into his eyes. "Give me more, Aydon. Fill me."

"Gods, this is torture," Aydon growled. "How I long to thrust hard, to feel your womb strike against my cock head."

"Then do it, Aydon," she coaxed. "Do it."

Aydon shook his head back and forth. "Not the first time. I want to make it a tender, memorable experience for you, sweet one. But," he let out a resounding groan, "I fear my loins burn too great for the patience I seek." He allowed himself to slide a bit deeper inside her cunt and they both moaned.

Her eyes widened with fascination as she watched Aydon grimace, his brow beading with sweat. What admirable control he displayed. How gallant his intentions. Yet, she yearned to convince him, *to hell with control and gallantry – the time is ripe for a bold impaling!*

"If I were the one fucking you for the first time, Jia-Nian," Danior boasted, his hand stroking his cock as he watched them, "I'd make sure to take it slow. To treat you to a long, languorous sweet fuck."

Still holding Jia-Nian above his cock, Aydon barked a laugh. "Hell's dogs you would! If it were you here instead of me, Danior, you'd have banged her swift and hard and been snoring by now."

"Oh, Aydon, please..." Jia-Nian whispered, squeezing the flesh of Aydon's broad chest. "Please give yourself fully to me. I want so much to feel you nudge my womb with that mighty cock of yours."

In a movement so swift and sure it stole her breath, Aydon flipped them until she lay beneath him and his muscled body hovered over hers. His eyes, intense in their purposeful gaze, grew dark, his expression fierce. He looked like a feral creature, a savage, intent on ravaging his prey.

Jia-Nian's heart skipped and she felt her body flush with heat. With a roar, Aydon thrust hard and deep, tearing a cry of sweet, pleased pain from Jia-Nian's lips.

She trembled as he penetrated deeper, harder, faster, her fingernails digging into the flesh on either side of his spine as he pumped.

"Are you all right," he said, some semblance of his gentler side fighting to emerge as he rammed into her again. "I don't want to hurt you."

"It's a most exquisite hurt," she assured, at a loss for the right words to describe how wondrous he made her feel. How entirely different it was to be with him than the fearsome experience she'd had with the Pushgans. "Like the flames that crackle next to us, I burn, Aydon. But the blaze is one of sweetest ecstasy."

Jia-Nian looked up to see Danior with a taut, concentrated expression across his features as he sat on a small rock, roughly yanking his cock while Aydon fucked her.

"No, Danior," she told him. "There's no reason for you to resort to manual massage. Come, bring me your cock so I may taste it as Aydon rides me."

"Aydon?" Danior said.

"How could you think to resist such a sweet invitation?" Aydon replied.

Danior positioned himself on his knees at Jia-Nian's side. She pulled herself up until she was semi-reclining. Braced on one elbow, she turned her head toward Danior, fisting his cock and drawing him close.

"Wet, shiny and covered with dew like the morning flowers," she said, licking the salty fluid from the tip of the broad purple cap. She pushed the foreskin down and swirled her tongue around his girth, moaning her delight at his obvious pleasure.

As Jia-Nian sucked a mouthful of Danior, Aydon treated her to a womb-jarring fuck. Each man played with her breasts, twisting her nipples, pinching and tugging them hard until her cunt responded with ripples of imminent orgasm.

Their joined trio fast evolved into a rhythmic, well-oiled chorus of flesh slapping flesh, sucking, slurping and deep male grunts and groans mingling with her impassioned moans.

The deep well of Jia-Nian's rapture rose to the surface, filling her senses, urging her on to suck Danior harder, to milk Aydon's cock with her inner muscles. She found herself fighting the urge to give in to wild thrashing and primal cries as she became lost in the exotic, foreign sensation of cunt and mouth penetration.

"I can't hold out much longer, Jia-Nian," Aydon said, his voice gravelly. "Watching your pretty little mouth suck on Danior's cock fills me with spikes of pleasure so hot my balls burn for release." Aydon's hand reached below, his fingers eager to locate her clit. She screamed around Danior's cock when he found it, pinching it.

"Fuck her harder, Aydon," Danior urged, his gaze glued to Jia-Nian's lips wrapped around his cock. "I like it when you make her tits bounce."

Aydon complied, shoving so hard she slid along the furs.

"Look at her beautiful face, Danior. See how her eyes flash like a storm-darkened sky, rife with thunder and lightning? See how her soft, plump lips—" Aydon's face contorted, his teeth clenching together in a pleased grimace. Jia-Nian could tell he was close to liberating his seed. Still his fingers saw to her pleasure.

Danior's hands clasped Jia-Nian's head and he looked at her in a way that made her feel cherished. "My seed comes," he grunted. "Milk it from me, little warrior, milk it—" Danior's expression twisted as Aydon's had a moment before.

Amid twin warrior roars, ribbons of Danior's hot cream sprayed the back of her throat while Aydon's searing seed anointed her well-fucked cunt.

Jia-Nian drank deeply of Danior, licking the last of his cream from his cock as his warm, softening flesh left her mouth. She braced herself against a quaking shudder as molten swirls uncoiled deep in her belly. Crying out their names, her body stiffened. Her men held her in their arms as her spine prickled and her womb pulsed hard with bolt after bolt of orgasmic bliss.

By gods, this experience, this heavenly, magnificent feeling, was beyond compare. She wrapped her arms around her beloved guardians as they lingered lazily by the fire, the forest's night air redolent with the musky scent of their sex.

"We haven't yet eaten," Danior said sometime later, clutching his growling belly. "If we are to spend the night fucking and tomorrow in motion, ready for action, we need sustenance." He leapt to his feet. "Keep the fire strong, Aydon. I'll return soon."

Jia-Nian watched Danior slip into his breeches and pad into the woods. "Danior loves you," she said as Aydon stoked the fire, adding more branches.

Aydon nodded. "He would fight to the death to protect me, as I would him. He is good and honorable and undeserving of his pitiless destiny."

"How long had you known him before Shivrane wielded her magic?"

"All our lives. Our fathers rode together as guardians and our families lived nearby, sharing often in repast. Danior and I were sent away for guardian training on the same day." Aydon uttered a soft laugh. "Never will I forget our mothers' wailing as they smothered us with hugs and warned us to take heed of danger at all times."

"Did you and Danior always ride together?"

Aydon's jaw muscle clenched and unclenched as he stared into the fire. A long moment passed before he answered. "Yes, along with his father and mine, who were both killed in battle."

Jia-Nian touched his arm. "I'm so sorry, Aydon."

He turned away from the flames and gazed into Jia-Nian's eyes. "As long as there is breath in me, Danior and I will always ride together."

Jia-Nian found herself yearning to pledge that as long as she breathed she too would remain at their sides. She could think of nothing more rewarding than to spend her days—and nights—with her beloved guardians. But she remembered their words when they told her she belonged to them...only until they arrived in Zalvanus.

The journey couldn't take long enough to suit her.

It wasn't long before Danior emerged from the depths of the forest, a long, lean hare dangling from his grasp.

"However did you manage to bag a swift hare in the dead of night?" Jia-Nian asked.

"He's developed into quite the hunter since becoming a shapeshifter," Aydon said, amusement in his voice.

"I tire of munching hay and shrubbery by day," Danior explained. "At night I can't wait to tear into roasted animal flesh."

The cooked hare rendered a meager amount of meat, but enough to curb the gnawing at their bellies. An accompaniment of salt-cured olives and dried berries that Jia-Nian carried in her satchels provided additional satisfaction to their hunger.

"What I wouldn't give for a jug of wine," Aydon said. "And a hunk of good cheese with millet cakes."

"Or a stew of goat meat and lentils with great cups of barley ale," Danior added. "Perhaps when we arrive at the next village the good people will share their victuals with us."

"Guardians of Zalvanus have earned respect and a worthy reputation far and wide," Jia-Nian said. "I have no doubt the villagers will be pleased to supply you with foodstuffs and replenish your wine pouches."

"I miss the sticky sweetness of dates and the lushness of fresh figs," Danior said. "I used to miss honey too..." His gaze locked on Jia-Nian. "Until tonight. What about you, Aydon?"

Now both men eyed her, warming Jia-Nian more than the fire's glow.

"Her juices greatly satisfy my cravings," Aydon answered.

"I've been remiss," Danior said, reaching for Jia-Nian's pouch of olive oil. "Present your buttocks to me, little warrior. We have preparations to make."

Jia-Nian reclined on her belly and Danior slapped her ass. "Not like that. Up on your knees, backside up, tits down, thighs spread."

She assumed the position quickly, eager for Danior's ministrations. "Is this all right?"

Having poured oil on his fingers, Danior glided them through her crease, traversing from top to bottom and then circling her tight hole.

Her eyes flew wide as his finger probed the small tight ring of muscle.

"Yes, this will do just fine." He grasped one cheek firmly and she soon felt his touch at her cunt opening. "I can ready your tight rear passage at the same time I fuck your juicy cunt." His cock hammered hard into Jia-Nian at the same time his finger shot into her dark passage. She screamed out his name, loving the sense of fullness, appreciating the insistent fucking.

"Slow and languorous indeed," Aydon quipped.

A husky chuckle rose up from Danior's chest. "I learned from watching you pummel Jia-Nian earlier," he said. "It seems to me our little warrior prefers it full, hard and fast." His thrusting actions matched his words.

Aydon knelt before her. "Lift your head, Jia-Nian. Your position may be fine for Danior's purposes, but you're too low to swallow my cock."

Supporting herself on her elbows, Jia-Nian opened her mouth to speak, only to find it amply filled by Aydon's eager cock. As with Danior, Aydon's sizeable appendage was more than she could take comfortably in her mouth.

Aydon worked her nipples brusquely, abrading the needy, aching buds with his rough fingers. Each pull of her sensitive flesh blazed a fiery path straight to her clit and deep inside her cunt, where Danior's thick cock toiled.

Her tongue familiarized itself with Aydon's silk-smooth shaft as her cheeks sucked him. Moaning around a bursting mouthful of man, she savored his unique flavor. Drawing back until his cock had almost popped free, Jia-Nian paid homage to the plump cock head, nudging her tongue into the tiny slit at the crown.

"Yes...just like that, sweet one," Aydon crooned. His groans and gasps increased her hunger, her need to give him pleasure.

Danior's finger wiggled in her hole while his cock established a rhythmic pace in her cunt. If being filled this way gave her such immense pleasure, she could only imagine the darkly erotic sensation of full double penetration.

"You enjoy having Aydon and me fuck you, don't you, Jia-Nian?" Danior asked. She moaned a pleased response. "Yes, I thought so. Your body adapts to sex like a

bird adapts to flight." He removed his finger from her hole as well as his cock from her cunt.

Jia-Nian sighed. A moment later her eyes flew wide at the feel of Danior's tongue ringing her tight pucker.

"She's ready, Aydon," he said a moment later. "Our woman can take us both."

Aydon withdrew his cock from her mouth and Jia-Nian sighed in disappointment.

"Up," Aydon said, bracing her under her arms as he lifted her to her feet.

"You in front, me in back," Danior said. "That tree looks more than sturdy enough."

In a blur of motion, Jia-Nian was dragged to the other side of the small clearing. Danior took more oil and greased his cock, then wiped the remainder off in her crease. Widening his stance, he leaned back against the tree and smiled.

"Come to me, Jia-Nian. Let me fill you your hot, tight ass until my balls meet the flesh of your plump cheeks."

He crooked his fingers in invitation.

And Jia-Nian accepted.

Chapter Six

"That's it, Jia-Nian. Just relax and lean against me," Danior coaxed, skimming his hands over her silken flesh. Her gently muscled arms were those of a woman not unfamiliar with physical tasks and swordplay. Her full hips were ripe, the curls of her little bush soft and dewy. She embodied all that was womanly and desirable.

It was taxing for him to be gentle or patient when what Danior wanted was to slam into this earthy goddess repeatedly, fucking her hard and fast until she fell in a heap of pleased exhaustion at his feet.

Impatience hadn't always been his manner. The change in behavior came about with Shivrane's wickedness. Along with the burden of shapeshifting, Danior was saddled by a pervasive sense of urgency...desperation.

The days were long as he galloped free on four powerful legs. But the nights were short with the scarce hours allotted him as a man. Through necessity he'd learned to make the most of it. To wring every last drop from life that he could each night, save for the few hours of sleep he required.

Now as Jia-Nian's pliant flesh rested against him, Danior pondered on the exquisite feel of her. Her full, rounded ass was every bit as appealing as that of the goddess Ivarus' moon that restored human life to him each night. Filling the center of Jia-Nian's own moon with his cock would only heighten his awareness of life, of that Danior was certain.

Cupping her breasts from behind, he marveled at the smooth, puffy nipples pebbling, beading, coming to life at the touch of his fingers. With a moan sweet as a cluster of dates, Jia-Nian squirmed against him, gliding her fingers from his thighs to his groin.

He closed his eyes in silent prayer.

Great Ko'Loran, give me the patience I need to treat this woman as she deserves. Grant me the endurance to take it as slow as she needs, to satisfy her completely. Let me remember that I am indeed human, at least for these few short precious hours.

Lifting Jia-Nian by the waist, Danior positioned his oiled cock at her opening. With all the care he could assemble, he eased himself with agonizing slowness into her tight passage.

The snug fit of her hole gripped his cock, clenching, constricting until he thought sure he'd spew his seed before even infiltrating her half the way. If that weren't enough, Jia-Nian's prolonged moan and beseeching sigh nearly had him trembling.

"Her expression is one of wondrous rapture," Aydon said. "Gods, Danior, our Jia-Nian is such a beauty. Her cheeks are flushed as pink as her nipples and her eyes darken with passion as your cock pierces her."

"The pleasure nearly makes me sob," Jia-Nian said. "You feel so good, Danior. So right inside me."

Danior let loose a mighty groan. "Your hole is so tight I may well expire from pleasure before this night is over." He struggled, doing his best to control the overwhelming urge to discharge hot strands of cream into her stretched hole. He continued to hold Jia-Nian by the waist as his cock filled her by small increments.

She sagged against Danior, moaning, his name a pleading whisper on her lips. His cock nearly exploded at the needy, breathy sound.

Patience...patience, he reminded himself. Savor this sweet, all too brief moment of life. Live it to its fullest.

Bending his knees behind hers, Danior supported Jia-Nian, slipping his cock further into her depths, her enthralled little gasps spurring him on.

He'd envisioned this very moment as he spoke to Jia-Nian just before the break of day. She'd stood there before him, fresh from sleep, lickable as honey and full of concern for his welfare. It was all he could do to keep from plundering her sweet-

talking mouth with his tongue while savagely tearing off her garment and impaling her on his cock.

He feared he might have done just that if Ko'Loran hadn't interrupted with the sun's first rays. Instead, Danior watched her comfort him as he shifted, stroking his hair, then his stallion's mane. The abject pity in her gaze almost killed him.

A whimper and subtle shift in Jia-Nian's position returned Danior's attention to the moment. This sweet moment of overriding bliss.

He snaked one hand down her belly, nestling his fingers at the moist notch between her thighs. Slipping inside her slit, he found her sweet spot and glided his fingertip across the swollen bud. Her shuddering response and the surge of her juice dragged a groan from his chest.

Jia-Nian turned her head, dipping it back and looking up into Danior's eyes. Before the slow erotic glide of her tongue had fully journeyed across her half-parted lips, he bent to capture her mouth in a crushing kiss. The taste of his little warrior was wild and heady as he swallowed her cries of delight.

Reluctantly, Danior ended the kiss. He could have kissed her like that, drinking the carnal bliss she offered, until he happily drowned in the cavern of her mouth.

"Are you ready for Aydon?" he whispered into the ear of the lovely maiden gloving his cock.

She nodded, her generous lips wet from their kiss, her eyes dark with passion. "Ready for his cock and for the full measure of elation that I know will follow," she said.

Dragging his gaze from her sweet face, Danior shifted his attention to Aydon. "She's prepared. Together we'll hold her while you penetrate her cunt."

"Yes...come to me now, Aydon. Fill me to overflowing. Make me sob with the bursting pleasure of being impaled on two engorged cocks."

Aydon took the few steps to close the distance between them. Danior watched his brother guardian stand firm, Aydon's expression solemn and intense as he studied the lush creature impaled before him on Danior's cock.

With a languorous swoop of his tongue, Aydon licked Jia-Nian from her throat to her temple before settling on her mouth and kissing her with deliberate carnal intent.

He skimmed his hands over her face, over her breasts and belly. After sliding his hand between her legs Aydon said, "Mmm, yes...you're ready. Your smell is tangy with sex. Hot cream pools at your slickened folds." He painted his chest with her juice, then bent to position himself, slowly guiding his cock into Jia-Nian's cunt.

She shuddered between them, her hushed moans and surprised gasps like sweet music to Danior's ears.

"I'm seated," Aydon said, straightening his knees. "Fully bathed to my balls in her warm liquid arousal."

He and Danior stood erect, supporting Jia-Nian by the strength of their cocks as her feet dangled above the forest floor. The weight and slight size of the little warrior's body was just right to complement his and Aydon's bulk.

"Oh...this is too much," she said with a muffled cry, her head rolling from left to right against Danior's chest. "I can't...I can barely..."

"Are you hurting?" Danior asked, unable to resist tonguing the delicate shell of her ear, nibbling at the soft lobe. Her panting rendered him incapable of keeping from flexing his cock in her tight depths while awaiting her reply.

"How can I respond to your question and not sound as if I'd lost my mind?" Jia-Nian answered. "The length and width of you both astonishes. It is like the deepest pain, mingled with the utmost ecstasy. It feels so good to be taken like this, to experience thick pulsing hardness in each hole."

"Open your eyes and look into mine," Aydon said. "Danior and I want you fully aware as we pleasure you."

A bubble of ecstatic laughter escaped Jia-Nian's lips. "Believe me, Aydon, I have never been so fully aware in all my born days! I am shaken by excitement, alerted by the moisture oozing from my cock-filled sex, wholly aware of the wild thrill filling my dark passage."

Growling, Aydon slipped partially out, slamming back into her high and hard. Jia-Nian wrapped her arms around Aydon's neck and moaned. He thrust three times more as he and Danior supported her. Each of Aydon's vigorous plunges had her bouncing and increasing the pressure to Danior's cock.

"Gods how I love this rough, untamed ride," she cried, and Danior felt in tune with her every vibration as Jia-Nian shivered with joy.

Once Aydon had stopped, but before Jia-Nian's ecstatic cries had subsided, Danior slipped his cock from her ass about halfway, then fucked her hole until every muscle in his groin burned with the need for release. Each mewling whimper, every sob that burst from her throat was like an elixir heightening his desire, driving him closer to completion.

"What magic is it that you weave, Jia-Nian?" Aydon asked as the same question trekked across Danior's mind. "The more we fuck, the more unquenchable my lust." Aydon flexed his hips, grinding himself hard against her as he took her mouth in a kiss. Jia-Nian quivered and moaned in response.

"Gods, I felt that pressure clear to my balls," Danior said, plastered hard against the tree and fighting to maintain control under the mounting waves of pleasure.

And yet...something was amiss...

A threesome sex scenario certainly wasn't new or unusual for him or Aydon. They'd shared and enjoyed more than their fair share of willing, enthusiastic females over the years. Their cocks had thrust into wide, cavernous, oft used cunts. Juicy taut cunts. And even some old, dry as the desert cunts.

They'd licked and nibbled on tits big, round and bountiful. Tits as small and sweet as figs. Tits stretched, worn and long milked out.

With hungry cunts and ready asses, women of all ages and stations made themselves gladly available to the duo, impatient to partake in fucking a muscled pair of legendary guardians.

Sinking his cock into a woman's depths had always been amusing enough entertainment. Danior would enjoy the hell out of the lusty wench until he was thoroughly spent and then send her on her way with a brisk clap to the ass or perhaps a bit of compensation for her purse. He couldn't remember a time when beautiful faces and lush bodies hadn't been plentiful and his for the taking. And take he did. Hungrily.

But never, not with a single one of those women—whose faces he could barely recall—had it been the way it was now with Jia-Nian. Never had Danior found his emotions tangling with his head as he went about the jovial mission of fucking. The only time emotion came into play was on the battlefield where hate, fear, anger, glory and vengeance intermingled with fierce intensity.

Jia-Nian moaned, the sound traversing through her body and into his. Danior smoothed his hand over her pulsing throat, her berry-tipped breasts, her soft belly. Yes, as he felt this amazing woman in his arms, heard her sweet mewlings, focused on how her hole cradled his cock, he had no doubt something was indeed amiss.

"It's never been like this before, has it Aydon?" Danior asked.

"Never," Aydon responded without hesitation. "Never..."

Danior wondered if they shared the same thoughts regarding Jia-Nian at that particular moment. He wondered if Aydon was thinking about how she'd brightened their lives with her sweet smile, her flashing eyes, her soft, willing body. How she made them laugh and nearly forget the day's blood-soaked battles. How she treated them tenderly as she tended their wounds, kissing their aches away.

How she, damned stubborn woman, battled Pushgans at their side with swift sword and brave heart.

No, Danior thought. Aydon was much too disciplined. He had far more control and greater sense than Danior when it came to women. Aydon would never allow himself to fall –

Danior sucked in a gasp.

“What is it?” Aydon asked.

“Nothing,” Danior lied. “Just the damned deep pleasure of it all.”

In truth, the realization hit Danior with more intensity than his forced shift from man into stallion each morning.

He’d fallen in love with Jia-Nian.

“Oh, Danior...Aydon...” Jia-Nian cried, her body bucking, her anus squeezing Danior with exquisite demand. Reaching back with one hand to clutch Danior’s thigh and grasping Aydon’s chest with the other, she cooed, “My two beloved guardians.”

The aching tingle and tightening in Danior’s balls was immediate at her soft, sweet words. His body stiffened and he became aware that Aydon was similarly affected.

“Damn impatient cock,” Aydon said, his voice gritty. “It won’t listen to reason. My gush of seed comes quickly.”

“Mine is no better,” Danior agreed, his spirit ascending to the realm between worlds, prepared to experience the mounting rush of absolute euphoria.

“Yes, yes...sing me with your twin streams of nectar,” Jia-Nian said, her body taking on a slow, persistent tremble.

Before losing the power of speech, Danior ground out, “Press her into me, Aydon. We need to support her as our bodies shudder with climax.”

Aydon did just that. The added pressure to Danior’s cock inside Jia-Nian’s scorching hot channel shredded the last threads of his control. Though his thoughts were already well on their way to escaping his body, Danior dimly heard both Aydon and Jia-Nian cry out, their bodies heaving, trembling in the throes of untold rapture.

Their conjoined orgasm was potent. Deep and jarring. It lasted far longer than any he'd remembered in the past. The soul-deep level of satisfaction, the incalculable pleasure and the luscious feel of the woman he loved leaning hot, spent and sweaty against him, swelled in Danior's chest.

As their final shudders of satisfaction subsided, in union the threesome sank to the forest floor in a heap, huddling together, unable to move much more than a little finger. Heartbeat atop heartbeat, cocks still buried, they stayed that way for a long while.

Long enough for the swell of gladness in Danior's chest to wither and make room for the crash of despair, the familiar pull of melancholy.

After all, what could Danior possibly offer a lively woman like Jia-Nian? He could imagine their life together in a village where she spent her mundane days gathering hay for his morning meal, picking burrs from his coat after a ride through the forest, removing a thorn from his hoof...

An existence where the scent of her womanly musk ate at his stallion brain like molten lava.

A life where she was completely without his protection by day should danger arise. That, more than anything, shook him to the core.

No, the few short hours of manly companionship, of the erotic love of a man for a woman, of the conversation Danior could provide each night, would never be enough. Jia-Nian deserved so much more than merely half a man.

It was best he keep his foolish notions of love to himself. Danior could bear neither Jia-Nian's pity, nor Aydon's scoffing at his heart's dilemma.

He would enjoy the delicious little wench along their journey to Zalvanus. But once there, he would part ways with her. No matter the crushing weight in his chest at the devastating thought.

Lazily collapsed over Jia-Nian, Aydon shifted his weight so as not to crush her. The erotic experience they'd just shared was not what he'd expected. Not like all the rest.

It was excruciating.

As he felt his cock slipping from the hot confines of her cunt, he struggled to maintain the connection to the last possible second. Separating from her wet flesh brought a strange, lonely sensation that he felt someplace deep in his center.

Nothing could be more unlike him after fucking a wench.

While he pummeled Jia-Nian, her breasts pressing close to his chest, her velvety belly mashed against him, Aydon was struck by a host of outlandish thoughts clawing at his mind.

Thoughts of Jia-Nian at his side, cooking his meals, birthing his babes. Erasing the horrors of battle that dwelled in his brain with a single kiss from her sweet lips. The spirited, willful Jia-Nian exchanging barbs with him. The luscious, succulent Jia-Nian warming his bed. Always. Forever.

Dizzied by the unexpected rush of images and invasive thoughts, Aydon groaned and rolled full onto his back. Staring at the deep purple night, he watched the stars twinkle and Ivarus' silvery pearl moon glow.

A quick glance Jia-Nian's way was a mistake, for Aydon's gaze became fixed on the moonlight shimmering in her hair and illuminating half of her beautiful face. Thankfully, her eyes were closed. If they were open, they'd draw him in and he'd likely drown in their inviting depths.

Mystification shrouded his soul. This wasn't supposed to happen. Damn it all to hell, he was a Guardian of Zalvanus! There was no room in his life for a wife or babes. He had no business entertaining such foolish, love struck thoughts. As a guardian he'd been trained to be disciplined, to never allowed feelings or family to get in the way of duty.

Aydon sighed. He was a damn poor excuse for a guardian.

By some cruel accident of fate he'd fallen in love with Jia-Nian.

Imagining Danior's mocking reaction almost made Aydon laugh. How many times had Aydon lectured the charming head-turner to keep his affairs with his wenches carefree and detached? If Danior had any inkling that Aydon had stumbled blindly into love, like a drunkard falling face-first into the mud, Aydon would be plagued by Danior's jeers and scoffing forevermore.

With another glance at Jia-Nian, he steeled himself. The sooner they reached Zalvanus the better. He needed to be free of her, to escape from the temptation, the too-sweet notion of spending an eternity in her arms.

Chapter Seven

Four days and nights had passed since Jia-Nian first experienced the rapture of double penetration with her beloved guardians. After hot, gritty, demanding days of skirmishes, some light and some more rigorous, they spent their nights wrapped in each other's arms. Between snatches of sleep the threesome engaged in lusty rounds of sex, Aydon and Danior taking turns with her front and back.

Each morning Jia-Nian made a point to awaken before dawn to have a few precious last words and share a few tender kisses with Danior before he shifted. It broke her heart to watch the transformation from man to stallion. He was such a brave soul. And he had a truly good heart.

This morning was different. Once Danior had transformed, Jia-Nian peeled off her garment and stood naked next to the glossy brown stallion, clapping his muscular flanks, whispering soothing words into his ear.

"Take me for a wild ride as the world awakens, Danior," she said. Grabbing a hank of his mane she hauled herself up on his bare back. "Show me the world as you see it each morning. I want to feel the wind whipping through my hair. Let me hear the sound of your hooves pounding the earth. Let me feel the vibration through my body as you gallop."

Before signaling Danior forward, Jia-Nian looked to the side where Aydon now leaned against a tree, arms crossed over his chest as he watched her. She offered a smile that silently spoke the words of her heart. His expression solemn, he gazed at her for a long moment and then nodded his understanding and approval.

In the next instant she and her stallion were off. Leaning forward, Jia-Nian clung to Danior's mane as he picked up speed and his hooves kicked up clods of dirt. Never had she felt so free, so wild. It was indeed the ride of a lifetime.

With each bounce of her buttocks against Danior's strong back her clit stirred. She thrilled in the feel of her nakedness slapping against his hide, at the sight of her breasts springing rhythmically with his gait. The cool morning wind chilled her, tightening her nipples to aching points. She longed to grasp them, pinch them, roll them to ease the erotic sting, but held fiercely to his mane for fear of falling hard to the ground.

It was on the return from their feral ride that Danior slowed his pace. The more leisurely cadence brought with it a new awareness of vibration. Jia-Nian felt the warm current of nectar emerging from her cunt, pooling on Danior's back. She leaned down against him, brushing her nipples against the coarse hair of his hide, abrading them, increasing the twinges of desire that coursed from her tits to her cunt.

Her hips began an involuntary writhing. Soft moans escaped her throat, caught on the wind and scattered, mingling with birdcalls and the sounds of the world coming alive. The pulsing in her clit intensified and Jia-Nian braced herself for a shuddering climax.

"Faster now, my love," she cried into Danior's ear. "Ride like the wind. Deliver me to a place where my spirit communes with the earth and sky and all of nature." Nudging him with her heels, she hung on as he broke into a furious gallop.

Her magnificent stallion didn't disappoint. As potent convulsions gripped her, Jia-Nian's impassioned cry rent the air.

With the last of her trembling, Danior again adopted an unhurried pace. Nearing the spot where they'd spent the night, the place where Aydon waited, Jia-Nian clapped his neck and stroked his mane.

"For the rest of the day, Danior, remember that you and I shared this extraordinary time together. That your spirit, your speed and agility, delivered me to grand new heights. What an extraordinary man you are, my beloved."

Truer words she'd never spoken. Both of her men, her lovers, were extraordinary. Good, bold, true and brave.

But while their hearts were pure and their hands and words often gentle, there was nothing faint or meager about them. No indeed, these two were distinctly men through and through. Aydon and Danior were fierce, bold, strong and infuriatingly obstinate. They seemed to thrive on battle, the exhilaration of victory and hot, hard sex.

Though often beset by a frightful assortment of gashes, bruises and abrasions, their colossal carnal appetites never faltered. And neither did Jia-Nian's. She couldn't get enough of their mouths, their tongues, their cocks.

As soon as she'd ministered to their wounds with her healing herbal poultices, Aydon and Danior were on her, in her, thrusting into her passion-drenched flesh. Into the wee hours each night, her body hummed with vibrations of one dazzling orgasm after another.

Arriving back at the site after her fervent morning ride, Jia-Nian allowed Aydon to help her from Danior's back. Threading his fingers through her hair, he gazed so deeply, so lovingly into her eyes that she felt the heat of his passion clear to her soul. Aydon fisted her locks, dragging her hard to his chest before claiming her mouth.

She wanted the kiss to go on forever and whimpered when Aydon's lips left hers. But, like his brother guardian, Aydon didn't disappoint. He got to his knees and forced her thighs apart, burying his head at her cunt, sniffing her sex, licking the remnants of her wild orgasm, nipping at her clit.

Just when she felt sure she couldn't take another moment of sweet, tingling pleasure-pain, Aydon slammed her against the tree and shoved his cock in her cunt high and hard. His expression was fierce, feral as he fucked her, growled at her, set her inner world afire.

Without mercy, he pinched her rigid nipples, dug his fingers into her hips, slammed into her repeatedly. The ride he provided was every bit as rough, wild and untamed as that she'd shared with Danior. And the climax was just as monumental.

* * * * *

Jia-Nian looked down at her hand clasped around Aydon's as they rode and she smiled. Her men insisted her hands possessed powerful healing magic and were all they needed to recover from their injuries enough to happily focus on their carnal mission.

Ah...if only it were so. If she possessed such power, Jia-Nian would have used it to soothe her own aching heart, to shield it from the pain of loss that soon would come. Merely a day or two's ride, Zalvanus loomed ever closer, the approach bringing with it mixed feelings of elation and sorrow.

Aydon and Danior had been honest and forthcoming. They'd treated her with respect and care but they'd never sought to deceive her with fanciful promises of love everlasting. Many times they spoke to her of their arrival in Zalvanus, where they would see to the business of the Zalvaneans they were sworn to protect.

And where they would part ways with her.

They'd send her on her way so she could continue studying the healing arts or otherwise occupy her time.

Before getting to know and love her dear men, Jia-Nian would have been thrilled at the prospect of living among the Zalvaneans. She had some distant family there, after all, with her departed grandfather being pure Zalvanean. There was so much she could learn among their people, so much she hoped to offer them in return for their years of kindness and generosity to the Strathulians.

But now...

Now arrival in Zalvanus held anguish for her.

While she'd managed to live all her life with one heart beating in her breast, how in the name of Ko'Loran could she go on living without her other two hearts now? Each time Jia-Nian thought of it the pain weighed heavier on her chest, clawing at her soul.

The feel of Aydon's fingers in her hair, sifting through her windblown locks, distracted her from her cheerless contemplations. With a pull on the reins, he slowed Danior's swift gallop to a leisurely pace, giving the stallion well-deserved rest and

allowing for conversation. When Aydon leaned close, sweeping her hair from her neck and brushing a kiss beneath her ear, she sagged against him and sighed.

"I never noticed this until now," he breathed into her ear as he fingered a spot on Jia-Nian's neck, just below and behind her ear.

Her hand went to her neck, fluttering at the small red stain there. "My birthmark," she said, having almost forgotten about it.

"A most unusual birthmark for a most unusual woman."

She felt his finger lightly tracing the round shape which ended in a zigzag tail at the bottom.

"It's familiar," Aydon told her. "I've seen it somewhere before."

"Perhaps you've glimpsed it atop my future throne," she said in jest.

"Ahhh, so all this time you've been royalty in hiding, hmm? Remind me to bow when next we dismount, my queen."

"I shall do just that." Jia-Nian glanced back to find the teasing smile she knew would be across Aydon's lips. "My grandfather used to tell me I bore the mark of the long awaited Zalvanean queen," she said, laughing softly at the sweet memory of the dear, gentle man. "Such fanciful, far-fetched tales he wove. His boundless stories held me captivated as a child."

"Of course! That's where I've seen it, emblazoned over the gates of Zalvanus," Aydon said. "It's the sacred symbol of their people."

"You scoff at me, Aydon. For shame," she chastised with mock indignation. All the while her grandfather's words swirled inside her head. Hadn't he told her the very same thing?

"I speak the truth." Aydon outlined the mark again with the tip of his finger. "The symbol is the same."

Jia-Nian laughed again. "If I deem you worthy, Aydon the Bold, when we dismount I shall allow you to kneel at my feet and kiss my toes. Danior the True may have a lick too if he behaves."

"You jest, Jia-Nian, but what if it is so?"

"Have you lost your senses, Aydon?" Jia-Nian clucked her tongue in derision. "Over the years I've scooped animal dung from outside our home. I've scrubbed the family's well-soiled clothes as well as our dinner bowls. I've butchered goats and fowl for our meals. I've—well, I could go on and on. Believe me, Aydon, I'm neither highborn nor queenly by any measure."

"As I've known a few queens in my time," Aydon noted, "allow me to differ. You're quarrelsome, stubborn, commanding, defiant, annoying as hell...and you're the best wench I've ever fucked. I'd say you're most decidedly queenly, Jia-Nian."

"You're just as inventive as my grandfather."

"Perhaps, but as young guardian apprentices, Danior and I were taught the chronicle of the anticipated queen by our Zalvanean trainers. That woman is destined to lead the Zalvaneans to victory against all foes—to bring peace to mankind for a thousand years."

"My grandfather filled my head with the same story. My mother, however, did not hold the same conviction. I remember once when she set me to the task of plucking the feathers from a fat fowl for dinner, I informed her that future queens didn't stoop to such mediocre chores. After she took a switch to my bottom I couldn't sit down for days."

"I find the image of your naked striped bottom most appealing." Aydon slipped his hand from her waist and slid it beneath her ass. "The woods are full of switches..."

"Ha! I'd like to see you try to take a switch to me."

"You make my loins tighten with your invitation."

"That was not an invitation, Aydon. It was a warning. I suggest you heed it if you value your precious loins."

Aydon laughed. "I would imagine the Queen of Zalvanus to be lively and spirited like you, Jia-Nian. It is said that she will possess amazing powers."

A dark cloud of sorrow intruded on her thoughts. "If that were so, Aydon, and I were this supposed queen, wouldn't I have slaughtered all of Tordanuk's vermin before they went about defiling and butchering my people? Wouldn't I have known that I'm the legendary Queen of Zalvanus and do something, *anything*, instead of watching my beloved people die all around me?"

"And yet you survived," Aydon said softly, stroking her cheek, wiping away the tear that trickled from her eye. "A woman alone amid all that carnage. How, Jia-Nian? Why?"

"You torment me, Aydon!" Jia-Nian cried, the guilt at not being able to prevent the death of her family, much less the rest of her tribe, stabbing at her thoughts. "I should have died with the others. I have no business, no right, no possible purpose to be the last Strathulian standing."

"Great Ko'Loran," Aydon muttered.

"What is it?" Jia-Nian looked left and right, wondering what he'd seen to bring such alarm to his tone.

"Anguish and sorrows untold she suffers in a land distant from Zalvanus," Aydon said, the familiar words from the prophecy barely audible. Despite the warm air, a chill clutched at her spine. "Soon a pair of guardians her secrets unlock," Aydon went on, "so that she may know her true self and her mission..."

"And by her side, bold and true her beloved princes rule," Jia-Nian continued the prophecy of old taught by her grandfather. "Giving life to the promise of a thousand years of banished fears." She sucked in a deep breath, suddenly finding herself so lightheaded she feared toppling from Danior's back.

"*Bold and true...* great Ko'Loran," Aydon repeated.

"Oh, Aydon, Could it be?" All of her grandfather's romantic tales of a beautiful, fair and powerful queen and the two handsome princes she loved, ruling by her side, flooded her thoughts. "That would make you and Danior —"

"I know," he said, the sound of his hard swallow clearly audible.

Was it truly possible that she was the foretold Queen of Zalvanus?

You bear the sacred mark, her grandfather had told her. That's why I gave you the name Jia-Nian when first I set eyes upon you, fresh from your mother's womb. Leader of men it means. And then he would tap her temple with his fingertip. All you need to know is safely locked away here until your time comes to journey to Zalvanus, to support your subjects and lead them to victory...

"Look, Jia-Nian, there's a small village up ahead," Aydon said.

Still dazed from the dubious prospects, she gazed forward. The day's light was waning and soon night would fall. The thought of resting her weary bones on a nice straw mat for the night was so appealing it nearly displaced the newfound wonder of her improbable fate.

Sniffing the air, she found the tantalizing thought of fresh food even more appealing. The images her mind conjured had her salivating. A bit of cheese, some juicy fruit, a crust of onion cake, perhaps a small glass of wine or ale. It had been so long.

Danior shook his head and snorted.

"It seems Danior senses the same forewarning that grips at my gut," Aydon noted. "While all seems quiet upon our approach, I fear it is too calm. Be wary as we draw near, Jia-Nian."

"Look, Aydon, over there." She pointed to the large, distinct prints in the dirt. "I've only seen Tordanuk's guards ride *qubuji*. They've either been here or are still present."

Spotting the beasts' four-toed prints sent a shiver through her. The shaggy *qubuji* were bulkier than horses and had small tusks on either side of their mouths. She'd witnessed many of her tribe gored by the vicious animals when the Pushgans invaded Strathul.

"We'll dismount here," Aydon said after leading Danior to the edge of the woods. "You stay here with Danior while I check the area."

Jia-Nian slipped from Danior's back, ensuring that her sword was properly affixed. Next she made certain the assortment of knives and small spears she'd collected from Pushgan bodies were strapped and tucked so she could reach them quickly.

"What do you think you're doing?" Aydon asked, giving her an incredulous look.

"The same as always," she answered, slipping the last weapon into the leather ties that crisscrossed her breasts. "Arming myself for battle."

Aydon grabbed her arm, yanking Jia-Nian against his chest hard enough to rob her of breath. Gritting his teeth as he spoke, he said, "Have you lost your senses as well as your hearing, woman? Jia-Nian, there's a strong possibility of finding an encampment of Tordanuk's guards in that village. You will remain here as I said."

Hands fisted on hips, she stared up into Aydon's scowling face, connecting with his narrowed gaze.

"I will not."

With that, Danior gave Jia-Nian a mighty shove with his nose, causing her to falter and tumble to the ground.

"There, you see?" Aydon said. "Danior is in agreement with me. For once you will set your stubborn will aside and obey me."

Jia-Nian grumbled as she rose to her feet, brushing dirt and leaves from her bottom. "No matter how fierce and mighty you may be, Aydon the Bold, you are one man alone. You need someone to watch your backside."

This time Aydon grabbed both of Jia-Nian's arms, pulling her flush against him. She saw something in his eyes then, something she hadn't noticed there before. In the blink of an eye, Aydon's mouth came down hard on hers in a scorching kiss.

"I will not risk losing you, sweet one," he said once their lips parted. "I cannot. Let me do what I was trained to do. You have my word I'll be back for you if it is safe."

"And if it is not safe?" Jia-Nian asked, trembling from fear and the aftereffects of Aydon's potent kiss. "If you are mortally wounded?"

Cupping her chin, Aydon gave her a tender smile. "Then my brother guardian," he patted Danior's hide, "will carry you to safety and into the gates of Zalvanus."

"But Aydon—"

The conspicuous sound of a *qubuji's* ferocious bellow silenced Jia-Nian's retort. Her blood ran cold with the realization that Tordanuk's guard was present and this would be no ordinary battle.

"Please, just this once be docile for me, Jia-Nian. Don't you understand? I could not live with myself if anything happened to you." He patted Danior's flanks. "And I know Danior feels the same way." Danior responded with a nod and quiet snort.

Jia-Nian clutched onto Aydon's battle-torn tunic. "But I can help you, Aydon. I've proven myself to you in battle already, haven't I? You know I can hold my own against the Pushgans."

"Not their elite. Not Tordanuk's guard. No matter how fine a warrior you may be, Jia-Nian, a woman is no match for those bloodthirsty monsters. It's said they attain their great strength from Shivrane's sorcery."

"Oh, Aydon, don't you understand that my life would be over should anything happen to you or Danior? What good is my safety if I must live the rest of my years mourning your loss? I have no one left in all the world, Aydon, save for you and Danior. If you must die in battle, then let me be at your side fighting with you to the bloody end."

"You don't know what they do to women, Jia-Nian."

Half laughing, half crying, she shook him. "But I do, Aydon, have you forgotten? You understand the lure of vengeance, I know you do. Give me the chance to cut off as many of their balls as I can before I leave this world. Besides, if I am truly the prophesized queen, then I won't die—and neither will you or Danior."

His eyebrow arched as he looked down at her. "And if you're not?"

"Then together we'll greet Shorana, goddess of the spirit world, after a glorious battle, fighting for what's right and good and just. I will not be put off, Aydon. What will you do, tie me to a tree to keep me from following? Would you leave me helpless so that I may be raped and dismembered by Tordanuk's guard should you be unable to save me?"

"Damn you, woman," Aydon spat. "As a man of honor it's my responsibility to protect you. And should you indeed be the Queen of Zalvanus, it's also my sworn duty."

"True," Jia-Nian agreed. "And so leaving me behind is your idea of protection?" She huffed a humorless laugh. "Guardian indeed."

"I'll strap you to Danior's back and send you off."

The last streak of orange on the horizon was replaced by deepest violet as the sun set.

"I think not," she countered, gesturing to Danior. "He's about to shift. Now there will be three of us to do battle."

Mere moments later Danior's transformation back to human was complete and he stood before them. "Give me my breeches, Aydon," he demanded. "I would have a word with her royal majesty here." His narrowed gaze in no way suggested that he used the term with reverence.

"What in the name of all that's holy do you think you're doing, Jia-Nian?" he asked, backing her into a tree and pinning her there. "This is war, a man's turf, not some game of wits to play. Aydon and I are trained in combat. We understand and anticipate the tactics of Tordanuk's guard. You would only impede us in our task. You will remain here as we investigate."

"War, a man's turf," Jia-Nian repeated, taking a deep breath after Danior unhanded her to pull on his breeches. "Tell me, is that what you learned in your guardian studies?"

Were you taught that the Queen of Zalvanus hid in the woods as her guardians fought?" Danior opened his mouth to speak but Jia-Nian continued.

"No, the accounts of her future glory in battle are legendary. On the chance that I am the queen, then it is your obligation to let me join in the fight."

Aydon broke into the conversation. "You're wrong, Jia-Nian, it is not our obligation, it's —"

"You're right. It's my royal command," Jia-Nian stated, experiencing strange goings on inside her head, as if an ancient fog gradually lifted from her mind. "You will each obey me or face my wrath. Is that clear?"

Aydon and Danior exchanged dumfounded glances.

"She sounds queenly," Danior said.

"And damned domineering," Aydon agreed.

"We must be stealthy and take care not to endanger the remaining villagers or the visiting Zalvanean in their midst," Jia-Nian said.

"But how do you know —" Aydon began.

Jia-Nian expelled a weighty sigh, realizing she didn't have the answer. "I don't know how I know, I just do. My head suddenly fills with disorderly bits of information." She looked up at them and gasped. "Such as the fact that you are both in love with me."

Danior's jaw dropped. "You're in love with Jia-Nian?" he asked Aydon, the question sounding more like an accusation.

Aydon's mighty scowl altered his handsome face. "I warn you, Danior, this is no time for your scoffing. After the battle when we've wiped the Pushgan blood from our swords you can jeer all you like. But know that it was never my intention for Jia-Nian to know what was in my heart. I would have taken it to my grave."

"Ah, yes. You were just going to discard me without so much as a look back once we reached Zalvanus," she accused. "And you call me mulish!"

"And what about you," Aydon thumbed Danior's chest, ignoring Jia-Nian's words. "She said *both* of us, did she not? Why didn't you tell me you were in love with her?"

"The same reasons you didn't tell me," Danior said. "How many times have you lectured me on this very subject, Aydon? I knew you'd mock the notion. Besides, I couldn't possibly be the second guardian prince foretold in the prophecy. There must be another."

"What makes you say that?" Jia-Nian asked, her hand resting against Danior's chest.

His expression became a sneer. "I'm only half a man, Jia-Nian, have you forgotten? If you are indeed queen, what would you do, house me in your royal stable by day and let me share your queenly bedchamber by night?" Danior coughed a humorless laugh.

Jia-Nian's heart ached at Danior's obvious pain. "Danior, how could you say such a thing? The half of you that is human is more a man than twenty other men put together. You know how I feel about you. I love you as much as I love Aydon."

Danior nodded. "Aydon is a good man...the best—although I have difficulty picturing him as a prince." This time Danior's laughter rang true.

Aydon's chin elevated and he smiled. "On the contrary, I believe I'd make a striking prince. Can you imagine the fun we'd have with a huge court of concubines, Danior?"

Jia-Nian treated him to a belly jab with her elbow. "There would be no concubines. I'd be all the woman either of you ever needed."

Danior bent down to brush a kiss across her lips. "That you would, little warrior."

"If we are to move," Aydon said, gesturing toward the village, "then we should go soon."

Both Jia-Nian and Danior nodded. "But first..." Jia-Nian said, reaching up to clasp Aydon's head and bringing his mouth to hers. She meant for her kiss to speak directly to his heart, to tell him of how much she loved him. He squeezed her to him, deepening the kiss, answering her heart message with his own.

After their lips parted, she did the same with Danior, fully realizing this could be the last time she ever kissed her beloved guardians. The way Danior held her and drank of her told her he shared the same thoughts.

Each kiss was indeed the kiss of a lifetime, a commitment of heart and soul.

“Armed and ready?” Jia-Nian asked.

“Armed and ready,” Aydon and Danior chorused.

And they were off to meet their destinies.

Chapter Eight

Taking care not to alert the tethered qubuji, the trio edged their way to the rear of a mudbrick building alight with torch flame where voices and raucous laughter could be heard.

"They sound drunk," Jia-Nian whispered and Aydon and Danior nodded in agreement. "That's good. Their reflexes should be dulled."

"Keep me as your prisoner and let the women and the youths go," a man's voice inside the structure said.

"You're our prisoner in any case, Zalvanean," came another, gruffer voice. "Tordanuk will enjoy questioning you while your brittle old bones linger on the rack. As for the women," he paused to revel in husky laughter, "once we've used them up we just might let them go. It depends on how well they please us sucking our cocks."

"Release the children, at least," the Zalvanean said. "They're hardly more than babes."

"The youths...ah, now there's a sweet promise. The girl children's little tits are sweet nuggets to suck and their chaste cunts and nether holes promise tight, hot fucks for my men. If they survive they can be on their way. The boy children will serve as slaves and sexual playthings while we're on the road."

"Have mercy! See how they cower?" the Zalvanean said in a pleading voice. "Surely it doesn't make you feel more a like a man to despoil innocent youths."

"Shut up, old man!"

Jia-Nian winced at the distinct sound of flesh hitting flesh, followed by a deep moan of pain.

Both Aydon and Danior furtively peeked at the window hole.

"I count five guards, six women and eight children," Danior whispered. "Plus the old man, the Zalvanean." He turned to Aydon and Jia-Nian. "But what of the village men? I expected to see their corpses littering the grounds, yet I've seen none."

"That has me mystified as well," Aydon agreed. "We need a distraction, something to draw the Pushgans out of the building and into the open air to keep the prisoners from harm while we advance."

"The qubuji," Jia-Nian said. "If we can stir them to an uproar, the guards will come see about the din."

"Good thinking, Jia-Nian," Danior said. "I'll steal around to where they're tethered and slit one of their bellies. That should create a deafening clamor."

He turned to leave but Jia-Nian caught Danior by the hand. "No, let me do it. I'm much smaller and can slip under and between the qubuji more easily than you."

"It's too dangerous," Aydon protested. "Qubuji are ferocious."

Jia-Nian smiled at him. "We waste precious time talking. Ready yourselves for the Pushgans so we can take down as many as possible at once. As soon as I finish with the animals I'll circle around and join you in front."

"Be careful," Danior said and Jia-Nian nodded before padding away.

Seven hulking creatures stood tied to a small grove of trees. That meant there were two Pushgans unaccounted for. Jia-Nian gazed left and right. The rest of the village seemed still and there was no sign of the other guards. With quick, furtive steps she closed in on the qubuji, selecting the biggest for her target. Its size meant it would move slower than the others and she'd have a better chance skirting around it.

Drawing her brother's short sword from its sheath, she approached from the back. The creatures stirred, sniffing the air. Innocence was not a trait of the qubuji. They seemed to be inherently cruel and sadistic, which, no doubt, was why the Pushgans chose to ride them instead of horses. Still, Jia-Nian saw no need to gut one of them to create a clamor. She glanced at her sword and switched her two-fisted grip so that the broad, flat side would meet the qubuji's hide with a stinging thwack.

The target beast spotted her and trumpeted just as Jia-Nian struck a blow to his backside. For good measure she slapped two of its brethren on their wide asses. The animals bellowed and Jia-Nian felt the vibration clear to her teeth. The other four qubuji's went wild. Wary of being trampled, she sidled away but before she could escape she felt the staggering pain of a tusk goring her thigh.

With no time for tears or self-pity, she ran to the appointed place of her meeting with Aydon and Danior. Once there, she tore away cloth from the ragged hem of her garment and tied it just above the wound.

She saw that Aydon and Danior had the Pushgans in clear view as four of the five guards spilled out from the building to investigate the commotion.

"There's a foe in our midst!" one of them shouted.

"Jia-Nian, your leg!" Danior cried softly, turning toward her and spotting her bleeding limb.

She put her fingers to her lips to hush him. "I'm fine. There's no time to delay. Let's kill these foul three-eyed sons of Pushga!" Sword in hand and a war cry roaring up from her belly, Jia-Nian ran toward the Pushgans who'd gathered at the grove of trees. Aydon and Danior were at her side, their battle cries thunderous.

The Pushgans, clearly slowed by their drunkenness, appeared startled and infuriated at the trio's approach. Jia-Nian's blade hacked at the knees of one Pushgan before he'd even had a chance to wield his weapon.

"You vile bitch! I'll rip your cunt in two and feed it to the buzzards!" he screamed, struggling to remain standing.

Jia-Nian smiled when he fell with a resounding thud. She finished the job with a swift thrust to his chest. But there was little time to revel in one small victory. The clash had extracted the fifth of Tordanuk's elite from the structure and he came darting at them fast.

"Watch your back, Aydon," she shouted. Aydon turned just in time to impale the advancing Pushgan on his sword.

Danior battled two Pushgans at once, his cry at being wounded tearing at Jia-Nian's soul. At the sound, Aydon took action, whipping his knife through the air and hitting his intended mark in the center of the back.

The fiend refused to die. Uttering a howl, the wounded Pushgan turned, enraged and rushing for Aydon, who still battled another of the three-eyed heathens. But before reaching Aydon, he raised his sword, clearly intent on slashing into Jia-Nian, who fought the third and final Pushgan.

It was just a fleeting moment between worlds as she watched the wounded Danior leap into the air, sailing in front of the attacking Pushgan, determined to protect her with his last breath.

His sword sank deep into the Pushgan's belly, but not before the Pushgan's sword had speared Danior's chest.

Her world splintering before her, Jia-Nian let out a cry of anguish as her sweet Danior fell hard. But there were still two Pushgans left to deal with and Jia-Nian would see them choke on their own blood before they touched those innocent babes inside the building.

Dragging strength from somewhere deep in her core, she sliced away at the Pushgan she still fought, resolute in finishing him off so that Aydon too, didn't sacrifice himself to keep her alive. With a mighty whack, she severed one of his arms, just beneath the elbow, enjoying his mighty howl of pain. His blood spurting, he came at her still but she moved too fast for the drunkard. With the next slash of her blade she'd speared the three-eyed tyrant through his fat gray belly.

She turned to Aydon who battled the largest of the brutes.

"I can handle him," Aydon cried. "See to Danior, Jia-Nian."

Torn, she did just that, kneeling at Danior's side. He was so bloodied it was difficult to see where his wounds were. His eyes were closed and she feared he was dead. The anguish building inside threatened to turn her into a wailing, useless slug of a woman and Jia-Nian fought off the urge to sob.

She took his hand in hers and smoothed the hair back from his beautiful face. "Danior...Danior, my beloved, can you hear me?"

His eyes opened and once he focused, Danior smiled. "You're safe," he said.

"Yes, thanks to you I'm alive. Just be still, Danior, you're going to be fine," she lied. As she spoke she could see the light of life waning from his soft brown eyes and it chilled her.

"You see?" he said, still smiling. "I told you,"

"Told me what, Danior?"

"That I couldn't possibly be the second guardian prince foretold in the prophecy." He coughed blood and Jia-Nian whimpered, holding his hand tighter, trying to somehow hold on to his fading life. "There must be another," Danior finished.

"No, there could never be another, my love. No one could ever replace you, my sweet, dear Danior." She brought his hand to her lips and kissed it.

His fray ended, Aydon came to kneel at her side. Jia-Nian glanced up into his eyes and saw the shock and pain there as Aydon took in the sight of his brother guardian.

"Oh, damn, Danior," Aydon said, taking Danior's other hand and clasping it tight.

"Take good care of her for me, Aydon," Danior said, his eyes closing. "Our little warrior...our queen..."

"I will, Danior," Aydon said, his voice choked. "I promise."

Danior's grasp of Jia-Nian's hand went limp and his head fell to the side.

"No! No, this cannot be!" she cried. "Great Ko'Loran, bring my Danior back to me!"

Aydon drew her to his chest and she wept.

"It is you," came the Zalvanean's awed voice above them.

Jia-Nian looked up from her grieving to eye the tall, slender old man gazing at her. Confused and doing her best to maintain some measure of calm, she asked, "Do you speak to me?"

"Yes, you, my queen," he said with a deep bow. "My name is Oktodd. I am one of the custodians of the sacred prophecy. By the gods, I have been searching for you all my days." The old Zalvanean got to his knees and prostrated himself before her.

Jia-Nian gasped at the fragile old man's act of respect. "No, please get up" she said, touching her hand to his head. "I don't know what makes you think that but you are mistaken, I am not the queen."

"You glow, my queen," the Oktodd said, rising to his knees. "We saw it as we watched you battle. A halo of light surrounds you."

Aydon focused on Jia-Nian, his eyes growing wide. "By gods he's right, Jia-Nian. Look at you, you've changed. Your hair shines like spun gold, your sweet face lights from within."

She looked down at her hands and saw the soft glow, amazed such a thing was possible. "I don't understand."

"It is as told in the prophecy...*her glowing visage in battle.*" Oktodd lifted the hair from her neck, exactly at the spot of her birthmark. "There is no mistake. You are the long awaited Queen of Zalvanus."

"No." Jia-Nian shook her head back and forth. "No! Look." She gestured to Danior. "The second guardian who would be my prince has been taken from me. There could never be another."

"With but a kiss from her lips," Oktodd said, quoting a portion of the extensive prophecy, "she restores life to her fallen beloved."

Aydon grabbed Jia-Nian by the arms and squeezed tight as he gazed into her eyes. "You can bring him back."

"What?" Jia-Nian's thoughts whirled.

"Danior," Aydon explained, his voice tight with emotion as he shook her gently. "Oktodd is right. You bring him back with your kiss. It's in the prophecy."

Jia-Nian's hand flew to her breast where her heart thumped fast and hard. Somewhere in the back of her mind she realized it was true, or was it merely wishful thinking? She lifted Danior's head gently to place it in her lap.

"Come back to me, my beloved Danior. In Ko'Loran's name let it be true and open your eyes..." Without wasting another breath, she leaned down and kissed him on the lips, willing him to rejoin the living, filling him with her strength.

When she ended the kiss she gazed down at Danior, who hadn't stirred, and Jia-Nian felt her heart twinge. Just when she'd convinced herself that she was not the one foretold in the prophecy, Danior's eyes opened. He gazed up at her and smiled, the light of life shining in his eyes once more.

"Little warrior," he whispered.

Aydon gasped, as did the old Zalvanean. It was only then that Jia-Nian became aware that the women and children stood behind them, for they uttered astonished gasps as well.

Oktodd prostrated himself again. With the rustle of fabric and whispered directives capturing her attention, Jia-Nian looked over her shoulder to see the women and children had followed his lead.

Aydon knelt on one knee before her, his sword before him, point at the ground. With one hand fisted against his heart, he bowed his head, resting his forehead on the hand gripping his sword's hilt.

"My queen," he said with reverence, and Jia-Nian's eyes filled with tears.

She felt Danior stir beneath her, clearly attempting to rise. "No, don't move yet, Danior...your wounds are too great."

But Danior rose to his knees with little effort. "I am healed." He took his place alongside Aydon in the same respectful stance. "My queen," he said in the same tone Aydon had used.

Deeply touched, Jia-Nian could no longer help it. She openly wept. Still bewildered by all that had happened, she was certain of one fact. Without question, she was indeed the Queen of Zalvanus, as incredible as it was. The realization brought exhilaration as well as trepidation for the monumental responsibility the title carried.

"Please, all of you, rise." She placed her hands on her guardians' heads, smoothing their hair. "There is no need to prostrate yourselves. There is no need to bow before me."

"Bear witness to this miracle," the Zalvanean said to the women and children as he got to his feet. "So that you may tell your children and your children's children of what took place here this day. Let your hearts be glad that our queen now lives and will bring an end to the bloodshed and carnage."

"There are two other qubujis," Aydon said to Oktodd. "Where are the other guards?"

"They were felled as they stormed the village. The women killed them before being overpowered. They fought admirably, determined to protect their young," Oktodd said, giving the women an approving smile. "It took three women each to slay those two monstrous Pushgans. Their bodies are at the far end of the village from where they made their approach."

"But what of the village men?" Jia-Nian asked. "Are they off hunting, perhaps?"

"Our husbands, brothers and fathers were slaughtered the last time the Pushgans stormed through the village months ago," one of the woman answered. "We are the lone survivors of the massacre."

"You've lived alone here since?" Danior asked.

"We have."

"I stopped by on my journeys a few days ago and discovered the female-managed village," Oktodd explained. "I had talked them into making Zalvanus their new home shortly before Tordanuk's guard took us unawares late this afternoon." He smiled

warmly. "Little did I know that I would be so blessed as to meet the queen herself and watch her and her legendary guardians conquer the enemy. Today my life is complete."

Two of the village women stepped forward. "You must be hungry and tired," one of them said. "If you'll allow me, my queen, I will take you and your guardians to one of our humble homes where you can enjoy a small feast of thanks and spend the night."

"Thank you, it would be good to sleep indoors for a change," Jia-Nian said, clasping the woman's hand, moved by the gracious offer. "As for preparing a feast, you have been through an exhausting ordeal. You and the others need to rest and regroup. All we need is a bit of cheese, some day-old millet cakes and perhaps a mug of wine or ale, should you have it."

The second woman smiled with kind eyes. "Please allow us this privilege. How grand for us to be able to tell our children's children of the day the great Queen of Zalvanus accepted our offer of hospitality."

"Truly," the first woman said. "It would mean so much."

* * * * *

"I'd almost forgotten the lush taste of fresh figs," Jia-Nian said, closing her eyes and savoring the bit of fruit on her tongue. "And how splendid to down ale again."

Tossing a stripped mutton bone with the other discards, Aydon clasped his belly, jiggling the taut, muscled flesh. "I can't remember the last time I've eaten so well. I feel like a king."

"It seems we'll have to be satisfied with the lesser title of prince, old friend," Danior quipped, picking the last of the flesh from a meaty leg of roast fowl.

"To the rest of the world you may be my princes." Jia-Nian rose to her feet and stretched. "But to me you will always be the kings of my heart...and of my bed." She grasped the hem of the clean garment the village women had given her after her bath in the river and drew it up, over her head. A glance at her thigh still had her somewhat amazed that the fierce gore from the qubuji had completely healed.

She stood before her beloved guardians clean, scented with herbed soap and naked. In truth, she'd never felt more beautiful or confident. When Aydon and Danior simply sat staring at her instead of leaping to carnal action, she couldn't help laughing.

"What's this? You are clean, your bellies are full, you've had plenty of ale to drink," she noted, "and by the looks of you, your kingly cocks are hard and ready for me. So, tell me, beloved guardians, what is the quandary that keeps you from snatching me to the bed and fucking me until dawn?"

"We spoke of it while you bathed," Danior said. "Things have changed, Jia-Nian. Aydon and I have no precedent as to how to carry on now that we know you are queen."

Hands braced on her hips, Jia-Nian frowned. "I don't understand. How to carry on about what? Nothing has changed between us, save for the fact that now we know we three were destined to be together."

"*Everything* has changed," Aydon countered. "Danior and I have been trained all our lives to revere and protect the almighty Queen of Zalvanus, should she appear in our lifetime. Not to fuck her royal cunt should the occasion present itself."

"My cock urges me to fuck my luscious, naked queen," Danior said. "But my mind leans toward wariness, for Aydon and I know not what protocol we must follow."

Jia-Nian spat a humorless laugh "As I stand here eager to feel your hands and mouths on me, your cocks gloriously fucking me, you speak to me of protocol?" An unexpected surge of uncertainty anchored in Jia-Nian's breast and she shuddered. Dear Ko'Loran, what if it was no more than a potent case of lust they carried in their cocks and not true heart-love after all?

Chin elevated, she looked down at them. "Fear not, guardians. I will not have you tethered to me solely out of a sense of duty. I don't care what the prophecy says. It would be wrong of me to expect either of you to remain with me without love. As...as your queen, I set you both free to live your lives as you choose...with whomever you choose." It all but shattered her heart to speak those agonizing but necessary words.

Aydon and Danior exchanged glances. She watched their solemn expressions become—jovial! At the sound of their laughter she bristled.

“You miserable sons of vermin!” she said, kicking at their legs. “You have the nerve to sit there scoffing while my heart breaks? What sort of men are you? If this is the reverence of which you speak, then I’ll have none of it!”

“How can we not laugh when you speak such utter foolishness, Jia-Nian?” Aydon asked, rising from the floor and holding his hand out to Danior. “We are not slaves to be set free, my queen. We are your guardians. Your protectors. Your lovers. We are the men who were devoted to you when you were still caked with mud and stank of dung.” Aydon winked at her.

“Before any of us even suspected you were the long awaited queen,” Danior added. “Search your heart and your mind, little warrior queen.” He touched her breast and her temple. “The truth is there. You hold us both love-struck. Prophecy or not, our three hearts are fated to beat as one.”

Jia-Nian felt her heart swell. They were right, of course. If she was going to be queen, then she had better learn to heed the sense of truth inside her head instead of giving her emotions free rein.

“Embarrassed, she felt her cheeks color as she smiled. “Thank you. You have assuaged my misgivings well.” She clutched both their cocks with a gentle squeeze. Loving the masculine groans her actions solicited, she let loose a throaty laugh. “So then, my beloved guardians, what protocol concerns you?”

Danior leaned close and licked her tit, leaving it wet and aching with need. “We merely wondered if we were expected to bow or do something else worshipful before we fucked your sweet queenly cunt...your highness.” Along with offering a charming smile, he cupped Jia-Nian’s dripping cunt, gliding one finger across her clit.

Her thighs locked instinctively around his hand and she relished the delicious quiver lodging deep in her belly.

“Our dilemma, your royal nakedness,” Aydon said, bending close to nibble Jia-Nian’s ear and pinch her tit, “is that while Danior and I are loyal, well-trained, dutiful and fiercely protective guardians, we are not in the least docile or submissive.” He sank his teeth into her shoulder and sucked.

“And doubt we ever could be,” Danior added, treating her to another firm swipe of his finger and making her moan. “It’s not in our nature to be meek or passive. So if our queen desires her princes to be timid, Aydon and I fear we will strongly disappoint.” Danior punctuated his point by thrusting his fingers into her cunt, while working her clit with his thumb.

“We only hope our lusty aggression won’t be too much of a disappointment,” Aydon said, cupping her breasts and rolling her nipples hard between his fingers. Then his mouth was on hers in a brutal, decidedly non-timid kiss at the same time Danior’s other hand slipped between her ass cheeks, his finger rimming her hole.

Jia-Nian’s inner world became a vibrant swirl of color, drawing her into its depths. Perfect. Her life was perfect. Praise the gods for bringing these bold and true guardian princes into her life.

Clutching her beloveds as if her life depended on it, the Queen of Zalvanus succumbed to scorching passion, trembling limbs and the splendidly regal throes of a most majestic orgasm.

Chapter Nine

"How will I know what I am supposed to do?" Jia-Nian asked, voicing her misgivings. Her fingers traveled across the pattern of delicate blue veins decorating her guardians' cocks as she spoke. "I know nothing of being a queen."

"My understanding of the prophecy tells me the gods must have inscribed all you need to know in here," Aydon tapped her temple, "before you even entered this world. When you need them, the truths will be made known to you."

"Besides, remember, Jia-Nian," Danior said, sitting next to Aydon, across from her on the floor, "Aydon and I are more than simply highly exceptional lovers—lovers so greatly skilled that our remarkable erotic attributes have been embedded in prophecy for all time."

He smiled at that, clearly quite pleased with himself. And with good reason. By Ko'Loran's blood, Danior spoke the truth.

"Handsome, talented, lusty lovers of legend," Aydon added. "Lovers gifted in the art of treating their insatiable queen to one potent orgasm after another." He and Danior nodded at each other, boasting self-satisfied smiles.

"And what does this have to do with my query?" Jia-Nian asked, trying to hide her amusement and the moist evidence of her arousal beading at the patch of curls between her thighs. Her gaze became locked on the pearly droplets of fluid seeping from their cock heads as she palmed their shafts, treating them to long, leisurely strokes.

"Just that we want you to remember we are your trusted counsel as well as providing a pair of impressive cocks," Danior said, smoothing his knuckles along her cheek and jaw. "With the blend of our training, your inborn knowledge and the mighty love and loyalty we three hold for Zalvanus, you cannot help but make a fine and fair queen."

"Thank you," Jia-Nian said. "I appreciate your faith in me—and I promise not to forget that you are my wise counsel as well as my well-muscled, well-cocked lovers." She chuckled at their impassioned expressions as she slid her hands between their legs and cupped their balls, giving them a sensual massage.

"What kind of power do you think we'll wield as princes?" Aydon asked Danior, his voice husky with lust. "Will we have the authority to issue commands?"

Swallowing hard, as Jia-Nian continued her ministrations to their sacs, Danior gave a confident nod. "I imagine so."

"Most assuredly," Jia-Nian said.

"Then what say we engage in some practice, Prince Danior?" A mischievous smile curling his lips, Aydon rose from the floor. Lifting Jia-Nian as if she weighed no more than a cluster of dates, he tossed her over his shoulder, her ass high in the air and her head at his back.

Intensely physical sensations curled through her body as he crossed the room in several long strides. Then the breath was knocked from her when Aydon flung her onto one of the thick straw mat beds.

"Arousal surges through my veins, queen," he told her, looking as if he damn well meant it. "I command you to get on your hands and knees and spread those queenly ass cheeks so that I may fuck your royal nether hole."

Near dizzy with desire, Jia-Nian assumed the position. "Yes, my prince. Do with me what you will."

"Stated in a fine, authoritative manner, Prince Aydon," Danior said. "It's my turn to try." He strode to the bed, situating himself on his back beneath the kneeling Jia-Nian. His eyes glazed with the dark heat of passion, he locked gazes with her. "I command you to ready your dripping cunt for me so that I might fuck your majestic passage as Prince Aydon pummels your ass."

"An admirably declared command, Prince Danior," Aydon said.

Jia-Nian's cunt gushed in response to Danior's command. A rush of lusty laughter bolted from her lips as she prepared for the delicious thrill of double penetration.

No matter how weighty the responsibility of monarchy, she would always have this bone-deep pleasure to enjoy with her beloveds. While the troubles ahead may be countless, her passionate, commanding princes would ensure that their royal threesomes soothed away the day's worries.

Aydon's big hands clasped her cheeks, his fingers digging in and spreading them to expose her hole. Gasping, Jia-Nian trembled from the roots of her hair to the tips of her toes with the feel of his warm, wet tongue swirling at her entrance. A moment later he had pressed his tongue past her opening and she heard his sweet masculine groan of satisfaction.

It was the first time he'd tasted her there. And she liked the darkly erotic thrill of it. Ah, would the wild wonders of sex with her beloveds never cease?

"Top to bottom," Aydon said. "Outside and in, front or back. Your taste, your scent, your womanly essence is more potent than the effects of any ale, Jia-Nian." As soon as the words had left his lips, Aydon's cock pierced her tight hole, pushing past the ring of muscle and into her waiting depths.

A cry ripped from her throat and her buttocks clenched instinctively, as they always did upon rear entry. Clawing at the bed covering, she had little time to sigh at the pleasure of Aydon filling her before Danior's fingers spread her lips. With one long, masterful stroke, his cock thrust high and hard into the wetness of her cunt.

"Ah, yes, fuck me, my beloveds," Jia-Nian cried, embracing the ecstasy, craving more of them. "Just like that. Show me no mercy. Thrust deep until I am bursting with the magnificent feel of your flesh front and back."

"We worship at the carnal altar of your sweet sex, my beautiful queen," Danior said, shoving deeper still as his hungry gaze roved over her swaying tits.

The agile power of their twin thrusts had her mind swimming in a sea of rapture, luring her to sink into the pleasurable sensations, to drown contentedly in this incredible awareness of erotic fullness.

As Danior clasped her waist, Jia-Nian's attention shifted to the cording muscles in his strong arms and chest. In a haze of lust, she sighed. Ahhh, the sleek, hard power of him. The sheer lithe masculine beauty of him had her cunt clenching.

Her nether hole tightened around Aydon's cock as well. His growl of satisfaction mingled in the night air with Danior's pleased groan.

How easy it was to imagine the superbly muscled physiques of her guardians forever captured in effigy. Perhaps she would commission such statues once she arrived in Zalvanus. The life-sized stone figures, a cluster of sculpted fig leaves concealing their erotic treasures, would flank her bedroom chamber.

Soon the three of them developed a practiced, erotic rhythm that had them rocking together as if they'd been born joined. Sparks of bliss spiraled through Jia-Nian's being at the utter bliss of it all.

"See what our queen offers you," Aydon said. "Her royal tits dangle temptingly, begging us to play with them. Tell me, brother guardian, are her nipples dusky and pebbled?"

"Invitingly so," Danior said, reaching up to pluck the erect buds. "And her eyes clearly tell the story of her rapture as I pinch those sweet, ripe nipples."

Jia-Nian gasped at the added spikes of ecstasy Danior's purposeful play created. His fingers were like magic, easing one ache while creating another.

"Now, brother guardian," Aydon said, "finger her most sensitive spot and describe our queen's expression as you further stir her passion."

Jia-Nian's moans sounded primal, animalistic to her ears. The feel of Danior's fingers delving past her lips and connecting with her clit stoked her inner fire until she burned with need, with expectation.

"Her musky scent ascends to my nostrils," Danior said, breathing deeply of her.

Aydon sniffed the air in a long, deep breath. "The perfume of her sex floods my senses," he agreed.

Gods, it was more than she could stand. Panting, Jia-Nian's head dropped and her eyes closed against the onslaught of euphoria. A shiver convulsed through her, signaling her body's initial preparation for orgasm.

"Her body stiffens, and my balls tighten," Danior said. "Lift her head for me, Aydon. I want to see the proof of mastery that we have over our little warrior queen as she succumbs to ecstasy."

Aydon did as Danior suggested, fisting Jia-Nian's hair and yanking her head up and back. Gasping, her eyes flew open to meet Danior's intense gaze, so feral and possessive.

"Ahhh, yes...that's what I want to see," Danior said, his voice a husky growl. "The queen's eyes blaze, Aydon. Flickering twin flames of ecstasy as I squeeze and roll over her sensitive spot."

"I want to see it in your eyes too," she told Danior. "I want to see the power I wield over your princely cock as you surrender to climax."

"Your soaked cunt sucks me deep." A slow smile curled Danior's lips as he gazed down to where they were joined. "A more beautiful sight I have never beheld. Tell me, Aydon, do you enjoy watching her hole swallow your cock. Do you like seeing your flesh as it hides and seeks?"

As he finished speaking, Jia-Nian watched the muscles in Danior's jaw flex and his features take on the familiar expression of rapture as it clutched at his core. She knew his time was close.

Aydon let loose of her hair, threading his fingers through it in a soothing motion. "If I were a poet," he answered, "I would skillfully depict the bottomless splendor of watching my cock pierce our queen's ass, her cunt, her mouth." Poet or not, his words

fueled Jia-Nian's approaching peak. "And the sight of your cock impaling her cunt now, Danior, as I ream her from behind is vastly sensual."

Before Aydon had finished replying, Danior stiffened, cupping Jia-Nian's breasts and squeezing. Hot ribbons of fluid surged through her cunt as Danior gritted his teeth and growled his release, sending a vibration through her that Jia-Nian felt clear to her clit.

As she watched her sweet Danior offer certain evidence of her sexual power over him, again Jia-Nian thanked the gods for returning him to her, for casting her beloved back from the land of no return. Whatever would she do without him in her life?

Aydon's groan was low and forceful. "My queen," he cried, clutching her hips. "My sweet, forever love." He roared as his essence spewed deep into her ass.

Tears filled Jia-Nian's eyes. There was no room left for even a single measure of bliss. She was gloriously filled to overflowing in both body and spirit. Her holes bathed in the warm cream of liquid happiness, she yielded to the rippling waves of convulsion, radiating from her clit to her cunt and ultimately finding their way to her nether hole where the spasms milked Aydon's cock.

"Forever, my beloveds," she cried.

* * * * *

Her guardians sleeping on either side of her, Jia-Nian nestled happy and contented between them as she slept.

She'd had many vivid, detailed dreams in the past, always focusing on some aspect of the tales her grandfather told her. Jia-Nian now realized those dreams were teaching her, preparing her for the future. But tonight's dream was different, more vibrant and lifelike.

In it she was shown a city filled with light, one that gleamed with gold and precious gems. Rich tapestries and deep rugs adorned the enormous rooms with soaring ceilings ornamented with intricate carvings and delicate scrollwork.

It was a beautiful place populated with joyful, carefree people of all ages, creeds and colors. There was ample food and drink, an abundance of soft, silken fabrics and buildings of stone with great columns. There was no illness, no sorrow, hunger or discontent.

She saw herself sitting on a throne, her princes flanking her as they rested on their own thrones. They were garbed in fine fabrics radiant with a sheen that reflected the sun's rays. Each ensemble was embellished with glittering threads of gold and silver, as if bits of the stars, moon and sun had been captured in the material.

While Jia-Nian realized she was dreaming, she embraced the inner knowledge that she was in fact envisioning a future time and real circumstances. The very notion stole her breath away.

So you see, little one, came her dear grandfather's voice, it is indeed as I always told you it would be for you one day. You will lead the Zalvaneans to certain victory and rule as their beloved queen.

Jia-Nian's eyes teared when her grandfather's visage shimmered into view. Her beautiful dream had just become much more cherished. It was the first time she'd dreamt of him since his passing years before.

"I wish this dream would never end," she said on a sigh.

Open your eyes, dear Jia-Nian, and you will see that I am no dream.

Afraid to let go of this special time with her grandfather, Jia-Nian hesitated. When she did open her eyes he still shimmered before her in a halo of light. He looked just as healthy and happy as she remembered him before he lay dying from the gash of a Pushgan's sword after one of their sieges.

She looked left and right to see both Aydon and Danior still asleep. Aware of her nakedness, she snatched a garment from the corner of the bed and held it to her breast.

Her grandfather gave her a warm smile. "Be unashamed of your nakedness before me, my child," he said, his voice gentle and with more substance than in her dream.

"Remember, I first glimpsed it when you eagerly slipped from your mother's womb into my waiting hands."

"Grandfather Lobaniah, how can it be that you are truly here? Are you not in Nirnan with Shorana, goddess of the spirit world, ruler of the dead?"

"That is where I dwell," he confirmed. "It is with her permission and with the consent of the great Ko'Loran that I show myself to you as your spirit guide, little one. I have always guided you, even after the time of my passing. I appear now because it is time. Time for you to meet your destiny, Jia-Nian, to fulfill the sacred prophecies."

"But why me, Grandfather? Why was I the one chosen for this great responsibility? I am not even fully Zalvanean."

"It is not for us to presume why the gods make such decisions, child. I know only that you and the two who will rule as your princes are of pure heart and bold in spirit. As for being Strathulian as well as Zalvanean, the prophecies clearly state that the queen comes from a distant land."

Jia-Nian surely feared she would faint dead away when three other figures shimmered to life alongside her grandfather. Though she'd never seen graven images of Shorana, Ko'Loran, god of sun and sky or of Ivarus, the moon goddess, Jia-Nian knew without doubt that she gazed upon the almighty deities now.

"Great Ko'Loran!" came Aydon's cry next to her. Jia-Nian was quite certain he meant it as a declaration of surprise rather than a greeting.

"You are correct, of course," Ko'Loran answered Aydon's verbalized gasp of wonder. Golden beams of light radiated from his body. He wore a long soft yellow tunic, embellished in gold along the hems. A circle of golden laurel leaves crowned his head.

She watched as Aydon promptly shifted to a sitting position, swiping his hand over his fresh-from-sleep face in a scrubbing motion, his eyes wide with disbelief.

"I'm glad you see them too," Jia-Nian whispered, relieved. "The one on the right is Lobaniah, my grandfather."

"It was as if someone tapped me on the shoulder, commanding me to awaken," Aydon replied, never taking his eyes from the startling vision before them.

"And the same for me," Danior agreed, sitting up and bearing a similar expression of utter astonishment. "It's you," he cried, gesturing to Shorana. "I-I glimpsed your visage when I died."

"It is," Shorana confirmed with a nod. "And you did." She was shrouded in soft white veils from head to toe, her appearance beautiful, calming and quite unlike how Jia-Nian had imagined the ruler of the dead. There was no glow, no light, she simply emanated a soothing sense of peace.

"Great Ivarus, I would know you anywhere," Danior said to the second female, his voice full of awe. Garbed in a flowing garment of pearly silver, Ivarus too, was most striking. An aura of palest silver glowed from her head to toe. "It is you who breathes precious life into me each night as you hang the moon in the darkened sky."

"It has been my pleasure to bring you such great happiness, my son," she acknowledged.

"And my displeasure to take it from you each morning," Ko'Loran said.

"How is it possible that we see you here?" Aydon asked. "Perhaps we three died in our sleep."

"As my granddaughter's guardians," Lobaniah explained, "you and Danior share her vision just as you share her destiny. "You need to be fully prepared for what awaits on your difficult journey to conquest over Zalvanus' oppressors. We are here to ready you to meet your fate and lay claim to victory."

"We bear gifts agreed upon by the Council of Deities," Shorana said. "I grant the three of you extended life and the unconditional ability to heal." She paused when Jia-Nian, Aydon and Danior chorused gasps. "No blow from any foe's sword, no plague or illness, no sip of poisoned wine or fiery breath from any dragon will end your lives. Nor will it leave you in agony for more than a brief time before healing commences."

"Good gods...can it really be?" Danior said.

Aydon shook his head, disbelief obvious in his expression. "No...it's too much to fathom. I can't believe it," he muttered. "We must be dreaming still or perhaps the ale we drank was tainted and has caused outlandish visions."

Shorana frowned. "Without belief, without faith, Aydon, you have nothing. You become merely a dried up husk, empty and useless." A blazing sword appeared in her hand and she swiftly plunged it through Aydon's chest before drawing it out again. Aghast, Jia-Nian and Danior cried out in despair but Aydon was silent, his face etched in pain, his mouth agape as he watched the torrent of blood seep from the mortal heart wound.

As they stared, the hole in Aydon's chest diminished until there was no evidence he'd ever been pierced. Even the blood disappeared. However, the brief healing time Shorana spoke of seemed to stretch to a small eternity while Aydon lay, looking quite dead. Finally, with a mighty gasp his lungs filled with air and Aydon was back among the living.

"Now you will believe it," Shorana stated plainly. "How about you, Danior?" She eyed the blade of her sword, running her fingertip down its flaming length. "Do you believe?"

"Yes!" Swallowing hard, Danior held up one hand in a halting motion while clutching the other to his chest. "Yes, absolutely, great Shorana. I wholeheartedly believe. There is no need for further demonstration, I promise you." He gave an audible sigh of relief when the sword vanished from Shorana's grip.

Jia-Nian would have chuckled if she'd been able to swallow her heart and set it back in place after the terrible fright.

"My children," Ko'Loran said, "your road to triumph, although certain, will often be grueling. With Shorana's gift of long life and healing, you will need ample vigor, energy, stamina, hope, good cheer and abundant strength. These are my gifts to you. So that you make the most of them, I also bestow wisdom."

Jia-Nian, Aydon and Danior had just begun to express their thanks when Ivarus interrupted. "Time grows short. You may offer thanks and give praise later. My gifts are separate and individualized. She gazed at Danior. "I believe I'll start with you, Danior. Go to the window and tell me what you see."

Drawing a garment about his waist as he rose, Danior went to the chest-high opening in the mudbrick. He bent to look out, his breath catching as he spied the exchange of night for day. Awaiting the familiar shift from man to animal, he steeled himself for the pain and discomfort brought by the daily distortion of flesh and bone.

Nothing. No pain. No shapeshifting.

Only the first soft shafts of sunlight creeping over the landscape.

"I am still me!" he shouted, dropping the garment to the floor as he got caught up in the amazement and excitement of grasping his skin and examining his human form. He clapped his thighs, pinched his skin and glanced back at the group. "Look!" he cried, clearly too astonished even to shed tears. "I stand before you a man with two legs by day!"

Jia-Nian and Aydon leapt from the bed and to Danior's side, grabbing him into a mighty three-way hug and shouting for joy. Tears of happiness streamed down Jia-Nian's cheeks and she spotted tears glistening in Aydon's eyes as well.

"Human life by day as well as night. My first gift to you," Ivarus said. "For my second gift, you will understand the thoughts and utterances of every species of animal and they, in turn, will understand you. That includes all shapeshifters under Shivrane's malevolent spell so crucial messages can be relayed with speed."

"I could communicate with my brother, D'Akola," Danior muttered absently.

"Yes, the dragon shifter," Ivarus said before turning to Aydon. "I grant you the gift of heightened senses and awareness, Aydon. Hearing, sight, smell, touch and taste. You will save lives by detecting poison by taste or smell, yet not die due to Shorana's gift of healing. You have the ability to hear distant horse hooves or the bellow of qubuji as they approach. You see traps that have been set, enemies crouching in wait. Even the

stealthiest footfall stirs your attention. But I caution you, you must remain focused and alert for these gifts to work properly.”

Jia-Nian wondered what Ivarus had in store for her. She’d already been given so much, she felt almost greedy as she stood there anticipating.

“You were born with a host of extraordinary gifts that will continue to unfold as you travel destiny’s path, Jia-Nian,” Ivarus told her. “As they are needed you will discover each gift and understand how to use it. My gift for you is the power to heal others, to relieve the suffering of those maimed in battle, to ease the burden of a lame child, to eliminate most any affliction.”

Jia-Nian’s heart leapt at the news, for she’d always believed she was a healer at heart.

“Henceforth,” Ko’Loran said, “you have the ability to walk between worlds to seek counsel with the gods whenever necessary. The rare gifts we confer bring you three closer to immortality than any other mortals now walking the earth.”

“As long as your hearts and souls remain pure and untainted,” Shorana added, “these gifts will remain with you until the day you die. There will be great celebration when you join me in Nirranjan.”

“If I may ask, great Shorana,” Jia-Nian wondered, “when will that be?”

Shorana smiled. “It will be when it will be, child. Be it a hundred years or a thousand, you three will live until your work is done. When the time comes you will know and be ready. Your passing from the world of the living will be swift and painless. You three will come to me together, looking not a day older than you do this very moment.”

Jia-Nian’s vanity nearly had her leaping with joy. The disagreeable thought of what she might look like as a thousand year old woman had given her great pause.

“Lobaniah,” Ivarus gestured to Jia-Nian’s grandfather, “will be your spirit guide and your direct contact with the gods.”

"Call on me at any time and I will answer," Lobaniah told them.

"On your knees, children, hands joined," Ko'Loran said and the three swiftly obeyed. He held one hand aloft. His palm radiated sunlight and Jia-Nian gazed at the symbol of wisdom and omnipotence there. Soon the room was infused with the joyous light of life.

"In my name and with my blessing," he said, "I marry you, one to another. Now and forevermore you are known and recognized as the foretold rulers of Zalvanus who restore peace and harmony to all lands. Rise, Jia-Nian, Queen of Zalvanus, Prince Aydon the Bold, Prince Danior the True and bring the sacred prophecy to life."

Jia-Nian gasped as she rose, seeing that she was dressed in finery befitting royalty. Though brief and comfortable enough to wear while riding a horse or when wielding her sword, the shimmering green and gold tunic was beyond what anyone lacking stature and position would wear.

She glanced at her princes and saw that they too, were garbed in rich attire, Aydon in dark blue laced with silver and Danior wearing rich deep purple with silver embellishment. The cut of their garments also would allow freedom to ride or to brandish their weapons during battle.

"You will find three elegantly saddled horses tethered outside," Shorana said. "One white and two black. These noble animals will remain with you, serving you for all your days."

"With thanks to the gods," Lobaniah said, gesturing to the deities, "I have been allowed to provide you with a special wedding gift. At midday today, you will come upon an oasis stocked with provisions, comfortable accommodations and a small lake. Only you will be able to see this place of safety and respite, it is invisible to all others. Wherever you journey, all you need do is ask for the oasis to appear and it will be there for you."

"It's a wonderful gift," Jia-Nian said. "Thank you, Grandfather." The princes chorused their thanks as well.

"As you have no doubt surmised," Ivarus said, "life as you know it will never be the same. Upon your arrival in Zalvanus there will be untold merriment and acclaim. You will also meet with treachery and deceit, so be wary always."

"Know that once word has spread of the appearance of the prophesized queen," Shorana warned them, "Tordanuk and Shivrane will rage. They will stop at nothing to prevent you from usurping their power by bringing Zalvanus to victory."

In unison, the deities and Jia-Nian's grandfather each raised one hand, smiling at the new queen and princes. "Our blessings upon you," they said. And in the blink of an eye they were gone.

Her eyes wide, Jia-Nian said, "They didn't allow us time to give thanks or praise."

"We already know what is in your hearts, children," came Ko'Loran's voice. "Go now and make acquaintance with your fate."

Chapter Ten

Mounted atop their majestic stallions, Jia-Nian on the white, her princes on the black, the trio bade farewell to Oktodd, the women and children. Danior explained that he'd communicated with the qubuji. They'd promised to remain docile in exchange for food and water and would provide them all safe passage to Zalvanus when they were ready to travel.

"Have I told you how beautiful you look in your lavish new garment?" Danior asked as they rode toward Zalvanus.

"Why, thank you, Danior," Aydon replied. "You look quite pretty yourself." All three fell into easy laughter.

"Thank you, dear Danior," Jia-Nian said. "And, yes, you've told me at least twenty times since we started our journey this morning."

"I can't help it," he said, his tone buoyant. "I am about to burst with happiness. Look at the sun, the blue skies and white clouds. I have never felt more free, more alive. I can barely believe that I sit atop a fine horse instead of being one." He reached down to clap his hand against the horse's hide.

"It's true," Aydon said. "We have met with a host of miracles since Jia-Nian came into our lives." He looked her way and smiled. "Our queen...our bride."

The reminder that she was now bound by marriage to her beloved guardians had Jia-Nian's heart spilling over with delight. How wondrous the changes in her life. How exciting the great adventures ahead.

"Our little warrior," Danior added. "I wonder if she already carries our babes in her queenly belly." Danior gave an expectant smile.

"Not yet," Jia-Nian said, the inner knowledge flowing to the forefront of her thoughts. "It will happen only after the greatest of our difficulties have been quieted."

Once Tordanuk and Shivrane are dead. Our firstborn will be twins, one male and one female, each with golden hair and one brown eye and one blue. Your seed mixes to create them, making you both their fathers."

"I didn't think such a thing was possible," Aydon said.

"Normally it is not," Jia-Nian replied. "This special gift of breeding has been granted by the gods."

"At midday when we come upon our oasis," Danior said, "we will practice."

"Practice what?" Jia-Nian asked.

"Breeding techniques. If Aydon and I are expected to produce perfect offspring, then we must engage in numerous hours of fucking practice. Isn't that right, Aydon?"

"Without question," Aydon readily agreed. "I believe it our solemn duty to ensure that our queen is supremely fucked in the most princely manner possible. That can only be achieved with endless practice."

Jia-Nian laughed, her heart afloat in a sea of gladness. "How vastly happy you make me, beloveds. You make jest, my lusty princes, but be cautioned. My already insatiable appetite for sex seems increased since our meeting with the deities this morning. Just pray that your princely cocks can keep up with my unquenchable cravings."

Their light, carefree banter continued as they rode beneath the warmth of the sun and picturesque sky. It was glorious to ride with Danior in the light of day. He had every reason to be in high spirits. In fact, it was the first time Jia-Nian remembered the three of them seeming so carefree. Previously they'd been forever on their guard for the approach of Pushgans.

Gods, it was immensely appealing to openly laugh out loud in the bright sunshine, to converse of such lighthearted things as fucking and babes in the making. Jia-Nian turned to Danior to say just that when she heard a whistling airstream followed by a resounding gasp.

“Danior!” she screamed, realizing he’d been pierced by an arrow in his back.

His eyes wide in a mix of pain and shock, Danior slumped and fell to the ground. Before Aydon could stop and dismount to help, another arrow had penetrated his back. Jia-Nian felt his cry of pain to the depths of her soul.

She would have screamed again but her breath was stolen when she suffered the same fate as her beloveds. Blinding pain lanced through her as she felt herself falling helplessly from her stallion, each struggle for breath more excruciating than the last as she choked on her own gurgling blood.

“Look at them in their fancy finery,” came the mocking sound of a gravelly voice as Jia-Nian felt the kick of a toe in her thigh. “Some stupid, careless royalty out for a cheery ride, no doubt.”

“If they were still alive I’d bow and thank them for providing us with such good targets,” a second man said and the two of them snorted laughs.

“Let’s see what we can salvage,” the first one said. Jia-Nian smelled his foul breath next to her face as he bent close to finger her garment. “The material is unlike any I’ve seen. Shivrane would smile upon us if we brought her such a gift,”

“The horses are top quality. We’ll take them back too. But first I’m going to fuck me some rich cunt.”

“No, I don’t think so,” Jia-Nian heard Danior say. That privilege belongs to me and my brother guardian here.”

“That would be me,” Aydon said.

The men gasped in unison. “By gods, did you see that?!” one of them shrieked. “They pulled the arrows right out of their backs—and there’s no blood!”

“I thought they were dead,” one said.

“They were!” said the other.

Jia-Nian recovered and she leapt to her feet, struggling to reach the arrow in her back. Aydon reached over and pulled it out.

She looked up into the bewildered expressions of the attacking pair in time to see them finally regain their senses and draw their swords. They were hulking giants, whose gray skin and third eyes revealed their Pushgan blood.

"Look," Aydon said. "I've really had enough for one day. First I suffer Shorana's sword through my chest then a Pushgan arrow in my back and now you propose to impale me yet again? I think not you fat-bellied tubs of tallow."

With a mighty backhand whack of his arm, he sent one Pushgan sailing through the air, landing on the ground with a thud.

"Please," Jia-Nian said to Danior when he stepped toward the other Pushgan. "Allow me."

"Your wish is my command, my queen," he said, stepping back with a sweeping bow. She noted he moved to the Pushgans' horses to have a mind to mind chat.

The Pushgan looked down at her, fierce and ferocious, hatred glittering red in his eyes. Getting this close to one without using her sword certainly wasn't something Jia-Nian ever thought she'd be doing. But things were different now.

"You're the one who wanted to fuck my rich cunt, aren't you, you stinking, disgusting swine?"

The Pushgan's eyes narrowed and he growled. "Try to stop me." Spittle dribbled down his chin as he spoke.

Jia-Nian stepped closer still and smiled up at him. "I doubt you'll feel up to doing much fucking after I'm through with you." With both hands she grabbed him by the balls and squeezed, lifting him off the ground and tossing him a few feet. It wasn't without great effort and exertion but, damn it all, she was able to do it!

"Go back to Pushga," Aydon yelled to the fallen Pushgans who lay groaning on the ground. "And tell Tordanuk and that mother of all bitches, Shivrane, that today you came face-to-face with the long awaited Queen of Zalvanus and her two guardian princes."

"I wouldn't engage in any pillaging or murderous stops along the way," Danior added. "I've had a conversation with your horses and they've promised to hurl you over their heads to the ground and stomp on your stout bellies if such a stop along the way should happen."

He turned to the horses and smiled. "Isn't that right, Cahga and Kro?" The surprise in the eyes of the Pushgans was evident then they heard Danior call their animals by name. "Yes, that's right," Danior said. "They told me the names you gave them." The horses snorted, nodding their heads and doing a sort of dance, hopping from one hoof to the other.

With the Pushgans disciplined and cowering, Jia-Nian, Aydon and Danior mounted their stallions once more and were on their way. Glib chatter and playful banter were replaced by contemplative silence.

"Look," Aydon said pointing ahead not long after. "I see lush green and water ahead." Shielding his eyes with his hand he looked skyward. "The sun is at its highest. It's midday. This must be our oasis."

"I'm glad," Jia-Nian said, spotting the area that seemed to shimmer as if it were but a vision. "After what we've just been through I could use some rest. That arrow in my back hurt like..." She shuddered. "I can't even begin to describe it."

"We may have been given the gift of healing," Aydon said, "but the initial pain of injury is in no way dulled. While the pain of those two mortal wounds I endured is gone, the stinging memory persists."

"Maybe the gods forgot about that," Danior suggested. "Perhaps if we asked Jia-Nian's grandfather about it."

Jia-Nian sighed as a new awareness was made available to her. "No, they didn't forget. The sensation of pain remains so that we do not become too lofty or complacent. The gods don't want us to be so far removed from humanity that we forget what it's like to suffer."

"I suppose I can understand their thinking," Danior said as their horses crossed through the hazy borders of the oasis. "We could too easily forget our mission."

"As evidenced by my failure to sense the Pushgans' approach," Aydon said, bringing his horse to a stop and dismounting. "I blame myself for the attack. With my gift of heightened senses and awareness, I should have known, I should have heard. *But I caution you, Ivarus warned me, you must remain focused and alert for these gifts to work properly.* Now I fully understand. I was distracted, caught up in the merriment of our newfound royalty and godly gifts."

"As were we all, Aydon," Jia-Nian said, allowing him to help her from her horse. "We let down our guard and left ourselves vulnerable."

"This gift of an oasis now makes more sense," Danior said, eyeing the luxuriant sanctuary. "It's clearly meant to be a place where we can safely relax and refresh after a grueling battle or a long day of tactical planning."

"It's truly beautiful," Jia-Nian said. "Look, the body of water is no mere dirt hole filled with water, but a sparkling lake bordered by large rock formations"

"One of which provides a waterfall that stands taller than either Danior or me," Aydon said. A slow smile crept over his features and he gave Jia-Nian a certain lusty look. "Several erotic ideas come to mind, my queen."

"We have yet to enjoy each other's bodies while in the water," she said, her hand smoothing over the fabric covering his broad chest.

Danior entered a large tent and called to them. "Wait until you see the impressive selection of foodstuffs – and the choice of wines and ales!"

Jia-Nian and Aydon followed him inside. There were provisions of all kinds, including weaponry and assorted garments for the three of them.

"How blessed we are," Jia-Nian said as she examined the contents of the large, opulent tent. "We must never take any of this for granted. We must always be mindful and appreciative of the precious gifts bestowed by the gods. Never should we let ourselves forget who we were and how we lived before we became queen or princes."

The threesome gazed at each other with an inner knowing. Now Jia-Nian, Aydon and Danior not only had possession, they also had understanding and true awareness. The time was right to give thanks and praise to the gods for their bounteous gifts and good fortune.

After glorifying the gods, the trio ate and drank of the delicious array of foods. Then it was off to the crystal blue lake and splashing waterfall where they stripped off their garments and readied themselves for some spirited play.

An ache of longing clawed at her as Jia-Nian gazed at her beautiful naked husbands. Nature had been exceedingly kind in creating their striking forms. Suspended long and firm between their thighs was the grandest treasure of all and impossible to ignore.

Locating a large rock near the lake's edge, she sat on it, dipping her toes in the refreshingly cool water. She held a ball of crimson in her hands, tossing it into the air and catching it.

"What is that you have?" Aydon asked.

"A pomegranate," she told him, offering a sensuous smile as she split the fruit's leathery exterior. "Have either of you ever tasted one?" Since the juicy fruit was a rare and infrequent treat, she imagined they probably hadn't. The side-to-side shake of their heads told her she'd been right.

"Good, then you're in for a treat." Holding it high and letting her head fall back, she squeezed the fruit so that juice dribbled in her waiting mouth and down her chin, throat and breasts. Ruby-red, juice-filled seeds sprinkled down, some caught by her tongue and some adhering to the sticky red juice gathering on her pale skin.

Danior's tongue peeked out to wet his upper lip. "Suddenly I find I've become ravenous."

"Then come have a taste, beloved." Jia-Nian reveled in throaty laughter as each man claimed a breast, sucking and nibbling. As they paid homage to her juice slickened tits, she squeezed the rest of the pomegranate's goodness over her belly and cunt.

Aydon's fingers dragged down through the stickiness until his head was even with the drenched curls between her thighs. An instant later his face was buried in her wetness and he slurped of her juices.

"Fruity deliciousness," he said, popping his head up briefly before returning to his task. With each tickling swipe of his tongue across her clit, Jia-Nian trembled. The sensations were so pleasurable she couldn't hold back her moans.

"But my cock demands more," Aydon added. "Spread those creamy thighs, sweet one, so I can fuck your cunt."

She obeyed most happily and then her attention returned to Danior as he cupped her breasts, staring at them as if they themselves were a plump offering of ripe fruit. His thumbs flicked over her erect nipples, sending shocks of sensation to where Aydon had tongued her clit a short time before.

Her breath caught as Jia-Nian felt the hard thrust of Aydon's flesh piercing her, shoving high and hard.

"Oh, gods, Aydon," she said on a sigh, "you fuck like a true prince."

She reached for Danior's cock, slipping the foreskin back and caressing the sensitive crest. "Look how your beautiful cock weeps for me," she said and Danior groaned. "Let me watch as you nestle that magnificent purple cock head between my breasts."

"What better sight could there be," Danior said, positioning himself, "than my spirited little warrior held captive between a rock and two hard cocks?" His hands clasped firm around her breasts, he slid his cock in and out of the valley, creating heated friction. "Ahhh...yes...I believe I have already answered my own question," he said, his gaze never leaving his engorged cock as he fucked her tits.

Aydon bent to kiss Jia-Nian, capturing her mouth in a sensuous dance, his purposeful tongue thrusts matching those of his cock. Confident, strong, intense.

She moaned, her mouth trembling against his, her body tingling with the wild, mindless delight that only twin fucking could elicit. She dug her nails into Aydon's shoulder and her other hand clutched at Danior's biceps. Never had there been or

would there ever be a greater love, she told herself, than that she shared with her beloveds.

The three of them had fucked together often enough that Jia-Nian could sense when climax was imminent. She could see it in the tightening of their jaws, the heaving of their chests, the steely look of determination across their features. She could feel their bodies stiffen, hear the beginnings of primal growls rising from their bellies.

"Both of you," she panted. "I want both of you to shower my breasts with your seed. Do it now. I command you to come all over my tits at once."

The masculine growls turned to feral roars as Aydon withdrew from her cunt and aimed his cock at her breasts, his creamy white streams crossing with Danior's as Danior came in a fiery burst of pulsing hot cream.

"Look at how magnificent," Jia-Nian breathed. "See how my royal princes bathe my flesh with the very core of their rich male essence?" She scooped fluid from her breasts with each hand and slathered it all over herself, from her face to her neck, arms, belly and thighs. Then she licked the residue from her palms, lingering on a sigh of greatest satisfaction.

"Can life be any more rewarding?" she asked. "Could I possibly be any happier?"

As if in answer to her query, Jia-Nian's body shuddered, sweet blissful convulsions overtaking her senses.

The area of the rock Jia-Nian had claimed for their fucking session became perfumed with the musky scent of sex combined with the tart sweetness of pomegranate. Once her scattered senses returned, she looked down to see that her princes' pearly white essence had mixed with the fruit juice, painting her flesh a soft, pleasing shade of pink.

She was about to engage in another contented sigh when she felt strong male arms and hands wrap under and around her arms, dragging her away. There was such power in those muscled arms that she felt certain either of them could hold her up high on the strength of one biceps alone.

"Where do my mischievous princes take me?" she asked, her heels skimming across the verdant grass as they tugged her backward. "Ooooh!" she screamed a moment later when she was tossed beneath the cool, rushing gush of the waterfall.

She'd heard of waterfalls before from her grandfather but had never seen one. Strathul was a dry, mostly parched land. What a wondrous joy to feel this torrent of water flowing over her face and body.

"It's a good thing our oasis comes equipped with a waterfall," Danior said, stepping into the small cove behind the downfall of water and lifting Jia-Nian to her feet. "Because I've noticed that our high-spirited little warrior likes to makes quite a mess when we're fucking."

"We'll just have to pay heed and scour every crevice of her queenly flesh," Aydon said, joining Danior and slipping his hand into the cleft between Jia-Nian's ass cheeks.

"I'd best make certain no pomegranate seeds have found their way up her cunt," Danior said, spearing her with his hand.

Jia-Nian moaned at the delicious sensation, followed by the abrupt shove of Aydon's finger up her nether hole. Sometimes she wondered if her lovers spent great blocks of time composing erotic plans designed to keep her insides throbbing with perfectly timed pleasure.

Slipping from under the curtain of water, she joined them in the cove. She ran the tip of her tongue across her lips at the same time she skimmed their chests with her fingers.

"I like the look of your tawny skin when it's wet," she told them, circling one of Aydon's nipples and one of Danior's with her fingers. "Your flat brown nipples grow erect and pebbly. She pinched them both and enjoyed hearing their delighted groans.

"When I was a girl I used to dream of one day having my very own prince with a strapping chest and a handsome face. And now see how blessed I am? I have two. The two most exquisite specimens in all the land."

She leaned close to Aydon, pinching one of his nipples while capturing the other small nub with her teeth. He reciprocated by playing with her nipples, drawing current's of rapture from his expert touch.

Jia-Nian left his side a moment later to repeat the exercise with Danior, who responded by rolling and tugging on her rigid buds as she played with him, nipping and licking.

She ended by breathing deeply from Danior and then Aydon. "Just as your nectar has its own distinct flavor and scent," she told them, "so does your flesh. If any man should ever be so foolish as to try to replace one of you, I would know." She gave each of their chests another lick. "Without doubt."

Aydon nudged Danior with his elbow. "Is your cock ready for action yet?"

Danior spat a laugh. "Are you jesting? How could it *not* be with the ministrations of our erotic little queen?"

Aydon eyed the lake. "In the water?" he suggested, the deep suggestive tone of his voice licking her body.

In answer, Danior offered a slow, agreeable smile. They crossed arms, hands locked over wrists, and bent at the knees, offering her a seat in the chair they'd fashioned.

"Your traveling throne, my queen," Danior said, his warm breath caressing her skin.

Jia-Nian gave a royal nod. Once seated, she rubbed herself like a cat against their muscular arms, purring her contentment, expressing her desire and pleasure. Rising to their full height, the men carried her to the water's edge.

"Stop for a moment," Jia-Nian said, clasping their biceps. "Allow me to taste your sweet mouths again before we go further." She reached up and drew Danior's head to hers, pressing her tongue against the seam of his lips and indulging in a raw, primitive kiss once she had access to the warm, wet recesses of his mouth.

Treating Aydon in kind a moment later, Jia-Nian basked in the heated sensation of wild oral mating, losing herself in his hot, insistent mouth.

"I can never get enough of your sweet mouth, little warrior," Danior told her as she leaned back against their chests and lingered on a pleased sigh. "Or your soft as silk cunt or tight as a fist nether hole."

"Or the feel of your skin," Aydon added, nuzzling her neck. "Or the sweet woman's scent of your sex when you're aroused."

Her laughter came as a lusty, earthy sound. "Then you must enjoy my scent all the time," she said, "because I am always aroused when in your company." Reaching back and feeling for their cocks, she latched onto them, squeezing and gliding their foreskins back and forth. Their considerable arousals pulsed hard in her hands. Soon their impassioned groans vibrated through her body.

Still carrying her, her princes walked into the water, gently depositing Jia-Nian until she stood breast-deep.

"See how her luscious tits float?" Aydon said, playing with her breasts, pressing them down and watching as they bobbed to the surface again.

Danior clasped her nipples between thumbs and fingers, tugging them beneath the water and letting go, inspecting the phenomenon as they emerged again.

Desire curling deep in her belly, Jia-Nian smiled as she watched the strapping, brawny warriors towering over her. She could so easily imagine them as curious little boys full of wonder as they made a new discovery. But no mere boys could instill the sensual awareness that pooled at her core, making her cunt seep with liquid heat.

She wove her fingers through their curly patches of hair then slipped her hands further back between their thighs, cradling their heavy sacs with slow erotic squeezes. There was no mistaking the fierceness of their twin arousals as their cocks prodded her thighs, pulsing and insistent.

A quick glance at each guardian's expression, solemn, intent and resolute, had Jia-Nian's knees trembling, her clit pulsing with an ache that yearned to be assuaged. A

dizzying shift in positions drew a gasp from her throat as they pierced her simultaneously. In one intoxicating swirl of water and raw power, Aydon had command of her nether hole while Danior drove hard into her cunt.

Enveloped in the silken luxury of bountiful water and filled with the exquisiteness of her beloveds' hot, throbbing cocks, the sensation of ecstasy transcended anything she'd even known.

Aydon nuzzled the back of her neck, growling impassioned words in her ear. At the same time he kneaded one of her ass cheeks and played with one of her tits. A man of many talents, he managed to do all this while making his cock twitch deep inside her anus.

Danior's breath mingled with hers as he took Jia-Nian's mouth in a brutal kiss. His lips and tongue drew heated need from deep in her soul, dispersing it to her breasts, her clit, her cunt. His calloused fingers, made soft by the water, swiped over her clit before capturing the swollen, sensitive bud and pinching it repeatedly.

"My sweet guardians, bold and true," she said on a ragged whisper as Danior's lips left hers. "My princes...my eternal beloveds." Her hips bucked with the first deep cunt spasm, increasing the mingled pain and pleasure of utter fullness. The water surrounding them rippled gently, then splashed furiously with their final, frenzied movements.

With primal cries, her lovers flooded her, their fingers and teeth digging into her possessively as the scald of their cream anointed her channels. Liquid heat swamped her and Jia-Nian shuddered in release, calling out their names.

Her queendom and all its mighty cares and responsibilities lay ahead. But for now, this magical moment as their minds, bodies and spirits locked together in an ancient dance of convulsing rhythm, this was Jia-Nian's entire world.

* * * * *

The afternoon they'd spent together in their oasis was beyond splendid, the night defined by white-hot need, tremors of utmost satisfaction and uninhibited expressions of soul-deep love and devotion.

By the time the queen and her princes neared the gates of Zalvanus the next morning, the threesome thrummed with palpable vibrations of curiosity and excitement.

They were wise enough to know they had much to learn. Missteps, mistakes and blunders would be made as they adjusted to their new calling and mastered the powerful gifts they'd been granted by the gods. But they vowed to dedicate themselves to their sacred mission, employing hard work, devotion, honor and forthrightness.

Jia-Nian glanced left at Aydon the Bold, her handsome, fearsome protector, and right at Danior the True, her sweet, impetuous defender.

What fine rulers they would make, fair, principled and virtuous—and yet formidable and intimidating whenever the need should arise. With her guardian princes at her side, Jia-Nian knew the trio would succeed admirably in their quest to bring victory to Zalvanus and, ultimately, peace to all the lands for a thousand years.

In the distance, the melodic timbre of trumpets heralded their approach, the stirring sound causing Jia-Nian's heart to swell in her breast, tears of joy to brim in her eyes.

An expectant smile on her lips, her head held high and her cheeks rosy with the glow of anticipation, the Queen of Zalvanus looked straight ahead, to the adventurous future she would share with her beloveds.

Another quick glance at Aydon and Danior, sitting proud and high in their saddles alongside her, had her near bursting with gladness. While she may indeed be the last Strathulian standing, Jia-Nian would never be alone again.

About the Author

Daisy Dexter Dobbs has a valid reason for lying when she's asked where she gets the ideas for her books. She knows most people wouldn't believe the truth about the madcap mayhem that goes on in her daily life. Case in point: Imagine frantically trying to file your way out of a locked bathroom door with a teeny nail file, dressed in nothing but a too-small towel while you're waiting for a real estate agent and a family with three small kids to arrive for a showing of your house. Okay, now picture the contents of a box of just-delivered sex toys (purely for research purposes, you understand) strewn on the bed just outside that locked bathroom door. Mmm-hmm, it really happened.

Happily married to her soulmate, the award winning artist and writer believes in love, happily-ever-afters and the wondrous, magical escapism of reading and writing.

Daisy 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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