

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT

N.J. WALTERS

*Amethyst
Dreams*



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Amethyst Dreams

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AMETHYST DREAMS

N.J. Walters

Dedication

For my husband, who inspires me daily. There are not enough words to thank you for all that you do.

Chapter One

Dr. Augustine Mitchell jammed the key into the lock and let herself into her office. Her feet were killing her. She wasn't used to wearing heels. Work boots were more her style.

She closed the door behind her and kicked off the offending shoes. It didn't help that her heels were very conservative compared to most other women's at the faculty event. They were still much higher than she was used to and they hurt. She'd never understood the feminine obsession with shoes. Give her a pair of flats, a pair of sneakers and a good pair of boots and she had all the footwear she needed.

"Much better," she sighed as she flicked on the light and padded over to her desk. Without thought, she turned on her computer. Augustine rubbed the back of her neck and rolled her shoulders, trying to release some of the tension. It didn't help.

She hated faculty affairs, the mingling of academics, university officials and the rich, who contributed to the university's coffers. Still, they were a necessary evil. Projects such as hers were in perennial need of funding and rich patrons were always welcome.

"If I were independently wealthy I wouldn't need to get dressed up every few months and attend one of these things," she muttered as she dropped into her chair. The skirt she was wearing rode up her thighs. Scowling, she shifted in her seat, trying to ignore the uncomfortable pantyhose encasing her legs like a vise. Pantyhose were an instrument of the devil as far as she was concerned.

Augustine wore khakis and jeans for the most part and dress pants when she couldn't get away with a more casual look. The only time she broke down and wore a skirt or dress was at weddings, funerals and faculty events, and she'd even been known to wear pants to a wedding. White linen—but pants all the same. She'd have done the

same tonight, but this was a special event—she'd just been offered the position as head of the Department of Archaeology.

She knew that Professor Harrington was retiring in a few months, but she hadn't given the situation much thought beyond wondering who would replace him. She'd applied for the position, not because she really wanted it, but because that's what she was supposed to do. It was part of the grand scheme of academic life—publish, get grant money and move up the academic ladder. If she hadn't applied for the position, her colleagues would have been talking about her. And not in a good way.

She hadn't expected to be offered the job. There were several other professors in the department with more years of experience than she. But with all the publicity surrounding her work the past few years, the powers-that-be at the university were very pleased with her. Her name was now recognized around the world and that brought prestige and monetary donations to the university.

She knew she should be excited. This was what most academics strived for. She had tenure, was recognized as an expert in her field and now she'd been offered a prestigious position, which meant more money for her and the respect of her peers. It also meant she'd get out into the field less. And it was fieldwork she loved more than anything else.

Still, if she didn't take the promotion, her colleagues would question her motives, and her sanity. Her funding would probably slowly dry up and eventually disappear. Maybe it was time for her to leave academia altogether. Several prestigious museums had been courting her to join their organizations.

Sighing, she rubbed her hand over her face. "Damn it," she swore when she realized she'd probably just smudged her mascara. Augustine wasn't used to wearing makeup either.

A knock came on the door and before she could tell whomever it was to enter, the door was pushed open. "You left the party too soon, Augie."

This night just couldn't get any worse. Standing, she used her right hand to quickly shut her computer down. She didn't trust Dr. Robert Bartlett any farther than she could throw him. She might be a tall woman at six feet, and strong from years of working on archaeological digs, but she still couldn't toss a man of Robert's size very far. He was only an inch or two taller than she, but he was heavily built, and none of it was fat.

"What do you want?" She saw no reason to be polite to him. They'd been at odds for years. Augustine saw past his blond good looks and easygoing personality to the shark beneath. Robert took advantage of his position, using anyone who could help him and walking over those who couldn't. And he wanted the job that had just been offered to her.

Robert strolled around her office, perusing her bookshelf. He stroked a finger over a small clay pot that she'd found in an Egyptian market years ago. She'd known the minute she set eyes on it that it was about four thousand years old. She'd bought it and had carried it with her ever since—a reminder that you never knew when or where you'd find something special.

"I just wanted to congratulate you, Augie. Who'd you sleep with to get the job? Dean Parker?"

Anger flooded her, but she kept her expression level. Robert was goading her by using the shortened version of her name that she despised. "That's your style, not mine."

He turned toward her and she saw the anger in his eyes. No, it was more than anger. It was pure hatred. Robert didn't like the fact that a woman had been given the position he'd coveted and had campaigned hard for. "It's all this equal rights crap. That's the only reason you got the job. We both know that I'm more qualified and better equipped for the position."

"If you mean that you kiss ass better, then yes, you're definitely more qualified than I am." Augustine didn't know why she was pushing Robert when all she wanted was for him to leave.

A headache was just starting to brew behind her eyes. She wished she could just close them and forget this night had ever happened. The faculty dinner had been incredibly stressful. She'd had to talk and verbally tap dance her way around her bosses. She hadn't given the university president her answer yet, saying she wanted a few days to consider her options. Franklin Jones hadn't been happy with her, but he'd agreed to give her until Monday. As it was Friday night, she didn't have much time and Robert was cutting into it.

Still, she didn't dare take her eyes off him for one moment. Like a snake, he was always ready to lunge and bite at a moment's notice. He'd leap on any sign of weakness.

Robert walked toward her. Every instinct was urging her to run, not to be alone with him, but she held her ground. She knew what he was capable of. He'd sexually harassed her friend and colleague, Olivia Fifield, for years, right up until Olivia had dropped out of academia and seemingly vanished off the face of the planet. If she hadn't had a letter as proof that Olivia was alive and had left of her own accord, she would have suspected Robert of getting rid of her somehow.

"No need to be unfriendly, Augie." He reached out to touch her face, but she knocked his hand away. No way could she let him touch her.

She gave him a mock smile. "I'm afraid there's every need, Robert. I haven't had my rabies shot." Damn, her tongue was going to get her into trouble. She was usually more careful and controlled in her dealings with her colleagues, especially hostile ones, but she was tired and out of sorts tonight, and not ready to deal with the likes of Robert.

"You won't have that position for long, Augie." Robert leaned his hips against the side of her desk and crossed his arms over his chest. "I know many of the wealthy patrons who fund this department. They'll be outraged that you got this position ahead of me, especially when I let it slip that I know you slept with several of your bosses to get it."

"You're disgusting," she spat. He'd ruin her good name and those of her bosses over this. Even though the rumors would ultimately prove to be untrue, innuendo and suspicion would follow all of them for the rest of their careers. In academia it was your reputation that mattered, not always fact.

Robert shrugged, completely unconcerned. "I prefer to think of it as being proactive."

"And how many of those bored, wealthy wives of patrons have you slept with?"

He shook his head in mock sorrow. "Augie, Augie, Augie. You know a gentleman never kisses and tells."

"Meaning all of them." She'd had enough and pointed to the door. "Get out, Robert. I've had enough of your threats tonight."

He pushed away from the desk, but instead of walking toward the door, he shifted closer, crowding Augustine close to the bookshelf behind her desk. "Now, Augie, that's not nice."

A bead of sweat rolled down her back as fear clenched her stomach for the first time. It was late and there was no one else around. Reaching behind her, she let her right hand play along the bookshelf. A large chunk of crystal filled her palm and she gave thanks to the student she'd mentored years ago who'd switched to geology and had brought her the crystal as a present. Augustine usually used it as a pretty paperweight. Tonight, it would make a good weapon.

"I'm not trying to be nice, Robert." She tightened her fingers around the rock.

"Maybe you should try harder." He reached out and ran a finger down her cheek. "If you're nice, maybe I'll keep you on after I become department head." He shifted closer and she could feel his erection brush across her stomach.

She shivered with revulsion and once again cursed the skirt she was wearing. There was no way she'd be able to knee him in the balls. The skirt was too narrow and tight to allow for such movement. Another good reason for wearing pants at all times, but it was too late to go back in time and change.

Keeping her voice low and even, she tried to reason with him. "Get out now and I won't file sexual harassment charges against you."

His eyes narrowed and his lips turned up in a cruel smile. The bastard was enjoying himself. "They won't hold. I can have a dozen witnesses say that you came on to me and I turned you down."

She didn't doubt it. He was such a snake he'd probably bribe students to say whatever he wanted them to.

"Besides," he cupped his hand loosely around her neck, the gesture threatening and not the least bit lover-like. "Everyone thinks you're a lesbian anyway. You dress like a man, act like a man and never date. Why would I even bother with you?"

Augustine ignored the barb, knowing that many of her colleagues did speculate on her sexual orientation. She could have easily told them she was heterosexual, not that there was anything wrong with being gay, but she'd always been drawn to men. It was just that the men she was drawn to always treated her like one of the guys. Her sex life had been nonexistent for years and she'd put all her energy into her career, which Robert was now threatening.

"I know for a fact that several female students have made complaints against you," she countered.

"Ah, but they were never proven." He leaned in so close she could feel his breath on her face.

"Rumor is everything, Robert. You know that." Hoping she could get him to leave without resorting to violence, she kept talking. "I can get people whispering again. No matter how much clout you have with the faculty and patrons, if your reputation is smeared you won't have a chance in hell of becoming department head." She paused and added, "Besides, I'm not sure I'm taking the position yet."

His fingers flexed against her throat, tightening briefly before he released her. From the speculation in his eyes, she could tell that he thought he'd won, that she was

reconsidering because of his threats. Augustine would never tell him that she didn't want the damn job to begin with.

"Fine." He stepped away and straightened his jacket. "I'll talk to you on Monday." He cocked an eyebrow and gave her a snide smile. "You'd better have the right answer by then."

He turned on one well-shod heel and strode from the room without looking back. Augustine released a pent-up breath and brought her right hand up in front of her. Blood seeped around the edges of the crystal. Swearing, she set the rock on her desk and examined her hand. Her palm had several small cuts where she'd held her makeshift weapon so tightly.

She had to get out of here. Grabbing her knapsack and her coat, she shoved her feet into an old pair of sneakers she kept in her office for whenever she wanted to go for a workout down at the university gym. It looked stupid with a fancy skirt, but she didn't care. If she ran into Robert again, she wanted to be able to run.

Augustine stared around her office one final time before she turned off the light and locked the door. When she returned on Monday, her life would be changed, whether for the better or the worse remained to be seen. Either way, change was coming and she was helpless to stop it.

* * * * *

Staring at the clock, Augustine sighed when she realized it was only five minutes later than the last time she'd checked. It was just after two in the morning and she'd yet to sleep.

She was still wound up after her confrontation with Robert. The man was a bastard, through and through. He had no scruples and would do whatever it took to get what he wanted. He was still angry with her for what happened four years ago in Egypt.

Rolling over, she stared out the window. In the city, the lights made it impossible to see the stars. But in the vast countryside of Egypt, the stars appeared so close some

nights she felt as though she could reach out and touch them. She'd been there on a dig. They'd discovered a mastaba, an ancient burial crypt that predated the pyramids. Not so unusual in and of itself, but what was special about this one was the strange, intricate lettering beneath some of the carvings on the wall.

It wasn't hieroglyphics or any other language that scholars could read. In fact, the only time the language had been seen was decades before, and it had been deemed a hoax. Dr. Amos Fifield had uncovered a tablet with writing, as well as several pieces of jewelry. Experts had examined the find and determined they were forgeries. Dr. Fifield persisted in his belief that he'd discovered an entirely new civilization, searching all over the world for more proof. As a result, he'd become a laughingstock in the academic community.

By the time he died, the only one who mourned him was his granddaughter, Augustine's friend, Olivia. The scholarly community had forgotten all about him. But he'd taught Olivia everything he knew about the strange language and the unusual jewelry with intricate carvings. So when the discovery in the mastaba had been revealed, the only expert on the planet was Olivia Fifield.

Augustine had no idea to this day what had happened to her friend. She hadn't been on-site when Olivia arrived. By the time she'd returned, Olivia was missing. They'd searched the area, as well as the mastaba. Augustine had known in her bones that Robert Bartlett was somehow responsible for Olivia's disappearance. It was only when she'd returned to the dig that she'd discovered that Robert had sent everyone off to town that day. He was the only one there when Olivia arrived.

It had taken almost two days to find any trace of her friend and when she had, it had been in the form of a letter and a sheaf of parchment paper containing a complete translation of the new language. Where her friend had come up with the translation and where she'd gone remained a mystery.

Augustine reached out and turned on her bedside lamp before scooting up in bed. Pulling open the drawer to her nightstand, she reached far into the back and took out

the folded piece of paper. Opening it, she read. "Don't worry about me. I'm going away for a while. I'm not sure if I'll ever be back. Maybe someday we'll see one another again. Thanks for being such a wonderful friend."

Tears filled Augustine's eyes and she blinked them back. Olivia had been the best friend she'd ever had. They were an unlikely pair. She was tall and athletic, while Olivia was short and curvy. Olivia had long blonde hair, a perfect heart-shaped face and a beauty that was undeniable, while Augustine's hair was short and black and her face incredibly ordinary. Still, the two of them had clicked immediately, both victims of misconceptions and rumors. They'd bonded while in school and worked together whenever possible. Even after four years, the loss of her friend had left a huge hole in her life.

"I wish I could talk to you now." She refolded the letter and stuffed it away. "I wish I knew where the hell you were."

After Olivia had been missing for several weeks, the authorities had gotten suspicious and started to investigate. Not a trace of her had been found. All her bank accounts had gone untouched. Finally, she was declared a missing person and her file kept open. Augustine had cleared out her friend's apartment, storing her belongings for when she finally returned. She couldn't bring herself to believe that her friend was dead.

Rolling out of bed, Augustine walked over to a painting of the Egyptian pyramids. Reaching beneath the frame, she pulled the picture aside, revealing a small safe beneath it. Turning the dials, she opened it and pulled out a necklace. It had been Olivia's and had been included with the letter her friend had left her, along with instructions to various other sites in Egypt where more information on the lost civilization might be found.

"Why?" Augustine still didn't know why Olivia had left this with her. It had been the find of the century and had made Augustine's career. She was now the foremost scholar on this lost civilization.

She'd give it all up in a heartbeat if it would bring her friend back.

Holding up the necklace, she examined the intricate carving on the silver torque, as well as the deep purple amethysts that wrapped around it. The one in the center was a perfectly round stone. It was flanked on either side by two smaller pieces carved into the shapes of crescent moons. The writing spoke of Layla, Goddess of the Moon.

Augustine knew she should have turned the necklace over to a museum or university for study, but she hadn't. The necklace belonged to Olivia, given to her by her grandfather when no one had believed it to be a real artifact. It wasn't Augustine's to give away.

The amethysts seemed to be shining unusually brightly tonight. Giving in to impulse, Augustine slipped the torque around her neck and let the cool metal settle between her breasts. Closing the safe, she padded back to bed.

She turned out the light and lay back against her pillows. She didn't want to think anymore. Not about Olivia, the lost civilization, Robert or what would happen when she went to work on Monday.

Shutting her eyes, she tried to block it all out. She closed her fingers around the necklace, feeling the amethysts against her palm. It was warm now and comforting in her grasp. Sighing, she relaxed and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Two

Augustine knew she was dreaming. After all, the moon was normally pale yellow or white, not this amethyst color. Still, it was a beautiful sight sitting so low and full in the sky. The air was warm against her skin, like a lover's caress.

She glanced down and noted she was still wearing the cotton drawstring pajama pants and tank top she'd worn to bed. The amethyst and silver necklace was heavy around her neck, the crystals shining as brightly as the moon itself.

It was odd to be having such a realistic dream, but Augustine decided she might as well look around since she was here. Her feet were bare, but the path was sandy and soft between her toes as she started to stroll. She was in a garden of sorts or maybe it was a desert oasis. She wasn't quite sure. Some of the plants seemed familiar, while others were quite unusual.

There were flowers of all sizes and colors. Large red blooms with few petals, smaller purple ones that resembled stars and tall yellow flowers that seemed to be some sort of sunflower hybrid. There were vines that grew up the side of a lattice with succulent-looking purple fruit attached to them. Probably some form of grapes.

Augustine reached out and stroked the broad leaf of a tree. It was soft beneath her fingertips. She looked up, noting that the tree stood over ten feet in height. The scientist in her noted that it seemed to have clusters of large, round fruit near the top, but she couldn't quite see what they were.

Interesting. But then, dreams usually were.

The heat was beginning to affect her and perspiration dotted her skin. It wasn't uncomfortable, just a reminder that this was a hot, desert climate. But she'd spent years traipsing around many of the world's deserts and it would take more than a little heat to dissuade her from snooping around.

A bird sent up a deep, low-pitched call into the night sky. Augustine paused, feeling its lament deep in her soul. The bird was lonely. Absently, she rubbed her hand over her heart, her palm connecting with the long, silver torque. Wrapping her fingers around the jeweled pendant, she took a deep breath, taking in the fragrance of the surrounding trees and flowers.

“Why are you here?”

She whirled around and stared into the shadows where the male voice had come from. A dark form seemed to separate itself from a cluster of trees. “Who are you?” She wasn’t overly concerned. This was just a dream, after all.

“Why are you here?” he repeated.

Augustine released a pent-up breath. It was just her luck to have a stubborn male invade her dream. Hadn’t she already had enough of single-minded males for one day? Still, she sensed he wasn’t going to let it go until she told him. “This is my dream, not yours. Why are *you* here?” She tossed his question back at him.

Her fingers tightened around the torque and she drew comfort from it. Funny, she’d never thought to wear it before. It belonged to Olivia. She’d never felt the urge to put it on before tonight. Now it felt as though it were a part of her.

The male hesitated in the shadows before stepping boldly into the amethyst light of the moon. Augustine sucked in a breath. Now she knew for sure she was dreaming. She’d never met a man this good-looking in all her years of globetrotting.

He was tall—at least six and a half feet—and all of it was pure muscle. His skin had a bronzed tone, which looked to be more natural than tan. Perhaps he was Middle Eastern in descent. His straight black hair fell to his massive shoulders. His chest was broad and totally bare, revealing a large expanse of smooth skin. He was wearing a kilt-like garment, much like the ancient Egyptians wore. The garment fell to mid-thigh, leaving his long, muscular legs unencumbered.

His body was incredible, but it was his face that captivated her.

Strong. That was the first word that popped into her head. Strength of character was evident in the hard set of his jaw and the narrowing of his eyes. This was not a man to be trifled with. His forehead was broad, his nose prominent. Eyes as dark as the night sky watched her. He didn't blink, didn't glance away. He looked as if he were carved from stone. There was no softness anywhere on this man. Even his lips appeared hard.

"This is my dream, not yours," he countered as he moved closer. For such a large man, he moved with a fluid grace that was mesmerizing. She stood her ground as he circled her slowly, the heat from his body enveloping her.

This was beginning to eerily resemble her earlier meeting with Robert. The only difference was, whereas Robert repulsed her on every level, this stranger held a strange fascination for her. Her nipples puckered, the hardened nubs pressing against the thin fabric of her tank top. A throbbing began low in her belly, reminding her just how long it had been since she'd had sex. Sure, she used her vibrator from time to time, but nothing replaced the feel of a strong, hard man thrusting inside her.

It had been five years since she'd indulged in an affair on a remote dig. The man had been a fellow archaeologist from Australia—big, blond and lusty. They'd scratched each other's itch for the two weeks he was there. But he paled in comparison to the man who continued to slowly circle her.

She could smell him, a combination of leather, male and some spicy soap or cologne. She creamed her pajama pants as she inhaled, the unique male fragrance reaching out to her deeply buried feminine side.

His breath caressed the side of her neck. "What is your name?" A shiver raced down her spine and goose bumps rose on her arms and back. He was so close his lips skimmed the outer curve of her ear.

"Augustine." Her voice was breathy, barely a whisper on the night air.

His lips grazed the sensitive skin at her nape and she knew he was smiling. She wished she could see it. Augustine sensed that he wasn't a man who smiled often.

“Augustine,” he repeated. Her name sounded slightly exotic as it rolled from his tongue.

“What’s your name?” She desperately wanted a name to go with her dream stranger.

“Rorik, son of Ebar and Jara.” His teeth closed around her earlobe and he bit down gently.

Augustine closed her eyes as that tiny bite ricocheted throughout her entire body. Cream slid down the inside of her thigh and her inner muscles pulsed in a primal rhythm. Her breasts were swollen and tender, aching for his touch. Her hips undulated of their own accord. She’d been hot before, but the outer heat had nothing compared to the inner fires roaring through her.

She licked her lips. They were dry and parched. “Rorik.” She let his name roll off her lips. It was a good name. A strong name. And it suited him.

“You should not be here, little one.” He stepped away, coming around to stand in front of her.

Little one. No one had ever called her that in her entire life. She was as tall as, or taller than, most men she knew. But not this man. Rorik was much taller and broader than she was. Around him, she did almost feel little. It made her feel...hot. Yet the sensations made her uncomfortable at the same time.

Augustine wasn’t an overly sexual woman—however that wasn’t the case around this stranger. He brought out parts of her that she’d kept buried most of her life. She was Augustine Mitchell—sensible, levelheaded and able to hold her own, physically and intellectually, with all the other men on a dig. She didn’t recognize this Augustine, the feminine, sensual one.

Squaring her shoulders, she stared him down, ignoring the fact that he looked even larger with his arms folded across his massive chest. His biceps were huge. Still, she’d never backed down from anyone in her life and she wasn’t about to start with some man from her dreams. “Why shouldn’t I be here? This is my dream.”

She sensed his frustration even though he didn't move, didn't make any betraying gestures. The man was incredibly self-contained.

"It is not safe for you to be around me."

She watched, fascinated as his fingers opened and closed into fists. She didn't fear he'd hurt her. On the contrary, she had the feeling that this man was always in control, maybe too much so. "Why isn't it safe?" Augustine almost didn't recognize the purring, flirty tones of her own voice.

She took a step toward him. He didn't move, not even when she placed her palm in the center of his chest and felt the fast, heavy thud of his heart. He wasn't as unaffected as he wanted her to believe. Something nudged her belly and she automatically shifted closer. There was no mistaking the rather impressive erection prodding at her stomach. Even though there were several layers of clothing between them, his shaft felt hot.

"I don't want this," he grated out from between clenched teeth. His eyes darkened as he lowered his head.

"Then leave." She smoothed her fingers over his collarbone before testing the thick muscles of his shoulders. "It's just a dream."

He shook his head, causing his long hair to brush against the side of her face. "It's more than a dream, Augustine. And it may already be too late."

Before she could ask him what he meant by that, he captured her mouth with his. She'd been both right and wrong about his lips. They were firm, but they were soft too. His tongue slipped along the seam of her lips, seeking entrance, and she gave it willingly, eagerly. He surged inside, running his tongue over the edge of her teeth before exploring the cavern of her mouth.

Rorik seemed to suck all the breath from her body as he laid siege to her mouth. She wrapped her arms around his neck, clinging to him. Somewhere along the way, he'd palmed her ass, tilting her hips inward so her mound was pressed directly against his swollen cock.

Augustine groaned and tried to suck in a breath, but it was impossible. The night, the sky, the moon, the oasis, all disappeared. Nothing existed but Rorik. Time disappeared as the kiss went on and on. She would have stayed there forever, but he finally broke away. Gasping for breath, she stared up at him. His eyes were totally black, his face even harder than before.

If she'd met him in a dark alley, she'd have been scared to death of him. But here in her dreams, she felt safe. Plus, somewhere deep inside her, she knew he'd never hurt her. Not physically. She didn't question her instincts. They'd saved her life more than once over the years and she trusted them implicitly.

"You should go before it's too late." His fingers tightened around her bottom as he uttered the warning.

She leaned closer, brushing soft kisses across his jaw. "I think it's already too late." She didn't want to leave. Not now.

"It's not too late for me, is it?"

She whirled around at the sound of another male voice. Rorik wrapped his forearm around her stomach, keeping her close. The newcomer was tall, not as tall as Rorik, but he was still larger than she. His hair was a little longer than Rorik's, but it was a dark brown instead of black. He wasn't quite as broad as Rorik, but was certainly an impressive specimen of manhood. If she hadn't met Rorik first, she would definitely have been attracted to him. Was attracted to him.

"So it has begun." Rorik's whispered words sent a shiver down her spine and not a good one. He didn't sound happy about this.

"What's going on?" She wasn't sure she liked this new turn of events in her dream.

The stranger didn't take his eyes off her as he strode toward them. Rorik's hold tightened briefly before his grip loosened. She felt bereft, abandoned, when his arm fell away from her. Which didn't make any sense. She'd just met the man. Still, she could feel his solid presence behind her. She knew he'd protect her if he felt it was necessary. Not that she felt a threat from the newcomer. Just the opposite in fact.

His eyes were the color of rich, dark chocolate. The light was a pale amethyst glow, but in the way of dreams, she knew his eyes were brown and not black like Rorik's. His face was similar to Rorik's, but his features were more finely drawn, not as harsh. They were even dressed the same in the simple kilt-like linen garments. "You're brothers?" There had to be some relation between them.

The man shook his head. "Cousins by birth. But brothers at heart," he added. "My name is Kirce, son of Farak and Tania. I was raised alongside Rorik after my parents died when I was a child."

"I'm sorry." She didn't quite know what else to say. She knew what it was like to lose family. Her parents had been older when they'd had her. Augustine had been a change-of-life baby, coming as a complete surprise to her parents. By the time she'd graduated college her father had died. Her mother had followed a few years later. She had a few cousins scattered around the world, but she'd never been close to any of them. Her work had been her refuge.

Kirce inclined his head and then looked at his cousin. "Rorik?"

Rorik sighed, his heavy breath ruffling her hair. "It is her choice."

"What's my choice?" Forcing herself to move, Augustine stepped away from Rorik. She stood, watching both men. "What's this about?" This was turning into a very frustrating dream. Her breasts ached and her core throbbed with need. She wasn't in the mood for riddles.

"Pleasure." Kirce let the word roll off his tongue as the corners of his mouth turned up in a smile. "It's about your pleasure, and ours, if you'll allow us." Reaching out, he boldly cupped her breast in his hand, circling his thumb around the swollen nipple.

Augustine gave a small cry and jerked back, not quite certain how to deal with this change of events. Her gaze flew to Rorik. He watched her out of unreadable eyes. "Rorik?"

His nostrils flared slightly when she said his name. The front of his garment pushed out, a blatant signal of his arousal. He cupped the side of her neck in his large hand and

pulled her close. Lowering his lips to her forehead, he pressed a light kiss against her skin. "Let us pleasure you, Augustine. Let us touch you, taste you, share our bodies with you."

Augustine went cold before a river of heat flooded her. They wanted to pleasure her. Both of them!

Heat crept over her skin. Her nerve endings all tingled. This couldn't be happening.

But it could.

Because this was a dream. A wonderfully delicious erotic dream.

She'd never had a dream this real in her entire life. Her entire body pulsed with life, with need, with repressed sexuality. It had been so long for her, too long. She wanted to feel their calloused hands against her skin, the brush of their tongues over her swollen flesh, the hard press of their cocks sliding in and out of her sex.

If this were reality, she would never have the nerve to do it. Okay, maybe she would have found the courage to take what she wanted, but with one of them, not both of them at the same time. But this was a dream. Right or wrong didn't exist.

Not taking her eyes off Rorik, she nodded. "Yes."

"So be it," Rorik whispered as he left a trail of openmouthed kisses down the side of her jaw. His large hands pushed under her tank top, shoving it upward as his fingers caressed her torso. She thought he'd touch her breasts, wanted him to touch her. But he kept pushing her top upward. She automatically raised her hands and let him tug the garment away.

She shifted closer, letting her bare breasts rub against the hard planes of his chest. Closing her eyes, she stifled a moan, as her nipples grew even tighter. Rorik gripped her shoulders lightly and pushed her away. "I want to see you." His voice was hoarse and low.

Augustine opened her eyes and stared up at him. Even though she'd just met him, he wasn't a stranger, not in her heart. It was as if she somehow knew him but had

forgotten him. Which made no sense at all. Rorik wasn't the kind of man any woman would forget. He was just too vital, too compelling, too male.

His eyes narrowed as he cupped her breasts with his hands. She wasn't a very well endowed woman, and his hands were so large his palms covered her completely. "Your skin is so soft. Like the finest silk."

Hands cupped her behind and squeezed. She gave a yelp, coming up on her toes. The action pushed her breasts more firmly into Rorik's hands. Somehow with Rorik touching her she'd forgotten all about Kirce. Which should have been impossible. Like his cousin, Kirce was very memorable.

With one man at her back and the other at her front, she was completely surrounded by them. But she didn't feel the least bit threatened. She knew one word from her would have them backing off and giving her space. She didn't question her knowledge. This was a dream after all, her dream. She was the one in control.

As if he'd read her mind, Rorik leaned down and captured one of her nipples between his teeth, biting gently. He used exquisite control to temper the power behind his touch. This was a man who knew his own strength and knew just how much to exert to bring pleasure. Fire streaked from her breast to her core. She clasped his shoulders tight as her knees threatened to buckle under the sensual onslaught.

Kirce shifted his hands, pushing them beneath the waistband of her pajama pants. His hands slid slowly over her bottom as he shoved the fabric out of his way. Augustine didn't protest as he continued his downward trek. He caressed her outer thighs, the backs of her knees and her ankles. Her pajamas pooled around her ankles.

"Step out." Rorik helped steady her as she followed Kirce's instructions. She was now totally naked, while they were both still dressed.

Augustine had always been self-conscious about her body. It was strong but not overly feminine. Her breasts were average and she didn't have much in the way of curves. She had to fight the urge to cover herself with her hands. Which wasn't fair.

This was a dream. She shouldn't feel this way. She felt her face getting hotter and knew she was blushing. That wouldn't do.

Going on the offensive, she placed her hand at the waistband of Rorik's kilt-like garment. "This has to go."

He smiled at her then and she stopped breathing. His smile was filled with heat, with masculine promise. "As my lady commands." He whisked the garment away, leaving him completely naked.

Her head started to spin and she had to remind herself to breathe. His cock jutted away from his groin, long and thick. She'd never had a lover that large before.

Swallowing hard, she reached out and ran her fingers down his hard length, feeling the heat and strength emanating from him. A rustling sound behind her made her turn her head. Kirce stood, hands on his hips, totally bare. He was just as impressive as his cousin. His erection was standing straight up from a nest of brown hair. His testicles hung low and heavy.

Rorik cupped her chin in his hand and brought her face back around to him. "Whatever you want, Augustine."

She loved the way her name sounded when he said it. The man could seduce her with his voice alone. Her skin was tight, almost itchy. Dampness coated her sex and inner thighs. Her breasts ached. She was more than ready.

"I want you." She glanced over her shoulder at Kirce. "Both of you."

As if that was the signal they'd both been waiting for, Rorik captured her lips again in another searing kiss. Kirce moved in behind her, pressing his cock against the dark crease of her behind as he kissed her shoulders and nibbled the back of her neck. Rorik's erection prodded her belly as he deepened the kiss, stealing every thought from her head.

Ending the kiss, Rorik licked and nipped at her neck, slowly working his way to her breasts. Cupping them in his hands, he took one nipple in his mouth, sucking hard. She

groaned and fisted her hands in his hair, holding him close as he pleased one breast and then the other.

Behind her, Kirce continued to tease the sensitive skin at her nape while his hands squeezed and caressed her hips. He eased open the globes of her ass, pushing his erection tighter against her. She whimpered as his fingers slid around to the front, sifting through her pubic hair.

Rorik suckled her breasts one final time before blowing lightly across the tips. Her inner muscles spasmed and she cried out. Her breasts had never been so sensitive before. She was close to coming. He went down on one knee in front of her, kissing his way down her stomach.

The night was quiet around them, as if all the birds had fled. Perfumed air floated around them, now laced with the scent of arousal. Heat enveloped her, both inside and out. She felt curiously weightless and unencumbered. Strangely free.

The ground was soft beneath her feet as she leaned back against Kirce and tilted her head back to look at him. He really was incredible—strong, handsome and built like a god. He lowered his head and gently kissed her lips. They were softer than Rorik's. Not feminine, but gentle. Even his taste was different, more honeyed where Rorik's was spicier. Their kisses were different, but there was no denying the fact both men were damn good at it. Better than good.

Her toes curled as Kirce slid his tongue into her mouth. Heat blossomed and more cream slipped from her core to dampen the folds of her sex and her inner thighs. She sighed when he leaned away, releasing her from the potent kiss.

His hands hadn't been still while he'd been kissing her. Kirce continued to tease her, threading his fingers through the hair on her mound, but not deepening the touch. It was sensual torture, pushing her to even higher heights of arousal.

"I want to see your pussy."

Her gaze flew to Rorik, who knelt patiently waiting at her feet. He had one hand wrapped around his cock, stroking up and down his hard length.

Kirce moved his hands, sliding them between her thighs. "Spread your legs so we can show him."

Augustine didn't even hesitate. She shifted, sliding her legs apart. Kirce slipped his fingers over the folds of her sex, pulling them back, exposing her totally to Rorik's gaze. Her breathing was fast and heavy, her breasts rising and falling rapidly with each lungful of air she sucked in. Her core ached to be touched, to be filled by Rorik or Kirce or both of them.

She leaned back against Kirce and arched her hips toward Rorik. "Touch me." The words were ragged. She was on the edge, aching and needing. This was unlike anything she'd ever experienced in her life.

Rorik shifted closer, his fingers barely, but not quite touching her. "Your cunt is hot. I can feel your heat, smell it." He leaned forward and inhaled deeply. "Sweet and wet and ready for me. For us."

"Yesss," she hissed. She tried to move closer, but Kirce held her firmly. God, she was going to go out of her mind if she didn't come soon.

Rorik slid one thick finger over her swollen lips, letting it brush her distended clit. Augustine cried out as his touch seared her flesh. She bit her bottom lip to keep from begging him to hurry. She wanted his finger shoved deep inside her. Her inner muscles rippled in agreement.

He leaned forward and she could feel his warm breath on her damp folds. "Mine," he stated as he stroked his tongue over her clit. At the same time, he drove two fingers deep, stretching her.

Her eyelids fluttered shut as pleasure consumed her. It bordered on pain as his fingers were large and it had been a very long time since she'd had a lover. He withdrew his fingers, curling the tips as he did so and hitting her sweet spot.

At the same time, Kirce bit down on the curve of her neck. She could feel the dampness of his skin against hers, the hard press of his erection against her ass. Rorik pressed his fingers inward at the same time he sucked on her clit.

Augustine exploded. Her legs shook and her thighs turned to jelly as spasms rocked her. Heat surged through her body from her toes to her scalp. Her inner muscles clenched hard around Rorik's fingers as he withdrew them. A long, thin cry came from deep within her. Kirce wrapped one strong forearm around her, keeping her upright.

A bead of sweat rolled down the side of her face as she sucked in air, desperate to catch her breath. She'd had orgasms before, but nothing in her life had prepared her for this.

This was off the charts.

Kirce murmured to her, spreading soft, undemanding kisses over her neck, shoulder, and jaw. She didn't understand what he was saying, but it didn't matter. The tone said it all. It was meant to comfort her and it did. She relaxed, knowing he wouldn't let her fall. The warm night breeze began to cool her overheated body.

Her head fell forward and she looked down at Rorik who still knelt at her feet. His lips were wet with her cream and, as she watched, his tongue darted out to lick them. "Delicious," he murmured. Her sex clenched, wringing another moan from her.

She blinked and continued to breathe, gradually coming back to herself. It was then she realized that both men were still hard and full. Neither of them had come. Her breasts started to tingle and she was shocked to discover that she was becoming aroused again.

A buzzing sound filled her ears and she shook her head. Rorik frowned and Kirce tightened his hold on her. The sound got louder and she felt herself slipping away. "No," she whispered. She wasn't ready to go. Not yet.

Rorik called her name. Kirce's grip should have squeezed the breath from her, but she could no longer feel his arms around her.

The buzzing surrounded her, pulling at her.

"No," she cried as she sat up in bed. She stared around the room, unable to comprehend where she was at first. Reality slammed into her with a vengeance and she

turned and glared at her clock radio. She hit her alarm, shutting off the offensive noise and then fell back onto her pillows.

Her body was hot and achy. And she was naked.

Augustine shoved back the covers and stared at herself. She'd had on pajamas when she'd fallen asleep. She looked around the room and found her clothing in a heap on the floor. She must have pulled them off in her sleep.

"That was some dream."

She rolled over on her side and the torque slid between her breasts. She couldn't believe she'd fallen asleep with it on. Wrapping her fingers around it, she absorbed the heat coming from the pendant.

Various aches in her body began to make themselves known. The sensitive area between her thighs was damp. Embarrassment flooded her as memories of her dream flitted through her brain. Rorik and Kirce had felt so real – real enough for her to come.

Augustine sat up and took stock. Her breasts were tender, the nipples distended and red. Her sex was wet. The sensitive folds felt swollen. All in all, she felt like a woman who'd spent the night with her lover. Or lovers.

Climbing out of bed, she stumbled to the bathroom. What she needed now was a shower and a hot cup of coffee. It was Saturday and she only had today and tomorrow to make the most important decision of her career. Come Monday she had to know what she was going to do about the job offer and the problem with Robert.

Chapter Three

Augustine stared out at the hot, dry sands of Egypt and smiled. Turning down the offer to be head of the department at the university was the best decision she'd ever made. Not only had it gotten rid of the headache of Robert Bartlett, but it had also given her the impetus to take the leap from academia to the private sector. And that had given her the funding and the time to take the trip here, to the last site on Olivia's list. Here, she hoped to discover even more about the lost civilization she'd privately started calling "The People of the Moon".

Her hand automatically went to the torque hidden beneath her cotton shirt. She wrapped her fingers around the pendant for a brief moment and then dropped her hand back by her side. Ever since that night more than two months ago when she'd first donned the torque, she hadn't been able to make herself take it off. It was foolish, really, but the necklace seemed like a part of her now, like it was hers.

And the dreams—she swiped the back of her hand over her brow—the dreams had continued, getting more and more graphic with each one. Many of her nights were spent with one or both of her lovers. She'd touched every inch of them, and they of her. Still, she always awoke feeling empty, their unions never consummated, never taking that final last step.

But it went far beyond sex. In quiet moments, after their sexual appetites had been appeased, they talked. At least she and Kirce talked. He was very interested in all aspects of her life, which was very strange for a dream when she thought about it. Rorik mostly watched and listened. Kirce and Rorik were a part of her life, even if it was only in her fantasies. A good therapist would have a field day with that one. Was she so out of touch with reality, becoming so reclusive that she preferred the company of men who weren't real?

It hadn't escaped her notice that both men were exotic in looks and the clothing they wore resembled that of ancient Egypt. Some might say she was more comfortable living in the past rather than in the here and now. "And they might be right," she grumbled as she strode across the sandy dunes and headed to her tent. She had notes to write and an article to submit.

"Dr. Mitchell." Augustine turned and waited as one of her grad students struggled to catch up with her. She liked Michael Reyers. He was intelligent and not afraid of hard work. She'd taken several students from the university on this dig, handpicking them herself. So far, she'd been more than pleased with their work.

"Yes, Michael."

His vivid blue eyes narrowed as he stared at her. Augustine had the sudden urge to wrap her hand around the torque to protect it. Which was silly. No one knew she had it. He straightened his shoulders and gave a quick glance behind him, as if to make certain they were alone. "I think I found something."

Excitement raced through her, but she allowed none of it to show. "What?"

He shoved a lock of sandy brown hair from his forehead. "I think it's a secret room, but I didn't want to try to open it until you were there."

Her skin tingled and all her nerve endings jumped to life. This was it. She could feel it in her bones. This was the last known location of artifacts from the unknown culture. At least it was the last one that Olivia had listed on her final letter.

"Let's go." She motioned Michael forward, but he hesitated.

"Maybe we should wait until everyone else is having lunch." He squinted as he stared at his watch. "Should only be another half hour or so."

Everything inside her went still and quiet as she contemplated his request. "You think it's that big?"

He hesitated and then nodded decisively. "Yes. I don't know why I feel that way, but I do."

Augustine nodded. "Okay, half an hour it is. I'll meet you in the main room of the mastaba." Leaving him standing there, she hurried back to her tent, booted up her computer and checked her email. At the last second, she sent off the latest article she'd been working on, as well as the final chapter of her book to her publisher.

It was going to be a beautiful volume, a companion to the first book that had been published two years ago, filled with photos of many of the artifacts and sites she'd uncovered over the past few years. She'd finished all but the final chapter before she'd left to go on this dig. The photos, the work and now the ending were done.

Augustine was already thinking about the next book and had copious pages of notes, as well as a rough outline. Perhaps whatever Michael had found would be a big part of it. If it was, she'd ask him to co-write some articles and maybe the book itself. It would give him much needed writing credits to help his career. She'd worked with hundreds of students over the years, but Michael Reyers was different. She recognized the passion and the drive in him, as it mirrored what was in herself.

A quick glance at her watch told her it was time. Closing down her computer, she gazed around the tent, unable to shake the feeling that there was something she was forgetting, something she should do. Shrugging, she hurried out of the tent. Whatever it was, she could do it later.

The inside of the mastaba was cooler than the outside. The blazing sun couldn't penetrate the thick stone. Augustine paused to give her eyes a chance to adjust to the darkness. Michael waited at the back of the room, flashlight in hand. He handed her a lantern and she motioned him forward. "Lead on."

He turned and disappeared down the corridor. She followed as he led her deeper into the ancient burial tomb. When he stopped it was in front of a solid wall. But Augustine wasn't surprised or deterred. Mastabas often contained secret rooms. She set the lantern down on the ground, stood back and examined the wall, letting her eyes drift over it.

"You see it, don't you?"

She could hear Michael talking to her in the background, but she ignored him. The torque around her neck was getting warmer by the second. She narrowed her gaze, certain it was there. There had to be a pattern, a way in.

Close your eyes and feel your way.

The voice in her head was feminine and quite lovely. Augustine paused and shook her head. Where the heck had that come from? Still, she found her eyes drifting shut as she obeyed the voice.

Darkness enveloped her as she reached out and placed her hands against the cool, rough stone. Energy pulsed from behind the wall. Behind her, she could hear the sound of Michael's breathing getting more rapid with each passing second. She could smell the clean scent of his soap as he shifted closer.

Letting her sense of touch guide her, Augustine slid her fingers over the stone. She hummed beneath her breath as her left hand moved lower and her right hand higher. The key to unlocking the door was there. She could feel it in her bones.

The humming within her got louder and she found herself mimicking the sound. A slight indentation appeared beneath her left hand, then another beneath her right. She pushed inward on both depressions at the same time and felt the whoosh as the stone shifted. Michael grabbed her as she started to pitch forward, his hard muscled arm wrapping around her.

"Careful." Michael released her and grabbed the lantern from the ground. Taking a step forward, he shined it into the room. "This is incredible."

The walls were covered in carvings that Augustine recognized well. This was indeed a room that belonged to the lost civilization. For whatever reason, they didn't have tombs of their own but seemed to share those of the Egyptians.

Some archaeologists had theorized that maybe they were a religious cult of some sort instead of a completely separate culture. Although why they'd have a completely separate language was a mystery. Again, they'd put forth the idea that it was linked to secret religious rites, but there was no way to be sure.

The explanation didn't feel right to her on a gut level. But science wouldn't accept that reasoning so she kept it to herself, putting forth several possible theories while sticking to the facts.

As always, the room was completely empty but for the carvings and a stone chair that sat in the center of the room. It was always the same in each of the sites where she'd uncovered proof that these people had indeed existed. There were no pots, no jewelry and no baskets with grain or perfumed unguents.

Nothing but carvings on the wall and a stone chair.

Disappointment filled her. She'd hoped for something more this time. Anything. A piece of pottery, a wooden box, an ancient tool. Something more than just another empty room. Michael had placed the lantern on the floor and was busy examining the writing on the wall with his flashlight. Of all the students she'd had, he seemed to have the most affinity for comprehending the language.

"This is incredible." His fingertips lightly skated over the carvings. "There seems to be a curse or a legend of sorts."

"Hmm..." Augustine wandered over to the chair. The humming sound was back, a buzzing in her ears that was getting louder with each passing second. Maybe the air was thinner in here. She glanced over at Michael, but he seemed perfectly fine.

"Something about visitors from another place and jewelry. I can't quite make it out." He held the flashlight higher, spreading a wider beam of light across the wall.

Her knees felt weak and Augustine knew she was going to fall down if she didn't sit. Even though it went against everything she'd ever been taught, she eased herself down into the chair. It looked exactly the same as all the other ones she'd discovered. It was stone, completely unadorned in any way.

Her hands clutched the arms as she sucked in a deep breath, trying to clear her head. The torque was hot now, practically burning her skin. Frowning, she lifted it out from beneath the collar of her shirt. The amethysts were practically glowing. Amazed,

Augustine slipped the necklace over her neck and held it out in front of her. The silver seemed to shine in the dark tomb.

It moved, slightly at first, but then faster. The pendant rocked from side to side, as if reaching for something. Totally fascinated, Augustine lowered the necklace closer to the left arm of the chair. With her free hand, she rubbed her fingers over the arm, finding small indentations. The marks were familiar. In the center was a perfectly round indentation, flanked on either side by two half moon-shaped depressions. It was a perfect match for the jewels on the necklace.

It had to be significant. She could think of no other explanation for the markings being there or for the pull of the necklace toward it. Excitement and fear shot through her. Dare she do it? Dare she press the necklace to the indentations and see what happened? Maybe it would unlock another room and lead her to more knowledge of the unknown people.

She had to do it. Plus, she wasn't alone. Michael was here in case something went wrong. Augustine lowered the torque to the arm of the chair. Gripping it with her left hand, she lined up the glowing amethysts with the indentations in the chair and pressed the two together.

"This is impossible," Michael muttered. "I have to be reading this wrong. They're talking about time travel or space travel. A completely different species from human beings."

Augustine barely grasped the meaning of his words before a great arc of energy shot through her, throwing her back against the chair. Her fingers clutched at the arms, pinned there by some great force. Her left hand felt as if it were on fire as the metal of the pendant seared her skin.

"Dr. Mitchell. Augustine!"

She heard her name being called as if at a great distance. She wanted to scream but couldn't. She wanted to tell Michael to take her research and to use it, but couldn't move. A great pressure descended on her, sucking the breath from her body. A loud

crackling sound followed by a bang seemed to shake the foundation of the room. She watched as Michael was thrown back against the wall. A whirring sound filled her ears. She was going to die.

She tried one last time to move, to release her grip on the necklace, but it was impossible. Her vision dimmed and then everything went black.

* * * * *

Rorik paced back and forth in front of the altar in the temple of Layla, the Goddess of the Moon—protector and mother to the people of T'ar Tal. He was currently trying to ignore his grandfather, who was also a priest of the Goddess. But once the older man got going on a subject, there was no stopping him.

"You cannot deny your destiny." Lamat shook his head and continued. "The priestess Olivia has foreseen it." The older man shot him a sly look. "Plus, you have been having dreams."

"I'm going to kill Kirce," Rorik muttered, knowing his cousin had gone to their grandfather, telling him about the dreams with the strange but beautiful woman.

Rorik wasn't an overly religious man, but the temple usually brought him a sense of peace with its heavy stone altar, perfumed flowers and sweet-smelling incense. Pillar candles flickered as he stopped suddenly in front of the altar, staring at the large amethyst that sat atop it. About two feet in diameter, it was as round as the full moon and carved with symbols of devotion to the Moon Goddess, Layla. Flanking either side of the large circle were crescent moons—one to represent the waxing moon, the other the waning. As always, he felt the pull of the powerful stones. As always, he ignored it.

"You cannot kill your cousin." Lamat stood and walked over to stand beside him.

"No?" Rorik would no more hurt Kirce than he would himself, but it didn't hurt for the old man to know he wasn't pleased by the betrayal. And that's how it felt to him. The dreams were special. Private.

"Kirce did the right thing coming to me. He was troubled by the dreams, but you would not talk about them."

Rorik raked his fingers through his hair and sighed. He couldn't deny it. Kirce had been trying for weeks to get him to talk about the woman in the dreams. Augustine. Her name alone had the power to set his blood aflame. And that wasn't good.

"It is naught but a dream."

Lamat frowned. "It is more than a dream and you know it in your heart."

His grandfather turned away and Rorik sensed the older man's disappointment. It weighed heavy on his heart. "Grandfather..." He broke off, not quite sure what he wanted to say.

"Rorik, son of my son, you will have a choice to make. And soon. No one will force you to do that which you do not want to do."

No one would force him, but Lamat would look at him with expectations in his eyes and his parents would expect him to do his duty. And Kirce. Only Kirce knew what being with Augustine felt like. It was so real that he awoke with the taste of her on his tongue, the perfume of her arousal on his skin. It was driving him insane that he couldn't really touch her. Yet, at the same time, he resented the hold she had on him. It wasn't his choice but one the Goddess had obviously made for him.

A slight noise at the back of the room alerted him to another's presence and he knew who it was without even looking. He and Kirce might be cousins by birth, but they were more like brothers in life. "You might as well join us, seeing as how you're a part of this."

Kirce strode forward, no apology on his lips. "You know it is almost time. I can feel her getting closer." He placed his hand over his heart and rubbed it. Rorik almost did the same thing but forced himself not to. He'd been ignoring the growing ache in his heart over the past few days.

"I thought it was impossible. I thought it was only the bracelets that allowed a priest or priestess to travel through time and space." That was the legend of his people.

Lamat rubbed his chin, fingering his trimmed white beard. "That is what we believed. But Olivia has spoken of another piece of jewelry with the same markings, studded with amethysts in the symbol of the Goddess. A torque, which she left behind for her friend."

Rorik's gaze narrowed on his grandfather. "And you only thought to tell us this now?"

The older man shrugged. "Olivia never mentioned it because of what I had told her about the bracelets. But when I mentioned that you and Kirce had been having dreams of a strange woman..."

"You told the priestess about the dreams?" Olivia might be the wife of his friends, Dak and Tor, but she was also the priestess of the Goddess Layla. In spite of her being here for four years now, he still wasn't comfortable with the fact that she came from another world. Yet it was the will of the Goddess that brought her here.

"I could not keep it from her, especially not when she told me of her visions. The woman is coming, whether you believe it or not. What you do when she arrives is up to you." Lamat reached out and patted Rorik on the shoulder. "I have faith in you."

Rorik didn't know what to say, so he said nothing as Lamat said farewell to Kirce and left them alone in the temple.

"I know you're angry with me," Kirce began.

Rorik shook his head. "Not angry. Disappointed."

Striding forward, Kirce pinned him with a glare. "I tried to talk to you about her, but you wouldn't listen."

"I know." Exhaustion pressed down on him. The past two months of restless nights were weighing down on him. The pressure of responsibilities long denied was eating at his soul. He had what he wanted in life. He enjoyed his profession as blacksmith, working at his forge. He had a home of his own that he'd built with the help of Kirce and his father. It had taken him many long, hard years to find even a semblance of

peace in his life. He didn't want or need the Goddess poking into his business, but there was no way to stop her.

Rubbing the back of his neck, he rolled his shoulders and stared out the window beyond the altar. The sun had just sunk below the horizon and the moon was high in the sky, shedding her amethyst glow to all the land. The purple beam hit the amethysts on the altar, illuminating the markings on them.

Rorik slowly repeated them in his mind, feeling them settle deep in his soul. "Sacrifice, duty, love, peace and renewal." More words were carved into the amethysts, but it was always these five that struck him the hardest.

He could feel Kirce behind him, sense his cousin's unhappiness. Sighing, he turned to him. "It's all right. You did what you thought best. I just wish we'd talked before you'd gone to Grandfather."

"I'm sorry for that, but I needed to talk to someone."

It was only then that Rorik really looked at Kirce and noticed his bloodshot eyes and haggard look. Anger filled him as he noticed that Kirce looked thinner. He'd been so preoccupied with his own dark thoughts these past months he hadn't noticed what a toll the dreams were taking on his cousin. "This is wrong." Turning to the altar, he raged at the Goddess. "We didn't ask for this. Our family has always served you, yet now you torture us."

"Rorik," Kirce growled. "Stop. This will not help."

Wind whipped up, seemingly from out of nowhere, and blew through the temple. The candles flickered and the incense wafted around the two men. The wind picked up speed, swirling around them at an alarming rate.

Shame filled Rorik, along with a hint of fear. One did not anger the Goddess. "I'm sorry," he offered, even though in his heart he knew that it wasn't completely true. He was sorry for cursing the Goddess, but he did not want what was coming and the Goddess knew it. "I beg forgiveness."

But his words were lost in the roar of the wind. The flowers toppled from the altar, the candlelight died and ashes from the incense took flight. Kirce grabbed his arm and held on tight, both of them shielding their eyes against the onslaught. Energy crackled on the air. Every hair on Rorik's body rose. His skin tingled.

He tried to take a step away from the altar but was driven to his knees by the tempest surrounding him. Kirce fell to his knees beside him. "We've got to get out of here."

As much as Rorik wanted to do just that, he knew there was no going anywhere until the Goddess released them. All they could do was hang on and wait for this to end. As soon as he'd thought the words, the wind ceased to howl and became a gentle wind that caressed his face before disappearing entirely.

Both of them struggled to their feet. Rorik picked up the heavy candlestick that had toppled over while Kirce scooped up the flowers that were strewn on the floor. He was straightening the candle in the holder when he realized they were no longer alone. Narrowing his gaze, he stared into the darkness behind the altar where the chairs of the priests and priestesses were located.

A dark figure slumped on one of the chairs. His heart began to pound and sweat broke out on his brow. Leaving the candle, he skirted the altar and went toward her. Deep in his soul, he knew it was Augustine.

Kirce was right behind him. "It's her." It wasn't a question. He knew his cousin experienced the pull of the woman as much as he did.

Still, he confirmed what they both knew. "It's Augustine."

Her face was pale, her clothing dusty. A smudge of dirt marred her cheek and her mouth was set in a thin line, as if she were in pain. It was amazing how that thought filled him with a relentless anger. She should never feel hurt or pain.

Unable to stop himself, Rorik scooped her into his arms and lifted her close to his chest. As much as he loved his cousin, he didn't want Kirce to be the first to hold her.

Kirce reached out and touched her short black hair. "She's beautiful." His features changed, growing harder. "And ours. Or mine if you don't want her."

The challenge had been thrown down and Rorik knew he had no choice. "Ours." He wanted to roar that she belonged to him. It was primal and raw and he hated the implications. Shoving her toward his cousin, he watched as Kirce cradled her in his arms.

Already, he wanted her back, but he wasn't certain he wanted the responsibilities that came with that choice. He was used to being decisive and he didn't like the way this situation made him feel.

For the first time in his life he wasn't sure what to do. His instincts told him to grab on tight to Augustine and do everything in his power to get her to stay. But that would mean he'd have to accept everything that came with that. And it wasn't just the woman.

If he allowed himself to be drawn into this triangle and she stayed, then Rorik would finally have to confront what he'd been fighting against his entire life—he was a priest of Layla.

He'd never spoken of it to anyone but had felt the pull since he was barely past boyhood. He knew his grandfather suspected, but the older man had never pushed him to accept the call. It had to be done freely or not at all. Still, Lamat was the last known living priest and their people needed more.

Augustine represented all that he'd tried to deny his entire life. Her being brought here was a stark reminder of the power of the Goddess. *She* wouldn't have brought Augustine here if she didn't have the potential to become a priestess. But there was the matter of free choice. No one could force a man or woman to accept their destiny. It was an honor to be chosen by the Goddess. Only he'd never felt as though it was an honor, more a noose around his neck, slowly tightening as each year passed and he denied his destiny.

He didn't feel worthy of being chosen to be with Augustine or to be a priest of Layla. Blood and fire stained his soul. He was tainted by the past, by decisions he'd

made, things he'd done. But now time had run out. The final choice would have to be made. According to legend, Augustine would have two days to decide if she was staying or leaving. After that time, she'd be trapped here, unable to return to her world.

Rorik followed Kirce out of the building knowing that none of their lives would ever be the same.

Chapter Four

Augustine rolled over in bed, snuggled into her pillow and sighed. She'd been dreaming again. This time the dreams had been violent, filled with darkness and a great wind. She frowned as she tried to remember it. She'd been cold. She shivered at the memory. It was the kind of cold that went straight to the bone.

A heavy arm wrapped around her, pulling her closer to a hard, male body. Augustine froze. Where the heck was she? She desperately tried to clear her fuzzy brain. The last thing she remembered with any clarity was going into the mastaba with Michael. They'd discovered a secret chamber.

The unknown male nuzzled her neck. She knew she should move and should probably object, but she was so warm and cozy. Still, this couldn't continue. She had to know what the heck was going on. Forcing her eyes open, she stared at her surroundings.

She definitely wasn't in the mastaba. This room was large and airy and the walls seemed to be constructed out of some kind of white stucco. Tiles, the color of sand, covered the floor. Augustine twisted her head slowly. An ornate wooden trunk sat against one wall, alongside a solid wood chair. The overall effect was one of austerity. Wouldn't hurt the owner to throw some artwork up on the walls or add a pillow to the chair.

She sighed, knowing she was avoiding the real problem. Whose bed was she in? Taking a deep breath, she started to turn. It was then she realized she was half naked. Her boots, pants and shirt were gone and she was wearing only her bra and panties. Not encouraging.

Not stopping, she turned over on her side. A large, bronzed chest came into view. Augustine swallowed, but it wasn't easy considering her mouth was bone dry. Lifting

her chin, she moved her gaze upward over a strong chin, full lips and a prominent nose before landing on a pair of chocolate brown eyes.

"Kirce?" Relief hit her. This was nothing but a dream. Granted, a very realistic dream, but just a dream. She'd come to know Kirce very well over the past two months as she'd slept.

"Augustine." His voice was thick with sleep, his gaze sleepy. He reached out and brushed a lock of hair off her forehead before letting his fingers trail behind her ear. "How do you feel?"

She frowned at his question. "I'm fine." And she was. At least she thought she was. Maybe a bit sore, but that was to be expected on the first few days of a dig. "Where are we?" She didn't remember this place from any past dreams.

"Tarnoc, a city of T'ar Tal." He let his fingers trace the line of her jaw before slipping down the side of her neck. It was distracting, but she tried to pay attention to what he was saying. "We are in the house of my cousin."

Wow, this was getting more real by the moment. Before the dreams had been hazy, taking place in lush gardens or an oasis. Never had they been in an actual structure before. Curiosity got the better of her and she sat up, propping her back against a heavy wood headboard.

The bed was massive. She could stretch out and her toes wouldn't touch the bottom of the mattress. That was very cool for a woman of her height. Although, to be fair, if the bed belonged to Rorik it would have to be large to accommodate his size. She brushed her hands over the sheets. They were very fine, very soft. The mattress beneath her wasn't hard but seemed to be stuffed with something. Whatever it was, it was incredibly comfortable.

Kirce shifted, propping himself up on one elbow as he watched her. His free hand grazed the inside of her leg before moving upward in a slow caress. Her breathing quickened as he stopped just before he reached the juncture of her legs and swept up over the top of her thigh.

She tried to concentrate on the room. It was important that she know exactly where she was, which didn't make any sense considering she was obviously dreaming. Two windows were situated on one wall. It wasn't night, but it wasn't yet day. Dawn was breaking and a new day was about to begin. She had enough light to enable her to see, but it wasn't overly bright.

Augustine sucked in a breath as Kirce's hand rested on her stomach. Her breasts quivered and the tips grew tighter. Her body had become used to his touch over the past few months of erotic dreams, but this was different. More real, somehow.

A noise from the corner startled her and her gaze flew just beyond Kirce. It was the darkest part of the room, but there was more than enough light for her to make out the figure lounging in a large chair.

Rorik.

He was completely naked, his massive bronzed body on display. Her toes curled as she ran her gaze over his muscular form. Even at rest, he was an impressive sight. Biceps bulged, abs rippled as he shifted his weight in the chair. He had one hand curled around his cock, stroking up and down as he watched her. He was totally at ease with his sexuality and it was an incredible turn-on.

Kirce chose that moment to slide his hand upward and cup one of her cotton-clad breasts. She moaned, her eyes never leaving Rorik's erection. She licked her lips, wanting to taste him, to touch him.

Soft breath caressed her stomach as Kirce kissed his way upward. He thumbed one hard nipple before tracing the edge of her bra. "Let me pleasure you." One finger slipped beneath the fabric, gliding over her skin. "Let me suck your breasts, taste the honey between your thighs."

Heat washed over her. Her eyes fluttered shut as she again licked her dry lips. Her panties were already damp and she was more than ready for Kirce.

A low growl from the corner had her eyes popping open. She looked at Rorik's face, really looked at it, for the first time. He appeared fierce, almost feral. Tenderness and

gentleness were nowhere to be found. His lips were drawn into a thin line, his cheekbones seemed more prominent.

Uncertainty flowed through her. Rorik didn't seem overly happy she was here, even though it was obvious he wanted her. She often sensed conflicting emotions flowing from Rorik but had never understood them. She bit her bottom lip and ignored the stab of pain to her heart. This was her dream. He wasn't supposed to make her unhappy. She told him so. "If you're not glad to see me, then leave. This is my dream."

A thought flashed into her mind that he might be jealous of Kirce, but she dismissed it immediately. They'd been coming to her dreams for months and he'd never once exhibited any signs of jealousy.

Kirce sat up and glanced from her to his cousin, a frown replacing the sleepy, contented look he'd been wearing since she awoke. The sheet fell down to his waist, barely covering the large bulge pushing up from his groin.

"This is not a dream." Rorik stood, crossing his arms over his chest. The scowl on his face would have frightened her if this were the first time she'd ever met him. She was reminded of that night two months ago when he'd first shown up in her dreams.

"It's certainly not reality," she countered. Enough was enough. It was time for her to take charge of the situation.

"Then what is it?"

Rorik shifted closer and Augustine found her gaze pulled toward his erection. Long and thick, his shaft sprang from a thick nest of black hair. Blue veins ran up and down the hard length and the plum-shaped crown was a dark reddish color. As she watched, liquid arousal seeped from the tip. He might be angry at her being here, but he couldn't disguise the fact that he wanted her.

Her body responded immediately, her already slick folds softening further, her breasts swelling. "This is my dream." She said the words slowly, as if to a child. Really, they'd been doing this for two months. She shouldn't have to explain it to him.

"If that is what you chose to believe, who am I to try to dissuade you?" Rorik prowled around to the end of the bed. Augustine didn't take her eyes off him. She was very aware of Kirce beside her, tense and waiting.

Rorik reached down and fisted the blankets in his hands. With one yank, he pulled them away, leaving her no way to cover herself. Even though she was still wearing her underwear, she felt totally naked as his gaze raked her from head to toe.

He put one knee on the mattress and crawled toward her. She felt like a deer being hunted by a lion, no not a lion. With his long black hair and black eyes, he resembled a panther. Hunger burned in his eyes and she was lunch.

She put out one hand to try to stop him. "Let's talk about this."

He wrapped his hand around her wrist, holding her as he leaned down and nipped at the tips of her fingers. When he gently bit the pad of her fingertips, her pussy clenched.

"What's to talk about?" Rorik slid his tongue between her fingers, lapping at the sensitive web of flesh at the bottom. "If this is just a dream, then let us pleasure you."

Augustine couldn't think straight. Not with Rorik continuing his erotic torture on her fingers. She ached, and it went beyond the physical. For the first time, she wished this wasn't a dream, and that they were truly here with her.

Of course, if that were the case, she'd probably run screaming. Dr. Augustine Mitchell, professor of archaeology, would never have the nerve to indulge in a *ménage à trois*. But Augustine, the woman, was braver in her dreams, more daring and adventurous.

Kirce finally shifted beside her, his hand cupping her breast, massaging it in his palm. "Augustine?"

She knew what he was asking. And why shouldn't she? She had no idea why she was even hesitating. It wasn't as if they hadn't done this before. But a voice in the back of her head reminded her it had never felt quite this real before.

But that was a good thing. Wasn't it?

Tired of thinking, Augustine reached up and twisted the front clasp of her bra. The cotton cups pulled back, exposing her breasts. Kirce pushed the straps down her arms and tossed her bra aside.

Rorik moved between her legs, pushing her thighs wide to make room for himself. He reached up and tucked his fingers just inside the waistband of her panties. "The words, Augustine. Say the words. I want no misunderstanding. Tell me what you want."

Edgy desire rolled off him in waves. She could sense the dark lust just waiting to explode. And she wanted it.

"I want you. I want both of you." Surrendering to the erotic pull, she reached up, wrapped her hand around Kirce's neck and pulled him to her. Their lips met and she closed her eyes.

Although she could no longer see Rorik, she could feel him watching her and Kirce. It made her hotter. She could feel slick cream sliding from her core and down the dark crease of her bottom. She hadn't been into sexual exhibitionism until she'd had these dreams, but she couldn't deny its effect. It was incredibly erotic to kiss one man, knowing the other watched.

Kirce deepened the kiss, his tongue tangling with hers. He tasted hot and male, with a touch of spice. It was familiar to her and she loved it. He broke away and kissed a path over her cheek, toward her ear. Capturing the lobe between his teeth, he tugged. Flames ignited deep in her core. She arched her hips as his tongue swirled around the delicate whorls of her ear.

Rorik peeled her panties down her legs in one pull, leaving her totally exposed to him. It was getting harder for her to breathe with each passing second. Something about these men made her abandon all sense of self. With them, she was simply a woman, receiving and giving pleasure.

Calloused hands shoved her thighs wider. Warm breath brushed the slick folds of her pussy. She knew what was coming next, yet it was even more than she anticipated. Two thick fingers forged past the tight opening of her sex. Rorik's tongue rasped over her sensitive flesh, leaving a trail of fire in its wake. The stubble on his jaw was a rough caress against her inner thighs. She bowed off the bed, shoving her hips toward him, wanting him closer, deeper.

Moving swiftly, Kirce closed his mouth over one of her breasts and sucked hard. It was too much. Her inner muscles spasmed and she came in a rush. It was almost embarrassing how quickly she'd come, but she didn't care. It felt too incredibly good for her to care.

She fell into her orgasm, experiencing every perfect second of it as it spun out of control. Her heart pounded, her breathing was quick. Her breasts rose and fell with every mouthful of air she sucked in. She had an acute sense of her body at that moment, of herself as a woman and as a sexual creature.

She sighed as the feelings started to subside. Awareness rolled in and she opened her eyes. Rorik raised his head and licked his lips. His face was covered in her juices. As she watched, he swiped his hand over his jaw. Kirce raised his head and smiled at her. She smiled back.

Even though she'd just had an incredible orgasm, she could feel the wanting, the need starting to build inside her once again. This time, she wanted to touch them. Scooting up into a seated position, she reached out and wrapped her hand around Kirce's erection. It jumped against her palm, hot and heavy. She allowed her hand to slide to the base before moving upward.

"Harder," Kirce groaned.

Augustine squeezed hard. When she stroked upward for the third time, she rolled her thumb over the head.

"Take him in your mouth." Rorik shifted until he was sitting behind her. He reached around, cupping her breasts in his hands. "Suck him until he comes."

Excitement raced through her as she lowered her head. Kirce's fingers tangled in her short hair, tugging her closer as she blew on the tip of his cock. She resisted the pull, instead licking her way around the bulbous head, leaving no place untouched. Kirce growled low in his chest as he arched his hips, pushing his cock against her lips. She opened her mouth and took him in.

Salty and spicy, his essence touched her tongue, filled her mouth. His excitement became hers. Cream dribbled down the inside of her thighs as she stroked Kirce with her hand and sucked him with her mouth.

Rorik continued to pluck at her nipples, tugging on the tight buds with his thumbs and forefingers. She tried to close her legs, needing to ease the pressure building in her pussy, but Rorik shoved his knee between them, keeping them apart.

"We will pleasure you when the time comes." Rorik pinched her nipples. The sensation bordered on pain but still managed to be pleasurable. She moaned around Kirce's cock.

She squirmed and rocked her hips, unable to ease the ache inside her. Kirce held her head in his hands as he rocked forward, driving his shaft deeper into her mouth. She relaxed, taking as much of him as she could, wanting to please him in this way. She didn't have much experience with oral sex, not in her real life. But in her dreams, she'd done this for him before and knew what he liked.

With her free hand, she cupped his scrotum and fingered his balls. His fingers gripped her tighter, his pace quickening. She felt the first ripple low in his shaft. Kirce cried out as he came, pumping his cock into her mouth. Augustine kept her grip around his shaft so he couldn't go too far. She swallowed as he orgasmed, sucking on the tip until he was spent.

He fell back and his cock came out of her mouth with a loud, wet pop. Augustine licked her lips and then moaned as Rorik pinched her nipples. Once again, the sensation bordered on pain but didn't cross the line. Her pussy ached to be filled.

They'd never gone that far in their dreams before, but she wanted to this time. "Fuck me," she whispered. In real life she'd never be able to say those two words. They were too raw, too real. But this was just a dream.

Rorik froze behind her. "What did you say?"

She swallowed hard, still tasting Kirce. She licked her lips and said the words louder this time. "Fuck me."

Before she had time to take another breath, she was flat on her back with Rorik looming over her. His lips were peeled back, his teeth bared like some fierce beast. "Not yet." The voice sounded pained, like those two words were the hardest ones he'd ever said.

Reaching out, he grabbed two pillows and shoved them behind her head. The new position pushed her chin close to her chest. Rorik straddled her, cupping her breasts. He thumbed her nipples as he pressed her breasts together, creating a tight channel. He eased forward, shoving his cock between her breasts. The tip of his cock brushed her mouth and she parted her lips.

"That's it," he crooned. "Let me fuck your sweet mouth."

Her hips undulated and she pressed her thighs together. It eased the ache somewhat but wasn't what she needed.

"Kirce." Rorik gritted out his cousin's name. As if Kirce understood what was expected, he sat up and moved between her thighs.

"I need to come," she pleaded. She'd never ached like this before. Her need was like a living thing, clawing at her.

"Soon," Rorik promised as he pushed his cock toward her mouth once again.

Augustine reached out to touch him, but he captured her hands in his and raised them over her head. Holding her captive with one hand, he snagged something from the bed. Cotton and elastic wrapped around her wrists before they were anchored to the headboard. He'd tied her hands with her bra.

Unbelievably, instead of being afraid, Augustine grew even more excited. She was now captive to the sexual whims of two men. It wasn't politically correct or modern, but her pussy clutched at the thought. Besides, this was just a dream. She could indulge her every want, her every fantasy here.

Satisfied, Rorik cupped her breasts again, pinching the tips until they were red and tight. Each time he applied pressure, she felt it between her thighs, like an echo of pleasure.

He forged his way between her breasts once again, pushing the head of his shaft toward her mouth. "Take me." It was a command, yet she heard the need beneath Rorik's plea. She opened her mouth and let him fill it. Unlike with Kirce, she was unable to control the depth of his thrusts. Yet for all his fierceness, Rorik was careful and gentle as he surged forward.

Between her thighs, she felt a light touch. Kirce stroked over her slick folds, his tongue finding every crevice of her sex. Moaning, she lifted her hips in encouragement. He rewarded her by taking her clit between his lips and sucking.

Augustine almost shot off the bed. She wanted to cry out, but it was more of a whimper as Rorik's cock continued to fill her mouth. In and out he slid, getting quicker with each thrust. Still, he never went so far that she worried about choking. Augustine used her tongue to rub the sides of his shaft, to lash the head as he withdrew. He was large and her jaw began to ache.

Kirce pressed two thick fingers deep into her core at the same time he sucked her clit. Augustine's eyes squeezed shut as she cried out. The vibrations raced down Rorik's cock. He bucked against her mouth and she swallowed and groaned at the same time as he came.

Rorik fell forward, catching himself against the headboard. He released her hands, lowering her arms back down as he shifted off her. Exhausted and spent, Augustine rolled to her side and curled into a ball. The sun was visible now, but she didn't care. She needed to rest.

But wasn't she already asleep?

Too confused to think, she closed her eyes, sighing as the mattress dipped beside her. Male hands cupped her hips, pulling her back until a large male body surrounded her. She sensed one of them stretching out in front of her and she opened her eyes. Rorik peered back at her, his gaze unreadable. He reached out and cupped her face in her hands. "This is more than a dream, Augustine."

She loved the way her name sounded when he said it, but she ignored his words. This was a dream. Even though it had felt incredibly vivid and real, what else could it be? There was no such place as T'ar Tal and Kirce and Rorik were figments of her imagination. Still, it was a wonderful fantasy. Snuggling back against Kirce, she let her eyes drift shut again. Rorik's hand fell away, but she sensed him there, watching her until she went to sleep.

Chapter Five

A bead of sweat rolled between her breasts, tickling her skin. Augustine groaned and rolled over on her back, throwing one hand above her head. It was going to be another scorcher. A sweet scent tickled her nostrils, making her frown. It was a combination between sweet grass and lavender. But she wasn't wearing any perfume. She didn't wear perfume.

She cracked her eyes opened and blinked. The room wasn't her bedroom at home, yet it seemed familiar. Her dreams from the night before came rushing back. "Ohmygod." She sat up and the sheet fell to her waist. Grabbing it, she held it to her chest. She was totally naked.

"It was just a dream." It felt more vibrant and had more detail than any fantasy she'd ever had while she'd slept, but it had to be a dream. Because if it was real, she was in big trouble. Augustine pinched the skin on her forearm and twisted. "Ouch." She stared down at the red splotch on her skin.

"Okay." She glanced around the room to get her bearings. "Don't panic. There has to be a logical explanation for this."

"Why do you insist on denying what is right in front of you?"

Augustine closed her eyes briefly. Now that was a voice she remembered. Deep and authoritative, it reached deep inside and made her entire body tingle. *Rorik*. Unable to believe her ears, she slowly turned until she was facing the doorway. He filled the entire space, his shoulders almost touching the frame.

Dressed in a pair of loose pants, he looked cool and comfortable. His chest was bare, although he was wearing a vest, which was open, displaying his abs to perfection. Both garments were a creamy beige and fairly plain. Utilitarian even. But the way Rorik

wore them was anything but ordinary. His hair fell free to his shoulders. His black eyes raked over her, not missing a single detail.

Her body immediately responded to that look. Her nipples tightened and her sex clenched. Real or not, he was still incredibly handsome. With his golden-brown skin, he looked exotic and good enough to eat.

She swallowed hard and tried to be logical. Rational. Although it was getting harder and harder with each passing second. "I've been dreaming about you for months now." She ignored the liquid arousal currently softening the folds of her sex. She had to focus on the problem at hand. "It's often felt real, but it wasn't. I'd always wake up in bed. Alone."

He inclined his head and sauntered into the room. The room was large and airy but seemed to shrink the farther into it he moved. "As I have dreamed of you."

From the expression on his face he wasn't too thrilled that he'd dreamed of her, which didn't make sense considering he got as much satisfaction out of them as she did. Or at least she'd thought he did. The fact that he was making her doubt herself irritated her. "Look, buddy. You invaded my dreams."

"That is a matter of opinion," he countered as he prowled to the window. No glass or screens separated the room from the outside. The colorful shutters were thrown wide to let in the morning breeze. Standing with his back to her, he stared outside.

Sitting in bed made her feel vulnerable, but she didn't see her clothing anywhere. She wasn't getting out of bed stark naked. A quick tug and the cover came loose. Keeping one eye on Rorik, she slid out of bed, keeping the sheet in front of her. As she moved, the mattress shifted beneath her. The smell of sweet grass tickled her nose and she realized the mattress was stuffed with it. She was normally allergic to perfume, but the natural scent didn't seem to bother her at all.

The tiled floor was cool against the soles of her feet as she struggled to wrap the sheet around her like a toga. The fabric was fine—linen if she wasn't mistaken. Taking one step at a time, she joined Rorik by the window. Now that she was up and around,

her body was making various complaints known. She was hot, sticky and slightly battered.

She swallowed hard. Her body felt as if she'd engaged in vigorous sexual activity last night.

Don't think about it, she told herself as she padded across the floor. Thoughts of sex with Rorik and Kirce made every nerve ending in her body tingle with awareness. *Focus on the moment.*

She swallowed hard, ignoring the dryness in her mouth. She was beginning to believe she was in big trouble. Taking her first look out the window, she gasped at the scene below. It was obviously well into the morning as there were people everywhere.

It looked like a scene from the past. There were no power lines and no cars. The sky was clear and blue, the sun streaming its rays down to the ground. The busy street was lined with houses and businesses. All the buildings were made of brick or adobe. It gave the place a sense of uniformity that was offset by the colorful doors. Each structure had a door made of wood that was painted in a brilliant color. Smells wafted up from the street below, but they weren't unpleasant. There were spices and flowers and a tinge of wood smoke.

The people chattered as they went about their business. The men wore the kilt-like garments she remembered from her dreams or the loose fitting pants that Rorik had on. Some wore colorful shirts, vests or robes. The women were garbed in sleeveless dresses with slits up the sides that exposed their legs from ankle to mid-thigh or long, flowing skirts that fell to their ankles, topped with sleeveless blouses or vests. In all, the women's clothing was colorful and decorated with rich embroidery.

Her knees threatened to buckle and she reached out and placed her hand against the wall for support. It was rough and cool beneath her palm. This was too real. Where the heck was she?

The last thing she remembered was... She frowned as she tried to remember. She was inside a mastaba with a student and they had just uncovered a room that seemed to belong to the unknown people she'd built her academic career on.

Maybe she'd fallen and hit her head. Right now, she could be in a hospital somewhere in Egypt in a coma. That would explain everything. All this might be nothing but a drug-induced fantasy brought on by medication.

But she didn't think so.

She needed facts, and her recollections of last night weren't much help. All she remembered was spending several incredible hours having sex with Rorik and Kirce. "Where am I?"

Rorik turned to face her, stoic and unreadable. "You are in Tarnoc, a major city of T'ar Tal."

She frowned, a vague memory of Kirce telling her the same thing last night flitting though her muddled brain. The heat from the open window caressed her skin, a contrast to the chill that washed over her. She opened her mouth to speak, but nothing came out. Spots formed in front of her eyes and she sucked in a deep breath. She would not faint. She wasn't some weak female. She was Dr. Augustine Mitchell, world-renowned archaeologist. She'd been in worse situations than this. She would figure something out. All she needed was time to think.

Rorik's lips tightened into a frown as he watched her. "Are you ill?"

It was then she realized she was speaking a foreign language. Not only that, but she understood it perfectly. "Impossible." She said the word in English, then in the other language. "I'm going crazy."

"Augustine." Rorik reached for her, but she waved him off, taking a step away from him.

"I'm fine." She wasn't fine, but she would be. At least she hoped she would. "Why shouldn't I be fine? I seem to be able to speak and understand a completely foreign language." She bit her lip to keep herself from rambling. Her voice was getting more

stringent and the concern in Rorik's eyes was growing deeper with each passing moment.

A noise behind them distracted her and she turned to see who or what it was. Kirce strode into the room, a tray in his hands. "You're up. Good. I thought you might be hungry." He placed the tray on the trunk that was closest to the bed. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine," she snapped. She was getting sick of answering the same question without getting any of the answers she so desperately needed.

"She still believes this is all just a dream." Augustine could not mistake the underlying anger in Rorik's voice.

Propping her hands on her waist, she glared at Rorik. The effect was ruined when she had to grab the sheet to keep it from falling to her feet. She rewrapped it, not looking at either man as she tucked in the end of the sheet, making sure it was secure. "I don't know what your problem is, but if anyone has the right to be pissed off, it's me. I started yesterday in one place and now I seem to be in another. That is, if I'm not really in some hospital somewhere." The anger drained out of her and was replaced with fatigue. She rubbed a hand over her face. "Maybe there was a cave-in or something," she muttered to herself. "That would explain this."

Rorik reached out and cupped her chin in his hand. His grip was firm and she knew she couldn't get away from him until he released her. Anger glowed in his dark eyes, a living and breathing entity. "You invaded my life and my dreams. Now you come here, disrupting my peace. I didn't ask for this."

Augustine froze, like a deer in the headlights. Afraid to move, afraid to do anything that might set him off. His voice was calm, his actions controlled but she couldn't help but feel as if he was a volcano just waiting to erupt. She didn't want to get burned when the explosion occurred. Even as she thought it, she knew he'd never physically hurt her.

Still, she decided not to move. Better to be smart about the situation.

"Rorik." Kirce dropped his hand on his cousin's shoulder and squeezed hard. "None of us asked for this. It's not her fault. This is the will of the Goddess. You know it as well as I do."

Rorik slowly released his grip on her chin, his fingers caressing the line of her jaw. Goose bumps rose on her arms and chest at the light caress. "It does not change the fact that she is here." He dropped his hand and stepped back. "And that can only mean trouble."

Irritated, she snapped at him. "Hey, *she* is standing right here. And I'll get out of the way as soon as I figure out how to get home."

A look of distress crossed his face but disappeared so quickly she told herself she must have imagined it. He turned on his heel and left the room, leaving a pall of gloom surrounding her.

"He has much on his mind." Kirce took her arm in his and led her toward the bed. "Come and eat. After that, you can bathe and dress. You'll feel better."

As easygoing and relaxed as he sounded, Augustine could see the signs of stress in Kirce's face and in the tense way he held his body. Deciding she'd be able to think more clearly when she was fed, clean and wearing something more substantial than a sheet, she allowed Kirce to lead her to the bed.

He lifted the tray and placed it on her lap. "I wasn't certain what you'd like, so I kept it simple."

Augustine stared at the tray, laden with fruit and bread and what seemed to be a light yellow cheese. He'd gone to a lot of trouble for her.

She looked at him then. Really looked at him. He was much less volatile than Rorik. Steady. His brown eyes were soulful and very expressive. His sensitivity was evident in the way he touched her, cared for her. He was the one who'd thought of food and a bath and clothing. Kirce was a caretaker by nature. And he was incredibly handsome. Or "hot", as her students would say.

"This is real, isn't it?" Somehow it was easier to admit it in front of Kirce than his cousin. "The dreams, everything I've learned about you over the past two months." She swallowed hard as she gave a quick glance at the bed. "The sex. It all happened. It's all true?"

The reality of the situation was slowly sinking in. She bit her bottom lip to keep from screaming aloud. It took all her effort to sit there and not run screaming from the room. But where would she go? There had to be something she could do. Some way she could get back home. She had a good mind—all she had to do was calm down and use it.

Kirce raked a hand through his hair, dislodging it from the thong that held it at his nape. "Yes." He crouched down beside her and took her hand in his. It was a strong hand, a sensitive hand. "The dreams really happened, but more in a place out of time. I can't really explain it. But I know you, Augustine. I know your hopes and fears. I know that you're proud of your profession and what you've accomplished. I know you're strong and independent." The corners of his mouth turned upward. "Maybe too strong and independent."

Before she could bristle, he continued. "But that is what makes you who you are." He brought her fingers to his lips and kissed the tips of each one. Her stomach clenched when he closed his mouth over her pinky finger, drawing it into his mouth and sucked hard. His teeth teased her skin as he released it. "You're special, Augustine. You have no idea just how much."

She wasn't certain she liked the sound of that, wasn't certain she wanted to know exactly what that meant. But she'd never been a coward. "What do you mean, I'm *special*?"

Kirce stood and removed the tray from her lap and placed it on the bed beside her. "There is someone who can explain it better than I can. Someone who understands what you're going through." He headed for the door. "Try to eat something."

He called out to someone as he left the room. Augustine waited, her body tense, her stomach in knots. If she tried to eat, she'd choke on it. She knew she wouldn't be able to keep anything down until she figured out her situation.

A familiar figure appeared in the doorway. Augustine blinked, unable to believe her eyes. "Now I know I'm in some hospital in a coma." She frowned. "Or maybe I'm dead."

"You're not in a coma and you're certainly not dead." Her visitor smiled as she hurried forward. "Welcome to T'ar Tal, Augustine."

Augustine came to her feet just in time to be enveloped in a huge hug. She looked down at the friend she'd been missing for more than four years. "Olivia?"

* * * * *

It took Augustine quite some time to recover from the shock of seeing her friend for the first time in years. They both laughed and cried and talked at once. Finally, they sat on the bed and Augustine used the corner of the sheet to wipe her eyes, careful not to unwind her makeshift toga.

"I don't understand. How did you get here?"

Olivia sat tailor-style on the bed, her skirt tucked around her legs. "Pretty much the same way you did, except it was the bracelets that brought me. You must have used the necklace."

Augustine's fingers flew to her neck. "Your necklace. I had it in my hand when it happened."

Her friend reached into the pocket of her skirt and held it out to her. "I found it in the temple on the floor. You must have dropped it after the transfer."

Reluctantly, Augustine reached out and took the necklace. It was heavy in her palm. She closed her fingers around it briefly before offering it back to Olivia. "You take it. It's yours."

The other woman shook her head. "That's not how it works. You basically have less than two days from the time you arrive to make your decision. If you decide to return back home you'll need the necklace to get you there."

"What do you mean *decision*? Of course I'm going home." She couldn't stay here. She had a life back on Earth, a book to write. Then something Olivia said struck her hard. "Two days? What happens after two days?"

Her friend gave her a sympathetic smile. "After two days, the moon will no longer be full and at peak power and you may be stuck here forever. I haven't quite figured it all out yet. It's possible you might have the ability to become a priestess of the Goddess. Or maybe the necklace brought you here for some other reason. At the moment, the Goddess is being unusually silent. If you were a priestess, you might eventually learn to control the power of the amethysts in the jewelry and be able to use it to time-travel. I'm still working on that."

"You're still working on it," she sputtered. "You mean you weren't trapped here?" She couldn't figure out any other reason her friend would have stayed. She'd been on the verge of the archaeological discovery of a lifetime. One that would have made her reputation and career.

Olivia smiled softly. "No I wasn't trapped here. I chose to stay."

Augustine's head was spinning. "But why?"

She looked down at her hands and sighed. "It's a long story."

"I'm not going anywhere at the moment. I've got time."

Olivia laughed. "At least get comfortable and try to eat while I explain it all to you."

Knowing she had to eat, Augustine settled back against the heavy wooden headboard, trying not to blush when she remembered how Rorik had tied her hands to it last night. *Don't go there*, she told herself. Still, her breasts tingled.

Grabbing the tray, she set it on her lap and picked at a piece of the cheese. "So tell me," she prompted her friend.

"The people here are very spiritual. Their deity is the Moon Goddess Layla. The amethyst is her stone, imbued with her power. Thousands of years ago, the Goddess went to a jewelry maker in a vision and commanded him to fashion two silver cuffs and carve them with special symbols." Olivia held up her wrists and displayed the bracelets. "When they were done, they were set with twelve amethyst stones. Four of the stones are perfectly round and the other eight were crescent shaped to represent the waxing and waning moon."

Augustine picked up the necklace and slipped it over her neck. "He must have made a necklace at the same time." The pattern on the torque of the round amethyst flanked on either side by the crescent ones was the exact same as the bracelets. It was obvious to her that they were meant to be a set.

"Exactly." Olivia reached out and snagged what appeared to be a large purple grape, popped it in her mouth and chewed. "Although, that seemed to have become lost in the records."

Augustine tried one of the grapes. Sweet juice exploded in her mouth as she bit down. Her stomach growled, reminding her it had been quite some time since she'd eaten. She grabbed another one as Olivia continued.

Every now and then she would find herself staring at her friend, wanting to reach out and touch her skin to be sure she was real and very much alive. It made it hard to concentrate on what Olivia was telling her, but she did her best to concentrate.

"The jewelry was taken to the temple, presented to the priest and priestess. They blessed the bracelets and spent years meditating on them before discovering their true power."

"That they would allow someone to time travel." As a scientist, Augustine considered the idea of being able to travel through space and time fascinating. As a woman who had actually experienced it, she found the concept more than a little disconcerting.

"Exactly!" Olivia shifted position, stretching out her legs and propping herself on one arm. "They became aware that a handful of the priests and priestesses of Layla could focus the power of the Goddess through the crystals, giving them the ability to travel through time and space. It was a dangerous thing to attempt and not done lightly."

"So where did they go?" Even as she asked the question, Augustine knew the answer. "Egypt."

Olivia nodded. "Their cultures were similar in many ways, geographically speaking. In another way they were like two halves of a whole. The Egyptians worshiped the Sun God while the people of T'ar Tal worship the Moon Goddess. A few traveled there and the two cultures shared their knowledge, but they had to be careful not to upset the balance of either world."

"I'm sensing that something went wrong." Augustine put the tray aside but at the last second nabbed another slice of the cheese to munch on.

Olivia nodded. "You got that right. A man named Abnal, a priest of Layla decided he'd like to stay in Egypt permanently. He stole a large amount of jewelry and other items and traveled to Egypt. With his wealth and superior knowledge he lived like a god among them. He also forever altered their culture. With the bracelets gone, no one from T'ar Tal could go after him and bring him to justice."

"This is like something out of a fantasy novel or some blockbuster movie." Although, to be fair, Rorik and Kirce were much better looking than any movie star she'd ever seen. Without realizing it, Augustine had finished just about everything on the tray. She shrugged and reached for the last grape. She had to keep up her strength and the food was delicious. "The history lesson is fascinating but what does it have to do with you or me?"

Olivia pushed herself upright and slid off the bed. "The bracelets brought me here because I had the ability to become a priestess for the Goddess."

Augustine's jaw dropped and she quickly closed her mouth. "You're kidding me."

She shook her head. "Nope. It was a shock to me too, but I'm getting used to it." She laughed. "Even after four years, I'm still trying to figure things out. Like why the necklace brought you here."

"No offense, but I don't care why it brought me. It's great to visit, but I want to go home." She'd never be able to tell anyone about her experiences because no one would ever believe her. "You can come with me, can't you? After all, you're one of the chosen who can time-travel."

Olivia shook her head. "I could probably go with you but I won't."

"But why?" Augustine really wanted to understand what would make a woman give up the only life she knew for a foreign place.

"Because I'm married and I have a baby boy." Olivia rested her hand lightly on her belly. "Plus there's another one on the way."

Chapter Six

Augustine relaxed in a tub of warm water, her head still reeling from her friend's confession. Olivia was married to not one but two men. It wasn't a normal arrangement for this world, but as it was what the Goddess had decreed, it was totally acceptable. And not only that, Olivia was a mother. It was enough to boggle her mind. Olivia had always been as career driven as she was herself, never talking about getting married or having a family.

Grabbing a soft washcloth and a bar of soap, Augustine began to wash. Time travel, magic jewelry, an alternate universe, plus a deity who actually communicated with some of the people—it was truly mind-boggling. Yet, she couldn't deny the fact that she was sitting in a large wooden tub, in a room with adobe walls, in a world that was not her own. If this wasn't real then she'd gone off the deep end and was in a hospital or padded room somewhere.

She preferred to believe it was real. Especially since she'd discovered there was a way for her to return home. After talking with Olivia, it was decided that she would be going home late tonight. A pang of sadness struck her at the thought of never seeing her friend again. Then there were Rorik and Kirce. What if she never dreamed of them again?

"Don't think about it," she cautioned herself as she dragged the washcloth over her breasts. Her nipples were tight and very sensitive. She shivered, ignoring the growing ache between her thighs.

Rinsing off, she stood and grabbed a large, thick towel from the stack that sat on an open shelf and wrapped it around herself as she stepped out of the tub. Like the bedroom, this room was austere. More about function than anything else. The tub had obviously been constructed for someone large.

She tried not to think about Rorik, naked and wet, lounging in it. But obviously, she was imagining it anyway. She shook her head, trying to banish thoughts of a completely nude Rorik from her mind. It wasn't easy.

She briskly rubbed her arms and legs, skimming over the more sensitive spots of her body. "Time to get dressed." She wanted to wear her own clothing, but Olivia told her it was being cleaned and would be returned to her tonight in time for her to change before she made the journey home. In the meantime, she was stuck wearing local clothing. She'd put her foot down at wearing a skirt or a dress. That simply wasn't her style.

Olivia had promised to find something for her. Making certain the towel was secured, she padded back into the bedroom. Sure enough, a pile of clothing sat at the end of the bed. Someone had also made the bed and removed the tray. It was disconcerting to think someone had been in the room while she'd been bathing only a few feet away.

Shrugging, she dropped the towel and reached for the clothing. She was alone now and that was all that mattered. When she shook out the garment, she realized it was a loose pair of pants, much like the pair Rorik had been wearing this morning. She held them up and shook her head. They'd be baggy on her, but that wasn't a bad thing considering she didn't have any underwear.

Slipping the pants on, she tightened the drawstring waist. Even pulling it tight, they still drooped down from her waist to sit on her hips. She gave her hips a little shimmy, satisfied when the pants didn't fall any farther.

Next came a vest. Unlike the plain beige pants, the vest was a deep purple and embroidered with colorful threads in a swirling pattern. It fit perfectly, three silver buttons holding it together over her bust.

Augustine wished she had a mirror so she could see how the outfit looked on her, but there was none in either the bedroom or the attached bathing chamber. Sighing, she finger-combed her hair as she walked to the bedside table and picked up the torque

she'd removed before she'd taken her bath. She stared at it before slipping it over her head. It was incredible to think that such a small object had such awesome power.

She quickly returned the towel to the bathing chamber, hanging it on a wooden rod to dry. The tub was still full of soapy water, so she reached in and found the plug at the bottom and gave it a tug. Satisfied, she dried her hands and headed back to the bedroom.

With nothing left to occupy her, Augustine had no idea what to do with herself. Should she go outside and check out the city? She wanted to but wasn't sure it was safe. She was indeed a stranger in a strange land. Still, the scientist in her wanted to have as much of a full experience as possible.

If she wanted to venture out, she'd need something to put on her feet. She glanced around, wondering if Olivia had sent along footwear. Tucked under one side of the bed was a pair of flat leather sandals. They were more like soles with leather straps that went over her foot and tied around her ankle. She put them on and walked across the room and back again, satisfied that they were secured properly. Not what she would have chosen but when in Rome...or T'ar Tal, as the case may be.

A knock came on the door just as she'd decided to risk taking a short walk. Hoping it was Olivia, she hurried to the door and pulled it open. Kirce stood there looking as tall and handsome as ever. His dark brown hair was pulled back at his nape, emphasizing his handsome good looks.

"You're bathed and dressed."

"Yes." Suddenly she felt tongue-tied around him. Which was ludicrous considering what they'd done together. Her breath caught in her throat as he ran his eye down her body.

A slow smile crossed his face. "I've never seen a pair of pants look that good before."

Augustine shrugged. She was slightly self-conscious about her appearance. Even though she was decently covered, she felt exposed. The vest came to just above her

waist and the pants dipped to her hipbones, leaving a swath of skin exposed to view. It was nothing really. No different than if she was wearing a pair of shorts and a tank top. Actually, she was more covered because she was wearing pants. Still, she felt half naked under Kirce's watchful stare.

As if sensing her unease, Kirce offered his hand. "Would you like to see some of the city?"

"I'd love to." Anything was better than sitting inside and stewing about her situation. His large hand closed around hers, drawing her forward. She noticed two more rooms on the upper level before they started down the stairs. "This is Rorik's house?"

"Yes. My uncle and I helped him build it a few years back."

The walls were smooth adobe, the stairs were constructed of the same material, but tiles had been set in the center of each one, adding a splash of color to the otherwise plain stairwell. Rorik certainly wasn't much for decorating.

When they reached the first floor, Augustine looked around, not even bothering to hide her curiosity. The room was open and airy, containing a sitting area, an eating area and what seemed to be a kitchen.

"You can explore later. If you choose to stay." The note of hope in Kirce's voice made Augustine cringe.

She didn't want to give him any false expectations. "I'm not staying. I've got to go home." Surely he'd understand.

Kirce paused and turned to face her. Reaching out, he ran his finger over the silver chain around her neck. The heat from his hand warmed her skin as he dipped into her cleavage and drew out the torque. Lifting the heavy pendant, he closed his hand around it. "Who knows what the day will bring."

Lowering his head, his lips grazed hers in an undemanding caress. They were firm, yet soft and warm. Tingles started where their mouths were joined and spread

throughout her body as he teased her lips apart and slipped his tongue inside. She felt the solid thud of the necklace as it fell back against her chest.

Kirce's hands cupped her ass, pulling her closer to the cradle of his thighs. His erection was hard and full. She moaned as he circled his hips, pressing the thick bulge against her mound.

The fact that she wasn't wearing any underwear left her feeling slightly wanton and more than half naked. Her nipples scraped against the fabric of the vest. The tips tightened into hard nubs.

And between her thighs... God above, the heat was overwhelming! She knew she shouldn't be doing this. Knew she needed to keep her distance from Kirce and Rorik or it would make it even harder for her to leave. Plus she didn't want to lead them on, make them think she was staying. Because she wasn't.

Her silent protest dwindled to nothing as Kirce's clever hands slid inside the waistband of her pants and cupped the globes of her behind.

He tore his mouth from hers, peppering her face and neck with hot, openmouthed kisses. "Perfect," he muttered as he nipped at the curve of her neck. "You're so perfect."

Augustine cried out as his sharp teeth nibbled on the curve of her neck. His tongue snaked over her flesh, soothing the small ache. She gripped his shoulders for support. Hard, warm muscles flexed and rippled under her palms. Like her, he was wearing a vest. But his was open wide to reveal the hard planes of his chest.

"I didn't mean to do this, but I want you, Augustine." His voice was thick with need and his hands shook as he slowly removed them from her pants and cupped her face. "Let me have you." He licked at her lips. "Just this once."

Just this once. The words struck her with the swiftness of a knife. If she didn't take advantage of the situation she'd never know what it was like to truly make love with Kirce. Even if he did come to her in her dreams again—which she didn't think would happen—it wouldn't be the same.

Augustine had never been an impulsive woman or one given to flights of fancy but she wanted this man in front of her. Right now. "Yes." Sliding her fingers through his hair, she tugged the leather tie away. Gripping his head tight, she went up on her toes and kissed him.

A low groan came from deep inside him, echoing the one that came from within her. His hands cupped her ass and then she was being lifted. Totally unconcerned, she continued to kiss him. Kirce wouldn't let her fall.

The fact that she trusted him implicitly struck her in that moment but then the thought was lost when a cool wall hit her back. Clever fingers quickly undid the buttons to her vest and pushed aside the material, baring her breasts.

"You were made for me, Augustine." Kirce's eyes glowed with emotion as he lowered his head and lapped at one rigid peak with his tongue. "You were made for us."

The mention of Rorik made her uncomfortable. What kind of a woman was she that she could be making love with one man and thinking about another?

Before she could think of stopping, Kirce took one of her nipples into his mouth and suckled as his tongue played over it. Augustine leaned back against the wall for support as her knees went weak. Pulling back, he blew on her nipple before moving to her other breast and giving it the same attention.

His fingers were busy again, this time at the drawstring of her pants. A cool rush of air washed over her skin as the fabric fell to her ankles. She stepped out of them and kicked them aside. Kirce cupped her breasts in his hands, thumbing her nipples, as he kissed a path down her torso.

Augustine was panting hard now, her chest rising rapidly. She felt totally alive, aware of every sensation bombarding her. The air wafted against her warm flesh, cooling it even as Kirce's gentle touch had it heating again. His hands were calloused, yet firm and gentle on her breasts. Teasing. Tempting. His lips were warm against her belly.

Her core was empty, needy. Liquid flowed from within to coat her outer lips as his mouth moved closer to her sex. She wanted his touch, his mouth on the hottest part of her.

“Open your legs for me.” His voice, warm and smooth, like honey, made her part her thighs. He gave a hum of approval as he nipped at her hipbone. Moving lower, he kissed her belly before sitting back on his heels.

She stared down at him, his hair was tousled, his gaze intent on her sex. He skimmed one finger up the inside of her leg, teasing the crease where her leg met her torso.

“You’re so hot and ready for me.” Augustine could hear the wonder in his voice as he spread her sex wide with his fingers.

She could not deny she wanted him. “Yes.”

Kirce leaned forward and stroked his tongue over her pussy lips. Up one side and down the other in one long, firm glide. She could feel more cream slip from her core at his caress. He lifted one of her legs and draped it over his shoulder, opening her even further to his touch.

Gliding his fingers over her core, he slipped one inside her slit. Augustine cried out and arched her hips closer. “More,” she gasped. She could already feel the quivers deep inside and knew she was close to climaxing.

He pulled his finger out and this time when he pushed inward, he used two fingers, filling her even more. In and out, he slid them, never changing his slow, steady rhythm. It was maddening. She tugged on his hair, bringing his mouth closer once again.

Laughing, he lapped at her clit, sending bolts of pleasure streaking through her. She rocked her hips harder as the first spasm of release took her over. Tilting her head back against the wall, she cried out as her core exploded with heat. Tremors shook her legs, weakening her knees as she came.

Kirce slipped his fingers from her core and rested his head against her belly. Both of them were gasping for air. When she recovered slightly, she realized how rigid Kirce held his body. He hadn't come.

She knew she was crazy, knew she was taking a risk, but she didn't care. Reaching down, she sifted her fingers through his hair. When he looked up at her, his hair tickled her belly making her smile.

"Make love to me."

Kirce was almost afraid to move, to breathe. He was so close to coming it wouldn't take much to send him over the edge. The smell of Augustine's arousal, the taste of her honey on his lips and tongue, and the feel of her soft skin against his cheek were unlike anything he'd ever experienced. Last night had been special but this was even more so. This time she knew it wasn't a dream, but she'd welcomed his touch, opening herself freely to him.

His cock was throbbing relentlessly, his balls pulled tight against his body. He took several deep breaths, trying to calm the rapid pounding of his heart. This was for Augustine, he reminded himself. It wasn't fair for him to take her until she committed to staying. He didn't want to risk leaving her with a child. His child.

When her hands caressed his head it was all he could do not to shove her against the wall and pound into her until he came. He was poised on the edge of a knife here. Yet he didn't want her to stop touching him. He shifted his head, gazing up at her. Her blue eyes glowed with pleasure, making his chest tighten. He'd given her that.

Then she utterly destroyed him with her next words.

"Make love to me."

Her voice echoed in his head. How he'd longed to hear those words, prayed that she'd someday speak them. He shook his head. "I can't do that to you." He wanted to take back the words as soon as he'd said them, but honor demanded them.

"Yes you can." Her soft hands caressed his face as she smiled. "It's all right."

"What about a child?" He had to say the words. Just the thought of her stomach round with child almost made him come.

"It's not the right time. It's safe."

He closed his eyes against the disappointment that flowed through him. Of course she didn't want a child. She wasn't even staying. Maybe he could help change her mind. Determined, he took a deep breath and stood.

Augustine was tall for a woman, but she was still much smaller than he. Kirce pulled at the lacings of his pants and let his cock spring out. "Touch me."

He had to bite the inside of his mouth to keep from yelling when her soft hand wrapped around his hard length and stroked from root to tip. He wanted this to last, but he was too close to the edge.

Grabbing her wrist, he applied pressure until she released him. "I'm too close." Her eyes widened at his confession, but then a satisfied, womanly smile crossed her face.

He cupped her hips, lifting her easily and making a space for himself between her thighs. Bending his knees, he positioned his shaft against her opening. Her honey bathed the tip of his cock as he pressed past the initial resistance of her body. She wrapped her legs around his waist as he pushed inward, one slow inch at a time, allowing her time to get used to him.

"You're so big," she moaned. She buried her face against his neck, nipping and licking his flesh.

Kirce swore under his breath as he hung on to his control, but it was close. Her cunt closed around him, bathing his shaft in wet heat. The small contractions of her sex rippled over his cock. His balls pulled up tighter.

He ground his hips against her pelvis and was rewarded when she sucked in a breath and circled her hips in return. Bracing her against the wall, he thrust. Slowly at first, but he couldn't maintain the pace for more than three strokes. He began to pump his hips faster and harder.

Augustine cried out, clutching at his head and shoulders. He felt branded everywhere her hands touched him. Kirce knew he'd never be the same again. There would never be another woman for him.

"Kirce," she called his name, burying her face in the curve of his shoulder.

He shuddered with pleasure as he continued to pound into her. Her inner muscles quivered with each stroke. Using one arm to keep her steady, he used his free hand to stroke her swollen clit. The tiny bud of nerves was hard, and wet from her juices.

She cried his name again and he roared hers in return as he came. His orgasm started in the base of his cock and shot straight to the tip. Hot cum filled her. Kirce thrust again and again, as Augustine came again. Her hot cunt tightened around him, making him gasp at the power of it.

Finally, her legs loosened, falling back to the floor. He steadied her as he carefully pulled out. They both groaned when their bodies separated.

She wouldn't look at him at first and he sensed her shyness, her unease with the situation. She was such a contradiction, so wild one moment, yet reserved the next. He cupped her jaw and tilted her face upward. "Thank you." The words were inadequate for what she'd given him.

"You're welcome." She smiled then and it was both womanly and mischievous at the same time. "I think I'm going to need another bath or at least a wash."

Kirce chuckled as he fastened his pants before bending down to pick hers up from the floor. "I still want to show you around the city." He handed them to her and she quickly pulled them on, tightening the drawstring.

She pulled her vest closed over her chest and fastened the buttons. "Give me five minutes." Turning, she hurried back up the stairs.

Kirce watched her go, admiring her long legs even though they were all but invisible in the voluminous pants. Then he headed to the kitchen. He needed to dump a cool bucket of water over his head. Maybe that would calm him enough so he wouldn't feel like taking her again.

He doubted it, but he could always hope.

Chapter Seven

Augustine felt as though her head was on a swivel. She kept craning her neck from one side to the other, trying to see everything at once. The city was a wonder. None of the buildings was more than three stories high and all of them were constructed out of adobe or wood or a combination of both. It gave a sense of continuity, of sameness, to the streets. Yet each home or business was different. The front doors were painted in a variety of colors while window boxes with exotic foliage and plants were in abundance.

The market was a feast of sights and sounds. Vendors sold everything from cloth to jewelry to food. You could buy farm animals or new clothing. Everything was right there in the open-air bazaar. Although on this morning, she seemed to be the biggest attraction. Wherever they went, people stared at her.

She felt self-conscious but safe with Kirce walking beside her. As a female archaeologist, she'd been in many countries of the world where a white woman who dressed in pants and kept her head bare was an oddity. Add her height to the mix and she was used to being the center of attention. Still, it wasn't exactly a comfortable sensation. She might be wearing the native garb, but it was obvious she wasn't from here. Her skin was much paler than everyone else's.

Many people seemed to know Kirce and called out greetings as they passed. Several women stared at the pants she was wearing before shaking their heads sadly at her. Augustine's back stiffened. She didn't fit in back home because many people thought she was too manly and it seemed to be no different here.

Kirce gave her shoulder a squeeze and led her toward a fruit vendor. He chose a piece and paid the owner. "Try this." The fruit was fuzzy on the outside, but when he cut it open it was juicy. When he placed the slice of fruit to her lips, she bit down.

Flavor exploded in her mouth. "It's so sweet." She chewed and swallowed. It reminded her of an orange, but it was a much darker color and not quite as tangy. "What is it?"

"An agmar." He cut off another slice and gave it to her before helping himself.

"It's very good." Juice coated her fingers and lips as she eagerly ate.

When the treat was gone, she stared at her hand in dismay. Kirce smiled and lifted her hand to his lips and licked off the sticky juice. Augustine almost groaned as his warm mouth closed over her fingers one at a time.

"Kirce." She tried to tug her hand away but he held tight to her wrist until he was done. She could feel the heat climbing up her cheeks as she realized they were the center of attention. She pulled again and this time succeeded in freeing herself.

He looked at her, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. "Anything wrong?"

She wanted to tease him back, to throw caution to the wind and maybe kiss and suck his fingers in return, but she couldn't. There were too many eyes watching them, judging them and she hated it. She tucked her hands under her arms and hunched her shoulders. "Can we just go?"

His smile faded, replaced by a frown. "I did not mean to upset you."

Great, now she felt ungrateful as well as self-conscious. "It's nothing." She glanced around, hoping people had gone back to whatever it was they were doing. But no. Most of them were still watching her and Kirce.

He followed her gaze and understanding filled his face. "Come." He took her arm and tucked it into the crook of his as he led her through the streets. "I will take you to see the camors before we head to the smithy."

"Camors?" That was a word she didn't understand.

"You shall see. I think you'll like them." Kirce continued to give her the history of the city as they strolled toward the outskirts. It was a small city by modern standards. Would probably be thought of as more of a town. But a vibrancy, a sense of purpose

existed that was as intoxicating as strolling the streets of New York City. The only difference was there was no traffic, pollution or mechanical noise. The smells in the air were spices, incense and perfumed oils. The noise was the mixture of voices and instruments as street musicians entertained the crowds, accepting whatever money was tossed in the basket in front of them.

Augustine wished she had more time to explore, to examine the social conventions of the society and observe it at work. She wanted to know about the arts, the roles of men and women in their world. How did they differ from Earth? How were they similar? So many questions that would go unanswered. There just wasn't enough time.

Then there was Kirce and Rorik. She tried not to think of the fact that Rorik was obviously avoiding her. It hurt. More than it should, considering they were little more than strangers who'd had sex together.

Except he didn't feel like a stranger. Neither man did. A connection existed between all of them that was inexplicable, but it was there nonetheless.

"This way." Kirce guided her down a narrow alleyway. She could hear the muffled grunts and knew they were approaching some sort of animal. Curious now, she lengthened her stride.

When they came to the end of the alley, she stopped. The creatures were a combination of a horse and a camel. She could think of no other way to describe them. Larger than a horse, it had the long neck of a camel. Kirce walked to the edge of the corral where the animals were lounging and whistled. Several raised their heads and started toward him.

"Come meet them." Kirce held out his hand and she went to his side. One animal poked his large head over the side of the fence and bumped the side of Kirce's face. He laughed and scratched the creature's neck. "This is Exor."

Augustine tentatively placed her hand on the animal's side. The fur was short but slightly stiff. "Hello, Exor." The animal snorted and turned to face her. Liquid brown

eyes, filled with intelligence, studied her. "Aren't you handsome." The animal nodded his head and snorted as if he understood.

Kirce chuckled. "Exor is vain but rightfully so. He knows he's magnificent."

"He's yours?"

"Yes." Kirce walked over to a small building and ducked inside. When he returned, he had a blanket and what looked to be a saddle of sorts. "I raise camors and train them. There's not a better animal alive when it comes to travel, especially long distances." He opened the gate and went inside the corral. One word from Kirce and Exor knelt. She watched as Kirce quickly placed the blanket, saddle and a bridle on the camor.

He gave a short clicking sound and the animal stood once again. Kirce took the ends of the bridle in his hands and led it out of the corral. The animal seemed even larger as it walked toward her. She took a step back.

"Would you like to go for a short ride?"

Her heart was pounding, partly in fear of the large beast and partly because riding together would bring her and Kirce into intimate contact. She swallowed. "Yes."

Once again the command was given and the animal knelt in front of her. Kirce showed her how to mount and then swung up easily behind her. He gave the short clicking sound again and Exor rose to his feet.

Augustine grabbed the animal's thick mane as it plodded forward. There was no horn, as there was on a horse's saddle, for her to hold on to. This saddle molded to the animal's body and had a piece in the back for the rider to lean against.

Kirce held the reins in his left hand and placed his right one over her belly, pulling her back against him. "Relax," he spoke softly in her ear. "I won't let you fall."

His words had a double meaning but she chose to ignore it. Right now all she wanted to do was enjoy the moment. Maybe it was cowardly of her, wanting to spend as much time as possible with him while wanting to protect her heart at the same time.

But she was a realist. She was going home and letting her emotions get away from her would only result in a great hurt in the end.

She relaxed against his chest. His arm banded around her, holding her tight. She could feel the heavy beat of his heart against her back, the hard bulge of his arousal. Her breasts swelled, pressing against the fabric of her vest. She bit her lip to keep from moaning aloud. Each motion of the camor had her sex rubbing against the saddle. It was maddening and incredibly arousing.

This was crazy. She'd barely thought about sex until she'd started having erotic dreams two months ago. And she'd certainly never indulged in sex as much as she had since arriving here. She paused, shocked to realize it was only yesterday. It seemed as if she'd been here much longer. But much of that was due to the dreams. Both men were familiar, as though they'd already spent so much time together.

Her thoughts, as well as her body, were in turmoil. She knew she had to return to her world, but a part of her wanted to stay. That, however, was a fairy tale, not reality. The reality was that she was sexually attracted to both men, but none of them really knew the other. It took months, years for that to happen.

Didn't it?

"Hold on." Kirce interrupted her meanderings. He gave her no more notice than that before giving the animal some unspoken signal. The camor broke like a shot from a gun, going from sedate trot to full out run within seconds.

Augustine gave a short scream as the animal raced away from the town and toward the desert. The wind whipped at her short hair and the breeze raced over her bare arms. Kirce rode easily, totally comfortable and in control. He held her tight and gradually she began to relax.

"See the desert. The beauty of this world. There is more than sand here. There is life. Plants and animals that make their homes in this arid land. Beyond the desert lie the mountains and vast forests of trees. And on the other side of the mountains they say is a lush world where all manner of vegetation grows."

"You've never been there?"

Kirce rested his chin on top of her head. "No. It is more than five full moons' journey to reach it. Traders come twice a year bringing goods and buying ours to take back to their homes."

Augustine could barely imagine a world where travel was limited to walking or using creatures like the one she was currently riding. It was primitive in many ways yet beautiful. She'd already noticed there was no electricity. Lantern and candles were used to light homes. The bazaar had sold lamps and oil as well as scented candles that had made her nose itch.

It was a simpler life in many ways. Yet it appeared to be rich in culture as well.

A million thoughts went through her head as they rode. She hadn't realized they'd been circling around until the city came back into view. It was breathtaking, a gleaming jewel in the middle of nowhere. The sun blazed down on it, but the amethyst moon was just beyond it, still visible in the midday sky.

Augustine was hot and thirsty, and slightly out of sorts by the time they trotted into the corral. Her body was still humming with arousal as she dismounted from the camor. She waited patiently while Kirce tended the animal, removing the saddle and turning it back out to feed.

"Thank you." The ride had been an incredible experience. Something she'd never forget. And that was the problem. She was never going to forget Kirce or her time here.

"You're welcome." He took her hand in his and they headed back down the alley they'd taken to get here. He frowned when he noticed the sweat on her brow. "You are too warm. You should have said something."

She shrugged. "I'm used to warm weather for the most part. It didn't bother me too much."

He took her to a communal well on the corner of one street and dipped a ceramic pot into it, drawing fresh water. "Drink."

She took the rounded cup eagerly and sipped. The water was fresh and cool and eased her parched throat. "That was wonderful."

Kirce took the cup from her, filled it and drank. The long column of his throat rippled as he swallowed. He returned the cup to its place on the edge of the well and took her hand again. She was already getting used to their fingers being entwined as they walked. Kirce was a toucher. It was no wonder he was so good with the camors.

They walked down several alleyways to a quieter section of town. There were fewer people, and the houses and businesses were farther apart. A heavy clang of metal on metal reached her ears. The steady pounding was almost like a song as it rang out.

Kirce paused at the opening to a building. The noise was coming from somewhere inside. He turned to her and took her by the shoulders. "Rorik fights his destiny as you do. That does not mean he cares any less than I do. Go to him. Talk to him."

Leaning down, he kissed her forehead and then her lips. It was a soft kiss. A kiss of goodbye. "I will see you at the temple later. Rorik will take you to Olivia's."

Before she could protest, he turned and walked away, his shoulders square, his head high and proud. He didn't look back.

Augustine watched him disappear, feeling as if her lifeline had been cut off. Kirce was easy to be with. Comfortable. The man inside this building was anything but. Her feelings for Rorik were much more complicated.

She almost ran after Kirce, demanding he take her to Olivia. But she held herself back. If she didn't see Rorik alone one final time she'd always regret it. Steeling herself for what was to come, she straightened her shoulders and strode into the cool, dim room and followed the sounds to the back.

Rorik was absorbed in his work and didn't notice her arrival, so she stood in the shadows and watched him. Stripped to the waist, his torso gleamed with sweat as he raised a heavy metal hammer in his right hand and brought it down hard. The piece of metal he was working on was so hot it glowed. He held it steady using a set of metal tongs as he landed blow after blow, working tirelessly as he shaped the metal piece.

His long black hair was tied back at his nape, and his face was hard with concentration. She realized that he used his strength easily, controlling it so as to not damage the metal. Finally, he held up the piece and studied it. Seemingly satisfied, he dipped it in a barrel of water. The metal sizzled and hissed as it cooled.

He set the piece down on his workbench and tossed his hammer down beside it before turning to face her. He'd known she was there all along.

"What are you doing here?"

Not exactly the friendliest of greetings. "Kirce brought me."

His lips tightened and his fingers flexed. So he didn't like that idea. Well too bad for him. She strolled forward, glancing around his workspace with interest.

"What do you want?" He crossed his arms over his chest. The move emphasized his powerful arms and shoulders.

"To see where you work. What you do." Mostly she just wanted to spend time with him. Even surly he touched something deep inside her. She knew his anger was based in fear. Fear of her being here and what it meant for him.

Augustine had no idea why Kirce was more accepting of her than Rorik was. Not that it really mattered, she supposed. She was leaving in a matter of hours. Her stomach clenched but she ignored it.

Rorik said nothing but continued to watch her, tracking her every move as she made her way around the room.

"What are you working on?"

Sighing, Rorik rubbed one hand over his face. "A metal chest for a merchant."

Augustine examined the chest. It was beautiful. Like a mini treasure chest. "It's incredible." The detail work was very intricate and she knew he had to have spent hours on this project. Rorik was a very talented man.

He shrugged. "It's nothing out of the ordinary."

Maybe not for him, but to her it was an amazing piece. She could easily imagine him standing in front of his forge for hours on end as he worked. She was close to him now. So close she could feel the heat from his skin, the scent of smoke, iron and man.

He had the most incredible eyes. They were black and watchful with long lashes that should have looked feminine but instead only served to emphasize his masculinity. There wasn't a spare ounce of fat on the man anywhere. He was all muscle, bone and sinew, put together in the most remarkable fashion.

"What did you do with Kirce?"

His question made heat roll up her face. No way would she mention what happened in the foyer back at the house. "He took me to see the camors and then he took me for a ride."

Rorik grunted. "I'm sure he did." He tore the tie from his nape and strode to a large bucket of water. Bending low, he splashed water on his face, chest and arms. When he straightened, rivulets of water rolled down his chest. Augustine wanted to lick them off.

It took her a moment to understand what Rorik meant. When she did, she felt her face get even hotter. She had nothing to be ashamed of. She was an unattached adult. She could have sex with anyone she wanted. Besides, Rorik hadn't bothered to stay with her.

He grabbed a towel and rubbed it over his face and neck before tossing it aside. "What do you really want, Augustine?"

The sound of her name on his lips made her heart ache. She'd made a mistake coming here. She wasn't even sure why she'd wanted to see him. He was difficult and surly and... She sighed. He was also warm and gentle and loving when he wanted to be. She'd seen examples of it time and time again in her dreams.

But obviously dreams were much different from reality. "I don't want anything. I shouldn't have come here." She didn't mean just his workspace but T'ar Tal as well. If she could roll back the clock several months, she would never have worn Olivia's necklace. Turning, she headed to the door.

Her heart cried for her to go back, to touch him one final time. She kept her face forward, her shoulders straight. "I'm sorry to have bothered you."

He swore, long and low, his words so crude she flinched. But she kept walking.

A heavy hand clamped down on her shoulder, spinning her around. Rorik's chest was heaving with anger as he held her, his hands wrapped around her upper arms. "You have no idea what your presence has done to me." Anger vibrated in every word he spoke.

She was tired of games and riddles. "What have I done to you?" Irritation dripped from her voice. He wasn't the only one who was pissed off. "I didn't ask for this. I didn't ask to be ripped from my home and deposited in a strange world. I didn't ask for months of erotic dreams that changed my life. How the hell can I ever have a normal relationship after knowing you and Kirce?" She shrugged out of his hold. "Your life?" she yelled. "What about my life?"

Rorik cupped her chin, his fingers holding her tight enough so she couldn't move, but not so tight as to hurt her. As always, he was very aware of this strength. "You can go back to your solitary life, back to digging in the dirt, writing your books and hiding from life."

His words hurt her more than he ever could physically. Is that what he thought of her? That she hid from life? A heavy lump sat in the pit of her belly as a small voice in the back of her head told her he might have a point. She shoved that voice aside.

"I've worked hard to get the life I have. It's not easy for a woman to make it in a male-dominated field, being in foreign lands where the culture doesn't always favor women. Working for years to get some sort of respect." She was panting hard now, her heart pounding. "You accuse me of hiding, but it seems to me that you're the one who is hiding. What are you hiding from?"

His fingers tightened briefly. He swore and released her, his hands fisted at his sides. "Do you want to know what I am hiding from?" He laughed, but it wasn't a pleasant sound. It was bitter and dangerous.

Augustine experienced a moment's fear but trusted Rorik not to hurt her. She'd come this far. There was no going back. "I want to know. What do you hide in here?" She placed her palm over his heart, reassured by the heavy thud.

He closed his eyes briefly. When he opened them again, they were blank. No shred of emotion showed. Not anger or pain or sorrow. Just a never-ending emptiness.

Whatever was coming, Augustine knew it wasn't going to be pretty.

"Do you know how Kirce came to be raised as my brother?"

She shook her head. "No. I know he's your cousin. I assumed his parents died."

Rorik's head fell forward as if it were too heavy for his neck to hold upright. He rubbed his nape and sucked in a deep breath before facing her. "I killed them."

Augustine flushed hot and cold as his words penetrated her consciousness. Impossible. Rorik loved his cousin. Of that she had no doubt. There was no way he killed his aunt and uncle.

"I don't believe you." She meant to say it loud and clear, but it came out as a whisper instead.

He continued to speak as if he hadn't heard her. "It was so long ago." His gaze turned inward, viewing a scene only he could see. "I had gone to visit them in the Marroc. It's a three-day ride from here and I was very excited."

"How old were you?"

His eyes flicked to her. "I was ten."

So young. Her heart ached for the child he'd been and the man he was.

"Kirce and I stayed up late, whispering and playing. My father had given me a knife, my very own for the trip. For protection. I was showing it off. We were supposed to be asleep, but we'd lit a candle so we could see the knife better."

Augustine couldn't take her eyes off him. Her arms ached to hold Rorik, but she knew he'd reject any sort of sympathy from her. "What happened?" She pitched her voice low. Soothing.

"Kirce wanted to see the blade, but I wouldn't let him. He reached for it and I pulled my arm away and struck the candle. It rolled across the floor and landed beneath the drapes, catching them afire. I jumped out of bed and beat at the flames, but they just seemed to keep growing higher."

She placed a hand over her mouth to keep from crying out as the horror of the situation filled her.

"Marroc is different from Tarnoc. Their homes are constructed mostly of wood. We both beat at the flames with our blankets and Kirce yelled for his father. Uncle Farak was slow to respond. There had been a celebration to mark my arrival. Many guests had come to eat and drink and laugh.

When Uncle Farak saw the fire he ordered us out of the house. We wanted to stay. To fight. He practically had to drag us away. I ran back to the bed long enough to grab my knife. I didn't want to lose it." Bitterness tinged every word Rorik spoke.

"By the time my uncle got us out of the house, the fire had spread. Men had gathered to fight the flames as my uncle went back for my aunt. They never came out." The look he gave her was filled with self-loathing. "A knife. I traded my aunt and uncle's life for a knife."

"No, Rorik." She placed her hand on his arm. It was as hard and stiff as the metal he worked at the forge. "It was an accident. A horrible accident. It wasn't your fault."

"Then whose fault was it?"

Augustine shook her head. "It was no one's fault, Rorik. Sometimes bad things happen for no good reason. No one can explain why. It just is." She was glad he'd opened up to her, that he'd told her about his past. But there was one thing she didn't understand. "What does your aunt and uncle's death have to do with my being here?"

He took a step back and her hand fell back to her side. The distance between them was more than physical and it made her ache inside. "Don't you see? I'm not worthy. Not worthy of you. Not worthy of being a priest of the Goddess Layla. Priests and

priestesses are rare, almost extinct in our world today. My grandfather is the last of the line of priests. But deep in my heart, I've always felt the call."

Her thoughts whirled as she digested everything he said. Olivia had explained all this to her. How desperate the people of T'ar Tal were for those special people who could communicate directly with their deity.

"The Goddess brought you here for a reason. Maybe it's because you're one of the special ones, a woman who could be a priestess. But why did *she* choose me to inhabit your dreams? Why not just Kirce alone or some other man?"

She shook her head, not knowing what to say to him.

"I'll tell you why." His tone was hard and bitter as he continued. "The Goddess is trying to push me toward a destiny I do not want, trying to get me to acknowledge what I've known my entire life. But I'm not fit to be a priest. Not fit to be in the presence of the Goddess. I killed my own kin. How can I take up a sacred calling? I cannot. I will not." He glared at her. "And nothing and no one will change my mind."

If there was any doubt in her mind that Rorik wanted her gone, it no longer existed. Obviously her being here had raised a dark specter from his past. While she ached for him, she knew it was something he had to deal with on his own.

But he was wrong. He wasn't to blame for what had happened. The fact that he had agonized over the event all these years later was proof of what a good man he was. Then there was his obvious devotion to his cousin. It was his guilt that was holding him back from accepting something he so obviously wanted. He might not realize it, but the tone of his voice when he spoke of being a priest of the Goddess betrayed him. The yearning brought tears to her eyes.

Augustine came to a decision. Nodding, she faced him. "I don't want to add to your pain, your sorrow. I will leave." She took a step forward, sliding her palms over his thickly muscled chest.

He covered her hands with his. "I don't want your pity," he snapped, but he didn't push her away.

"It's not pity I'm feeling right now," she all but purred as she stepped closer and pressed her pelvis against his. The hard bulge of his cock nestled against her belly. She knew he'd reject any offer of comfort on her part. But this. This he would accept. Sex, the joining of two bodies, was something she hoped he wouldn't turn aside.

For her it would be making love. She knew that now. She loved Rorik as she loved Kirce. It was strange to love two totally different men. But once you peeled back the complex layers of their personalities, they were both men of honor, of character.

She swallowed back the tears that threatened. There would be time for tears later. Augustine was afraid she'd be shedding tears over this man for years to come. However, right now he was in front of her and she could offer him this.

It was as much for her as it was for him. This final joining would give her a memory, something special to pull out on cold nights in years to come.

Slipping her hands over his shoulders, she wrapped them around his neck and tugged him down as she went up on her toes to meet him. Her lips touched his and all thoughts of the past or the future disappeared.

There was only now. This moment.

And it was theirs.

Chapter Eight

Rorik hardly dared to breath as Augustine's lips grazed his. He'd expected her to scorn him, to revile him after his confession. Instead, she'd reached out to him.

Confusion filled him. She reminded him of Kirce, who never once had blamed him for the loss of his parents.

He felt unworthy of them both.

Her lips were soft and warm as they opened over his. She sucked his bottom lip into her mouth, drawing a deep groan of pleasure from him. His body ached and not just from the hard work he'd been doing all morning. He'd pushed himself at the forge, pounding metal for hours, all the while being very aware of the fact that Kirce was with Augustine. He knew his cousin would make love with her. And why wouldn't he? Kirce wanted her to stay.

Rorik wanted her to stay too. But he couldn't, wouldn't ask that of her. He'd already ruined the lives of his cousin, his parents and his entire family with his part in the death of his kinsmen, but how he yearned to keep her with him forever! Something about her made him want to be better, stronger, the man she wanted and needed him to be.

Every muscle in his body tightened as her tongue slid between his lips, drawing his into a duel. His hands moved of their own volition and were quickly filled with the roundness of her behind. He cupped her ass, pulling her up and inward so that her mound was pressed directly against his shaft.

He wanted to let her go but knew he would not. It was selfish, but he wanted these moments with her. Wanted to touch her skin, hear her sighs of pleasure, feel her explode in his arms one final time. He would have to let her go. He knew that. But right now she was in his arms, warm and willing.

Closing his eyes, he briefly thanked the Goddess for her gift. He thought he heard feminine laughter, but that was impossible. The only woman with him was Augustine and she wasn't laughing.

He deepened the kiss, twining his tongue with hers, tasting her passion. It was sweet and bitter at the same time. This was the end. Within hours she would be gone and he would have the rest of his life to regret it.

Rorik shoved the unwelcome thoughts to the back of his mind where the rest of his nightmares dwelt. Time was short and he didn't want to spend it worrying about the bleak future ahead, not when Augustine was in his arms.

Releasing her lips, he trailed kisses down her stubborn jawline. He smiled as she tilted her head to one side, offering herself freely. Taking the delicate lobe of her ear between his teeth he bit down gently. She groaned and shifted, rubbing her breasts against his chest.

Need roared through his body. The pounding of his heartbeat obliterated all sound. The heat from the forge merged with the fire within him, threatening his tenuous control.

He could smell her, a combination of woman and soap and the slightest whiff of the camor she'd been riding. No delicate perfumes for Augustine. He could think of no scent that wouldn't be dimmed by the sheer magnificence of the woman herself.

Her hands tunneled through his hair. The slight sting of his scalp as she tugged him closer made his cock jerk.

He pulled back and drank in her beauty. Her lips were parted and moist from their kisses. Her breathing ragged. Her eyes, usually the color of a summer sky, were darker now, like the sky before an impending storm.

She reached for the buttons of her vest and slipped them free one by one. The torque, which had been tucked into the vest, was revealed. Rorik ignored the necklace as he traced the delicate line of her collarbone and lower, pushing aside the fabric to reveal her perfect breasts. Her nipples were already tight peaks of need and he rubbed

his thumb over one of them. A soft moan escaped her as he did the same to the other one.

Her hands slipped from his hair and moved to his shoulders. Strong fingers kneaded his tense muscles, drawing a groan from deep within him. How he longed to lie on a bed and let her stroke her hands over every inch of him. But there was no time for that. The afternoon was waning and Rorik's balls were ready to explode.

His fingers traced her ribs as he moved down her torso, tightening around her waist when she leaned forward and licked the base of his neck. She shifted her caress lower until she found a nipple. Her lips nibbled at it while her clever fingers toyed with the other.

His body was alive in a way it never had before. The woman in his arms was special. It was as if the Goddess had fashioned her specifically for him, to respond to his every touch, to make his heart and body sing with pleasure.

Sweat trickled down his brow as he reached for the drawstring on her pants. He'd seen pants on a woman only a handful of times in his life. It wasn't common here, but somehow it looked right on Augustine, emphasizing her femininity rather than detracting from it.

He tugged but the string wouldn't give. Grabbing the drawstrings in each hand, he yanked hard, breaking it apart. The loose pants fell, catching on her hips for the briefest of seconds before falling to her ankles. Rorik lifted her out of the garment. He meant to lower her back to her feet, but she wrapped her legs around his hips, pressing her moist heat against his erection.

The feel of her honeyed pussy against his cock was almost enough to push him over the edge. Shifting her higher in his arms, he latched on to one of her breasts, using his tongue and lips to tease and pleasure her.

Soft moans and desperate cries filled his ears as she struggled to get closer to him. Her skin was slick, gliding against his as he suckled one breast and then another, loving the feel of her hard nipple against his tongue.

Holding her with one arm, he slid his free hand down her back, over the curve of her behind and lower. She jerked in his arms when he used his index finger to massage the puckered opening to her ass.

Cream from her slit coated his hand as he fingered her slick folds before returning to her back passage. With his finger coated in her cream, he pushed the tip of his index finger inward.

Her breath hitched and her fingers dug into his shoulders. But she didn't stop him. Encouraged, he pushed deeper, past the thick muscles guarding the opening. "Relax and let me in," he murmured. If she'd been staying, this would have been the first step in preparing her to take both him and Kirce at once.

Rorik had to close his eyes and take a deep breath as images of him driving into her from behind filled his mind. He could picture Kirce below her, filling her cunt, as he filled her ass. She'd be so tight, gripping them both harder and harder until they couldn't stand it any longer.

He pressed his finger deeper, could sense her struggling to accept the foreign invasion. It gave him a feeling of dark satisfaction to know he was the first man to touch her in this manner. She was tight and untried and absolutely perfect.

"Rorik." Her voice quivered as she spoke and her legs tightened around him. "I..." She broke off and moaned as he pushed his finger as deep as it could go. Augustine panted for a few seconds before burying her face in the curve of his neck. "Too much."

It was too much. It wasn't enough. Conflicting emotions surged through him. He wanted to be gentle with her. He wanted to fuck her until she screamed. He wanted her gone. He wanted her to stay.

Sweat stung his eyes as he slowly removed his finger. He couldn't take her ass, not now. It was too soon and he had no salve to help ease his passage. But that didn't mean he couldn't take her from behind, pounding into her hot, wet channel.

He unhooked her ankles from around him, catching her when her knees buckled. The necklace gleamed against her pale skin. The amethysts glowed and the script on the torque mocked him, reminding him of all he was turning his back on.

Augustine blinked up at him, her eyes dreamy and warm. Welcoming. "Turn around and face the table." Confusion filled her face but she turned away from him.

He shifted closer until his chest was touching her back. Cupping her shoulders he pushed the vest off. It fell to the floor between them. He let his hands glide down over her arms until their fingers were touching. He held them briefly before guiding her hands to the top of the worktable and laying them flat.

"Hold on," he murmured in her ear as he released her and stepped back. "Spread your legs." His body tightened almost to the point of pain as she parted her long, lithe legs. He could see the pink of her delicate flesh, the dampness on her inner thighs, a bead of sweat rolling down her spine.

"Beautiful," he murmured. "Now lean forward a bit more." He guided her until she was exactly as he wanted her. Opening his pants, he freed his cock, which was hard and damp and ready.

Standing behind her, he pushed forward, letting his shaft glide over her damp folds, coating himself in her cream. She whimpered when his cock stroked over her swollen clit.

Reaching around her, he cupped her breasts in his palms as he continued to slide his shaft over her. He rolled her nipples with his fingertips, squeezing gently as he stroked his shaft faster. It was heaven and torture at the same time to feel her bathing his cock with her cream, to hear her breathy cries as she climbed higher and higher.

She cried out, her body trembling with her release. Rorik positioned himself at her entrance and, in one quick thrust, slammed home. Augustine cried out again and it mingled with his shout of pleasure as her inner muscles gripped his cock.

Breathing was almost impossible in the thick, hot air surrounding them. Rorik was only a few strokes away from coming, but he wanted Augustine to go with him. Sliding

one hand down her belly, he fingered her clit as he bent his knees and withdrew almost all the way before shoving his cock forward again. Her pussy rippled around him. He squeezed his eyes shut and counted to ten before doing it again.

Augustine was whimpering, muttering incoherent words and phrases. He recognized his name and loved the sound of it on her lips as she moaned it again and again.

"You'll never forget me," he promised as he began to fuck her hard and fast. He drove deep but couldn't get deep enough. He wanted to imprint himself on her body and soul.

"Never," she promised, gasping for air.

Her feet left the ground on the next thrust. She cried out and her inner muscles squeezed so tight he lost control. "Augustine!" he yelled as his cock jerked. Hot spurts of his semen filled her as her pussy milked him dry.

She whimpered, her body quivering as she came again. Her hand slid forward, but he caught her before she fell. He wanted to stay buried in her warmth forever, but knew the time had come to set her free.

Rorik pulled out of her, steadying them both. His legs were shaky. It was only from the heat, he told himself. It had nothing to do with how he felt about the women in front of him. He took a deep breath and pulled his emotions back in, burying them.

Augustine reached out, supporting herself on the table as she struggled to catch her breath. She was totally naked but for the necklace and the flat sandals on her feet. He took a moment to admire the long, delicate line of her spine. He wanted to lick it, to taste her skin, but he forced himself to remain upright.

Hitching his pants back up, he tied the laces before running a hand through his hair. He looked around and found her pants shoved to one side. Grabbing them, he shook them out and went to her side. "Here."

She turned her head, blinking at him several times before her gaze fell to her pants. She frowned but took them.

When she held them in her hand for several seconds, doing nothing, he swore. "You have to get dressed."

Augustine nodded and closed her eyes. Seeing her totally naked, her skin glistening, her body bathed in his scent, he wanted her again. Rorik couldn't take it. Grabbing the pants from her, he lifted one foot and shoved it down in one of the legs of her pants. Augustine leaned her butt against the table for support. He did the same with the other leg of the pants and then yanked them up. She shifted away from the table and swayed as he tugged the material up to her waist.

The drawstring was broken. He remembered then that he'd snapped it to get to her earlier. Taking the folds of the pants, he knotted the excess material. That would do to get her home.

Half naked she was just as enticing as she was totally naked. He plucked the vest off the floor and shoved it over her arms. Not taking any chances, he did up all three buttons, ignoring the fact that his fingers were trembling.

"You have to leave now."

Augustine frowned at him and he could see her eyes were clearer now. "That's it? We make love and all you can say is 'you have to leave'?"

He ignored the shaft of pain in his heart. "We had sex." The lie soured his belly, but it was for her own good.

Even though he was taller than she, Augustine still managed to look down at him. He wasn't quite certain how she managed it. She put her hands on her hips and stared down her nose. It was a combination of her physical stance and pure attitude. No other woman had ever stood up to him before. He frightened most women with his sheer size and brooding personality. But not Augustine.

"We had sex," she repeated. Shaking her head, she turned from him. "It might have been just sex to you, but it was more than that to me." She took a step toward the door. "I never took you for a coward."

Fury roared through him. He was moving before he even thought of it. His hands gripped her shoulders hard, whirling her around. Fear flashed briefly in her eyes before being replaced by anger.

Good. He could deal with anger but not fear. He never wanted Augustine to be afraid of him. He'd do anything to protect her. Anything. And right now that meant she had to leave. He was no good for her. She had a life in another time and place. A life she had worked hard to build. He had no right to ask her to give that up.

"I am no coward," he spit out. His jaw was clenched so tight it was a wonder he could speak at all. "I am doing what needs to be done."

"Perhaps." She shook her head as the anger bled from her face, replaced by sorrow. "But there is no need to be cruel about it." She glanced down at his hands that still gripped her tight. "Now let go of me. I want to go and get a bath and get changed back into my real clothing. It will soon be time for me to go."

He released her, remorse filling him. "Augustine." He wasn't quite certain what he wanted to say to her.

"No." Holding up her hand, she took a step away from him. "We've both said enough. "We both know I'm leaving. There's no reason for me to stay. Is there?"

He gave no answer as he had none to give.

She gave a brittle laugh. "Of course there's no reason to stay. What was I thinking?"

"I will see you home."

"No." She didn't look back as she stood in the doorway. "I can find my own way to Olivia's home." She had no idea how to get there, but she would ask someone. Considering her friend was a priestess of the Goddess, Augustine assumed most folks would know where she lived. Straightening her shoulders, she strode away, swallowed up by the alleyway beyond his workshop.

Bitterness filled him at the thought of her spending her last hours here alone or, more likely, with Kirce. "That is your choice," he reminded himself as he picked up his

hammer from the workbench. He raised his hammer and brought it down with a roar. The wood gave way to his fury and the table broke in half.

Rorik stood staring at the remains of the table. It reminded him of his life. Shattered. The hammer fell from his hand to the floor, raising a cloud of dust before settling. He sank to his knees and raised his head to the window just beyond. He could see the amethyst moon barely visible in the sky.

“Tell me what to do.” He hadn’t prayed to the Goddess in years. Not since the night of the fire years ago when he’d prayed for her to save his aunt and uncle. Closing his eyes, he fisted his hands on his thighs. “Tell me what to do!” he roared.

His head fell forward. Exhaustion fell over him as he asked the Goddess for the courage to do what was right for Augustine, for his cousin, for his people.

The sun faded from the sky as he sat there in the dust and prayed.

Chapter Nine

Augustine felt battered and broken. She knew she had to return to the life she'd left behind. Despite what Olivia said, there was nothing for her here.

That wasn't strictly the truth. Kirce was here and she did love him. He was a sensitive soul but a warrior at heart. Then there was Olivia. She'd missed her best friend and hadn't really had any time to visit with her.

But there was just as much, if not more, weighing on the side of going home. For one thing, Rorik didn't want her here. Then there was the fact that she had an entire life waiting for her. She didn't even know why she was debating this in her head. There was only one decision she could make.

Her bath had revived her somewhat. She was grateful for the fact that Kirce had decided to wait for her at the end of the alleyway just beyond Rorik's workshop, in spite of the fact he'd told her Rorik would take her to Olivia's. Although she'd told Rorik she could get there on her own, she wasn't certain she could have done it. She'd been too upset to think straight, let alone find her way along unfamiliar streets.

He'd said nothing about what had transpired between her and Rorik. He'd simply taken her by the hand and led her to Olivia's. It didn't take a genius to figure out she and Rorik had made love. Well, she'd made love. He'd had sex. Or so he'd said.

She closed her eyes, remembering the way Rorik had touched her. He'd been gentle at times and rougher at others, as if he couldn't get enough of her. There had been more than just scratching a physical itch in his touch. But that no longer mattered. It was time for her to go.

Dressed in her clean khaki pants and shirt, she laced up her boots. She was ready. The silver torque was heavy and warm around her neck, a reminder of what was to

come. Augustine wasn't quite certain how this would work, but Olivia had assured her it would.

Her friend had shown great empathy and compassion by drawing her a bath and leaving her to her own thoughts. Olivia had sensed that she needed time to herself—time to think and compose herself.

Augustine hadn't even met Olivia's husbands or son. The men had left earlier in the day, taking the little boy with them. She regretted that she hadn't met the child, but he was staying with one of his sets of grandparents tonight. She'd meet Olivia's husbands later at the temple.

A light knock came on the door. "Come in."

Kirce pushed the door open, his face set in solemn lines. "Are you ready?"

She nodded. "I'm ready."

"Augustine," he began, but she stopped him.

"Please don't say anything, Kirce. I have to go back. Your Goddess obviously made a mistake in bringing me here."

Kirce walked to her side, clasped her hand in his and lifted it to his lips. "The Goddess doesn't make mistakes." He kissed each of her knuckles before placing a kiss on her palm. "I'm grateful for the time I had with you. I want you to stay, but it has to be your choice." He tucked her hand into the crook of her arm and led her from the room. "Come, it's time for us to go to the temple."

The trip went far too quickly. There were people on the street, all of them watching her while trying to pretend they weren't. Many of them looked sad or disappointed. One lady was sobbing as they passed.

"Why is she crying?"

Kirce sighed. "She knows you are leaving. They are losing hope for the future. We have Olivia now, and that is a start, but there is much to do to rebuild what we've lost."

The entire complicated situation came smashing down upon her. An entire race of people had pinned their hopes on her—a tall, lanky, slightly boring archaeologist. How had this happened?

Because the necklace had brought her here, the people assumed she was a priestess of the Goddess. Or at least she had the potential to be one. But that was impossible. Wasn't it? She certainly hadn't had an indication that she could fill such a role even if she wanted to, which she didn't. She had a life waiting for her at home.

Before she could even begin to delve into the question, they were in front of a magnificent stone temple. Olivia waited outside, flanked by two very different men. One was fair and handsome, the other dark and fierce.

Her friend stepped forward and hugged her. "I wish you weren't going, but I understand why you are."

Augustine was glad someone understood because her thoughts were totally muddled. For a woman who prided herself on being a logical scientist, she couldn't make any sense of the varied emotions and thoughts coursing through her. She hugged Olivia, grateful for her friendship and understanding.

"Is there any way I could have a few more days to think this through?" Even as she asked, she knew the answer.

Olivia shook her head. "Unfortunately, the moon is only at its peak power for two nights. If you don't go back before the cycle is completed, you may never get another chance."

That was a scary thought.

"I want you to meet my mates, Tor and Dak." Both men came forward, cupped her shoulders, then leaned down and kissed her. When they stepped back, she shook her head. The testosterone level was enough to make a woman giddy. All the men here seemed to be larger than life.

Kirce hovered behind her, his hand on the small of her back, a gentle reminder that he was still there. Augustine appreciated his support and turned to smile at him. He smiled back, but his was tinged with sadness.

Her heart clutched at the thought of never seeing him again. Never seeing Rorik. She took a breath and slowly exhaled. "Let's get on with this."

Olivia nodded and started up the stone stairs. "Follow me."

A sense of calm descended on Augustine as she stepped into the temple. Stone benches sat on either side of an aisle that led to an altar at the head of the room. The ceiling was high, making the room open and airy. Several large, arched windows had the shutters pulled back, allowing the light of the amethyst moon to shine inside.

It really was a remarkable sight. The purple glow seemed to illuminate the altar. Fresh flowers were strewn on top and smoke from the incense wafted up from ornate holders. Two pillar candles were atop large metal holders. But the most spectacular item of all was the large amethyst trinity in the center. A huge amethyst flanked on either side by a crescent one.

Olivia had told her about it, but being told about it and seeing it were two different things. Augustine had been unconscious on her arrival and had missed it. Now that she saw it, she had no doubt in her mind that the gemstones and the inscription on the necklace matched those on the altar.

"Amazing." Her voice was hushed as she stepped forward. Her legs kept moving until she was directly in front of the altar. It was even more spectacular close up.

"It's incredible, isn't it?" Olivia came to stand beside her. "Will you do something for me?"

She turned toward her friend and looked down at her. "Anything."

Olivia nibbled on her bottom lip for a moment. She looked slightly nervous. That wasn't a good sign. "Will you sit here alone in the temple for a while before you go back?"

She frowned. "What good will that do?" A part of her just wanted this over and done with. Another part of her rejoiced at the excuse to stay a bit longer.

"Maybe none," Olivia conceded. "But it helped me make a clear decision about whether to go or stay when I did it." She squeezed Augustine's hand. "Please."

Augustine nodded. "Okay. I can do that." It was only for a short while and seemed to mean so much to Olivia. It was the least she could do after all her friend had done for her.

"Thank you." She motioned to the men. "We'll be right outside."

"I'll see you before I go?" She didn't want to leave without having one final chance to say goodbye. Her mind was suddenly crammed with a hundred things she wanted to say to Olivia, wanted to ask her.

"I hope so." Her friend gave her a smile before releasing her hand and turning away.

Olivia and her two husbands left the temple. Kirce waited until they were gone and then came to her side. He cupped her face in his hands, staring down at her for the longest time. So many emotions played across his face, so much sadness. "I love you, Augustine. Now and always." He lowered his head and kissed her.

It was a long, slow kiss that made her toes curl and her heart ache. Tears welled in her eyes and slipped from the corners to trickle down her cheeks. Kirce raised his head and she could see his eyes were damp too. He made no attempt to hide his sorrow.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

He wiped the pads of his thumbs over her cheeks, trying to stem the tide of her tears. "I know you are." He leaned forward and kissed several tears from her face before turning and walking from the room.

Alone, Augustine turned to the altar, her eyes overflowing with tears. "Why did you bring me here?" She wasn't expecting an answer and was shocked when she got one.

Because it was your destiny.

The voice was definitely female yet ageless somehow. "Who said that?" Her heartbeat quickened as she swiped at her eyes, drying the evidence of her tears.

You know who I am, Augustine. In your heart, you know.

"I don't believe this." She spun around in a circle, searching for the source of the voice. "This is some sort of trick." She wouldn't believe she was talking to a goddess. That was impossible.

Laughter, light and airy, seemed to surround her, enveloping her like a warm hug. I have no need for tricks, my child. All I want is for you to be truthful with yourself. Why will you not stay?

She rubbed her damp palms over the legs of her pants. "I have a life. A dig to complete. A book to write." Somehow it didn't seem that important when she said it aloud.

All worthy goals to be sure. But what will you do when your book is done?

Augustine had asked herself the same question on more than one occasion. "I'm working for a museum now. I'll have papers to write, more digs to go on, displays to coordinate." It all sounded so academic and slightly boring.

What of the people in your life?

Augustine almost said *what people* but managed to stop herself at the last second. It sounded pathetic to say that no one would really miss her. Sure she had colleagues who would wonder what happened to her, but that was the extent of it. With her natural inclination toward study and academics, coupled with her travels, she hadn't built many friendships. She'd had Olivia, but that was about it.

She pictured Kirce in her mind, his sadness and tears. He was unashamed to tell her how he felt about her. He would miss her, as would Olivia. If only Rorik cared too. But she couldn't stay, knowing how much her presence was hurting him.

"I have to go."

The choice is yours. And there are choices.

Augustine shook her head. "I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't. If I go back I hurt Kirce and Olivia."

And yourself.

As much as she wanted to admit it, the Goddess was correct. "And myself. But if I stay, I hurt Rorik. If you're really a goddess, then you know how much my being here has hurt him. Plus, I don't fulfill the obligations I left behind."

It is a dilemma. One only you can decide.

Augustine's entire body trembled and her legs were like jelly. She locked her knees to keep standing as the reality of the situation hit her. "I'm really talking to a goddess, aren't I?" It was totally unbelievable yet totally plausible in this setting. Maybe it was easier to believe because Olivia had told her about what had happened to her in this same temple. Maybe it was because being here in T'ar Tal was like a time outside of time, totally surreal.

I am.

The light flowing breeze that wafted through the temple suddenly changed, whipping into a fierce wind and wrapping Augustine, much like the way it had back in the chamber in Egypt. The necklace around her neck got warmer with each passing second. Her fingers began to tingle. Dread filled her. She opened her mouth to speak, but the words froze in her throat as a figure coalesced in front of her. Purple light encircled the woman who was swathed in flowing robes. Augustine couldn't quite make out her features, but there was no denying the flood of power emanating from her.

Augustine felt as though she were being split in two. Now that the time was really here, her heart was pleading with her to stay, to take the chance to have real friendships and maybe a husband and children. Those were dreams that Augustine had long filed away. Suddenly they were there, begging her to take the chance.

Her head reminded her that men didn't fall in love with women like her so quickly. Rorik didn't want her here to begin with. What Kirce felt for her was probably lust. And what would happen to her when that passed? She'd be in a strange world with no one but Olivia to call friend. Back home she might be alone, but she was safe.

Safe.

The word struck her hard. She was as much of a coward as Rorik, refusing to face what truly troubled her. She was afraid of giving everything in her heart to two men and having it rebuffed. Rorik had already tossed it aside. It was probably only a matter of time before Kirce did too.

What did she know about being a wife? Nothing. She wasn't exactly a model for femininity. She couldn't cook worth a damn. She didn't know anything about the customs of this world or even what she could do if she stayed here. How would she earn a living? Olivia would help her get a foothold in this strange world if that's what Augustine wanted, but it would be very different from the life she would be leaving behind.

Her head spun. Her mind whirled with the possibilities even as the room itself seemed to shift. "I feel dizzy," she muttered, reaching out to grab the edge of the altar."

It is time.

"No!" The male voice echoed off the thick walls of the temple and made Augustine's heart leap for joy.

It is too late, my son. She has made her choice.

Rorik ignored her and fell to his knees before the veiled lady. "She does not have all the facts. She cannot make her choice until she knows them all."

You understand the implications of this.

It wasn't a question. "I do," he replied firmly.

So be it.

Rorik sprang to his feet and strode to Augustine's side.

"Why are you here?" As much as she wanted to throw herself in his arms, she held herself back.

He reached out and his hand hovered just above her cheek before falling back to his side. "You've been crying."

She shrugged. "That's beside the point. Why are you here?" Part of her wanted to hope, but she was too afraid. Her life had been filled with too many disappointments. She'd given herself to him without reserve and he'd pushed her away. This time he had to take the step forward.

"After you left, I thought about everything that had happened and I did something I hadn't done in years." He rubbed a hand across the back of his neck. He looked tired.

"What did you do?"

"I prayed." He laughed. "No, I demanded first. I cursed. And finally I prayed."

Augustine licked at her dry lips. "What did you pray for?"

"For courage. For hope. Redemption." He shrugged. "I just prayed. There was silence for so long, I knew my prayers wouldn't be answered. In the past I would have been angry. Now I just felt empty."

And that is why I spoke to you, my son. You were ready to listen.

Rorik chuckled and inclined his head respectfully toward the Goddess. "You are correct, my Lady."

Augustine was enthralled by what was happening. They were having a three-way conversation—her, Rorik and the Goddess. She never would have believed it possible before this moment, yet it seemed perfectly natural.

It is natural.

Augustine jolted when she realized the Goddess had heard her thoughts.

I know your thoughts and your hearts. Both of you. I know that Rorik blames himself for what happened all those years ago. But in truth, there is no place for blame.

Sometimes a person's destiny is meant to unfold a certain way. That is the way of things and not even I can change it.

"But why?" Rorik's question was filled with such pain, Augustine couldn't hold herself back any longer. Reaching out, she closed her fingers around his and held on tight.

"I can answer that." Kirce strode down the center of the aisle, self-assured and as handsome as ever. Augustine held out her other hand to him and he came to stand by her side, clasping her hand in his. He inclined his head to the Goddess before turning to his cousin. "It's because we were meant to be raised together. We're stronger together than we would have been if we'd been raised separately. We were always meant to be brothers."

"Is that so?" Rorik turned his hopeful gaze to the Goddess.

Each soul knows its path when it enters life. It is decided on before birth. But there is still free choice and sometimes things just go wrong. It is part of living. That is what happened to your aunt and uncle. If they had made different choices, their lives might have unfolded differently – or not – no one can know for sure.

Rorik shook his head. "I'm still sorry for my part in what happened."

"As am I," Kirce added. "You are not the only one who feels guilt about that night, Rorik." Pain was etched on his face as he spoke. "I always ask myself what I could have done differently, how I could have saved them. But there is no going back to the past and my parents would not want either of us not to reach our full potential, to not reach out for happiness."

Augustine squeezed both men's hands. She was so proud of both of them. Now that they'd begun to make peace with their pasts they would be fine. Yes, they still had a hard road ahead, but now that the subject was out in the open, both Rorik and Kirce were on their way to healing from the wounds of their childhood. Her stomach dropped when she realized they no longer needed her. Her trip here had accomplished what the Goddess wanted.

"I never knew you felt that way." Rorik held out his arm to his cousin and they grabbed each other's forearms, a silent bond of friendship and brotherhood.

Kirce shook his head. "You were racked with enough guilt. I did not want to add to it." He paused as he released Rorik's arm. "I feel the pull as hard as you do."

Rorik narrowed his eyes. "You have the calling to be a priest?" Augustine could hear the shock in his voice.

"Yes."

"Why did you say nothing?"

Kirce sighed. "I knew the call of the Goddess was within you as well. But how could I reach out and answer it when you would not? It was my place to be beside you and support you in whatever you chose to do." Standing tall and proud, he faced his cousin. "You are my brother, in this life and any more to come. There is nothing I would not do for you."

Rorik swallowed hard, seemingly overcome with emotion. "You are my brother." He glanced at the Goddess and offered a small smile. "It seems as if we are about to embark on another journey together."

You will both accept your calling.

"We will," they both said as one.

The Goddess faced Augustine and reached out her hand. *It is time.*

Biting her lip to hold back tears, she started forward. The necklace was hot now and a thick humming sound in her ears. Rorik stepped in front of her as she sensed Kirce stepping behind her, boxing her between them.

"My purpose here is done." She refused to look at Rorik, knowing she'd burst into tears if she did and she was determined to be strong, to be adult about this. "You have given your people hope, not just one priest of the Goddess, but two."

"Augustine." She shivered as he said her name. She heard the emotion in his voice but wasn't under any illusion that it was more than gratitude. They'd only known each

other for less than two days, if you didn't count the dreams. And they were dreams after all, not reality.

She said nothing, as there was nothing left to say. Her heart was heavy as she placed her hands on his chest. Her intention was to push him away. Instead she found herself focusing on the heavy thud of his heartbeat against her palm.

Strong fingers cupped her chin, raising it to meet his gaze. "Please stay."

Oh how she'd wanted to hear those words from him, wanted to believe them. She knew now that she'd been lying to herself, telling herself the sensible thing—she had to go home when she really wanted to stay.

She swallowed back the lump in her throat. "It's gratitude you feel, Rorik." Reaching out, she stroked her hand over his cheek, feeling the prickle of stubble against her skin. It was rough, like him. But exciting too. She closed her fingers, capturing the sensation in her palm. "You were right earlier when you said it was just sex."

He closed his eyes and when he opened them again she was shocked to see tears in them. "I lied." Gripping his shoulders, he shook her lightly. "Goddess, how I lied. I didn't want to face my past because if I did, and you were right, that would mean I'd wasted so many years."

Kirce's hands came around her to rest on her belly. "You forced us both to look at ourselves, Augustine."

"I'm glad." And she was truly, but it was getting harder and harder to stand here and pretend that her heart wasn't breaking. "But it's time for me to go home." Her voice broke on the final word. Home. She wasn't sure she had one, either on Earth or T'ar Tal.

"If that is what you want, I will not stop you." Rorik's hands fell from her shoulders. Following his lead, Kirce pulled away and came to stand beside his cousin.

The two men stared at her before glancing at one another and nodding. They went to one knee at the same time, each one taking one of her hands in his. It was Kirce who spoke first.

"I told you I loved you and that was the truth. I've loved you since the first dream. I love your stubborn nature, the way you don't give up when you want something. I love your strength and your softness."

She bit her bottom lip, but it was useless. A single tear slid down her cheek.

Rorik brought her fingers to his lips and kissed them one by one. "There are not words enough to explain the depth of my feeling for you, Augustine. But if you stay, I will try to find them."

A second tear rolled down her face. She was overwhelmed by both men but still wasn't certain what to do. What kind of a life would she have here if she stayed? She looked to the Goddess, who only smiled.

Only you can answer that, my daughter. Both lives would be good ones. The one back on Earth would be filled with career success and satisfaction. You will live a long, healthy life and your name will be in the history books forever.

That was more than she'd ever hoped for. All she'd ever wanted in her life.

If you stay here, your life will be very different but perhaps no less fulfilling. You will live a long, healthy life and your name will live on in the hearts of your family and your children. You can become a priestess if you choose. Your children will have that potential as well. You are very special.

Augustine glanced back at the men standing in front of her and, from the looks on their faces, she knew that neither of them had heard what the Goddess had told her. Kirce looked sad, but Rorik appeared determined.

He whirled around to face the Goddess. "If she is going back, I am going with her."

"You can't do that," Augustine gasped. "You belong here. Your people need you."

"But I need you." He was so close she could feel the heat from his body, see the resolve in his eyes. "I cannot function without you. Now that I have had you in my life I cannot live without you." He raised his hand. It hovered over her face briefly before falling back to his side. "You are everything. Without you, there is no purpose."

Kirce, who had been quiet for so long, spoke. "Stay. Marry us. The three of us together are stronger than any of us can be separately."

Her belly quivered as hope surged. She could do this. She could stay and have it all. The only thing nagging at her was her obligations back home. Then she remembered Olivia. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Squaring her shoulders, Augustine faced the Goddess. "What about the things I left undone? Instead of sending me home, can you get a package to go back to Earth like you did when Olivia left?"

The Goddess inclined her head. I can, but you have only two hours to get everything together.

Rorik pulled her into his arms, all but smothering her in his embrace. "You are staying?"

Her stomach settled and she felt as if a huge weight had been dropped from her body. She pulled back her head enough to see him. "I'm staying."

She was lifted off her feet and hugged so hard the breath was sucked from her lungs. Augustine pushed at his shoulders. "Rorik," she gasped.

He loosened his arms but didn't release her. "Thank you." He dropped his forehead to hers. "You won't be sorry."

"I know." She smiled as she felt herself being lifted from Rorik's embrace. Kirce held her tight, snuggling her close to his heart. She smiled at both of them. "But first, I have work to do."

Chapter Ten

It was well past midnight by the time the three of them returned to Rorik's home, her home now she supposed, and climbed the stairs to the bedroom. The past few hours had been spent with Olivia, the two of them filling pages of parchment paper as fast as they could. Augustine had been determined to get her final thoughts down so she could send them back home. She knew that Michael would be up to the job of writing the final book she'd planned.

She wrote him a long letter with detailed instructions about what to do with her belongings. Thankfully, because she'd just moved to take her new job, most of her belongings were in storage. She gave him directions on where to find the key and permission to dispose of them. It was a shame that her bank account would eventually end up as government property, but there was nothing she could do about that right now.

The hope existed that, sometime in the future, Olivia would be able to figure out the whole time travel thing and make a quick trip home to dispose of both of their estates and give the money to charity.

For now, she'd done all she could and the Goddess had sent the package back to the same point where Augustine had disappeared. She only hoped that Michael was still there and would find it.

Kirce, ever aware of her moods, bent down to whisper in her ear. "It will all be fine. The Goddess will see to it."

It was still amazing to hear how much a part of their lives that their deity was. It was so different from back on Earth. Here, the Goddess was a real and integral part of the lives of all the people. And the two men beside her would give new hope to

everyone when it was announced at their joining ceremony tomorrow that they were both priests of the Goddess.

Augustine still couldn't believe she was getting married tomorrow. But Rorik was insistent. Now that she'd decided to stay, he wanted to bind her to them as quickly as possible. It was flattering and nerve-racking at the same time.

Rorik paused just inside the door of the bedroom. "Thank you is not sufficient to tell you how much your sacrifice means to me." He drew her toward the bed and she sat on the edge. He went down on one knee in front of her and began to unlace her boots.

She peered down at his bent head and felt her heart swell. Yes the future was uncertain, but that was the same anywhere. She'd miss computers and her favorite television shows and hot fudge sundaes, but those were all superficial things. She would find things to love about her new home. "It's not that much of a sacrifice. Not when you look at what I gain in return."

Kirce sat on the bed beside her and unbuttoned her blouse. "We will build you a bigger house. Something grand." He tugged the fabric apart and slid it down her arms.

Rorik tugged her boots and socks off and sat back on his heels. "Anything you want is yours."

They were both serious. The last of the tension inside her melted away, replaced by the surety that she was exactly where she needed and wanted to be. "I don't need a new house. This one is just fine." She brushed a strand of hair off Kirce's cheek and tucked it behind his ear. "All I need is the two of you." Reaching out, she stroked the side of Rorik's face.

"We are yours as you now belong to us." Rorik stood and tugged her to her feet long enough to undo her pants and pull them down her legs. Kirce lifted her out of the puddle of fabric and laid her across the large bed. She was still wearing her bra and panties but felt naked before them. They had a way of looking at her that stripped her bare to her soul.

“You both still have way too much clothing on.” She was shocked a little by the sultry sound of her voice as much as by the request. She wasn’t used to asking for what she wanted in the bedroom, but that was about to change.

Kirce winked at her as he stripped off his clothing.

Rorik’s eyes never left her face as he slowly peeled his vest off and went for the opening of his loose, linen pants. His cock sprang free, hard and ready from the thick nest of dark curls at his groin. His golden-brown skin glistened with a sheen of perspiration, his muscles rippling as he stepped out of his pants and kicked them away. When he was totally naked, he placed one knee on the mattress and crawled toward her.

Her skin was hot, every square inch of her body filled with the fire of need. It didn’t matter that she’d had sex with both of them earlier today. This was different. Yes, she’d slept with the two of them at once, but that had been in her dreams or when she thought she was dreaming. This was the first time they would all be together and she was completely aware of what she was doing.

She reached for Kirce as he stretched out on the bed beside her. His dark brown hair flowed over his shoulders and grazed her face as he leaned forward and kissed her on the mouth. It was such a soft, gentle kiss it brought a sigh to her lips. Like Rorik, he was fully aroused, an incredible specimen of manhood.

She licked her lips, tasting him. Both men groaned and she smiled.

Rorik unhooked her bra, peeling it down her arms. “Let’s get this out of the way.”

Kirce reached for her panties, quickly stripping them away. There was no shyness, no sense of self-consciousness as she shifted to help them remove the last of her clothing. Her slenderness and lack of curves didn’t bother her at all. They made her feel beautiful. And that was a gift beyond measure.

She smiled and held out her arms to them both. Kirce bent his head and kissed her again. Rorik nuzzled her neck before moving lower. His tongue stroked her collarbone before teasing the plump flesh of her breast.

"You taste like honey," Kirce murmured as he licked at her bottom lip. The man could certainly kiss. He had a way of taking his time, as if he had no other thought than to spend all night kissing her. His tongue slid inward, seducing hers. Her fingers tangled in his hair, holding him to her. Not that she needed to. Kirce seemed in no hurry to leave.

Rorik, however, seemed intent on taking her as fast as possible. His tongue lashed at her nipple, making the peak tighten before he took it into his mouth. Cream slipped from her core, softening her folds as she undulated her hips.

Kirce continued to kiss her, but his hand slid down to cup her breast. He teased the hard nub with his thumb before moving lower. His fingers coasted down her ribs and circled the indent of her navel. She moaned as Rorik's hand mirrored Kirce's.

Both men had their hands on her hips and then her inner thighs, pushing them apart. Kirce lifted her leg and draped it over his thigh. On her other side, Rorik did the same. That left her sex wide open for anything they wanted to do to her.

Her breath caught and her lungs labored as, together, their hands stroked over her slick folds. She pulled back from Kirce's lips, breaking the kiss between them as she struggled to get enough air into her body. Kirce began to nibble on her earlobe.

A wild cry broke from her lips as Rorik inserted a single finger into her core. Kirce soon joined him, pushing one of his fingers past the initial resistance at her opening. One of them circled her clit with his thumb. She had no idea who and didn't care. Their fingers stretched her as they began to thrust them in and out. Her body was so sensitized, so needy, even the roots of her hair hurt.

"More," she gasped. "Harder." She pushed her hips upward.

Working in tandem, they drove their fingers deeper, widening them as they stroked out to the edge of her opening before pushing hard again. Her hips pumped wildly. Her orgasm was so close she could almost taste it.

Rorik nuzzled her breast, taking the nipple into his mouth. He grazed it with his teeth. The sensation shot her over the edge. She cried out as her inner muscles squeezed

their fingers. Liquid flowed from her core as she shook from head to toe. Her heels dug into the mattress as she lifted herself into their touch one final time before collapsing back on the bed.

Low voices spoke words of praise and comfort as they withdrew their hands and stroked her hair. She opened her eyes and gave them both a sleepy, sated smile.

Rorik stared down at Augustine, enthralled by the picture she made spread across his bed. Their bed now, he supposed. It belonged to all of them. Contentment, the likes of which he hadn't known since he was a child, enveloped him. Need clawed at him, but for the moment, it was held at bay by the sheer happiness within him.

It wasn't just the physical relationship with Augustine but everything else that went with it. She was such a treasure, her moods ever changing. She would challenge him constantly, and not just in his regular life, but in his role as a priest as well.

He glanced at his cousin. Their eyes met and he sensed the deep understanding that flowed between them. There would be no jealousy, no discord in their sharing of this special woman. It was meant to be. She completed both of them in a way she would never fully understand. He didn't fully understand it himself – he only knew it was so.

Now that he'd made the decision to embrace his role as a priest for his people, he felt a tremendous weight slip from his shoulders. By holding back, he'd been denying a vital part of himself. Augustine had helped him to realize that.

She stirred and opened her eyes. Her blue eyes were sleepy and the smile she gave them set his blood stirring once again. Her legs were still sprawled apart, her pussy glistening with the proof of her orgasm. The smell of sex permeated the air around them.

Rorik growled as he leaned in and captured her lips. Tilting his head to the side, he devoured her mouth, taking all the breath from her body before breathing it back into her. She moaned deep in her throat, her fingers digging into his shoulder.

He pulled back just enough so he could nibble on her bottom lip and see her face. She had such an open face. Her every expression was there for him to see. She was sleepy and satisfied, but he could see the arousal building in her again.

Dipping a finger into her core, he coated it with her cream before circling the puckered opening of her behind. "Do you remember what I said earlier?" He pushed the tip of his finger past the tight muscles.

She gasped but nodded, a combination of fear and arousal in her eyes.

Rorik slowly thrust his finger forward until it was buried as deep as it could go. "There is a salve that will make it easier for you to accept me here." He closed his eyes as he pictured his cock buried in her ass. "You'd be so tight and it would feel so good." He opened his eyes and stared at her. "Kirce would fuck your pretty pink pussy, while I'd take you here." He slipped his finger almost all the way out before driving it deep.

Augustine groaned as she pushed her behind down to meet the upward thrust of his finger. She glanced from him to Kirce and back to him.

"Trust me," he whispered.

She nodded. "Yes."

Augustine couldn't believe what she was agreeing to. She was apprehensive but she was excited too. The thought of having both men at once, at having Kirce buried deep in her core while Rorik took her from behind was incredibly arousing.

She knew it would hurt at first. His finger had burned the first time he'd pushed it into her ass, but it felt surprisingly good now as he thrust it in and out, widening her, preparing her.

When he'd whispered for her to trust him, she was lost. She sensed he needed to claim her this way, to have her in a way no other man ever had. They needed to come together as one unit to seal their commitment to one another. Augustine had no idea how their three-way relationship would work on a daily basis, but she trusted they'd find their way.

She sensed Kirce's excitement, felt the hard thrust of his cock against her thigh as he stroked his hand up and down her inner thigh, coming close but never touching her sex.

"Yes." She trusted both men implicitly. But more than that, she loved them.

Kirce rolled off the bed and disappeared into the bathing chamber. He returned seconds later with a small wooden box. Placing it on her stomach, he opened it and dipped his fingers inside. The scent of honey and herbs tickled her nostrils. Even the scent was arousing.

Rorik removed his thick finger, giving way to Kirce. The cool slickness of the salve coated her flesh as Kirce slipped one of his fingers easily into the tight opening of her behind. A second finger joined the first, stretching her. It hurt a bit, burning slightly. She sucked in a breath.

"Breathe," Kirce told her as he widened his fingers. "The salve will ease the burning. His eyes twinkled. "And the herbs will soon have you begging for more."

She wasn't sure about that, but she was willing to try. A few seconds later, she thought Kirce might be right. The inner muscles of her ass tingled and it was much easier for him to work his fingers in and out.

Rorik knelt beside her as he gathered some of the salve on his fingers and stroked it over his swollen cock, coating it until it glistened. He groaned as his hand squeezed his erection.

"Will that add to your arousal?" She managed to get the words out around a moan of pleasure as Kirce widened his fingers, stretching her, preparing her.

"Yes." Rorik took her hand in his and wrapped it around his hard length. His cock pulsed hard beneath her palm. It made the blood in her veins pump even faster, leaving her slightly lightheaded.

Dipping her free hand into the salve, she scooped up some and reached for Kirce, rubbing it up and down his length.

He gasped and withdrew his fingers, leaving her feeling strangely empty. She wanted both men and she wanted them now. "Take me. Make me yours."

Rorik lifted her into his arms while Kirce set the salve to one side before stretching out on his back in the center of the bed. When he was settled, he reached for her. Rorik held her hips, keeping her steady as she straddled Kirce. Gripping his arousal in her hand, she guided him to her pussy and he slid home.

She hissed as the cool salve glided over her inner muscles, making them tingle. She hadn't thought about that when she'd coated Kirce's shaft with the stuff. She ground her pelvis down on his, making them both groan.

Ohmygod! This was beyond anything. Whatever was in that salve amplified every sensation that fluttered in her core.

Rorik shifted until he was right behind her. Kirce pulled her down, wrapping his arms around her as Rorik pulled the cheeks of her ass wide. She tensed in spite of herself.

"Relax," Kirce crooned as he rubbed his hands up and down her back.

Lips kissed a path down her spine. "I won't hurt you," Rorik promised.

Taking a deep breath, Augustine let it out slowly, forcing herself to relax. Kirce's cock flexed inside her, sending a fresh shower of cream sliding over it.

Rorik took advantage of the moment, pressed the head of his cock against her ass and pushed. It was much wider than either of their fingers. Augustine froze, preparing herself for the invasion, but Rorik didn't move.

Her muscles clasped tight around him, throbbing briefly before settling once again. The salve was working its magic and soon her body was tingling inside.

Rorik's hands tightened around her hips and she could feel his breath, heavy and warm against her spine. "Relax. You can take all of me."

Although Kirce was still beneath her, she could feel the steady throb of his cock inside her. Her body responded by growing more sensitive and aroused by the second.

She could feel the tip of Rorik's shaft just inside the tight opening of her behind. He needed to get deeper if they were to finish this the way she wanted to.

Tentatively she pushed back. Another inch of Rorik's shaft filled her. His moan of pleasure filled her ears.

"That's it," he encouraged as he pressed forward slowly.

She was full to overflowing as he continued to slide into her. Yet she wanted it all. Had to have it. The salve they'd used was lighting a fire deep within her. And she knew that she needed to have the two of them fuck her to ease the need blossoming inside her with each passing moment.

It clawed at her, a living thing that needed to get out. She reached behind her, grabbed Rorik's hips and pulled. He gave one final thrust, burying himself to the hilt.

"Ohhh. Yesss," she hissed. She was panting hard now, trying to accustom herself to having two huge cocks buried inside her. Just thinking about it made her breasts ache and her core throb.

They filled her, surrounded her, but it still wasn't enough. She did what Kirce said she would. She begged for more. "Fuck me." Her body bucked as she tried to move.

Kirce swore and helped her ease upward slightly. She placed her palms on the bed to support herself. Her breasts hung down in front of her, the tips tight and red. Kirce pushed upward and latched on to one of her nipples, sucking hard. The motion drove him even deeper than before. She tilted back her head and cried out as pleasure suffused her entire body.

"I can't wait," Rorik growled behind her. His teeth nipped at her nape, sending shivers down her spine.

Kirce released her nipple and dropped back to the bed. He cupped her breasts in his hands and squeezed.

Rorik wrapped his hands around her hips, shifting her forward and back. Both cocks eased out and were then pushed deep when Rorik pulled her back.

"So good," she gasped. It was even better than anything she'd ever imagined. She knew she'd be sore tomorrow, but she didn't care. "Harder!"

Rorik picked up the pace but didn't push too hard. She knew that in spite of his powerful arousal, he was always aware of her. It made her heart swell as tears pricked her eyes.

They moved as one unit, thick cocks sliding in and out of her body. Her pussy and her ass throbbed and clenched tight around them. It seemed to go on forever even though she knew just a few minutes had passed when a familiar tingle grew deep within.

She cried out as her entire body spasmed. Neither man stopped, but continued to slide in and out of her body, pushing her even higher. Everything around her disappeared until all that existed was the pleasure that gripped her.

Kirce tried to hold on a bit longer. The passion and pleasure etched on Augustine's face were things of beauty and he knew he'd remember this moment forever. His balls ached for release. The gathering pressure grew and he knew it wouldn't be long. The sensation of his cock sliding in and out of her pussy with only a thin barrier separating him from where Rorik filled her was incredibly erotic.

He smiled as he imagined their positions being reversed. It wouldn't happen today, or tomorrow for that matter. Augustine would need time to recover. But someday soon they'd do this again and her tight ass would grip his cock.

He groaned and yelled her name as his cum shot up his shaft. He heard Rorik yell and knew that his cousin had found release as well. Augustine slumped toward him and he caught her in his arms. She felt right there, filling the emptiness he hadn't even known was there until he met her.

She whimpered as Rorik withdrew from her. He winced, worrying that she'd be uncomfortable for their joining ceremony tomorrow. No matter, there were ways to make her feel good, to bring her to orgasm that didn't include intercourse and he wanted to try them all with her.

Rorik lifted her off him and laid her facedown on the bed. Kirce stroked his hand down her back, once again thanking the Goddess for bringing her into his life, into their lives. He and Rorik stared at one another and smiled. Life was good.

Augustine could barely breathe. She'd never been so exhausted in her life. Nor had she ever felt so relaxed and sated. A cool cloth touched her sensitive skin and she moaned.

"It will make you feel better." She smiled into the pillow as Kirce continued to gently wipe the cloth over her sex and behind, cleaning away the remains of the salve and the evidence of their lovemaking.

"You'll have a warm bath in the morning and you'll feel better." This from Rorik who stroked his warm palm over her back.

She sighed, wanting to say something. Anything. She opened her mouth but all that emerged was a yawn.

The mattress depressed as Kirce stretched out on her other side and pulled the light sheet over them.

"Love you," she managed to get out as sleep claimed her. Wrapped in the safety and comfort of their arms, she slept.

* * * * *

Standing at the back of the temple, Augustine looked up the aisle. Flowers overflowed the altar and sweet incense filled the air. Although the moon was no longer full, its purple glow bathed the front of the room.

The room was filled to overflowing with family and friends, most of whom she had yet to met. Yet every face was smiling at her as she made her grand entrance.

Taking a deep breath, she looked at the two men who waited for her there. They were both dressed in the familiar loose linen pants and leather boots. But this time they were both wearing shirts that had been dyed a deep purple. Embroidery filled the back

and front with symbols of the Goddess. It was very similar to the decorations on the garb she was wearing.

Olivia had arrived a few hours before the ceremony with the beautiful clothing. Augustine had even been persuaded to wear the long skirt with the slit up the side instead of pants. And from the looks of lust and approval in both Kirce and Rorik's eyes she was glad she had.

This was her wedding day. It bore no resemblance to any ceremony she could have ever imagined. She was joining with not one, but two men. Some people might not understand, but here in this world, in this place it was being celebrated.

She smiled to herself as the heavy silver and amethyst torque began to warm against her skin. To think it had all begun with amethyst dreams.

Wrapping her fingers around the necklace she gave it a squeeze as she gave silent thanks to the Goddess. Light, feminine laughter filled her ears as she released the pendant and began her short walk toward her future husbands and the beginning of her new life.

Epilogue

Michael Reyers blinked in the darkness and swore. Something had slammed him back against the wall and made him drop his flashlight. It had also knocked over the lantern as well. He groped around the floor, ignoring the pain in his head.

“Augustine, are you all right?”

He remembered the roaring sound in his ears, the pressure pushing at him from all sides. The taste of fear was bitter and strong in his mouth. He’d thought for certain he was going to die.

But he was alive. The only question still to be answered was whether Dr. Mitchell was still alive. She’d been at the heart of whatever had happened. Michael wasn’t sure if it was an explosion of some sort or something else. Either way, he had to find his flashlight.

Finally, his fingers closed around the cylindrical handle. “Gotcha.” He turned on the switch and was rewarded when a strong beam of light hit the opposite wall. “Dr. Mitchell?”

He pushed himself up and walked slowly toward the stone chair in the center. It was empty. He let the beam play over the floor until he’d covered every inch of the room. Empty.

“That’s impossible,” he muttered. Then it hit him and he chuckled. “She’s gone for help, of course.” She’d probably found him unconscious and went to get help.

Glad that he’d figured out what happened, he was about to leave when he felt it. A slight tingle in his fingers followed by an incredible pressure pushing at him. “Not again,” he growled as he lunged for the door.

But he was too late. A wind seemed to whip up from out of nowhere. This time, he lunged for the stone chair, grabbing on to the arms and holding tight. The pressure drove him to his knees as he hung on. If he hit the wall again, he might not be as lucky.

A huge bang filled the air, the pressure was so bad his vision dimmed. Gritting his teeth, he hung on, determined to stay conscious.

It was gone as quickly as it had started. The air cleared, returning to normal. The pressure was gone.

Michael raised his head slowly and glanced around the room. Nothing seemed to have changed. He leaned his hand on the seat of the chair to push himself upright and hit something.

Grabbing his flashlight, he swung it toward the seat of the chair. It had been empty just moments before but now a small paper-wrapped package sat there. "Impossible." Even more incredible was the fact that his name was scrawled across the top. He recognized the writing. It belonged to Augustine.

"I'm losing my mind," he whispered even as he whipped out the package and read the letter on top. His mind whirling, he raised his head and stared at the markings on the wall, the ones that talked of time travel. "Impossible." Yet he was holding the truth in his hand. Augustine Mitchell wasn't coming back. She was in another world and time, and furthermore, Dr. Olivia Fifield, who'd gone missing several years before, was with her.

If he hadn't been here himself, hadn't felt the powerful wind and the energy arcing through the room, he wouldn't believe it. Heck, he'd lived it and still wasn't sure he believed it.

Her letter gave him the password to her computer and instructions on how to access her notes. The package also included pages of notes for the next book and she wanted him to write it.

This was the opportunity of a lifetime and it was being handed to him on a silver platter. A part of him thought it unethical to take another person's work and pass it off

as his own. That he couldn't do. He'd write the book, but it would be published under both their names.

He'd sell the belongings she had in storage and use the money to help finance the time he needed to work on the book. Eventually, she'd become a missing person, just as Dr. Fifield had. No one would ever know what happened to either of them. He would never tell anyone the truth. He didn't want to end up in a padded cell in some institution where no one would ever believe his wild story.

A pang of envy filled Michael. They were experiencing an entire new world. His gaze went back to the writing on the wall. It had happened twice before. And although it seemed impossible now that the two pieces of jewelry that had been responsible for the time travel were gone, he was hopeful that maybe someday it could happen again.

T'ar Tal. The name was one that only he would ever know. He'd burn the letter, as she'd instructed, just as soon as he wrote down all the pertinent details in his journal. Her notes, he would keep in case any questions arose in the future.

For now, all anyone needed to know was that Augustine had been called away on business. He'd pack her belonging and ship them back home to the States. He had work to do if he was to avoid any questions that could prove awkward.

Gathering the notes, he tucked them inside his shirt. Staggering to the door, he walked through it, turning one final time to stare at the mysterious room. The stone wall began to close almost as soon as he was in the hallway. He had one final glance at it before the stone settled, once again closing the room from prying eyes.

A new energy filled him as he hurried down the corridors. No one else knew about the room but him, and he intended to keep it that way.

For now.

About the Author

N.J. Walters worked at a bookstore for several years and one day had the idea that she would like to quit her job, sell everything she owned, leave her hometown and write romance novels in a place where no one knew her. And she did. Two years later, she went back to the same bookstore and settled in for another seven years.

Although she was still fairly young, that was when the mid-life crisis set in. Happily married to the love of her life, with his encouragement (more like, "For God's sake, quit the job and just write!") she gave notice at her job on a Friday morning. On Sunday afternoon, she received a tentative acceptance for her first erotic romance novel, *Annabelle Lee*, and life would never be the same.

N.J. has always been a voracious reader of romance novels, and now she spends her days writing novels of her own. Vampires, dragons, time-travelers, seductive handymen and next-door neighbors with smoldering good looks all vie for her attention. And she doesn't mind a bit. It's a tough life, but someone's got to live it.

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

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

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