



North of Nonesuch Anthology

NORTH OF NONESUCH ANTHOLOGY

by

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CAPRICORN CAPERS

Chapter 1

As Krystal Kapp strapped on her skis, she told herself lies of omission were not the same as deliberate lies. Without actually saying so, she'd made the guys in the group she'd come with believe she'd gone shopping with the rest of the girls, while the girls figured she intended to nap in her room. So what? This gave her time alone. Which she desperately needed. Sometimes being in a crowd was more than she could handle. Like now, when what she called her "jumping jitters" tried their best to drive her out of her mind. Especially after the weird dream last night.

She'd had similar ones before, all involving being chased by something that was half man, half animal. Last night he'd caught her...

Pushing with her poles, she skied rapidly away, wishing she could leave the shards of that dream behind as easily as she did Nonesuch Lodge. She hoped skiing by herself might free her of them.

In addition, today marked the watershed of her thirtieth birthday, which she'd told no one. It also marked the fifth year since her exactly one-year-younger sister Myla had packed up and moved from Michigan's Upper Peninsula to limbo. She hadn't phoned or written, so Krystal had no idea where her sister was. The package containing Myla's medallion had arrived, but the return

address had been the same as Krystal's, so there was no way to locate her sister from that.

And today's Myla's birthday as well as mine. They were the only two survivors of the Kapp family. If Myla *had* survived. Krystal had tried all the ways she could think of to find her, but none had worked. Where was her sister and how could she have forgotten what might happen if she took off her medallion?

Heading for the lift, Krystal took a deep breath of the afternoon's chill air and put Myla away for the moment. Thinking about her sister always made her sad. Her second breath told her the major storm forecast was right—she could smell snow. But not a single flake fell from the overcast sky as yet. Plenty of time for at least one good run before the storm clouds let loose.

On the lift, the guy next to her unreeled a come-on line, but she snapped, "Get lost." The last thing she needed was an entanglement with anything male. Sure, she'd come with a group—the only gal not matched up with a guy—but that was so she didn't have to meet anyone else. Especially men. She'd finally decided no man in the world could ever satisfy her, so why keep looking?

Once on top, the line guy barged past to ski down the groomed slope ahead of her. When she readied herself to follow, something flashed in her mind, making her pause.

Left-hand trail through the pines.

Who'd said that? A quick look around showed nobody near her. *Damn.* Maybe she ought to see a shrink. The voice

in her mind that had plagued her off and on ever since she'd arrived here—and a bit before—was getting worse. Furthermore, she was all but positive the voice belonged to whatever creature it was that had caught her in last night's dream. Besides, *what* left-hand trail? She'd been at this resort in the south end of Nonesuch County for three days now, and she'd skied all the trails—none went off to the left.

As she let two more skiers go past her, she noticed a few snowflakes swirling in the freshening wind. The lift warning light began flashing. In a minute she'd hear the announcement that it was closing down. She was now the next to last one on top. Rather than let the other skier go past her, she readied herself, aware this one run would be all she'd get in.

Instead of schussing straight down, as she'd first intended, Krystal began traversing, wanting to make her run last longer. By mid-slope, she could hardly see the bottom through the thickening snow. As she veered to the left, she spotted what looked like a light among the heavy growth of pines that guarded the slope to either side. A light? But nobody lived anywhere near this wilderness resort, did they?

Guess again.

With no one close to her, anywhere near, she had to admit the voice was in her head. That had to mean she was on her way to Bonkersville. Even as she cringed at the possibility she might be going mad, a name came to her.

Chattanooga. Where eighteen years ago she'd first heard a voice in her head.

No need to worry about that now. Come and visit. You'll never find another birthday present like mine.

Krystal faltered, certain she was losing her mind here and now. She managed to recover her balance, but in the doing, veered off the groomed trail to the left. She'd forgotten about the last skier until he zipped past her like an Indie race car, startling her, so that she wound up skiing even farther to the left. Before her lay a thick stand of pines, but to her surprise, she saw a trail heading into them.

I'm waiting.

What was waiting? How did whatever it was know she'd been born on this December day thirty years ago?

Nothing's there. It's all in your own head.

My name is Shadrach Capprich, and I've been waiting for you all my life. Follow the trail.

While she listened, in her confusion, she found she'd skied into the woods. Which wouldn't do. But when she stopped and looked behind her, her tracks were already obliterated by the wind-driven snow. More ominously, the trees had closed behind her, with a trail no longer visible. Ahead, though, she made out a faint track. Impossible!

Hurry, the storm worsens.

No question of that. Though the pines blocked the brunt of the wind, she could feel it against her back, pushing her on.

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What choices did she have? Turn, retreat on an obliterated trail, and try to find her way back to the resort's downhill slope? Or trust an imaginary voice in her mind and go on ahead?

I am no more imaginary than you are. You haven't much time left.

She could barely see the faint track ahead. Hadn't there been a light?

Trust me.

She'd learned early not to trust anyone. Yet she forged ahead, trying to convince herself that way was the best choice, trying to ignore the uneasy feeling she was being manipulated by something. Some *thing* half human, half animal. Like a mythical creature, maybe a satyr?

I'm as human as you. She'd swear she heard a chuckle.

Whatever talked in her mind couldn't know just how funny those words were.

Oh, yeah?

Jolted—it had to be reading her mind—she stared into the thickening curtain of snow and caught a faint glimmer. A light!

Shining just for you, fearless one.

Could she have possibly conjured up a name like Shadrach? Either she had or ESP existed. What the hell, why not—*she* existed, didn't she? The light grew brighter, a beacon leading her toward—what? Shelter from the storm anyway. With Shadrach? It came to her that she *had* heard that name before. From that strange time when she

was twelve and was sent away to live with her Tennessee grandmother for a year. Granny used to sing a crazy old song about Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego. In a fiery furnace. Tossed in there by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon.

Heavens above, as Granny used to say. Krystal hadn't thought about that time in years. Didn't want to, then or now. Myla had never mentioned her time with Granny either.

No furnace, but there's a fire in the fireplace and the kitchen range. No Meshach or Abednego, either. Or King Nebuchadnezzar.

"Stop reading my mind!" Her words were swallowed up by the blizzard as she skied toward the light. Coming from, she finally made out, a dwelling of some kind. She thought she caught a whiff of woodsmoke in the now howling wind. All but blinded by the snow, she plowed her way toward the house, almost running into it. Dropping her poles, she slid her fingers through the slits in her mitts, unlatched her skis, stepped out of them and reached out to feel for the door. Whatever she found behind it, she had to take shelter here or die.

Light poured out as the door was flung open. "Welcome," a man's voice said. His hand grasped her wrist and pulled her inside.

Krystal stumbled over the threshold into a log cabin. Behind her, the door slammed shut. Blessed heat surrounded her.

“Take off your clothes and warm up.”

She turned, and got her first good look at the man who'd let her in. Taller than she by half a head, medium build, curly brown hair, amber eyes, wearing what looked to be leather pants and a white T-shirt with the Capricorn symbol decorating the front. No, it was a copper medallion on a leather thong. He was definitely buff. She was sure she'd never seen him before, and yet there was something familiar about him. His eyes? But she certainly didn't know him.

“Shadrach, I presume,” she said as she shucked her mitts, head gear, ski jacket and then sat on a nearby bench to remove her boots and heavy outer socks so she could take off her ski pants.

“You might say you're glad to meet me at last.” His voice had a lilt to it, one she couldn't identify. “I'm certainly pleased to see *you*.”

She didn't answer until her boots were off, then stood, wriggled out of her ski pants and faced him in her red long johns and sweater. “You tricked me into coming here. Why? Who are you?”

Instead of answering, he took her hand, raised it to his lips and licked her palm.

Heat glimmered through her in glowing bursts, settling low inside as his tongue began to probe the sensitive webs between her fingers. Belatedly she jerked her hand free.

He grinned at her, his amber eyes mischievous. “Don't

you mean *what am I?*”

Before she could form an answer, he said, “Never mind all that. First things, first. Come and sit at the table. I have hot chocolate and cinnamon toast waiting.”

At his words, plus the scent of cinnamon, her stomach rumbled. She hadn’t eaten since breakfast. “Thank you.” She followed him through the one room cabin to the kitchen area and sat at the pine table. Maybe after the food, she wouldn’t feel so confused.

She should be furiously angry at what he’d done—lured her here. Instead, she was beginning to feel at home, just as she had with Granny so many years ago. She shook her head and cleared her throat, ready to take up the battle again. Before she could speak, he plunked a mug of hot chocolate in front of her, a marshmallow melting on top. Her cold hands curled around the mug, and she sniffed its enticing aroma.

“To think chocolate was once reserved for royalty,” she murmured.

“Which, of course, we are.” Amusement simmered in his voice. “There are few who can say that these days.”

As she sipped her chocolate, she found herself thinking she could listen to him forever and never get tired. What was the matter with her? “Did you hypnotize me?”

He laughed, deep and hearty. “You’re just recognizing

what I am. What *we* are, my beautiful Capricorn.”

She set her mug down and frowned at him. “I’m not yours in any way shape or form.”

“No? Have you forgotten what your granny told you?”

Without her willing it, her fingers rose to ease her grandmother’s medallion from under her sweater and clasp her hand around the copper oval embossed with the Capricorn symbol. As she held it, she watched him trace the same symbol on his with his forefinger.

“Eat your toast,” he ordered, pushing a laden basket toward her.

Automatically, she took a half-slice and bit into it, the tangy cinnamon taste on her tongue making her realize how hungry she really was. The next she knew, the basket was empty. “Oh, sorry. I didn’t mean to be a pig.”

“You couldn’t be if you tried. That’s not your destiny.”

Collecting herself, she frowned at him. “You better not try to tell me *you’re* my destiny.”

He grinned at her. “You’re here, aren’t you? I called and you came. Let’s not waste time on words.” He got up and held out his hand. “Rise and join me in the dance.”

She hadn’t been conscious of the strange flute-like music playing until now. Had it been audio all along? She hadn’t seen him turn anything on. And dance? In her bare feet? Whatever for? Yet she stood, and he took her by the hand, leading her into the middle of the large main room, where the floor lay bare. Or was it? Was the grass she thought she saw underfoot painted there? She snatched her

hand free. No way did she intend to obey this man.

Staring at him, she noticed something strange among his brown curls. Something that looked like—no, impossible, it couldn't be. She saw a few white hairs amongst the brown, no more. She started to back away, but, before she could retreat, the flute music surrounded her, beguiled her, seducing her feet into dancing, turning twisting, circling Shadrach. When he took both her hands, she didn't resist, mesmerized by the melody of the pipes. *Pipes?* Her thought was vague and vanished as the notes speeded her feet.

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Chapter 2

Krystal had never danced like this, so wild and abandoned. She seemed to be spinning, spinning out of the world with only Shadrach's hands keeping her from flying off. Or was he pulling her into the spins? When he released one of her hands and grasped the chain holding her medallion, she vaguely wondered why. Then he started to lift the medallion over her head, and the spell was broken. She snapped out of her daze, pulling away from him. As she did she thought she caught a glimpse of blue sky and sunshine. Impossible.

"No!" she cried, prying his hands off the chain. "I promised Granny I'd never take it off."

The piping died away, he picked up his own medallion from the floor, put it back on and sighed. "I thought maybe Pan's pipes would make you forget." Turning away from her, he said something she didn't understand to the fire, which was almost out. Immediately flames licked at the logs once more. She blinked, sure she was seeing things.

"I remember her," he said.

"Who? My granny? How could you?"

"You can bring back that memory if you try. You were almost thirteen at the time, in a Chattanooga mall with your grandmother."

Krystal started to shake her head, pausing as a glimmer of that time in Tennessee came back to her. Her grandmother had died just last month and left her a place she never wanted to go back to. The only time she been there was one summer when she was a teen. She and Granny had driven in from the farm to shop for clothes. "Now don't you go eyeing up every boy who goes past," Granny warned. "You ain't ready for boys yet, so there's no use you making them think you are."

But when Granny's attention was turned elsewhere, of course Krystal had looked at the boys. She was almost thirteen. Certainly old enough to *look*.

"That's what I heard you thinking when you 'eyed me up'," Shadrach said.

She stared into his tawny eyes and blinked. "It *was* you. I remember thinking your eyes were the same color as the lions in the zoo."

“What else?”

“A voice in my head whispered, ‘Where do you live?’”

“Yeah, and old Granny heard it in her head, too. She pinned me with her hawk eyes and zapped me with a Greek curse that froze me in place. It lodged in my head—I can still recall how the words sounded today, though I still don’t speak Greek. By the time I could move again, you were long gone. When I recovered, you were nowhere in sight. I never saw you again. Until now.”

“A Greek curse? Granny? I know we had Greek ancestors, but nobody in the family actually spoke it.”

“I have a smattering of Greek, enough to recognize the language when I hear it.”

“I don’t doubt she knew curses. I was afraid of her. When my parents sent me to her for that summer, my mother stressed obedience, saying if I didn’t listen carefully to Granny and do as she said, I’d be sorry. I still don’t like to think about the time.” She shivered.

He took her hand. “You’re cold. Come sit with me by the fire.”

She didn’t resist, even though the chill had been more of an inner one. She definitely didn’t want to think about that Tennessee summer.

When they sat side by side on the couch near the fireplace, he said, “So, you see, we’re not really strangers.”

She tried not to be trapped by the feeling that sitting close to him was exactly what she should be doing. Close enough to touch if she reached out and... *No!* She edged

away and said, “Are you putting ideas in my head? I don’t like the thought that you can read my thoughts.”

“Any ideas are your own. And I can only read some thoughts. If you practice, you’ll soon read thoughts in my mind as well.”

She shook her head. “You brought me here. Why?”

“Myla.”

Krystal swiveled to face him. “My sister! Where is she?”

“I was taking you there when you pulled away from me.”

Recalling the strange glimpse of sunshine and blue sky, she put her hands to her head. “I can’t believe all this. How could you be doing such a thing?”

He took hold of her wrists and pulled her hands down, folding them both between his. “Myla’s disappeared. Her mate happens to be my brother. His message to me was a tad garbled, but he thinks you can help.”

“So you came to retrieve me?” Disbelief edged her words. “Why all the hoodoo stuff? Why not just call or write me and give me that message?” Krystal freed her hands. “Why didn’t her mate—I assume you mean boyfriend—contact me himself?”

“Neither Meshach nor your sister are in this country. Which is why I had trouble understanding what he meant at first.”

“Do you mean she’s married?”

“Of course. Otherwise she couldn’t be where she is.

I've looked for you for years. Luckily I've found you because, garbled or not, my brother's message was urgent."

She raised her eyebrows. "Why didn't you just send a mind message to me?"

"I can't do that if I don't know where you are."

"Look, tell me the truth, do you really know my sister?"

"Yes. I even know you have her medallion. Think about this. Why did you decide to ski at Nonesuch Lodge?"

She didn't want to listen to any more, didn't want to stay here with him. Krystal jumped up and padded to the window. Snow adhered to the lower pane, blocking part of her view. There was nothing to see but swirling whiteness anyway. A mother of a storm. She was trapped in this cabin for the duration of the blizzard. With this really weird guy named Shadrach.

"You're right. I am really weird. I'm usually called Shad though." He spoke from behind her.

Turning from the window, she muttered, "I suppose you have brothers named Meshach and Abednego, too."

"Just Meshach. My one-year-younger brother. Our parents quit baby-making after that. Just as Myla is your only sibling. We never do more than replace ourselves."

"We? What *we*?"

"Your parents and mine, plus any other Caprics."

Krystal sagged, exhaustion catching up with her. Why was this happening? What did Shad want with her?

"Primarily to bring you to your sister."

“Stop doing that!”

He shrugged. “You broadcast. I can’t help picking up messages. Look, I know the trek here in the blizzard wore you out. You can use the only bedroom the cabin has—I’ll take the couch so I can keep an eye on the fire. Wouldn’t want it to go out during the storm. There’s a butane heater, but we could lose electricity and the generator is capricious.”

Soon Krystal lay in Shad’s king-sized bed in her long johns, her head churning with confusion. Could she believe anything he said? But if he didn’t know Myla, how had he come up with her sister’s name? And how could he possibly know she had Myla’s medallion? Not with her here, but in her backpack at the lodge. She never left home without it.

Myla had disappeared five years ago, when she was twenty-four, disappeared off the face of the earth as far as Krystal could tell. She’d tried everything to find her, knowing all too well the kind of trouble her sister could get into. Myla had always called her when she needed help. Too often. But Krystal had always come to the rescue. As she would now, if Myla would contact her.

She’d memorized every word of the cryptic note Myla had sent with the medallion. “I’m going where the sun always shines, to the isle of golden dreams, where happiness reigns and everyone dances. With my heart-mate. You wouldn’t believe me if I tried to explain. I only hope you will find a way to come here one day.”

There was no such place in this country, or the entire

globe, Krystal knew. Yet she was haunted by the glimpse she'd caught of blue skies and sunshine while she'd danced around with Shad. Myla used to dance in wild circles like that while she listened to Native American flute music. But surely it wasn't possible to dance yourself to a place where the sun always shone. With or without a heart-mate.

Disturbed as she was, exhaustion claimed Krystal, and she fell asleep with the faint sound of piping in her mind.

* * * *

Stretched out on the couch, Shad pictured the young girl he'd seen in that Chattanooga mall all those years ago. Krystal had been lean and lithe, a budding beauty with her auburn curls and topaz eyes. He'd felt her with his mind and known instantly she was like him. Fearing he might never see her again, he'd sent a mind message asking where she lived. She heard it all right, because she paused to look back at him. The old woman spotted him right off and slammed him with that Greek curse that rooted him to the floor. She then caught Krystal's arm and dragged her off. If he could have followed he would have, but wiggling so much as a finger had proved impossible. They were long gone before the youth group leader came up and smacked him on the shoulder, which shoved him off the curse spot, so he could move again—if only out of the mall and onto the bus with the rest of the crew.

After their parents separated, Meshach had stayed with their mother, but he'd gone with his father to upstate New York. His dad never would tell him where his mother and

brother were, but he'd kept an extra-close watch on Shad. This was the first time his old man had let Shad take a trip without him. Probably because it was with a church youth group, and his father figured he couldn't get into much trouble building a church in Tennessee. The mall there was the first time he'd known there were others who wore medallions besides his family.

Which was just as well, because in the motel where the youth group slept that night, one of the guys had stolen the copper medallion his mother and his father had warned him never to remove. The old lady's curse apparently had after-effects, because he usually slept too lightly to allow such a theft. He didn't find all this out until later, because at the time he thought he was dreaming...

Shad woke in a flower-strewn meadow with his head in his mother's lap. She smiled down at him. *I feared never to see you again*, she mind-sent.

Taken aback by her voice in his mind, he didn't fully understand they weren't in the USA. When he could find words, he asked, "Where are we? How did we get here?"

Usually by taking the medallion off and dancing to the pipes. This is the Isle of Capri, a long time ago.

"Piping?" He still didn't understand, but he didn't care. Sitting up, he looked around and saw immense rocky hills rising behind him. Ahead glistened the bluest water he'd ever seen. "A long time ago?"

If you recall from history lessons, the Greeks once settled this island. Now the Romans have found it and threaten to take over.

No good will come of that.

Shad's head buzzed with confusion. Greeks? Romans? He vaguely recalled Capri was somewhere off Italy. And then he really looked at his mother. He blinked and turned his head away, shocked. She was naked to the waist. Below, she wasn't— *Isn't human.*

Look at yourself, son. Her mind-sense held laughter.

No. Impossible! Half of him wasn't human either.

We're Caprics. Half goat. Pan's chosen people.

His mother reached and pushed one of his curls back into place. *We have very little time together. You're here because your medallion came off, but children cannot remain here, and you are yet too young for a heart-mate.*

"Where's Meshach?"

I left him with Aunt Mag. I wanted your father to return here with me once you boys came of age, but he broke my heart when he told me he'd never revert to such indecency again. He couldn't understand how much I needed to be in Capri. He was my heart-mate and I miss him yet. I have hope that when both you and Meshach become young men you will find your heart-mates. And someday I hope your father may change his mind. Then we can all be together again. You can't stay now. Because you are my son I'll be able to dance you back so you can recover your medallion.

He heard piping, and she pulled him up and into a spinning dance. The next he knew he was back in the lodge where the church campers slept, facing their leader. "Thank the Lord, you have come back," the man

said. He eased the copper medallion over Shad's head. "As you see, the lost has been found."

He turned to glare at a red-haired kid. "Greg has confessed his theft and will apologize to the Lord Almighty for his sin, and to you for causing you distress. But, Shadrach, you needn't have run off in the night to search for it. Had you roused me, I would soon have discovered the culprit. As it was, when we found you gone, we feared you might have come to grief."

So the medallion was once again his, but nothing else that had happened that night made any sense to sense to Shad until much later in his life. He was twenty-two when his father vanished, leaving the medallion he never took off behind and a brief note: "I miss her." That was when Shad and Meshach had finally connected again and pooled their knowledge.

* * * *

Now that Shad had finally located Krystal once more, and planted the seeds in her mind that drew her here to his cabin, he realized finding her had only solved one part of the problem. How much had her old granny told her about Caprics? Obviously enough to scare her. How in hell was he going to convince Krystal to remove the medallion? He had to, because Meshach needed her. Besides, she was his ticket to paradise.

The young girl from that time in the Tennessee mall was now thirty, an everything-in-the-right-places woman,

her curly auburn hair cut short, her topaz eyes touch-me-not wary. And she was sleeping in the bedroom in his bed. He sure as hell wished he was sharing that bed with her. Just the thought of it made him hard. But she was too skittish for him to risk a wrong move.

He finally dozed off, only to come to full alert when she screamed. He sprang up, dashed across the main room and opened the bedroom door. The light slanting in from the fire showed Krystal thrashing around in the bed, muttering unintelligibly. He tried to scan her, but her nightmare shut him out. A touch was likely to frighten her.

Easing onto the edge of the bed, he spoke her name softly at first and then louder. "Krystal, wake up!"

On his fourth try, she sat up abruptly, eyes wide open, staring at him. "You!" she accused.

He shook his head. "Not me. A bad dream. You screamed so I came in."

"You were in the dream! Only not like..." Her words trailed off and she shivered.

He laid a tentative hand on her shoulder, unsure whether she'd allow a touch. To his surprise, she began sobbing and flung herself at him. He put his arms around her, drew her close and stroked her back, murmuring soothingly.

"A monster," she babbled against his chest. "Half-human, half something else. He chases me, catches me..."

"There's no monster in this room. Just the two of us. I promise."

She pulled away, her cheeks tear-stained. He handed her the box of tissues from the bedside stand and she mopped at her face.

“Why are you so afraid of your dream monster? Does he hurt you?”

“It’s just that he’s so strange. And I don’t want to be caught.”

“Ever?”

“That’s an odd question.”

He took the bed’s second pillow, propping himself against the headboard.

She looked at him askance for a moment, then did the same with her own pillow. “I don’t think you ought to be here, but I don’t want to be alone for a bit. Until the shreds of the dream are all gone.”

He figured she had no idea how desirable she looked with her hair tousled from sleep. He’d never thought he’d find a woman in long johns appealing, but the ones she wore clung to her curves most enticingly. “Red,” he murmured.

“What?” She glanced down at herself. “Oh, my long-johns. If I have to wear the darn things, at least I can buy red ones.”

She had no clue how sexy he found her. “You must know you’re different,” he said. “Earlier you danced with me. We could dance by the fire again, until the dream shards all vanish.” Without giving her a chance to refuse, he slid from the bed, grasped her hand and tugged. “I might

even be persuaded to fix more cocoa.”

“The cocoa sounds great,” she said as she followed him from the bedroom, “but I’m not so sure about dancing.” She stopped before the fire, holding her hands to it. “That feels good.”

“Don’t you want to go to Capri?”

“You mean the Isle of Capri? My grandmother used to sing an old song, a sad one, about meeting and parting on Capri. It must be a beautiful place, one anybody would like to visit. But I don’t see any jets parked outside.”

“We don’t need a plane to fly. Didn’t you feel you were flying when we danced?”

Krystal had, but she didn’t mean to say so. Though she hadn’t seen him turn anything on, she heard the high thin sound of a reed pipe again. He must have a remote.

“About that cocoa,” she said.

“We must dance first.”

“I don’t want to.”

But he took her hands and, at the same time, the music took her feet. She found herself dancing whether she would or no. Struggling against the urge was in vain; the pipes cajoled, enticed, commanded her to dance. She whirled away from Shad time after time, only to be caught by him again and again in the twisting patterns of the dance. Mesmerized by the dance and the sunlit gleam in his golden eyes, she didn’t feel him lift off her medallion until too late.

“Almost there,” he whispered. “Hold tight.”

The piping grew frenzied. He whirled her around

faster and faster, in a dizzying dance, the sun hot on her arms and shoulders, the grass soft under her bare feet. At last, exhausted, she flung herself to the ground, pulling him with her.

Sun? Grassy meadow?

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Chapter 3

Krystal stared about her at a totally unfamiliar landscape. She lay in a meadow semi-surrounded by high rocky walls, with still higher peaks farther on. Hearing the splash of the sea, she rose onto an elbow and found blue, blue water beyond an incline leading down to the sea. Beside her lay Shad.

Made it, Shad mind-sent.

She turned to look at him and gasped. Those *were* horns in his hair! His torso was bare and... Krystal bit back a startled cry. The rest of him was hairy. Not human. And he had hoofs instead of feet—four of them. Involuntarily, she reached for her medallion and found it gone. She tried to sit up, instead sprawling awkwardly onto her side where she gazed down at herself in horror.

“What have you done to me?”

I didn't change you. Capri did.

Staring at her lower body, hairy and hoofed like his, she decided she had to be dreaming. Remembering what

Granny had told her would happen without her medallion, she ran her fingers through her hair, encountering what she feared. Horns. Smaller than Shad's, but horns all the same.

Krystal forced her changed body upright, balancing on four small hoofed feet. Like Shad, she wore no clothes. Her hairy lower body hid her female part, but her breasts were bare. She crossed her arms over them. Granny had warned her she wouldn't like what would happen without the medallion. But this nightmare couldn't be real.

"I want to wake up," she moaned.

"You are awake." He spoke aloud, sounding exactly the same as he had in his cabin. Which was more than she could say for the rest of him. "Awake and in Capri. Don't you want to find your sister? She's here, you know."

"Myla? She can't be." Not only her body was strange, her mind felt itchy. No, that wasn't quite right—but weird somehow.

"You brought her!" a man's voice rumbled.

Krystal swung around to see who he was, finding it odd the way her torso moved while her—what?—hind quarters stayed in place, feeling excessively exposed even with her arms covering her breasts.

"Good to see you, bro," Shad said.

Staring at a darker version of him, she realized this had to be Meshach. Her sister's mate?

"Krystal's modest," Shad told him.

Meshach smiled at her. "Myla was too, at first." His smile faded. "Do you think you can find her, Krystal? She

and I have a connection, but ours has been broken ever since she vanished. Since Shad and I have even a stronger one, I hoped you and Myla might, too.”

A connection? Does he mean mentally. Krystal started to shake her head, pausing when it occurred to her that the tickle inside her mind might be something like a buzzer.
Meaning I should answer?

In her mind, she said her sister’s name.

Krys! I thought you’d never get here.

How can words in my mind feel so much like Myla’s voice sounds?

Tell them Tiberius has me penned up in his villa. Hurry, for he means me no good.

Krystal was convinced it all had to be a dream.

Myla, are you—changed?

The change is what makes me a curio to Tiberius. His sexual perversions are many and horrid. I fear he intends to force me to be one of them. Or worse. Please hurry.

Tiberius? Krystal shook her head. Surely her sister couldn’t mean the guy who was once Emperor of Rome somewhere way back in the time of Christ. But shouldn’t Capri look more populated? There were no buildings of any kind in sight, No roads either. And no boats on that blue water.

Um, why didn’t you tell Meshach?

Because he’d rush to try and save me and get killed.

But now you want me to tell him. I don’t understand.

If you’re here, that means his brother must be, too. I met

Shad before we came here and I know he has a cooler head.

“Did she reach you?” Meshach asked Krystal.

She nodded. “Myla told me someone she calls Tiberius has her penned up.”

Meshach blanched. “Great God Pan, help us!”

“Bad vibes, bro,” Shad said. “Tiberius was a great general before he became Emperor, but as I recall he turned rotten in his late years.”

“Tell me. His Villa Jovis up in the heights is a compound of perversions.” Meshach grimaced. “When the dead bodies of children he’s violated and tossed from the heights into the sea wash up on our beaches, we give them decent burials.”

Krystal shuddered. “How did my sister get where she is?”

“Myla knew better than to venture from this area where Pan set wards to protect us,” Meshach said. “But there’s a pool she loves that lies beyond the wards.”

“Wards?” she asked.

“A spell to keep us safe. The outer side of the wards look like rugged terrain to the Romans, but not to Caprics. We see through them from both outside and in and pass through as though they don’t exist. But we rarely leave their safety. Myla though...” He sighed.

“I know my sister. Nothing stops her if she sets her mind on doing something.”

He half-smiled. “I’ve discovered that.” The smile faded. “Tiberius’ men must have captured her at the pool.”

Krystal frowned. “Wait a minute. I’ll accept this is Capri. Even the wards. But I can’t get my mind around Tiberius. He ruled way back in the early AD years.”

Both brothers spoke at once. “This *is* 34 AD.”

Shock muted her. Impossible! Yet since she’d met Shad everything else that happened had been impossible. She couldn’t deny she’d been physically changed and was talking to two men physically altered in the same way she was. On Capri—though apparently not the modern day isle. Well, obviously not, for she could see no sign of civilization.

The clatter of hoofs sounded. Minutes later the three were surrounded by other Caprics, both male and female. Krystal eyed them, hoping against hope her mother and father might be here. But they weren’t among the group.

“We heard you call Pan,” a white-haired male said. “Before he left, he tried to dance us back to a time when the Greeks still owned the island but failed. We haven’t seen him since.” He stared at Shad and Krystal, then turned to Meshach. “This must be your brother and his mate.”

Meshach introduced the two of them, naming the other Caprics. Too many names all at once. The only one that stuck with her was Rick, the white-haired male. “Tiberius has captured Myla,” Meshach added. “We’re off to rescue her.”

Shad laid a hand on his brother’s shoulder. “Wait a tick. We need to figure how.”

“All of us will go up there and—”

Rick interrupted Meshach. “We number sixteen, counting Myla and the two newcomers. Tiberius has Roman soldiers as guards. With weapons. Once we get past Pan’s wards, we’re vulnerable. Our only weapons are our hooves. We’d never even get close to her. Worse, he might kill the males and capture the females.”

“Someone needs to leave Capri and bring back weapons,” Shad said.

Meshach stared at him. “You know we can’t bring anything from our time when we dance here.”

“Has anyone ever tried bringing in a weapon as old as this time?” Shad asked. “I collect ancient weapons. One is a Roman sword from some early AD time. Even one sword would help.”

“I have an old spear,” Rick said. “Greek, I think.”

“Where?”

“With my mate’s and my medallions—my step-brother, Ron Grant, in Hurley has them. I told him if ever anyone showed up with a medallion like mine, he was to give the two he’s keeping to whoever it was.”

“Good to know. We don’t have time now, but we may need those medallions soon.”

“Problem, bro,” Meshach said. “None of us have medallions to get back.”

Shad untied a pouch from his wrist. “This is my mate’s. It’s not channeled to me, so I tried to see if I could bring it here. The pouch is goat leather and these are Pan’s medallions, so it worked. He focused on Krystal.

“Remember where the sword is?”

“Hard to miss right over the fireplace.”

He looked at Meshach. “You left your medallion with me. I put it in the chest at the end of my bed. Where’s Myla’s? We may need it to get her away from the villa”

“Oh, heavens,” Krystal said. “Hers is in my backpack I left at the hotel. How will I ever get it back?”

“When I knew you were on the way to the cabin, I called and told them to store your luggage, guaranteeing payment.”

She glared at Shad. “You were that sure, were you?”

“Heart-mates are fated to be together. Here’s what you need to do. Once you’re back inside my cabin, collect

my medallion, your sister's and Meshach's. Bring all three here with you, along with the sword. To return, remove your medallion, then turn on my recording that mimics Pan's piping and dance your way back to Capri."

Rick raised a reed pipe to his lips. "Ready?"

Krystal nodded, her head whirling with confusion. Was she dreaming all this? Surely it couldn't be real. People who turned into half-goats and lived in Roman times on Capri? Her sister a captive in a Roman emperor's villa?

Shad leaned close and kissed her. Could a dream kiss make her feel as though she soared with the gulls that flew overhead? Before the kiss ended, the music of pipes surrounded her. Shad pulled back and, a moment later, her medallion settled around her neck. He caught her hand and pulled her into the dance.

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Chapter 4

Krystal stood on a rug in the middle of an unfamiliar room, wearing her socks, red long johns and a sweater. *Wait. I'm in Shadrach's cabin.* That weird dream she'd had about Capri...

Sleep-walking, maybe? She called his name. No answer. Nor, when she searched, was he anywhere

inside. Surely he wouldn't have gone out in the storm. Even as she thought this, she noticed sunlight slanting in the window, padded over and looked out.

No snow, except for a bit under the trees. More than one day had obviously passed since she'd come to the cabin. Shocked, she backed away from the window, stepped on something and looked down. A medallion and chain lay at her feet.

She never took off her medallion! Involuntarily her hand went to her chest and she felt the circle of her medallion. She picked up the other one and saw the Greek 'S' on the reverse side. Shad's. The weight of the metal in her hand cleared her mind of all doubt. No dream. Capri had been real.

Here she was back in Michigan though. If she chose to, she need not involve herself further in this strange encounter. But, if this wasn't a dream, she'd be leaving Myla in deadly danger. And where was Shad if not on Capri? Did this strange empty feeling inside her mean what he'd said—that they were heart-mates, meant to be together? She couldn't risk not believing she'd really been on Capri, weird as that seemed.

Stop doubting. Do what you came here for.

She dressed hurriedly in her ski togs. Opening the front door, she stepped into a cool but not freezing cold morning. She got underway to Nonesuch Lodge, where Shad had told them to store her luggage. With no idea of how much time had passed since she was last at the hotel,

she hoped her backpack was still there.

If the lodge receptionist considered it odd to have someone arrive in ski gear with no snow on the ground, she didn't show it when Krystal asked to collect the stored luggage. Luckily the lodge shop was open and she had money in her ski jacket. She bought a light jacket, jeans and pair of Adidas, which she changed into in the restroom, pulling a clean T-shirt and underwear from her backpack, then stuffing her winter clothes inside. Before she left, she noticed a stack of newspapers on the counter and glanced at the date. March third! How could it be? But she had to admit it certainly was no longer December. Was time different here?

After the climb up the hill to the lodge, and her walk back down to the cabin with the backpack on and toting her ski boots, all she wanted to do was rest. But she forced herself to go through the pack until she found the pouch containing Myla's medallion, differing from hers only by the Greek letter representing 'M' on the back. Then she checked the chest in the bedroom, found Meshach's and put it in the pouch with her sister's. Though both had the Greek 'M' on the reverse side, his was larger.

Back in the main room, Shad's medallion joined the other two in the pouch, which she hung on her wrist by the strings. Last of all, she pulled a chair over to the fireplace and took down the ancient sword hanging above the mantel, almost dropping it. Dang, but the thing was heavy. Clutching the sword to her with one arm, she removed her

own medallion and set it on an end table. Then she picked up the remote for the CD player and clicked it on. Pipes began their beguiling music.

She'd worried about not doing the right dance, especially with the heavy sword, but her feet seemed in tune with the pipes directing her movements this way and that, whirling her about without any conscious thought. At last she felt grass under her feet—no, her hoofs—but all was dark. Night had fallen with a sickle moon above. She dropped the sword. Arms came around her, and Shad's voice murmured in her ear, "I never want to be without you again."

She clung to him, hardly hearing Meshach's cry of "The sword!"

Relishing the now familiar warmth of Shad's arms, Krystal felt oddly bereft when he set her away from him. "Once Myla is recovered, we'll never part. I need my medallion so I can return to the cabin to bring back yours and any other weapon that might be ancient enough to make it back with me."

Krystal removed the pouch from her arm and, by feeling for the circle with the Greek 'S', pulled his out and handed it over.

"Rick's here with the pipes." Meshach's voice. "The others are close by."

"Good. Wait until I get back to go to the villa. Two of us armed are better odds. Stay close to Krystal while I'm away."

Then the music triggered dancing. Shad took her hand for a brief moment, then his pulled free. The pain in her heart told her he was no longer beside her. Or anywhere on Capri.

The dancing ended when the music stopped. “We’ll sleep now,” Meshach said.

As if she could!

* * * *

The Caprics slept in a circle, mates next to each other, Krystal and Meshach the only odd pair. He soon nodded off. From what she could tell, all the others slept as well. She closed her eyes, willing herself to at least rest. Not much time passed before she felt herself drifting into dreamland.

Krys!

She jerked awake. Myla’s voice. Opening her eyes, she found herself in the circle of sleepers. So Myla’s voice was in her head.

I’m here, sis.

There’s a giant celebration beginning. Feasting and flowing wine and sickening orgies. So far I haven’t been forced to participate in any, but I fear I won’t survive if I am. Is help on the way?

As soon as Shad gets back to Capri. I have your medallion, so we’ll be able to dance you free once you have it around your neck.

Oh, thank heaven. Bring it to me now. You must. You’ll never be able to sneak in here during the day. But at night...

Shad’ll be back soon. He and your mate are coming to—

If I have my medallion, I can hum the music I need to dance to and escape. Please, Krys, I'm really scared. I'll tell you how to sneak in the villa while it's still dark. My pen is within the outer walls of Villa Jovis, but not in the courtyard proper. It's near the stables where they keep their horses. I've watched people come and go, so I know all the gates are locked and guarded at night. But the gate nearest me has a broken lock that hasn't yet been fixed. And the night guard brings a wine pouch, so he sleeps through much of the night. He's snoring right now.

But I don't even know where the villa is.

I can tell you exactly how to get here. And guide you while you're on the way.

Meshach is here next to me. He's got a...

No! He might insist on waiting for his brother. Anyway, if you have my medallion we don't need a warrior type like him. He's sure to wake the entire compound. There's been talk of a sacrifice at the feast, and I know they mean me. I can't wait.

Krystal could feel the terror in her sister's mind-send.

After taking a deep breath, she sent, Okay. Brief me.

* * * *

As Krystal crept away from the circle of sleeping Caprics, one word vibrated in her mind. *Sacrifice*. She'd been interested in ancient Greek history in school, but not ancient Roman. Since the old Greeks had been into sacrificing, the old Romans must have done it as well, because as she remembered, they copied a lot from the Greeks. The hierarchy of their gods was similar for one thing—though the Romans changed the names. Jove

instead of Zeus and so on.

The other event she recalled was the human/animal fights in the coliseum in Rome—bizarre kinds of sacrifices. What horrible method did Tiberius have in mind for her sister? If only she'd paid more attention in high school when they'd rushed through Greek and Roman history in a month's time. The Greek part had interested her, so she'd taken a couple courses in college.

Shad said Tiberius had been a famous general before he became Emperor, but had turned rotten in old age. It took effort for her to remember she'd been shunted to a time when he was still alive, still Emperor, and presumably now possessing dark traits. If the celebration tonight was anything like the Greeks had, this would be a drunken orgy.

Thinking of how Myla worried that Tiberius planned to abuse her sexually made Krystal shudder. First abuse and then sacrifice? *Never!*

Following the instructions her sister mind-sent, she climbed up and up, surprised at how much more efficient hoofs were than feet for going up rocky inclines. *Half-goat.* Yes, she was, voluntarily or not. It certainly gave her an advantage at the moment. Even though her eyes remained human, in the feeble light of the slender moon, she could see better as well.

After what seemed an eternity, she came to either a natural plateau at the very top or one Tiberius had carved into the mountain. She drew in her breath. Though she'd

expect Villa Jovis to be impressive, the walled-in compound was huge. *I can see the outer walls*, she sent to her sister.

She held, concentrating on memorizing Myla's new instructions. To the left of the mid-point, she followed the wall. Gate one. Gate two. The third and correct gate. By now she could hear faint music, singing and boisterous laughter. She ran her fingers over the gate, feeling for a hand hold. Metal handle in her grip, she slowly and quietly eased the gate open. It creaked and she stopped, holding her breath. Someone snorted. When the snort turned into a snore, she resumed until the opening was wide enough to ease her Capric body through.

The drunken guard lay sprawled to her right. By the smell, the buildings to her left were the stables. Unfortunately hoofs weren't as quiet as feet, but the noise from the revelers, louder here, would conceal any noise she might make—from all but the guard anyway. She'd have to hope his drunken stupor was too great to notice.

Ahead of her looked to be a wooden corral, though higher than the ones she'd seen in America. Myla's pen. Even in her half-goat form, there was no way Krystal could leap over the top. Trotting toward it, she found the corral gate where her sister had said it was. *Locked. Damn.* She removed the pouch from her wrist, pulled the opening apart, reached in and felt the backs of the two medallions until she had the one with the smaller Greek 'M.'

Can't open the gate, she sent. *Have to pass you the*

medallion through a space between the logs.

When her sister's hand touched hers, she set the medallion in Myla's palm and withdrew her hand.

I'm replaying Pan's music in my head as I put my medallion on. I'm dancing. Oh, thank heaven it's working. I'm...

Myla? No answer in her mind. She hoped that meant her sister was back in the US. Safe in Shad's cabin because that was where the medallion had been last. Close by, a man shouted words she didn't understand.

But I'm not safe. She whirled and made for the gate.

* * * *

Too late. The gate clanged shut before Krystal could escape through the opening she'd left. The guard, brandishing a lethal-looking sword, stood before her swaying on his feet, but shouting and ringing a clanging bell with his free hand. With no clear plan in mind, she turned from him, ran toward the stables and plunged in among the horses. Hiding was impossible, since she certainly looked nothing like one. Her entrance caused horses near her to panic, kicking and squealing, so that their fright spread to the rest. The stable boy roused, took one look at her and bolted, knocking over the lantern on the floor near him and spilling its contents.

Hay caught fire, spreading along the dirt floor as the first group of guards reached the door. She fled on, passing among milling horses in her desperate search for another door, hearing what she took for cursing behind her even if she couldn't understand a single word.

Unfastening another door, she dashed free of the stable and saw two of the guards now mounted bareback on terrified horses they had trouble controlling. Whirling away from them, she searched for another gate along the wall, hoping against hope some of the guards might have left their posts when the alarm bell sounded.

Hooves pounded behind her. She turned to see how close the mounted guards were. Only frightened horses followed her. Soon they ran even with her, surrounding her as they galloped on, forcing her to veer this way and that with them or be trampled. She tried working her way to the edge and finally slipped free, her hoofs sliding on tiles.

Tiles? Was she in a courtyard of some kind? She spotted a man dressed in a white robe tied with a golden cord. He called to her, and she tried to swerve around to escape. But her hoofs skidded on the tiles, tipping her sideways. Over she went. Though she scrambled up as fast as she could, when she tried to flee she was brought up short, nearly strangling from a cord noose he'd slipped over her head. *Trapped.*

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Chapter 5

In his cabin, Shad retrieved Krystal's medallion and placed it in the pouch tied to his waist. He then removed from a strong-box the ancient Greek dagger his father had

left him. With luck it'd be old enough. After removing his own medallion, he set it on the same end table where he'd found Krystal's. He reached for the remote, but a flurry of movement made him hold.

Myla appeared, wearing only her medallion. She gaped at him, then lunged for the throw on the back of the couch to drape around her. "Where are my clothes?" she cried.

"You all right?"

"Yeah, but where are my clothes?"

"You arrive wearing clothes only if you left wearing them, and you return to the spot you departed from. Which wasn't here. Blast that brother of mine. I told him to wait until I returned. But I'm glad he got you away."

"Barely in time. But it wasn't Meshach. Krystal brought my medallion. I hope she escaped, too."

Shad's gut tightened. "Escaped?"

"I told her how to get to the villa in the dark. I had to. Tiberius was going to—"

Shad grabbed her shoulders. "Where did you leave her?"

"Inside the walls of the compound. But she must have run though the gate as soon as she knew I was gone from the pen." Myla bit her lip. "At least I think so."

"She went to the villa alone?" His voice grated.

Myla nodded. "I nearly became a sacrifice. She saved me."

To become one herself? Shad let her go and grabbed the remote. "You're staying here," he snapped. "Krystal left her

backpack with clothes and money in it. Use what you need.” He rattled off the name of the Rick’s step-brother in Hurley and told her to find out where he lived, go there and retrieve the medallions. And an old spear Rick left with him. “Hurley’s in Wisconsin, not far from here. My truck’s in the garage. Use it. Don’t return until you have the spear, their medallions as well as mine with you. Understand? Now go outside so the piping won’t tempt you.”

She swallowed, staring at him. “Yeah, okay.”

Waiting until she shut the door behind her, he clicked the remote and threw himself into the dance.

* * * *

Torches flaring from posts showed Krystal an older man whose lean face was dominated by what she’d always thought of as a typical Roman nose. Smiling, he looked her over with an air of authority. She forced herself not to flinch at the cruelty in that smile. He spoke, but she didn’t understand one word. Could this be Emperor Tiberius himself?

He tugged on the cord around her neck, the movement causing his robe to open and forced her to walk toward him. The now open robe revealed his naked body. He’d used the golden cord to trap her. She didn’t dare look away from him, but she angled her gaze up so she didn’t have to look at what the open robe revealed. His capture of her had obviously aroused him. She supposed he must think she was Myla.

Her only chance to escape was to charge, knock him

over with her bulk so that he dropped the cord, then race away. As she braced herself, he shouted, startling her. Two men ran into the courtyard from the adjacent building. Could she attack three at once?

Another, this one armored, hurried up, sword drawn, answering that question. She was once more trapped.

* * * *

Dark still reigned when Shad got back to Capri and found Krystal wasn't among the Caprics. He mind sent her a message. *Where are you?*

Looking for a way out of the compound.

We're coming.

He roused his brother, told him how Krystal had gotten Myla free, but was trapped herself and needed rescuing. Meshach needed no urging. Before they left, he asked Rick to find out exactly where all the other Caprics had left their medallions.

By the time the two brothers climbed high enough to see the villa, false dawn lightened the sky. Staring at the long stone wall enclosing the emperor's compound, Shad noticed a partly open gate to his left. They crept closer, smelling the acrid stench of burnt wood, and found a large rugged rock to duck behind. Peering out, Shad saw an armored guard stagger through the gate and relieve himself.

Stay here, he sent to Meshach and raced toward the Roman. The guard, intent on what he was doing, didn't

see him until Shad grabbed his hair, yanking his head back. Before the guard could call out or try to struggle, the edge of the sharp dagger slit his throat. Shad grabbed the guard's sword and gestured for Meshach to join him.

With his brother behind him, Shad slipped through the gate. He closed it to avoid anyone chancing to notice the guard's body outside. In the uncertain light he saw a partly burned building with horses milling around outside it. Stables. A recent fire, successfully doused, judging by the water puddles. He noticed an intact corral-type pen—Myla's?—and peered through a space between the wooden bars. Empty. He sent Krystal another mind message. *We're here. Where are you?*

Courtyard of the villa. Rope around my neck. Tiberius, two servants and an armed guard. a

Beyond the pen, the flare of torches lit the grayness. Must be the courtyard. *Krystal's a prisoner. Four men to deal with, one a guard, Shad sent to his brother. We'll drive the horses ahead of us for cover. Help me herd them.*

I'll take on the guard, Meshach sent.

The horses responded to the two Caprics by racing toward the flaring torches, out of control.

Since Shad still carried Krystal's medallion as well as his brother's, if the worst happened he could toss the medallions over their heads and they'd arrive safely at his cabin. He might do that anyway, since getting one Capric,

—himself—out of the compound would be a lot easier than three.

The walled courtyard had low walls but opened at one end. Some of the horses veered off. A few pounded on into the courtyard. Coming up behind them, Shad saw how Krystal was tethered by the man in the white robe. Tiberius? The guard tried to get to Tiberius to protect the emperor from the horses, but Meshach, sword in hand, blocked him.

Paying no attention to the wild shouting in a language he didn't understand, Shad raised his sword and sliced through the cord tethering Krystal. She immediately eased the noose around her neck loose, yanked it over her head and off.

Go! he sent. *Done. Get away,* he told Meshach.

Shad followed Krystal from the courtyard with Meshach close behind, avoiding the scattered horses still wandering around. *Gate near the pen,* he sent to her.

After reaching the gate with no one in pursuit, Shad opened it and they slipped through, wasting no time in descending the steep hill as fast as possible, just as the sun rose.

“We’re safe for the moment, but they’ll come looking for us,” Meshach warned after they passed though the ward and the other Caprics gathered around them. “Pan told us these wards won’t last forever.”

“Already they’re thin in places,” a red-haired female said. She looked at Meshach and gasped. “You’re

wounded.”

“One of the guards got lucky. I’ll survive.”

Shad stared at the blood dripping down his brother’s arm, ashamed he hadn’t noticed.

“If you send me back, it’ll be easier to take care of at your cabin,” Meshach insisted.

He was right, but Shad took a look anyway. Nasty looking sword gash in the upper arm. Fortunately, the blood wasn’t spurting. He’d make it okay. He had to.

“Rick’ll tell you where the others’ medallions are.” He pulled his brother’s medallion from the pouch. “You’ll collect all of theirs and bring them here. Myla’s still at the cabin, so make sure you bring back her medallion and she yours. We’ll all go together when we go.”

“Go?” the red-haired female asked.

“The Romans’ll come looking for us, count on it. We can’t stay on Capri.”

“He’s got the info,” Rick said. “Good to go.” He raised his reed pipe.

As the first few piping notes sounded, Shad flung the medallion over his brother’s head. The dance had hardly begun before Meshach vanished.

“He’s in a hurry to get that wound treated,” the red-head said.

“Probably more eager to get back to his mate,” Rick

commented

Shad grinned. "I know how he feels." Already holding Krystal's hand, he led her away from the others and down the incline toward the sea.

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Chapter 6

Krystal glanced around at the secluded spot on the small beach that Shad had chosen. Beautiful azure waves lapped the sand, the sun gifting the water with sparkling diamonds. A soft sea breeze teased her hair. Giant monoliths thrust up from the blue sea, some near, some farther out. With the immediate danger over, she could relax and enjoy Capri. She looked at Shad and the glint in his eyes told her the beauty of the isle wasn't all she might enjoy.

He put his hands on her shoulders, drew her close and kissed her. For a moment, she was all too conscious of their changed shapes, but the sizzle zinging through her made her forget everything but being in his arms. The feel of his chest hair against her naked breasts heated her more than the sun as his kiss deepened. She savored his dark and spicy taste.

When his mouth traveled to her breasts, first laving one, then the other, her insides turned liquid. She held his head to her, wanting more as he drove her crazy with need.

She moaned her pleasure, every cell in her body

acutely aware of him and demanding satisfaction. But when he released her long enough to turn her back—no, her hind quarters—toward him, she remembered what she was. What he was. *Half animal*. She tried to pull away, but he was stronger and mounted her, his male member sliding easily into her female part.

The hot thrill shooting through her banished all thought of *how* he was making love to her. She wanted more and more and more. Wanted him never to stop. She screamed out her joy of Capric mating as she reached the peak, amazed how she stayed up there until he finally shouted, so that they fell over the edge of bliss together.

And that was just the beginning.

Much later, they waded into the sea and washed. “I didn’t realize...” her words trailed off.

“How we could be together until we tried?”

“You mean this was your first time, too?”

He grinned at her. “As a Capric, yes.”

“How did you know—well, what to do?”

“To heart-mates, some things come naturally. We are, you know.”

She took a deep breath and sighed it out. “I never expected to be anyone’s mate. Not after Granny told me I wasn’t normal.”

“You’re delightfully normal. The most beautiful Capric in the world.”

She smiled. “I guess I can be sure I’m the first Capric you ever told that to.”

“First and last. There’s no one like you in any form. You’re mine and I’m yours.”

* * * *

As they neared the meadow, they heard piping. “Dancing?” Shad muttered. “Wonder why?”

When they came closer, Krystal saw he was right. The music caught their feet and they joined the others in a wild and frenzied dance. Finally, Rick, who’d been dancing as he played, took the pipes from his lips and dropped to the ground. Exhausted, all the others joined him.

“Do this often?” Shad asked.

“We saw Roman guards through the wards,” Rick said, “and were afraid they might see us through one of the thin places. So I played and we danced. Pan strengthened the wards by piping. I figured it couldn’t do any harm.” He held up the reed pipe. “Pan gave me this and taught me how to use it before he left.”

“One wasn’t a guard,” the red-haired female said. “He was older, didn’t wear armor, and keep staring at that thin spot.”

“I noticed him,” Rick admitted. “If you’re thinking he was Tiberius, no. I’ve seen the Emperor and it wasn’t him.”

“What if he’s some kind of, well, wizard or whatever the Romans call them?” she demanded.

“Don’t go borrowing trouble, Rena,” Rick told her.

“But he could be. Isn’t it possible he might conjure up some magic to undo Pan’s?”

Rick shook his head. “Pan has far more power than a

mere mortal.”

Rena raised her chin. “Had, maybe. But the Romans drove Pan off Capri, didn’t they?”

“By sheer numbers and weapons Pan had no power over,” Rick countered. “I love you dearly, heart-mate of mine, but sometimes—”

Rena interrupted. “What happens to us if that bearded Roman *is* a magician and Meshach was more injured than we thought so can’t get back?”

“His injury wasn’t incapacitating,” Shad assured her.

“But what if the wound is worse than it looked? How will he be able to go looking for our medallions?”

“Myla’s with him,” Shad said. “She’s not hurt.”

“And where are we going to land if we do get the medallions in time?” Rena persisted.

“All sixteen of us will land in my cabin,” he said. “Which is too small to be more than a temporary location for us. Will we be separating or do you intend to stay together?”

“I want to stay together,” Rena said. “I think we all feel that way because we’ve been a group for a long time.”

Murmurs of agreements came from the others.

“But don’t some of you have family?” Krystal asked.

“Not all Caprics are able to reproduce,” Rick told her. “Few of us have children. And, like Shad and Meshach, none of us have living parents. The older folks were killed in the first Roman raid on the isle. If Pan hadn’t set the wards for us, we’d all be dead.”

How tragic. That must be what had happened to her parents. Tears came to Krystal's eyes. With the tears came the memory of Granny's death last November. And the will that had left the farm in Tennessee to Krystal. *I meant to go there and sell it, but then I went skiing instead. And wound up here.*

"I own a farm in Tennessee," she said. "The house is old but large and there's some acreage. It could be, uh, a kind of refuge."

Shad reached over and hugged her. "Good thinking."

"If we survive long enough to get there." Rena, the doomsayer again. "Who knows how long Meshach and Myla will take to come back?"

* * * *

Night cloaked the isle without the pair appearing. At least no more Roman guards prowled about. Without putting their uneasy feeling into words, the Caprics remained close together.

Snuggled next to Shad, Krystal whispered, "I never believed in sorcery, but if Caprics exist, I suppose real magicians can, too."

Shad nodded. "I don't like the fact the guards brought the bearded man with them. We can't discount his interest in that thin spot in the wards. Fortunately, time passes faster in our time than it does here. So my brother and your sister have had maybe a month or two by now to locate and retrieve the medallions."

Krystal concluded that it meant some hope remained

for them. “I believe the Romans killed my parents,” she said.

“Meshach told me ours died in the raid.”

She blinked back tears as she stared into his amber eyes. “They must have known each other.”

“Had to. Whatever happens, *you* won’t die here. I have your medallion. It’s best if I send you to safety now, so...”

“No!” Krystal didn’t want to die, but neither did she want to leave him. The thought of life without Shad appalled her. Granny’s warnings about what would happen if she ever removed the medallion had never included the wonder of finding a heart-mate. Recalling Granny brought up more memories. An idea wiggled its way into her mind. “Shad, do any of the others speak Greek?”

“I don’t know. Why?”

“The Greek curse—you said you remembered the words. If you told them to a Greek speaker, maybe he or she could make sure of what they were in that language and be able to use it as a weapon. It affected you when you didn’t know Greek—why not a Roman? If that wizard comes back with the guards, the curse may neutralize him. We can ask Rena first—she has a slight accent.”

Next to Shad, a Capric raised up. “Who mentioned my name?”

Krystal recognized Rena’s voice and lifted her head. “Can you speak or understand any Greeks?”

“What if I can?”

“Shad needs to ask you about a Greek curse that might

work on that Roman magician.”

Rick stirred, and the four of them withdrew from the rest of the sleeping Caprics.

* * * *

Rena was still struggling to identify one of the words Shad remembered when a rustling nearby startled them. Shad drew the dagger from its tattered sheath hung on the cord at his waist.

Bro, we're back. Got them all.

“It’s Meshach and Myla,” he told the others as he re-sheathed the dagger. In mind-send he summoned their predicament to his brother. *So we need out of here fast.*

Other Caprics joined them, and Shad told them to wake everyone else.

“What’s that light?” Myla asked, then answered her own question. “Great Pan, those are torches!”

“They’re coming,” Rick said.

“Say that word one more time,” Rena said to Shad.

He obliged and a male Capric said, “That sounds something like ‘frozen’ in Greek, but you don’t have it right.” He rattled off a Greek word.

“Ah, so that’s why I couldn’t get that one,” Rena said. “I’ve got it all now. But I’d best not say it out loud in case it does work.”

“You don’t say it out loud,” Shad told her, his attention fixed on the oncoming torches. “You mind-send it, tossing it at the one the curse is intended for.”

“That’ll be a challenge. But I’ll try.”

“We brought the spear,” Meshach said. “I’m better with a sword, so I’ll use one here. Anyone good with a spear?”

“I used to spear fish,” a male said. “Romans would be easier.”

Shad herded them into a circle, facing outward, the male with the spear opposite Meshach with the sword. Myla left her place next to Meshach to distribute the medallions, giving each mate their mate’s medallion.

“Each pair will have to drop the chains around their mate’s neck at the same time, so be ready when Rick begins piping.” The torches were now close enough so Shad could see the Romans that held them.

Rick put the reed pipes to his lips. Nothing happened. “I can’t play!” he cried. “Pan, help us.”

Rena swore. “That bearded guy is in front, the son-of-a-bitch! His mouth’s moving. Bet he’s making the pipes not work. Pan hasn’t talked to any of us for a long time. He might even be dead. Looks like it’s up to us. So here I go with the curse.”

They badly needed the pipes. Would Krystal’s idea work? Did Rena have the right words? As the agonizing minutes crept by, Shad fingered his dagger.

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Chapter 7

Shouting, the Roman guards, mounted on horses, swept forward. Shad saw with dismay they'd targeted the weak spot in the wards.

"The bearded guy isn't moving now," Rena reported, "not even his lips."

Readying himself for action, Shad listened, praying to hear the piping begin.

"The wards are thinning," Meshach warned.

Then loud and clear, over the Roman's clamor, came the strangest, most melodious piping Shad had ever heard. As the music caught at his feet, he flung the sword away and dropped Krystal's medallion over her head. At the same time, he felt her do the same for him. He joined hands with her and with Myla on his other side, knowing the other Caprics were doing the same. As the dance began, he was vaguely aware the Romans had dismounted and milled around in odd patterns. The piping rose to a crescendo, the dancing grew more frenzied. Faster and faster they spun...

Shad fell backwards, pulling both Krystal and Myla with him. He hit something soft. A couch. He, Krystal, Myla and Meshach were sprawled in a tangle of arms and legs on the couch in his cabin. He caught Krystal to him and kissed her before untangling himself and standing to look around. All sixteen of them were crowded into the main room of his cabin. "We made it," he said.

"I'm naked!" Rena shrieked

"I figured most of you would be so I stacked sheets on

the bed.” Myla pointed toward the open door to the bedroom. “Ladies first.”

By the time everyone had draped sheets around them, Meshach had popped the corks from two bottles of champagne and lined up flutes on the table. “Bought this on our travels to get all the medallions,” he said. “I wanted us to be able to celebrate our arrival back in the US.”

“We’ll toast Rick’s playing first,” Shad said.

Rick held up a hand, then clutched hastily at his slipping sheet. “No, it wasn’t me. The pipes left my hand before I could try again to play them. I could never make such glorious sounds. What we heard set even the Romans to dancing. I’m convinced it was Pan himself playing those pipes. He came to pipe us forever from Capri. To save us.”

After a short silence, Shad raised his flute of champagne. “As Caprics, Pan’s chosen people, wherever, whatever he may be, we toast Great Pan.”

As they all drank, he thought he heard the faint sound of joyous piping, but it was gone so quickly he couldn’t be sure.

* * * *

Standing on the wide front porch of the old farmhouse in Tennessee in her robe and slippers, Krystal took a deep breath of the cool October morning. With the others depending on her to finish up the legalities, so they could all move to larger quarters, she’d been so busy she hadn’t had time to think. It’d been mid-August when they’d arrived in Shad’s cabin. He’d left shortly after, catching up

on his various business projects. They hadn't been together in months and she'd never before realized how painful it was to be parted from your mate.

Now, at last, they were all at the farm. All except Rick and Rena—and Shad. Staring at the view of the county highway through the trees, she noticed a red pickup turn off onto the winding road that led to the farm. Not yet seven o'clock, too early to be the roofers who'd promised to be out this week. Rick and Rena were due back today with the architect's revised plans for the house they were planning to build in the woods adjacent to the farm. But Rick didn't drive a red truck. Shad did. Anticipation mounted until she couldn't stand to wait. She flew down the steps and along the drive as the truck turned in the gate.

It rolled to a stop beside her. Shad leaped out and grabbed her, holding her so tight she could hardly breathe. "I thought I'd never get here," he murmured as he let her go.

"I have a surprise for you," she said. Taking his hand, she led him toward the barn.

"You bought a cow?"

"Two, but that's not the surprise."

"Chickens?"

"You don't keep chickens in a barn. They're in that coop over there." She pointed.

"Horses?" he asked as he slid open the barn door.

"Not yet." The warmth of connection with the man she loved ran through her from the feel of her hand in his.

From their stalls, the cows shifted to stare at them. “Don’t worry, you’ll get milked soon,” she told them. She angled Shad toward the ladder to the loft.

He grinned at her. “I’m beginning to suspect what my prize may be.”

Once up in the loft, he took in the stacked hay bales, then looked at loose hay strewn onto the loft floor. “Mmm, yes. All this hay just for us.”

She punched his arm. “Turn around and look.”

When he did, he drew in his breath. A mural had been painted along the barn wall across from the loft. Not just any mural, but one of Capri, of the view from the beach where they’d first made love. Blue sky, the sea an even deeper blue, the sun diamonds gleaming in the water, the monolithic sentinel rocks—all were depicted vividly. He turned back and drew her into his arms.

He’d waited for this moment, dreamed of it the entire time they’d been separated. “Any more to the surprise?” he murmured against her lips.

“Wait and see.” Her voice was breathless.

“No more waiting.” He slanted his mouth over hers.

He wanted to go slow, to cherish every inch of her as they made love, but when he reached between them to untie and open her robe, the feel of her bare skin under his hands sent him climbing. Her eager response to his touch raised his heat level to scorching flame.

Still holding her, he edged them both over to the spread of hay and eased down with her. Her breasts were as

enticing as he remembered from Capri, made for his caresses. When his fingers slid lower, he found she was as ready as he felt. But he forced himself to hold back.

She pulled away from him and tugged at the belt on his jeans. Once she had it unbuckled, he stopped her from unzipping them. “Better let me,” he said, sliding the zipper carefully. He pulled jeans and shorts down only to realize they’d never go over his boots. *Not planning things very well, am I?*

Chagrined at his eagerness, he sat up to take off his boots. She grabbed his T-shirt and pulled it up over his head and off, then used both hands to shove him back down. “Mmm,” she said, “my turn,” and slid a leg over him, then positioned herself over his hardness.

He groaned as, with maddening slowness, she eased him into her soft, moist warmth and wriggled until he was all the way inside. Then she rode him to distraction, making him forget everything else. When she cried out with release, he went with her, unable to control himself a second longer.

They eased back down to reality. Still holding her on top of him, he said, “Best surprise I’ve ever had, but next time no boots.”

She slid off and nestled close, laying her head on his chest. “Will we ever—I mean can we be in our Capric form ever again?”

“Liked it better than way, did you?”

She punched him.

“Those days are over. But that doesn’t mean we can’t dance to recordings of pipe music without removing our medallions.”

From below came a loud moo.

Krystal sat up and reached for her robe. “They need to be milked. Which means Meshach’ll be coming in the barn any minute.”

“My brother milks cows?”

“Lots of surprises for you this morning.”

He yanked on his shorts and jeans, stood and zipped up. The he reached into a pocket and took out a folded-up red bandana. “A surprise for you inside.”

He watched her fold back the cloth and draw in her breath. “Oh, Shad.” Tears shone in her eyes.

He plucked the ring from its nest and slid it onto her finger. “The rest comes as soon as possible.”

Krystal blinked the tears away. “Don’t I have to agree to ‘the rest’?”

He grinned at her. “As your heart-mate, I already know you do.”

The door of the barn slid open. “You two through up there?” Meshach called. “Admiring the mural, I mean?”

Shad looked at Krystal, and they both laughed. “Just making sure we’re still heart-mates,” Shad said.

“And?” Meshach asked from below.

“He’s forcing me to marry him,” she said, wrapping her arms around her heart-mate. “Even if he didn’t...the answer is yes.”

“Forever,” Shad agreed.

