



SHANNON  
ROUCHELLE

BOOK 1

THE RISE AND  
FALL OF KEIDON

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KEIDON: BOOK 1

BY

SHANNON ROUCHELLE

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The Rise and Fall of Keidon  
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## DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to my friend Bertha,  
who encouraged me to write this book.*

*And to my husband Jerry Richard, my  
biggest fan.*

# CHAPTER 1

Cassandra Wellington peered through the window. The battle escalated outside the fortress. Explosions close by made her cower in a corner. *I need to get out*, she thought desperately.

Loud voices spread through her ears and cries from far away quickly sounded. Women and children pled for their lives. Cassandra knew it wouldn't be long before the fortress walls were invaded by the enemy. She raised herself onto her hands and knees, then dared peek out the window. The Delmirths, the red-hooded enemies who speared everyone in their path, overtook the guards that protected the castle.

Cassandra cried in despair when a guard took a spear in the head. Blood splattered against the windowpane in front of her. Unable to watch another minute, she rose, turned on her heel and ran down the castle steps to the main entrance.

Once Cassandra reached the door, a loud thump sounded on the other side. She held her breath and listened quietly out of fear. Loud shouts in another language resonated through the

walls. The enemy attempted to break into the castle. She covered her mouth in surprise. A red-hooded being ran past the window as the enemy surrounded the fortress.

"Cassandra, where are you?" a voice bellowed.

She turned and ran into her father's arms.

"You must hide my daughter. They mustn't see you."

"What about you?"

"Don't worry about me, I'll be all right. I want you to go into the dungeon and escape through the secret door."

"Aren't you coming with me, father?" Cassandra asked.

"I can't, my darling. I'll be damned if some hideous Delmirths will run me from my castle. I'm the king of this nation. This is our home and I'm going to protect it."

"But —"

William Wellington grabbed his daughter by the arm and guided her in the right direction. "Once you reach the dungeon you must retrieve the items from the safe. Do you remember the combination?"

"Yes of course, but where should I go?"

"Travel by horse to Vestile. Once there, a boat will be waiting for you."

"That's a two day ride! Come with me, father!" she pleaded.

"I'm not well," he replied. "I can't travel long

distances. My time is almost over."

"How can you give up like this?"

"I'm not giving up, I'm being logical. Listen, Cassandra, you're the one person who can end this madness. Find safety, then complete your quest. You know what is at stake and you also know how to fix it."

"I'll come back for you, I promise."

"There might be nothing to come back for. I hate to be pessimistic, my darling, but the time is dwindling. The prophets say —"

"I know perfectly well what the prophets say!" she snapped. "It's my responsibility to bring the Ruby Idol back to the sacred land and marry a prince!"

"You must. If you don't, the kingdom will fall and Delmirths will overrun the land. Do you want that?"

"Of course I don't want that! The problem is I can't find anyone to marry. If only I could choose a man that I love...why does he have to be a prince?"

The banging on the fortress walls intensified. They both looked up from their interrupted conversation.

"You must leave, darling. You'll put our kingdom in jeopardy if you stay. I'll send Tor and Blake for protection."

"I can't —"

"Take the boat and head to Moorshore. The

land is teaming with trained warriors who will protect you. Darling, please do not tell another living soul about this quest you're on."

"Why?"

"No one can be trusted. It's difficult to know who is or is not working for the Delmirths. If word leaked out that you were about to end their evil legacy, someone would be sure to stop you."

"I promise, Father."

"I hope you keep your word, for the good of the nation. Don't forget to take the map. It's in the dungeon safe. It will show you how to get to the sacred land."

"How can I leave you?"

The banging continued.

"Run!"

Cassandra barely had time to peck her father on the cheek when something shattered nearby. William put on a brave face and pulled out a long dagger from his sheath.

Cassandra didn't want to leave him, but she knew the entire family would be destroyed if she were captured. Without a second thought, she ran down a long hallway, past suits of armor, to the secret entrance. The pounding rang in her ears. She turned to look behind her and knew time wasn't her friend. She pressed her hand against the loose brick. The moment she pushed it in, the wall opened. Loud shouts and her father's distinctive bellow filled the corridor. The



Delmirths had made it through the entrance. Clashing swords clanged in the distance.

Tempted to turn around and defend her father, Cassandra knew that would be foolish. He wouldn't hear of it. The battle down the hall continued. With another backward glance, she listened as footsteps neared. She dashed into the safety of the wall and pressed the loose brick. Within seconds, the wall enclosed her into its sanctuary. Shuffling sounds assured the Delmirths stood outside her hiding place. Cassandra held her breath and listened.

"We need to spread out and find her," a voice commanded. "She couldn't have gone far. We'll comb this entire place until we find her."

"What if we fail?"

The distinct sound of a spear sailing through the air ended with a thud. Cassandra's eyes widened in terror at the thought a body fell to the floor.

"Does anyone else think we'll fail?" the voice bellowed. Silence followed.

"Let's go!" the leader yelled. "I need to find her! I want her alive and unharmed!"

Cassandra waited until the footsteps passed in the distance, then pressed the loose brick. The wall opened up to reveal a dead body at her feet. She had the sudden urge to find her father and make sure he was still alive. After taking a few steps down the hallway, she heard running from above

her head. The Delmirths were upstairs searching the bedroom quarters.

Aware there wasn't much time, Cassandra knelt down to peer at the disgusting Delmirth. These beings were the ugliest things she ever saw. They had sunken faces, large green eyes that protruded from their heads and gray wrinkled skin. Cassandra pinched her nose in disgust. The Delmirths not only looked like the walking dead, but they smelled like it, too. With quick fingers, she undressed the enemy and hastily took the red robe back to the hidden wall.

Pressing the brick for the last time, she waited for the wall to close in around her. Once safely hidden from view, she turned around in the confined space and followed the stairs into the heart of the dungeon. At the bottom step, she ripped the long flowing gown from her body and stuffed it into her knapsack. With the red robe dangling from her hand, she winced and pulled the putrid garment over her head, then secured the hood snug to conceal her long red curls. She dashed to the far side of the room and peered out the window. Darkness had set in.

Cassandra grabbed a lantern and lit it carefully. The light created an eerie atmosphere around her. She held the lamp in front of her, guiding her footsteps to the secret Wellington safe. As she approached, a red light beamed and a beep sounded, recognizing her presence. The safe had

extra enchantments placed around it should a thief try to get near it. She placed the lantern on a nearby table and squinted into the shadows. The princess moved the dial to the right combination. After several failed attempts, she heard a click and the safe's door opened.

Cassandra reached inside and pulled out the Ruby Idol. The beautiful sculpture of a woman's face smiled back at her and she swallowed nervously at its beauty. The sculpture had an uncanny resemblance to her. She caressed the idol lovingly and smiled.

The idol glimmered in the light. Cassandra placed the sculpture into her knapsack. With it hidden from view, she immediately felt the power of its magic caress her through the leather material of her bag. She located the secret map her father referred to and stashed it inside a hidden compartment in her knapsack. Reaching her hand into the safe, she felt around for the heavy dagger. Holding it up to the light, she studied the sharp blade that had shed much blood in the past. Placing the dagger into her scabbard, she looked around the shadowy room to make sure she hadn't forgotten anything.

A heavyset door situated in the corner of the room would be her only chance of escape. She took a deep breath and fumbled with the bolts. Making sure there were no enemies in the area, she sneaked out quietly and closed the door

behind her. A maze of trees created the perfect camouflage. Carefully, she moved among the foliage and listened for any sounds of the enemy. In the silence, she moved quickly.

After getting a safe distance away from the castle, she took one more longing glance at her kingdom, thinking about her loved ones who were surely defeated in battle. A horrific image of her father lying in a pool of his own blood came to mind. Cassandra sighed in the darkness. The fate of the kingdom and its people rested in her hands. For a moment, she felt like turning around and forgetting the entire quest. *How can one person save an entire nation?*

Cassandra contemplated this question as she crept across the grounds. Her need to accomplish such a feat seemed almost meaningless if her father were to die. *Would he be disappointed if I gave up? Maybe I'll never know*, she thought sadly. Tears trickled down her face and blurred her vision. She stopped walking to wipe away her sadness. A grunt sounded close by and she realized she stood in plain view.

Two red-robed Delmirths stood right in front of her. Cassandra immediately lowered her head to the ground, attempting to conceal her identity. One of the beings said something in a foreign language. She grunted in a low tone, trying to imitate them.

The heaviest set Delmirth stepped forward and

grunted again. He repeated his strange words. Cassandra didn't answer. He placed a gnarled hand underneath her chin and lifted her face. In an instant, she pulled out her jeweled dagger and swiped it across his hideous face. A putrid smell filled the air as liquid spilled to the ground.

The other Delmirth raised the signal horn and let out a triumphant blow. The night remained quiet for a second, then suddenly a noise in the distance erupted. The enemy approached. Cassandra didn't waste any time and clutched the idol in her hand, but feared revealing what she held.

The two Delmirths backed away from her. A bright light illuminated her garment. They both shouted something and turned to run.

Cassandra threw her dagger and nailed the one in the back. He died instantly. Thankful the creatures were not as fast as her race, she pulled her weapon from its back and caught up with the other Delmirth, slicing her blade across his neck. She looked up and noticed more enemies running down the path toward her. Aware she was outnumbered and couldn't fight them all alone, she ran through dense brush toward the stables and almost slammed into Tor and Blake.

"Your father sent word for us to be prepared to leave. We are here at your service, my lady," Tor said, bowing quickly.

"Your horse, my lady." Blake assisted

Cassandra onto her horse, after which both warriors quickly mounted their own stallions.

Silent commands instructed the horses to follow. The three of them departed the stables just as a horde of Delmirths intercepted their path. Blake withdrew his weapon and slashed at the approaching creatures.

As the princess attempted to assist in battle, Tor ordered, "They will capture you. Ride, Princess! We'll catch up."

Several Delmirths grabbed at her and tried to pull Cassandra from her horse, but a swarm of soldiers defending their land lashed out at them. As she attempted to ride off, a stocky robed figure grabbed her by the leg and nearly yanked her to the ground.

Cassandra quickly pulled out the idol and held it up high. The creatures cowered away at the light.

Her protectors seized the chance to free their princess's horse, snatching their mounts' reins. On the heels of her smaller, but swifter brown palfrey, Tor and Blake left the battle scene, their warhorses charging down the narrow road with their princess in the lead.

The night air chilled her fair skin and the flimsy robe provided no protection against the piercing wind. She ignored her discomfort and guided her horse at full speed.

Powerful gusts of wind told of dragons circling

above their heads. Tor and Blake rode alongside her. When the looming path narrowed, Tor took the lead and Blake rode in the rear with Cassandra safely in the middle. They traveled for several miles until the trees thinned up ahead and left the riders exposed on the open prairie.

Astride a dragon mount, the Delmirth leader tormented the three riders with harsh words and sweeping attempts to capture the princess. The rider swooped low enough for his dragon to claw at her robe. The agile palfrey swerved and the grasping razor sharp talon just missed Cassandra's flesh, but ripped a large hole in her sleeve.

Tor and Blake slashed with their swords. Blake rode near enough and sliced a toe from the foot of the attacking black dragon. Cries of agony tore through the sky.

The angry rider ignored his dragon's pain and jumped from the creature, landing on the back of Cassandra's horse. The startled palfrey whirled and nearly bucked them off, then stood stock-still.

Tor and Blake moved to intervene.

The red-robed rider put a sword to the princess's throat. "If one of you heroes comes near, I'll slit her throat. Drop your weapon, Princess." The heavy dagger fell from her hand. He gripped her tightly around the waist.

Cassandra smelled his putrid breath on her neck. She tried to remain calm and think of a plan.

With the Ruby Idol in her possession, the odds were in her favor.

"Where did you hide it?" The leader moved one hand up her body while his other hand held the sword at her throat. "I want the Ruby Idol. Your ancestors stole what's rightfully ours. I know it has brought your kingdom peace and happiness, but I need it for my people."

"The Ruby Idol belongs to no one!" Tor yelled. "It needs to be brought back to the sacred land."

The Delmirth laughed. "If it is returned to the sacred land, then my people will perish." He cupped her breast in his hand. "The Princess feels nice."

"Get your paws off her!" Tor scowled.

The Delmirth rubbed her breast until her nipple peaked. "You see that? She likes it."

"Stop touching her," Blake warned.

Cassandra sighed against him.

"Jealous?" he laughed. The Delmirth leader squeezed her flesh between his fingers. Captivated by her breasts, he removed his sword from her throat.

In an effort to distract, Cassandra deliberately undid the first three buttons of her robe, leaned down on his arm, which compelled the sword even lower, and allowed him access to her breasts. The Delmirth lowered his head and sucked on one bud, his grunts audible in the quiet. She faked several pants as he licked her nipple with his



rough tongue. With him distracted by her flesh, she subtly motioned her protectors to move in for the kill. It took Tor and Blake a moment to pull their gaze from the scene and obey her orders.

The Delmirth raised his head for a split second and smiled into her pretty face. "I want you, Princess," he whispered, caressing her neck. At that moment, Tor rode in fast and sliced the leader's head off. The loud thwack echoed in the night. Blood splattered the front of Cassandra's robe. They all turned to where the decapitated head lay on the ground, the large green eyes looking up into nothingness.

Without a master, the wounded dragon roared and took to the air.

"That was some plan, Princess," Blake said, riding up to her and retrieving her dagger. "For a moment, we thought you were enjoying it."

"I had to think of something," she said, buttoning up her robe. "I hope I didn't make you jealous?" Their heads turned at the sound of more Delmirths quickly approaching.

"Let's go!" Blake commanded. The three of them took off through the open prairie, riding hard, with danger hovering overhead. The miles passed in a blur. The dragons and their riders continued to pursue. It took all their efforts and skill to hold them at bay. "The forest is up ahead!" Blake shouted.

A fierce dragon pursued Cassandra, its long

talons within inches of grabbing her. Tor managed to catch up with his lady's palfrey and stabbed at the dragon. In retaliation, it breathed fire at him. Tor screamed curses as his clothes ignited. Cassandra turned her head in fright at the sound of his voice.

"Put it out!"

The dragon never stopped its pursuit of the princess. Through the screams of one of her protectors and the flapping of dragon's wings from above, Cassandra focused on her task at hand. She reached into her knapsack and pulled out the idol. The radiance shone brightly into the dark night. Blinded by the radiance, the dragon and rider gave a high-pitched scream, then flew a safe distance away. In the shadows of the night, the trio soon found themselves in a thicket. Tor had managed to quench the fire, but the smell of burnt flesh lingered around them.

"Tor, are you okay?" Cassandra could tell by his silence that he wasn't. "I'll have a look once we stop."

The further they journeyed onward, the denser the woods became. After a long hour of maneuvering horses through the forest, Blake dismounted. "I think we're safe."

"Are you sure?" Cassandra looked at the sky. Thick foliage and sparkling stars filled her vision.

"Yes," Blake replied. "I don't feel their presence nearby." He took her horse's reins and guided

them a little further. The sound of water summoned them.

"Have you been here before?" she asked.

Tor and Blake replied in unison. "Yes."

Once they reached the secluded spot, Tor assisted the princess down from the horse. The men tied the horses to a nearby tree. Cassandra pulled the idol from her knapsack and studied its fine craftsmanship. She lovingly caressed the statue, gazing at it in the moonlight.

"Is something wrong, my lady?" Tor asked.

Cassandra met his questioning glance and nodded. "My father and the kingdom..." She lowered herself to the ground and wept. "They are gone."

Tor and Blake knelt beside her. They both put a comforting arm around her shoulders.

"We don't know that for sure," Blake replied. "Your father could have escaped the Delmirths."

"As for the kingdom," Tor said, "it can be saved."

"How?" she asked. "The Delmirth army has overthrown our kingdom. We don't have enough men to protect our land or people."

Tor rubbed her gently on the back. "We have a strong army. They may not be present at this moment, but they are waiting beyond the lake. That's why it's important we reach them in time. If we can notify them of this upheaval, they will protect the people and give us enough time to

reach our destination." Tor reached for the idol and studied it carefully. "It's amazing that a statue such as this can change the outcome of our lives."

"What do you suggest we do?" Cassandra asked.

"I suggest we rest here for the night, then leave at first light."

Cassandra leaned against Tor's shoulder and sighed.

"Damn that burns!"

She jumped away, then slowly undid his shirt and studied his charred skin. His shoulder and part of his upper arm were singed. "My poor man," she said, touching him softly. "Will you be okay?"

Tor laughed. "I'm a warrior, remember. I've had worse injuries than this."

Blake leaned over and studied the wound. "We've been protectors for your kingdom since we were young. In our combat training, we suffered broken bones, cuts and burns. Tor's injury is minor. Don't worry about us, Princess, we can take care of ourselves. It's you who is our main concern."

Cassandra took the idol from Tor's hand and studied it. "My father has entrusted both of you to watch over me. You have proven over the years to be the best warriors in our land. I feel safe knowing you're in my charge." She wiped her face and gazed at the inviting pool. "Shall we bathe?"

Blake took the idol from her hand and safely stowed it in her bag. He turned to her and smiled. "Let's have a relaxing bath." Tor and Blake approached the shimmering water and felt the temperature with their hands.

"It feels just right," Tor said.

Cassandra got to her feet and unfastened her robe. When the men returned, she stood naked before them. The moon peeked through the clouds and shone down on her. Tor and Blake came up to their princess and escorted her to the pool of water.

"May we wash you?" Blake asked.

Cassandra sighed and lowered herself into the steamy depths. She closed her eyes as the warm water caressed her. "Yes, you can wash me."

Tor and Blake undressed and joined the princess in the pool. She peered at them discreetly when they lowered themselves into the water. Tor and Blake were similar men in many ways. Both had rugged faces, muscled bodies and long blond hair tied back at the neck. The difference being, Blake had brown eyes and Tor had blue.

They sat on opposite sides of her. She felt her insides stir with desire. Cassandra knew she could never have these men sexually, but still longed for their touch.

Blake gently ran his hand down her back. "You're red hair looks lovely in the moonlight," he whispered.

Cassandra smiled.

The princess enjoyed his strong hands on her back. The warm water against her skin eased the tension from her body. "I can't believe I have to do this quest," she sighed in frustration. "I guess with war upon our kingdom, and the idol igniting its power more frequently, it needs to be done."

Tor tenderly washed the blood from her breasts. "Can you imagine what will happen when the idol is returned to its rightful place?"

"What will happen, Tor?" Cassandra asked.

He grinned slyly. "The evil of this world will vanish. The Ruby Idol is the giver of peace and blessings on earth. There will be no more fighting and destruction."

"That would be a sight to behold," she moaned. "Why do the Delmirths want it?"

Blake answered, "The Ruby Idol is calling to its homeland. The Delmirths know if you achieve this, their people will die."

"Why does it have to be me?"

"Have you looked at the idol?" Blake asked. "The carving on the sculpture is you, Cassandra. You're the chosen one to bring peace to this land."

Cassandra lifted her gaze to the night sky and listened to the cry of the dragons. She knew it was her destiny to end the corruption placed upon her family's land. The princess closed her eyes to the gentle touch of her protectors, allowing the evilness to disappear for one night.

## CHAPTER 2

Keidon wiped the remnants of blood from his blade. He had traveled around the countryside fighting the evil Roubands for three weeks. They were fierce green scaled creatures stealing from the poor, and killing innocent people to overtake their land. The last of his enemy died at his feet, its eyes stared blankly up at him. Keidon kicked the creature with his boot. "Dumb bastard!" he said, wiping the blood from his mouth.

Keidon had fought for the freedom of the northern people. The warrior army had assembled and assisted him with slaughtering over two thousand Roubands.

Most of the commoners that were previously locked inside their homes or businesses within the village for protection, emerged.

A middle-aged woman with a small child on her hip approached. "Thank you."

The dirty child stared up at him with innocent big brown eyes. He held out his small frail hand to shake Keidon's hand.

"Nice meeting you, young man."

The boy gave a shy smile.

Keidon glanced around at the smoldering debris. He and his troops had saved most of the area from destruction. Without a second glance at the villagers, Keidon picked up his belongings and slung his knapsack over his shoulder. "Let's head out!" he ordered.

Some of the bolder villagers ran up to the warriors, giving them gifts of gratitude. A few of the women blocked Keidon's path and threw their arms around his neck. He muttered acknowledgments to them and pushed his way through the mob of females.

Keidon had this problem every place he went. Known as the bravest warrior in the land, he also had rugged good looks to compliment his skills—shoulder length brown hair, a beard and mustache, dark eyes and a strong muscled build. When he smiled, he melted the heart of any female and had proven that theory during many encounters with the opposite sex.

His thoughts drifted back...

*One day, after Keidon and his army battled the Delmirths, he met a beautiful woman in the village of Pauge. They killed off the last of the enemy when she emerged from a rundown old house. The instant their gazes met, it was love at first sight. Angelina had long black hair that fell below the waist, fair skin and the biggest brown eyes he ever saw. Mutual understanding passed between them. This woman was different than*



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*the others. Angelina seemed sincere and worked hard as a seamstress and cook to support her ailing sister and younger brother since their parents had died in war.*

*She invited him to stay in their humble surroundings for several days. They talked a lot and became better acquainted. During that time, Keidon formed quite an attachment to her siblings and a strong desire for Angelina. He could feel her connection with him as well. One night, he asked Angelina to marry him. She said yes. Two weeks later, they had a small ceremony in the village, surrounded by family and friends. That night, as they made love for the first time, Angelina lost her virginity to the man she loved. He never forgot how tender and sweet their loving had been.*

*Keidon settled in the village, building a better home for Angelina and her kin. They lived as a happy family for a year, until one day when the Delmirths unexpectedly raided the village. Many lives were lost that night and many people disappeared without a trace, Angelina and her siblings were among them. Since that horrific night six months earlier, Keidon traveled in hopes of finding his beloved and her family.*

*The nightmares plagued his mind. He kept reliving the horrible incident, wondering if he could have saved them if he'd done something differently. Keidon and the Delmirth leader, Holton Noorse, battled it out with swords. They were the only two left standing in a bloody battle for survival. The other warriors either fled or were killed, leaving the area deserted. What few villagers remained had hidden among the ruins.*

*Angelina and her family were with them.*

*Holton eyed Keidon with hatred and rage. For years, the warriors and Delmirth army battled. The one fought for the freedom of all people, the other for destruction of the earth. Keidon wanted to see these creatures die. He was tired of constantly defending his people, of the death and loss of land.*

*Keidon raised his sword and equally matched Holton's strikes. They were both strong and very skilled in the art of fighting. The warrior effortlessly danced around the Delmirth, striking a terrible blow to his skull. The creature howled in pain. A blue liquid leaked from the side of his head. Injured and angry, Holton swung fast and furiously, barely missing him. It had taken all Keidon's skill and training as a warrior to avoid death.*

*By the time the afternoon sun set in the sky, Keidon was tired. His entire body ached. He knew his enemy felt equally weak though they continued to fight with perseverance. Keidon's guard slipped and the Delmirth swung his sword. It struck him across the chest. The warrior fell hard to the ground and screamed in agony.*

*The Delmirth approached Keidon, ready to finish the job.*

*"No!" Angelina cried from the shadows.*

*A wicked smile on his face, the Delmirth left Keidon to die on the ground. Keidon watched in horror as the creature approached his house. Cries for help could be heard from where he lay. When he looked up, Holton had a sword to their backs and ordered them to climb onto his dragon.*

*“Angelina!” Keidon screamed. “No!”*

*She called back words he couldn’t decipher. The kids cried for help. Keidon attempted to get to his feet and rescue them, but collapsed in agony. The rush of the dragon’s wings fanned him. The continual cries of his loved ones faded into the sky as he watched helplessly from where he lay. There wasn’t a damn thing he could do. Keidon couldn’t walk.*

*Hours later, he managed to crawl to his house, found his medicine bag and patched himself up the best he could. That night he heard voices whisper around him and, peering into the darkness, noticed two bulky shapes hovering over him. A cool cloth settled on his forehead, another over his wound. He grimaced at the stabbing pain across his chest. Everything went black.*

*Keidon woke to the sound of familiar voices. Delirious from his pain, he looked up and found two men sitting by his bed – Lund McKenzie, a young warrior in his army, and a doctor by the name of Mark Styne. Both of these men served and worked for the good of mankind. Keidon had great respect for them. Lund, a young blond man in his early twenties, had deep blue eyes and an irresistible smile. He was known as a ladies man by many of his colleagues. Mark, who was older, had gray around his temples, dark glasses and curly brown hair. Mark remained single due to his shyness around women. Keidon and Lund had tried to set him up with women on several occasions, only to have their efforts backfire.*

*“Where am I?” Keidon shifted.*

The doctor placed a cloth on his forehead. "You're at home. Don't you recognize it?"

Keidon opened his eyes a little wider and groaned.

"You have a terrible wound. I've used all the medicine I can. It needs time to heal."

"How did you find me?"

Mark leaned over and grabbed Keidon's hand. "We came back to see if there were any casualties. That's when we found you."

"Lucky for me," he moaned.

"You need to rest for a few days. I'm going to keep watch and see that it happens. Where are your wife and the kids?" Mark asked. "I couldn't find them anywhere. Were they taken to safety?"

Keidon's eyes widened at the mention of his loved ones. "The bastard...he took them." The two men glanced at each other in horror.

"We're sorry to hear that," Mark said, patting his hand. "If there is anything we can do for you..."

Keidon was never one to argue with the doctor, still he couldn't just lie there while his family suffered. He tried to raise himself up, only to fall back promptly. A groan left his lips.

"There's nothing you can do in your state," Lund said. "If it will make you feel better, I'll go search the area for them."

"They won't be in the area," Keidon growled. "The bastards took them..." He had difficulty finishing his sentence. The memory of his wife and her siblings constricted his throat.

"I'll search the area," Lund replied.

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*Keidon watched helplessly as the young warrior left the room.*

*In the hours that followed, Mark stayed true to his promise and kept a close eye on him. He tended Keidon's wounds and made him hot soup. Days later, he regained strength enough to continue on his travels. Mark and Lund accompanied Keidon in hunting down the enemy and attempting to find his loved ones. Keidon couldn't stop thinking about Angelina. Every day since the tragedy, he prayed that by some miracle she was still alive.*

His mind came back to the moment.

As Keidon defeated invaders in other villages, the women caressed and kissed him, tempting him with their bodies. He needed release, but didn't want to be unfaithful to Angelina, presuming she were still alive. In the back of his mind, he knew she must be dead. Keidon had a gift for seeing into the future. When he thought of Angelina, he saw a deep dark void. He kept telling himself that some day she would miraculously return. As the days, weeks and months went by, he found himself alone. Keidon walked to the outskirts of the village. His horse grazed safely in a patch of lush grass.

"What are you thinking about?" Lund asked.

He turned his attention to the man who was twenty-one and full of energy. "I've been thinking about all these damn wars we fight. When will it end?"

Lund shrugged his shoulders, his gaze on the ground.

"I'm also thinking about Angelina. If I had only known about the hidden sanctuaries when I first met her, I could have kept her from harm. Every time we protect a new village, I hope I'll find her there. Is that so wrong?"

"It's not wrong, boss, but I think you need to move on with your life. You've got to stop living in the past and look at what you have right in front of you."

Keidon looked up at Lund, then his gaze moved past him to two women staring at him from across the street. They were both attractive and trying to lure him with their low cut dresses.

"They want you," Lund whispered. "If you don't take them, I will."

He needed a woman, that much was true. Would he ever find his wife or was he living on false hope? "You take them, I'll pass."

"You can have one and I'll take the other."

"No," Keidon said firmly. "As much as I like sex, I want something more than that. I want to have a relationship, something real. Do you understand?"

"I think I do."

"I'll wait until she comes along. If I can't find my wife, I'm hoping to find love with one woman. She must be out there," he said, scanning the horizon. "I just wish I knew where."

## CHAPTER 3

Cassandra lay against Blake's chest and listened to his heartbeat while nestled comfortably between her two protectors. She stirred from her slumber and looked up at the clear sky. Morning brought a new day. She sat up and glanced at Blake and Tor nestled under their blankets. They looked so peaceful lying there as if they didn't have a care in the world. She pulled her blankets down and grabbed her knapsack by her side. The Ruby Idol was safely stowed in the pouch. Reaching in with care, she lifted it out and stared at it in awe. A red glow shone all around her. "This is amazing," she whispered.

Tor rolled over and opened his eyes to the sound of her voice. "What is it, Princess?" He immediately sat up and stared at the red radiance. Tor nudged Blake in the side. They both gaped at its magical powers.

"It wants to go home," Blake suggested. "We need to make that happen."

Sun shone brightly in the sky, radiating its heat

upon them. The three of them had breakfast soon after. Tor cooked a wild rabbit, roasting it over an open fire. Blake had brought some provisions with him including bread, cheese and fruit.

"This is wonderful," Cassandra said, eating her third slice of bread.

"I wish we could enjoy the pleasure of your company more often," Tor commented.

"How special would it be if we did this all the time?" Cassandra asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I think I could handle it."

They all laughed. Cassandra finished her meal, then frowned at her protectors.

"What's bothering you, Princess?" Blake asked.

Cassandra met their questioning faces. "I'm to marry a prince according to the law. There's a lot riding on my decisions. My quest needs to be complete as soon as possible. If I don't return the Ruby Idol to the sacred land and remain a virgin, we'll all be doomed."

Tor and Blake both put a comforting arm around her shoulders. "You'll do it. We'll help you."

"Promise?"

"Yes," Tor said, kissing her gently on the lips.

Cassandra settled herself onto his lap and nestled her head against his shoulders. She closed her eyes to the feel of his gentle hands on her back. "I wish you guys were princes," she sighed.



"Why, would you marry us both?" Blake asked cheerfully.

"I wish I could. I love you."

"That you do," Tor agreed with a smile.

"What if everything goes terribly wrong? What will become of us?"

Blake grabbed her hand and squeezed it tight. "We'll not fail you, my fair Princess."

She laughed at the way he said it. Cassandra knew she could count on them. "I don't want to marry a man I don't love," she said. "If I have to marry one of these stupid, incompetent losers, I'll scream."

"We'll help you find the prince of your dreams, then you can live happily ever after," Blake replied.

As they finished breakfast, a loud screech sounded from above. The three of them packed their belongings, knowing the enemy circled the area searching for their whereabouts.

Tor assisted Cassandra onto her horse. The two men mounted their own steeds. Cries grew louder, the flapping of wings nearing.

"I think they've found us," Blake called, leading the group through the thicket.

Cassandra glanced up to see four black scaly dragons fly above. The trees were dense around them, creating a safe haven for the moment. The men slowed their horses and looked at each other, deciding what to do.

"The Lake of Shellan is a day's ride from here. My wooden boat is tied to the dock," Tor said. "If we can make it there and cross the lake..."

"How the hell are we to cross the lake?" Blake asked. "The Delmirths will easily overturn our boat."

"Why not wait until nightfall?" Cassandra suggested. "They have poor night vision, don't they?"

"She's got a point," Blake agreed. "We'll continue to travel through this damn forest. It might take us longer, but making it there alive is what matters."

Cassandra lifted her gaze to the heavens. Four large shadows hovered overhead. The dragons screeched again. She covered her ears at the noise. "Let's get out of here."

Blake commanded his horse to continue. The others followed his lead. Brambles tangled them up and slowed their process, but the cries of dragons eventually faded when the forest thickened even more.

"I think we lost them," Tor said.

"At least for now," Blake replied gratefully.

With the Delmirths out of range, the three of them enjoyed each other's company. Tor and Blake related to Cassandra some of their past adventures.

"I can't believe you got lost in the woods for three days!" Cassandra laughed. "I thought you

were experienced warriors?"

Blake grumbled. "Experienced warriors, but not experienced navigators."

"How did you find your way out?" Cassandra asked.

Tor continued. "We rode around in circles for a few hours, then realized we were doing it. That's when my stomach led the way."

Cassandra grinned. "Your what?"

"My stomach. We hadn't had a home cooked meal in days and my stomach never steers me wrong. That's when we found this village filled with wine, women and song."

"So you drank, ate and what else?"

Tor gave a devilish grin. "This village had a fine saloon. Inside were two of the most luscious, big breasted women we'd ever laid gazes on."

Cassandra felt her insides twitch. She wanted sex. "What did you do with these women?"

Blake spoke up. "We had amazing sex with them"

Cassandra wanted to know more. "What does it feel like to be inside a woman?"

Tor smiled. "It's the best sensation in the world."

"Really?"

"Yes, Princess."

"I wish I could find out soon."

"You will, Princess. Once you find your prince, you'll have a man inside you."

"Stop talking about it," she scolded.

As Tor moved his horse further back, he caught a glimpse of movement in the trees. His eyes widened in terror and a sound escaped his lips. Blake and Cassandra stopped riding to stare at him.

"What is it?" they both asked.

"I thought I saw something," he said, squinting. "It's large and black."

Blake smiled. "It's probably a bird or something."

Tor took one more glance at the trees, then shrugged his shoulders. "You're probably right. Let's go!" He tugged on the reins and his horse continued.

Cassandra caught a glimpse of movement about a hundred yards from where they rode. Uneasiness settled in her stomach. They were being watched. "Blake," she whispered.

"Yes, darling. What can I do for you?" Blake turned his head and his brows rose.

"Tor is right. There is something in those trees. I swear I saw two of them."

Blake's eyes narrowed, following the direction her finger pointed. There in the woods two sets of red, angry eyes stared back. "What the hell is that?"

The men withdrew their swords.

"What about the princess?" Tor asked.

Blake glanced into Cassandra's dazzling green

eyes. "You stay here and we'll take care of this."

"But —"

"No buts," Blake said, leaning over to kiss her lips. "Stay here, okay?"

Cassandra wanted to argue, but thought better of it. She held her horse back and watched as her protectors moved toward the black snarling creatures. The dark shadows obscured her vision. The sudden clashing of swords startled her. Cassandra decided to wait until the men had killed whatever it was that they dueled. She would look at the dead carcass after.

A loud roar thundered through the clearing. Cassandra jumped down from her horse. This sounded serious. She sneaked closer and watched Blake and Tor take stabs at an ugly black animal. It had large fanged teeth, red eyes, a massive black body and two large horns growing from the top of its head.

She covered her mouth to stifle a scream. The animal charged at Tor and missed its mark, its horn stuck in the trunk of a tree. It grunted and clawed at the soft earth to free itself. Tor and Blake took this opportunity to charge, sticking their blades into its side. The animal squealed. Cassandra covered her ears. She had seen and heard enough. As she turned around to retrieve her horse, another set of angry eyes glared back at her.

With a swallow, Cassandra looked the ugly

creature square in the eye. Without lowering her defenses, she drew and held her dagger in front of her for protection. Steam wafted from its nostrils. Red eyes glared at her, hungry for the kill. She was about to defend herself, when Tor and Blake rode onto the scene. The beast got angrier, its claws pawing the earth, ready to charge at any moment.

“Stay calm,” Blake warned. “Make eye contact.”

Sweat trickled down Cassandra’s back as her two protectors dismounted their horses and slowly walked toward her, but never made it close enough. Without warning, it lunged and knocked her to the ground, her dagger pointed outwards. The blade stuck in its eye. She shrieked as sharp fangs sank into her arm.

Blake and Tor were quick to react, stabbing at it with daggers. The beast barred its sharp teeth down on her arm and her blood oozed from its mouth.

She cringed when a large green goop dripped from her blade onto her red robe. Cassandra felt as if she were about to suffocate, the heaviness of the creature weighing down upon her.

Blake ruthlessly stabbed it again. This time it lay still. “Cassandra, darling, are you all right?”

She couldn’t speak. The weight of the animal constricted her breathing.

“We need to release its jaws from her arm!”

Blake and Tor stood on either side of the beast

and yanked at the drooling mouth. Their hands slipped several times, the sharp fangs cut into their fingers.

"I...can't...breathe," she panted.

"Hold on, darling!"

The warriors pried with all their strength. The jaws slowly broke apart. Once they'd freed her arm, the men had to work on their next task.

"Here, help me get this bastard off her!" Blake demanded.

The two heaved and grunted, pushing the animal from her entrapped body. Tor and Blake immediately kneeled by her side.

"Are you okay?"

Cassandra looked from one man to the other and nodded.

Blake examined her wounds. "This looks bad. We need to clean it up. Tor, grab my knapsack."

She lay in the coolness of the woods and looked up at the thick trees. It was difficult to see the sky from here. The sound of the dragons had returned. Their cries resounded over the treetops. As she waited for her protectors to clean her wounds, she wondered what other obstacles they'd have to endure before their quest was complete.

## CHAPTER 4

Mark met Keidon outside the village gates an hour later. The men were immersed in deep conversation. Lund joined them soon after. They watched the young man as he walked across the grounds, tucking in his shirt and zipping up his pants, a sly smile on his face.

"I take it you had a pleasant romp?" Keidon asked.

Two young women peered through the window at them.

Lund looked past Keidon and noticed supplies packed on his horse. "You're leaving us?"

"I have to go home. I'm tired." Keidon saw his disappointment. "Listen man, I'm sure our paths will cross again."

Lund looked close to tears. "I guess you're right. War is inevitable, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

Keidon stuck out his hand to shake. "It was nice fighting with you again."

Lund shook his hand. "You're the best warrior."



There has been rumor of your greatness across the land. If you keep this up, you could be crowned the greatest warrior that ever lived."

Keidon felt his face flush at the compliment. "You're too generous. If anyone should be crowned for their greatness, it would be you guys. The minute I need assistance, I know I can always count on both of you." The three of them stood awkwardly. "I'll have you over some time," Keidon said. "You haven't seen my cabin since I built it."

Mark's eyes lit up.

"That's a great idea!" Lund said. "We could sit around and maybe rekindle old times."

Keidon nodded in agreement, then glanced directly at Lund when he spoke. "You take care and stay out of trouble."

Mark patted his broad shoulder. "Go find yourself a good woman, settle down and have a few kids."

"I'd like that," Keidon replied. "The problem lies in finding that good woman."

They made small talk for a few minutes, then Keidon mounted his steed, tipped his hat to his fellow men and rode off. Many people were curious and peered from doorways and windows, making him feel self-conscious. Lund was right—these people seldom had a stranger in town. Their gazes followed him until he cleared the village.

Keidon commanded his horse to ride faster and

the mount obliged. The hot sun beat down and made the journey uncomfortable. After several hours, he stopped at a secluded area with lush trees and a river. Keidon jumped down from his horse, then led the stallion by the reins to the water. His thirsty steed slurped up the cold liquid.

“Drink all you can, Dusty. We have a long road ahead of us.”

Keidon got down on his hands and knees. He splashed cold water onto his sunburned skin and instantly felt refreshed. Cupping his hands into the water, he drank greedily, the coldness trickling down his dry throat. After he’d had enough to drink and filled his canteen, Keidon stripped off his shirt. The sweat trickled down his body. He dipped the garment into the river and soaked it thoroughly.

“Hello!”

Keidon turned around, surprised by the intrusion. A beautiful woman stood alone by the river’s edge with her horse. She smiled and drew near. “Who are you?”

Keidon wrung his shirt out and squinted up at her beautiful face. “I’m Keidon Roke.”

The woman’s eyes widened at the sound of his name. “The Great Warrior?” she exclaimed. “I’ve heard so much about you!”

Keidon studied the slender woman. She wore a white dress that ended just above her knees. His gaze traveled upward to her breasts. The nipples

stood erect through the thin material. Keidon pulled his gaze away from the tempting mounds and met her eyes. They were the color of the sky. The woman's long blonde hair hung past her shoulder, her smile dazzled.

"I'm Elizabeth," she said, kneeling to his level. "You're trespassing on my property."

"Your property?" he asked.

She grinned and turned, pointing at a small house on a hill. "That's mine," she added.

Keidon stood quickly and attempted to put his shirt on.

Elizabeth stopped him. "Please, don't."

He had one arm in his sleeve when she grabbed the material in her hand and pulled it back off. "What are you doing, miss?"

"I want to look upon your masculine body. Maybe touch and kiss it."

Keidon saw the lust in the woman's eyes. "Who are you again? Do you usually come on to strange men?"

She flashed him a dazzling smile. He couldn't help but think of those luscious red lips on his privates.

"I'm Elizabeth Sage. And yes, I usually come on to strange men. It's my profession."

He had never slept with a harlot before. "Is business good out here?"

She ran her hand up and down his masculine chest. "I get a lot of riders who stop by the river.

This is a good place to rest up and have a drink, among other things."

Keidon wanted to stop her from going any further. He couldn't have intercourse with this woman, his conscience wouldn't allow him. What if his wife were still alive? The thought had never left his mind.

"What would you like me to do for you?" Elizabeth lowered the top of her dress and exposed her large nipples.

He felt his cock harden at the sight of her flesh.

"What's the matter, warrior? Are you scared?" Elizabeth moved closer.

Her exposed mounds pressed against his chest, the hard nipples rubbing his skin. Elizabeth grabbed his right hand and guided it to one of the aroused peaks. His fingers circled the enlarged nipple, toying with it. Keidon suddenly pulled away and avoided her gaze.

Elizabeth grabbed him by the arm and turned him to face her. "What the hell is your problem? You arouse me, then not perform?"

"It's not you, it's me. I can't stop thinking about someone..."

"Are you married?"

Keidon nodded. "I'm sorry."

Elizabeth took a deep breath and composed herself. "Don't be. You're an honorable man to turn away from a willing woman."

This time Keidon pulled on his shirt. He

buttoned it up to cover his battle scars.

She straightened her dress and primed herself for her next customer. "If you ever change your mind, you know where I live."

He tipped his hat to the woman and mounted his horse. Keidon was about to ride off when he noticed three riders on the horizon.

"It looks like I have customers," she said.

"Are you sure?"

The woman stood and waited for the men to draw near. Keidon waited with her to make sure it wasn't an enemy. When they approached, the men eyed the woman with lust. She returned the favor. Keidon knew these men weren't villainous, but riders stopping for a drink by the creek and a romp with the whore. They all dismounted their horses and acknowledged Keidon who waved politely to them. The men guided their horses to the river and knelt to the ground. Keidon watched them drink eagerly.

"Hot day out, isn't it?"

Keidon and Elizabeth agreed. The men gazed up from their drink and studied her curves. She lowered her top to show off her massive breasts. The three riders whispered amongst themselves until the youngest got to his feet and stood before her.

"My name is Steven," he said nervously. "I'm nineteen."

Elizabeth smiled back. "Is this your first time?"

The young man nodded.

"You came to the right place, darling." She guided his hands to her breasts. "They don't bite."

Steven massaged the massive mounds. The two riders became voyeurs and encouraged him. She slid the dress from her body and stood naked in front of the three men. Keidon couldn't find the strength to leave the scene. The riders by the water whistled.

"Do you want oral or intercourse?"

Steven stood undecided. "Both?"

The men by the water laughed. "Go for it!"

The youngest found the courage to pull Elizabeth to the ground with him. She quickly pulled his penis out and sucked on him. Steven screamed his pleasure. "That feels good!"

Another guy loosened his pants and knelt to the ground behind her. He inserted his cock into her pussy. He rammed himself hard against her. She cried out in excitement. The third man watched and eagerly waited for his turn.

Keidon pulled his gaze away. He listened to their groans of pleasure as he rode and wondered how many men passed by the river in a day and how much money she actually made. He thought it must be a substantial amount for her to live alone in a rather nice house.

He journeyed onward, anxious to go home and put his feet up. Five hours into his trip without interruptions or unexpected delays, he looked

upon his cabin. It was situated all alone in the woods surrounded by wildlife and a lake. He took a deep breath. Keidon had been away from home too frequently, the evidence was apparent in his unkempt yard.

“Come on, Dusty,” he called. “Let’s go!”

The horse moved swiftly. As they approached, Keidon dismounted and took in the glorious sights. He suddenly felt at peace. This is where he belonged and nothing could make him leave his humble abode.

## CHAPTER 5

Cassandra remained quiet for the remainder of the journey. The encounter with the black beasts scared her enough to see the dangers of this trip.

"Are you all right, Princess?" Blake asked, concerned.

"Is there anything I can do to cheer you up?" Tor added.

The princess shook her head. "I told you, I'm fine. I never realized how dangerous this was going to be. For some reason, I thought it would be easier."

Blake laughed. "Nothing is easy, my love, especially when it involves a quest such as this."

"Thank you," she whispered, her voice breaking with emotion.

"For what?" the men asked.

"If it weren't for you guys, I'd be dead. I want to thank you for risking your own lives for me."

Blake and Tor both had tears in their eyes when she said this.



"We would do anything for you, Princess," Tor replied, grabbing her hand. They rode their horses side by side. "How does your arm feel?"

"It's healing just fine thanks to the medicine you applied."

"Let's say once we cross the lake we have a special night."

Cassandra's eyes lit up. "What do you have in mind?"

"I was thinking of swimming in the lake and dinner by a fire."

"I would really like that."

The three of them continued to move through the woods. After a few hours of travel, they dismounted their horses for a light snack. The forest of trees thinned up ahead and allowed them a full view of the lake.

"There it is!" Cassandra exclaimed.

The warriors gazed out on the horizon. The sound of dragon's wings circling the area whispered over the treetops.

"They are waiting for us," Tor said, settling himself on the ground. "When we emerge, they will pounce."

Cassandra sat down next to him. "I have a bad feeling about this trip. Somehow I think we'll fail."

"Fail? How can you even suggest that?" Tor pulled away from her.

"I'm sorry, but the enemy is very powerful."

"And what are we?" Blake asked, grabbing

food from his satchel.

"You don't have faith in us, or in yourself," Tor griped. "Don't forget the Ruby Idol wants to be in its final resting place."

Cassandra glanced at her horse and noticed the idol glowed through her bag. "I'm sorry," she said. "The Delmirths are dangerous creatures and have a strong leader to guide them."

Tor shook his head in disgust. "And we have the strongest warriors in the world. For your information, two of them are sitting beside you!"

"We didn't have to come along and protect you, Princess," Blake stated. "We could have left you to do it alone. Tor and I risk our lives for you all the time and this is the thanks we get!" Blake handed Tor some bread and cheese. He passed the remaining food to Cassandra. The warriors seemed to be at odds with her. They began to converse among themselves and deliberately left her out of the conversation.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "Please forgive me. I lost my faith for a moment."

The men laughed about a funny situation they had encountered on their travels.

Cassandra placed the food on the ground and stood. She grabbed the reins of her horse, contemplating whether to leave them. The tears welled up in her eyes. "Won't you forgive me?" she asked again. When she turned around the two men had stopped talking to look at her.

"What are you doing?" Blake asked.

"If you refuse to forgive me, I'll leave without you."

Tor and Blake laughed. "You can't survive without us, Princess," Tor replied. "You may have combat training, but you're no match for the Delmirths."

Cassandra pulled out her heavy dagger and studied it in the light. "I think I'll manage fine on my own." She placed the dagger back into its sheath, about to mount her palfrey, when Tor grabbed her arm.

"Don't go, my lady." Tor held her close in his arms for a moment, then broke the contact.

Cassandra busied herself with the preparation of her horse while the men packed up their provisions in silence. The sound of dragon's wings and curses could be heard up above. "They're waiting for us," she whispered.

Darkness had set in and created an eerie atmosphere. Blake helped Cassandra onto her horse and listened for the enemy. "Remember, they have poor night vision."

"Thank goodness," Tor replied.

They all sat on their horses with swords and daggers at the ready. On Blake's command, the three took off through the forest to fight the Delmirths. The moment they emerged from the forest, the dragons were on them. The riders flailed their swords. Tor and Blake took the brunt

of the battle and protected Cassandra from their wrath.

“Go, Princess, to the boat!” Tor screamed.

Cassandra jumped when a dragon nicked her arm and turned in midair to take another swipe. Blake and Tor fought numerous Delmirths. She wanted to assist them in battle, but they yelled at her.

“Leave, Princess!” Tor cried.

Blake had decapitated another Delmirth. Its head rolled to her feet.

“But—”

“We’ll find you on the other side, we promise!”

Cassandra noticed more dragons and riders come in for a landing. The enemy jumped down from their dragons and battled the warriors on land. Several ran toward her.

“Go!” the men shouted.

The princess obeyed this time. Her horse galloped at a good clip until she reached the dock and climbed down from her steed. A wooden boat tied to the dock garnered her attention. Cassandra untied the rope and pushed the boat into the heavy current. Climbing into the vessel, she grabbed the paddles and maneuvered the boat into the darkness. The shouts of the Delmirths drew closer. They laughed and shouted something she didn’t understand.

She paddled hard and managed to get far enough away, certain they could never catch her

except by air. Cassandra rowed with all her might and watched the angry Delmirths gather on the beach. They shouted obscenities at her. A dart sailed in her direction and pierced her upper arm. Her cry of pain filled the air as she tried to pull the wretched thing from her skin. The sharp edge was deep and the blood made it slick. Cassandra gripped it tight and yanked it free. After a few good tugs, the dart let go, except for the end of the tip that was still trapped inside her arm. Blood oozed from the wound, its flow impeded only by the embedded tip.

It wasn't until the moon shone through the clouds that she got a good look at the poisonous dart. Cassandra had used these darts to defeat many of her enemies. She knew in order to survive she needed medicine soon. There wasn't much time—four hours at the most. With a deep breath, she forced herself to remain calm. If she panicked, the poison would work its way through her body that much sooner.

Through the shadows, Cassandra saw the apparent new leader shout orders to his army. She had visions of them pursuing her through the sky and braced herself for what was yet to come.

Picking up the paddles, she remained strong and concentrated on her mission—to find land as soon as possible. As the hour wore on, she felt herself weaken. Her arms wouldn't cooperate. The strength left her body. She touched her sweaty

forehead and closed her eyes to the consuming dizziness. The dark waves that lapped against the boat had made her seasick. Cassandra leaned over the side of the craft and retched. The world spun around faster and faster. She tried to pick up the oars, determined to find land. The oars fell from her hands. She leaned back in her seat and held her head, moaning. The boat rocked unsteadily in the wind. Clouds obscured the moon and Cassandra found herself in total darkness.

A strong gust of wind blew across the lake. Cassandra screamed in terror as the boat rocked dangerously back and forth. She held on tight to the edges as the waves increased with force. From out of the darkness, the sound of dragon's wings soared above her.

Thankful the dragon's sight was as poor as the Delmirth's, she swallowed another bout of vile. The wind and waves grew stronger. Fearful of losing it, Cassandra placed her knapsack around her shoulders.

The dragons fought against the wind in their attempt to fly across the water, only to be pulled back by the forces of nature. Flashes of lightning appeared in the distance, accompanied by rolling thunder. Tiny droplets of rain fell. Within minutes, the storm intensified and the rain became a torrential downpour. The waves pitched the boat precariously.

A large wave came out of nowhere and headed

straight for the boat. It hit head on. The wooden craft flipped over. Cassandra struggled to the surface and gripped what she soon realized was the boat seat.

She felt along the length of the wooden boat, made her way to the edge and dipped under only long enough to surface. She held onto the overturned boat with all of her strength. Her arms tired and her head spun as the storm pounded all around her. The dingy hit a rock and splintered. With the last remnant of her sanctuary disappearing below the surface, she gave up.

## CHAPTER 6

Visions of a battered boat and a woman's cries for help, jerked him awake and to the front door of his cabin. Stormy weather ignored, Keidon headed barefoot to the water lapping angrily at the shore. The instant the cold waves slapped his skin, his entire body numbed, but he kept his eyes on the horizon.

Waves swept over his head and he gasped for breath. *If I don't find this woman soon...* Strong currents threatened to drag him down, but he pushed onward, fighting the pounding waves, high winds and pelting rain. Something moved in the dark. A small boat. Keidon swam toward it, determined to rescue the woman. As he neared the object, a huge wave rose above him and pulled him underwater.

Murky depths closed over his head and the tow of the waves pushed him even lower. Keidon didn't want to die this way and forced his body to surface. When he emerged, the partial remains of a boat floated past him.



A cry for help sounded in the distance. Keidon followed the voice. Flashes of lightning silhouetted a woman clinging to a rock. Her fingers slipped from the surface. Desperate, he swept an arm around her waist and dragged her against his body.

Nervous, Keidon prayed she wouldn't die in his arms. Her eyes were closed and she rest limp against him. The dead weight slowed his, but he kept himself afloat, riding the strong current to shore. He kicked and paddled with his one arm. When his feet felt earth, he staggered to the beach and collapsed onto the sand, the woman beside him.

Keidon ripped open her robe and placed his ear to her chest. Lack of breath and heartbeat settled fear's spidery fingers around him. Knowledgeable of first aid, he tilted her head back, pinched her nose and started mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Keidon worked quickly, placed his lips firmly against hers and blew into her mouth, then proceeded with chest compressions. The woman coughed and sputtered.

He rolled her onto her side, allowing her to clear water from her lungs. When the woman breathed several normal breaths, he scooped her into his arms and carried her to his cabin. Once inside, he laid her gently on the bed and kindled a fire. The blaze warmed the room as he scrutinized the fragile beauty lying peacefully on his bed

covers. The garment she wore unsettled him. Keidon had seen similar robes many times in his travels. *Why the hell is this beautiful woman wearing a disgusting Delmirth robe?*

A dagger's handle gleamed from the scabbard at her waist and cast an array of colors around the room. He unsheathed the weapon and held it up to the light. The jeweled dagger glimmered. *Where did this woman obtain a legendary blade?* Keidon had seen a few of these in his travels, but only in the hands of royalty. *Is she royalty, or did she steal it? Maybe she is on the run from authorities and that's how she got shipwrecked?*

With plenty of questions to ask, he held the mighty dagger in his hand and enjoyed the feel of its weight. This weapon was worth a fortune. Keidon sliced the blade through the air and listened to the threatening sound it made, positive this dagger killed a few enemies in its time. After testing the blade with his skilled moves, he set it on the desk.

Back at the woman's side, he wrinkled his nose at the putrid smell that wafted in the air. Apparently, she had been on quite the adventure. Aside from the blood, there was large rips in the material and several stains—one of a wild animal, the other semen. Keidon hoped the last smell wasn't correct. As he placed his nose to the robe, he knew his senses didn't deceive. *Maybe she has a lover or is married? Could it be Delmirth cum?* He

tossed the nasty image from his mind.

Keidon studied her carefully and tried to piece together the evidence. This lovely woman lying on his bed couldn't possibly be an enemy. The Delmirths were ugly, smelly looking creatures, with gray skin and big green eyes. She definitely wasn't a Delmirth.

In the dim light of the fire, an attraction for her flared. Keidon went to the kitchen, filled a washbasin with warm water, then grabbed bandages and antiseptic. He approached the bed and tended her head wound. A deep gash blemished her temple. Gentle, he cleaned and dressed the wound, then started to undress her. He lowered the wet robe below her breasts and gasped in shock. Her right arm had an ugly infection from where a dart had hit, the tip still trapped inside. Keidon had seen these kinds of wounds before. The poison, if left too long, could kill in a matter of hours.

Briskly, he rose from the bed and crossed to his dresser. Keidon fumbled through the medical bag he carried with him on all his adventures. He pulled out a pair of small-nosed pliers, a needle, a bottle of antiseptic and a medicine bottle with serum to control the spread of the poison. Keidon carefully inserted the pliers into the wound in search of the tip.

Confident in his own skills, he patiently worked. Moments later, the pliers bumped metal.

Slowly, he pulled the tip out and dropped it into a basin, set aside the small tool, filled the syringe with medicine and stuck the thin needle into her upper arm. Gently, he rubbed the infected area with a sponge, then bandaged the wound.

Keidon finished undressing the woman. With the wet robe pulled from her body, he held the disgusting material at arm's length. Not wanting a Delmirth robe in his house, he went to the front door and threw it onto the trash heap to be burned later. As he entered the house, lust ignited in his blood. Unable to help himself, his gaze roamed over her irresistible body, from her large firm breasts to below the waist. He wanted her bad.

Hesitant, he approached the bed for a closer look. If he were a real scoundrel, he'd take her while she was unconscious, but loyalty and honor forbade such. Even though the thought was almost irresistible, he knew he'd never be able to go through with it. His gaze explored her tantalizing curves right down to the mound at the juncture of her thighs. Aroused, Keidon knew he couldn't do anything about his animal urges and draped a soft, warm buffalo hide blanket across her body.

With temptation covered, he paced the room. *Who is she?* Keidon rubbed his chin thoughtfully, then remembered something dropped from her shoulders when he dragged her ashore. He rushed out into the dark night to the spot where he had

resuscitated her. Searching the shoreline, he spotted a bulge in the sand. Keidon grabbed the bag and hurried back to his cabin.

He set the knapsack onto the kitchen table, opened the main pouch and stuck his hand inside. His fingers latched onto something silky. Pulling it out, he held it up and gasped at the beautiful red dress with its low bodice and long flowing skirt. Carefully, he placed the dress over a chair and reached back into the bag. This time his hands grasped something solid. He pulled out the heavy object and his mouth dropped at the sight. The red idol glowed in the shadows.

He heard about this idol and recognized it as the Ruby Idol—the giver of peace and prosperity. *What in hell's name is she doing with it?* Keidon peered at the idol and shuddered. The woman staring back at him resembled the one lying on his bed. A strong desire to shake the beautiful woman until she awakened flitted across his mind, but opted to wait until she regained consciousness of her own accord. He studied the fine markings on the idol one last time, then grudgingly placed it back into her bag. *Who is this woman and why did she carry with her a valuable dagger and that idol?*

Certain he hadn't missed anything, he was about to close the pouch when he spotted a hidden side pocket. Ever wary, he grabbed onto something rather soft and worn. Carefully he pulled out the folded paper. The wet object was

fragile. As he spread it on the table, his eyes widened at his findings. *The map to the Sunken Islands.*

His gaze traveled across the map and followed the red dots that led to where the Ruby Idol was said to be. *This can't be the Ruby Idol stashed in her bag? The Ruby Idol is unattainable. The land is sacred.* Keidon had heard about many men who tried to claim the idol out of greed and never made it back alive. The Sunken Islands were in the middle of a desert with nothing around for miles.

Keidon pieced together the puzzle. Black X's on the map caught his attention. They were warning signs, possible booby traps. Familiar with maps like this one and with the markings, he stared long and hard. Tired, he grudgingly folded the map and placed it back where he found it.

Standing by the fire, he undid his trousers. Naked in the fire's glow, the heat penetrated his chilled skin. Warmth made him drowsy. Keidon grabbed another blanket from a nearby shelf and set up a makeshift bed on the floor. Before climbing under the covers, he leaned over the radiant beauty with the flaming red hair and felt her forehead. The serum was working. Her breathing appeared normal and color had returned to her face.

Keidon was curious about the color of her eyes. Hadn't he been looking for a woman to fulfill his days with companionship and his nights with

love? *This could be her*, he thought, stroking her forehead.

He settled beneath the makeshift bed covers. “Goodnight, my fair lady,” he whispered.

Keidon rolled over onto his side so his body faced hers. He stared up at her still form. He knew that tonight he’d have sweet dreams of the woman lying unknowingly in his bed.

## CHAPTER 7

Cassandra woke sometime in the night. Her gaze darted nervously around the room until settled on a large figure lying a few feet from the bed. The bulk of a man was partly covered by a blanket. In the dim light of the crackling fire, she saw his muscled torso. Had this man rescued her from the depths of the lake? The clothes hanging over the fire indicated such a possibility. She lay back on the pillow. *I'm naked!* Her cheeks flared in embarrassment.

Cassandra rolled onto her side and studied the man on the floor. He had saved her life, carried her to his cabin, undressed her and tended her wounds. She lifted her right arm. It still ached from the impact of the dart. Still alive meant her hero knew about poison. Her arm was bandaged tight, but a hint of blood seeped through the material.

She closed her eyes. If this man hadn't rescued her when he did, she would have died in the lake. *Who is he?* Her gaze took in the rugged cabin



interior, much like a trapper's cabin with heads of every wild animal imaginable mounted on his wall.

A wide range of weapons aligned the interior. Swords of many shapes and sizes, spears and other kinds of objects she never saw before, also bedecked the interior. Her gaze focused on her dagger on the desk. *Does he know who I am?* Cassandra wanted to keep her identity a secret. If he knew she was the princess of Kensington and the sacred flower of the land, he would never touch her. He would be forbidden to if he was a warrior.

Cassandra studied the man. She was a virgin and not allowed to enjoy the pleasures of sex until her wedding night. Although she had courted many men, most too boring and unattractive to the eye, she wanted a man with a great physique—one that had long flowing hair, a strong build and rough hands. From all the weapons and prized heads on his wall, she knew he loved adventure.

*How can I repay him for saving my life?* When he stirred on the floor and kicked the blanket from his body, Cassandra gasped and covered her mouth at the gorgeous man before her. Aside from the irresistible torso matted with hair, he also sported shapely muscled legs and a cock that lay limp against his thigh. Cassandra rose, and feeling a little unsteady on her feet, sneaked quietly to

where the hunky man lay. She crouched down to his level. Gently, she rubbed his temple and felt the smoothness of his skin.

Suddenly, he rolled over and faced the wall.

Startled, she scrambled to her feet and climbed into bed. Her heart beat wildly against her chest. Cassandra studied the form of her rescuer. *Maybe it's best not to wake him.* It took her awhile to get to sleep, but eventually her eyes closed and sweet dreams filled her mind.

The smell of home cooking appeased her senses. Cassandra rubbed the sleep from her eyes. She could hear a cheerful hum from around the corner. Nervous and aware of her nakedness, she climbed out of bed. She went to the fireplace and searched for her dried robe, but the only garment that hung by the fire was a pair of trousers.

"I threw it away," a voice said.

Cassandra turned around. A blush heated her cheeks. She placed one arm over her breasts and the other hand over her mound. The man who stood before her wore riding clothes and looked dashing. "I can't find my robe." His smile accompanied his averted gaze from her.

"I'm Keidon Roke," he said. "I threw your robe away because it stunk up my cabin. You can put this on." Keidon tossed her a clean robe and grinned. "Don't be too upset, my lady. The very idea of having a Delmirth robe in my house

disgusted me.”

Cassandra felt her blush deepen.

“Breakfast is ready if you’re hungry. I’ll wait for you in the kitchen.” His gaze swept over her before he left the room.

Cassandra picked up the robe and donned it. She didn’t know why this man made her nervous. His presence alone stirred her senses. *You want him. Admit it—he’s a gorgeous, hunky warrior.* Cassandra dismissed the lusty thoughts and concentrated on the story she would tell him. Dressed, she entered the kitchen and noticed him alone at a small table. Two plates of eggs, bacon and toast made her forget all else. She was starved. Sitting across from him, she gazed into his face and stared with intensity. “Thank you,” she said quietly, “for saving my life.”

“Don’t mention it. I had a vision of you in the water last night.”

“A vision?” she asked.

Keidon started eating, the yoke dribbled down his chin.

Cassandra stared into his deep brown eyes. He had a handsome chiseled face, long brown hair and wide lips.

“What’s your name, my fair lady?” he asked, crunching on bacon.

“I’m Cassandra Manor.”

Keidon’s brow furrowed. “I’ve never heard of the name Manor before. Are you new around

here?"

"Yes," she lied. "My father is a merchant who sells his wares on the road."

"Your father is a traveling salesman. How interesting. So the idol and dagger must be gifts from your father?"

"You looked through my belongings?"

Keidon smiled. "It was difficult not to find the dagger. As for the idol, I couldn't help but look though your knapsack. I was curious about you."

She felt the heat in her cheeks. "Those items are not gifts from my father. They are family keepsakes. I carry them with me always."

Keidon stared at her. "What is your profession?"

"I sew, cook and look after my family. I lead a very boring life."

"What in the world are you doing out here? Why were you on the lake?"

"Well I..." Cassandra didn't want to reveal her true calling. She wasn't sure whether she could trust this man. If he knew she was a princess he would look differently upon her. All warriors did, with the exception of Tor and Blake. The lie didn't come easy. She didn't know what to tell him.

"Were you looking for an adventure perhaps?"

"Yes!" she agreed. "I took the boat out and that's when I got caught in a storm. You found me soon after."

"What about the dart in your arm?"

Cassandra wished he'd stop asking questions. The answers were becoming difficult to think of. "A Delmirth struck me with a dart while I was out on the water."

"What in the world are they doing in this area and why were you wearing one of their robes? You're not a spy are you?"

Cassandra laughed. "I stole the robe from a dead Delmirth. It was the only way I could escape."

"Escape?" he asked, shoving toast into his mouth.

Cassandra managed to do the same, anything to stall for more time. "My village is under siege. My father told me to make a run for it and save my life."

"What's the name of your village?"

"Quanteum."

"That's far away from here. So you're on the run. How very interesting. Did they follow you?"

"I don't think so."

"Why are the Delmirths attacking? They must want something. The Kensington Palace is located in that direction. The Delmirths must be trying to overthrow the kingdom."

"I don't know," Cassandra said, peering down at the floor.

"I've heard they have a beautiful princess who is yet to be wed. I wish I could marry a princess. Wouldn't that be the life! But it's only a dream."

Warriors can't marry royalty, it's not heard of."

"She's the sacred flower of the land," Cassandra whispered.

"What?"

"It is rumored that once she marries a prince or someone of her equal, the land will become fruitful and all evil of this world will be gone. Sounds like a fairytale, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Keidon replied, his voice distant. "I don't know the entire story. Do you?"

Cassandra kept her eyes averted and shook her head.

"I'll check your wound and make sure its healing. If everything looks good, I'll take you back home to your father. He must be worried about you."

"No!" she screamed loudly.

"Did I say something wrong? What is it?"

"I don't want to go home," she whispered.

"Why not?"

"I'm scared. What if my land is completely destroyed?"

Keidon poured them both a glass of water, then tipped his back in a few gulps. He slammed his glass onto the table. "I'm a warrior. All I have to do is send word to my troops."

"Please, let me stay for a few days. I'm tired and want to rest."

He studied her carefully, sighing. "You don't think there is anything left to fight for?"

Cassandra felt the tears trickle down her face. She wiped them hastily away.

Keidon caught her motion and came around the table. He knelt at her side. "Why do you really want to stay?" he asked, brushing her cheek with his fingertip.

She couldn't tell another lie. She looked into his deep brown eyes and confessed. "I've been traveling with two warriors. They are my protectors. Before we got separated, they told me they would meet me on the other side of the lake. I'll wait for their return."

Keidon squeezed her hand and gave her a look of encouragement. "If you insist, Cass, we'll wait for them."

"You'll let me stay?"

"Yes, you can stay."

"If they haven't returned in a couple of days, then I'll leave without them."

"I will accompany you, if you'd like."

Cassandra needed a brave warrior for this journey, that much was true, but she needed to keep her quest a secret. "Maybe," she replied. Cassandra smiled down at him. Her heart pounded in excitement. She had the urge to kiss him, but resisted temptation. She picked up her fork and turned away from his enticing eyes. He truly was a man of honor and one that made her body surge with desire.

## CHAPTER 8

After breakfast, Keidon showed Cassandra the bathing area. "It's a warm pool," he said. "You'll love it."

"Are you going to stay with me?"

Keidon glanced down at her. A lump caught in his throat. Cassandra was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen. Her long wavy auburn hair shone brightly in the morning sun, but it was her sparkling green eyes that captivated him the most. They reminded Keidon of emerald gemstones found in remote parts of the world. "I'll stay with you if you'd like."

Cassandra smiled.

His penis twitched with desire. Keidon walked another hundred yards, then stopped. Cassandra came up from behind him and gasped.

"It's wonderful!" she exclaimed.

Keidon was happy she approved. He watched her as she moved to the edge of the water and tested the temperature with her foot.

"This is unbelievable!"



"Do you like it?"

"Like it? This is the warmest one I've ever felt."

"Please," Keidon offered. "Enjoy."

Cassandra unlatched the belt and hesitated.

Keidon watched with interest.

"I guess you've already seen me naked." She let the robe drop to her feet.

Keidon tried not to stare. "I'm sorry," he apologized.

"For what?" she asked, lowering herself into the water.

"You'd think I'd never seen a naked woman before."

"Would you like to join me?" she asked. "There's plenty of room."

Keidon swallowed nervously.

"Please."

He shrugged his shoulders and pulled his shoes off. Sitting by the water's edge, he rolled up his pants and dipped his feet in.

"I meant all of you," Cassandra said.

Keidon trailed his fingers into the water. He wanted to impress her in the worst way. He had learned a little magic when he was a young boy and thought he'd use his skill to the best of his ability. "Cass, watch this," he said. Her gaze settled on him. Carefully he swirled the water in a circle with his index finger. It moved faster and faster. When the water spiraled out of control, he commanded it to rise. It did so at once. He heard

Cassandra gasp. Keidon had managed to make the spiral rise higher and higher, then, with great care, placed a hand under it and held the swirling water in his hands.

Cassandra clapped from where she sat. "How does the water not leak through?"

"It's magic," Keidon said. "What would you like me to make with this water?"

Cassandra wrinkled her brow in confusion. "Make?"

"Think of anything."

"Okay, how about a fish?"

Keidon molded the twirling water with his fingers. The water bent at his will and formed into the shape of a large bass.

"I can't believe it!" she cried. "I've never seen anything like this before. I didn't know you were a magician."

"I'm not, but my cousin was until he was killed in battle. He hoped to be a great magician someday. Before he died he taught me a few tricks."

"Can I touch it?"

Keidon glanced at Cassandra's eager expression. He nodded and watched her lift herself from the depths of the pool and walk toward him. Her nipples stood erect from exposure to the wind. His gaze took in all her delicious features, from her large tits to her warm mound. She leaned over and touched the water

fish in his hand. He couldn't help but notice her right breast by his face. He could have easily moved his mouth toward it and taken the erect nipple into his mouth. Keidon tried to brush the erotic thoughts from his mind and concentrate on her excitement.

"I can put my entire hand through and it doesn't collapse!" She moved closer, her breast against his cheek. "Can you make a butterfly?" she asked.

Keidon popped the fish with his fingers and worked the spiral into a butterfly. He wanted to make it the most beautiful thing Cassandra had ever seen. She nestled next to him and watched with interest. Keidon felt nervous with her body brushing up against his. He managed to keep his mind focused on his art and conjured the image to Cassandra's delight.

"Keidon, you're amazing!" She leaned over and kissed his cheek. His heart beat rapidly from the contact. Cassandra gripped his arm with her hand and admired his creation. "I could look at this all day," she sighed.

"I think my arm would get tired from holding the water!" he laughed.

She giggled along with him. "You can destroy it if you'd like."

"Be my guest," he offered.

Cassandra poked two fingers into the water butterfly and watched it collapse into his hand.

Keidon allowed the water to trickle through his fingers and back into the pool.

"Beautiful," she said.

He watched Cassandra return to her previous spot in the pool. She lay back luxuriously. "This feels nice. Come join me."

He couldn't resist those pleading green eyes. He was a fool for the remarkable color of her eyes and her sensuous voice. Slowly he undid his shirt and pants and allowed both to fall to the ground.

Cassandra glanced up at him, her eyes widened. "Oh my!"

Keidon thought his cock had grown to its massive size. "What is it?"

"Where did you get such a nasty scar?"

He lowered himself into the steamy depths. "It's a war scar. A Delmirth sliced me across the chest with his blade. I almost died."

Cassandra paled. "Thank heavens you didn't."

Keidon looked across the pool into her emerald eyes. They held mystery in their depths. "I'm fine," he added. "It hurts once in awhile, especially when I'm exerting myself."

"Did you win the war?" she asked.

He wanted to get off this topic. The thoughts stirred up too many unpleasant memories. "Yes and no."

"What?"

Keidon sighed and tried to clear the bleak images from his mind. "We defeated the

Delmirths, but a few of them managed to escape and take some of our villagers with them."

Cassandra gasped. "That's terrible! I'm sorry."

"I'm hoping to find them someday."

"Never give up trying," she said.

He fell silent after that, feeling a tinge of depression.

Cassandra washed her body, running her hands along her arms and breasts. She disappeared below the depths for a time. Keidon forgot about his troubles for a brief moment. She suddenly came up and smiled. Keidon's cock wouldn't go down. Her breasts jiggled above the water.

"That feels good," she said, wringing out her hair.

Keidon laughed at her enthusiasm. He leaned back into the warmth to allow the water to relax his body and ease his cock. Closing his eyes, he listened to the wind in the trees. The silence put his mind at ease and made him forget momentarily about the gorgeous woman sharing his bath.

"Why would a mighty warrior live all by himself in the middle of nowhere?"

Keidon opened his eyes to the soft voice in his ear. He sat upright, startled.

"I'm sorry," Cassandra said.

His cock pulsed. He looked her in the eye. His gaze wandered to her luscious lips. "I like the peace and quiet. The scenery is beautiful, too." He

reached out and touched her red curls. His fingers trailed through her hair. The urge to kiss her was too much for him to bear. He knew if he kissed her now he might not stop himself from going further.

"Can you wash my back?" she asked, breaking the silence. Cassandra turned her back to him.

Keidon couldn't resist the temptation to run his hands along her tender flesh. He gently touched her skin. The contact took his breath away. The water trickled down her spine to her buttocks. Keidon massaged Cassandra's shoulders and cupped warm water onto the spots his hands had touched.

"That feels good," she sighed.

He was happy to give her some pleasure. Keidon continued to work the knots out of her shoulders and back.

"Do you have a woman?" she asked.

Keidon's hands stopped in mid-stroke. He didn't know how to respond to the question. He wasn't willing to reveal his past to a stranger, at least not yet. "I've had a few women along my travels," he replied.

Cassandra laughed. "That's not what I meant and you know it."

Keidon wanted to play innocence. "I have no one at this time. And you?" He waited for her to confess about a lover or husband, to explain the stains on the red robe she wore when he found her.

"I have no one either," she confessed.

Her voice sounded sad at this revelation. Cassandra got abruptly to her feet and kept her back to him. Keidon watched her curvy body walk to the edge of the pool. She leaned over to retrieve the robe. Cassandra stepped from the warm depths onto dry land. Keidon followed behind her and grabbed his clothes, dressing in silence. He could tell by her change in disposition that something disturbed her. "Are you worried about your protectors?" he asked, buttoning his shirt.

Cassandra kept her gaze on the ground. Tears lingered in the corner of her eyes. Her expression said it all.

Keidon felt a pang of sympathy for this woman. He had the urge to take her into his arms and erase the worry from her features. Keidon pulled his pants on and adjusted the bulge in the front. His cock throbbed, desperate for release. He ignored his discomfort and focused on the sad woman who stood across from him. "Should we look for them?" he offered.

Cassandra looked up at this moment and shook her head. "They should be along shortly. If they haven't arrived in two days, I'll continue on without them."

"Where will you go?" Keidon asked, standing so near he could hardly breathe.

"I'm heading west," she said.

"To where?" he inquired.

Cassandra turned and walked toward the horse. "What would you like to do?" she asked, mounting the horse.

Keidon approached his horse. He knew he wasn't going to pry anymore answers from her. He climbed on in front of her and took over the reins. "Why don't you get changed, then I'll take you on a picnic to my favorite spot."

Cassandra didn't reply.

Keidon added, "It's a magical land."

"Magical?" she asked. "What do you mean?"

Keidon laughed at her quizzical tone. He wanted to build up the excitement before he took her there. He had never taken another living soul to his favorite resting place. The idea of sharing something so special with another human being didn't feel right. Keidon knew Cassandra would be different. She'd appreciate the beauty of this land and respect it for what it was. "It has special powers. I like to go there because the land protects me from all outside dangers. I know I cannot be harmed as long as I'm within the barriers of the invisible walls. Whenever I want to relax and enjoy the sights and sounds of nature, that's where I go."

Cassandra held him tighter. "I've heard of these magical lands, but I've never seen them. I haven't had much experience when it comes to travel."

Keidon patted her hands with reassurance. "The magical lands are few and far between. As



an avid hunter and warrior, I've come across a few on my travels. I happen to have one on my property."

Cassandra smiled widely. "I can't wait to see it!" she said, gripping him tightly around the waist. Dusty trotted back toward the cabin.

Keidon packed a lunch and waited for Cassandra to emerge from his bedroom. He had placed the last of the sandwiches into the knapsack when she appeared around the corner. Keidon's eyes widened when he saw her. He almost dropped the knapsack onto the floor. "You're breathtaking, Cass," he said, his voice husky with desire.

Cassandra wore the red dress he'd found in her pack. It accentuated her taut breasts, narrow waist and full hips. The skirt billowed to the floor in soft folds. He wanted to take her right there in the kitchen. The naughty thoughts wouldn't leave his mind. She walked up to Keidon and smiled. His gaze rested on her luscious lips, then traveled down to her breasts. They were round and massive. He imagined himself massaging them with his fingertips while his lips sucked on the hard peaks.

"Are you ready to go?" she asked.

The warrior shook himself from his erotic daydreams and focused on their outing. Cassandra followed behind him. Keidon strapped the knapsack to the horse and assisted his

beautiful companion onto Dusty. Once he was settled behind her at the reins, they took off through the forest, his right hand protectively on her waist. The sun beat down upon them and cast a warm glow on the happy couple. Dusty slowly made his way through the dense forest of trees. The rugged man guided him along the lakefront and listened to Cassandra's intake of breath.

"This is heavenly," she said. "Oh my, look at this!"

They spotted two deer grazing in the trees. The pair looked up curiously at the sound of crackling twigs. Instead of running in the opposite direction, the deer continued to graze.

"They're not even scared," Cassandra said.

Keidon smiled from behind her. "That's because I've been feeding them since I moved here. They are use to me and quite tame."

The horse trudged along past dense forest, sandy beaches and rocky terrain. Cassandra unintentionally leaned against Keidon. He'd never felt so alive. He missed spending time with a woman. Since his wife had disappeared, he'd longed for female companionship.

They journeyed for over an hour and enjoyed the scenery. Keidon pointed out many interesting wildlife abundant in these parts of the woods. He felt proud of his knowledge and took it upon himself to educate her on anything she questioned.

"What kind of bird is that?" she pointed up a tree.

Keidon smiled at her innocence. He had seen practically every beast known to mankind and, as a great hunter, had killed his share of trophies. "That's a Lorewhirl."

"It's simply beautiful," she whispered. "I've never seen a wingspan like that before."

"They're a rare breed and mostly found in this area. In all my travels, this is the only place I've ever seen them."

"You know everything about wildlife, don't you?"

Keidon laughed. He couldn't deny this, no matter how much he tried. "I'm a hunter, Cass. I do it not only for the meat, but for the enjoyment, too."

"Can I see you in action someday?" she asked.

His smile faded suddenly. He didn't know when that would ever happen. She would leave in a couple of days, then he'd never see her again. Their paths had crossed for only a fleeting moment. He knew this and was sure she did as well. "I don't know when we'll have the opportunity—"

From out of the bush, a huge Boarhound emerged.

Keidon had fought these vicious animals before and had won, the result graced his wall. "Be very quiet," he whispered. "They are mean and will

tear you to pieces if given the chance.” Keidon slowly withdrew his bow and arrow from a side pouch.

The Boarhound never took its black beady gaze off them. The beast was black in color with a tuft of white hair at the top of its massive head. It had a long horn and growled low under its breath. Drool dripped from its chin.

Cassandra whimpered.

He knew she was frightened by the way she slumped against his chest. “Give me room to breathe,” he said. He felt the pressure immediately ease. Keidon carefully raised his bow and arrow and aimed. The Boarhound charged.

The arrow whizzed past its massive head. The beast clipped Dusty’s leg and grazed the stallion’s belly. The horse sidestepped, lost footing and stumbled to its knees. Cassandra and Keidon fell forward and sprawled onto the ground.

“Don’t make any sudden movements!” Keidon warned.

Cassandra obeyed, but the stallion scrambled to its feet. The Boarhound lowered its ugly head, its eyes focused on the two of them. It clawed ferociously at the ground, ready to charge again.

Keidon quickly grabbed another arrow, ready to bring the beast down. The Boarhound ran full speed toward Cassandra and closed in on the helpless woman. Keidon heard her shrill scream. He let the arrow fly. The thundering hooves

instantly died.

Cassandra looked up from her position, her eyes widened in surprise. "You killed it!" she cried.

Keidon got to his feet and ran to her side. He helped her up, concern gripped his features. "Are you all right?" he asked.

Cassandra shook with fright. "I was so scared," she whispered. "I thought we'd..."

Keidon took her into his arms and kissed her fears away.

## CHAPTER 9

The moment their lips touched, Cassandra felt as if she had died and gone to heaven. She had never experienced such ecstasy in someone's arms before. Keidon kissed her tenderly. He started with her lips, worked his way to her cheeks and finally to her temples. She closed her eyes to the sensation. This was the most exhilarating feeling.

Much too soon, Keidon lifted his face and studied her. He ran his hands through her hair and gently stroked the locks. "We got off easy," he said.

Cassandra reached out and wrapped her arms around his neck. She wanted to feel the security of his embrace.

Keidon sat down and pulled her onto his lap. "It's okay," he whispered. "I'm a hunter, remember?"

She placed her head against his shoulder. "This feels nice," she sighed. "I could almost fall asleep."

Keidon massaged her tense muscles. "I'd still like to take you to the picnic spot."

Cassandra met his gaze. "I wouldn't miss it for the world!" The close contact stirred mixed feelings that confused her. She wanted to hold him longer and possibly share another kiss. Boldly she grabbed his rugged face and kissed his lips.

Keidon responded wholeheartedly. He brushed her lips softly, then used his tongue to pry her mouth apart. Cassandra accepted his tongue inside and enjoyed his manly taste. Their tongues danced around each other. She wanted sex, felt her body tingle with excitement, her center dampen with anticipation.

Keidon kissed her neck, then moved down to the large mounds overflowing from her dress. His lips and tongue lavished them with kisses. Keidon's fingers caressed the nipples through the gown, his thumbs massaging them in circles.

Cassandra panted with delight. She wanted him. She couldn't hold out much longer. Her body needed the fulfillment of a man inside her. She leaned back and allowed Keidon to pull her dress down. His mouth latched onto a nipple. He suckled eagerly from one breast to the other to Cassandra's delight.

"I want to be inside of you," he panted. Keidon grabbed her hand and held it against his cock.

She felt its hardness through the trousers. His urgency was apparent. Cassandra wanted the feel of his erection inside her. As he began to lower his zipper, she moved away. "I can't," she said,

pulling her gown up.

"What's wrong?" Keidon asked. "Is it something I did?"

Cassandra felt a blush stain her cheeks. "No, it's not you, it's me. I think we're moving too fast," she lied. Her body cried out this wasn't true, but her head told her differently. *How are you going to return the Ruby Idol to the sacred land if you're not a virgin? The kingdom and its people are depending on you.*

To lose her virginity would mean to let her father down. Cassandra knew she couldn't allow herself to do that, especially for one night of passion. *It's not worth it*, her logical mind told her. She looked into Keidon's eyes and saw confusion and hurt. He obviously thought she wanted the same thing he did. "Can we take it a little slower?" she asked.

Keidon looked embarrassed and ran his hands through his hair. "Of course, I'm sorry. I thought that..."

Cassandra silenced his words with a gentle kiss. "I thought I was ready, too. Apparently I'm not." Her body throbbed with desire. *How can I avoid his sex appeal?* Cassandra knew she couldn't allow Keidon to find out she was a virgin. Not only would the revelation embarrass her, but would leave him wondering why she'd waited so long. She didn't want to burden the warrior with her troubles and dangerous quest, to have him protect



her on the journey would lead to temptations.

Keidon got to his feet and dusted off his trousers. "If you'll excuse me for a moment, I need to go into the bush."

Cassandra watched her handsome warrior hike into the trees and disappear from view. She waited patiently for his return. When he didn't show up for awhile, Cassandra worried. *What if something dreadful happened to him?* She decided to quietly follow his trail so as not to startle him. Through the thick foliage, she saw him, his pants pulled down around his ankles, moaning his pleasure. Cassandra's eyes widened. Keidon had his hard cock in his hands and flogged it vigorously. She couldn't believe she had turned him on so much. She wished she were knelt on the ground assisting him. It would pleasure them both. At the mere glance of this, she felt a warmth building in her mound and a tingling in her nipples.

Cassandra felt guilty watching him, but couldn't take her gaze off the scene. *Is he thinking of me while he's jerking off?* Cassandra hoped so. She wanted to be the image he thought of in his time of need. Keidon's moans got louder. Suddenly, his cum squirted out from the end of his enticing shaft and coated the nearby bush. He moaned, slowing his hand movement. Cassandra turned away and sneaked back to the camp. She had settled herself onto the ground, when she heard his footsteps

near.

"Shall we go on the picnic?" Keidon asked, with a smile of relief.

Cassandra returned the smile and got to her feet. "Yes, let's go." She pretended not to have witnessed him masturbate. The two of them inspected Dusty's wound and, once they were sure he was well enough to travel, mounted his back and continued on their way. The afternoon sun beat down on them and made the journey grueling.

"We don't have far to go," Keidon said, wiping the sweat from his brow. "How are you holding up?"

Cassandra leaned into him and smiled her pleasure. "I love the heat."

Dusty trampled through the thick forest and wound his way past desolate areas. The trees blocked out the sun and created a cold and spooky atmosphere. Cassandra shivered for a moment.

Keidon placed a warm hand on her arm. "It's up ahead," he assured her.

Cassandra waited anxiously for the darkness to disappear and the sunshine to warm them again. Noises echoed from all around the forest. "I think I'm paranoid," Cassandra stated.

"Don't be, my dear. I'll protect you."

Cassandra had heard those words from Tor and Blake. When they'd parted, the men had promised to always protect her. *Where are they now?* She

brushed the question aside and tried to concentrate on the beauty surrounding them. A light could be seen in the clearing. Cassandra sat upright, excited about the magical lands. A large rock wall loomed in the distance with the sound of thundering water. "Is there a waterfall?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes," Keidon replied.

Glittery sparkles danced through the air. Cassandra inhaled deeply, amazed by its beauty. Dusty moved through the dense forest before a large opening appeared. Cassandra gasped and cried in delight.

"What do you think?" Keidon asked.

She didn't know how to put her thoughts into words. The scenery was like something out of a fairytale. Tiny sparkles of light danced through the air, reminding Cassandra of delicate fairies. To add to the colorful rock walls of browns and yellows, a beautiful green and blue rushing waterfall cascaded to the stream below. Dusty stepped through the invisible barrier and, the moment he did, Cassandra felt a weight of problems lift from her shoulders. "This is truly amazing!" she gasped.

"I knew you'd appreciate its beauty." Keidon jumped down from the horse and assisted Cassandra to the ground. He held her hand tightly in his own and showed her the magnificent flowers and gardens.

She rushed around excitedly, smelled the sweet scents of the plant life and caught a sparkling ray in her hand. Cassandra laughed with delight as the glittering lights paraded across her palm. "I can't believe you have this on your property!" she exclaimed. "Why don't you bathe here?"

"I do," he smiled widely.

Cassandra pictured him parading around buck naked, enjoying the peace and tranquility of this place.

"Do you feel like another bath?" he asked.

Cassandra felt herself blush. She did want to see Keidon naked again. The idea aroused her to no end. "Why don't we have lunch first? I'm starving!"

"Me, too," Keidon replied. He pulled the knapsack from the horse and proceeded to set up a cozy picnic spot by the waterfall.

Cassandra knelt, then helped him arrange the food and beverage on the checkered tablecloth. "Do you bring many women here?" she asked, settling beside him.

Keidon handed her a sandwich and shook his head. "You're the first."

Her brows raised in surprise. "I thought a man of your caliber would have wined and dined plenty of women in this magical land of yours."

"I waited for the right woman to come along."

Cassandra couldn't help but smile. The sweet sentiment melted her heart. She knew he spoke

the truth. "I want to go with you on your next adventure. I need to."

Keidon leaned in close to Cassandra and touched her cheek with his fingertip. "You are beautiful, my fair lady. Why would someone as sexy as you want to accompany a wild warrior on his next adventure?"

She couldn't help the words rushing from her lips. "I want to learn everything there is about you."

He poured glasses of wine for the two of them and handed her one. "I'm not that exciting," he said with a devilish smile.

She took a sip and watched him do the same. "This is delicious," she sighed, leaning back to watch the falls. "I somehow find that hard to believe. You, boring! I can't picture it."

Keidon finished his wine then cut a block of cheese. "Have some, my dear."

Cassandra nibbled on the cheese and took in his rugged features. She studied him carefully, from his tan riding clothes to his cowboy hat. This is where he belonged. "You must hate to leave this place when you're called for duty."

Keidon shoved a piece of cheese into his mouth, followed by half a sandwich. "I do hate to leave this place. It's my home. But I must protect my country and its people."

"You're so heroic."

He flashed a genuine smile. "Thank you, my

sweet. It's all in the line of duty."

Cassandra finished her sandwich and cheese. She washed it down with the remainder of the wine. Cassandra lay back and listened to the calming sound of the falls. "This is romantic," she sighed.

Keidon moved beside her and whispered into her ear. "What could I do that would make it even more so?"

Cassandra opened her eyes a smidge. "We could swim underneath the falls," she suggested.

"You want to see me naked again?" he asked.

She sat upright and gave him a hard kiss on the mouth. "Yes," she breathed. "I want to see you naked." Cassandra took the liberty of lowering her dress to reveal her massive breasts. She got to her feet and pulled it down past her waist, knees and ankles.

Keidon took a harsh breath. "You're breathtaking, Cass."

She stood in front of him and allowed him to gaze upon her many curves. Normally she would feel self-conscious of a strange man lusting over her body, but with Keidon it was different. His brown eyes took in every inch of her body, devouring it with desire. "Take your clothes off," she ordered. "I'll be waiting for you in the pool."

Cassandra sauntered to the edge of the water and jumped in. She could feel his lustful gaze as she went. *He wants you*, she thought. *His eyes say it*

*all.* Cassandra couldn't help but feel elated by this. She wanted him, too. As the tranquil water washed over her body, she felt her pussy tingle with desire. Her mind told her, over and over again, to keep her distance. After all, she had waited this long to lose her virginity, another couple of weeks or a month wouldn't make that much of a difference.

Cassandra dove under the water and enjoyed the feel of it against her body. She turned and her eyes widened in shock. Keidon had discarded his shirt and pants and walked toward the pool. She couldn't help but lower her gaze to his privates. Keidon's manhood throbbed in the shimmering light. Cassandra knew he was horny for her and in need of release. "I'm sorry for staring," she said. Cassandra swallowed nervously and a blush stained her cheeks.

Keidon eyed her and lowered himself into the warm depths. Cassandra felt relief when he covered up his cock. If she had to look at his throbbing member another minute, she would have acted on her thoughts. "You have an amazing body," she said, swimming up to him.

Keidon grabbed her hand and lured her toward the falls. The water cascaded down and made them gasp for air. "Isn't this amazing?" he yelled.

Over the pounding surf, she laughed, nodding. It was amazing. Not only were the magical falls the most magnificent thing she had ever

experienced, but so was the man sharing it with her.

Keidon suddenly grabbed her into his arms and planted a gentle kiss on her lips. Cassandra responded wholeheartedly and wrapped her arms around his neck. She felt her breasts press against his chest, Keidon's cock throbbing against her mound. He could have easily inserted it. Cassandra wondered what it would feel like to have him rip through her barrier.

The kiss intensified and his hands cupped her breasts. Cassandra let him massage them under the waterfall. She was delighted when his fingers pinched the nipples, gasping in ecstasy. His hands lowered to her mound, his fingers about to find their way inside her pussy, when she pulled away.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

Cassandra dipped below the falls and emerged momentarily to look at him. "No, I'm enjoying the pool."

"If I offended you, I'm sorry."

Cassandra disappeared from view. She came up from behind him and placed her hands at his waist. "I'm not offended. I want us to enjoy the luxuries of this magical place for one afternoon. This is simply heavenly!"

Keidon smiled.

She dove below the depths once again and this time he joined her. The two of them frolicked in the warm afternoon sun. They swam for a while,



then bathed nude by the pool's edge before jumping back into the water to cool off. Cassandra joined Keidon underneath the falls and kissed him gently on the lips. She rubbed his shoulders, enjoying the feel of his skin beneath her fingertips. The kiss intensified to something more urgent when a loud screech sounded from above. Through the thundering water, a commotion took place in the sky.

Keidon pulled his hands away from her softness and ran out from under the falls.

Cassandra followed behind and shuddered, grabbing his arm.

"What are the Delmirths doing here?" he asked aloud. High above, the Delmirths flew on their dragons. The leader shouted to his followers, words they couldn't understand from where they stood.

Keidon shrugged Cassandra's hand from his arm and walked up to Dusty. He pulled his bow and arrows from a side pouch.

"Keidon, you're not going to shoot them are you? They'll see us!"

He raised his arrow and took aim at the fleet.

Cassandra came up from behind to stop him. "You're going to get us killed!" she shouted.

Keidon paused to look at her. "We are hidden in the magical land. Even if I shoot a few of them down, they cannot detect where it came from."

Cassandra stood back to watch a master at

work.

Keidon aimed and shot continuous arrows at the enemy. The Delmirths fell from the sky. Some landed only a few feet from the magical land. The leader turned his dragon around and hovered in the air, looking for the source.

Cassandra grabbed her clothes and quickly dressed.

The leader shouted into the wind, "Where the hell are you? Show yourself!"

"Who is this man?" Cassandra asked.

Keidon raised his bow and arrow, aiming at the hideous beast. "That's the bastard who took away my loved ones. He's going to pay dearly for that." He let the arrow fly. It whizzed through the air and struck the Delmirth. They watched as Keidon's opponent fell from his dragon.

## CHAPTER 10

“What’s his name?” Cassandra asked.  
“His name is Holton. I’ve wanted to kill him for a long time.” Keidon grabbed his clothes, dressed and then waited for danger to pass. He came out of hiding and leaned over Holton to check his pulse. Cassandra left the confines of the magical land to see.

While Keidon pressed his fingers against Holton’s neck, he opened his eyes and grabbed Keidon’s arm.

Cassandra cried out in terror.

“You!” Holton raged. He coughed up a green slime and gasped for air.

Keidon yanked his gnarled fingers from his arm. “What did you do with my family?”

Holton smiled wickedly. “I’ll never tell you. The woman sure is good, if you know what I mean.”

Keidon placed a boot onto his chest. Holton gasped and clawed at his leg. “Where is she?”

Holton laughed. A low wicked sound erupted

from his throat. "She's..."

Keidon waited anxiously for the Delmirth to confess. "Well?" Holton looked between Keidon and Cassandra, then his eyes widened with recognition. "That's her!" he shouted.

Keidon gave Cassandra a confused glance. "What is he talking about?"

Holton never took his gaze off Cassandra. He lifted his hand into the air, attempting to speak. "I need it for my people," he coughed.

"Talk sense!" Keidon shouted. Holton's body went rigid.

"Is he dead?" she asked.

Keidon raised his bow and arrow and took aim. He shot an arrow at Holton's neck. "Now he is."

Cassandra buried her face against the warrior's shoulder.

Keidon held her momentarily. "We need to leave, darling. The others might come back to investigate. I don't want you around to see more bloodshed." Keidon thoroughly checked Holton's pockets and they vacated the area, walking in silence. Once they reached the magical land, he turned on Cassandra. "He seemed to recognize you. Did you know Holton?"

Cassandra shook her head and gazed toward the ground. "I've seen plenty of Delmirths before, but never knew any of them by name."

"He seemed to know you." Keidon studied her for a moment longer, then decided to set up camp

in the safe zone for the night. "If we return to my cabin there's a chance of confrontation. We'll wait it out until tomorrow."

Cassandra agreed. Silently, they spread blankets onto the ground. The sky began to darken and the cheery atmosphere they had experienced throughout the day suddenly turned gloomy. "I wish he had suffered longer," Keidon said. "The arrow was too swift."

"What woman were you talking about?"

\* \* \* \*

Keidon didn't want to confess that he was married and searching for his wife. The idea of sharing this truth with someone was too painful. "Holton took some of my villagers."

"You mentioned that earlier, but you never told me how they were connected to you. Keidon, you asked about your family. Did you lose parents and siblings to this monster?"

Keidon could feel the tears well up in his eyes, then wiped them quickly with his shirt sleeve. He didn't want to discuss his past.

"I'm sorry for prying."

His silence made the moment awkward. "I don't want to talk about it."

Cassandra got up from her crouched position and placed an arm around his shoulders. "If you ever need to talk I'm here for you."

The words sounded sweet to his ears. Keidon couldn't help but smile. The woman was genuine with her affections. He squeezed her hand and leaned over to kiss her cheek. With the beds made, Keidon did a quick scan of the area before lying beside Cassandra. The two of them looked up at the night sky and watched the stars twinkle.

"Are you okay?" she asked, squeezing his hand.

Keidon sighed deeply, trying to keep his emotions intact. "I sometimes wonder why my life is so messed up."

"Everyone has a plight in life. Some challenge they must face."

"What plight do you have, Cass?" By the eerie silence, Keidon thought it must be something of great importance.

She avoided his gaze and kept her eyes focused on the twinkling stars. Suddenly her eyes widened in shock. "Keidon, I thought I saw movement over there!" she pointed.

He squinted, looking for shadows in the darkness. "I don't see anything..." From out of the night sky, dozens of dragons and their riders soared down to earth. They landed close to the vicinity. Keidon jumped to his feet, readying his weapon for attack. "Don't leave the barrier!" he warned. Keidon took off on a run and watched the ugly Delmirths spread out around the sanctuary. Taking careful aim, he shot at them one by one.

The enemy dropped at his feet. A warning in English sounded.

"Come out you coward!"

"You killed our leader!" another shouted.

Keidon aimed where the voices generated and picked them off easily. Out of the darkness, several Delmirths slinked along a path, obscured by shrubs. He heard their hushed whispers. Keidon watched the beasts walk through the invisible barrier. Delmirths walked by, oblivious to their presence.

Keidon took this opportunity to smite them down with his arrows. He waited on his haunches for more movement. Two Delmirths took off through the night sky. Their voices carried off into the night.

"We'll seek revenge, warrior!" they shouted.

Keidon attempted to strike them down with his arrows, but the enemy was out of reach. "Damn it!" When quietness enveloped the area, Keidon lowered his weapon and joined Cassandra under the blankets.

"Are they gone?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "for now."

Keidon removed his clothes and tossed them onto the ground. "A couple of them got away. Not to worry, my dear, they won't return tonight."

Cassandra poked her head out of the blankets and watched Keidon settle in beside her. "Why can't they see us when they're in the magical

land?"

"Only the pure and good people go unnoticed. Evil cannot cloak itself in the magical land. That's why we'll stay here for the night, to be safe."

Cassandra snuggled up to Keidon and warmed herself against his bare skin.

Keidon sighed in the darkness and placed an arm around her shoulders. "Do you feel safe?" he asked.

Cassandra smiled up at him and kissed his bearded cheek. "Yes, of course I do. Thank you, once again, for saving my life. You're making quite a habit out of this."

"I've only saved your life twice—first in the lake, then on the picnic."

"It doesn't matter. What matters is how to repay you?" Cassandra said.

"I don't expect you to do anything for me. Your presence alone is payment enough."

She snuggled even closer. Her breasts rubbed up against his chest.

Keidon wished he could tell Cassandra how he really wanted her to repay his services. If she only knew how much he desired her, she'd roll as far away from him as possible. Keidon looked up at the night sky and wished to find release from his aching need with the woman by his side.

\* \* \* \*



Cassandra listened to Keidon's restful breathing. He had finally fallen asleep after tossing and turning. She knew he was sexually frustrated. Cassandra had witnessed this when he masturbated in the bush. She was horny, too. As tired as she was, she couldn't shut her mind down. Her body stirred with desire, having the feel of Keidon's pressed against hers.

She wrestled with the thoughts of pleasing him orally. Cassandra had heard Tor and Blake speak of how women pleased them with their bodies after a war was fought and won. If she had been any other woman, she would have allowed Keidon the pleasures of exploring her body. This was different. Cassandra knew she had to be careful not to give away her identity, or her virginity. As much as she wanted the warrior to enter her, she couldn't allow it to happen. If the Ruby Idol was to be successfully returned to its resting grounds, she'd have to keep her distance.

*What's the harm in pleasing him orally?* She watched his chest rise and fall, the blanket above his waist. *He might want to go further,* she thought. *And that will lead to disaster.*

Cassandra pulled her gaze away from his luscious body. Tor and Blake knew she was the princess so they didn't touch her. Keidon didn't know. The thought made her feel deceitful. *How angry would he be if he found out?* She thought he'd be disappointed and hurt by the secret. Cassandra

wanted to come out and tell him about her plight, but something deep inside her wouldn't allow it.

*You want to lose your virginity to him,* a voice echoed. Cassandra knew it was true. She turned to look at Keidon. He had shifted, kicking the blanket below the waist. She studied his penis in the moonlight. His sexual frustrations were evident throughout the day. *What would it be like to orally please him?*

Cassandra licked her lips in anticipation. Without another thought, she decided to go through with it. *As long as I pleasure him, it shouldn't get out of control.* Happy about her decision, she lowered her lips toward his cock and took the limp head into her mouth.

"What the hell!" Keidon woke from his slumber.

His penis immediately grew to an enormous size.

"What the..." he gasped.

"Lay back and allow me to pleasure you."

Keidon didn't argue. He did as he was told and closed his eyes to the sensation.

Cassandra ran her tongue around the tip of his penis. He shuddered with pleasure. She licked his cock with vigor and enjoyed the salty taste on her tongue. Her hands found their way to his scrotum. She caressed and massaged it with her fingertips. Cassandra liked the feel of his unruly hair against her skin. Her lips teased the tip of his cock.

"Take more, please!"

Cassandra opened her mouth wide and took his shaft inside. She sucked the length in a long quick motion. Cassandra again took him in inch by inch, wanting to please him.

Keidon placed his hand firmly onto her head to increase the pressure to his cock. Her mouth eagerly welcomed him inside. "Oh!" he moaned.

She massaged his balls and felt them tense under her touch. Cassandra yearned to taste him. She licked and sucked him hard. Cassandra pulled his cock from her mouth and teased the tip with her tongue. He groaned his pleasure. His body felt tense against hers. Keidon's hands clutched her head as she moved her mouth up and down his shaft. He tensed his legs, his body rigid. He climaxed into her mouth, screaming out in delight. "That feels good!"

Cassandra swallowed his juices and licked the remaining cum from around his cock. She enjoyed the taste of the bitter spunk. Keidon lay on the ground, panting and sweaty. It took him a few seconds to regain his composure. "Thank you," he whispered.

"For what?" she asked, lifting her face to meet his.

Keidon was at a loss for words. "For fulfilling my fantasy," he finally replied. "I always wanted to wake up from a dream to a woman sucking me off."

"I'm glad I could help."

"Can I do something for you?" he asked.

She wanted to protest.

Keidon moved swiftly between her legs and spread them wide. "I want to taste you, Cass." She couldn't find the words to stop him from proceeding. Part of her wanted to shout no, the other part wanted him to continue.

"Do you want my fingers, lips or both?"

Cassandra wanted all of him, but knew she couldn't venture that far. "Have you ever given a woman an orgasm with only your mouth?"

Keidon smiled. "Yes."

She could see the top of his head lower toward her moistness. His wet mouth touched her pussy lips. Cassandra gasped into the still night.

Keidon tugged on the lips, pulling and licking them. His tongue darted into the moist mound, flicking in and out.

Cassandra panted, enjoying the sensation. He increased the pressure. Keidon licked urgently and placed his mouth hard against her. She was close to orgasm. Without using his hands, he licked and sucked her pussy.

She could hear his moans from down below. Cassandra had her hands in his hair to keep his head firmly in place. She listened to his pleasures with each thrust of his tongue. Keidon was truly a master at this.

She lay on the blanket and looked up at the

stars. Her body arched in pleasure as Keidon slurped the juices from her mound. She moaned, shuddering with delight, wishing it could go on all night, pulling his mouth even closer.

“Suck me hard!” she panted. Keidon’s tongue moved in and out of her pussy in quick motion. Without warning, she came hard and cried out her delight. “Oh, Keidon!” she shouted. He stayed between her legs and tenderly licked the juices. Cassandra closed her eyes and listened to his slurping noises. “I loved that,” she sighed. “I’ve never had anyone excite me like that before.”

Keidon stayed between her legs. “May I do it again?” he asked.

Cassandra spread her legs even wider, ready for another mind-blowing orgasm. She closed her eyes. She knew her mound would hurt tomorrow from all the pressure his mouth bestowed, but at this very moment it was the greatest sensation she had ever known.

## CHAPTER 11

Cassandra woke the next day with a big smile on her face. Keidon had gone down on her twice during the night and refrained from using his fingers. It was a magical night of lovemaking and pleasuring each other's needs. Keidon had fallen asleep with his face against her mound, his hot breath warming her pussy lips. She ran her hands through his silky hair and listened to his steady breathing. He was at peace.

The sun peeked over the horizon and warmed the earth. Cassandra wanted him to wake and enjoy the beginning of a new day with her. She lay contently on the blanket and watched the birds chirp in the trees as she listened to the sounds of nature. Last night was an awakening like no other she had ever experienced. In Keidon's arms, she had found true meaning in her life. She knew that he was the man she was destined to spend her life with. The thought tugged at her heartstrings. Her desire to please him last night had been heightened by his own urges. *Could it be love?*

Keidon stirred. He shifted his head slightly.

His mouth found her pussy. Cassandra cried out in surprise as he worked his head between her legs, maneuvering snugly between them. She grabbed onto his head and massaged his scalp with her fingers. He licked and sucked, his tongue working its magic as it had during the night. Cassandra gasped in ecstasy, her body tense. She wanted to climax in his mouth and give Keidon the satisfaction of tasting her juices.

She stared up at the clear blue sky and faintly heard the sounds of nature that surrounded them. Her cries of pleasure drowned out most of the noise in the forest. Keidon's beard tickled the insides of her thighs. Cassandra enjoyed the sensation of his rough hair against her skin. She arched her back and cried out his name as his tongue darted in and out of her mound. Finally, when she knew that she couldn't hold out much longer, she let out a deafening scream. She clutched his head in her hands.

After he licked away any traces of cum, he emerged to wish her good morning. "How are you, my dear?" he asked, kissing a trail along her belly.

Cassandra relaxed in his arms, satisfied once again. "I'm fine, thanks to you and your magical tongue."

Keidon laughed and stopped to nurse on her tits. "These are beautiful," he said, squeezing the

nipples between his fingers. He reached up and kissed her, the smell of his own scent on her lips. "Cass, when will you be ready for intercourse?" he asked. "I'm anxious to have my cock in here." His hand wandered to her wet mound. He rubbed it gently.

"Soon," she said. Cassandra felt her face flush in embarrassment. She knew she should tell him the truth about her quest and her status as a princess. Her father's warning stopped her from revealing her identity.

Keidon licked the tips of the hard nipples and enticed them with his tongue. He paused to tug on a hardened peak.

Cassandra wanted to know what it would be like to have a man inside her. If it felt half as good as his tongue, she knew she'd be addicted instantly.

"Are you hungry, my dear," he asked.

She sat up, feeling a soreness between her legs. "I'm really feeling it today," she said.

Keidon seemed happy by this revelation and watched her rub a hand around the aching area. "I didn't mean to be rough on you last night. I was thoroughly enjoying myself. I hope the soreness was worth it."

Cassandra got to her feet and tried to locate her clothes scattered on the ground. "Yes, it was. In fact, it was probably the best night of my life."

"Maybe we can do it again sometime." His



smile faded.

Cassandra caught the strange look on his face. "What is it?" she asked.

"You told me you'd be leaving in a couple of days. That means we don't have much time, do we?"

Cassandra could feel her pulse quicken. She had to leave, possibly by tomorrow. Her chances of seeing Keidon again were slim, if ever. "We'll have to make the most of the time we have together," she said, pulling her gown over her head. Keidon and Cassandra dressed in silence.

Once clothed, Keidon prepared breakfast. "I know this isn't much," he said, handing Cassandra a plate of leftover sandwiches and cheese, "but it will have to do until we get back to my cabin."

She was famished. After the lovemaking they had shared under the stars, nothing could dampen her spirits. Keidon sat beside her and enjoyed their meal. Cassandra had polished off two sandwiches and a glass of wine, when a shadow blocked out the sun for a split second. At first, she thought it was the Delmirths searching for their assassin. When she peered up into the sky, her mouth dropped open in surprise. Hovering above them was the most magnificent bird Cassandra had ever seen. "What is that?" she asked, unable to contain her excitement.

"That's my pet, Talon," he remarked calmly.

"Your pet?" she repeated. "How can that be? I don't understand..."

Keidon shoved another piece of cheese into her mouth to stop the questions from continuing. "Finish your meal and then I'll show you."

Cassandra quickly ate the remainder of her food, then proceeded to clean up their camp. By the time Keidon had polished off his breakfast, Cassandra had mounted Dusty's back and waited for her warrior.

"Anxious, are we?" he laughed, taking over the reins and mounting.

As Dusty made his way out of the magical land, Cassandra voiced her concern. "What if they return while we're out here?"

Keidon grabbed her securely by the waist. "Then they'll have to confront me, won't they?"

His confidence set her mind at ease. She leaned casually against his chest and soaked in the warmth of the sun. Dusty traveled steadily through the woods, maneuvering around rocks and big trees. The jaunt seemed quite easy for Dusty until a steep hill came up to meet them. "Where did this come from?" Cassandra inquired.

Keidon commanded the horse onward.

"This is very high," she stated, looking uneasily behind them.

Loose rocks tumbled down the slope as they passed. Unfazed, Keidon pushed Dusty's abilities to the limit.

Cassandra's visions of the three of them slipping down the hillside and falling to their deaths made her shiver in the hot sun.

"Are you cold, Cass?"

She shook her head, not wanting him to see the terror in her eyes. The peak was within reach. Dusty struggled to move the heavy burden up to the top. Finally, he accomplished it and stopped at the plateau. Cassandra gasped in wonder. A beautiful valley spread out before them. Straight down from the high cliff a bird's nest appeared. Cassandra squinted against the blinding sunlight. The graceful bird hovered in the air.

Keidon whistled for it to come nearer. It obeyed at once, flying close.

Cassandra could see the detail in the wingspan. She swallowed hard with nervousness and excitement.

"Talon!" Keidon shouted. "Come here, darling!"

"Darling?" Cassandra asked, laughing. Talon flapped its long white wings and lowered itself into the nest. Cassandra peered down to see the bird staring at them with its black beady eyes. "What kind of bird is that?" she asked.

"It's a Mareagle, part of the eagle family."

"I've never heard or seen anything like it before," she said. "Why is it looking up at us like that?"

"He's waiting for us to climb onto his back for a

ride."

Cassandra gasped. "You can't be serious!" she said.

"I'm very serious. Let me demonstrate." Keidon jumped down from Dusty's back and leaped off the cliff.

She screamed as his body disappeared from sight. Unable to look, she covered her eyes with her hands.

"Cass, I'm okay!" he shouted.

She dismounted the horse and leaned over the edge. Keidon sat proudly on Talon's back waving happily at her. Before she could say a word, the bird rose higher and higher into the air until it was level with the cliff.

"Climb on!" Keidon encouraged. "It's not scary, I promise!"

"I hate heights!" she said, stepping back from the edge.

"I'll hold you tight, don't worry!"

Cassandra had bleak visions of their bodies lying splattered on the rocks below. She couldn't brush the pang of worry aside. Talon flew to where she stood and allowed Keidon to reach out and grab her. Through all her screaming and fighting, he managed to pull her up in front of him. He clasped his arms firmly around her waist. Talon took off in flight. "You bastard!" she screamed. "How could you?"

Keidon laughed. As the bird left the security of

the cliff, it soared into the open sky.

Cassandra felt sick with fear. She had never been in the air before and certainly never had the desire to be. She clutched Keidon's arms and dug her nails into his skin.

Talon gracefully flapped its wings and soared on the wind current. The bird flew over forest, lakes, rivers and small villages. Keidon leaned over and pointed out something of interest. "See that down there?" he called. "That's my cabin!"

Cassandra could see the small cabin nestled privately in the woods. From this high viewpoint, it was the most beautiful thing she had even seen. Cassandra relaxed. It didn't take long before she was pointing out things that caught her eye. The warm wind whipped through her hair, the gust of fresh air exhilarating.

Talon took them far away from Keidon's home, across barren land and over wild terrain. While they were soaring above the rugged forestland, Cassandra noticed a flicker of red in the trees. She squinted for a better look and gasped in surprise. At least two hundred red-hooded figures marched in a straight line. She pointed this out to Keidon.

"Damn it!"

"Where are they going?" she asked.

Keidon studied the magnitude of the army. The Delmirths were headed in the direction they had come from. "They're going toward my property!"

Cassandra shook her head. "They can't be! Why

would they do that?"

Keidon gave her a pathetic look. "Why do you think?"

"They don't know it was you who killed their leader, do they?"

"I'm sure they figured it out. It happened on my land."

This statement disturbed her. If they attacked at Keidon's cabin that meant she would be discovered. If the Delmirths knew Keidon protected her, it would put his own life in danger and she couldn't stay with him much longer. By tomorrow she would have to leave and say her final goodbyes, never to see her heroic warrior again. Her heart fluttered and caused a pain in her chest. She couldn't bear the thought of leaving her man behind. *What other choice do I have?*

Keidon guided the bird in another direction.

Cassandra didn't know where he was headed, but had a feeling he was looking for reinforcements for an upcoming battle.

## CHAPTER 12

Hours later Talon landed in a desolate little town in front of an old rundown building. “What is this place?” Cassandra asked, leaning forward with curiosity.

Keidon dismounted the bird, then lowered Cassandra to the ground. “This is my hometown. See that house over there?” he pointed up the street. “That’s where I lived before the Delmirths raided our village.”

“That’s when your family was taken from you,” she replied quietly.

Keidon could hear the sadness in her voice. It pained him to be here. He could still see the battle clearly in his mind.

“Why are we here?” she asked, looking up and down the barren streets.

“I’m checking to see if my old buddies are still around. If they are, I can warn them about the upcoming battle with the Delmirths. There’s no way in hell I can fight all those bastards alone.” Keidon led the way down the street, past

merchant shops and finally to a quaint house at the end of the block.

Of all the houses, this one was the most beautiful. The building had a fresh coat of white paint with green trim. The smell lingered in the air. The house had a wraparound porch with a rocking chair by the entrance.

"He's got to be here," Keidon said, pounding on the door. They waited in the stillness. Keidon raised his fist and banged again. They could hear a woman's giggle from within.

Finally, the door flung open and an attractive female stood in the entrance, half clothed in a dress shirt. "Yes?" she asked, smiling.

Keidon had seen this woman before. She'd stood by the doorway of her house and tried to lure him with her low-cut dress. As Keidon stared at this dark-haired beauty, he noticed her breasts protruded from the unbuttoned shirt. She moved the material aside deliberately and allowed Keidon to have a clear view of her tits.

Cassandra coughed behind him.

"I didn't notice her," the woman replied, eyeing Cassandra with distaste. The woman made no moves to cover up her exposed flesh. She enjoyed Keidon's gaze on her aroused nipples. "My name is Aurora. Aren't you Keidon Roke, the handsome warrior from these parts?"

"Yes," he replied, coughing into his hand, "and I'm not interested in your services," Keidon said,



lifting his gaze from her boobs.

Offended, the woman gave him a hurtful look. "We don't see too many men around here."

"I understand," Keidon replied, aware that Cassandra was agitated. "I'm here to see if Lund McKenzie is still around. If not, do you know where he could be?"

The woman smiled. "He's in the bedroom with a woman. We could join them if you'd like."

Keidon glanced at Cassandra, whose expression clearly said no. "I think we'll have to pass. Do you know how long he'll be?"

"When it comes to sex, Lund can be at it for hours," she smiled. "If you want him, you'll have to get him yourself."

Keidon watched Aurora slink sexily away. She hadn't left the room before the shirt she wore had been discarded. Aurora turned around to show off her curves. A swollen belly sat below her voluptuous breasts.

"It's Lund's baby," she smiled, rubbing her stomach. Aurora lifted her huge tits into her hands and offered them to Keidon. "When I come into my milk, you're welcome to have some. Lund told me they already have juice in them."

Keidon licked his lips. He'd always wanted to nurse at a woman's tit, to taste her sweet milk. Unfortunately, he'd never had the opportunity. "I can't."

"Suit yourself," she said, lowering the

tantalizing mounds. "Have a nice day!"

Keidon stared after her.

"Do you mind?" Cassandra spoke into his ear. "I thought we were here to find your friend, not drool over some whore," she said, wrinkling her nose. "I can't believe she came onto you right in front of me!"

Keidon found Cassandra's jealousy amusing. He smiled down at her and leaned in to kiss her lips. "Does that make you feel better?"

"Maybe," she said, kissing him back. "I guess we better get Lund out of the sack."

Keidon made for the nearest door and listened for sounds from within. "This must be it." He leaned up against the frame, afraid to interrupt them.

"Just knock," Cassandra coaxed. "If you don't, we might never get hold of him."

Keidon took her words of advice and rapped gently on the door. He placed his ear against the frame.

"There's someone at the door," Lund panted.

"Ignore it," a woman replied. "Faster, Lund!" she screamed. "Make me pregnant!"

Keidon and Cassandra stared at each other in surprise.

"She wants to be pregnant, too?"

He shrugged his shoulders. The springs from the bed squeaked in a continual motion. Keidon didn't have the heart to interrupt the lovemaking

session. Cassandra leaned into the door as well. Her eyes widened at the sounds from within.

"I'm close!" she yelled.

Lund panted, the sounds of his thrusts becoming more urgent. Finally, he let out a cry of release.

Keidon could feel his own cock swell. He grabbed Cassandra's hand and guided it to his bulge.

"You're in the mood?" she asked, rubbing the front of his trousers.

"Listening to them has turned me on. What about you?"

Cassandra was about to respond.

"Who's at the door?"

"It's Keidon!"

"I need to pull out," Lund whispered.

"Not yet!" the woman scolded.

Lund appeared at the door a moment later. He tucked his shirt into his trousers and followed Keidon to the entrance. He closed the door behind him. "These damn females can't keep their hands off me."

"But two?" Keidon asked. "How the hell do you keep up with them both?"

Lund laughed. "It's not easy. You may have noticed the one is pregnant."

"I couldn't help but notice. You're going to be a father, possibly by both women. That's quite a feat."

"The fucking part is easy. It's the burden after that might be more challenging."

"Congratulations and good luck," Keidon replied, holding out a hand to shake.

"I'll need all the luck I can get." Lund turned around and noticed Cassandra emerge from the shadows.

"She's taken, lad," Keidon spoke harshly.

Lund smiled. His gaze roamed lustfully over her beautiful glowing face, mass of red curls, voluptuous breasts and tiny waist. "If you ever get tired of her please send her my way."

Keidon laughed and introduced the pair. He couldn't help but feel protective of Cassandra, especially with the way Lund hungrily looked her over. "Could I have a word with you alone?" Keidon asked.

Lund managed to pull his gaze away from her tits and followed Keidon to the main entrance. Once the door was shut, Keidon turned on Lund. "First off," Keidon said, "that is my woman. She is totally off limits to you. Secondly, I didn't come out here to watch you fuck one of your whores." Lund was about to say something when Keidon cut him off. "I came here to tell you about another battle that is about to take place on my property."

"Your property?"

"Cassandra and I flew over the countryside and noticed the Delmirth army marching toward my place."

Lund ran his hand across his stubble chin. "Why to your place? What did you ever do to them?"

Keidon smiled. "I killed their leader."

Lund was speechless for a second. Finally, he gave a whoop and a holler. "You did it man! You killed that bastard! I hated his guts!"

Keidon didn't feel the same exhilaration as Lund. "You need to send out for reinforcements immediately. Contact the doctor. We're going to need him."

Lund nodded his head in agreement and shook Keidon's hand. "I'm sorry if I offended you. It's just that she's so...."

"Beautiful," Keidon offered.

"I was going to say breathtaking."

"Let's forget about it and concentrate on our strategy for victory." Keidon walked with Lund behind the house where his horse stood tethered.

He unhooked the rope and jumped onto his horse's back. "I'll ride hard and fast," Lund said, patting his horse proudly. "I won't let you down."

Keidon stared up at the young warrior, knowing in his heart he'd keep his word.

\* \* \* \*

Cassandra sat across from Aurora and Delores in the parlor, feeling uncomfortable. They were dressed in Lund's long shirts, partly unbuttoned

to expose their heaving breasts. Cassandra could see why Keidon found them distracting.

"We enjoy the sex," Delores said. "A woman needs to survive these days, no matter how you do it."

"We don't sleep around as much," Aurora added, "since Lund took us under his wing. He provides for us quite nicely. We only provide our services to men when we want to make a little extra cash."

"Are you both having Lund's baby?" Cassandra asked, looking between the two dark-haired beauties.

"I'm already pregnant," Aurora beamed, rubbing her swollen belly. "Delores is still trying. At the rate they're going at it, I think she'll be pregnant soon."

"What about you?" Delores asked. "When are you and that hunky man going to have a baby?"

Cassandra could feel her face flush. She didn't know how to answer that question. "We haven't..."

The two women gasped at the same time and covered their mouth in shock. "You haven't had intercourse with him?" Aurora didn't wait for an answer. "Listen, dear, if you don't fuck him, I will."

"We both will," Delores added.

Cassandra could feel their steely gazes bore into her very soul. "It's not that I don't want to, or that

I haven't thought about it, it's just that..."

"Once you've had one cock inside you it's easy," Delores said. "Are you scared?"

Aurora suddenly gasped. "You're not a virgin?"

The women turned to Cassandra, wanting to know the truth. She felt her face flush to a deeper shade of red.

"So it's true!" Delores whispered. "You must be in your twenties! Why the hell have you waited so long?"

"I've had my reasons," she said quietly.

"Are you planning on fucking this warrior or what?"

"I'm thinking about it," she said, twisting her hands nervously in her lap.

"Listen, sweetheart, time is wasting. If you don't please this man soon someone else will. They can only hold out for so long," Delores said.

"It's not that I haven't pleased him in certain ways..."

The women smiled at this. "Thank goodness!"

Cassandra looked between the beautiful women sitting opposite her and dared to ask the question that plagued her mind. "Can I ask you something?"

Aurora and Delores leaned forward. "Yes," they said together.

"What does it feel like to have a man inside of you?"

Aurora spoke first. "It's the most amazing feeling in the entire world."

"The orgasm can be quite amazing, too," Delores added.

"You don't know what you're missing, sweetheart, by not having a big strong man pound his cock inside of you."

"If you don't find out soon," Delores continued, "then someone else will. I'm sure he enjoys head, but most men want more than that."

"Take it from a woman who has seen it all. If you don't put out, then he'll get out."

"What about waiting for marriage?"

The two women laughed. "It's a rare thing these days," Aurora said.

"Only the decent ones with willpower wait."

"Most men and women," Delores replied, "don't have the willpower to wait. The sexual tension is too much."

"Did you ever love someone that filled your very soul?"

Aurora and Delores both said, "Yes," together.

"I'm carrying his baby," Aurora said proudly.

"Hopefully I am, too," Delores stated, rubbing her hand across her belly.

"Allow this man to take your virginity. It's obvious that he cares about you, he wouldn't even fuck me. It'll bring you fulfillment in so many ways."

Cassandra nodded to Aurora. She knew the



woman was right. If only it were that easy to surrender herself to Keidon. If she did, the quest would be a failure, then what would become of them?

"I can't believe he wouldn't fuck you," Delores said. "Maybe we need to test his strength on me."

Cassandra didn't know what Delores meant. When Keidon entered the room, Delores and Aurora rose to their feet and approached the warrior. "Lund left to send for reinforcements," Keidon said, glancing down at the dark-haired beauties.

They both rubbed seductively against his body and unbuttoned their shirts to reveal aroused nipples. "What do you say to a threesome?" Delores asked, kissing his neck. "Or maybe a foursome, if she wants to join us?"

"Girls, that sounds like a great time, but really I must be going. I have..."

Aurora had lowered her lips to his cock, kissing his hardness through the material of his trousers. "I think I need to release your tension, warrior."

"No, really..."

Cassandra couldn't believe what she was witnessing. The two women roughly pulled his trousers down around his knees. They both gasped in shock at his erection.

"That's the biggest one I've ever seen!" Aurora cried.

"Oh my," Delores said speechless.

"I want it in my mouth first," Aurora said, pushing Delores out of the way. Aurora opened her mouth wide, ready to plunge his shaft into her gaping mouth.

Keidon yanked her head away. "I can't!"

"We want to please you," they said together.

"Please," Delores said. "I'll give you a free one."

"Me, too," Aurora offered.

"I'm not interested in Lund's whores. I need to go." Keidon shoved his rock-hard penis back into his trousers. He turned to Cassandra who sat on the couch with a satisfied look on her face. "Let's go, darling," he said, holding out his hand.

Cassandra turned to follow Keidon out the door. Aurora and Delores held her back momentarily for advice.

"Fuck him," Delores said. "He's got the biggest cock I've ever seen."

"One like that would give you the best orgasm in the world."

"You really think so?" Cassandra asked.

"Believe me, I know," Aurora replied. "I've dreamt of one that size at least a thousand times and the orgasms get better every time."

Cassandra left Lund's home with a feeling of hopelessness. With her sexual drive strong, Cassandra knew she couldn't fight the urges much longer. She climbed onto Talon's back and clutched Keidon's waist. As the bird took them

higher and higher into the clouds, she could feel his muscles tighten. She knew at that moment he fought off the same desires.

## CHAPTER 13

Talon soared over the familiar land. He passed by the Delmirth army as they marched in procession. Once they arrived at Keidon's homestead, Cassandra stood and stretched alongside the majestic bird. "That was quite the journey," she said, smiling up at him.

Keidon leaned down and kissed her lips. "I hope you enjoyed yourself?"

"Yes I did. How much longer until the Delmirth army arrives?"

Keidon's smile faded. "I would say tomorrow sometime. My men will be here by then."

"Why aren't they attacking by air? They could have been here already."

"I think they've planned a surprise attack."

Cassandra stared into Keidon's brown eyes. She wanted to know the answer. "Why didn't you sleep with those whores? You definitely had the chance."

Keidon grabbed her in a warm embrace and kissed the top of her forehead. "Why do I need

them when I've got you?"

Cassandra smiled into his shirt. Those were the kind of words she wanted and needed to hear.

"Lund will have his hands full with women like that."

Cassandra closed her eyes and held him tight. She knew the man she had in her arms was one of a kind.

"Darling," he whispered. "Why don't you go and rest by the lake while I prepare dinner."

"Do you need help?"

Keidon squeezed her even tighter. "I might need help later in the bedroom, but in the kitchen, no."

She pulled away from his arms and kissed his bearded cheek. "I can definitely help you with that."

"Talon, you can go home," he commanded. "I want you back tomorrow morning."

Talon squawked in reply.

Cassandra watched in fascination. "How does he know what you're saying?"

"We've known each other for so long."

Cassandra timidly rubbed the bird's head. She enjoyed the tickle of his feathers beneath her fingertips. "Why does he need to come back?"

Keidon looked at Cassandra firmly. "I need you to leave tomorrow before the Delmirth army arrives. I'll have no woman of mine fight in battle."

"But..."

Keidon placed his finger on her lips. "No arguments," he ordered.

Cassandra fell silent and continued to stroke Talon. The bird lowered its head to nudge Keidon affectionately, then took flight. She gaped in awe at his amazing wingspan. "That's quite the bird," she sighed.

Keidon unexpectedly lifted her into his arms. He carried her toward the water.

"Put me down!" He walked until the water came up to his knees and dropped her in.

She screamed when the coldness chilled her skin. The dress she wore clung to her. Cassandra could see Keidon's gaze lingered on her hard nipples as they poked out from the drenched material.

"I like what I see, my lady," he said, dipping his mouth to capture a nipple between his teeth.

Cassandra laughed, thinking Keidon would make love to her in the water.

As he suckled one breast, then the other, he suddenly broke the contact. "That's a preview of what you're going to witness tonight."

She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him hard on the lips. They stood that way for a long moment. He threw her a devilish smile as he waded out of the water. Cassandra watched her man walk toward his cabin and disappear inside. Lifting her face to the sky, she smelled the

warm salty breeze. Cassandra waded out of the icy depths and took her shoes off to walk along the beach. She felt truly alive with an unexplainable emotion. Keidon had proved he cared for her, the image of him turning down Lund's women brought a smile to her face.

Sand squished between her toes. The warm particles massaged her tired, sore feet. In the back of her mind, she could picture Keidon massaging her in many other places. In a few hours it would be dark, then she would have Keidon all to herself. He wanted to be pleased tonight. Cassandra knew he'd want to go all the way. Would she turn him down or confess her identity and admit the truth? She hoped to avoid a confrontation at all costs. If she could leave quickly without hurting him, it would be the best for both of them. The thought of leaving Keidon made her stomach turn somersaults. He was everything she had always hoped for and more.

Cassandra was contemplating this problem when she noticed several objects wash up along shore. Squinting, she thought it must be the glare of the sun playing tricks on her. As she neared the two bulges that stuck out of the sand, she realized they were dead bodies. Running to the place where the people lay, Cassandra knelt down by the closest man. Slowly she turned one over and screamed. "No!"

The tears trickled down her face. She covered

her mouth to stifle another outburst. Her terrified gaze took in the mangled body. Tor lay partly in the water. His eyes stared blankly into space. Repeated stab wounds were evident on his torn shirt. By the color of his skin and the condition of his body, Cassandra could tell that he had been floating in the water for several days.

Cassandra fell to her knees. In the distance, she heard someone run toward her. Keidon's shadow towered above. Cassandra wiped the evidence of the tears from her face.

"Are these your protectors?" he asked.

Cassandra let out a muffled, "Yes."

He walked briskly past her and turned over Blake's body. "I'm sorry, Cass. This is terrible."

Cassandra looked beyond Tor and gazed at Blake's remains. Much like Tor, he had repeated stab wounds in his chest. Blake appeared to have put up quite the fight, having a deep gash in the side of his cheek and many cuts to his hands and legs. "They promised to come back for me!" she sobbed. "They promised!"

Keidon gently moved Blake out of the waves and pulled his body onto shore. "We need to bury them before the buzzards come."

Cassandra got unsteadily to her feet. "I can't!" she cried.

Keidon held her in a warm embrace. "It's going to be okay," he soothed. "I'll take care of you."

Cassandra broke away angrily and hit him with



her fists. "You don't understand!" she ranted. "These were my friends, they protected me! Tor and Blake were always there for me when I was growing up. I can't live without them...I loved them!"

Keidon grabbed Cassandra's hands to stop the abuse.

Cassandra fell to the ground, pulled her knees to her chest and cradled her head between her legs.

Keidon lowered himself next to her and lifted her onto his lap. "I've got you," he said. "Let it out."

She clutched his waist tightly. "Don't leave me," she sobbed. "Please."

Keidon kissed the tears that streamed down her cheeks and found her lips. Cassandra opened her mouth to him and allowed his tongue inside. He thrust it in repeatedly. Whisking her into his arms, he carried her inside the cabin. Once safely in his domain, Keidon laid Cassandra onto his bed.

She held tight, not wanting him to leave.

"It's okay, darling," he soothed. "I'm not going anywhere." Cassandra felt the warm flames in the fireplace.

Keidon briskly went to work and lowered her dress from her bosom. He stripped the drenched garment from her chilled body. "This blanket should warm you," he said, grabbing a buffalo hide from the foot of the bed. "Why don't I get

you a warm drink?"

Cassandra reached out and grabbed his hand. "No! Don't go!"

Keidon lay down beside her and discarded his own wet clothing. They both lay naked and stared lovingly at each other. "Do you want to talk about it?" he asked, kissing her neck.

Cassandra shook her head, the tears filling her eyes. "Not right now."

Keidon sealed her lips with a kiss. "I'm sorry for asking."

"Kiss me," she coaxed.

Unexpectedly, Keidon rose slightly and positioned himself above Cassandra. She felt his weight upon her. His chest hairs rubbed against her aroused nipples, down below she could feel his hard cock wedge between her thighs. An urgency she had never known stirred within her mound. Without another word, he started to love her. He coaxed his tongue into her mouth, gently thrusting it over and over. The grim pictures of Tor and Blake gradually left her mind.

Keidon lowered his lips to her neck, then worked his way to her breasts. Between his fingers and his lips, he teased, pulled and sucked, bringing the nubs to a red and raw state. Cassandra moaned in pleasure enjoying his skilled lovemaking.

Keidon left a trail of kisses down her belly and stopped at her wet mound.

Cassandra anticipated his oral attention, but to her surprise, he briskly moved her legs wide apart. Lifting his hardened cock toward her pussy, he thrust it deep inside her in one swift motion. Keidon tore apart her barrier. Cassandra gasped in pain and clutched onto his back. "Keidon," she cried out.

"You're a virgin!" Keidon gazed down at her in concern. "Do you want me to stop?"

Cassandra shook her head. The feel of his cock stirred an excitement within her. "Please continue," she moaned. "I want you."

"I'll be gentle," he whispered into her ear. Keidon slowly delved further into her wetness with each thrust.

Cassandra dug her nails into his back in a wave of excitement. Inch by inch, he moved in a steady rhythm. Cassandra opened her eyes long enough to see Keidon focused on his upcoming orgasm. Perspiration trickled down his back. To Cassandra this was the most exhilarating experience of her life.

Keidon rammed his hard cock into her over and over again.

Cassandra cried out in ecstasy every time he plunged inward. Keidon lavished her breasts with his tongue, his body moving faster, riding her with determination. His balls rammed hard against her.

"I'm going to cum!"

Cassandra anticipated his release. She felt his hot sticky cock steadily pound inside her. She knew he was close to completion. The muscles tightened on his face, his movements heightened. She closed her eyes to the wonderful sensation. With each thrust of Keidon, she felt her own body driven to the brink of orgasm. Suddenly, they both let out a cry of delight. Cassandra felt his cum fill her.

"Oh my!" he shuddered, falling limp on top of her.

Keidon had muscle spasms, his seed emptying into her. Cassandra enjoyed the feel of his body pressed up against hers.

"I didn't know you were a virgin," he whispered, kissing her gently on the lips. "I thought you were experienced in lovemaking. Why did you wait?"

Cassandra couldn't look him in the eye when she said, "I was waiting for the right man to come along."

Keidon smiled at these words.

She watched his naked body rise from the bed and walk toward the kitchen. A horrifying thought entered her mind. She had lost her virginity to a warrior and the quest had failed. Cassandra pictured the disappointment on her father's face once he found out. *That's if he's alive.* Cassandra wanted to suddenly hide from the world and never return. Her journey had ended

and all hope was lost because of her weakness. Cassandra wanted to cry into her pillow.

Keidon walked into the room at that moment with a washbasin. He grabbed a washcloth from the confines of the basin and wrung it out. Gently he placed it against her mound. Blood stained the cloth. "You're not disappointed in me?" he asked, gliding the cloth against her skin.

"No," she replied.

Keidon finished his task and left to empty the basin.

She glanced up at the ceiling and contemplated his question. *I'm not disappointed in Keidon*, she thought glumly, *I'm disappointed in myself*.

## CHAPTER 14

Later that night after the fire died down, Cassandra slept in Keidon's embrace. She enjoyed his strong muscled arm wrapped securely around her waist as she lay on her side, facing the wall. Keidon's bulk pressed tightly against hers. Cassandra's eyes opened to the feel of his arousal stirring against her backside.

Cassandra watched the shadows of the fire flicker against the wall. Not sure if Keidon were awake, she whispered softly, "Are you sleeping?"

Keidon stirred at the sound of her voice. "Yes darling, I am," he said ironically, kissing the nape of her neck.

Cassandra kept her back to him and smiled. "I can feel something poke at me from behind."

"You turn me on with your charm and beauty," he replied.

"Do you want me?" Cassandra nodded.

"Yes, I want to try again."

She rolled over to face Keidon and stared deeply into his brown eyes. She watched him shift. His cock stood erect. Cassandra wanted him

inside her. "Please," she begged. "Make love to me."

"Spread your legs wide, my lady."

Cassandra obeyed his command.

"You look eager," he said, meeting her gaze. "We've got all night."

Cassandra couldn't take her gaze off him. Never in all her life had she seen a man who measured up to all her expectations.

"Let's lay down on the rug. That way we can feel the warmth of the fire."

Cassandra liked the idea. She wrapped her arms willingly around his neck and snuggled into his chest as he carried her to the floor.

Gently, he laid her down onto the thick rug. "Spread your legs, Cass."

Cassandra opened them up to him. A wave of excitement washed over her. The man of her dreams was going to make passionate love to her.

\* \* \* \*

Keidon saw the lust in her eyes. He wanted her, too. What harm could come from bedding a willing woman? After tomorrow, he didn't know what would become of them. Now that her protectors had been killed in battle, he hadn't a clue what her future plans held. Would she return to her family or continue on her mysterious journey?

He put aside his doubts about their future and concentrated on pleasuring the woman beside him. The stability and happiness Keidon found with his wife vanished the day she was brutally taken from him. His life had lost all meaning until now.

She spread out on the rug, eager for him to pleasure her. "Please," she begged. "I need you."

He lowered his body onto hers and kissed her neck. He nibbled on her earlobes while his fingers explored the massive curls. He had seen some beautiful women in his day, but never one who had red wavy hair that smelled as sweet as honey and eyes that shone like emeralds.

Cassandra wrapped her legs around his waist.

Keidon found her luscious red lips and kissed them tenderly. She moaned. He enticed her mouth open, their tongues dancing together, exploring. Keidon took pleasure in her panting.

Eventually he moved his head lower. His lips found her taunt nipples. Keidon could tell this excited her. Keidon gently kissed one hard bud while stroking the other with his fingertips. He continued sucking the buds before his tongue stroked the entire breast, his mouth working magic, his fingers moving lower. Her legs were spread wide apart, hips raised upward, waiting.

The moisture that surrounded her mound dripped onto his fingers. She was ready for his cock. Keidon took this opportunity to drive her



over the brink. He moved his body downward so his head was at her pussy. Her womanly scent aroused his senses. He placed his tongue in her wet folds and nipped at the lips. She moaned in pleasure. He sucked hard and enjoyed the juices that flowed into his mouth.

Cassandra buried her hands into his hair.

Keidon put two fingers into her pussy, then paused. "I know why you didn't want my fingers inside you before. You were afraid I'd find out you were a virgin." He dipped his face toward her wetness, drinking her in.

"I wanted to tell you," she gasped.

"Do you want me to continue?" He paused his loving, waiting for her answer. The question hung awkwardly in the air. Keidon still had his fingers inside her pussy, rubbing it gently to keep her wet.

"I want you," she moaned.

Keidon didn't need to hear another word. He buried his face into her mound and licked, stroked and sucked until she called his name into the night. He lifted himself to her level. His penis was rock hard and in need of release. He could feel her hips tilt upward and invite him to enter. Inch by inch, he moved into her moist pussy.

"Please, I want all of you."

He slowly pushed his way through, aware of Cassandra clutching his back. "This may hurt," he said. "I'll try and be as gentle as I can." She panted

in excitement. "I can stop..."

"No!" she pleaded. "Keep going, please!"

Keidon moved deeper into her until his entire length was inside. She gasped with pleasure as he filled her. They moved as one, rocking back and forth on the warm rug. Keidon felt her muscles tighten around him. They were both close to release, a few more strokes and he would shoot his seed inside her. Keidon enjoyed the feel of Cassandra's body pressed against his. As he loved her, he thought of the last few days they spent together. She filled a void in his life and brought unexpected happiness to him.

He kissed the nape of her neck, eager to bring Cassandra to completion. He closed his eyes to the feel of their bodies moving in perfect harmony. He increased the momentum. Cassandra clenched her pussy muscles, ready for release. They cried out in ecstasy at the same time. Keidon slowed his movements as their orgasm subsided.

Keidon lowered himself to lay on top of her, aware that he was still rock hard within her. She playfully made her muscles twitch around him. He became more aroused.

\* \* \* \*

Cassandra smiled at him and brought his mouth down to hers. "I liked it so much I think we may have to do this all night."

"All night?" Keidon had a devilish grin on his face.

"You're still hard. Does it ever go down?"

"Not around you, my lady," he grinned.

"Is there something I can do to help?" she asked, feigning ignorance.

His eyes darkened. "What do you have in mind?"

Cassandra shifted her body so she lay on top of him. She looked down at the most handsome man she'd ever seen. Keidon raised his hands to massage her nipples. He squeezed them between his fingertips, and caused her body to clench around him. She began to move up and down, enjoying the sensation of him inside her.

"I take it you're enjoying sex?" he asked, panting.

"Yes, you feel so good," she smiled.

Keidon put a finger on her clit.

Cassandra called out his name. She rode him faster taking pleasure in their lovemaking. His cock felt hard and filled her completely. She tilted her hips back, allowing him more access with his fingers. "You want me again, do you?"

"Yes," she gasped. Before he released, she pulled him out and sucked on his cock, tasting their juices together.

Keidon kept a firm grip on her as she sucked and licked his shaft. "Cass, turn around so your head is facing my cock."

"What?"

"I want to show you another way to make love."

Cassandra complied and positioned herself. Keidon directed her down allowing them to pleasure each other with their lips. Cassandra didn't know how much more enjoyment she could take. Keidon stuck two fingers inside her as she took his entire cock into her mouth.

It took all of her concentration to continue to lick and suck him while his fingers and lips worked their magic on her pussy. The orgasm happened quickly, Cassandra's cries ringing out around the room. Once Keidon had a good tasting, he urged her to ride him again. She had only moved a few more times, when she felt him ejaculate. She clenched in excitement.

"Cass! Oh Cass!" he roared.

Cassandra collapsed onto his chest. This time she could feel his cock go soft. "I finally did it," she muttered, kissing his nipples.

"This was the best I've ever had," he said, breathing hard.

"Do you mean it?" she asked, lifting her face to look at him.

"Yes," Keidon said, pulling her in his strong embrace. He gently kissed her forehead and tightened his grip around her waist.

"Did you ever sleep with a woman you loved?"

Keidon went silent with a pained look on his

face.

Cassandra waited anxiously for him to say something, growing concerned when he didn't answer. "What is it? Did I say something wrong?"

Keidon let out a deep breath. "I loved one. A filthy, low life Delmirth took her. I was supposed to protect her and I failed. I have never forgiven myself."

"I'm sorry," she said, kissing his chest. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"No, actually I don't." Keidon sighed and held her tightly. "Holton was the bastard who took her. Because I killed him, the army is out for revenge. That's why there will be plenty of bloodshed tomorrow."

Cassandra felt his body tense. She rubbed his arms gently and attempted to calm him, quickly changing the subject to lighten the mood. Tenderly she lowered her lips to his chest and whispered, "You're my first and I'm happy you were."

Keidon hugged her tightly. "I hope I didn't disappoint you. This night isn't over yet, my darling. And I intend on pleasuring you until morning. Are you up for the challenge?"

"Yes," she answered, kissing his lips. Satisfied with his answer, she ran her hand lovingly across his hairy chest. The act of lovemaking was more than she had ever thought it would be, especially with someone she loved.

## CHAPTER 15

Keidon stared down at Cassandra's sleeping form. He had never felt so alive. They had made love all through the night until exhaustion took over. Cassandra was eager to try any position he suggested, including the backward position, one of his favorites. She had screamed so loud when she came he thought the entire forest would hear. Finally exhausted, Cassandra had snuggled into the crook of his arm in the early hours of the morning. He liked the feel of her body pressed against his.

He ran his hands lovingly through her red curls. She didn't stir from his touch. Keidon admired her beauty, from her luscious red lips and ample bosom to her trim waist. Last night, he'd realized she was the first woman whose body molded perfectly to his. It really was the wildest night of his life. They had enjoyed each other to the limit. His body completely satiated, his penis didn't even stir when it rested up against her buttocks.

As the light filtered through the wispy curtains, Keidon's stomach churned. Today he'd battle the Delmirths. In a few short hours, the nasty creatures would be on his doorstep. Careful not to wake Cassandra, Keidon rose from the bed and dressed in his battle gear. After he finished dressing and sharpening his weapons, he went outside to complete one more task.

The morning sun beat down upon him. He grabbed a shovel and started to dig two holes underneath a pine tree. By the time he'd finished, he felt a warm hand caress his arm. Keidon turned around to see Cassandra wearing her red dress. "I like what I see," he said, admiring her beauty.

"I didn't know where you were. I thought maybe you were in the pool. I was prepared to join you."

"I don't know if there is time," he said, glancing up at the sky. "I might fly and see where the army is. My men should be along shortly."

Cassandra gazed down at the holes he dug in sorrow. "These are for..."

Keidon nodded, aware she was about to cry. "Why don't you grab a bite to eat and meet me here? We'll have a burial for your men."

She nodded and walked toward the cabin.

Keidon dug the last of the holes. He wrapped the men in tarps before transporting them to the burial site. Keidon dragged Tor toward the nearest one. He was about to lower him into the ground.

Cassandra cried softly. "I'll miss you," she sobbed.

Cassandra assisted him in covering up their bodies. Once the mounds met with their approval, Cassandra picked a handful of wildflowers and placed them on their graves. Keidon stood solemnly next to her and listened to the sincere words she spoke.

"Tor and Blake were brave warriors. They fought in many battles, always willing to risk their lives for others. They were the most thoughtful, kindest men I have ever known who enjoyed life to the fullest. They always fought for what they believed in, never failing to complete a task no matter how dangerous. They proved that in their last battle. I'll miss their sense of humor, the laughter we shared, the stories they told..." Cassandra wiped the tears that streamed down her cheeks.

Keidon wrapped her in a warm embrace and gently rubbed her back.

"Most of all, I'll miss their friendship and how much they loved me," she continued.

Keidon held her tight as she wept for all she had lost. When the last of the tears were shed, Keidon said a quick word. "Even though I never knew you, I'm sure you were great men. Thank you for protecting Cass all these years. I salute you." Keidon raised his right hand. After he finished, he walked Cassandra to his horse and led



her to the warm pool.

"Thank you," she said, kissing his cheek.

"For what?" he asked.

"For your kind words. That was very nice of you and it made me feel better."

"I want you to sit, relax and have a quick soak."

"What about you?" she asked.

"Talon should be here soon. I need to scan the area and see how close the enemy is."

They had reached the secluded spot in the woods. The two dismounted Dusty and stood by the edge to admire the warm water. "It looks inviting," Cassandra said, lowering her dress.

Keidon told himself he needed to get a move on. War would soon be on his doorstep.

"Can you join me?" she asked, lowering herself into the steamy depths.

Keidon's gaze took in her remarkable form and watched as it disappeared beneath the water line. "I would love to, darling, but I must return to the cabin. Stay here until I come and get you. This will be the safest place for you to hide."

"I'll be waiting," she said, motioning for him to step closer.

Keidon knelt down to kiss her lips. He could taste wild strawberries on her mouth. "You taste delicious," he moaned, wanting to delve a little further.

Cassandra opened her mouth to welcome his tongue. It darted in and out several times to enjoy

the sweetness.

"I really should be going," he said, cupping her left breast underwater. "Talon should be here in about fifteen minutes or so."

"Then we've got time," Cassandra teased, lifting her upper body out of the water and tempting him. "I need you to love me. Please, it will make me feel better."

Keidon groaned. In the back of his mind, he knew he should ride back to the cabin, but his cock told him something different. With Cassandra around, it was any wonder he got out of bed at all. He could feel her draw him closer and pull roughly at his warrior apparel.

"How do you get this damn thing off?" she asked.

He moved quickly away from her and, in one swift motion, discarded his clothes. The warmth of the sun beat down upon his exposed skin. His erection stood upright in need of release. Seductively, she pulled him into the water, guiding him with her hands.

She grabbed his shaft and ran her hand up and down the thickness of it. "Why don't you sit down and I'll join you."

Keidon lowered himself into the steamy water, sighing as he did so.

Cassandra straddled his lap. Holding onto his penis, she guided it toward her wet pussy and inserted it. She began to move up and down on

him.

Keidon closed his eyes in ecstasy and enjoyed the ride.

"I'll do all the work," she said, pressing her lips to his nipples.

Keidon let her make love to him in the morning light. He basked in her sudden thrusts and mewled pleasure. Slowly, his entire penis had entered her.

Cassandra pulled completely off his long shaft, only to plunge it back again. She did this over and over, driving him to the brink of madness.

"Oh Cass!" he shouted.

She repeated the movements quickly. Thrusting his full length inward, then pulling it out to the tip of his cock. Keidon could tell it drove her crazy as well. Her erect nipples were pressed against his chest. He decided to bring her to even more pleasure by sucking roughly on them.

She cried out his name when he pulled hard on the taunt buds with his teeth. "I want to come," she panted, arching her back in pleasure.

While Cassandra steadily rode his shaft, Keidon fingered her clit. He knew he had found her pleasure spot when she closed her eyes and gasped for breath.

"Keidon!" she cried.

"You like that?" Keidon rubbed her pussy lips with his fingers. Her cries echoed in the quiet forest. Keidon came seconds later, his orgasm as

powerful as hers. Their cries had died down when a noise from behind caught their attention.

"What's that?" Cassandra asked, straddled onto his lap.

From out of the forest, two men on dragons emerged from hiding. Cassandra, too shocked to move, sat there with her mouth gaping open. Lund McKenzie and Dr. Mark Styne trudged through the trees and approached the pool's edge. Lund eyed the scene with a big smile. The doctor turned away and tried to keep his gaze focused on something in the trees.

"What do we have here?" Lund asked. He gazed at their naked bodies entwined in the water. "I take it you're not a virgin anymore?"

Cassandra's face turned red.

"My women told me," he added. "It sounded like you were having quite a good time. I could hear your screams clear through these bushes. Keidon must be quite the lover."

"Where are the rest of the men?" Keidon asked, ignoring his remark.

"They're surrounding the property. The Delmirths are about twenty minutes away. We could see them drawing nearer from the air."

Lund eyed Cassandra hungrily. "If you need help getting dressed," he offered, "I'm your man. Or better yet, if you want me to have a quick dip with you in the pool, I can help you with all your womanly needs."

Cassandra pulled herself off Keidon and dressed. She approached Lund and shouted, "You've made crude remarks ever since I met you!"

Lund seemed embarrassed.

"It's not enough that you already have two women pregnant, but now you want a third, is that right?"

Lund stared at the ground as she approached. "I'm sorry..." he mumbled. Lund glanced first at Keidon's shocked expression, then at the doctor's. He turned and ran back toward the sanctuary of the woods.

"Get lost you bastard!" she shouted. Cassandra stalked angrily past the men.

Keidon had never seen an outburst like that before. He knew one thing—he never wanted to cross Cassandra Manor. Keidon dressed in silence and walked by a flustered Mark Sty. "This is Cassandra," he said awkwardly, pointing to the woman sitting on the horse. "And this is Mark Sty. He's the doctor that travels with our army."

Mark offered a hand for Cassandra to shake. Once the introductions were made, the three of them took off toward the battle zone, taking the well-used trail. As they came through the clearing, Keidon gasped in surprise. All the men from the northern region were there to fight, even the general himself.

Talon waited impatiently by the cabin,

squawking his disapproval.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," he said soothingly to the bird. "I had business to attend to."

Cassandra met Lund's eyes, a steely silence hung in the air.

Keidon broke the tension by introducing his woman to his loyal and honorable troops. The men were cordial, some shaking her hand while others bowed before her in a gentlemanly fashion. Keidon could see the lust in their eyes. His jealousy demanded Cassandra leave immediately. He guided her toward Talon and moved them out of earshot from the rest of the group. "Talon is going to take you to safety. Once danger is over, he'll fly you back here and we can start a new beginning."

Cassandra's eyes lit up at these words.

"Whatever journey you were taking before I met you, I'll accompany you in completing."

"I would like to stay here with you," she whispered. She wrapped her arms around his neck, their lips pressed together in a long, urgent kiss.

The troops made approving noises and some of them chuckled, but Keidon didn't care. He was in the arms of the woman he loved and nothing could destroy his happiness. Keidon broke the contact. "Wait here." He disappeared inside the cabin and returned with Cassandra's knapsack.

"You'll need this," he said.

The sound of marching grew louder as it neared the property. Keidon looked at Cassandra. "That's your cue to leave. Stay safe," he said, touching her cheek with his fingertip.

"You, too," she replied. "I can't lose you."

"You won't." Keidon assisted Cassandra onto Talon's back. The bird flapped its wings briskly, building up speed.

"Where is he taking me?" she asked over the noise.

Keidon looked up with a wide smile, "To the magical land."

"I'll still be on your property, not so far away."

He nodded his head. Suddenly, Talon took to the sky. His massive body soared into the clouds. Keidon prayed he would see her again. He had to win this battle. His future depended on it. He made a decision at that very moment. If his army defeated the Delmirths, he would ask Cassandra to be his wife. It was the right thing to do. No force on this earth could stop him. He smiled to himself, then grew serious as the Delmirth army appeared and moved into battle position.

## CHAPTER 16

Keidon nodded to General Striker who acknowledged him with a formal wave. His troops assembled in multiple lines and awaited their orders. Keidon stood in the front line beside the general and held his sword at his side.

The Delmirth troops stood and faced them, wearing red robes and hoods. "I'm Damon, the appointed leader of Holton's troops," a red-robed Delmirth said. "I need to speak directly with this man!" he shouted, pointing a gnarled finger at Keidon. The Delmirth leader eyed Keidon with distaste. "You're one of those warriors from the Chestal Tribe."

"This is your last chance to get the hell off my land!"

"You killed Holton and now it's payback time."

"He kidnapped my family! The bastard got what he deserved!"

"You were a coward! You killed Holton while keeping yourself hidden."

"I would have killed your leader whether I



made my presence known or not."

Damon laughed, his sunken gray face wrinkled even more. "That's what you think. Let's see who is the strongest, shall we?"

"I'm going to fight for the freedom of all mankind!" Keidon yelled, raising his sword into the air. "Who's with me?"

His troops followed suit, yelling and shouting in victory, then fell silent in expectation. The Delmirth army frowned and grumbled their disapproval.

"You may think you have us beat," the leader spoke, "but you're sadly mistaken. Once we massacre your army, it's time for us to find the princess."

"The princess?" Keidon asked in confusion. "Who are you talking about?"

Damon tilted his head back and laughed. "Princess Wellington of Kensington Palace. She has something very valuable and I want it back."

Keidon held his blade out for protection.

"She came across this very lake," he pointed out. "We killed the two bastard warriors protecting her. We've combed the entire lake for her body and came up empty handed. My men and I have come to the conclusion that you're hiding her," he commanded.

Keidon's eyes widened. *Cassandra Manor couldn't possibly be the princess of Kensington Palace, could she? If Cassandra was, that meant she lied to me*

*all along about her identity. Why the hell would she do a thing like that?*

"I think you're protecting that wench! I want her!"

Keidon snapped out of his reverie and stared at the Delmirth as if he had lost his mind. "I have never seen this princess you speak of."

"Liar!" he shouted, raising his dagger high into the air. The Delmirth smiled, then looked past him. Something red lay atop a trash pile outside the cabin. "Is that a Delmirth robe I see?"

Keidon turned around. He forgot to burn the retched thing.

"You do have the princess!" he accused, his green eyes bulging even wider at the realization. "She stole a red robe like that one to conceal her identity!"

Keidon stood in denial. They couldn't possibly be talking about the same woman. The person he referred to had to be someone else. *But what if it wasn't?* He refused to answer that question. He glared at the Delmirth army. "I have not seen the princess," Keidon replied. "I'm running out of patience speaking with you."

Damon stood taller and more commanding. He eyed Keidon with hatred. "I'll find her," he said viciously. "And when I do, I'll treat her the same way Holton treated your wife."

Keidon raised his weapon at these words and struck Damon in the side of the head. The war had

begun. Swords and daggers clashed from both sides. The fight escalated quickly. The enemy troops battled Keidon's men throughout the valley.

The Delmirth leader recovered from his blow and swung his weapon at Keidon's chest. The impact of the blade ricocheted off Keidon's armor and knocked his own weapon from his hand. Keidon turned the blade from his chest and shoved it hard at Damon. The two men stood face to face, struggling to possess the weapon. Keidon could see Damon's hunger for the kill, the bulging green eyes pierced his very soul.

They grunted and growled, struggling to impale the other with the blade. Sweat trickled down Keidon's brow. He concentrated hard on regaining the power. The blade moved closer to Damon's chest.

The angry Delmirth swore under his breath. "You won't kill me," he whispered. Damon fought hard to keep the sharp edge from splitting him open. The blade was within inches of his robe.

Keidon strained and put his entire weight into it. Finally, the weapon struck Damon in the chest. He fell back stunned, giving Keidon the opportunity to reclaim his own sword.

While Keidon fought the leader, he noticed his own troops were taking a nasty beating. Some had died quickly, their bodies strewn on the ground. Lund was on Keidon's left and battling a

Delmirth. Mark Styel also handled his share of the burden. He dragged the wounded victims toward Keidon's cabin in hopes of saving their lives.

Lund had finished off his opponent, and came up from behind to watch Keidon's back. While Lund battled the approaching enemies, Keidon struck a powerful blow to Damon causing him to stumble backward. In his place, six more Delmirths came to defend him. Not capable of fighting them all at once, they soon lost track of Damon. Keidon noticed he had moved by the water to battle General Striker. Keidon swiped his blade at two Delmirths and struck them both in the chest. They dropped to the ground with weapons still in hand. Keidon took their daggers and used all three in succession, taking careful aim at the enemies fighting Lund. The blades shot across the small expanse that separated them.

The men dropped at Lund's feet one after the other. "I owe you one!" Lund called.

Keidon nodded and took on another big brute. The red-robed warrior he battled was stronger and faster than most. It took all of Keidon's skills to stay on top of the game. The Delmirth swung a heavy dagger at his chest, missing its mark by inches. Keidon managed to roll under the warrior's legs and grabbed his feet to bring him down. To his astonishment, the Delmirth landed on his own dagger, the blade imbedding into his skull. Keidon yanked hard at the dagger and

attempted to free the blade from the deep wound. Finally, he pried it free and ran off to fight another Delmirth.

From where Keidon stood, it looked as if they were outnumbered. A majority of his men had fallen, most to their deaths. General Striker still battled Damon and three heavyset men close to the lake. Keidon was about to run to his aid when he heard a howl in the distance. The yelping noise got louder. The enemy was oblivious to the oncoming noise. His own men stopped fighting momentarily.

Hungry, vicious wild cats appeared at the edge of the woods. The beasts had huge heads, large yellow eyes and sharp bristly fur in the shape of spikes.

"You must fight fair!" Keidon shouted.

The Delmirth army laughed and screamed out their victory. "You didn't fight fair with Holton!" someone replied back. "Attack!"

The cats suddenly sprang from the density of the forest. They pounced on his troops and chewed them to pieces within minutes. He cringed when one knocked Lund to the ground. The cat had drool dangling from its chin. Its sharp teeth gnawed through the handle of his sword, which Lund used to wedge into its mouth. "Help!" he managed to shout.

One large cat had approached Keidon. He knew he didn't have much time. If he were to save his

army, he'd have to act fast. Placing his fingers to his lips, he blew a high-pitched whistle. The sound carried through the woods despite all the fighting and cries of fallen troops. Keidon hoped it reached help in time.

A cat took this opportunity to lunge at him and knocked him to the ground. Keidon fell hard. The cat dug its sharp teeth into his arm. Keidon roared in agony. To Keidon's dismay the cat tore into his body with its razor sharp fangs. He blearily looked up to find men battling all around him. Some fought the Delmirths, the others wild cats.

Keidon managed to lift the arm that held the dagger and swung it hard. It hit the cat square in the jaw. The cat howled in pain, then ran back for the taste of more blood. The weight on his chest was almost enough to suffocate him. He tried to kick it with his feet, but it was no use, he felt too weak.

Keidon sniffed the air. The smell of burning assaulted his senses. A thick smoke suddenly filled the sky. Keidon coughed and heard the cries of people in the haze. His eyes burned from the smoky embers.

Somewhere in the distance a loud squawk sounded. Blocking out the bright sunshine the shadows of hundreds of birds circled the battle zone. Talon swooped down low and grabbed a cat into his sharp claws. The cat kicked and fought in an attempt to break free. Talon took it higher and

higher into the sky, dropping it to the earth from a great height. The cat splattered against a rock.

One by one birds of Talon's size picked up the wild cats and killed them. Keidon slowly regained his footing and looked at the devastation around him. Everywhere his gaze wandered, dead bodies lay. Then he looked toward his cabin. He knew at once where the burning smell came from. A cry of despair escaped his throat. *What happened to the wounded and where is Dr. Styx?* His cabin was supposed to be a sanctuary to save the wounded, not a place to kill his own men.

He ran in the direction of the cabin. Keidon tripped over the masses of bodies strewn on his yard. He hadn't seen this much death in a long time. A few men he'd known all his life lay with their eyes wide open. "No!" he screamed.

Keidon leaned over a few of them in hopes that some were still alive. As he went from body to body, he knew it was no use. The battle had ended and they were defeated. The cabin was within sight. Keidon approached a deadly scene. Lying on a charcoal heap were bodies. Most were his own men with only a few Delmirths amongst the ruins. Keidon covered his mouth with his arm. His eyes burned from the smoke.

Keidon took off on the run and blindly made his way through the smoky haze. A few Delmirths jumped out at him, but Keidon easily took them down. In the distance, he heard the clashing of

swords. Keidon followed the sound until he stood along the beach. To his astonishment, General Striker and Damon were still battling it out. They were evenly matched, donning similar scars on their bodies and faces. Bravely, Keidon stepped forward to find Lund at his side. "You're alive!" he screamed.

Lund had taken some terrible blows to his face and body. Blood leaked from every crevice.

"You need medical attention!" Keidon said. "Go find safety!" Lund refused to listen and raised his weapon to help defend the general. The two men moved into battle position and swung their blades at Damon. The Delmirth leader put up a good fight and battled the three men with ease. He smiled wickedly, clashing his dagger and sword. Lund made contact with his arm, which caused the Delmirth to retreat briefly. When he came back, he appeared stronger than ever.

In all of Keidon's years of fighting, he had never battled someone so fierce. Damon had the strength of six men. They all moved along the shoreline, the water lapping at their legs. Keidon broke apart from the rest and disappeared into the thick haze.

The evil Delmirth waded further into the water, the two enemies fighting strong. Damon clashed his dagger with the general's sword, their weapons holding firm against each other. Lund took this opportunity to swipe the enemy from



behind, his dagger sticking him in the back. Damon screamed out in pain, pulled the blade out and cast it into the lake.

Despite his injuries, Damon managed to gain the upper hand and lowered his dagger quickly. First, he swung his blade at Lund and knocked him off his feet. Then he speared the general in the neck. Blood splattered the surface of the water. The general fell hard. Damon laughed and raised his bloodied weapon in victory when something shot at him from within the haze. His eyes widened in fear. The piercing of many barbed spikes came directly at him. Damon didn't have time to react. The spikes nailed him in the head and chest.

Keidon emerged from the smoky air holding a bow in his hand. He approached Damon's body, relieved to find the wild cat spikes had worked as planned. The Delmirth rolled around in agony along the water's edge, then stumbled and fell. Keidon pulled his gaze from Damon and cried out in despair. General Striker lay gasping for air in the shallow water. Keidon ran to his side and lifted his head onto his lap. "General," he whispered. "Can you hear me?"

From out of the smoke Keidon's army emerged to see their captain die. Lund stood among them, his head bowed in sorrow. "Keidon," the general choked. "I want you to have this." General Striker pulled at a badge pinned to his coat. "You must

take over the army." He gasped for air and looked at Keidon sternly. "You're to lead the men. Keidon, you have proven today that you're a great warrior. Hail to Keidon!" he coughed.

All of the men surrounding the scene bowed before Keidon. "Hail to Keidon!" they shouted. He felt overwhelmed by the honor. Clutching the badge in his hand, Keidon watched as the general took his last breath, then died in his arms. The army lowered their heads in honor of a great man. Keidon placed the general onto the ground. Tears formed in the corner of his eyes. Amidst the sorrow and pain, a cry rang out a few feet away. Keidon turned around in surprise.

Damon lay very still and looked up at a woman approaching from the haze. "That's her!" Damon cried out.

Keidon walked to where Damon lay struggling for breath. He looked up at the woman who stood across from him. "That's Princess Wellington! I want it back!" he croaked, holding an arm out to her. "My men will hunt you down. We'll keep searching until we get it." Damon attempted to say something else, the effort too taxing for him. Gray ooze leaked out from where the spikes had hit his body, staining the ground. A putrid smell filled the air. He choked, his eyes firmly cast on the woman. "They're coming!" he warned. "You can run but you cannot hide." He let out a low choking sound and died seconds later.

Keidon looked up in question at the woman standing across from him. He wanted answers.

## CHAPTER 17

Cassandra felt the piercing eyes of the army upon her. Keidon's glare was the worst of them all. He wanted immediate answers. When none came, he stood with his hands on his hips and a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"Well?" he asked. "Are you the princess of Kensington?"

With her head bowed she frailly answered, "Yes."

Loud gasps and whispers filled the awkward silence. The men bowed to the ground in honor of her majesty. Keidon refused to take a knee. "You lied to me," he shouted, "and put my men in jeopardy!"

"I was going to tell you," she said. "I promised my father I'd not reveal my identity."

"I don't believe this," he muttered, running his hand impatiently across his face. "What else haven't you told me?" Keidon's gaze lowered to the knapsack she carried. The Ruby Idol glowed brightly through the material. "I take it that is no

mere trinket you carry with you."

Cassandra was about to make her confession when Mark Styne walked through the smoky haze.

"Mark!" Keidon shouted. "Thank heavens you're alive!" Keidon embraced him for a quick moment, then looked sternly into the doctor's face. "Where were you?" he asked, searching for answers.

Mark removed his glasses and wiped the blood and grime from his eyes. "I was inside the cabin when the Delmirths started the fire. I managed to save a few people and drag them into the bushes behind the cabin." Mark placed his glasses onto the bridge of his nose. His gaze moved from Keidon's face down to the emblem pinned on his shirt. "Why are you wearing that?" he asked. "Where is the general?"

Keidon looked down and shook his head. "He's dead."

Mark let out a stifled cry. "Dead," he repeated.

"We lost so many..." Keidon put a comforting arm around his shoulders. "At least we destroyed those damn bastards!"

Mark nodded in agreement. "I guess I should attend to the wounded."

"You do that." Keidon turned his attention on his army who still bowed before the princess. "Men, rise to your feet and find the maimed. After everyone is accounted for, we'll have a ceremony for our fallen comrades." Keidon marched past

Cassandra and deliberately ignored her presence.

She reached out and grabbed his arm as he went by. "Please," she begged.

Keidon kept walking.

Cassandra ran after him, determined to make him listen.

A rustling in the trees made them turn and look. Standing a few feet away was Lund, pale-faced.

"Keidon!" he shouted. "I flew around the perimeter of your property and found there is another Delmirth army marching toward us. This time they're accompanied by the Black Death Tribe. There are more men then we can fight. We have to get the hell out of here!"

Keidon commanded his army to gather around. "Men, I want you to take as many of the wounded as you can on horse or bird. Go to the sanctuary outside of my village. There should be plenty of room for all of you."

Lund nodded.

"I'll take the Princess to the one on my property. I need to find out what the hell is going on. I want someone to take Dusty!"

"Let's go!" Cassandra shouted, running toward Talon.

"Men, move out!" Keidon commanded.

Mark and Lund followed alongside Keidon, aware of the enemy close by. "We'll wait to hear from you," Lund said.

“Bring your women with you. We wouldn’t want the Delmirths to find them.”

“Yes sir.” Mark and Lund disappeared into the haze.

Keidon and Cassandra settled onto Talon’s back. Keidon grasped her roughly around the waist. “Fly!” he shouted. The bird took flight and carried them far away from the destruction down below and what used to be Keidon’s homestead.

\* \* \* \*

Talon took them over familiar territory and flew gracefully over the lush forest. Amidst all the beauty of this place, Cassandra had a strange feeling they were being followed. It wasn’t until she glanced behind her did she see the red-hooded Delmirth army close behind. They were accompanied by the Black Death Tribe riding deadly dragons. They appeared fiercer than the Delmirths, wearing black-hooded robes and carrying bows and arrows.

One of the riders from the Black Death Tribe pulled up close to them and aimed an arrow at Cassandra. She could see the black paint smudges under his eyes. She waved her dagger wildly in the air. The arrow ricocheted off the blade. “That was close!” she cried.

The arrows continued to zing all around them. One struck Keidon in the forearm.

"You're hit!"

Keidon broke the arrow at the tip.

"They're gaining on us!" she shouted.

"Hang on tight and I'll try to lose them!" he yelled back.

Talon took a nosedive toward the ground. The forest came up fast to meet them. The bird flew between the trees, Keidon guiding him with expertise. Cassandra could see red and black blurs close in from all sides. Out of nowhere, a huge tree loomed and blocked their path. Keidon pulled hard on Talon's reins, causing the bird to fly upward. Some of their pursuers were not as fortunate and hit the tree head on. A few stayed on their tail.

The trees began to thin in the distance. Talon zoomed in and out, weaving between the remaining forest vegetation. Cassandra dared a glance behind and noticed one Delmirth and two Black Deaths coming up from the rear. She felt an icy cold hand brush the side of her arm. The Delmirth was only seconds from pulling Cassandra from the bird. The waterfall in the sanctuary suddenly appeared. Talon flew right into it and landed softly onto the ground. The Delmirth and its followers kept going. "That's amazing!" Cassandra said. "I can't believe they don't see this place."

Keidon dismounted the bird and assisted Cassandra to the ground in silence.



She knew he was still fuming. He turned his back on her and looked out toward the beautiful waterfall. Cassandra felt her heart beat in fear. Would he never speak to her again? "I didn't want to deceive you," she said, kneeling by the water. "I promised my father I wouldn't reveal who I was to anyone."

Keidon kept his gaze focused on the magical water, his hands on his hips.

"He was afraid if someone found out who I was, they would stop me from completing the mission. I was afraid..."

Keidon finally broke his trance and glared down at her in anger. "So you're Princess Wellington, am I right?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"I've heard about a Princess Wellington. I didn't know I would bed her! Can you do that, sleep with warrior men?"

Cassandra felt the heat in her face. "I..."

"Is that why you were still a virgin when I met you?"

"I'm the sacred flower of our nation—"

"You were the sacred flower of the nation. You're not anymore, thanks to me!"

"I'm sorry. I never wanted to hurt you." Cassandra rose and came behind him to place her arms around his waist.

Keidon shrugged her off and kept his distance. "I could be killed for sleeping with you. Did you

know that?"

Cassandra lowered her head.

"I heard that you can only marry a prince. So why were you with me? What did you hope to accomplish?"

Tears trickled down her face. She wanted to blurt out that she loved him, that he meant everything to her, but his harsh words cut through her train of thought.

"I wish I had never met you, Princess. You've made a fool of me in front of my entire army," he said, his eyes wide with loathing. "My men are in danger because of you! So what kind of mission are you on?" Before Cassandra could answer, he reached over and picked up her knapsack, pulling out the Ruby Idol. "Explain the truth about this!" he demanded.

Cassandra watched him pace anxiously back and forth. "It's called the Ruby Idol," she whispered. "The sculpture has been in our family for generations. It has great powers and is known to increase wealth and prosperity among its owners."

"Is that why the Delmirths want it?" he asked.

"Yes, and for other reasons as well."

"Such as?" Keidon stopped pacing to stare at her.

She felt his eyes penetrate her very soul. "The Ruby Idol was stolen by one of my ancestors many years ago. It was finally handed down to my

father. Since we've been in possession of it, the sculpture has been igniting a powerful force, wanting to go back to the sacred land. The Ruby Idol is calling for its home." Cassandra walked up to Keidon and looked him straight in the eye. "The Delmirths want to stop me from reaching my destination. If they do, evil will continue to reign and they will become even more powerful."

"And if they fail?"

She glanced at the igniting idol in his hand. "Then the evil of this world will vanish and only goodness will remain. The entire world will prosper."

Keidon let out a deep sigh. "Is there anything else I should know about this quest of yours?"

Cassandra remained silent. Part of her wanted to tell him about the sacred promise and her failure to keep it, but the other part of her didn't want to reveal the truth.

Keidon waited. "Well?"

"There is nothing else to tell you," she lied. "I have a map that will show us how to reach the land."

"Then I'll take you there at first light."

Cassandra felt relief in knowing he'd accompany her on the remainder of the journey. In the back of her mind she wondered if it was all worth it. *What will happen once we touch the sacred land? Can the mission still be complete or will the spirits know I'm not a virgin?* She prayed that her

secret not be revealed. If they were lucky, the land would never find out.

\* \* \* \*

Keidon moved over to a rock and sat down upon it. In a quiet voice he said, "The Ruby Idol looks a lot like you."

"I think it is me. That's one of the reasons I've been appointed this mission. I'm also the princess, so it is my destiny."

Keidon stared hard at the statue flashing on and off in his hand. "Why didn't you tell me sooner? We could have returned the idol instead of putting so many lives in danger."

"I didn't know whom I could trust."

Keidon rubbed the sculpture with his hand and looked at it thoughtfully. "But you allowed me to be your first. Why?"

"I was attracted to you. I felt safe in your arms—"

"Obviously you didn't feel safe enough to tell me about this quest, or to reveal your identity. I can't believe you told me your father was a traveling salesman. That's funny," he laughed mirthlessly. "What would royalty like you want with someone like me?" His expression suddenly became serious. He got up from the rock and placed the idol back into her bag.

Cassandra leaned against a tree and watched

Keidon close the flap. "I'm not interested in a prince," she said. "I've dated enough of them. They were all boring and stupid. And then I met you."

Keidon stood to his full height.

Cassandra felt the butterflies in her stomach. She wanted to throw her arms around his neck and kiss his lips. "You were everything I've always wanted. You're handsome, sexy, rugged, adventurous, funny..."

Keidon didn't acknowledge the compliments.

"You have one hell of a smile. It melts my heart."

He approached the tree where she stood and leaned casually against it.

Cassandra noticed the many bloodstains on his shirt. He had taken a terrible beating. Then her eyes spotted the crest pinned on the pocket of his shirt. "Are you the general of your army?"

Keidon looked down at the merit badge and nodded. He hovered over her, his eyes studying her carefully. "We can have no future together and you know it. Warriors and princesses don't mix."

Cassandra felt the tears well up in her eyes. "I don't care!" she shouted. "We can change the laws if we want to!"

"No we can't. This is the way it is and always will be."

"Then let's make the most of it. Make love to me, Keidon."

Ignoring her plea, Keidon turned and went to work attending to his wounds and setting up camp in silence. Cassandra offered to help him, but Keidon gave her the cold shoulder.

Cassandra decided to let him have his space. She took off her shoes and dipped her feet into the warm pool. Talon sat on the opposite side and drank from the waterfall. Cassandra watched the magical dust flicker into the air as it had done the last time she had been here. This place had been more romantic then. She and Keidon had enjoyed each other's bodies and skinny-dipped in the pool. It had been a wonderful experience and one she would always treasure.

The images made her very sad. Cassandra wiped the tears from her eyes and placed her head on her knees. The man she loved was within her reach, yet so far away.

## CHAPTER 18

Keidon woke sometime in the night. He noticed the moon high in the sky. It cast a shiny glow on the earth below. Keidon rolled over to find Cassandra moved closer to him. She lay pressed up against his body. He propped himself up on an elbow and studied her in the moonlight. Cassandra was a beautiful woman, a radiant princess. Keidon remained in denial. He wished it weren't true.

As he studied her features, he thought about her betrayal. *Why did she keep her identity from me? Maybe she knew you wouldn't make love to her if you found out that she was a princess.* That's what his head told him, but not his heart. *Could I have resisted such a gorgeous woman?* Keidon had done it in the past and never thought twice about it, but somehow this was different. Cassandra had stolen his heart like no other woman had done before. Even his wife Angelina, hadn't made his heart surge as this woman had.

Cassandra would travel to her castle and marry

a prince and he would go back to rebuilding his home in the wilds. They were two different people with very different lives. This caused him great anguish. If only life were simple. Keidon cursed his upbringing. How happy he would be to have Cassandra Wellington as his bride. Keidon brushed the image from his mind. It could never happen. The laws of their people would see to that.

Keidon stared up at the moon. He was emotionally and sexually frustrated. His cock stirred inside his pants. He wanted to act on impulse and take her there in the moonlight. The thought excited him even more. He knew she wouldn't object, in fact, she'd welcome him. He went back to staring at her sleeping form. *I don't want to hurt her*, he decided. *What harm could come from one more night of love?*

He acted on his manly urges. Keidon silently lowered himself to her mound and slipped his head underneath the blanket. He could smell her tangy pussy. Keidon licked his lips in anticipation. Nudging her legs apart, he dipped his tongue to her moist center and started licking.

"Keidon!"

"Lay back and let me love you."

Cassandra let him have his way.

Keidon ran his tongue over her pussy lips and savored her womanly taste. He combined her pleasure by placing two fingers inside her.



Cassandra arched her back in ecstasy. "Oh, Keidon!"

Her cries of delight increased in volume as his fingers moved briskly in and out. He paused to have another lick, then proceeded to use his fingers. Keidon felt her thighs tense around his head. He had to hold her legs wide apart to keep her from applying too much pressure.

"I'm close!"

Keidon alternated between licking and stroking her with his fingers. The wetness from her pussy gushed onto his skin. After minutes of vigorous activity, she let out a cry in the night. He felt her muscles tense around his fingers. Keidon continued to stroke until her orgasm subsided. Once it did, he moved himself to where she lay and kissed her lips.

"I taste tangy," she sighed.

"You do, my Princess."

Cassandra smiled. "Why did you forgive me?"

"I couldn't stay angry with you forever. What good would it do us, anyway? We still have a mission to complete." Keidon cupped one of her breasts between his fingers. "I kind of understand why you did it," he mumbled, kissing the nipple. Keidon nursed one, then moved to the other.

"I did it to protect my people. I was afraid."

He lifted his head and nodded. "Who knows, maybe I would have done the same thing in your position."

"Speaking of positions," she teased. "How would you like this position?" Cassandra moved herself onto all fours. She arched her back to allow him easy access to her pussy. "I want you inside me."

Keidon came up from behind and inserted his hard penis into her moist mound. It slid in with one smooth jerk.

Cassandra voiced her pleasure.

"Does it hurt?" he asked, his chest pressed against her back.

"Yes and no. I like the feel of your entire cock inside me."

Keidon's body moved in a steady motion, back and forth, in and out. His cock appeared at the tip, only to plunge back in until his balls slammed against her. Every time he did, Cassandra would scream in passion.

He liked the feel of her hot juices around his cock. Keidon rode her fast and furious, the friction heightening the sensation. He wanted to cum inside her. His hard shaft throbbed for release. Her pussy juice leaked onto his balls and into his pubic hair. Her occasional screams turned him on ever more.

"Cum inside me!" she cried.

Keidon rammed her from behind over and over again. His dick ached for the upcoming orgasm. He lowered his lips to her back and ravished it with kisses. He had never wanted or needed

something so much in his life. If he didn't have release soon he would burst.

Cassandra cried, "Keidon!"

Her muscles clenched his cock, her orgasm elating. Keidon hoped to climax at the same time as she did. He listened as her cries died away. Her body relaxed under his. Keidon increased the momentum. The friction started to build again.

Cassandra moaned and panted her excitement building. "I'm going to cum again!"

Keidon couldn't believe this. The woman was about to have another orgasm when he hadn't even had one.

"Cum with me!" she yelled. "Please! I need it so desperately!"

Keidon liked it when she encouraged him. He felt the tension in his cock build higher and higher. Keidon closed his eyes in anticipation. Finally, without warning, he let out an earth shattering roar. His cum spurt inside her tight, wet pussy. "Oh my!" he cried. "Cass!" Keidon rocked continually and waited for the amazing sensation to subside. Once it did, he pulled his spent cock from her wet mound. He collapsed on the blanket beside her and gasped for breath. "I thought I'd never cum," he said. "That was wonderful."

Cassandra lay halfway across him and listened to his beating heart. "You had quite the workout," she smiled, kissing his chest.

"It was well worth it," he said, holding her in a

warm embrace. "Let's say we get some sleep and continue this later."

Cassandra reached up and kissed his cheek. "I would like nothing more." They settled in for the night.

\* \* \* \*

Throughout the night, Keidon loved her. Cassandra woke the next morning with an ache between her thighs. They had explored each other's bodies and enjoyed the warm pool. It had been a magical time for them. As Keidon stirred, Cassandra couldn't help but admire his rugged features in the early morning light. He looked so peaceful lying there, as if he didn't have a worry in the world. If only she didn't.

Cassandra got up and dressed, eager to find the secret map stowed inside her knapsack. She needed to figure out how to reach the sacred land and survive. As her gaze roamed over the ancient writings, she could hear someone approach from behind. Thinking it was Keidon, she turned around to give him a dazzling smile, but stifled a scream instead. A Black Death Tribe leader walked through their sanctuary, oblivious to her standing right in front of him. She slowly backed herself against a tree and watched wide-eyed as more passed through.

Keidon woke and sat upright to watch the tribe.

All these men wore tribal garments of black robes and carried heavy daggers. They were huge brutes with angry eyes. Keidon placed a finger over his lips in warning. Cassandra caught his gesture. She kept quiet, staying out of harm's way.

When the last of the men left the sanctuary, they looked up and noticed the Delmirths fly past on dragons. The moment danger left them Keidon dressed and ran to Cassandra's side.

"That's not the way I like to greet the morning," she said.

Keidon leaned down and kissed her softly on the lips. "What about this way?"

She wrapped her arms around his neck. "What are they doing out here so early?"

Keidon shrugged his shoulders. "Looking for you and that precious idol, what else." He looked down and noticed the map in her hand. "Can I look at that, please?" he asked.

She saw the desperation in his eyes. Without hesitation, she handed it over.

Keidon walked over to the nearest rock and settled down. "These are the Sunken Islands," he said. "How did your ancestors retrieve the idol from this forsaken place?"

Cassandra came up from behind and placed her arms around his neck. She peered over his shoulder. "I don't know, darling. I guess luck was on their side."

"I hope luck is on ours when we try and put it

back."

Cassandra's heart raced at these words. She had lost her virginity. If she hadn't, the chances of success would have been in their favor. She let out a deep sigh.

"What is it, Cass?" Keidon glanced at her.

Cassandra pulled away and straightened to her full height. "It's nothing. This journey will be difficult, that's all."

"Who said life was easy. I've been on some very dangerous missions before and survived. I'll do it again, only this time in your company." Keidon folded the map and stuck it into his pocket. He stood up and stared into her eyes. "Listen, darling," he said, lifting her chin to meet his gaze. "We're going to leave tonight, after dark. It will be safer for us to travel. We need to go to Lund and Mark. They are to be notified of our next move. Once we show them the map, it will be just you and me."

"Isn't your army going to come along for protection?"

"Yes, but I want a majority to stay behind and have a few follow more closely in case we encounter trouble. Are you okay with this?"

Cassandra nodded. "I'm proud of you," she said, touching the badge on his shirt. "You're a general."

Keidon smiled. "It's what I've always wanted, to rise to the top. Let's hope I can command the

army the way General Striker did."

"You'll do it, only better."

"What do you say to one more relaxing day, just the two of us?"

She couldn't help but smile at this suggestion. For the remainder of the day they swam in the warm pool, sunned themselves by the water's edge and made love until nightfall. When the sun dipped below the horizon and the stars twinkled in the sky, Keidon prepared Talon for flight. Cassandra looked around the sanctuary as if she were seeing it for the last time.

Keidon came up from behind. "Is there anything wrong?" he asked, placing his arms around her waist.

"I want to remember this place always. It has great memories for us."

Keidon kissed her neck. "We'll come back soon. I have faith."

Cassandra felt the tears escape from the corner of her eyes. She watched the waterfall cascade into the pool below. The dancing pixie lights twinkled in and around the trees. She tried to make a mental note of this moment and capture it in her memory forever.

Keidon gently pulled her away from the waterfall and guided her toward Talon. Once they were settled onto his back, the bird took flight. The rush of cold wind took her breath away. Cassandra took one more sorrowful glance behind

her knowing she'd never see this magical land again.



## CHAPTER 19

Talon took them over hills and streams, past lush forest territory and finally to Keidon's village. When they arrived, Lund jumped to his feet. "General!" he called out. When everyone noticed Cassandra, they bowed. The princess blushed under the greeting.

"At ease!" he shouted. All eyes were on Keidon as he surveyed the people in the sanctuary. Unlike the magical land they had come from, this one wasn't as elaborate or teeming with twinkling pixies. Keidon looked beyond the scenery and focused on the injured people huddled on the ground. Dr. Mark Styne attended to the many wounded. He acknowledged Keidon, then continued with his healing.

Keidon noticed Lund's women stared at him with interest, eyeing him from head to toe. Keidon pulled his gaze away and focused his attention on the others. "Princess Cassandra and I have a quest to fulfill. It will be dangerous, but it must be done to rid the world of evil." Keidon focused his gaze

on Lund and Mark before adding, "We must travel to the Sunken Islands." A low murmur erupted all around them.

Mark spoke first. "That would be suicide! We can't go there!"

"No one has ever made it out alive!" Lund shouted. "Why the Sunken Islands?"

Keidon turned to Cassandra. She pulled the knapsack off her shoulders and fumbled through the bag. Carefully she pulled out the glowing idol.

"That's the Ruby Idol!" Lund shouted. "I've heard of its great powers. Why the hell does the Princess have it?"

Keidon took the idol from her hands and held it out for all to see. "This idol was taken from the Sunken Islands. It goes without saying, it was for greed. Since then, it's been passed down from generation to generation. It finally stopped at the Wellington line. Princess Cassandra is on a mission to return it back to its rightful place before the Delmirths get hold of it."

"It looks like her!" Delores cried.

"It is her destiny," Keidon continued. "If it is not returned to the sacred land evil will continue to corrupt."

"What can we do to help?" Mark asked.

"Cassandra and I will stay with you until tomorrow night. After that time, we will travel only after dark to ensure the enemy can't spot us. I want my army to do the same."

"Will we travel with you?" Lund asked.

Keidon shook his head and placed the idol back into her bag. "No, you must stay a day behind, in case of trouble. I will disclose our route to my appointed leader. Lund, Marquis and Dator, I want to see the three of you in private. Mark," he said, looking directly at the doctor, "you will travel with the army and put your remarkable healing skills to good use."

"What about us women?" Aurora asked. "We don't want to stay behind!"

"You must!" Lund said sternly. "I don't want a woman of mine to risk her own life and baby's."

"But..." she protested. "You could be killed!"

Lund glanced down at his two women. "I'm a warrior, this is what I do. I have to be there for Keidon." Lund turned his back on them and followed Keidon to the far side of the sanctuary.

Once they were out of earshot, Keidon pulled out the map from his pocket and disclosed the secret markings. "See these red dots, this is the route Cass and I will take. If we fly, we should avoid all land obstacles. I'm sure there are plenty of booby traps along the path."

"What about these danger signs?" Marquis Caulkin asked.

Keidon eyed the black markings with worry. "We fly around them if at all possible. Hopefully we can do that without too much trouble."

"The Sunken Islands are known for danger. I

think it's inevitable we'll have to face them," Lund said. His finger trailed along the map and stopped at each skeletal sign. "Flying might be the safest way in, but what if there are traps in the air?"

Keidon sighed and studied his crew with a ray of hope. "You are the best men I have. You have never let me down in the past. I'm sure you'll prove yourself worthy of this challenge." Keidon allowed the soldiers the opportunity to study the map. He waited patiently for Lund to copy the route in his journal, when the moon peered through the clouds and created a source of light.

"I think I've got all the important details marked," he said, handing the map to Keidon.

The men left the private corner of the sanctuary and made their way back to where the others were gathered. Lund grabbed Keidon by the arm, a look of concern on his face. "Keidon, how are things between you and the Princess?"

He studied the young warrior and noticed the anxiety in his eyes. "We're fine. I was angry at her for keeping her identity from me. After thinking it through, I know why she did it. Why do you ask?"

Lund glanced nervously to the ground and shuffled his feet. "The way I treated her...then I find out she's royalty. I'm so embarrassed. Do you think she'll ever forgive me?"

"Cassandra needs time. But yes, I think someday she will." Keidon stepped away from Lund and moved past him.

The young warrior again stopped his progress. He gripped his arm tight. "Do you love her?"

Keidon pried Lund's fingers from his upper arm. "Yes, I love her."

"You're a lucky man," he whispered. "I thought sex with two women would make me complete. I thought I could be happy. Look at me! I'm involved with two whores who have no consideration for my feelings whatsoever."

Keidon studied the young man in deep thought. "I think you're going to be a wonderful father—"

"How do I know they are mine?" he interrupted. "With the way they sleep around, they could be anyone's."

"Do you really think someone else is the father?"

Lund let out a deep sigh in the darkness. "I think they are mine, I just wish they weren't."

Keidon patted him sympathetically on the shoulder. "Once they become mothers, I'm sure they'll settle down."

Lund laughed. "Do you really believe that?"

Keidon paused for a moment, his eyebrow raised in an ironic quirk. "You can always hope. How are your wounds?" he asked, changing the subject.

Lund opened his shirt to allow Keidon to see Mark's patchwork. "What do you think of that?"

Keidon eyed the numerous bandages on his

chest. "I'm happy we have a doctor in our presence, that's for sure."

They hadn't walked far when loud jeers from the troops reached them. "It sounds like a wild party," Lund said, inching closer.

Keidon came up from behind and gasped in surprise. Delores and Aurora sat between two soldiers, their tops removed. The men touched and tasted their tits. Cassandra sat by herself in the shadows, her expression concealed. Keidon saw the outline of her slender form. He moved his attention from the princess to the men.

To everyone's delight, Aurora and Delores pulled away from the two soldiers. "Take it all off!" someone shouted. The women obliged and discarded their remaining garments. They stood surrounded by rowdy men and danced seductively in a circle. The soldiers took the opportunity to kiss and fondle them.

Lund swore in despair. "See what I mean? They will never change. Once a whore, always a whore!"

Keidon watched him stomp off angrily into the darkness.

"Who's first?" they called.

Delores pointed in Keidon's direction. "I want him!" Delores moved quickly through the throng of men. Her large tits bounced up and down with her stride. She stood before him and boldly ran her hands up and down his chest.

The soldiers whooped and hollered. "Give it to her!" they shouted.

Keidon felt a blush creep over his face. Delores cupped his balls through the flimsy material of his trousers. "No, Delores. I'm not interested." She didn't stop fondling him, nor paid heed to the encouragement of the soldiers. Keidon felt himself harden under her constant massage. "I can't..."

Delores lowered herself to the ground, ready to coax his penis out. She pulled the zipper down.

From the corner of his eye, Keidon noticed Cassandra slip into the forest. He broke away from the rowdy scene and went after her. "Cassandra!" he called.

Lund sat on a rock, his face was like a stone.

Keidon paused, but thought better of it. He knew Lund probably wanted to be alone. He pressed on and moved into the thick foliage. He had walked another hundred yards when he spotted Cassandra. Her auburn hair shone in the moonlight. Keidon approached, anxious to take her into his arms. "Are you all right?" He saw she had been crying.

"Was she good?"

Keidon took a step closer. "Nothing happened."

"What if I hadn't been there? Would you have given in?"

"No," he said firmly. "I'm not interested in Delores or Aurora. I'm interested in you."

Cassandra motioned for him to sit beside her on

the ground.

He obliged and placed an arm around her shoulders to keep her warm.

"I couldn't watch them any longer," she confessed. "It made me uneasy."

"Lund couldn't handle it either. He's alone in the forest feeling sorry for himself."

Cassandra moved into his warm embrace, her head rested against his chest.

Keidon felt his cock stir with excitement.

"Lund got what he deserved," she said. "He wanted loose women, so he got them."

Keidon ran his hand through her soft hair. "He's regretting it. He wants what we have."

Cassandra looked into his eyes. "What do we have?"

Keidon brushed his finger across her soft skin. "He wants a commitment, a woman who will stand beside him and comfort him. Lund wants someone like you." Keidon moved his lips tenderly against hers. He pried her mouth open with his own. His tongue eagerly darted in and out.

She moaned her approval. Cassandra wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him to the ground with her. He lay on top, his hardness pressed against the material of his pants. "I know we have no future together," she moaned, "but I want to enjoy what little time there is."

Keidon lowered his lips to her breasts and



pulled her dress down. In the coolness of the night, he felt the hard buds against his mouth. He teased them with his teeth. He unzipped his pants and pulled out his throbbing cock. He lifted her dress and inserted his fingers into her moistness. "You're wet," he panted. "I want you!" Keidon briskly moved his fingers around her wet mound.

Cassandra cried in excitement. "Please, I want your cock!" She grabbed hold of his penis and guided it toward her wet pussy.

Keidon removed his glistening fingers and licked the juices from his fingertips.

Cassandra inserted the head of his cock, inch by inch she prodded him further. "It's wonderful! Ride me hard, Keidon!"

He felt the tension throughout his body. He needed release. His penis darted in and out to the tip, then plunged back into her warm insides. Keidon positioned her legs above his head to explore deeper.

She screamed out in pleasure. "Keidon!"

"Is that too deep?" he asked, dipping his mouth to her breasts.

"Yes, but keep going. I'm close!"

Keidon rammed his cock in and out. He pounded hard against her pussy with one thought in mind—to give her a mind-blowing orgasm. His balls ached for release. He couldn't hold out much longer. His need to empty his seed consumed him.

Cassandra clenched her pussy muscles.

His cock throbbed even more. He felt the urgency of her need. Keidon moved his fingers to her wet mound and rubbed her clitoris for extra stimulation. His cock continued to drive into her with force.

She clawed frantically at his back. Her screams carried into the forest. "Keidon, I'm cuming!"

He rode her hard, his orgasm close. Seconds later, he cried out in pleasure. He closed his eyes as he came inside her moistness. Keidon felt the tension leave his body. Cassandra clenched her muscles around his softening shaft and allowed him to release his remaining juices.

Keidon fell on top of her, snuggling into her neck. "That was amazing," she sighed. "I hope Lund didn't hear us."

"Hear us," Keidon smiled. "He probably watched us." They both turned to the sound of rustling in the trees. Keidon knew the young warrior had witnessed their lovemaking.

\* \* \* \*

Cassandra lay against Keidon's naked body. The wild orgy in the forest had ended and all that remained was silence. She glanced down at Keidon's hand that cupped her right breast and smiled. They had made love twice during the night. The second time they pleased each other with lips and tongues. It had been very satisfying.

She felt fulfilled as a woman and enjoyed the magic of his body next to hers.

She tried to close her eyes, but she had a strange feeling she was being watched. Cassandra rolled over, careful not to wake Keidon. She stared up at the dark night. The stars twinkled in the sky. The cloud blocked the moon and cast the world in shadow for a brief moment. A noise whispered in the distance. It sounded like dragon's wings. Cassandra waited, her gaze focused on the sky. The moon suddenly peered out and the vision became clearer. Cassandra gasped. The Delmirths flew through the night sky, a horde of tribal men in their wake.

Why were they traveling in the dark? She thought their night vision was limited. Cassandra wanted to wake Keidon to find out the answer. The last of the evil had disappeared from her view when Cassandra rolled over in an attempt to fall asleep. She had closed her eyes when another noise jostled her.

"Get off me, you whore! Didn't you fuck enough men for one night?" Lund shouted.

Cassandra pulled her dress on and felt the chill on her bare shoulders. She carefully walked around Keidon and moved through the dense woods to listen in on the conversation. As she neared, Cassandra pushed the thick foliage from her view and watched the two figures.

"You're a slut!" he screamed. "Why can't you

be more like the Princess?"

"The Princess!" she shouted. "What the hell does she have to do with anything?"

Aurora came into the picture and stepped swiftly to Delores's side. "What is the problem? Some people are trying to sleep."

Cassandra saw the two women clothed only in undergarments.

Lund stood with his hands on his hips. His breath came in short gasps. "I'm disgraced by the two of you! You're carrying my babies and here you are fucking anything in sight. You don't give a shit about my feelings!"

Delores moved a step closer, her eyes enlarged. "How else am I supposed to make money for the winter?"

"Find a decent job!"

"We need money to feed and clothe these kids!" Aurora spoke. "We enjoy our work and won't quit for the likes of you!"

"Why couldn't you be more like Cassandra? She's a decent, beautiful woman!"

Aurora seethed with anger. "If you like her so much then go fuck her! She's sleeping with Keidon in the forest."

"Admit it," Delores said, pressing her large tits against his chest. "You want her. The jealousy is eating away at you, isn't it?"

"I think she's a respectable woman, that's all."

"You talk about us sleeping around, when you

would do anything to have your cock inside her!" Aurora spat.

"Leave, you whore! Get out of my sight! Go fuck the enemy for all I care!"

Delores reached up and slapped his face. Aurora followed. The two women picked up their belongings from the camp and disappeared into the darkness.

"I bet they're not my kids!" he shouted after their retreating forms.

Cassandra stood in the shadows, too numb to move. She knew Lund had wanted her, but she hadn't realized his feelings went so deep. She discreetly watched him pace back and forth in the clearing. Cassandra wondered where Delores and Aurora ventured off to, thinking maybe they had gone to sleep with one of the other soldiers. She decided to join Keidon under the covers and leave Lund alone with his thoughts. She had made it back to their quiet little alcove when she heard feminine voices whisper through the trees.

"I don't care if the enemy catches us. It might be exciting. Think of all the men," Delores said.

"We wouldn't have to wait here for Lund," Aurora replied.

"He might never return. Then what will become of us?"

Cassandra decided to follow them. She carefully trudged through the foliage, keeping her distance. She could distinctly hear their harsh

words.

"I'm not carrying his baby," Aurora confessed. "I got pregnant when he was on the road. It could be any number of men."

"I know he's the father of my child," Delores said. "I don't care if he sees his baby or not. I can't believe he wants me to stop fucking other men. I love it too much!"

"Wasn't last night amazing?" Aurora interrupted. "Those soldiers satisfied me beyond my wildest dreams."

"I enjoyed myself, too!"

Cassandra kept up her pace and listened to the women talk about their wild orgy. The trees thinned up ahead. Cassandra crouched low to the ground and kept herself hidden. Aurora and Delores had reached the outskirts of the sanctuary and stared out into the night.

"Should we go?" Aurora asked.

Delores shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. I can't stay here and be dictated to. We need to lead our own life."

Cassandra had the sudden urge to reveal herself. She moved forward, about to voice her presence, when two Delmirths flew over the sanctuary. The women looked up and pointed at the riders.

"What do you think?" Aurora asked. "Shall we join them?"

Delores ran from the security of the sanctuary

and flailed her arms wildly into the air. "Here I am!" she cried. Aurora joined her.

Cassandra shouted, "No!" It was too late. They had been spotted by the enemy. Cassandra knew she couldn't leave the safe haven or she'd put the entire army in jeopardy. Wide-eyed, she watched the dragons land beside the women.

The red-robed beings dismounted and approached the women. "What do we have here?" a low voice asked.

"I'm Aurora and this is Delores. We are here to serve you," she said, bowing low to the ground.

The Delmirth laughed. "We need whores. I'm Sator, leader of the troops. Whom do you serve and where do you come from?"

Cassandra shook with fear. She prayed the women wouldn't disclose their invisible barrier.

"We belong to no one," Delores said. "My friend and I have traveled by foot in hopes of finding someone as strong and masculine as you."

Sator and his fellow Delmirth smiled. "You will serve us well."

The Delmirths both grabbed a woman and caressed their breasts. "They are soft," Sator moaned, squeezing Aurora. "Are you pregnant?"

"Yes," she moaned, allowing the red-robed being access to her tits. "The milk will provide nourishment to my hungry men."

Sator suckled on one tit, then moved to the other. He lifted his head and licked his lips in

hunger. "We are in search of Keidon Roke and his men. Have you seen them?"

"What will I get if you tell me?"

Sator stuck out his rough tongue to reveal large bumps. "I will give you the greatest orgasm ever. My cock is like this and so are my fingers."

Aurora gasped when Sator lowered himself. She clutched onto his head and screamed out in pleasure. "Damn, that feels good. Suck me!"

"I'll make you cum if you tell me," said his muffled voice.

"We satisfied his troops last night."

Sator licked her pussy. "Where are they?"

Aurora smiled and glanced in the direction of the sanctuary. "They are flying to the Sunken Islands. Keidon and the Princess will arrive there in a few weeks. They'll travel at night so as not to be spotted by your men."

Cassandra watched from the sanctuary.

Delores lay on the ground with her legs spread wide and allowed the other Delmirth the pleasure of entering her.

"Where are they?" Sator asked.

Aurora gasped. "They are behind you."

Sator emerged from her mound and warily eyed the surrounding area.

"They are flying out tomorrow night," she added.

Sator smiled. "I will be waiting. When they least expect it, we'll attack. You will be greatly



rewarded for this information,” he said.

The other Delmirth paused from fucking Delores. “What made you reveal their whereabouts?”

Delores urged the Delmirth to continue riding her. “Our lover forbids us to have sexual pleasure with others. He told us to leave and never return.”

Aurora panted in response. “Before we left, he urged us to fuck the enemy. So here we are.”

Cassandra covered her mouth in shock. Aurora had given away their plans and all because of Lund’s stupidity. She turned on her heel and listened to the last waves of ecstasy coming from the women. Cassandra had to warn the others. They had to leave at first light. It would be their only way of survival.

## CHAPTER 20

“How could you?”

Keidon opened his eyes. Lund's displeasure sounded moments later.

“What is your problem?”

Keidon dressed and followed the raised voices. Cassandra and Lund stood and faced each other.

“They're gone!” she shouted. “It's Lund's fault!”

Keidon briskly walked up to the pair and intervened. “Who left? What the hell is going on here?”

Cassandra pointed a finger at Lund. The tears trickled from the corner of her eyes. “Aurora and Delores left with the Delmirths after having an argument with Lund. I followed them through the bush. They walked through the barrier and allowed Sator and his army to take them.”

Keidon gasped. “Are you sure?”

“Why didn't you try and stop them?” Lund asked.

“Me!” she spat. “Why the hell were you trying

to dictate to them? You know they would never give up their profession for anyone!”

“Will you kindly explain from the beginning?”

Cassandra took a deep breath. “I heard shouting, so I went to check it out. Lund had a fight with his women. He wanted them to stop sleeping with other men —”

“That’s because —”

Keidon held up a hand to stop him. “I want to hear her story first.”

“They of course refused.” She relayed everything she heard. “Aurora even told Sator we were flying out tomorrow night to the Sunken Islands.”

Keidon paled at these words. “Oh no!” he mumbled.

“It’s not my fault!” Lund yelled. “They should respect me! They’re carrying my baby!”

“That’s what you think!” Cassandra shouted. She stepped up to Lund and looked him in the eye. “Aurora told Delores the baby isn’t yours. She only said it was so that you would support them. You’re so damn gullible!”

Lund’s mouth dropped open. “That can’t be true!”

“It is!” she cried. “As for Delores, she doesn’t give a damn about you. I watched her with a red-robed Delmirth and she enjoyed it! I also know about your feelings for me. Admit it, you want me!”

Lund backed away, stung by her words.

Keidon turned to look at him in surprise.

Cassandra glared at his shocked face one last time, then turned on her heel.

"Not so fast!" Keidon commanded. "Show us where the women are."

"Follow me," she mumbled. Cassandra avoided looking at Lund. She followed the path the two women had taken.

Keidon and Lund trailed behind the princess in steely silence. When they reached the barrier, Cassandra stepped aside to let the men pass.

"They were right here when I left."

Keidon moved to the invisible wall and peered into the darkness.

Lund took off to the right and searched for any sign of them. "They're gone!" he said. Lund turned to the left and ran up and down the path. "Where the fuck are they?" he shouted.

"How am I supposed to know?" Cassandra hollered back. "When I left they were having sex with the men. Delores was on the ground with her legs spread wide and Aurora —"

"Stop talking!" Lund said, screaming in her face. He immediately lowered his head in shame. "I'm sorry, Princess."

Cassandra fell silent.

Lund wiped his face in exasperation. The tears formed in the corner of his eyes.

"Listen man," Keidon spoke softly. "We'll find

them. It's almost dawn. Cassandra and I will head out soon. They're not expecting us to travel until tonight." Keidon placed a reassuring arm around his shoulders and attempted to comfort him.

Lund broke away from his embrace and stormed off into the forest.

Keidon glanced at where Lund disappeared then turned to Cassandra. "I'm going after him. Pack up our things. We're heading out soon."

\* \* \* \*

Cassandra watched him leave, his anger apparent in his stance. She marched through the trees back to their camp. The sun appeared over the horizon. Cassandra expected Keidon to arrive shortly. She wanted to avoid an ugly confrontation with him. It was obvious he was angry with how she'd handled the situation. Cassandra didn't care what Keidon or anyone else thought. She grabbed the knapsacks and shoved their belongings inside. Making sure she didn't forget anything, she did a quick sweep of the area. By the time she had finished, Keidon had arrived. His hard expression hadn't changed. "We're packed and ready to go," she said quietly.

Keidon's jaw was clenched, his brown eyes glaring. "You were too harsh on him," he chastised. "It wasn't his fault."

Cassandra crumpled to the ground and sobbed.

"That's just great! Take his side! He's the reason we're in this mess —"

"I don't want to hear another word! I'm not taking sides," Keidon said, pacing the small expanse. "I'm being reasonable. Lund is too good for those women. All he wants is someone to love him."

"Love him!" she spat. "All that man ever does is seduce women and sleep with whatever crosses his path. He's a heartless bastard!"

"He is my friend and a great warrior who loves you!" Keidon stopped pacing and towered over her.

"What did you say?"

"I said he loves you. Lund may not seem like the type, but he's fallen for you. The least you can do is show a little compassion for the man."

Cassandra took a deep breath and attempted to digest this information. "Why would he have feelings for me? He hardly knows me."

"He knows that you're a good woman who is compassionate and caring."

"What do you think about this?"

Keidon grabbed his knapsack and slung it across his shoulders. "Why should I care? It's obvious the two of us don't have a future together. You've made that clear."

"I don't care about the laws!" she shouted.

"You're to marry a prince and a prince you shall marry. I'll help you reach your destination,

then you can live happily ever after with someone of your own status."

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"Keidon, wait for me!" Cassandra scrambled to her feet and grabbed her belongings. She chased after his retreating form. Keidon took brisk strides and lost her amongst the trees. She could hear him break branches along the way. "Where are you?" she shouted. It wasn't long before she came into a clearing. The troops had all gathered around a smoldering fire, cooking breakfast. When they noticed the princess, all of them lowered their glances. Lund sat between two of the men, his expression solemn. His piercing blue eyes held Cassandra's for a moment, then he stared off into the distance.

Keidon came up to the princess and handed her a plate of fruit and cooked meat. "You need to eat to keep up your strength," he said.

Cassandra reached out and took the food. She perched on the edge of a rock and nibbled on a grape. She heard the laughter of some of the men. Keidon sat next to Lund. The two men were immersed in deep conversation. Cassandra felt left out. She finished her meal and left the men to their merriment, stalking off into the bush to wait for Keidon. Cassandra was almost hidden from view when she half turned and noticed Keidon's gaze

follow her. Cassandra smiled as she rounded the bend. She knew deep in her heart Keidon Roke loved her.

Cassandra passed by an inviting pool and stared at herself in the water's reflection. Her hair hung limply past her shoulders and her face had dirt smudges on the cheeks and forehead. She wondered what the two women were doing at this moment. She had visions of a wild orgy taking place. Cassandra had witnessed them playing with the two Delmirths during the night and presumed the women were sex slaves for the army. She could only hope the women enjoyed it.

She brushed the vivid images from her mind and focused on her glorious surroundings. Cassandra stripped her filthy red dress from her body and lowered herself into the warm depths. She allowed the water to cleanse her skin. When her entire body was submerged to the neck, she dunked her head beneath the water and rinsed her hair. Making sure no one was looking Cassandra placed her hand to her pussy. She inserted her fingers inside her mound and moved them slowly back and forth. Closing her eyes, she imagined Keidon making love to her, his hard cock stroking her insides.

Cassandra pulled her fingers out of her pussy and rubbed the clitoris. She gasped at the delightful feeling. Keidon's lips were on her breasts and sucked hard at the taunt buds. His



tongue flicked over one bud, then the other. He placed pressure on her mound and stroked it briskly with his fingers. His cock plunged in and out of her wetness. She gasped and fondled her clitoris faster and faster. The images of their lovemaking were clear in her mind.

She felt her body heighten with urgency. Moving her fingers quickly, she could feel his seed spurt inside her. Cassandra let out a cry of relief and slowed her strokes. She calmed her breathing and lay back in the pool to relax. Cassandra opened her eyes to see Lund and Keidon emerge from the bush. Talon followed behind. She felt a blush stain her cheeks. How much of her self lovemaking had they heard or seen? Cassandra washed her arms and avoided their gaze.

"Are you ready to go?" Keidon asked.

Lund tried to look away.

She had seen the hunger in his eyes and knew Delores and Aurora had been right. Lund wanted her.

Keidon ignored Lund's lustful glances and feasted his gaze on her. "I bought you a new dress from Lund. Here, try it on."

Cassandra gazed at the beautiful lace bodice with a brown skirt. A smile appeared on her face. "Thank you, that was so kind." She emerged from the pool and dried off with a towel. Lund turned his back and waited for Cassandra to finish dressing.

"You're simply beautiful Cass," Keidon said.

Cassandra smiled. He'd finally spoken in kindness. She picked up her knapsack, the red glare from the idol visible through the leather bag.

"It needs to go home," Lund replied. The princess nodded in his direction and walked toward the barrier. "Be safe, both of you."

Keidon shook hands with Lund, then took him in a quick embrace. "Follow a day behind, okay? Don't forget to travel only by day. Sator will be looking for us tonight."

"I won't forget, General."

Cassandra had the sudden urge to set things right. She felt guilty of the hurtful things she had said to Lund. His blue gaze roamed over her face and body.

"Be safe, Princess. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you."

"We'll find the women and bring your baby –"

"Don't let them harm Delores. She's carrying my child."

Cassandra could see the worry in his expression. The distaste she'd felt for this man had been replaced with shame and guilt. Cassandra felt the tears linger in the corner of her eyes.

"He has forgiven you," Keidon whispered. "Let's finish this mission and save his women."

She nodded her head and took a deep breath.

Keidon urged Talon forward and directed the bird through the barrier. The moment Cassandra

stepped out of the security of the sanctuary, the hot sun beat down upon her. With the assistance of Keidon, she climbed onto the bird's back and waited for the warrior to take command at the reins.

Keidon ordered the bird to fly. Seconds later a gust of wind swept over them. Talon soared higher and higher, the safety of the sanctuary further behind.

Cassandra swallowed nervously. She clung tightly to Keidon's waist and closed her eyes in fear. Evil lurked all around, waiting to destroy them. Cassandra felt the weight of the idol press against her thigh. She needed to complete the quest. The entire nation relied on her success. She had a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. It was only the two of them facing the harsh elements of nature. With no protection from the sanctuary, they were an easy target for the enemy. Could they possibly survive? Cassandra leaned her head wearily against Keidon's back. She knew the answer.

## CHAPTER 21

Talon journeyed over rugged terrain and left behind the barren prairie land. Keidon guided him with skill. He could hear Cassandra's intake of breath when they passed over obstacles. "Are you all right?" he called.

"Yes!" she cried. "This is beautiful!"

Keidon smiled. In the daylight hours, they could see sparkling streams, wildlife grazing in the forests and the numerous color contrasts of land and trees. Hours into the flight, Keidon commanded Talon to land.

Cassandra peered over his shoulder.

The enormous bird circled around an inviting spot. Gliding lower and lower, he landed. Keidon felt tired and sore from hours of sitting. He jumped down and stretched his body, offering her a hand, which she eagerly accepted.

"What is this place?" she asked.

Keidon pulled out the map from his breast pocket and spread it over a flat rock. "We are right here," he pointed. "We've made good time so far.

It's much easier traveling in the daylight than it would be at night."

Cassandra leaned over him, her body pressed up next to his.

Keidon felt her breasts move along his back. He tried to ignore the sensuous feelings it stirred within. "I thought we might need a break." Keidon folded the map and watched Cassandra's retreating form. She had her back turned from him and glanced up at the rugged mountain peaks.

"I love the mountains," she confessed. "There is something about them that makes me feel alive and excited."

Keidon could see the shadow of her body through the flimsy material of her dress. He had to admit Lund had good taste in clothing. He managed to pull his gaze away from her tantalizing form.

"Are you still angry with me?" she asked.

Keidon studied the way the sun shone upon her auburn hair, the lovely curls cascading past her shoulders. He imagined himself running his hands through the mass.

"Are you?" she asked, turning toward him.

Keidon took a deep breath and sat on a rock. He ran his hands through his thick hair. "I wasn't impressed with the way you handled Lund. He is my friend."

Cassandra had her arms crossed defiantly over her breasts. "I was polite to him when we left."

"Yes you were, and for that I am grateful."

"Are you jealous about the way he feels for me?"

Keidon smiled. "Of course I am. Lund and I had a man to man talk about you. If it wasn't for me, he'd be sleeping with you right now."

Cassandra shook her head and laughed. "That's what he thinks. I'm not interested in Lund," she said. "I want you."

Keidon felt his cock stir inside his pants. Those were the words he wanted to hear. "Who were you thinking about when you masturbated in the pool?"

Cassandra gasped.

"Lund and I noticed you through the trees. We didn't want to disturb you."

"I was..."

Keidon saw the blush on her cheeks. "You don't have to tell me. If it was Lund, I'll understand. He's a young, good looking man."

"I wasn't thinking about Lund," she said. "I was thinking about you."

Keidon couldn't help but grin.

"What's so funny?" she asked, heaving her breasts higher.

"I'm pleased. I would have been disappointed if it had been Lund."

"Why are you so hung up on Lund? I have no feelings for him."

Keidon sighed. "I believe you."

"Once we find Delores and Aurora, he'll find happiness again," she whispered.

"He doesn't want any harm to come to his baby. Hopefully we'll come across them on our travels to the Sunken Islands."

A silence fell between them. Cassandra turned her back and stared up at the looming mountain. "What's that up there?" she asked, pointing.

Keidon got to his feet and came up from behind. He placed his arms around her waist and felt his cock grow hard. Squinting, he followed her finger. "Those are Dolger Beasts. They live on the mountaintops."

"Will they come down here and bother us?"

Keidon moved his hands up the lace material of her top, cupping her breasts and squeezing them hard. She leaned against his broad shoulders to allow him access. His fingers found their way inside and massaged the hard peaks. He fondled the nubs and caressed them with his thumbs.

"Take them in your mouth," she panted.

Keidon pulled her down on the grass with him. He hovered over her. He lowered the top, his mouth capturing one breast and sucking on it before lavishing the other.

Cassandra moaned.

Keidon maneuvered himself between her thighs. Lifting her skirt, his hands found their way to her moist centre. He unzipped his pants and pulled out his cock, guiding it toward her pussy.

She gasped in pleasure when he plunged it deep inside her, his cock aching for release. He felt Cassandra's pussy juice run down her legs. Rubbing her clitoris with his hand, he massaged the area.

Cassandra wrapped her legs around his waist and urged him to go deeper. Keidon obliged and inched his length inside. Cassandra cried out. "You're so deep!"

Keidon pounded his cock in and out, driving her over the brink. He needed to ejaculate inside her.

"Kiss my breasts!"

Keidon rode her hard like a wild beast in heat. His mouth bit hard on her nipples. Cassandra voiced her pleasure and pain. He could see the redness on her breasts from his loving. He took as much of her breast into his mouth. His need increased. Faster and faster he went. Sweat trickled down his back. Keidon could feel his body tighten. He was close to orgasm. Cassandra let out a cry of pleasure. He wanted to orgasm with her. He plunged deep inside her again, his eyes closed, ready for the moment. He called out her name and rode her steadily until his orgasm subsided.

Cassandra placed her arms around his neck and pulled him down on top of her. He laid his head onto her shoulder. "Keep you cock inside of me," she whispered.

"What?" Keidon asked, kissing her neck.



"I want you to grow hard again." Cassandra clenched her muscles.

Keidon's cock stirred. He didn't think he'd be ready for seconds so quickly, but she stimulated him from within. "That feels good," he moaned.

"I can feel you harden," she said, rubbing his back. "This time I want to be on top."

Keidon rolled over so that she was positioned above him. He grabbed her breasts in his hands, ready to pleasure her again. "You're going to be in for a wild ride."

"I'm ready," she smiled, reaching behind her to gently grab his balls.

Keidon closed his eyes. His cock had grown to its massive size, ready for more action. She arched her back and started to ride. Their afternoon loving had begun.

After reaching a mutual orgasm, the two lay naked on the grass to admire the blue sky. The afternoon sun beat down upon them. Keidon leaned over for his knapsack and reached into a side pocket. He pulled out some fruit and dried meat. "We should travel while there is still daylight."

Cassandra grabbed an apple from his hand and munched on it. "Tonight they'll be waiting for us at the sanctuary. I guess we need to get as far away as we can."

Keidon chewed a dry piece of meat and admired her beauty. He leaned over to kiss her

lips. "We should eat and then go. I want to make it past the mountains if possible."

Cassandra agreed. They ate in silence, admiring the rugged scenery.

Finishing lunch, the two journeyed onward. Talon soared through the clouds. The air became colder. Cassandra shivered and wrapped her arms tightly around Keidon. The bird soared for the remainder of the day, the scenery below blocked out by the cloud. Hours later, Talon dipped below the cloud cover. They had passed through the most dangerous terrain.

Cassandra stirred from behind, hugging him tightly. Keidon squeezed her hands. "I'm looking for a place to camp for the night!" The sun had set below the horizon. In a few short hours, the Delmirths would be ready to attack. Once their absence was discovered, the red-robed beings would be in pursuit. Keidon wanted to put as much distance as he could between them. He scanned the area below and searched for a secluded area. Beyond a winding stream, Keidon noticed a cozy little spot covered by lush trees, creating a perfect shelter for the night. Keidon thought it would provide the best protection.

Talon flapped his massive wings and glided lower. The ground quickly came up to meet them. "Are you all right?" he asked, jumping down.

Cassandra held out her arms and allowed him to carry her to safety. "I am now," she whispered,

snuggling into his neck.

Keidon carried the princess to the mountainside haven and placed her gently on a rock. "Stay here and I'll scan the area." Keidon glanced behind him to make sure she'd obey. He waved in her direction then took off on a run. The moonlight cast a brilliant glow around him. It allowed full view of the surroundings. He passed by a creek and enjoyed the soothing sounds of nature. Aside from the trickling water, the place remained quiet. He scanned the tall trees further on and listened for any wild beasts. With his keen eye, he took in the sights and sounds. Keidon turned around to return to camp when he noticed an opening in the mountain. Taking a step closer he peered into the darkened cave. "Hello!"

His echo reverberated off the walls. Keidon edged his way in and felt along the cold granite. Keidon knew this would be the best place to camp tonight. Keidon exited the dark cavern and briskly returned to Cassandra. He reached camp, relieved to find she still sat on the rock as ordered. "I found a place for us to camp," he said, holding out his hand. "Come, darling. It will shelter us from the wind and hide us from the enemy." Keidon grabbed their belongings. "I'll start a fire," he suggested when they entered the cave.

Cassandra stepped out into the darkness and helped gather dry sticks.

"You don't have to help me if you don't want

to," he said. The princess dropped the pile she had in her hands and placed her arms around his neck. In the moonlight's glow, he could see her green eyes sparkle. "Has anyone ever told you that green eyes are very becoming?"

Cassandra laughed and kissed him gently on the lips. "Yes, all the time. Has anyone ever told you that a beard and mustache are sexy?"

Keidon laughed. "Women say it tickles."

The princess rubbed her face deliberately against the thick hair. "It does tickle," she whispered. "Maybe I want to feel it on another part of my body."

"Let's get the fire going, shall we. After, I can test that theory out."

Cassandra leaned over to pick up her pile of sticks. They both had a high bundle in their arms. Cassandra entered the cave first and dropped her load in the middle of the floor.

Keidon had reached the entrance, when he heard a movement overhead. He peered up the mountainside. He couldn't see a damn thing.

"What was that?" Cassandra asked.

Keidon entered the cave and shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. It's probably just the wind."

Cassandra shivered in the cold. The wind had picked up and howled outside the cavern walls. "It sounds like a storm is coming."

"That's why we need this fire," Keidon replied,

rubbing two sticks together. As he worked vigorously a scampering noise could be heard on the ceiling.

"What the hell is that?" the princess asked.

Keidon saw fear in her eyes. "It's not the Delmirths, I can guarantee it. They would discover tonight that we're not at the sanctuary."

"Then what is it?"

Keidon ignored her worried tone of voice. "Honey, I'm sure it's nothing. Let's get this fire going then we can snuggle under the covers."

Cassandra bared her shoulders and tantalized him with her flesh.

"Don't turn me on yet," he replied. "I want a fire first."

The princess watched him work quickly. Within minutes, he had a spark. Cassandra assisted him by adding dry leaves to the flame. Before long, a roaring fire filled the cave. Keidon held out his arms to her. He took delight in the feel of her body. "Are you hungry?" he asked. "I could cook some meat on the spit." Keidon held out a long stick with a pointy end.

"Do you have anything to cook?" she asked.

"No, but I'm sure I can trap something for us."

They heard rumbling above their heads. Keidon grabbed his sword. "Get your dagger," he told Cassandra. "We might need to fight."

The princess held out her jeweled blade.

"Stay here while I go check."

Cassandra waited in the far corner of the room.

Keidon got to his feet, ready to exit the cave. Several oblong heads peered in from up above. The Mountain Trolls were short in stature with large oblong heads attached to a skinny neck. Their bodies were bony and feeble. They wore ragged material to cover them. The leader of the group let out a loud noise to alert his kin of intruders. Hundreds of Mountain Trolls swarmed down the hill to reclaim their territory. Several holding heavy clubs, attempted to invade the cave. Keidon stood his ground and swiped his blade at the ugly beasts. He had destroyed several with one mighty blow.

Keidon let out a battle cry and battled the hordes of trolls. Several had made it past him and invaded the cave to find the princess. Not wanting any harm to come to the princess, he back stepped to find she had killed a few with her dagger. His distraction allowed for more to enter the cave.

Cassandra leaned over and grabbed a burning stick. She swung it wildly through the air, igniting the rags of the trolls who'd entered. Their high-pitched screams echoed off the walls. They ran in all directions. Most left the cave and threw themselves into the cool stream. The burning trolls were replaced by dozens more.

Keidon continued to slice them at the neck. His sword cut easily through the bony creatures.

Cassandra used a fire stick to protect herself

and flailed it wildly at anyone who came near. One troll came from behind and swung its club at her back. Cassandra crumpled to the ground. The burning stick she held flew from her grip and hit Keidon in the face. He screamed in pain and dropped his sword.

The beastly trolls took this opportunity to club him. He felt the brutal pain in his back and legs. Keidon extinguished the flames in his beard and reclaimed his weapon. He moved to where Cassandra lay and sliced the heads of three trolls who were beating on her. He danced around the flames and struck the trolls in his path. Leaning over he picked up a burning stick and flung it around in his other hand. The trolls vanished from the cave, screaming in fright.

Suddenly from out of the night sky, the shadow of Talon emerged. He soared low and dove toward the Mountain Trolls. He picked up several at a time and flew high into the air, then dropped them. Keidon watched in amazement as their bones shattered when they hit earth. Talon chased the remaining trolls back to the hills. Keidon saw their retreating forms. He had a feeling they wouldn't return tonight.

He entered the cave to find Cassandra lying on the ground where she had collapsed. Gently he turned her over and noticed a huge welt form on the side of her head. "Cass, can you hear me?"

She moaned.

Keidon carried her to the sleeping bag and gently laid her down. He covered her with a blanket then removed the dead trolls from the cave. Keidon reached into his knapsack to find the medical supplies Mark Styne had given him for the journey. Keidon searched through the contents and pulled out antiseptic and bandages. He worked swiftly to clean the nasty wound. After he had attended to the head wound, he rolled her over and pulled down her top. A bruise had formed on her back where the clubs had impacted. Keidon kept Cassandra propped up on her side and used his body to shield her.

Keidon wrapped his arm around her waist and listened to the sound of her breathing. Before he closed his eyes, Talon stuck his head into the cavern. "Good work, darling," he said. "Tomorrow I'll reward you."

Talon flapped his wings in understanding and left the confines of the cave.

The warm crackle of the fire made him tired. Keidon didn't have the willpower to stay awake a minute longer. He would need his strength for the days to come. He held Cassandra tightly under the blankets, thankful they had Talon to watch over them.



## CHAPTER 22

Cassandra woke with a start. A severe pain traveled from her lower back to her shoulders. She sat upright, drenched in sweat.

Keidon rolled over and peered at her in the darkness. "Honey, are you all right?" He gently rubbed her shoulder. "I can give you something for the pain."

Cassandra winced and snuggled up next to his naked body. "What happened to the trolls?"

"I killed the bastards. Talon scared the rest of them away."

Cassandra closed her eyes to the sensation of his hands.

Keidon kissed her forehead. "Let me get you something for the pain."

She watched him rise from the warmth of the covers and disappear into the shadow of the cave.

He rifled through the bag, muttering something inaudible to himself. He returned moments later with a pill in his hand and a water bottle. "Take one of these," he said.

Cassandra tilted her head back and swallowed the pill. She washed it down with the water.

"It will make you feel better. Go back to sleep." Keidon crawled under the covers. He lifted her up so that she lay partway across his chest.

"I like listening to your heartbeat," she said, running her hand across his chest.

Keidon stroked her hair with his fingertips.

Cassandra closed her eyes. She dozed off, listening to the rise and fall of his breathing. In the distance, she heard him whisper, "I love you, Princess."

She smiled at the sound of these words. *I love you too*, she thought.

Cassandra stretched and yawned. She'd experienced a wonderful sleep after she had been medicated. Opening her eyes, she discovered Keidon gone. She sat up and flinched. Slowly, she got to her feet and walked to the cave entrance. She remembered fighting the beasts with fire, then the pain from their clubs. After that, everything went black.

Cassandra stuck her head outside and stared at the beautiful rugged scenery. Aside from the dead trolls lying scattered on the ground, the campsite had charm. A dense forest could be seen in the distance. The song of the birds carried through the trees.

Cassandra's chilled body warmed to the sun's

radiant heat. She turned her attention to the creek bed where she noticed Keidon crouched by the water. He filled canteens for their trip. Her gaze focused on his muscled physique. She felt her body stir with need. Even though part of her knew she should relax and heal, the other part of her wanted to experience sex.

Keidon turned to look at her.

His dazzling smile melted her heart. She returned the smile and leaned against the entrance.

Keidon finished his task and carried the full water bottles back to the cave. "May I help you, ma'am?"

Cassandra waited until Keidon packed the bottles into the knapsacks, then grabbed his hands. She dragged him to the sleeping bag. Cassandra slowly lowered herself to the floor. "My back is sore," she moaned.

"Let me see," he said, rolling her onto her stomach. "The bruise looks bad this morning. I'll rub some ointment on it. Just relax."

Cassandra heard him rustle through his bag.

Keidon returned holding a white container in his hand. "This will help ease the pain."

"You should have been a doctor," she smiled. Keidon lay next to her and rubbed ointment onto her. She gasped when it made contact. "That's cold!"

Gently, Keidon ran his hand up and down her

bruised skin. He massaged her sore muscles and listened to her moan softly.

"You have magical hands, Keidon." He applied another layer of cream to her body. She closed her eyes and enjoyed the sensation of his hands. She imagined they were massaging her down below. "I wish we could make love," she whispered.

Keidon gently worked the cream into her skin.

Cassandra closed her eyes to the soothing feeling. Keidon's strong hands relaxed her aching muscles and released her body of tension. She didn't know how long she lay there, but when she opened her eyes, Keidon sat cooking breakfast by a fire. "I didn't realize I slept."

"How is your back?"

"It feels much better thanks to you."

Keidon offered her a seat by the warm heat.

Once she had settled down to eat, she gazed at Keidon's rugged demeanor. "Why did the Mountain Trolls attack us last night?"

Keidon sipped a warm drink and held the cup to his lips. "We invaded their territory. This cave might be home to them."

Cassandra savored the cooked fish in her mouth. "I think we should leave before they return."

Keidon kissed her on the cheek and nodded in agreement. They finished their breakfast then prepared for another day of travel. Keidon emerged from the cave and took one last look

around the vicinity. He joined the princess on Talon's back. He held tight to the reins and commanded the bird to fly.

\* \* \* \*

The weeks that followed proved to be difficult. The mountains and streams soon became a luxury of their past. What they faced were desolate and dry climates. Whenever they stopped for a rest, Keidon would have Talon circle the area and look for water. These kinds of places became increasingly difficult to find. After spending hours searching for a camp, Keidon noticed a glimmer of light reflect off the sun. "I think I found water!" he shouted.

Cassandra sat in the front, her limp body nestled against his chest.

Keidon knew she was tired. What seemed like an easy mission at the start had proved to be trying and difficult. The lack of water holes didn't make it any easier. Talon soared gracefully toward the ground. Keidon's eyes lit up, seeing a fresh stream trickling through a rocky environment. This had to be the only fresh water for hundreds of miles. Their canteens had been empty for three days. Keidon knew if they didn't drink today, they would die.

He eagerly jumped to the ground and caught Cassandra as she fell into his arms. He carried her

to the water's edge and scanned the area for predators. When none showed themselves, he thought it would be safe to stay for awhile. Cassandra and Keidon had traveled steadily for weeks without a rest. The princess needed food and water to build up her strength.

He laid her gently onto the sand and leaned over to fill the canteens. After he had filled one, he lifted Cassandra's head onto his lap and opened her mouth to administer liquid. He gently poured some into her parched mouth.

She coughed and sputtered.

Keidon thumped her back and gave her another drink.

Minutes later, Cassandra opened her eyes and greedily took the canteen.

"Slow down, darling. You're going to make yourself sick."

Cassandra emptied the canteen, then leaned over to retch.

Keidon held her head up as she vomited the contents. "You've been sick a lot lately," he said. "Maybe it's something you're eating."

Cassandra lay with her face in the sand and gasped. "I don't know. Why aren't you sick?"

Keidon shrugged his shoulders, eyeing her with concern. He scanned the surroundings. "Honey, why don't you stay here and I'll find us some lunch."

Cassandra moaned.

He gently rubbed her back then got up to look for food. Keidon had walked a hundred yards when he heard a splash in the creek. He peered into the shallow depths surprised by the mass of fish swimming by. He ran to his knapsack and pulled out a bow and arrow. Keidon quietly stood on the shore and took careful aim at the rainbow trout. The arrow sailed straight and fast. It struck two fish at a time. Keidon shouted at his success and trudged through the water to claim his prize. Pulling the arrow from the squirming fish, he set them aside and waited for more. Not long after, Keidon had killed a dozen fish. He carried his catch to where Cassandra lay. "Cass, I caught our meal," he said. He saw her open one eye.

"That's nice," she whispered.

Keidon leaned over and felt her forehead. She didn't run a fever. Cassandra started to feel nauseous a week ago. Keidon assumed the intense heat and lack of water were contributors to her condition. Keeping a close watch on her, Keidon managed to find enough kindling to start a fire. He cleaned and gutted the fish and cooked them over an open fire.

Cassandra slowly got to her feet to join Keidon by the warmth.

"I'm glad you're here with me," he said, kissing her cheek.

Cassandra smiled and reached over for a plate of fish. "Thank you for catching lunch. I would

starve if you weren't around."

"I wouldn't be much of a warrior if I couldn't keep us fed." To Keidon's surprise, Cassandra had finished six fish on her own, along with a few dried berries. "It's strange how you're sick in the morning and then by the afternoon you eat everything in sight."

Cassandra paused from licking the berry juice from her fingers. They both turned to look at each other in surprise. "Oh no," Cassandra whispered.

Keidon paled at the thought. "You're pregnant."

"I can't be," she said. "It's not possible..."

"Not possible," he replied. "Of course it is." Keidon ran his hand through his beard. "Maybe it's something else. When was your last period?"

Cassandra shrugged her shoulders. "I don't remember."

"What other symptoms do you have?"

Cassandra met his gaze. "My breasts are sore, I'm sick in the morning and I'm tired."

Keidon had seen enough pregnant women to know the symptoms. Even his Angelina had been four months pregnant before losing the child. "You're definitely pregnant."

Cassandra paled at these words. "We're not even married. I'm a princess and you're a warrior. How is this ever going to work?"

Keidon was too shocked to move or think clearly. He couldn't imagine himself a father to



Cassandra's baby. He could lose his life for this. "We'll figure this out. Don't worry." Even as Keidon said the words, he knew he was only fooling himself. They had plenty to worry about.

"The mission!" she cried. "We'll fail for sure! I won't be allowed to enter the sacred land!"

Keidon's eyes widened as he wrapped his arms around her in comfort. "What are you talking about?"

"Keidon," Cassandra whispered. "I haven't been truthful with you."

He withdrew. "What do you mean?"

"In order for me to enter the Sunken Islands, I must enter as a virgin."

Keidon covered his mouth in shock. "All this time you knew and you never told me! Why are we on this mission if we can't complete it? We'll fail!" Keidon jumped to his feet and paced. "That's why you remained a virgin all this time, right? Cass, why didn't you tell me? I would have understood!"

Cassandra held her head down in shame and cried into her hands. "I wanted to be close to you. I felt an attraction," she sobbed. "After Tor and Blake were killed, you comforted me."

Keidon thought back to their first night of lovemaking. "I'm sorry. I guess it's partly my fault. How are we supposed to enter the Sunken Islands if you're pregnant? The sacred land will know. We can't complete our quest." Keidon

stopped pacing to glare down at her.

Cassandra lifted her tear-stained face and held out her hand to him.

He turned from her. "I'm angry with you for not being truthful with me. What other secrets are you hiding?" Keidon clenched his jaw. "I want you to rest up and then we'll get the hell out of here. The Sunken Islands are not that far."

"Do you mean we're going to continue?"

"We've come this far, I guess we have no other choice. I'm willing to risk my life trying."

"What about the baby's?"

Keidon glanced at Cassandra one last time then went to check on Talon. He hadn't gone far when he noticed the bird pull a fish from the stream. Talon swallowed them whole. Keidon watched him with fascination. He took a step closer when he heard a loud screech from above. He lifted his hand to shield his eyes from the glaring sun. Squinting, he noticed a flock of wild birds the size of Talon circle the sky. Their loud squawks could be heard from where he stood. Keidon had a bad feeling they were trespassing on their territory.

Grabbing a dead fish on the shore, Keidon attempted to lure Talon away from the stream. The bird looked at him with his large beady eyes then proceeded to catch his own. The flock of angry birds descended towards them. Keidon glanced in Cassandra's direction to see her run for cover. Keidon rushed to retrieve his weapons.

When he returned he found Talon in battle with over a dozen wild birds.

The flock noticed Keidon and dove dangerously close. He swung his sword at the birds that came near. Keidon managed to behead one of them after it nipped at him. The black cloud of birds increased in number as more appeared in the sky. Keidon knew they were fighting a losing battle. He pulled out his bow and arrow and struck down as many as he could.

Ten birds pecked at Talon from all angles. He attempted to fight them off and use his sharp beak for protection. Keidon realized Talon couldn't destroy them on his own, he'd need his help. Taking careful aim, Keidon struck down a few more, only to have them replaced by a large mass. Talon flapped his wings in fear, eager to take flight. The black birds had him surrounded and blocked his escape. Keidon picked off another dozen to give Talon the opportunity to break free. The bird took to the sky and floundered in the air. From Keidon's viewpoint, he knew Talon was injured.

The bird soared higher and higher then dipped toward earth. The black mass followed in pursuit. Keidon watched in horror as the wild flock attacked him from the air. Birds pecked at him from all sides, his body covered in blood. Moments later, Talon fell from the sky. Keidon saw his body land on a rocky ledge. In the heat of

the afternoon, the black mass narrowed in on their victim. Within seconds, Talon's body was covered in black. The hungry birds pecked him apart. Keidon couldn't watch. He turned away from the brutality to find Cassandra hidden behind a shrub. "We need to leave." Keidon grabbed her hand and helped her along.

"Talon..." she cried.

"He's dead," Keidon replied. "I filled our canteens. We should be good for a few days if we ration." Cassandra turned to look back, but Keidon blocked her view. He didn't want her to witness anymore brutality. Keidon led them past a rocky barrier and listened to the sounds of the scavenger birds. Their loud squawks reached his ears. He half turned to look at Talon one last time. The bird had been stripped to the bone.

## CHAPTER 23

Talon's death had left them wandering the desert on foot. Cassandra knew Keidon held up fine, but she felt her own body protest. According to Keidon's map, they were in the vicinity and looking for the entrance to a grand temple.

The Ruby Idol burned a hole into Cassandra's knapsack and ignited a red fiery glow as they neared. She felt the presence of something more sinister in their wake, even though she couldn't see anything. The hot sun beat down upon them. The warm wind fanned their charred skin. Cassandra opened her canteen and tilted back the bottle. The last trickle of water soothed her parched throat. "I'm out of water," she said, wishing for more.

Keidon reached into his knapsack and handed her his bottle. "I don't have much left."

Cassandra took it greedily and took two long swallows. She handed it back to him and avoided his gaze. Ever since she'd discovered she was pregnant, Keidon wouldn't speak with her unless

it was necessary. She didn't know if he was upset about their impending parenthood or the fact that she'd kept a secret from him. Cassandra thought it must be both. She attempted to smooth things over the best that she could. Every effort she made ended in disaster. Keidon wouldn't even sleep with her. Cassandra undressed in front of him. She hoped to arouse a passion in him. Keidon would eye her with distaste then move his sleeping bag as far away as possible.

Most nights Cassandra cried herself to sleep. She adjusted her knapsack and continued to walk ahead of him. Her feet ached in her shoes. She felt like casting them aside and walking barefoot until she realized the hot sand would blister her skin. Cassandra squinted against the blazing sun. From all directions, the only thing to see was miles of sand. There wasn't shelter or water to be had. Cassandra turned to the right. In the distance, she thought she saw something. *The heat is getting to you*, she thought. *It's only a mirage*. Lifting her hand to shield the sun from her eyes, she stopped walking and stared into the distance.

Keidon walked right into her. "What is it?" he asked.

"I think I see something over there!" she pointed.

Keidon followed her finger and squinted.

Cassandra waited for him to say it was her imagination. To her surprise, he let out a loud

shout of joy.

"That's the temple!"

"Are you sure?"

Keidon pulled the map from his breast pocket. He held it up against the light and studied the fine drawings. "Yes, this is it!"

Cassandra wanted to run into his arms and kiss him.

Keidon actually grinned in relief.

He looked incredibly sexy when he smiled. In the back of her mind, she hoped he'd sweep her into his arms, but he didn't. He carefully folded the map and placed it back into his pocket. "We're out of water, so it's a damn good thing."

"Shall we go?" she asked.

"After you."

She could tell by his tone of voice and the way he reacted to their current situation, he hadn't forgiven her. Cassandra walked ahead of him then practically ran as they drew near. The excitement and fear built within her. Would they be able to pass through the gates unscathed? Only time would tell. After weeks of searching for the ancient temple, they had found it. Cassandra fell onto her hands and knees in gratitude.

Keidon came up from behind, his eyes widened in amazement.

A grand temple with an archway made of stone loomed before them. Cassandra slowly got to her feet and peered up. The sacred land could be seen

from the entrance. Unlike the desert they had crossed, the Sunken Islands had lush green grass with trees. The beauty went on for miles in all directions. An elaborate cave stood on the right with carvings of wild animals lining the walls.

Cassandra knew this is where the idol needed to rest. Her knapsack felt heavy from the weight of the sculpture. She heard it smoldering from inside. The idol knew that it was home. Cassandra touched the fabric and noticed the red hot glow ignite against her hand. "Why is it called the Sunken Islands?" she asked.

Keidon glanced at her quickly and took a step forward. "I don't know. Why don't we enter and find out."

Cassandra waited outside the entrance and watched as her brave warrior stepped through the barrier. She took a deep breath and marched in after him. Cassandra expected the earth to crumble in around them, but nothing happened. She looked around, afraid some hideous monster would reach out and grab her, but that didn't happen either. "That's strange," she muttered.

Keidon motioned her onward. He was the first to arrive at the cave and study the markings above the doorway.

Cassandra took in the surroundings. Her eyes caught something sticking out of the ground. She screamed when she realized what it was. Everywhere she looked skeletal heads with large



empty eye sockets stared back at her.

Keidon turned to her in surprise. "What?"

Cassandra pointed to the nearest one. "They obviously weren't worthy to enter the lands, were they?" She tapped his shoulder and whispered into his ear, "Neither are we."

Keidon placed a finger over her mouth to keep her quiet.

Anxious to complete the quest, Cassandra brushed past him and touched the large stone door. It slid open and allowed them into the darkness. She swallowed nervously. Cassandra looked at Keidon for reassurance and stepped inside the tomb. Keidon traced her steps and held her back the moment the door shut behind them. "It's dark in here," she said, grasping his upper arm.

Keidon reached into the shadows to touch her hand. With his keen eye, they slowly made their way along the narrow cave. The Ruby Idol radiated a brilliant red light.

Cassandra withdrew the idol and held it out in front for guidance. The heat from the sculpture singed her skin. Ignoring the pain, she continued on, knowing their mission would soon come to an end. Trickle of fresh water leaked from the ceiling and onto the floor. Keidon filled the canteens with liquid. After he finished, he let Cassandra have her fill of fluids. "That's better," she sighed.

"Keep your dagger ready," Keidon warned.

"There might be hidden dangers along the way." He felt along the wall and took slow and careful steps. A hissing sound filled the narrow path. Keidon swung his sword at a large black snake that slithered along the cold barrier.

The head landed by Cassandra's feet. She covered her mouth to stifle a scream.

He took another couple of steps. Two more snakes came at him. While Keidon killed one, Cassandra grabbed her weapon and swiped at a hissing beast. The snake lifted its head to strike when she threw her dagger at its throat. "Thanks," he said.

Cassandra cringed and walked around the decapitated snakes.

Keidon held his sword in front to feel around in the darkness. "Hold the idol out," he commanded. The princess did as she was told. When Keidon touched the wall with the tip of his blade, sharp knives sailed across the gap and imbedded into the stone opposite.

"How did you know that was here?" she gasped.

Keidon smiled. "Because of them," he pointed to the floor.

Cassandra held the idol up to see what he referred to. Lying slumped against the floor were two skeletal bodies. Cassandra pressed herself protectively against the rugged warrior. She matched Keidon step for step. They rounded a

bend where a light could be seen in the distance. Cassandra was ready to run toward it.

Keidon held her back. "Don't!" he warned. "There could be more hidden dangers."

Not taking any chances, Keidon edged himself forward and urged Cassandra to stay a few paces behind. She watched him approach a room with a grand temple situated in the center. From where she stood, Cassandra could see the monument surrounded by torchlight. The Ruby Idol glowed red. She bit her bottom lip to keep herself from screaming out.

Keidon entered the room and jumped when a giant cleaver passed under his feet. He took another step and avoided spears shooting near his head.

Cassandra stood nervously at the entrance. "Please, don't move!" she shouted.

Keidon paused, mid-step. "What's wrong?"

"I don't want you to die!"

He turned on the spot to see tears stream down her cheeks. "I'm doing this for all mankind."

Cassandra entered the room and retraced his steps.

"Wait by the door! I want to deactivate the weapons first."

She didn't listen to his word of warning. All she knew is that she needed to be at his side through the good times and the bad. Cassandra had reached safety and grabbed him protectively

around the waist. He refused to show affection and left her side the moment they touched.

Keidon dodged several more spears and a gaping dark hole in the floor. The grand temple was three steps away. He motioned for Cassandra to follow. She approached with caution, nearly falling into the invisible black pit. At the last second, Keidon grabbed her around the waist and pulled her close to him.

She gazed into his deep brown eyes, longing for a kiss. She felt his need and desire press against her thighs. Cassandra closed her eyes and waited. Her body was on fire. His hot breath touched her temple and worked its way toward her mouth. In a second, his tongue would find its way inside. Cassandra suddenly cried out in pain. A severe burning in her hand made her drop the idol onto the floor. The instant it touched the cold granite, a rumble sounded.

Cassandra leaned over and picked up the hot sculpture from the floor. She climbed the three steps to reach the top of the temple. Carefully she placed the idol into the engraved stone. Red sparks flew the instant it came in contact with its final resting place.

Dirt and debris crashed down from the ceiling. Keidon grabbed her hand and attempted to shield Cassandra from the rocks.

A loud voice rang out from the idol, "You are not a virgin! How dare you try and deceive me!"

Cassandra shook with fear. "I'm sorry!" she cried. "Please, erase the world of evil. I beg of you!"

The Ruby Idol's eyes shone a brilliant red. "Only someone pure and untouched can end the evil."

Cassandra fell onto her knees before the temple. "I ask forgiveness. I am weak!" she cried.

The idol shook with fury. "You are too late. Since you failed, you must wait for the next worthy soul."

"Who will that be?" she asked.

The Ruby Idol who had similar facial features as the princess, looked down upon her with a sly smile, "Why your daughter, of course."

Cassandra and Keidon gasped at the same time. "Raise her to be pure and unspoiled. Then send her to complete the mission you failed."

"How long do I have to wait?"

The idol lit up the room with its light. "When she turns eighteen, the girl can return."

Cassandra shook her head. "No! Please don't let us wait that long. The Delmirths will rule the earth until then. They are evil—"

"Silence!" the idol bellowed. "You must pay for your sins. Leave my sight!"

Cassandra hadn't even got to her feet when the cave shook violently.

Keidon ran to her side and pulled her along behind him. Large boulders fell from the ceiling

and blocked the exit.

"Where should we go?" Cassandra cried.

Keidon turned on the spot and blindly fought his way through the thick cloud of dust particles. They ran a few steps in another direction, when the floor opened up beneath their feet. Cassandra screamed out in fright. She grasped Keidon's hand as they fell further and further into a black pit.

"I love you!" He squeezed her hand tightly.

A cold wind swirled around them. The blackness pulled them deeper into nothingness. Cassandra had horrid visions of them falling for all eternity. She closed her eyes and felt nauseous from the fast movement. Just when she thought this nightmare would never end, they hit something hard. Cassandra gasped.

Keidon pressed up next to her, clawing at the earth. She felt as if she would suffocate. "Help me!" he gasped.

Cassandra soon realized they were below the earth in what appeared to be a thick wall of sand. Together they frantically dug. Their hands emerged above the ground. Cassandra could see a hint of light. Desperately needing air, she fought her way through the entrapment. Cassandra felt relief when Keidon pushed her through the gap. She laid face forward onto the sand and coughed. She listened to the sound of Keidon as he collapsed next to her.

When she opened her eyes, she realized they

were outside the entrance to the Sunken Islands. Cassandra rolled over and fell against Keidon's chest. "Is it over?" she asked.

Keidon lifted his head and looked around the haze. "It seems to be." His eyes widened in surprise.

Cassandra followed his gaze. Lying within their reach was the Ruby Idol.

## EPİLOGUE

Keidon crawled to where the idol lay and reached out to touch it. He gasped at the excruciating pain in his hand. He studied his charred skin, the blisters forming from the heat. The rapidly forming scars would be a reminder for years to come of his failure. Keidon closed his eyes and wished the pain away. He glanced at the Ruby Idol glowing in the sand. It had been thrown out of the sacred lands along with Keidon and the princess. “We were so close!” Keidon screamed.

They peered through the haze and squinted as the forms drew near. It wasn’t until the threatening darkness loomed closer did they see the enemy troops. The Delmirth army surrounded them and pointed daggers from all directions. Keidon and Cassandra surrendered and held their arms up in defeat.

The leader of the group jumped down from his dragon and stepped forward. His red robe trailed along behind him. His green eyes peered at them beneath the hood. “My name is Sator,” he sneered.



"I'm happy to meet your acquaintance. You will bow to me!"

"Sator," Keidon repeated. "You're the bastard that stole Lund's women."

The evil leader laughed. "I never stole anything that didn't want to be taken."

"Where are they?" he asked.

The Delmirth stood above Keidon's injured body and smiled down at him with spite. "The women are serving my army and enjoying every minute of it."

"You lie!" he screamed.

"Bow to me or you'll die!"

Keidon and Cassandra lowered their bodies flat to the ground.

"That's better. Well, well, well," he said, shaking his ugly head. "It looks like the Ruby Idol is mine. Who would have thought?"

Keidon watched the sculpture cast a red glow. He had failed his army and let his country down. Keidon tried not to think about the last few minutes he had encountered in the chamber.

"What a sad sight this is," the Delmirth continued. "To see you cast from the Sunken Islands as if you were trash!" The army that surrounded them laughed. "Keidon, you had it all. You were the general of your army. The best warrior this country has ever known. You rose to power only to have it ruthlessly taken away from you. And now you have failed." Sator walked

around them and kicked dirt into their faces. "Such a pity you lost it all." He stopped pacing to look down at their hunched over bodies. "As much as I'd like to steal what you have left," he said, glancing lustfully at Cassandra, "I'm going to let you keep her. I would much rather see you die in this desolate place with a companion by your side than alone."

"That's very honorable of you!" Keidon yelled. "You're a slimy bastard!"

"We still have some spunk left, do we? Maybe we should rid you of that!"

"No!" Cassandra shouted. "Leave him alone!"

Sator smiled, his jagged teeth gleamed. He leaned over and snatched the Ruby Idol from the sand. "It's mine!" he cried, holding it high into the air.

The Delmirth army went wild. "The power is ours!" The men shouted in celebration.

"Punish them for killing our leader!" he commanded. Several Delmirths obeyed at once and lined up to whip Keidon and Cassandra. Keidon attempted to get up and fight, only to be flogged ruthlessly by the enemy. He fell to the ground in a heap, too weak to defend his honor. The cracking of the whip sounded. The enemy took pride in their accomplishments. Keidon closed his eyes to the pain. The whip tore through his flesh. He could feel the blood run down his body.

Cassandra lay huddled on the ground. Three Delmirths struck her.

"Take that, Princess!" they shouted.

Keidon couldn't stand her cries of agony. He knew at that moment he had forgiven her for what she had done. They were both physically weak and because of their lust for one another, they had to suffer the consequences.

Sator paced back and forth, monitoring the beating. "Had enough?" he asked, stopping before Keidon.

He looked up and studied Sator's gleeful expression. "Wait until I come back to power..."

Sator laughed. "You become powerful? That will be the day!" He stood above Keidon. "I took that power from you with this!" he said, holding the idol above his head. "Your days of glory are over. You and that pathetic wench of yours will die in this desolate place."

Sator's gaze left Keidon and focused instead on Cassandra. The princess had her dress ripped in the back, her bloodied skin exposed. Sator passed by one of his men and handed the idol to him. "Take this. I have business to attend to." Sator knelt in front of Cassandra and eyed her over lustfully. "Even when you are beaten and bruised, you're still sexy." Sator lifted her chin and forced her to meet his gaze. "You could be my whore," he said, licking his lips in hunger. "I want you to please me in front of my men."

"No!" Keidon shouted.

"Oh yes," Sator laughed wickedly. "I'm sure Keidon would like to watch." Sator's eyes wandered to her heaving bosom. He cupped a breast into his hand and felt the flesh between his fingers. "It's so soft," he whispered. "Should I have a taste?"

Cassandra tried to pull away from his grasp, but a soldier whipped her again from behind. She fell hard against Sator.

A soldier slugged her across the face and knocked her out.

"That's better," he said, fingering the hardened nipple. "She can't resist me. I think the Princess is excited!"

The army cheered their leader on. Keidon lay close by and watched in despair as Sator took a nipple into his mouth. Cassandra lay limp in his arms, unable to resist. Sator tore her dress wide open in the front to have access to the other tit as well. He sucked hard between the two and enjoyed the taste and feel of her flesh. He was about to lift his robe to reveal his throbbing penis when thunder rumbled in the distance. Sator glanced up, his brow creased with worry. "What the hell?"

Dark clouds formed over the horizon. From where Keidon lay, he saw a storm approach in the distance and move at great speed. Sator quickly dropped Cassandra from his embrace. He

approached his dragon, ready to ride off. "Give me the idol!" he demanded. A red-hooded Delmirth stepped forward and handed it to the leader. Sator placed it safely in his satchel. "A sandstorm is coming!" he shouted. "If we don't leave now, we'll die!"

"What about the Princess?" one of the men asked. "Aren't we going to take her along for our enjoyment?"

"Grab her if you want, but I'm getting the hell out of here!" Sator whipped his dragon. The black beast rose into the darkening sky. His army followed suit.

Keidon watched a red-hooded enemy lean over Cassandra's limp form. The Delmirth carried her away and placed her on the sand. "You sure are beautiful," the Delmirth said, running his fingers along her face. His hand lowered to her breast and cupped it greedily. He lowered his lips and sucked on her nipple.

A loud smacking sound reached Keidon's ears. Keidon watched the Delmirth mount the princess. "Get off her!"

"Jealous?" the Delmirth laughed and wedged himself between her legs.

Determined to fight for Cassandra, Keidon tried to get to his feet as the red-robed man moved steadily back and forth on top of her. Thankful the unconscious Cassandra was oblivious to what took place, he growled as the Delmirth moaned

and panted. His attempts to stand failing, Keidon crawled through the sand. "Get off her!" He saw the Delmirth suck on her nipple. Keidon tried to shut out the pleasure from the enemy. Tears trickled down his face. He had failed everyone he loved, especially his princess.

The storm moved closer, the wind picked up speed. A clap of thunder shook the premises. Through the impending storm, Keidon tried to block out the Delmirth. A cry of pleasure sounded moments later. The Delmirth slowed his pace and sucked her nipple one last time. He rose and straightened his robes as he approached Keidon who lay on the sand. "I got what I wanted."

"Please, don't let us die."

The Delmirth let out a haunting laugh and kicked him hard in the ribs. Keidon gasped for breath. The tears stung his eyes. He watched in anguish as the enemy mounted his dragon and took off into the sky. A strong wind suddenly blew around them and swirled dust into the air. Keidon had to save them somehow. He couldn't leave them to die in the desert. He slowly crawled to Cassandra, the effort unbearable. He coughed and sputtered. The sand entered his lungs. Determined to survive, he saw Cassandra's lifeless form in the haze.

Keidon pulled a blanket from his satchel and placed it over their heads. He listened as the storm pelted against the fabric. If they didn't survive, the

world would be doomed and evil would rule the country forever.

Keidon prayed his army would find them. If only...





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rise and Fall of Keidon is the first erotic fantasy novel written by Shannon Rouchelle. As a teenage girl she enjoyed reading romance and fantasy. She aspired to someday combine the two interests and create romantic magical worlds for avid readers.

When Shannon isn't writing she spends quality time with her family and friends.