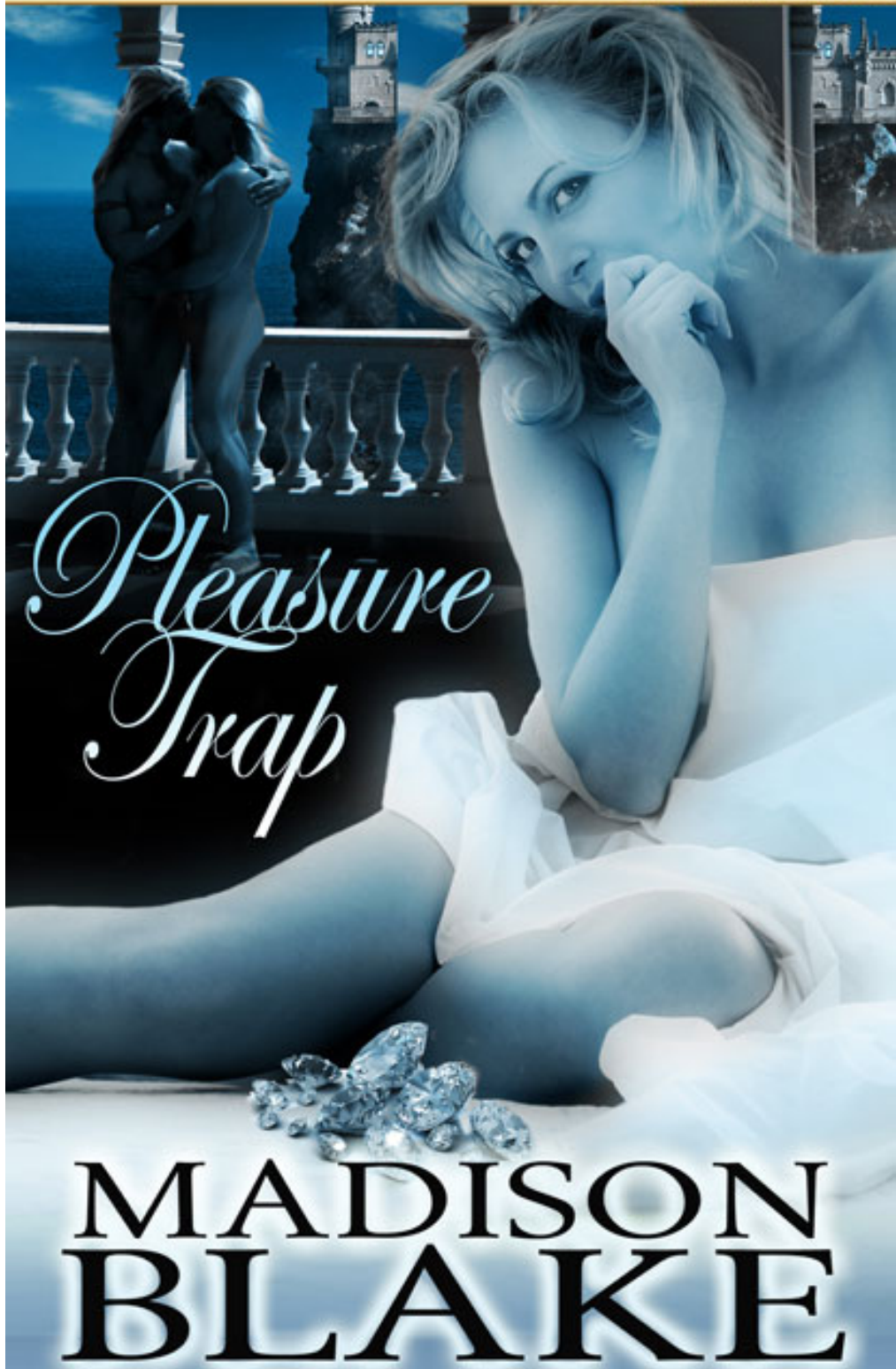


ELLORA'S CAVE XANADU



*Pleasure
Trap*

MADISON
BLAKE

Pleasure Trap

Madison Blake

Jobless and about to be homeless, Raisa Sheldon is captivated by a glittering diamond star. When she touches it, she's transported to a dazzling palace owned by two amazing – and gorgeous – men.

Sex with her is the only cure for the potentially fatal disease that afflicts them both. She wields the power of life and death over them, but it was nothing compared to their ability to provide her with pleasure beyond her wildest imagining as the days and nights blend into one long, orgasmic delight. When one shocking revelation rocks the axis of her world, the palace becomes a trap from which she has no wish to escape.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorasave.com

Pleasure Trap

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PLEASURE TRAP

Madison Blake

Dedication

To my wonderful editor, Meghan Conrad, who made this story better, even if I did cry over the edits. Thank you!

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Energizer: Eveready Battery Company, Inc.

Chapter One

Damaon closed his eyes and shuddered, knowing he'd reached his limits. Every day, he'd been sliding closer and closer to the edge, but he always had himself in control. This time, he was hanging on by a thread. A *very* slim thread.

It wouldn't take much to send him over.

The need to lash out at the errant worker surged through him and his mouth worked as he stared at the diamond figure standing passively in front of him. Should he let loose a scalding torrent of words, the inanimate form wouldn't understand him unless the corresponding stimulus and reaction had been programmed into him. Even so, abusing his servants in that way didn't appeal to him. With the disease trying to overpower him, Damaon had to clench his teeth to prevent the words from slipping out. Hell's gems, it was probably his fault in the first place for not encoding this particular worker with the proper instructions for gem harvest.

He made an abrupt motion and rushed away from the fields, the hot sun beating down on his back. He headed in a beeline for the glistening palace looming in the distance.

He needed his mate.

The door to the library where Adamas was doing his research banged open. He looked up, startled, to see his mate stalking into the room, his jaw locked tight.

Something was wrong.

Adamas placed a marker on the book, then stood up and hurried toward his lover. "Damaon, what's the matter?"

Damaon pressed a hard kiss on his lips and, with his tongue, marauded his way into Adamas' mouth. Before Adamas could even register the pleasure of having his mate's hands and mouth on him, Damaon was spinning away and storming past him further into the room. He tracked mud all over the polished multifaceted tile floors and kicked off his shoes. One hit the wall and the other the back of an armchair.

Adamas' eyes narrowed. He remembered Damaon acting in much the same way years ago. Hell's gems, had it been fifty years? Slowly, he went toward the door and closed it. "Damaon, *shikima*, come here. You need a hug very badly, I can tell."

Damaon stopped in the middle of the room as though electrified and his shoulders slumped. His head drooped, then he sighed and ran a hand over his face. "I'm behaving like a ten-year-old again, aren't I?"

"Yes, but I daresay in another six months or so, there will be two recalcitrant boys in the palace instead of one." Adamas embraced Damaon from behind, enjoying the sensation of his mate's hard body, warmed from working outside all day. Damaon always smelled like the sun and the land combined and the heady scent intoxicated Adamas. There was something so sexy about a man who loved to work the fields. "What is it this time?"

"One of the workers mangled the diamond crop in the south sector during harvest and hid it from us. I wanted to recall the products, but it was already too late—they had already been scattered on Earth." Damaon kicked the nearest couch he could reach without being released from Adamas' arms, a sign that he was still angry about the unnecessary waste. However, Adamas was asking about something more than the destroyed crops and Damaon knew it. The fact that he avoided talking about the real problem told Adamas a lot. "Hell's gems, Adamas. Did Orin ever tell you if he had the same problems we do with our workers?"

"Sh." Adamas kissed Damaon's nape and sucked the sensitive skin, making his lover moan. "I believe all the immortals encounter the same problem, one time or the other." His hands slipped under Damaon's work shirt and caressed the taut flesh of his

chest. "Empty your mind of everything. Relax and enjoy this." His tongue stroked the outer shell of Damaon's ear, then plunged in for a probe before he sucked on the lobe.

Damaon's knees buckled, taking Adamas down with him.

Damaon turned when his knees touched the ground and their mouths met with fierce gentleness and fiercer hunger, tongues dueling for supremacy and teeth biting down on soft flesh. Damaon made a sound of triumph as he drew blood, then swiped his tongue repeatedly over the cut lip in apology. Adamas kissed him back with equal ferocity and sucked his lover's lower lip in response, then engaged him in a torrid, open-mouthed kiss.

Without pausing a beat, he ripped the buttons from the work shirt and shoved the offending garment off Damaon. He ran his hands over his mate's strong, heated back, admiring the smooth, satiny texture of his skin and the rippling muscles that were gained from working the land. Adamas had meant to comfort his lover, but it was turning into something different, something exhilarating, especially as he was caught up in his own needs. "You're like drug in my veins." He nipped Damaon's skin at the jaw. "A sweet, wondrous drug. I can't get enough of you."

"I'm here," Damaon growled. "Take me."

Adamas' mouth trailed down the solid column of Damaon's throat, then he peppered his lover's shoulders with a shower of biting kisses. Damaon's skin was a golden bronze from working outside under the sun and his broad muscled chest meant there was more skin to touch and taste. Adamas savored each patch of skin with slow thoroughness, licking the sweat from his flesh and enjoying the sounds of Damaon's harsh groans and incomprehensible shouts. His arousal notched a level higher when Damaon trembled from the teasing laps and caresses on his nipples.

Goddess be merciful. Adamas shifted to ease his hardening cock within his trousers. He didn't know how long he could last before he burst from the pressure, and Damaon had yet to touch him.

Adamas closed his eyes as he sucked on one hard bud, moaning at the flare of lust when Damaon cupped his buttocks through the cloth and squeezed with slow rhythmic clasps. Unable to help himself, he ground his hips against Damaon, seeking to ease his aching shaft, only to discover that the action did nothing but fuel his desire. Under his fingers, Adamas noted Damaon's heart beating in a fast, irregular rhythm. His breathing grew choppy. Frustration and excitement made him bite down on the turgid nipple, causing Damaon to cry out.

Soothing the hurt nipple with his tongue, Adamas' hands trailed south to ease his mate out of his trousers and underpants. Damaon groaned and plowed his hands into Adamas' thick hair. Adamas breathed in Damaon's aroma—a combination of his own unique scent, the warmth of the sun and the earthy fragrance of the diamond fields—and sucked harder when his hand closed around Damaon's thick, throbbing cock. His rigid shaft pulsed with life and power, hardening further when Adamas squeezed and rubbed. His own cock grew in response.

“Adamas, my love, my cock wants to be in you.”

The words excited him, no matter that they had been lovers for several centuries. Desire lanced his spine, making him tremble, and he shoved down his own trousers with shaking fingers. He surged back up and their mouths met in a ravenous kiss as their cocks crossed and caressed and stroked against each other, the friction causing them to cream with arousal. Damaon's hands roamed his back in broad, loving sweeps.

“Damaon, Damaon,” Adamas breathed against his neck, “I want you. Take me.”

Damaon positioned him, pushing his head down onto the floor and his butt up in the air. Adamas quivered with anticipation, his anus already widening for Damaon's entry. He sighed with pleasure when Damaon's cock breached the tight ring of muscles, then relaxed even more so that his mate could push his lubricated cock in. He wanted it all—the entire bruising length of it. He wanted the wondrous pain and the ecstatic pleasure. He wanted everything.

Inch by inch, Damaon entered him. Adamas gritted his teeth at the pain-pleasure. He was so hard by now his cock strained against his stomach.

“Have you been good today, Adamas?” Damaon cooed above him. He withdrew the few inches that he had worked in, then thrust, withdrew and thrust, over and over.

“Hell’s gems, Damaon, just seat yourself within me! I’m aching so fucking – Ah!”

Damaon had grasped his cock and was rubbing along its length in the same rhythm that he’d set with his cock. As usual, Damaon ignored his demands.

“I’m where I want to be.”

Adamas could almost see him grinning with wicked intent. He sighed with relief that Damaon’s condition hadn’t yet caused him to degenerate into a harsh, savage cruelty that would have made him rejoice in reducing Adamas into a mass of aching, excruciating need. The torture would go on for hours on end, with no hope of relief in sight, until Damaon couldn’t ignore the urgent call of his body.

“I want to take my time,” Damaon said through gritted teeth as he continued his infuriatingly slow rhythm, “so I can do this longer. Do you feel how much I love you?”

“Yes,” Adamas answered, his breath ragged. It was there in the firm bite of Damaon’s fingers in his waist, in his labored breathing, in the solid, stroking caresses of his cock. He loved Damaon too, loved him for five hundred years and beyond, and he hoped for more years in which to love him. The day they’d been gifted with the shared mantle of the Diamond Gem Immortal was the most blessed day of their lives. “Fuck me harder, Damaon, and take me. Take everything that I am, my love, my life... Everything is yours.”

Damaon didn’t answer, but he made an anguished, guttural sound and his unhurried plunges changed speed. His thrusts were imbued with a desperate hunger, a searing possession, and his fingers dug deep into Adamas’ flesh. The fierce roar of a menacing predator rose from deep within Adamas and he met his lover’s ruthless drives with brutal upstrokes of his own hips, the muscles of his anus clinging tighter around Damaon’s cock.

They exploded with scintillating brilliance. As Damaon released into him, Adamas gave his own aching cock a swift hard stroke and he released onto his stomach, the sharp pleasure washing over him in a giddy, overwhelming wave. Making love with Damaon just got better and better. What they said about practice was true.

After more five centuries of making love, they'd reached the zenith of perfection.

Almost.

Damaon withdrew from him and, turning around so that his back was on the carpeted floor of the library, Adamas drew him close. Damaon kissed him with heart-wrenching gentleness, as though atoning for his earlier roughness. Adamas kissed back with all the love in his heart, telling Damaon there was nothing to forgive. He rolled them over until Damaon was beneath him, breathing hard. Adamas lifted his head and searched his lover's silver eyes. He didn't know how long he stayed in that position, brushing back Damaon's damp hair from his brow while they stared at each other, each unwilling to voice the thought in his head.

The time had come upon them again.

Adamas pressed a gentle kiss on the wide forehead. "Sleep, my love. I'll go check on the calling star. I hope it's grown enough to send."

* * * * *

The few items of her things that hadn't been sold had all been moved into storage the previous day. There was really nothing else to do but to hand the key over to the real estate agent, though for some reason, Raisa Sheldon was loath to do so. Maybe because she'd lived here all her life and had a lot of happy memories. Well, except for the last few years.

But there was nothing she could've done.

When her mother had died of breast cancer two years ago, her father had lost his will to live. Never really healthy to begin with, his body had deteriorated, though the doctors couldn't find the cause. He'd uttered his final sigh in his sleep about six months

ago and Raisa could've sworn she saw a hint of a smile on his lips. Maybe the ghost of her mother had come to fetch him. Raisa didn't know, but wherever they were, she hoped they were happy together. Just when she thought the worse was over, the global recession finally caught up with the firm she worked for and her role was declared redundant. Faced with the huge medical bills, she had no choice but to sell the house she had once thought she would raise her children and grow old in.

In a world where giant, historic financial institutions could topple overnight, nothing was certain any longer.

The yearning for one final look at the home she'd loved—though the rooms had been stripped bare—filled her and she decided to make a last goodbye. If she were fanciful, she'd think the house wanted to say a farewell of its own.

She moved from room to room, immersed in the memories. Here was where they'd sat together as a family, watching the football games that her father loved, or the sitcoms that always had her mother in stitches. There where the piano used to be, where she'd spent a great many hours practicing, but still falling short of her instructor's expectations. Her father in his den, working on balancing his checkbook. The kitchen, where her mother had created some of the most sumptuous cakes Raisa had ever tasted. She could smell the fragrance of cinnamon and butter, taste the freshness of nuts and fruits.

Images crowded her mind, pierced with the poignant, bittersweet joy of happy times gone by.

Her bedroom, where she'd grown up from a young girl into the woman she was now. The décor had changed over the years, reflecting her tastes and moods. Now its walls sported a faded yellow, the color strong in places where it had been hidden from the sun by the furniture. Her parents' bedroom, where her father had spent too much time, first taking care of her mother, then he himself, lying alone in the big bed, thin and wasted.

Tears fell from Raisa's eyes, grief overwhelming her. She sat down on the steps to the attic and cried – for her parents, for herself, for the fact that she was now alone in the world, with no job, no place to stay and very little savings in the bank. When it seemed there were no more tears left for her to shed, she wiped her eyes with the back of her hands, stood up and squared her shoulders.

Her little bout of self-pity over, she moved to go and get on with the rest of her life, starting with perusing the recruitment ads in today's papers. She could print her resume in the internet café near the budget hotel where she'd rented a room for the next few nights.

A tug on her senses stopped her in mid-step. The attic was calling to her, reminding her that she hadn't visited it yet. There was really nothing to see in there, not even memories to lure her, for it had merely served as storage for unwanted things. But still...

An urgent, insistent pull from above decided her.

The goodbye wouldn't be complete, she supposed, until she'd seen every room, every nook and cranny one last time. She turned and moved up the stairs. Anyway, she needed to check if she had indeed cleared everything out.

One slight push of her hand and the attic door swung open to reveal the small, unevenly shaped room. The late afternoon sunlight filtered in through the tiny crack in the wall and illuminated part of the room. Raisa flicked on the switch, but no light came on. Oh, yeah. The electricity was cut this morning in preparation for the turnover.

Well, goodbye, house. I've had a wonderful thirty-two years living here –

She swayed as strong waves of compulsion battered at her, drawing her further into the room.

Something glinted from the far corner.

Had she overlooked something when she was clearing the things out the other day?

The slight glint turned into a sparkle.

Almost without conscious thought, she moved forward, shuffling at first, then walking with brisk steps toward the spot. A shaft of weak sunlight highlighted the area, falling directly on the object.

She caught her breath.

How could it be? How could she have overlooked this?

She was no gem connoisseur, but there on the floor was a medium-sized diamond in the shape of a star.

Maybe this was the answer to all her problems. Maybe she wouldn't have to sell the house. No, she'd already sold it, so maybe she could buy it back. If she managed the funds from the sale of the gem wisely, she could have something to tide her over while she looked for a job that she wanted, instead of being desperate enough to accept whatever came her way.

Excitement rippled through her veins as she bent to pick it up. Her hand drew near to the diamond and the gem started to pulse, giving off strong energy waves. She grew alarmed. Why was this gem reacting in such a strange manner? Or maybe she was hallucinating, in which case everything was fine. Still, better to be careful. She wanted to pull back, but her hand had touched the diamond star by this time. It wasn't cool, as she'd thought, but imbued with throbbing warmth that surged up her arm. She became dizzy, breathless, and darkness descended upon her.

Chapter Two

Raisa woke, conscious of her nakedness. She usually slept in her teddy, unless she had a man over for the night. Which she must have, because the satin sheets under her body were sinfully sensuous next to her bare skin. Oh, lovely. She moved in a sinuous stretch much the same way as a cat, purring when a warm hand caressed her stomach.

“You have such lovely lips,” a voice groaned in her ear, deep and grating with a melodious undertone that vibrated through her body. “Soft and full...”

Her brows knitted. So why wasn't he kissing her? Mainly through feel, she found his head and burrowed her hands in his thick hair—long and luxurious—and pulled his head down as she lifted her face to his in invitation, her lips parted. Another groan, then firm, warm male lips drew her mouth into a slow, thorough kiss, before he pushed his tongue past her lips and explored her mouth. She met his advance with a bold one of her own, and their tongues teased and caressed with increasing abandon. Lust surged up within her in huge, powerful waves, her skin so sensitized that she quaked when his breath wafted over her flesh. She had the terrifyingly overwhelming urge to rub against him like a kitten. It had been a long time since anyone had moved her this strongly. Where did she find this treasure of a man?

She was drowning in so much pleasure—both from the kiss and his hand caressing her breast—that she almost didn't note the sensation of another pair of lips running its way up her leg. The moment she did, she knew something was wrong. She'd heard of men with octopus hands but a man with two mouths? What kind of man did she go to bed with last night anyway?

Not her usual type of man, that was for sure. She didn't go for men with hard, gym-toned bodies—and from the press of his body against hers, the muscles of this man above her was *rock hard*—nor did she like soft men with big bellies. Something in

between was fine for her, thank you very much, especially if he had a nice, thick, long cock—

No, wait. The surge of power rushing up her arm flashed through her mind, then the darkness overwhelming her.

No date, no man. Hospital?

Taking note of his position—no, *their* positions, as there had to be more than one man on the bed with her—she gathered her strength with slow, subtle movements so that the men wouldn't be aware of her actions. She hoped her long-ago karate lessons wouldn't fail her at this crucial juncture. Judging the time to be right, she suddenly let fly in a burst of black-belt karate movements that would've done her *sensei* proud. Unfortunately, her legs were always stronger than her hands, especially from a lying-down position and she was only able to kick one man away. He landed on the ground with a solid thud and a loud "oof!" The other man, alerted by her swift jab, cursed and clamped his arms around her wrists and threw his body over hers so that she wouldn't be able to kick out at him too.

Damn.

The hard, sharp-edged angles of his body cut into her softness, but her flesh cradled him, adjusting to accommodate him. Little tendrils of stirring drifted across her entire body.

Damn, damn, damn.

Hard and thick, pulsing against her crotch. Needy. Hungry. Making her both.

Her eyes popped open and encountered a stern, forbidding face with slashed brows the color of snow. The hair above his dark face was a sheet of bone-white, falling in long, straight lines about his equally tanned shoulders. She'd never seen hair that color before. Angles formed his face, with his nose jutting out like a proud mountain above the valley, and his lips had tightened into a straight line of displeasure.

She raised her chin in defiance.

His eyes – a curious silver color – glittered.

She wasn't afraid of him, though she feared her response to the attraction that arced between them. She hadn't been this attracted to anyone in a long, long time, an attraction that urged her to consummate the act he'd already started. He was a damn good kisser and she bet he was also skillful in other areas. Just one sinuous move of her body beneath his, one throaty purr, would be enough to signal her acquiescence. Her nipples pebbled, reacting to his nearness.

He must've felt the rising nudge against his skin, for he lifted his upper body slightly, glanced down and his face softened with interest. Dipping his head, his warm, rough tongue made feathery licks against one turgid bud, tightening it further.

She made a growl low in her throat. She liked the way he aroused her further, loved the way he laved her skin and she wanted more –

She thrust the voice away and glared at the bone-white head still intent on her breast, trying to ignore the slice of pleasure as his teeth tugged on her nipple. She tried to shove her knee up into him, but couldn't move it beneath his weight. "Get off me, you slug!"

He raised his head and glared into her eyes. "I'm no insect."

"What?" Her anger was momentarily distracted.

"You called me an insect."

Raisa laughed, unable to help the curl of her lip at his ignorance. "A slug isn't an insect. It's a gastropod."

"No matter." He shrugged. "All Earthlings are insects to me."

"What?" The thought that she was in the presence of an ignoramus was immediately suspended for revision. Earthlings. Was he a Martian?

He peered closely at her. "You object to being called an insect?"

"Of course I object! I'm *not* an insect."

"Well then. I'm not a slug."

The man was more cunning than she realized, and she felt a measure of respect for him. "Fair enough. Now, will you move and let me up?"

He frowned. "You invited me to kiss you."

True enough, but she didn't have to agree with him. She glared back at him and lied, "I didn't like it!"

"Tell your pussy," he purred.

Damn.

She was wet, coating his cock head with her juices.

"It was a mistake," she informed him coldly. "I don't have sex with strangers."

"We kissed." His silver eyes narrowed. "That makes you a non-stranger in my books."

Theoretically, she ascribed to the same definition as him and she had to admit her body's eager response to his nearness was making it hard for her to maintain her stance. Still, she managed to force the words out of her mouth, "Get. Off. Me."

"What if I ask nicely? Will you have sex with me then?" His firm lips turned up in a sardonic smile. "Note how I restrain myself. If I'd wanted to take you, it would be so easy for me to do so." His cock throbbed a sweet, enticing music from between her thighs. "Just one push in and you're mine."

God, how she wanted to. "No." She had the ultimate pleasure of spitting the word in his face.

He crushed her chin between his fingers. "You dare say no?" His hot breath feathered her cheek and a shiver went through her. How would it feel to be ridden by such a stud of a man? There was no doubting he was all Alpha male, and a stallion by the size of his cock. She didn't know how much longer she could hold out. Hell, he wasn't doing anything yet and she was already fighting with herself not to jump on him. She was conscious of his cock pressing against her clit and damn, but she wanted that hard cock in her.

Still, a woman had to stand by her principles. Sometimes, they were all she had left. "Yes, I dare," she forced the words out of her mouth. Her bones felt like cracking beneath the hard press of his fingers, but she held her ground. "As I said, I don't have sex with strangers."

He clenched his teeth and flung himself off her. He stalked over to the other man standing a little ways from the bed, who was rubbing his ass and watching them, and snarled, "This woman is not worth the trouble. Send her back and get another one."

Raisa's breath caught in her throat as she had her first full sight of him—the man who'd kissed so divinely. She sat up slowly, mesmerized. He was shaped like a panther, dark and sleek and predatory and all graceful movements. The breadth of his shoulders emphasized the slow tapering of his body down to his hips. His buttocks clenched as he walked and corded muscles bunched in his powerful legs.

Oh my.

A beautiful specimen of a man, he yanked at her senses. Electricity sizzled in the air and their eyes met. Her throat went dry at the intense lust in his silver orbs and, for a moment, she couldn't hear anything but the loud roar in her ears.

The other man spoke and the spell was broken. She dropped her gaze.

Her dry throat didn't recover.

His body being tanned all over, the startling crystalline whiteness of his cock and balls shocked her. They possessed the brilliance and clarity of a multifaceted diamond of several carats. His organ looked so much like a rich woman's expensive dildo she had the aching urge to touch it, to see if it burned and pulsed like a real cock.

"Why..." she croaked, then swallowed in an attempt to wet her throat. "Why is your cock like that?"

"Don't distract us with your inane questions," the stallion thundered.

"What kind of disease do you have?" She shuddered. Such a waste of prime male flesh. She wished she could've gotten to him before he'd contacted the virus. Or

bacteria. Whatever. "I don't want what you have. You can't pay me to have sex with you."

"I don't have any disease," he roared. "I'm an immortal. I'll probably live for another millennium or three, long after you've gone and been turned to dust."

"Immortal?" she squeaked. What a god-awful waste. Not only disease-ridden, but mad as well. Maybe she should be pacifying him instead of arguing and shouting with him. "Of course you are," she said in as soothing voice as she could manage, but which she was sure sounded fake as hell. She'd never been able to lie, even to save her ass from difficult situations. "You'll live forever."

He made a sound of disgust. "Adamas," he said, turning to the other naked man in the room. "Get us another woman. Now. One who'll spread her legs and keep her mouth shut."

Oh my.

How had she lucked out?

She couldn't tear her eyes away from the other man, the one who must've been kissing her leg when she'd kicked him away. He possessed a body that was as magnificent as the other man, though leaner, and his angles were of a softer edge. He was as pale as the other man was dark. His cock though was made of the same crystalline whiteness, his hair was an identical bone-white, though he wore it longer, to his waist, and laugh lines bracketed the corners of his silver eyes. He also looked kinder and there was a definite expression of long suffering on his face as he looked at his friend.

Friend? Or brother, explaining their similar coloring?

She sucked in a startled breath, when Adamas caressed the other man's cheek and murmured soothing words, no doubt to calm him down. Lover? She was certain of it when Adamas moved closer to kiss him and there was such love and gentleness in the long kiss that it brought tears to her eyes.

A shimmering tingle filled the air. The atmosphere shifted, then filled with sexual tension.

The kiss turned passionate, heated, on the edge. An aura of danger and desperation permeated the room, heightening her senses and causing the fine hairs on her body to stand.

She wanted no part of this. She didn't want to see madmen having sex.

She shifted on the bed, but the men ignored her. Emboldened, she swung her legs to the floor and stood up. She sent them a surreptitious glance. They still didn't take note of her, intent as they were on kissing—more like devouring—each other. She had the sensation that for them, she'd ceased to exist. Whispering a mixed prayer of desperation and thanksgiving, she looked around wildly for her clothes, but couldn't find them in the room that was bare of anything but the basic furniture.

Growls like that of a lion emerged from one of the men.

Forget the clothes. Sure that violence was about to erupt, she ran straight for the door, her one thought to escape. At the door, however, she couldn't help but take one last, lingering look at men the likes of which she'd never seen before. Her breath caught in her throat at their masculine beauty and the graceful movements of their lovemaking, at the profound love arcing between two men who didn't seem mad at all, from this distance. Even the scintillating brilliance of their genitals appeared right. If only she could join them...

A foolish thought, if she'd ever had one. She should leave now, while they were otherwise occupied. She turned to go—

And found she couldn't.

She didn't want to.

Enthralled by the sight in front of her, she stood rooted to the spot, immobile, frozen as she watched the two men make love with a ferocity that called to her. A wave of pure unadulterated hunger hit her and her lust rose up in answer, filling her body

with unfulfilled desire. Her blood burned and slammed through her veins, igniting fires all over.

The lovers kissed and caressed with wild, vicious heat. She started and moaned when invisible hands stroked her as well—down her back in a long smooth glide, then cupping her buttocks, the same way Stallion was cupping Adamas'. She experienced sensuous rubs on her belly, easing the heavy ache, then lower, lower, until a phantom hand was teasing her pussy, the same way Adamas was rubbing his hand along Stallion's powerful cock.

What the hell was happening? How was it that she could feel both their touches?

Painful and urgent hunger etched on his face, Stallion snarled and wrestled Adamas to the ground. A white, solid pallet appeared out of nowhere under Adamas' buckling knees. Adamas moved fast for a man in the grip of a terrible lust. He must've pulled the cot from somewhere, maybe even under the bed she had been sitting on earlier.

Like the horse for which she'd likened him to, Stallion poised to plunge into Adamas, his massive cock rigid at the entrance of his lover's hole.

Her breath stuck in her throat. He was...beautiful. Magnificent.

Stallion hesitated.

"Hell's gems, Damaon, fuck me!" Adamas roared.

The veins stood out on Stallion's—Damaon's—neck and his shoulders were rigid with control. "I'll hurt you."

"No, you won't. I want you to fuck me just that way—hard and fast, with all the savagery in you."

With one swift plunge, Damaon drove his entire length inside.

Oh God. Raisa welcomed the phantom cock that pressed into her pussy, burying itself to the hilt within her. She shuddered. It felt so real as it throbbed and pulsed within her, so hard and thick her muscles clenched tight around...air. Yet, no other cock

had felt this good, this sumptuous, this mind-boggling. She staggered against the wall and leaned against it for support. She closed her eyes and whimpered as the phantom cock withdrew, feeling it caress every inch of her inner muscles with an ethereal touch. Her juices dripped from her pussy to the floor and her belly tightened with a tension she'd long forgotten.

Ah...

Her breath gusted on a sigh as the phantom cock initiated a fast, heart-pounding rhythm, the long, hard length of air spearing into her. Damn. Not hard enough. Gritting her teeth, she plunged her fingers into her nest of blonde curls and fingered her clit. It was a testament to her far-gone state that she didn't even find it strange that she was bucking her hips into emptiness to the pace set by a plunging cock that she could only feel but not see.

A cry from Adamas made her open her eyes, and the sight of the convulsing lovers on the floor attaining their releases propelled her over the edge and into her own. She screamed and thrust two fingers into her channel and her pussy clenched around them as waves of shattering ecstasy crashed down on her. She whimpered with satisfaction and relief as the waves shimmered, ebbed and faded away, leaving behind a languorous sense of ease.

She sank down to sit on the floor, her sweat-dampened body still heaving with her need for air. The clear, cool marble was pleasant against her heated body.

What was that? Had she just had sex with some...ghost? What the hell was happening? She trembled, not liking how things had turned out, especially the way she was captivated by the men's lovemaking. Recalling how she'd felt the men's caresses on her body *the exact moment* each was stroking his lover in *exactly the same manner*, she turned a speculative gaze on them that held a touch of fear. How could they do that? Did being crazy break down the mental walls and made them empaths? But how could she receive their thoughts when she didn't possess any psychic talent herself?

They were good, she had to give them that.

Adamas brushed his lover's hair back from his face and pressed a gentle kiss on his brow. Now that didn't seem like the action of a madman. Quite the opposite, not to mention caring and affectionate. After covering him with a blanket that he spun—no, *dragged*—from nowhere, Adamas rose and snagged a high-backed chair that was situated with a desk near the door. The elegantly designed white chair looked fragile and unable to hold his considerable weight.

She could only watch and admire Adamas' predatory feline grace as he made his way toward her, the chair lifted effortlessly in his large hand. She imagined being held in those huge hands, sure that she would feel like a delicate doll tucked into his protective strength. Yet, where a brittle, porcelain doll evoked the feeling of weakness, she felt warmth and safety, cherished. His hanging cock caught her gaze—it was about at the level of her eyes, after all—and despite its flaccid state, it was still a considerable size. She swallowed hard, desire humming once more in her veins. To want him again so soon—

Well, she hadn't really had him, just some ghostly cock that could belong to anyone.

Nearing her, he set the chair down backwards and straddled it.

"He's sick, isn't he?" Sympathy swelled in her breast, especially after she'd witnessed Adamas' love and care for his mate. She tucked her legs under her, one hand brushing through her short hair and patting it into place.

"Yes, Damaon's sick, but not in the way you mean." His face contorted in a grimace. "I apologize for his behavior. He's not...himself these days." He eyed her with sudden interest and his nostrils flared. Good God, was the scent of her arousal still in the air? "I thought you'd be gone by now—I certainly didn't think I'd see you here, especially there on the floor. Why? The bed not comfortable enough for you?"

She wasn't going to admit that she wanted them with a hunger that bordered on pain. "That was a low trick you did," she snapped.

"What trick?" he asked. A bewildered frown appeared on his forehead.

"As if you don't know," she retorted.

"No, I truly don't," he said.

His sincerity stabbed at her and she looked at him with uncertainty. "You don't?"

He shook his head. "But before you tell me, perhaps you'd like to move to the bed. It'll be more comfortable for you. Or I could make a cot for you."

Dazed, she copied his movement. She rather liked the cool marble behind her back and beneath her ass. It kept her grounded and balanced, because stunned at his response, she could only stare at him. "I felt as though you—he—both of you were caressing me when you were making love," she said in a whisper. "And...and...and when he thrust into you..."

"He drove his cock into you too?" he asked hoarsely. Her shock was reflected in his.

"No—yes—I don't know," she cried out and clenched her legs tight together. "Not his cock, per se, because he was obviously occupied with you, but a ghost of it, maybe a projection of his or—"

He was shaking his head again. "I don't understand this. Neither Damaon nor I are psychic, and we didn't acquire any mind power with the office of the gem immortal. The other immortals aren't psychic either, so it's nothing to do with our function as caretakers of the gems."

"It couldn't be me," she croaked. "I'm not psychic either. My family doesn't have a history of telepathic powers."

"This is most curious." Adamas gnawed on his lip as his gaze turned inward. "I have to do some research—"

A long, low groan interrupted their discussion. Their heads swung toward the other man who lay on the cot.

"You should get him to a doctor." Raisa cast a look around the huge room. Though it contained merely the basics—a bed, a table, two chairs and a built-in wardrobe—its sumptuous décor and the elegant furniture all looked to be edged with small, glittering diamonds. "You look like you can afford it."

Adamas sighed. "It's not as easy as that. For this illness, only *you* are the cure."

Her mouth dropped open in shock.

He continued, almost as an afterthought, "This time around, anyway." His silver eyes flicked over her in a long, lingering look and his gaze was a sensuous phantom caress that trailed fire in its wake. So far, he hadn't pounced on her, though he could have, so he must only be testing her mettle. Also, she sensed that he was different from his lover—kinder, gentler. He'd even apologized for his mate, so no, she didn't think he would force or charm her into having sex with him.

But test her? She'd oblige.

She stretched and purred like a cat, displaying herself to better. A flame leaped in his eyes and she wasn't surprised to feel an answering throb within her.

She'd accepted and reveled in her sexuality from the first moment she'd been introduced to sex, but by no means was she indiscriminate in her partners, nor was she the type to jump from bed to bed. But like any woman who lived her life to the fullest, she knew she'd regret it if she didn't go to bed with a stud like Adamas even once, especially in light of the chemistry sizzling between them, even if the earlier phantom sex hadn't happened. And yet, something held her back, some basic instinct of self-preservation.

"You look like a woman who enjoys sex," he said, apparently finished with his inspection. "And your lack of a fake sexual modesty is so refreshing." She watched him warily when he stood up, spread his hands and made a slow turn. Like one hypnotized, she couldn't take her eyes off his perfect body. He was drawing her into a sensual web of his making and she was powerless to resist. Like Damaon, Adamas possessed yummy, taut buttocks. She couldn't wait to touch them and sink her teeth into them. "Do you like what you see?"

"Yes," she said, breathless.

A slow smile bracketed his mouth. His hand cupped his cock in a light, sensual caress and stroked with languid motions, causing a liquid molten heat to snake through

her bloodstream. "I assure you, we have the skill to go with our equipment. You will be so thoroughly satisfied you'll be begging us not to send you away. We will fulfill your every fantasy, everything your heart desires—"

She was *this* close to saying "yes", but the image of herself, on her knees, begging, jarred her awake. She wrenched her gaze away. "No, damn you." She squeezed her eyes shut to protect herself from any further visual temptations he might provide. "Go get another woman."

"Why are you so against this?" Adamas sounded perplexed. "All we're asking is just sex for a limited period of time."

"That's the point." Frustrated at his denseness, she shouted at him. "I've never done 'just sex'. I'm not that kind of woman. All my sexual experiences have been within the boundaries of a relationship. I won't be treated like a slut."

That and the exciting strangeness of their crystalline cocks were the reasons for her resistance. As much as she was fascinated by their rigid shafts, she was afraid their appearance was the result of some obscure disease she'd never heard of. She had to struggle not to touch them and hold them in her hands, to test their texture and to...do so much more. And she was *very* afraid that the lust they aroused in her was overshadowing her good sense.

"I am *not* a slut," she emphasized for good measure.

"We never thought you were."

"You stripped me naked without a by your leave and you mauled me in my sleep." Well, she may have exaggerated a bit, since she wasn't mauled at all, but how to make her point otherwise? Oh damn, that reminded her. Her eyes flew open. "Where the hell am I? Why am I naked and how the hell did I get here? Why does your cock look like a crystal dildo?"

Oops. Had she really said that about his cock? Well, she'd never been shy and that was her first question, anyway. She thought it said a lot about her restraint that the question had emerged as the last.

His shoulders shook and she could see that he was trying not to laugh. Unfortunately, he couldn't quite hold it in and his guffaw spilled out. "Are you always this forthright?"

"Shoot straight, that's my motto," she said.

"We do that, too, if you're interested to know," he said with a bland expression and she knew they weren't talking about the same thing. She fought the urge to laugh with him and she realized with a start that she hadn't laughed in quite some time, burdened as she was by material concerns. "In any case, answering your questions will take some time. Are you hungry? Do you require anything?"

"Some clothes would be good," she suggested wryly. Adamas' perfect masculine nakedness and utter lack of self-consciousness was a distraction she could do without. She would hear his explanations and walk away, though not without a twinge of regret.

A wiggle of his fingers and air spun around her. When the mist cleared, she was wearing cloth of the softest white. It shimmered in the sunlight that shafted through the windows and settled against her, the fabric molding and clinging to her skin and outlining her slight curves.

"This is—" She stared down at herself and fingered the cloth and discovered it so sheer and smooth that she didn't want to release it. "How the hell did you do this?" She had a plausible explanation for the cot—well, she thought she did—but this...this defied reason and logic and everything she had been taught. There could only be one explanation, but to believe that meant—

"I didn't create something out of nothing, if that's what you're asking. If you were on the bed, you would notice there's only one pillow left. What I did was to rearrange the pattern of the missing pillow into a robe for you—"

"No!" she shrieked. What was he talking about? "Who cares about the stupid pillow? Where am I?"

"You're no longer on Earth." Adamas voiced her worst fear.

“Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God.” She slumped back against the wall, shocked. “How the hell did that happen? Who are you?”

“As you know, my name’s Adamas,” he said, “and my lover’s Damaon. We are the Diamond Gem Immortals.”

Immortal. Stallion—er, Damaon—had said that awhile ago. In fact, Adamas had mentioned the word too, if she wasn’t mistaken. So Damaon hadn’t been mad. She was the one who hadn’t understood. “Gem immortal? What’s that?” Her voice came out as a shocked whisper.

“Exactly that. Damaon and I are immortals and we take care of the gem diamond.”

“You take care of the diamond,” she repeated in a daze. Her mind, normally running full speed ahead, was slow to process the information. “Take care...meaning?”

“Meaning we grow the diamonds on a farm, like the way your farmers grow your crops. Diamond is the gem Damaon and I are privileged to care for and you’re now in the Diamond Palace, as evidenced by the material used to construct this building and the color scheme used to decorate it, if you haven’t noticed yet.”

She did notice the stark white or silver scheme of the décor and the tiny diamonds decorating the edges of the furniture in the room. She’d thought Adamas and Damaon were filthy rich, but to have the power to *grow* diamonds, well, that was wealth beyond imagination.

Her neck was also getting damnably tired from looking up at him. “I think I’ll go back to the bed before we resume this conversation.” Once she was seated with her feet tucked under her and she rolled her aching neck a few times to ease the strain, she asked, “So, if we’re not on Earth, where are we?”

“We’re...” Adamas checked himself. He had moved his chair beside the bed so she could see every expression that crossed his face. “In Earth terms, we’re in another dimension.”

Her eyebrows shot up. “Seriously?” She’d thought all those science fiction books she’d devoured when she was a youngster were just that—stories.

“Strictly speaking, the demesnes of the gem immortals don’t stay in any one particular place. We go where the need takes us.”

“Need?” She was starting to sound like a parrot. Then she nodded sagely. “Ah, like when you *need* a woman for sex.”

“No, we don’t need to go where the woman is,” he answered so patiently she knew he hadn’t caught her sarcasm – or else he’d ignored it. “She *comes* to us.”

“What!” she screeched. “I knowingly went to you, with my own free will, for sex?” *I don’t believe it. I never would’ve done something like that.* “Why don’t you tell me what *really* happened, buster?”

He eyed her with trepidation. “I understand you’re upset, but you have to understand that you have also played some small part in your being here. Do you remember holding an exquisite diamond shaped like a star?”

“Yes.” She sniffed. “I thought it was the answer to all my troubles.”

“That was our calling star. It drew you, ‘called’ to you, and the moment you picked it up, you were teleported here.”

Raisa stared at him, aghast. “That’s cheating! What kind of choice was that?”

His spine stiffened. “You could’ve chosen not to take the diamond.”

“I repeat, what kind of choice was that? Diamonds are of great value and much prized on Earth, in case you don’t know. Nobody would turn away from them, if he so much as caught a glimpse of one.” She knew she shouldn’t have thought about saying goodbye to the house, even if it had been the place where she had grown up in, where all her happy memories were. She wasn’t sentimental at all – *aha*. She sagged once more against the headrest. “The calling star’s compulsion was so strong it drew me when I was two levels below it.” She shook her head, sickened. “There was no choice at all. What kind of monsters are you immortals?”

Shock stole across his face. Adamas leaned forward and frowned. “It shouldn’t have happened that way. The compulsion weave was embedded within the gem, but it

would have been triggered only when you saw it and not one moment before. That's how I've always done it."

"Then you must have done something different this time, because it cost me my freedom," she said bitterly.

"Only for fourteen days...uh... What's your name?"

"Did you mean to ask that before or after we had sex?" Seeing his darkening expression, knowing he was being kind and patient when he must be so obviously worried about his mate's health, she hastily said, "Raisa Sheldon."

He controlled his rising ire with effort. "Raisa, mortals can only stay in an immortal palace for fourteen days, then they have to leave or the demesne does it for them."

"You mean the..." She made a gesture in the air. "The palace boots out the mortals? Is it a sentient being?" She gazed at the walls with new respect.

"Sentient? I'm not sure, but I think it works in the same way as your body does with foreign objects. Like, if you eat something that didn't agree with you, you'd vomit it up," he explained. "I'm sure you've realized by now that your mortal clothes aren't allowed in here and if you want to know, they're lying on the ground where you found the star. Fourteen days from now, you won't be here either. The palace will send you back to Earth."

Two weeks. Well, at least she wouldn't have to worry about food or a roof over her head for that period of time. Too bad she'd paid an advance on her hotel room for three days.

"Raisa..." Adamas hesitated, then his expression firmed and became determined. "I wouldn't have asked if it weren't important, but since you're here, I would like to offer you a choice and ask you to reconsider having sex with us. Damaon needs you and soon I would also need — hell's gems, Raisa. He's dying!"

Chapter Three

Raisa shuddered at the anguish and torment in his voice. She hadn't realized Damaon's illness was that grave. "You're obviously delusional, because he needs a doctor, not more sex." She glanced at the hapless man still stretched out on the cot some distance away. Perhaps she should have offered the bed—no, Adamas could've magicked a bed for his lover if the cot were uncomfortable. "I know some very experienced doctors—"

"Sex is exactly what he needs, but with a woman, not with me." Adamas buried his face in his hands. "Soon, I will need the same thing."

What kind of disease was it that more sex was needed to cure it? Maybe something that affected only immortals. Numerous questions barraged her mind and she wasn't sure she believed him.

"Why? What can sex do? If you're so sure sex could heal him, why not get more women so that he could...you know, go nonstop if his stamina is that good? Since you're an immortal with vast power at your disposal, I don't see how that could be a problem."

Adamas laughed, but the sound was without mirth. He lifted his head and his silvery eyes were bright with unshed tears. "Vast powers indeed, but not limitless. Once the calling star expended its inherent energy to teleport the woman—you—here, it misted into the air, something like returning to the elements." He drew in several breaths and grounded his fists against the chair. "That particular plant grows only one calling star every fifty years, but we don't have fifty years in which to wait." Adamas released a ragged sigh. "At best, I think...Damaon has another year before—" He broke off, anguish stealing across his face, then continued, "and I...maybe five or six years."

Raisa drew a deep, shuddering breath, hating the feeling that was coming upon her. She felt as if she were being gently trapped—into a gilded cage, but trapped nevertheless. “What is this disease you’re talking about? Why would you need a woman and what could the woman do?”

Adamas speared her with his frank gaze. “Let me tell you first that this disease didn’t come from sexual activities. As immortals, we are immune to the viruses and bacteria that may live in a human body.”

He sprang up from the chair and strode toward her. Despite herself, her gaze was drawn to his bobbing cock, where a thick vein pulsed from the tip of his cock head to the root. A powerful urge to touch his cock rocked her, almost making her reach out her hand.

“Now then, you asked about my cock, especially its unique appearance.” He stopped in front of her and released a short, humorless laugh. “The reason for that is because I’m the Diamond Immortal. However, I assure you that it’s as warm and living as any part of my body, or should I say, as any other man’s cock you’ve seen in your life. Do you want to touch it?”

She wanted to say “no”, not sure if she could bear to release him later on, but she wasn’t proof against the hint of wariness in his voice. Had other women been repulsed by his strange appearance?

“You’re beautiful,” she said in a hoarse voice. Her hand cupped around his cock, which jerked in reaction. He sighed as she explored the rigid, crystalline length. Despite the cold appearance, his cock throbbed with awesome power. Hot, molten steel. She yearned to take him in her mouth and test his texture with her tongue. Light hit his cock and refracted, spilling in rainbow waves around it and highlighting the illusion of warmth with reds and yellows and oranges.

Incredible.

She wasn’t aware that she was dipping her head toward him when he stopped her. “Is this your choice, Raisa?” His voice came as though from afar. This close, she could

smell the fragrant musk of his groin and she wanted to rub her cheek against him. "There's no going back once you suck my cock."

His words were like a splash of cold water and dispelled the sensual haze.

She released him and jerked back. "I...I'm sorry."

"No need." He whirled around and gulped in several huge breaths. "I was the one who stopped you, remember? Though I may regret it later on," he said below his breath. She probably wasn't supposed to hear it, but in the silence, sound carried quite well.

"T-thank you."

"I don't want you to feel that you've been cheated out of another choice," he said grimly, walking to his chair and straddling it once more. "I don't go back on my promises, Raisa."

"You're not at all what I expected of an immortal. I mean, you're like a god," she drew a shaky hand through her hair, "with powers and magic. You could've taken what you wanted from me and there wouldn't have been anything I could do about it." She had fought for the right to make a choice and here she was, about to throw it away on the strength of a beautiful cock. Better if he had seduced her and be done with it. That way, she wouldn't have doubted the might of her convictions, as she was doing now. "You could've just let me dig my grave, but you didn't. You play fair, you don't abuse your power..." She gave a short laugh as a thought occurred to her. "Or is this your tactic? 'Wear her down with kindness until she gives in?'" She regretted the words as soon as they left her mouth.

Adamas stiffened. "Is that how you see me?"

No. There was an earnestness to him that she sensed wasn't faked, but she had to keep a few weapons at her disposal. "I don't know you, do I?" She shrugged with an insouciance she didn't feel. "Maybe we should go back to your explanation of how you came to be with this disease." She made an impatient sound. "Does it even have a name?"

“No.” He laughed, but the sound was flat. “But I’ll make one up for you. How about hardness of heart?”

“Hardness of heart?” What kind of name was that? Very apt, as it turned out.

“Working with diamonds is not without its hazards,” Adamas began. He rested his hands on top of the backrest and continued, “You know the diamond is the hardest among gemstones.” He waited for her to nod. “Well, as we get more and more exposed to the gem in line with our work, its hardness seems to...be transferred to us, so that our hearts get a tiny bit harder with each encounter. Not only in terms of the physical aspect, but also the emotional side. At our worst, we can become brusque and inconsiderate and short-tempered, among other things. We’ve been known to flare up without reason, and we become very, very selfish.”

She couldn’t quite take it in, everything sounds so fantastical and impossible. She knew the diamond had been the cause of greed and theft and God knew what else, but to affect a person in such a way was...unbelievable. Did a gem have that much power over a person?

She didn’t realized she’d voice out her question until he answered, “Raw diamonds—growing diamonds—are unstable and a short exposure may not affect a person so much, but regular contact, day in and day out, for fifty years, give or take a year or two...Well, calculate it in the exponential, but never before had we left it this late.” He groaned and pounded his head against his arms. “And I can’t do anything to help Damaon, only he has the touch—hell’s gems!” The anguished roar was in tandem to the palpable emotion that poured out of him in waves.

If what he was saying was true, then a hardened heart—the physical one, which would stiffen and render the valves and the arteries useless—would be the cause of death, as the blood wouldn’t be able to flow through. And Adamas was beating himself up because instead of seducing her—the woman able to reverse the situation, or so he said—he was giving the decision for their life or death into her hands. Apparently, if

Damaon were the one sitting in front of her, he would've used his "touch" – that charming smile, she supposed – to get what they wanted.

But that still didn't explain one thing.

"And what can sex with the woman do?" She hated the quaver in her voice.

"Ever since hardened and embittered Diamond Immortals existed, the women had been able to soften their hearts, bring them back from the brink of death and enable them to continue working with their beloved diamonds. There have been ten women before you who have served us in this capacity and as you can see, we're still here." Adamas took a deep breath and studied her with deep concentration. "You hold much power, Raisa, whether you want it or not. You may not need us, but we do need you. Very much."

"And if I don't give you what you want?"

He gazed into her eyes with unflinching honesty. "Then we look for our successor. But please, please reconsider, Raisa. You say the calling star didn't leave you with a choice, so I'm giving you one now, but you must give us your answer before the fourteen days are up." He hesitated. "I don't want to press, but we need to know as early as possible. And if you do agree, and if having sex with two men offends you, then I beg you to consider Damaon. If you would save him, I'll be very grateful."

* * * * *

Though she didn't want to admit it, Raisa was moved by Adamas' obvious love and affection for his mate. Devotion, deep and steady. What she wouldn't give for him to direct that kind of emotion at her. But no, he and Damaon were mates and it was as plain as the eyes on her face that they didn't need anyone else. They only needed the occasional woman to soften them up, as had men throughout the ages, just that their need was a little bit different.

Coming from a place where more than fifty percent of marriages ended in divorce, she found it equally inspiring that their being together for – he'd mentioned ten women

at fifty years each, plus another fifty years to come to her, apparently the eleventh woman—at least *five hundred fifty years* hadn't lessened their love or passion for one another. It was truly a miracle they weren't fighting boredom or each other by the second hundredth year. In fact, the heated ardor of their love still burned brightly as the sun.

Rubbing her tired eyes as she wandered about the palace, she wished their passion was less exuberant.

She had requested and been granted a guestroom the previous night, but it seemed the men couldn't stop having sex. Even with the barrier of the wall between them, her sleep kept being interrupted with their moans and groans, not to mention the insidious phantom touches of their hands and mouths and teeth which caressed and stroked every part of her. The fervent attentions of the phantom cock dizzied her senses, as it mercilessly slammed into her again and again. She couldn't remember having experienced so many orgasms in one night.

She was inclined to think the sex kept Damaon's demons—the further hardening of his heart—at bay, but she wished the cool marble between their rooms had been able to prevent her from experiencing those skillful touches. She wished they weren't been so energetic and...

She had to stop kidding herself.

Despite all her protests, she wished she were in their room with them, romping on the bed.

Raisa wandered through the great palace, admired the high-ceilinged dome of the central hall with its fat, white pillars and stared, awestruck, at the seeming endless proliferation of diamond-studded rooms. Adamas had wanted to take her on a tour of the place, but she'd preferred to wander on her own. Shrugging, he hadn't insisted. She knew he wanted to spend more time with his mate than playing courteous host to her unwilling guest.

Something he'd said the day before puzzled her. Since both men worked with the diamonds, why was it that Damaon only had about a year left while Adamas had more? Did it have something to do with each man's constitution or immunity?

She knew what Adamas was asking her though in their conversation. Save Damaon, if she didn't want to save them both. Hell, if there was anyone she wanted to save, it was the better man—Adamas—but of course, since he was the better man, he would insist on saving everyone else but himself.

Not that she had already decided to save them, but she was torn. According to Adamas, she *could* help, if she wanted to. She could make a change in their lives, enable them to live for another fifty years to continue growing those damnable diamonds that would eventually make them sick again, but what about the principles by which she'd lived her entire life? But, more importantly, should Adamas and Damaon die because of her, how could she live with herself?

The question was a conundrum and best left for another time as she caught the sound of a feminine hum. Rounding the corner, Raisa found herself looking at a woman's back the likes of which she'd never seen before.

Her mouth dropped open at the fantastic sight.

The woman was a wonder of crystalline perfection, from the exquisitely carved strands of hair falling on her shoulders down to the delicate arches and toes of her bare feet as she stood on tiptoes, her arm waving in a graceful wave as she wiped a window clean. Pearlescent clothing covered the woman's vital parts, lending a solid contrast to the rest of her multi-faceted diamondlike form.

"Who are you?" Raisa asked in wonder.

The woman stopped and turned to her, revealing a small, sweet face with large diamonds for eyes. "Hello, mistress. I'm Dia. What can I do for you?"

"Are you for real?" On Earth, Dia would've fetched a fortune. She could've solved Raisa's problem.

Dia's brows furrowed as though she didn't understand the question. "What can I do for you, mistress?" she repeated.

Raisa felt a small twinge of disappointment at the evidence of Dia's real nature. In essence, Dia was something like an artificially intelligent robot, though her movements were so lifelike and her voice so fluid that Raisa had initially thought Dia must be one of the sentient denizens of the demesne. Apparently, she was wrong.

"I'm Raisa."

"Mistress," the woman greeted shyly.

"Just Raisa."

"Mistress."

This conversation was going nowhere fast. "You're beautiful," she said, wondering at the extent of Dia's conversation skills.

"Thank you," Dia said, smiling and ducking her head.

Hard to believe she was made from inanimate gems. Whoever brought her to life must possess great powers.

"Are you the only one or are there more of you?"

Dia frowned, then said, "What can I do for you, mistress?"

That must be the default question. Well, it was better than most men's pick-up lines.

"Nothing." Raisa sighed. She just didn't have the knack to carry on a one-sided conversation. "Carry on."

"Mistress needs me to carry something?"

"Uh, no." How to get Dia to resume her industrious cleaning of the windows? "Uh, continue your work."

"What work does mistress need me to do?"

Blast. "Wipe the windows."

"Yes, mistress."

Raisa heaved a sigh of relief as the diamond servant went back to her task. She continued onward to see more rooms, some of which were bare of furnishings. She'd been exploring the palace since after breakfast, but thus far, she'd only seen about half the rooms in the east wing, the ground level of which led to the kitchens. The west wing, she was informed, was closed and used only when the immortals were having a party, which had not happened in a long, long time. Musing as she walked, she meandered through the rooms she hadn't seen—mostly empty—and made her way back to the morning room—so called because the bright light of the sun shone in through the French windows, creating a cheerful atmosphere in which to have one's breakfast—when she finally realized what was bugging her about the place. She stared at the wide expanse of wall across from her in disbelief. The monotonous color. A clean yet sterile whiteness. Everything was either stark ivory or multi-faceted crystal, right down to the pillars and doors and even the furniture.

Landscape paintings would be good. The rainbow hue of colors would break up the tiresome white and liven up the place. Colorful rugs by the doors and potted plants with fresh green leaves in strategic places. Bright curtains in vivid shades by the windows and—

“Leave this room.” The low, masculine growl—tight and restrained—from the next room slashed through her interior design plans. The voice reminded her of the furious snarls of a beast that was in much pain. “Now.”

Raisa rushed into the corridor in time to see two diamond servants—a man and a woman—fled out of the room. As soon as they had cleared the doorway, the sound of plates shattering on the tile floor could be heard. Objects being hurled at the wall. Shouts of heated frustration. Screams of abject pain.

For a man who'd had countless, orgasmic sex the night before, Damaon was in a very bad way.

Curses exploded from a voluble male throat and more loud bangs and thuds emanated from the room. Then silence.

Cautious, Raisa peered around the open door to see Damaon slumped against the wall, on the far left corner of the room, an expression of pure misery and anguish on his face. His eyes were closed and he slid to the floor before he buried his face in his open palms. Soft expletives filled the air.

Damaon was hurting.

She pinned a bright smile on her lips and sauntered into the room. "So this is where you disappeared to."

His body stiffened and when he lifted up his head, his face was stony and forbidding and his silver eyes were cold. Yet, for all that, her attraction to him beat at her, making her weak with desire for him. "What? Changed your mind?"

"Not at all," she said easily. She glanced at the mess on the ground to the right of the huge oval dining table, then veered toward the left to sit on the floor opposite him. The refreshing coldness of the tiles seeped through her robe.

Damaon frowned. With a gesture, he spun a white felt rug beneath her, making her snug and warm.

"Thank you."

He shrugged. "No problem. Take it as...apology for what happened yesterday. Then again, you might decide to have sex with me in gratitude."

"What? For this little thing?" she scoffed. He wasn't so far gone as Adamas had intimated. When not in the grip of lust, Damaon was quite...nice. Sort of.

"I might luck out." He didn't quite grin, but his lips lifted a little.

"Dream on. By the way, I want a blue rug the color of the ocean on a sunny day. It's my favorite color."

"Sorry, can't oblige."

"Why not?"

"I can only spin white. That's the diamond immortal's color. That or transparent, but since transparent isn't a color..." His lips twisted as he surveyed her. "I'd love to do transparent on you."

"You wish," she huffed, though her body tingled.

"How about this?" A moment later, he offered her a bunch of white tuberose, its fragrance filling the air. Even its stems were white. "For you."

"Thank you." She breathed in their scent, then lifted her head and dimpled at him. "Though I prefer lilacs."

Damaon scowled. "You're a hard woman to please." He made a move to get up, but was forestalled by her hand on his arm.

"I'm sorry," she said, immediately contrite. She should've known better than to tease a man at the edge of his temper, a man who'd lost control over his behavior through no fault of his own, a man who was trying to be civil to her after the explosion she'd witnessed. "I was only teasing. I love these. No one has given me flowers in a long time." She squeezed his arm as she lifted the blossoms she held in her other hand. "Thank you."

He searched her face as though to gauge her sincerity. Apparently satisfied, he settled back against the wall, but kept her hand in his, stroking her fingers and doodling on her palm. "Why not?"

"What?" A strange heat curled through her body, though he probably hadn't been intending to seduce her. One touch and she was in flames. How pathetic could she get?

"Your boyfriend's the stingy type?"

She thought back to what she'd just said. "Oh. No boyfriend for close to three years. My parents fell sick, one after the other, and I had to take care of them. They're gone now, but..." How could she articulate the loneliness she felt at her parents' passing, the two people in the world who had known her the best? How would he understand when he had Adamas by his side for over five hundred years? Adamas who loved and cared

for him, who had showered on him a devotion none of her ex-boyfriends had ever shown her.

He opened her hand, exposing her palm, then placed a kiss in the very center. His lips burned a hole in her flesh. "I'm sorry for your loss." Though the act seemed to drain him, solace emanated from him in tangible waves.

Tears shimmered in her eyes at the thought of her parents. "Thank you," she choked out. She snatched her hand back and buried her face in the bouquet of flowers, letting the tears drop into its white depths. A hesitant hand soothed her hair, gathering confidence as he continued. She found the action kind and comforting.

When she had gotten hold of herself again, she looked up to see him in close proximity to her. She didn't know if there was a mute plea in her teary eyes, but his mouth was descending, then landing on her lips in a gentle kiss of reassurance. She sensed his tightly leashed control over the fierce, violent urge to ravage her lips in harsh possession, sensed his care for her in her fragile state and knew she was lost. She could resist the rude Damaon who insisted on sex as though it was his right, but she couldn't resist this Damaon who fought his inner demons to show her a tenderness she hadn't thought possible.

He needed her to save him, but more than that, *she needed to save him*. She couldn't do anything for her mother or her father, but she could heal him and Adamas. She could ensure that they live for another fifty years, at least.

Raisa curled her arms around his neck to draw him into a deeper kiss. She pressed against him, enjoying his hardness against her softer flesh and her body hummed in anticipation as she threw away her reservations. His tongue thrust deep into her mouth, making her dizzy. She grew dizzier still when she breathed in his unique heady scent of man and sun and soil. His heat surrounded her.

This was right. She knew it was.

As for her principles...

Adamas wasn't a stranger and now, neither was Damaon. Though they had been acquainted for less than a day, they were not merely names connected to handsome faces and hunkalicious bodies. She knew more than that. She knew about the important things. She knew a little bit of their souls.

Adamas' love and devotion toward his mate. She'd bet he had never been unfaithful to Damaon, which was something she couldn't say for her latest ex. His willingness to die that Damaon might have a second chance at life. His trying to do what was right—look at how he'd given her a choice after the fiasco with the calling star—no matter that his decision might tear him apart. His sense of honor.

And Damaon...

Damaon smothered a curse against her lips and flung himself away from her. "I'm sorry," he gasped, his breath ragged. He closed his eyes and drew one arm over them. "I never meant—I don't—"

His sense of honor. Damaon most likely knew of the bargain she'd made with Adamas and despite his obvious need for her, he wouldn't allow his mate's integrity to be impugned. Moreover, his remorse and guilt proved there was still some humanity underneath that brusque exterior, a humanity that struggled to overpower the numbing effects of the diamond's hardening might.

"Well, what do we have here?" Adamas drawled from the doorway. "I come to find my luncheon on the floor."

Raisa turned her head to look at him. "I've decided." She trembled from the enormity of her decision. Once she spoke the words, there was no going back. Yet, a certain peace resonated within her.

Adamas stilled into alertness and Damaon sounded as though he'd stopped breathing.

"Yes?" Adamas asked in a quiet voice.

She stared across the distance into his strange silver eyes that even now burned with a flicker of lust. "I've decided...to help you, both of you."

Damaon's fingers bit into the flesh of her arms, causing her to face him. He moved so fast and so silently she was dizzy. One minute he was feet away from her and the next, he was so near she could feel the heat emanating from his body. "Are you sure?"

She aimed a bold smile up at him, desire already rising in her. "What are you waiting for?"

Damaon's mouth crashed down on hers and his weight pushed her to the floor. Though the warm rug protected her back, she discovered that nothing protected her from his rampaging lust. His mouth devoured her as though he'd been living in the desert for years and had suddenly found water. She met his pillaging tongue with a thrust of her own, tangling and dueling with his until she forced him back into his mouth, then making an exploratory foray of her own into his enticing wet warmth.

He broke off the kiss—more of a struggle for supremacy—with a ragged laugh. His silver eyes glowed with hunger and anticipation, and he was breathing as though he'd just completed a race. For that matter, so did she, the rapid beating of her heart almost overwhelming her into a faint. "I need you so badly."

"Then take me." She couldn't believe she gushed, but she did and she wouldn't have been surprised if the rug beneath her were damp with her juices.

"No foreplay." His body was so rigid, she could've cut paper from the sharp angles and the extreme control on his will made the veins on his neck stand out. "Just pure animal rutting."

The thought of a rough and violent tumble excited her. "I want you."

The words hardly left her mouth when the robes they were wearing disappeared and, with one swift surge, he buried his thick, rigid cock in her wet warmth.

The universe seemed to hold still.

He was a newly forged steel taken from the crucible of fire—beyond hard, beyond heat, beyond anything she imagined. He was so huge he threatened to tear her apart, but, oh, damn, how to describe how good he felt within her? How he stretched her to the point of pain that was just right? How satisfying, how...*orgasmic*.

“By the Goddess Ishaka, you’re so tight...” Damaon drew in a ragged breath, his silver eyes glittering. He said through gritted teeth, “So hot...so good... Ah...” He rocked a little, causing her gasp at the curl of pleasure that snaked through her body.

“Damaon,” she said.

“Goddess, how arousing that sounds,” he said, his voice thick. “Say it again.”

“Damaon...” She moaned, because he’d moved his hips, an infinitesimal movement that brushed his body against her clit.

“We’ll take it slow next time,” he promised, “but now, it’ll be hard and fast.”

Sounds good.

She barely curled her legs around him when he began to move, hard, frenzied strokes that rammed into her with unyielding strength. Each frantic thrust propelled her a notch higher toward release. He captured her mouth in a deep, punishing kiss, his tongue stabbing in to stroke the insides of her mouth in a rough caress. He tasted of sun and earth, heady and intoxicating. She responded with the same wild abandon, hungry for his taste. He overwhelmed her senses and surrounded her with his scent as he pounded into her sex-starved body.

Yes! Oh God, yes!

Never had a man felt so good, the muscles of his back bunching beneath her questing fingertips. She could only feel and hang onto him, her nails digging deep into his flesh, then scoring his back when white-hot pleasure slammed into her, bathing her in its blinding light.

Damaon had hardly attained his release when Adamas took his place and her still-pulsing pussy clenched around his considerable width. Adamas’ clean scent enclosed her in their private space as he leaned over her, his breathing harsh and shallow as he eased into her. She couldn’t believe the eager way her pussy walls were closing around him, as though a hard cock hadn’t just pleased her in the most thorough way.

Adamas groaned. “You’re right, Damaon, she feels good, so good.” He pushed another inch inside.

A little cry escaped her lips. She wanted to echo his words, but in the end, she could only say, "Adamas."

He stilled and the delighted expression on his face was wiped away as he looked down at her. "You want me to stop? Is it too soon for you to take another cock?"

She wanted to see him come, that was what she wanted. "No, I want you, I can take you." She worked her muscles and her pussy clenched around him, dragging a moan from his lips. "I just wanted to say your name." She asked, anxious, as a thought occurred to her, "Don't you like it? I thought that since Damaon—"

"I love it," he assured her, his mouth swooping down to claim hers as he drove all the way into her.

She arched into him in reaction, rubbing her breasts against his chest. Her nipples tightened further at the contact and all the breath left her body as big, warm hands cupped the white mounds of flesh and kneaded them. Fingers pinched and plucked her nipples, causing myriad sensations to shoot within her body. Her heart sped up in excitement and she sighed into Adamas' mouth, loving the way her breasts and pussy were being loved at the same time.

A woman could easily get used to this.

She only realized it was Damaon at her breasts when his warm mouth closed over a turgid nipple and sucked it deep. The thought of two men making love to her simultaneously aroused her beyond imagination and she started to buck.

Adamas' reaction was to move faster. All coherent thoughts flew out of her head. There was only Adamas as he plunged into her, thrusting with hard, swift strokes as though his life depended on it. The squishing and slapping sounds of their union hurried the frenetic pace toward orgasm. Primed by Damaon's fierce lovemaking, Raisa exploded, her body shattering around Adamas, gripping him in a clenching vise that pushed him toward his own ecstasy.

Her inner muscles continued to throb around Adamas in pulsing waves, and he groaned and caught her lips in a powerful kiss. He continued the rhythm with his semi-

erect cock and set her off into a series of mini-orgasms. "You're wonderful," he rasped when he raised his head. "Absolutely magnificent."

Her legs slid to the rug, Raisa having lost the strength to keep them clasped about his waist, and her eyes remained closed. She couldn't do anything more than made a sound that could be anything. She hadn't felt anything like this before, so boneless she didn't think she could stand again and so satisfied she could weep.

Though he probably said the same thing to the other women who'd come before her, she felt a warm glow at his words. She hadn't been sure she could take their size, much less two of them, but they'd been able to bring her to a level of pleasure she hadn't attained before. She especially liked the multiple orgasms, as she hadn't been entirely sure it wasn't myth when she had read about them in the magazines.

Damaon's hand pushed her hair back from her face.

Her eyes slit open in time to clash with the feral, hungry look in his. "And there's more to come."

Chapter Four

"This time, we'll take it slow," Adamas interjected. His lips lifted in a slow smile that sent a surge of lust lancing through her. "Very slow."

"Let's use a bed this time," she started to say, when Damaon shook his head. "We won't need it."

"Why not?" she asked, as Adamas withdrew from her. She had to force her pussy to stop from clenching around him to keep him inside of her. The sight of his cream-covered cock made her shriek. "Holy shit! You both came in me!" Her earlier question was pushed out of her mind as the consequences of their actions occupied her thoughts.

Damaon's silver eyes mocked her. "That was the intention, wasn't it?"

Adamas had a totally different reaction. He frowned at her, as though the whole thing was her fault.

She couldn't stifle the panic within her. This was so totally not in accordance with her plan. "Will I become pregnant?"

"Ah." Adamas' brows cleared. "The answer is no."

"No?" Profoundly relieved, she sagged back against the rug and closed her eyes. She hadn't known she was so tense. "I know I should take equal responsibility for this and I can't believe I forgot about the condoms, but are you sure?"

"You can only get pregnant if we bring an offering to Ishaka before we have sex."

The peculiar name made her look at them. "Ishaka?"

Damaon answered, "The god of gems, whom we worship."

"So what you're saying is that if you offer something to Ishaka and asked for a baby, he'll grant you your wish. Otherwise, your sperm is rendered infertile." She paused. "He?"

“She.”

“Ah.” Of course. Fertility was the province of women. “Shouldn’t you call her a goddess then?”

Adamas shook his head. “Ishaka is primarily male. It is only when fertility issues are raised that he becomes a she.”

“A she-male?”

Damaon grinned. “Legend has it that Isha and Aka were once two separate people, Isha being the god who oversaw the immortals in gem creation and management, while Aka is the goddess watching over the procreation needs of the immortals to ensure progeny who will eventually become the caretakers of the gems.”

“However, one day, Isha and Aka fell in love.” Adamas took up the tale while Damaon helped her to sit up so that he could take up the place behind her. Good, she could lean back against him, the heat of his chest warming her as the rug hadn’t been able to do. She almost lost her breath at the sensation of his pulsing cock against the base of her spine. He was hard again. The astonishing thing was that she wanted him, too, and so soon after her multiple orgasms. “Their love was so great and deep that they vowed they would never be apart.”

Damaon nuzzled her throat and licked her skin, his tongue rough and arousing. The gesture was so erotic she lost track of the story, her whole concentration shifting to whatever Damaon was doing to her body. Desire flowed through her in a sluggish, molten slide, ending in the fragrant cream between her thighs. His hands caressed her sensitive skin, making their way up from her belly to the underside of her breasts, stroking, lingering at her ribs until her nipples puckered from anticipation and the white globes became heavy with want.

“Damaon...please...”

“You aren’t listening to the story, *shikima*,” Damaon remonstrated.

Her interest was caught by the unfamiliar word. “Shi...shi...”

“Listen.”

Her raw moans punctuated Adamas’ voice as Damaon ended her torment and the heat of his hands covered her breasts. She sobbed at the exquisite feeling of her breasts being massaged and stroked, aroused beyond measure. Her head rolled back onto Damaon’s shoulder and she nipped his throat, lust dancing in her veins at the salty, earthy taste of him.

A rough sound made her look up.

Above her, hungry flames leaped in silver eyes as Adamas gazed at them, his voice trailing away into silence. A sharp pinch at her nipples had her arching her body, as though offering herself to the man before her. Adamas stared at her breasts with an intensity that took her breath away and she made a rough, yearning sound that broke his stupor, that made him lean down.

Time was suspended...and speeded up again when a warm, wet tongue feathered her exposed nipples in light, ethereal touches. She curled her hands into his hair and tried to pull him closer, but he was like stone and wouldn’t budge.

She whimpered.

“Tell me what you want, *shikima*,” Adamas instructed hoarsely, his breath rippling over her skin. “Tell me.”

Her hungry, throbbing pussy overrode all thoughts. “Fuck me,” she cried out.

Low laughter emanated from two male throats, harsh and amused.

“Later.” Damaon growled above her. “What else do you want, *shikima*? Adamas is here to fulfill your *every* wish.”

Her nipples were so tight by now the ache was almost unbearable, not to mention the churning tension in her belly. She had to get some relief soon.

“Suck me.”

“I thought you’d never ask,” Adamas muttered just before his heated mouth enveloped her breast. The sensation was heaven, but she wasn’t aching there anymore. She allowed him a couple of pulls before she pushed him away.

“Not there,” she said in a breathless voice. Her hands still clutching fistfuls of his hair, she tugged him down between her widened legs. “*There*. Eat me. Suck me. Do whatever you want, *just make me come*.”

Dear God, the need—this awful, gut-twisting need that intertwined with her terrible hunger for them. But the men weren’t through torturing her. Though his nostrils flared with interest at the sight of her wet pussy, Adamas returned to her breasts and inflicted his slow, thorough strokes and she became mindless with the myriad shooting sensations crowding her system.

What were they doing to her? Her body wasn’t her own anymore, but a slave to their whims, their every caress. Each glide of their hands, each swipe of their tongues, each exploratory pass of their mouths made her slide deeper and faster into a soundless void where none existed but Adamas and Damaon. They left no skin untouched, no flesh unexplored, no square inch unkissed. They claimed her, body and—most probably—soul.

When Adamas finally slammed home into her pussy, she was already senseless with the most overwhelming urge to move. The overpowering need had built up in her with each sensual caress, each erotic stroke until she was a burning column of fire. She wanted release like a parched man in the desert hungered for water, she *needed* it the way she required air to live. A basic necessity to ensure her survival.

She knocked Adamas onto his back and rode him, frenzied, jerky movements that cared only about servicing her desires and attaining her own pleasure. She gripped him tight by the shoulders, digging her nails into his flesh, as she rocked to the throbbing beat of a drum only she could hear. She sobbed and writhed to the tempo until the drum released her, when the waves of pleasure washed over her in crescendoing swells.

Breathing hard, and damp all over with sweat, Raisa slumped over Adamas, who was still hard within her.

What the hell was that? They had primed her so much and so well that one tiny flicker of flame was enough to set her alight. Sex with her previous boyfriends had been good, but not one of them had been able to rouse so much fire in her.

She shuddered. Was sex with Adamas and Damaon going to be like this always? She hadn't thought she was capable of pure animal rutting, when there had been nothing on her mind but satisfying the primeval urge within her.

Yet she liked it. Though feeling as if all her strength had been leeched from her, a heady exhilaration still ran through her veins.

Beneath her, Adamas' chest vibrated with his laughter. "Magnificent." He positioned her head and claimed her lips in a deep, passionate kiss, his tongue stroking along her lips until she opened them. The flavor of rich, dark chocolate invaded her senses and stirred her desires. She couldn't want him again, could she, after that glorious orgasm?

But it seemed she did, for her pussy clenched around him as she kissed him back, as she tried to drink in his exhilarating essence. All her languor and sleepiness were gone, and all she wanted was to soar to the heights again, but this time, she wanted him with her. She wanted them to find their pleasure together and with Damaon too, if possible.

She wanted them both with a desire that was both terrifying and exciting in intensity. Yet, ever the passionate woman, she welcomed the opportunity to satisfy her lusts.

Adamas' huge, warm hands slid from her face and roamed her body, lingering in places that he must have known sensitive nerves lay because his actions were increasing her arousal and causing her breathing to shorten. He caressed her breasts, then cupped her buttocks and started to move her along the length of his cock. "We're not done yet, you know."

"Thank God." She kissed his jaw, loving that he was as excited as she, evidenced by the racing heartbeats under her fingertips.

He laughed. "A woman after my own heart."

Good.

She purred, which caused a breathless laugh to burst from his mouth.

"Do you like anal sex, *shikima*?" he asked.

"I've done it before," she answered, looking at him.

"How about taking two cocks at the same time?" His silver eyes glittered with challenge.

"That would be out of this world," she said, laughing, yet inwardly, a mounting excitement rose. Did he mean what she thought he meant? She'd heard about how a woman could take two men at the same time and how the position could prove interesting for the woman. She'd never been tempted to try it before, but now she wanted to. Adamas and Damaon somehow brought out the sexually adventurous vixen in her.

"Bad pun," Damaon scolded from behind her.

Adamas let her body settle against his and eased her butt cheeks open. "Ready, *shikima*?"

"Do it," she said, deliberately relaxing. Damaon's cock touched her hole and her heart hammered with equal parts anticipation and exhilaration. His cock slid past the tight ring of rectal muscles and she gasped at the tingling pleasure, all the erogenous zones in her ass coming awake. Adamas was huge and hard in her pussy and coupled with Damaon's cock in her ass, she felt filled in a way she never had before. A good kind of filled.

"Relax, *shikima*..." Damaon crooned. "Relax. Trust me."

"Oh God, yes..." She moaned in delight as Damaon slid in deeper, his thick cock stretching her anus the same way Adamas was stretching her pussy.

Their cocks pressed against one another and the friction on her inner walls was very erotic, arousing her further. “Yes, yes, yes! Ah...ah...oh God oh God...Ooooh.” A final, long, shuddering sigh as he seated himself to the hilt within her. Her hum of satisfaction was lost in Adamas’ mouth when he drew her down for a torrid, open-mouthed kiss and Damaon peppered her shoulders and back with kisses. She was sandwiched between them, just as she’d heard it could be, but nothing prepared her for the intense pleasure the position brought her.

The room was becoming very hot as the temperature increased, but it was nothing compared to the heat within her when the two men began to move in rhythm.

Swish, slap. Swish, slap. Swish, slap.

Her body wouldn’t stay still and she began to move with them, writhing and rolling her hips, each action pushing them higher, farther, nearer the brink. Their labored breathing and soft groans and exclamations filled the air, along with the pungent scent of their arousal, feeding the spiraling tension in her belly. Damaon nipped her shoulder and the sharp pain sent her falling off the edge.

She screamed as she orgasmed for the nth time that day, her release totally shattering her as both men surged into her and their cum flooded her body.

She fainted.

* * * * *

Damaon woke from his post-coital nap, yawning. They’d had nonstop sex for the past five days—no, six, counting today—and he still wanted her. The moment he registered that she was lying beside him and his hand rested on her soft belly, he grew as hard as the diamond.

He groaned. When would this awful, wonderful lust stop? Not for himself, because there was nothing he loved more than being sheathed in her warmth all the time—unless it was being in Adamas—but she had to be sore from all their activity. Each encounter with her sweetness, kindness and compassion had thawed his heart that little

bit more until he could look back on his former hardness and wondered how he'd been able to control himself from lashing out at the world or worse.

Still, he had to admit that insatiable lust was better than the terrifying hardness of his heart, when sometimes breathing was a difficulty, when the sluggish flow of his blood caused him to become dizzy. He never told Adamas these things, however, because he hadn't wanted to scare his mate, nor had he revealed the numerous times he'd awakened from nightmares of dying, of leaving Adamas behind.

He pushed the thoughts away. Those things were staved off for another fifty years due to this magnificent woman who had given of herself so generously, and who more than fulfilled his expectations that she would be a tigress in bed. She was all that and more.

Still, for all her courage, she had been scared when she'd awakened from her faint that first time, wondering if she was ailing, as such a thing had never happened to her before. Adamas had swiftly assured her that there was nothing to worry about, that her body was probably not yet accustomed to experiencing so many orgasms in so short a time. Too much pleasure had caused her system to short-circuit.

It hadn't happened again. When she realized her nerves were getting accustomed to the nonstop ecstasy, she'd relaxed and enjoyed the ride.

Another thing of import had also contributed to her distraction. He remembered her frowning at them, her skin flushing pink and delectable that he had to exert tremendous amount of will not to pounce on her.

"You didn't put on any lubricant." The deep puzzlement in her voice complemented the confused scowl she threw at him. "How come I don't feel pain in my ass?"

He couldn't understand her question. "Because my cock produces the cream to facilitate the penetration." His statement ended on a slight rising tone.

Her eyes grew big and round as a plate. "Your cock can cream?"

He nodded, wondering what the problem was.

“Adamas’ too?”

“Yes.” *All the men in Ragnon, in fact.*

“Wow. How...convenient.”

Something clicked. “Ah, I take it none of the men on Earth has this wonderful ability?”

She shook her head, still awed.

Remembering, Damaon chuckled. She had been adorable in her confusion.

He paused, savoring his quiet laughter. He couldn’t remember when last he had laughed.

His brows knitted when he realized she would be in their bed for only another eight more days. Why were the days suddenly flying by? He wished there were some way he could stop time, but not even an immortal had power in that aspect. He shifted to lie on his side and rested his head on an upturned palm, while he observed her in the late afternoon light.

Her features weren’t remarkable, but taken together, she possessed a pleasant face that became truly lovely when she smiled with genuine joy. Her short golden-blonde hair was now brushed back from her face, but when she wasn’t lying down, it curled around her cheeks in a way that framed her face. Though her body was slight, with her small, round breasts, tiny waist and slightly flaring hips, she was able to take both of them into her in a way that brought all three of them huge satisfaction.

Hell’s gems. What a remarkable woman.

He didn’t know what had made her change her mind about having sex with them, but he was glad she did. Instead of the amazing time they had, they might have spent the time torturing each other with hints of what-could-have-beens.

She shifted, sighed and settled back on the bed again, her legs falling a little bit apart in an inviting manner.

He didn’t want to ignore such an enticing call.

He repositioned her legs, rearranging them farther apart so he could lie on his stomach between them. Excitement spiked within him, which didn't help the diamond-hardness of his cock, when he glimpsed her pussy through the blonde thatch covering her. He looked up at her, marveling at the wide expanse of creamy complexion that was broken by two pretty buds of the deepest rose cresting high on small hills. A definite feast for the eyes and the tongue.

Turning his head, he nuzzled her soft white thighs, breathing in her scent, before he swiped one long path with his tongue, ending with his face buried in the blonde curls. Pressed intimately against her, the scent of her musk filled him and drugged his blood. He didn't know why he trembled, but he did. Hands shaking, he parted her thatch to reveal the treasure within.

Sweet.

He moaned with delirious joy as he sipped from her pussy, her woman's juices coating his tongue and lips, as he explored her folds and teased the tiny bud of her pleasure. Her moans and mewling cries, as well as the painful pull of his hair, told him she was awake. He kissed her there as he would her mouth, a wild, ravenous kiss that had her keening and shuddering.

A knock sounded on the door.

He ignored it, intent on savoring his prize.

Someone on the other side of the door rapped again, more insistent this time.

Damaon lifted his head from between her thighs and growled. Who dared? He was going to smash this particular servant into smithereens. A glimmer of his old savagery returned. "Come in." He wasn't particularly surprised to hear himself snarling the words.

Raisa caressed his scalp and chided, "Damaon." Then she suggested, "Why don't you go back to what you were doing?"

Tempting. He proceeded to do just that, the honey in her cunt calling to him, as a servant girl entered, carrying in a tray of dishes. “Masters, Mistress, where do you want me to place this?”

He raised his head, struck by a sudden realization.

Polite. The servants were all so polite. Lifeless, not only physically, but emotionally as well. He didn’t know why it should bother him now, when it never had before. Maybe Raisa had healed even the tiniest corners of his heart—making him *really* feel—and he wasn’t satisfied with blandness anymore. Maybe he’d gotten used to Raisa’s many moods that monotony now chafed at him. He didn’t know, but he was thinking that if—*when*—they have time, maybe Adamas could program some temper into the servants. Give them character and make their days livelier, but that wasn’t the priority in his and Adamas’ long list of things to do. Maybe Iderea would help. Sapphire’s little girl was very good with programming emotions.

“Just put the tray down on the desk, Dia, then you may go.”

Dia?

Raisa knew the girl’s name? When the hell did she have the chance to find out details like that?

The moment the servant Dia left, Raisa turned to Adamas, who had awakened by now. “How is it that they—the servants—can move and talk? Are they like the AI robots back home? How did you make them so lifelike?” Bemusement suffused her voice. “Did you name them all? Are the gems sentient here?”

“Later.” Damaon made her lie down and returned to ravaging her pussy, partaking more of her sweet juices and making her cry out in surrender, her body jerking and writhing in orgasm. She clutched his head tight to her pussy, not wanting to relinquish him even after she’d grown still from her shudders. Though his cock remained hard and aching, pleasure swept through him at her release. He gave her pussy one final swipe with his tongue, then kissed his way up her body. Easing her fingers from his

hair, he finally sat up, licking his lips with enormous satisfaction. "There, now we can talk."

Raisa moaned and her restless legs moved. "Do we have to?"

Adamas laughed and Damaon's heart lifted in response. It had been some time since Damaon had heard his lover laugh. Hell, *he* hadn't even smiled for months before Raisa had arrived.

Adamas smoothed back her damp hair in a loving gesture. "You're the one who has lots of questions."

Raisa drew Adamas' hand down to her mouth and sucked each digit with deep concentration. Watching her, Damaon felt the pull of her mouth as though she were sucking his cock and he could see Adamas falling under her spell. She opened her eyes and pressed a moist kiss in the center of Adamas' palm, all the while holding his gaze, then sat up with regret. She swept a hand through her hair. "All right, where were we?"

Damaon gave her pussy a single glance of regret, wishing he could be in her again. But the reason he'd performed oral sex on her was because she had to be sore from all the riding they had done and if he could give her some reprieve, he would. "First of all, how did you know her name? I don't think I ever saw you talking to her."

"Oh, shouldn't I talk to her?" Raisa patted her hair into place, not that it was badly tousled. "I'm sorry, I didn't know your rules and –"

He took hold of her hands. In the past few days, he noticed she fiddled with her hair whenever she was nervous. "You can talk to anyone you want. I was merely curious."

"The second day after I arrived. I wandered around the palace and I saw her wiping the windows." She shrugged, then grimaced. "We talked. Not that she was a very good conversationalist. Someone should upgrade her program."

"I see. I wonder how –?" He lifted an inquiring brow at Adamas, who shrugged.

“What’s that look?” Raisa had caught their silent exchange and her eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“I was just wondering where she got her name,” Damaon said, frowning. “Do all the servants have names? What about the workers in the fields?” He hadn’t known, but then, he hadn’t bothered to ask, being too busy in those early days with acquainting himself with his new position. However, if they did have names, surely his predecessor would’ve mentioned it.

“I don’t know.” Raisa bit her lip. “Our conversation didn’t touch on that and I doubt if she could give me a satisfactory answer.”

“To answer your questions, when Adamas and I arrived at the palace to begin our duties as the Diamond Immortals, both the servants in the palace and the workers in the fields were already animated. They have only one expression on their faces—a cheerful, sunny smile. They could talk about the gem they were in charge of all day, but that was the extent of their conversation. So, no, they’re not sentient at all, as they can’t think for themselves or make decisions.”

“About a hundred years ago, a fad swept through the immortals,” Adamas continued. He had shifted and now sat behind Raisa. He wrapped his arms around her and rested his chin on her head, his gaze far away. “We gifted them—the servants and the workers, that is—with a semblance of emotions and thoughts and conversation, something to make their interactions with us more lifelike, more...human. But they weren’t real emotions. How to explain this to you?” He mulled over the question, but Damaon hit upon an analogy first.

“It’s somewhat like your computer programmers on Earth.” Being curious about the different cultures and societies in the universe, he had devoured the books in the library on the topic. “We input a set of codes into their systems to make them behave like humans given a certain set of conditions, but by themselves, they can’t think or feel.”

“Exactly. We programmed them in such a way that they can now respond appropriately to the given stimuli, sort of a cause-effect correlation program.” Adamas suddenly grimaced and Damaon knew what came to his mind. “Sometimes, I regret it, especially when Damaon went into one of his moods. Then the servants would just stand there bewildered, not knowing what to do, as Damaon couldn’t get the words past his clenched teeth to give them a work command.”

“I do *not* have moods,” Damaon felt compelled to protest.

Adamas deemed it wise not to answer. Rightly so. Raisa, however, couldn’t smother the tiny giggle that escaped her lips. Damaon glared at her, but she only stuck her tongue out at him.

This playful side to Raisa was something new, as was the indulgent response welling up within him. Not wanting to examine the emotion further, he returned to the topic at hand. “Anyway, we never gave them names, so we’re surprised that they have somehow given themselves one. I mean, if Dia has a name, it’s logical to assume the other servants have them too.”

“Maybe someone gave them the names,” Raisa suggested.

“Who?” Adamas frowned, perplexed.

Raisa shrugged. “You sometimes have parties, I guess.”

“Just one big one to introduce ourselves to our peers,” Adamas answered, then smacked his forehead as something obviously came to him. “Recently, we’ve also been having small gatherings with a select group of friends, who wouldn’t have done such a thing without getting our permission.”

“Well then, couldn’t one of the immortals who aren’t part of this group of close friends have done it as a joke?”

Damaon thought over the immortals who had attended the big party, though it was a pretty *long* time ago so he couldn’t be sure exactly who had been there. He nodded when he recalled one or two of his contemporaries who could’ve done the deed. The

Ruby Immortal, for one, who was just a hundred years into the job. “Maybe.” He wasn’t inviting that practical joker again, should there be an occasion.

“There you have it, but who animated them in the first place?” The expression on her face turned reflective. “Whoever he is—or was—must possess powerful magic to transform minerals into animated figures.” Damaon could see from her expressive face that an idea struck her. “I don’t suppose they’re battery-operated?”

Damaon shook his head with regret. If the immortals ever had the magic to bring minerals in human form to life, they didn’t possess it now. Needing to take away her disappointment at the unsolved mystery, he said, “I’m going to check the diamond fields later. Would you like to come?”

Her eyes brightened with green light. “Yes.”

* * * * *

Raisa stole a last awed look at the diamond-glass panels of the gigantic palace. Even from a distance, the sharp delineating lines of the entire structure shone with bright clarity. She couldn’t believe she’d been staying there for the past five days.

Turning around, she stared in wonder at the blinding pristine whiteness everywhere. Everything made her eyes boggled in stunned disbelief. Before her, a huge field was packed with diamonds of all sizes and in different stages of growth, separated by white picket fences. Damaon had taken her around the field where she’d seen diamonds of all sizes. By far the cutest were the baby diamonds, which were as small as the nail of her fifth finger and littered sturdy shrubs like glistening decorations on little Christmas trees. Workers gave the illusion of busyness as they went about their various tasks—sowing, planting, watering, weeding and harvesting. Unlike Earth, diamond planting and harvesting didn’t seem to be restricted to any particular season.

Weeding? Raisa squinted to make sure, but she could only see the workers rooting about in the soil, then throwing something into the sack they carried with them. The soil wasn’t the rich, dark brown color that she was familiar with, but was instead as white

and fine as the sand that she'd seen on some of the luxurious beaches on Earth. Fascinating. To her right, workers fell in line as they walked toward the enormous building at the front center of the field, both hands carrying a heavy basket filled to the brim with diamonds.

Above them, the great sun shone overhead. Damaon explained that each gem demesne had its own unique sun to further the growth of the gems. Apparently, each sun had different qualities necessary for gem growth. If the sun in the diamond demesne had shined in the emerald demesne for example, the baby emeralds, instead of growing, would die from its harsh light.

"It's...fantastic," Raisa said, her voice full of astonishment as she tried to take everything in. "I felt like I had fallen into a diamond mine."

"There's no comparison," Damaon said in response to her comment. "This is much more pleasant than a diamond mine."

She gazed at him, sure that a question was in her eyes. How would he know? Yet he was right that mines were mostly dark and creepy. "I was talking about the abundance of the gems."

"Even so." He inclined his head in acknowledgement. "In the mines, you could dig and dig with nothing to show for your efforts."

"What do you mean?" Maybe he had read about a real-life account of a miner in one of those books that he confessed to devouring.

"I worked in a diamond mine. Before."

"Before?" she echoed. Startled, she glanced at him beneath the wide brim of the ivory hat they had conjured for her. Rather, at his profile, for he was busy looking at something in the distance. Somehow, she hadn't thought that he had another life before being an immortal. She'd thought he was the progeny of the previous Diamond Immortal and had stayed in the palace all his life. With his revelation, then maybe Adamas was. "You were hu – mortal?" He was still human, but immortal.

“Hmmm?” He asked in an absentminded way, then turned to her with raised brows. “Sorry?”

She repeated her question.

His face changed, turning stern and forbidding. “Yes. About five hundred and fifty years ago, I had a normal human being’s life span like yours.”

“And you hated the mines.” His words coupled with the hard, bitter tone in his voice led her to this conclusion.

He remained silent for a while, as though battling some demons. “Most of the time,” he finally said. “I’d seen my father and brother die in the mines and I swore I wouldn’t be one of them. Yet, after the accident that caused their deaths, I had no choice but to work in the same mines to provide for my mother and younger siblings. We had no other livelihood in the community, unless I moved away. But then, there was Adamas. He was a cripple, did you know that?”

So Adamas was once mortal too. How the hell did they become the Diamond Immortals then? “No, he never mentioned. But he walked so normally that I wouldn’t have suspected—”

“It was a birth defect, but he was fully healed when he became immortal. Since then, I didn’t want him to do anything taxing that might injure his health.”

“So you confined him to the palace.”

After Damaon had invited her to visit the fields, Adamas said that if Damaon was going to work, he was too. The last image she’d seen of Adamas when she and Damaon left the palace was of him loping off toward one of the rooms they maintained as an office. What work he had to do, she didn’t know. Paperwork?

A rueful smile touched Damaon’s lips. “I wouldn’t put it that way. Much as I love working in the fields, Adamas hated it, so our arrangement suited us just fine. I oversee the actual growing and harvesting of the diamonds, while Adamas puts his brain and the equipment to work on researching the perfect spots where we could plant the harvested diamonds and—”

“Wait a minute. What do you mean ‘plant the harvested diamonds’?”

His brows shot up in surprise. “Where do you think the harvested diamonds go?”

“I don’t know.” Raisa shrugged. “I never really thought about it. I thought you sell it for money to buy things.”

“So immortals grow and harvest diamonds and emeralds and sapphires to satisfy our own material wants?” Damaon laughed, amused. “Our world is not so small, Raisa. We serve Earth, Mars, Ragnon, Elantra, Shenae...” He continued to rattle more unfamiliar names that she finally made him stop.

“So forgive me, but what exactly do you do, after you have the diamonds in your hands?” Her apology was made in such a starchy voice that he grinned.

“We place or ‘plant’ the harvested diamonds leagues beneath the land on each planet in the universe, so that you would have the joy of discovering and excavating a mine full of gems.”

“Huh.” Her brain shrieked as it tried to accept this new concept that overturned years of scientific conditioning. “You mean the diamonds aren’t made by the friction of Earth’s layers of soil or whatnot?”

He took great delight in shaking his head.

“Darn. The sun must be affecting my ability to think.” The statement was partly true, as she was perspiring so much under its heat she was distracted by the damp sweat covering her entire body. Not even on Earth had she sweated this much. The ivory hat wasn’t doing much good. If anything, this gave further evidence that she wasn’t even anywhere *near* Earth.

Damaon laughed out loud, a hearty shout that she heard for the first time since she arrived. The sound wrapped itself around her heart, making her feel warm in a nonphysical way. “We’ve finished the tour, so why don’t you go ahead into the palace? I’ll be along shortly, as I still need to check some things that I’ve neglected in the past few days.”

The reason for the neglect burned in his eyes and made her pussy clench in hunger. She turned to go, but was hauled back into his arms for a long kiss. His body was still full of hard angles, but now they cradled her instead of biting deep into her flesh. She wound her arms around his neck and kissed him with all the passion and desire in her.

When he lifted his head, she invited in a husky voice, "Come to bed as soon as you can."

His silver eyes glowed in the afternoon sun. "I will."

"You're a good man, Damaon." She caressed his cheek. Damaon's revelation of their duties as caretakers of the diamond jogged her brain regarding something that Adamas had once said, causing her to see things from a different angle. "Not that I agree with what you have done, but I'm glad I made the decision to help you."

His eyes widened with confusion and he seemed incapable of moving or saying anything, so she stood on tiptoes and kissed him once more before leaving for the palace.

"Wait, you can't leave me like this," Damaon finally called after her. "What do you mean?"

She stopped walking and turned around, her gaze zeroing in on his perplexed expression. "I've wondered why is it that you are in more danger of the heart hardening disease than Adamas, why you only have about one year left while he has several years more. Given that both of you work with the diamonds, you *should* deteriorate at the same rate, but you didn't." Raisa smiled at him across the distance, but his figure was a bit blurry due to the moisture in her eyes. Initially, she had thought him not worth saving, but her opinion had changed. Now, after her blinding realization, all she wanted to do was to wrap her arms around him and keep him safe.

"You may like working in the fields, Damaon, but you also know very well that more contact with the diamonds hastened the pace of heart hardening and eventual death. Adamas would've benefitted from working the land sometimes—he's so pale he looks like a ghost—but you never allowed him, did you?" She shook her head.

“He hated any sort of physical activity—”

“You convinced him that *only you* have the magic touch because you know diamonds, that if he touched them they’d probably die, so he should confine himself to the palace and make strategic plans, while you sweated under the sun and exposed yourself for the two of you. You sought to protect him at the cost of your own life. Why?” She shrugged. “I’m really not very conversant with how the calling star worked, so I can only guess that maybe you were afraid the star wouldn’t have grown big enough when it needed to be sent or it was late in finding the woman to help you or something. But whatever your reason is, you wanted to give Adamas a bigger buffer between life and death. A noble purpose, yes, but would he appreciate it when he realizes you had effectively taken the choice away from him?”

His big form hurried toward her and he caught her by the arms. “He knew. He *knew*, damn it,” Damaon said harshly, his fingers biting into her flesh. “He knew what the diamonds can do. I never deceived him. He could’ve insisted on coming to the fields with me, but he never did.”

She wondered whom Damaon was convincing—her or himself. “Adamas knew,” she agreed, absorbing the pain of his hold and knowing it was nothing to the pain Damaon must be feeling, “but he’s an honorable man. Knowing he could’ve bungled the growth of the diamonds, do you think he would’ve insisted?” By the flush on Damaon’s face, it appeared he had already thought of this point and used it to his advantage. “That first day, when you were sleeping, we talked. He was anguished that he couldn’t help you, that only you ‘have the touch’. At that time, I thought he was talking about your ability to convince me to have sex with you. Apparently, you’re the charming one and normally you would’ve been able to seduce me out of my skirt. But knowing what I now know, I think my earlier assessment was wrong and my new conclusion is the right one.”

She looked up at him, compassion and understanding pouring out of her. “Adamas thought only you can handle the diamonds and the knowledge that there was nothing

he can do, that every day he was sending you to your death, eats into his soul and sends him into tormented anguish. Is that better than if he'd worked beside you all this time?"

Chapter Five

Adamas smoothed his hand over the gentle rise of her butt. Silky. Soft. The texture a delight to his sense of touch. He couldn't resist giving her a slight pat.

She mumbled in her sleep.

He'd never been partial to Damaon's backside, but the sight of hers was enough to make his breath catch in his throat. His cock stirred to awareness and he imagined himself taking her from behind while he stared down the long, graceful line of her spine, feel the urgent grinding of her hips against his —

A sound made him glance to the side, to see Damaon lying on his side watching them, the mercurial silver of his eyes sleepy and unguarded. He was stroking Raisa's arm, which lay near him. After twelve days of Raisa's healing presence, Damaon had lost his hard edges, almost reverting back to the Damaon he once knew before they had become immortals. Something that the other women hadn't been able to do. Not only that, but Damaon had become...more restful. He was content to spend time with them, even if that time was mostly spent in bed. The eagerness to get back to the fields had been muted. Adamas knew love of the land still burned in his mate, but it didn't claim him anymore. Perhaps standing so near death this time had awakened Damaon to the more important things in life.

He hadn't known he was asking permission until he saw Damaon nod. Just that one slight forward dip of his mate's head and his cock sprang to aching rigidity, creaming in his excitement.

Hell's gems.

He didn't need much convincing to give in to the rising desire within him. He kissed Raisa's unblemished back. Soft, so soft and smooth. He licked the skin at her nape, teasing and arousing her until she moaned and arched her body. He worshipped

every inch of her, her sighs and whimpers stealing across his body like a caress. His cock tightened to the point of pain. He squeezed her fleshy buttocks and opened her up for his marauding tongue. He breathed in her womanly scent and tasted the heat of her channel, savored the salty sweetness of her cream and reveled in the orgasmic cries that were wrung from her throat.

He wanted more.

He positioned her, placing a pillow under her so that her buttocks rose high in the air. A deep, swirling arousal clenched him tight in its grip at the sight of the long, clean lines of her back and the enticing swell of her ass. He drew in a shallow breath as he opened her wide and eased himself into her heated wetness. She lured him further in, tilting her ass to enable him to bury his entire length in her pussy.

Ah! The incredible sensation of being surrounded by her. Though his body urged him to move, he forced himself to remain still and savor the feeling of being held in her femininity. *Inside Raisa*, the thought ricocheted within his mind, reflecting off prisms and making him see a wondrous kaleidoscope of multicolored splendor.

Raisa.

He released his breath in a quiet sigh of satisfaction.

She moaned and her hips thrust up against his, commanding him to move. He bent over her and rained gentle, passionate kisses at the base of her nape. His arms snaked around her body and he filled his hands with her breasts, firm, heavy globes of flesh that he squeezed and teased until her nipples burgeoned into tiny, hard buds.

He wished he could see them. Still, the thought of their pale loveliness incited him to withdraw and plunge back in.

“Yes...more...” she pleaded.

Securing his hold on her, he pistoned in and out of her and his drives gained speed as the seconds ticked by. His hands shifted to her waist, tension gripping him fast and low. Her inner muscles pulsed around him, closing in, her clasp like that of a man hanging on for dear life.

Her low shout of pleasure triggered his orgasm. He let go of control to explode in her soft warmth even as he absorbed the shudders of her uninhibited delight. Her grip on him was strong and sure, so tight he could die.

In the clutches of extreme pleasure, he was aware of a missing ingredient.

Damaon.

Adamas turned and hauled him closer, then kissed him with all the unbridled passion within him. Damaon's response inflamed him and the eroticism of exchanging a torrid kiss with his mate while buried inside Raisa roused his semihard cock. He surged within her again and again until he'd shot all of his load into her in tandem to her shattered cry.

Never, ever had he felt so satisfied, so utterly boneless. His hand fell away from Damaon. Adamas hid his face in Raisa's nape, his weight forcing them deeper into the bed. He kissed her damp skin, sucking a bit of flesh into his mouth. She trembled and her inner muscles rippled with bliss.

He allowed himself a few seconds to taste her and to regain his strength, then lifted his weight from hers and withdrew with reluctance.

"Hmmm...That was lovely." She yawned and stretched with a sensual languorousness that affected him more than he liked, seeing as he'd just had his release. Two of them, in fact. "Sleepy..."

"You have to get up soon," he said, amused.

"Why?" The word was mumbled into her pillow.

"We have a party scheduled tonight."

She moaned. "Can't we skip it?"

Damaon laughed, something he wouldn't have done twelve days before. He was rubbing his erect shaft with languid strokes, but he seemed in no hurry to seek release. "I'm flattered that you'd rather spend the time in bed with us, but I'm afraid we can't, *shikima*. The party is coming to us."

Raisa burrowed deeper into the bed, if that were possible.

Adamas sensed there was something more to her reluctance than insatiable lust for their bodies. No matter how good he and Damaon were, after twelve straight days of nonstop sex—except for necessary functions and that one trip to the fields—she had to be eager to see other faces. “What’s the matter, Raisa?”

She turned her head and fixed unblinking green eyes on him. “They’ll know.”

“They” must refer to the other immortals, but... “Know what?”

“That I’m here to help you, that we’re having sex.”

A sliver of amusement filled him, though he didn’t let it show. For a woman who had been so bold about her sexual needs, her shyness fascinated him and the contradiction in her nature intrigued him. He realized there were a lot of things he didn’t know about her and he was eager to peel down her many layers, one by one, to discover who she really was.

“If they’re our real friends, *shikima*, they’ll be forever grateful to you.” Damaon wore an uncertain look on his face as he stared down at Raisa. Adamas knew his mate was contemplating whether they should change the date, since she was so averse to it. Then Damaon grimaced. “I’m sorry, *shikima*, but we can’t call off the gathering without incurring Orin’s wrath and uh, I’d rather stay on his good side, if you don’t mind.”

Raisa rolled onto her back and Adamas took the opportunity to admire her sleek and well-toned body. She gleamed with health and the afterglow of sex. His hand trailed up the satiny skin of her stomach and ribs and doodled on the smooth skin.

Yet, she was so much more than her physical appearance.

Generous and adventurous in bed. Courage and an inner core of strength. A way of facing life with joy and abandon.

Not for the first time, he wondered at the events in her life that had made her thus.

Raisa cocked her head at Damaon. “Who’s Orin and why is he so important?”

“Rather, who’s Esmeralda and why is *she* so important?” Damaon countered with a mischievous grin.

“Huh?” She looked from one to the other with confusion.

“Stop teasing, Damaon.”

“I’m only stating facts,” Damaon protested.

“Orin is the Emerald Immortal and Esmeralda is his wife. He spoils her terribly,” Adamas said in as solemn a voice as he could manage. “Whatever Esme wants, Esme gets and woe to the man who thwarts her, because when Orin gets mad, he made a sick Damaon seem like a child in comparison. It just so happens that she’s the one who organized this little gathering about a month ago and she is *so* looking forward to this.”

Raisa frowned. “They don’t sound like nice people. Why are you friends with them?”

“Because we have no choice.” Damaon shook his head mournfully. “Esme’s from Ragnon and she has this idea in her cute little brain that Ragnorians should have a reunion every month.”

Raisa looked taken aback. The poor dear obviously hadn’t thought beyond their being immortals. “You’re from Rag-Ragnon? I mean, Damaon has told me you were mortals before, but I guess I never really thought about your origins. Where’s Ragnon?”

“It’s a little planet several galaxies away from Earth.”

“You know, I never really understood that.” Her brows slashed together. “I thought Ishaka made sure the immortals have children who will eventually be caretakers for the gems, but well, you never really finished telling the story of his-her legend, so there may be something I’m missing.”

“No, you thought right.” It seemed Damaon couldn’t resist anymore and lifted his hand to caress her hips. Sometimes, he’d stroke up and touch Adamas, letting his hand glide up Adamas’ arm before returning to Raisa’s skin. “Normally, immortals reproduce the next generation of caretakers, but in our case, the previous Diamond

Immortal was so immersed in his job at one point that he neglected his health. By the time he realized what was happening and sought to send the calling star, the diamond had ripened on its stalk and was spoiled. Thus, with no calling star to send and having difficulty breathing by then, he made us the next caretakers.”

“But why you and not some other man—”

“Actually, he chose Damaon,” Adamas clarified. Losing interest in the story—except for the bond with Adamas, his mate had hated his mortal existence with a passion—Damaon lowered his head to nibble on her skin and play with her breasts. Adamas tangled his hand in his mate’s bone-white hair, enjoying the peace and contentment that stole through his veins.

“Why?” There was a hitch in Raisa’s breath, most probably due to the fact that Damaon had commenced sucking on her nipple. Her eyes fluttered, wanting to close, but Adamas knew she struggled to keep them open and trained on him.

“Because Damaon worked in the diamond mines and he breathed and lived those gems to the extent that he knew them better even than himself. He loved working them and the diamonds returned the feeling, if such a thing is possible, because they thrived and glowed under his care. He was the perfect candidate.” Adamas felt the corners of lips lift in a wry smile. “I was only the tagalong. Damaon included me in his bargain with the dying immortal because—”

“I couldn’t face eternity without you.” Damaon raised his head, his mercurial eyes glowing with deep intensity.

Overpowering need and love slammed into Adamas, making his heart swell with emotion. A different kind of warmth suffused him, one that filled him with quiet joy. Their mouths met and clung in a profound kiss of promise and devotion.

Adamas had always thought Damaon voiced his request out of pity for the lame man that he had been. After all, being crippled, Adamas was a burden to his family and a social outcast because of his inability to contribute to the community. But now, he knew the reason was love, but he couldn’t have known the depth of that love. Being an

immortal may have healed his crippled legs, in order that he might fulfill the demands of his job, but Damaon was his real blessing.

A sound made them drew back.

Adamas looked down at Raisa, who was weeping. She sniffed. "That's so sweet."

He thought so too, but he didn't want the mood to degenerate into sentimentally. He swatted her hip in a light pat. "Sweet or not, you have to haul your butt up. We've only about three hours left to prepare before the horde descends on us."

"Three hours!" Raisa scrambled from her position, then paused, a stricken expression on her face. "Oh no." In a display of true feminine vanity, she wailed. "I don't have a dress."

Adamas didn't know why, but he and Damaon exchanged a glance, then burst out laughing.

"Men." Aggrieved, she swung her legs over the side of the bed. Adamas barely managed to shoe her bare feet in hastily spun slippers before she stalked into the adjoining bath.

* * * * *

Raisa examined herself one last time before the large gilt mirror in the hall. Her golden-blond hair had been washed and combed until it fell in shiny waves around her face. Her fair skin had a healthy pink glow from the exuberant exercise of the past few days and her green eyes were bright and excited, if shadowed by a little apprehension. Though relieved that it was only to be a small gathering, she wasn't all that eager to meet the Emerald Immortal and his mate, given what she knew of them from her lovers.

Lovers.

For a moment, she forgot her anxiety as she thrilled to the word. Adamas hadn't been bragging. They certainly had the skill to go with their equipment. They had

immersed her in a sensual haze of never-ending pleasure interspaced with lazy conversations about themselves and everything and nothing in particular.

The whole situation was surreal.

Whenever she awakened from a nap, she'd pinch herself to make sure she was really lying between two hunky males in a bed huge enough for five people. She never needed a blanket, for their body heat was adequate to keep her warm. She discovered that she was insatiable for them, which had never happened to her before. Yet, even as her body demanded to be filled by them again and again, she hungered for knowledge about them and she stored the tiny bits and pieces they dropped about themselves and their former lives indelibly in her mind.

She realized with sickening clarity that she only had two more days before the palace would eject her from the premises. In the mirror, she saw bleak despair filling her eyes.

"What is it, *shikima*?" Adamas suddenly appeared behind her. Of the two men, he was the more sensitive one, as he always seemed to be attuned to her moods. He dropped a kiss on top of her hair. "Is the dress not to your liking? I think you look fabulous in it and I'm not saying that just because I was the one who made it for you."

After she had exited the shower, dripping wet because of the absence of towels, the men had insisted on kissing away every water droplet that clung to her skin. By the time they were done, she was on fire for them and they tumbled onto the bed. With an hour to go before guests started to arrive, Adamas had spun white, sparkling cloth about her sensitized skin and soon she was draped in a simple, floor-length gown of elegant design with tiny studded diamonds that enhanced the creamy complexion of her bared arms and shoulders. She'd stared, stupefied, not having owned any gown as chic as this.

Now, she made a show of admiring the dress in the mirror in front of her, then bestowed a tremulous smile on his reflection. "The dress is magnificent. Thank you."

"*You're magnificent.*" He whirled her around and planted a kiss of such passion and longing on her mouth that she was soon moaning and clutching his shoulders. Her knees went weak and she was in danger of falling in a heap to the floor. She clutched tight on his shoulders, her fingers digging into his flesh through the cloth.

He clutched fistfuls of her skirt in his hand and inched them up until they were bunched around her waist. Moaning, she barely registered that his hand was skimming her inner thigh and cupping her mound, his fingers delving intimately into her folds.

"Adamas!" she whimpered.

"Hell's gems, Raisa," he said hoarsely against her ear. "I can't get enough of you."

"Your guests..." she felt obliged to protest, though her pussy was already creaming in anticipation of his penetration.

"They can damn well wait."

He thrust two fingers into her, but it wasn't enough. She wanted something more substantial than his fingers in her. She wanted him, his thick, hard cock. She wanted both of them. "Damaon..."

"He's here. Open your eyes."

Through the hazy film of desire covering her eyes, she caught sight of the other immortal leaning against the opposite wall, his silver eyes intent on them, dark with need. She reached out a hand to him just as Adamas thrust his fingers into her and she sobbed. "More, more...ah..."

She bore down on his fingers, his thumb rasped over her clit and the tension within exploded into sparkling diamond lights. She hadn't even come back to her senses yet when Adamas turned her around to face the mirror and she looked at her lovers in the oval surface, both men's faces hard and their eyes glittered with lust. Damaon walked over to them and stood directly behind Adamas, his head descending to exchange a hot kiss with his mate.

She burned from watching them, her yearning for them a molten liquid flowing through her. Her earlier release wasn't enough. She wanted a solid cock within her, one her pussy could hold and clasped tight.

She gasped when her wish was granted. Her palms slammed flat on the hall table when Adamas eased his rigid cock into her. Now she knew why he didn't give her any underwear. Her breathing grew shallow when another push caused her to surge nearer the mirror.

Adamas grunted.

It was a while before she realized that Damaon was fucking Adamas, who was fucking her. She was so aroused at the thought that she creamed even more, her slickness allowing Adamas to slide easily within her.

Oh God.

There it was again, a phantom cock thrusting into her ass, making it seem as though both Adamas and Damaon were fucking her. The sensation was incredible, one cock real and firm and the other insubstantial, yet no less tangible. She dimly recalled Adamas saying he needed to research on the phenomenon, yet she'd never asked him about it afterward. Come to think of it, he didn't seem to have taken the time to do the research. She would remind him about it—

She moaned, her thoughts scattering when Adamas kissed and licked her nape, his hand coming around her body to cup and squeeze her aching breasts as he thrust deep into her. Her gaze remained fixed on the mirror, on Damaon's hungry expression, on Adamas' bone-white head near her golden blonde one, the colors so near they seem to blur. She saw herself, her eyes half closed and her mouth hanging open as she strained to reach for the ecstasy they promised. She looked like a wanton with her gown bunched about her waist and a man's hands insinuated beneath the material and touching her bare flesh.

She wanted to be a wanton for them, to be anything they want. In the back of her mind, she knew she had passed the point of no return. While her body hungered for

them, something else was swelling from within her, an emotion so powerful that she almost drowned in it.

Adamas pistoned in and out of her, his thrusts changing, becoming shallower as the pressure increased in her belly. The ordered rhythm that he and Damaon had set was shot to pieces as the men plunged and withdrew with frantic urgency, igniting the tension and urging the flames to flare higher. The edge of the hall table dug into her stomach, but the pain served as a counterpoint to the pleasure spreading through her.

“Gems, Raisa, now. Now!” Adamas pinched her clit and sent her over the edge.

She keened as her pussy gripped his cock and milked him of his seed. Damaon’s thrusts pushed her deeper against the table, but she relished the pain, her body spasming into mini-orgasms. She was damp with sweat and her gown was full of wrinkles, but she didn’t care. She’d never felt more alive than at this moment.

Adamas withdrew from her and the bunched material at her waist fell along the lines of her body. “Raisa, sweet, are you okay?” He helped her stand up straight and, with a wriggle of his fingers, her gown was back to its pristine condition.

She smiled at him ruefully, her body still lax with languor. “Too bad you can’t take away the sweat.” She could also still feel the delicious downward slide of their combined juices on her inner thigh, the evidence of their recent joining.

“If we had time, Damaon and I would lick them away from your body.” Adamas adjusted his robe and, behind him, she saw Damaon wink at her.

She couldn’t believe it when her pussy clenched. She’d become an insatiable hussy since meeting them. “I don’t think you should say things like that,” she said, breathless. “Not now, anyway.”

Whatever Adamas might say was lost with an unfamiliar woman’s cheery greeting.

Raisa turned her head toward the sound. She flushed when her gaze encountered the strangers who were standing in the hall, having been admitted into the premises by one of the servants. By the greenish tinge to their features and clothes, however, she could deduce who the couple was.

Instead of the disdain Raisa thought she would see on Esmeralda's face, given her lovers' description of the Emerald Immortal's wife, the young face looking from her to Adamas to Damaon from behind a curtain of wavy, deep emerald hair was alight with curiosity and mischief. Raisa was startled at just how young the other woman was, based on her features. She couldn't be more than twenty, if at all.

"Dinner hasn't started yet, but I think the entertainment has already begun. You should've waited for us to arrive at least, Adamas. I think we missed a big part of it." The woman grinned, then stepped forward to hug Raisa. "Hi, I'm Esmeralda and this is my husband, Orin, since no one seemed to have the manners to introduce us. As you can see from our attire," a light, mock pout of her full lips made her look more adorable, "we're from the Emerald Palace."

"I guessed," Raisa said in a daze. She was having a hard time reconciling the reality with the dreaded depiction she'd received about them. Esmeralda seemed...nice, likeable even. If they were on Earth, Raisa was sure she would hit it off quite well with this lady in green. She just hoped the other woman hadn't caught the scent of sex in the air. "I'm Raisa Sheldon, from Earth and I..." Her voice trailed away, unable to voice out the reason for her mortal presence in the Diamond Palace. It was one thing to engage in the act with men who were her lovers, but quite another to announce the fact baldly to strangers, even if said strangers were her lovers' friends.

"No need to explain." Esmeralda squeezed her hand. "We understand and we're very thankful, though I don't think you find your purpose here that much of a hardship." Her eyes twinkled and Raisa was horrified to feel a blush coming on. In a quick turnabout, Esmeralda glared at Adamas. "Why didn't you tell us, you fool? We could've postponed this gathering by a few days."

Before Adamas could say anything, Raisa blurted out, "But...but you insisted on having it tonight."

Esmeralda's eyes narrowed and responded to her comment, though her gaze didn't leave Adamas. "Oh, I did, did I?" She turned to the tall man beside her, who had thus

far watched them in silence. "Orin, my dear husband, you have to defend my honor. Show this poor excuse of an immortal who's really the boss."

Here it comes. Raisa prepared to cringe, sure that the wrath of the mighty Orin would blow her clear across to the end of the hall. Adamas and Damaon were right after all. Esmeralda was a spoiled bitch who wouldn't hesitate to use her husband's might to browbeat the other immortals.

To Raisa's surprise, Orin merely grinned indulgently and dropped a hand around Esmeralda's waist. "You're getting predictable, wife. Maybe if you fall to your knees—"

Esmeralda cut him off with a light pat on his chest. "Darn. Only a hundred years and I'm boring you already. I don't know how to survive the next millennium. Maybe one day I'll find myself replaced and—"

"Never," Orin said in a fierce voice. He bent and engaged his wife in a long, deep kiss that spoke of love and affection.

Looking at them, Raisa felt several stabs of envy. When could she hope to find an enduring love like theirs? One hundred years. The kissing couple was so focused on each other that Raisa could say with surety no one else existed for them at this very moment. Or like Adamas and Damaon's relationship, which lasted for more than five hundred years and was still going strong.

Raisa was shaken out of her thoughts when Damaon said in an aggrieved voice, "I've always told you to get a room, but you just *never* listen."

His comment was the impetus the lip-locked pair needed to break apart.

"Hello to you too, Damaon," Esmeralda said, her green eyes dazed. She shook her head and, with a slight squeeze on Orin's arm, stepped toward Raisa and linked arms with her. "Come, Raisa, let's leave these overgrown boys to amuse themselves. I'm anxious to know all about you."

Raisa usually held herself aloof from strangers, but there was a warm open friendliness about Esmeralda that made Raisa feel immediately at ease with her. The apparent contradiction of the reality with Raisa's preconceived notions about the other

woman caused her to have a blinding realization. She stopped in the middle of their stroll and stared at the other woman. "This is the real you, isn't it?"

"What do you mean the real me?" Esmeralda asked in surprise.

Raisa laughed. "I think I've been duped. Adamas and Damaon led me to believe that you were a shrew and Orin a tyrant."

"I was right to call them boys." Esmeralda shook her head and smiled, a dimple flirting about her right cheek. "They never pass up any opportunity to tease me." There was nothing but affectionate indulgence in her tone.

The women resumed walking.

"Have you known them long?" If it was her hope that Esmeralda would give her further insights into the men's character, Raisa was destined to be disappointed.

"I only knew them because they were Orin's contemporaries," Esmeralda explained. "And even then, the immortals don't socialize very much. They still hold their once-every-century meeting to discuss business, but other than that, they don't meet at all. I tried, believe me. The year I became Orin's wife, we threw a party to celebrate our nuptials. All the immortals came, but maybe that was because they were curious about me." She giggled. "The next year, I threw another one, despite Orin's objections." She grimaced slightly. "I just wasted my time, because nobody came."

Raisa couldn't believe Adamas and Damaon would be so rude.

As though Esmeralda read her thoughts, she gestured dismissively in the direction behind them where they had left the men. "Oh, not them. They sent their regrets, because their star or something had brought in a woman the day before."

A sharp slash of pain gripped Raisa, striking her where it truly hurt. She shook the feeling away. Of course there were other women. Where were her brains? The men did say they needed a woman every fifty years. How could she have thought even for one minute that there weren't any woman before her?

Just as there would be even more women after her.

She just never spared any thought for it before and she didn't like thinking about it now.

"Raisa?" Esmeralda's hands gripped hers, steadying her.

She looked up into those wise and compassionate green eyes and saw understanding and a knowledge she instinctively shied away from, a knowledge that she knew if she acknowledged would only bring more pain.

She labored to remember what they were last talking about. Oh yes, a party. "I'm sorry your party bombed."

"Bombed?" Thankfully, the other woman followed her lead, her brows creasing at the unfamiliar term.

"Oh, that it failed. You're not from Earth?"

"No, I'm from Ragnon, same as Adamas and Damaon."

"Oh yes, I forgot. Damaon seemed to have said something like that earlier."

"After that fiasco, I started targeting smaller groups." Esmeralda wrinkled her nose as she looked around them. Some steps back, they had turned a corner and branched off into one of the smaller corridors that Raisa now recalled led to the kitchens. "At first, it was just the four of us—the Emerald and Diamond Immortals and me. Then, fifty years before, I was able to convince the Topaz Immortal and his wife to join in the yearly gathering and finally about three years before, I recruited the Sapphire Immortal and his daughter." She paused, thoughtful. "Or was that the other way around?" A dismissive sound escaped her. "No matter. My goal was to establish an active social life among the immortals, but when people's lives are as long as eternity, they tend to move slowly." She made a face. "No, that wasn't fair. They're very busy taking care of the gems and all that, as I'm sure you know."

Not really. Considering that Adamas and Damaon had taken just one afternoon off to catch up on their work in the twelve days she'd been here, Raisa believed the immortals could find the time to join the parties if they wanted. Maybe the problem was that there was no motivation for them to do so.

Dia passed them just then, bearing a plate of steaming egg custard in a transparent bowl. She smiled and nodded at them before continuing on her way to the parlor, where the numerous dishes were set out. When Raisa had peeked in earlier, she'd seen barbequed leg of lamb, venison with blueberries and roasted trout and artichokes with almond. Her mouth had watered from the fragrant smell. It had also made her wonder just how many they were expecting for dinner. Another thing she hadn't understood was why mainly Earth food was served, until Adamas informed her he had changed the menu to suit her taste.

That had earned him a kiss. Esmeralda's voice drew her back from thoughts of food. "So you're from Earth."

Though it wasn't a question, Raisa answered, "Yes."

"How'd you feel to find yourself here?"

Raisa laughed, remembering the first day. "I was stunned. Suddenly, fiction became fact, which made me wonder if fact will become fiction," she said. "You know, that Earth doesn't exist anymore and that I had been sleeping in a time capsule all this time and some machine was feeding me images of my fake 'real' life."

Esmeralda laughed with her. "I don't understand all that jargon, but I know the feeling. My mortal life had revolved around farming and taking care of my sister and nephew, then I was thrust into the opulence that was the Emerald Palace. I was overwhelmed, to say the least," she said. "Believe it or not, Orin was very stern and forbidding in those days, so...scary, especially when I first met him."

"He loves you very much." Again, that stab of envy.

Esmeralda's expression turned dreamy. "I know. He still can't take any jokes when it comes to our relationship though. He's afraid that I'll grow tired of living the life of an immortal and leave him. Silly man." Her tone was chiding, yet indulgent. "Doesn't he know yet that he's my life and I don't want to be anywhere but with him?"

"Maybe if you tell him enough..."

“Or if I stop making such jokes...” Esmeralda trailed a hand against the marble walls. “I’ve always wondered what it’s like living here.”

“Aren’t all the palaces the same?” Raisa asked.

“No,” Esmeralda said. “The building structure’s different and the color’s definitely unique. Mine’s green.”

“I never wondered,” Raisa said dryly and was surprised by Esmeralda’s squeal and impulsive hug.

“Oh, I like you.”

“Thank you,” Raisa stammered. “I...I was just thinking the same thing about you earlier.”

“Really?” Esmeralda’s eyes glowed. “If only—I could stay here for a time, then it would be a change of scene for me. White instead of green.” She had paused the merest beat, but Raisa had noticed and she knew what the other woman had originally meant to say.

If only Raisa were staying on a permanent basis, they might become good friends, best friends even.

But she wasn’t staying and she couldn’t. Only immortals could settle in the gem palaces and she...she was wasting her time wishing otherwise. “I think you’d grow bored before long, because Orin wouldn’t be here.” Raisa didn’t wait for Esmeralda to agree with her as she continued speaking, “I know what you mean though. Once, I was thinking that a landscape painting would look good on these walls, you know, to give a splash of color among all these pristine whiteness.”

Esmeralda’s eyes widened. “You’re so clever. My place could do with a snowscape or one with mountains, even flowers.”

“But Adamas—or was it Damaon?—said that they couldn’t weave any color but white,” Raisa said.

“And my husband can only create in green,” Esmeralda said in excitement. “So—”

Raisa turned and stared at her newfound friend in mounting exhilaration as she caught where Esmeralda was leading. "We'll get all the immortals to contribute a bit of color in one another's palace, whoever wants."

"Brilliant!"

"I wouldn't have thought it without you." Raisa shook her head ruefully. "Do you think Orin would agree?"

"I don't see why not, as we're not hurting anybody." Esmeralda grinned. "Did you know that the idea of gifting the servants with human emotions came from the Emerald Palace?"

Raisa smiled. "Somehow that doesn't surprise me."

"Orin was against it at first, but I was going crazy with all the never-ending, and at times inappropriate, cheerfulness. Once, I fell down a flight of stairs and the servants who were cleaning the ground level saw my fine tumbling act, but instead of rushing to my aid, they burst out laughing." Esmeralda's green eyes snapped with remembered ire. "I had to give specific and repeated instructions before one of the footmen went to the fields to find Orin. Apparently, none of the servants had ever set foot outside the palace before."

Raisa's hand flew to cover her mouth. "I didn't know such a terrible thing happened. Adamas and Damaon never mentioned it."

"Nobody knew," Esmeralda said in a rueful voice. "It wasn't hard to keep it a secret, considering the way the immortals isolate themselves from their peers. Anyway, I wasn't too badly injured, just some scrapes and bruises. I was mostly stunned. But because of that, Orin finally gave in to my wishes. He made some changes to the servants' programming and on the occasion of our wedding, a few months after my harrowing accident, all the immortals who came saw our "humanized" servants and they all want the same thing. I've never been a trendsetter back home. It was quite a new and exhilarating experience." She then made an impatient sound. "But enough

about me. I'm eager to start redecorating my home. What say we go back and persuade the men to agree to our scheme?"

Esmeralda's eyes gleamed with such malevolent glee that Raisa laughed, happy and carefree. She turned back toward the way they'd come, then linked arms with the other woman. "What are we waiting for? Let's go."

Chapter Six

“You really have a flair for this, Tap,” Raisa said, the admiration evident in her voice. “Such elegant design. I’ve never seen the like on Earth.”

She had also never seen a painting being created in such a manner. Normally, artists produced their masterpieces first, then searched for the best frames to showcase their magnificence. But in this instance, Esmeralda had decided that the wooden frame should be generated at the outset in order to provide the boundary for the immortals’ weaving of the landscape. Otherwise, they might let loose their doubtful creative talents and turn the pristine whiteness of the palace into a kaleidoscope of discordant colors.

Damaon’s shudder of horror gave the deciding vote.

Raisa and Esmeralda had returned to the central hall to find that the Topaz Immortal and his wife had arrived. Tap was short and rotund, pleasant and accommodating with an ever-present smile on his kind face. His wife Bronwyn, on the other hand, was his opposite, tall and thin and prone to contradict her husband on everything.

After the introductions, Esmeralda had presented their idea with such vibrant enthusiasm that the men fell under her spell and agreed immediately. Raisa would’ve been jealous of the way the other woman had Adamas and Damaon eating out of Esme’s hands if Raisa hadn’t been busy trying to hold in her laughter.

Now, at her words of praise, the portly man beamed. “I’ve always been interested in wood carving. Maybe I can take it up as a hobby.” He had used the shawl draped around his wife’s shoulders to make the frame of the painting.

Bronwyn snorted.

Sensing potential discord in the offing, Raisa interjected, “So now, Orin, it’s your turn. I want some grasses on this side of the painting.”

Orin lifted a questioning brow at his wife. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. I've always wanted a gown like Raisa's."

"I won't need that much material. Maybe all you'll get is a new skirt."

"Orin!" Esme exclaimed.

"Adamas?" Orin turned to the pale-skinned Diamond Immortal, who grinned at Esmeralda's impatience.

"I'm ready when you are, Orin, since that lover of mine couldn't stop smiling like a fool," Damaon said.

As Orin filled in the space Raisa had outlined with tall blades of lifelike grass that waved in the wind, Damaon spun a demure, knee-length skirt for Esmeralda from the pretty vase filled with tuberose that had graced the hall table. He made it all sparkly with tiny diamonds scattered like sequins against a backdrop of satin, which made Esmeralda smile with pleasure.

"Ooooh, you're all here!" an exuberant, girlish voice exclaimed from the doorway, interrupting their intense study of the "painting".

Raisa turned in time to see a child—no, a teenager—run toward them and throw herself into Damaon's arms. She gave him a smack on the cheek, then bestowed the same energetic greeting on Adamas. Raisa was amused to see the two men greet the girl with avuncular affection before they strode forward to shake hands with the man who had appeared behind the girl.

"Hello." Inquisitive sapphire eyes regarded her from a gamine face. "I'm Iderea." A slight grimace. "Or Ida, for short. I do so prefer Ida, though." This was said with an eager, persuasive smile that Raisa couldn't help smiling. "I'm the daughter of the Sapphire Immortal, that's my father over there," she said with a casual gesture over the congregated men, "and I'll be sixteen in three more months."

That couldn't be possible. Raisa stared at the male newcomer in a daze, her gaze roving over the straight physique, the hint of taut male flesh underneath his cerulean

robes and the attractive features with a bluish cast. On Earth, he could've passed for a man in his early thirties, not a man with a teenage daughter, though the numbers were possible if he'd sired a child in his late teens.

The other women, Iderea included, laughed merrily at her reaction. Raisa supposed the astonishment and disbelief she was feeling was reflected on her face.

"Sapphire has already been around for two millennia, but immortals age slowly, if at all," Esmeralda said, taking pity on her.

"Wow," Raisa said weakly. Even if Sapphire aged, he'd still be a handsome man. The intense melancholy in his azure eyes only made him more appealing, she decided as she was introduced to him. He nodded politely at her, aloof. She didn't miss the noticeable lack of a wife, or Iderea's mother, for that matter. But since she didn't know if she would be opening old wounds by asking, she kept her mouth shut.

Esmeralda laughingly cajoled Sapphire into contributing his thread for the painting and he spun a wide, flowing river beside the grassy embankment from Iderea's decorative belt. Everyone oohed and aghed at the resulting picture, which was a simple, yet amazingly lifelike landscape that could've used an image of a distant black mountain with snow caps. Adamas or Damaon could've done the snow caps, but there was no one to "paint" the mountain, unless the Onyx Immortal was coming. Which he wasn't.

Adamas clapped his hands and the chatter stopped as they faced him. He grinned. "I didn't know so many of you are artistically gifted. We have to thank Raisa for pushing your otherwise hidden talents to the fore." Everyone laughed. "We can make more paintings later, but for now, dinner's ready and I, for one, am famished."

Dinner was a warm, boisterous affair, full of laughter and conversation. Even Sapphire, who was seated across from Raisa, relented enough to smile every now and then. When Damaon would have led Raisa to sit between him and Adamas, Iderea had inveigled them into letting her take Raisa's place, relegating Raisa to Damaon's right side. Damaon had sported a huge frown on his face at this maneuver, but Raisa

shushed him, proclaiming she didn't mind. The girl was obviously something like a favorite niece and it was equally obvious she adored her unofficial "uncles" as she chattered first to Adamas, then to Damaon at regular intervals during the meal. As for Raisa, she enjoyed sitting next to Esmeralda, who regaled her with the story of her romance with Orin.

When they were finally lingering over coffee and tea, their bellies filled and the atmosphere relaxed, Raisa escaped to the washroom, feeling the effects of a full bladder. The food was sumptuous, every last dish, and she felt as though she were in gastronomic heaven the entire time.

The washroom was designed like those in five-star hotels, with plenty of space for a waiting area complete with comfortable cushioned chairs and mirrors. Going further in, she found a row of cubicles and taps. There must have been a lot of parties held in the palace in the old days.

As she was washing her hands, the door opened and Adamas and Damaon sauntered in. She smiled, pleasure coursing through her at the sight of them, but her heart really speeded up when Damaon locked the door.

"Wha-What are you doing?" Her eyes locked on them, she groped for a towel to wipe her hands dry.

"We decided we need a little exercise from all those—how do you Earthlings say it? Ca-calories. That's right—calories we've consumed." From the mirror, she saw Adamas took hold of her hands and patted them with the towel, his expression grave and solemn.

Until she saw the twinkle in his silver eyes.

"And we have a very pleasant exercise in mind," Damaon murmured against her ear.

The burgeoning hardness against her spine excited her.

"But your guests..." she protested weakly as she gripped Adamas' hands.

“They can entertain themselves for a few minutes.” Adamas kissed her, his tongue flicking gently against her lips, seeking permission to enter.

She could no more deny him than she could her need for air or food. She opened her mouth and welcomed the brush of his rough tongue against hers, hot and passionate and yet, unbelievably gentle. She wasn’t surprised when Damaon’s hands covered her bare breasts and he rolled her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers. Her hands lifted and gripped Adamas’ naked shoulders, then she moaned as she ran her hands down his muscled back, his skin smooth as satin.

Magic was so convenient to have around, especially when one was in a hurry to make love.

She was so intent on the kiss that she wasn’t aware of Adamas removing her hands from his body until he wasn’t there anymore. She opened her eyes, blinked and saw that he had ensconced himself in one of the plush armchairs. His fingers crooked invitingly, but she was drawn by his smile and the turgid length of his cock lying against his stomach.

She dragged Damaon, whose cock bumped her ass teasingly, along with her. She rubbed against him and pushed her hips back, making him groan.

Adamas released a hoarse, unwilling laugh. “Stop playing, you two, and come here. I’m hungry.”

“After all that you’ve eaten earlier?” she managed to tease. Fire raced in molten streams through her body, stimulated both by Damaon’s caresses and the stark lust in Adamas’ eyes.

“This is different.”

She clambered up the armchair. “Yes, so very different...” she murmured in assent as she sank down on him. His cock was a perfect fit within her, filling her up so completely.

Adamas sighed and nuzzled her breasts, then opened his mouth over one rosy peak and proceeded to tease it further. She cried out. “Adamas...oh God...”

“Sh.” His teeth rasped over the burgeoned bud, shooting pain through her that mingled with the pleasure arising from her movement on his cock.

Damaon stopped her with a hand on her back, then pushed her down further so that he could ease his creamed cock into her hole. His thick cock slipped past the tight ring of her anus and she moaned with rising pleasure. Even in her wildest days, she’d never taken two men simultaneously, but she was becoming to realize that this was her favorite position—two hard cocks within her, thrusting into her at the same time. The friction of their rubs against the thin membrane that separated her channel and her hole increased her bliss to unimagined heights.

All thoughts flew out of her head as the men resumed the rhythm of their plunges, their breathing labored as they drove in and withdrew, over and over in a cadence that stirred up the tension in her belly. Her clit rubbed against Adamas’ groin with each stroke, sparking a delicious swirl of delight that prodded her upward journey toward the ultimate release.

Each man drove deep into her, plumbing her heat, when all of a sudden, the pace changed, becoming fast and shallow. The pressure in her clit increased until she screamed and exploded into jerky, uncontrollable motions, her orgasm riding her high. Adamas bit down on her nipple and she was shoved higher on the crest of her ecstasy. The men soon followed, one after another, both her pussy and her anus not letting up on them until they’d shot their load into her.

She slumped against Adamas, her pussy still throbbing around his cock. Not long after, the pleasure faded away and she was made aware of the heavy feeling in her stomach. “I still feel so full,” she moaned.

Damaon withdrew from her. “That should teach you not to eat so much next time.” There was a hint of laughter in the rogue’s voice. She’d kill him when she was recovered. “Maybe we should do some more exercise,” he went on to suggest, his hand palming her buttocks.

Adamas smoothed her hair. "Let's just sit here for some time," he soothed. "You'll feel better in a little while."

"I think she should walk around," Damaon contradicted. "It'll help in the digestion." His hands were gentle as he wiped the sweat from her body with a towel. She hadn't been pampered since her mother had fallen ill and she'd almost forgotten how good it felt. "Here, sit up."

Though his touch was impersonal, she tingled when he stroked her erogenous zones. Her nipples puckered, and she swore he lingered on the taut buds. His thumb even rasped a caress across one, though his face was impassive when she glanced at him. He helped her to stand. She bit back a protest when Adamas slid out of her and her pussy was empty once more. A wriggle of Damaon's fingers and they were all clad once more in the clothing they'd worn earlier.

They walked with her, round and round the small room until she was more like her usual self. She gave them a slight push toward the door. "I think you should go back first."

"Don't tell me you still feel shy that the others know about us," Adamas teased.

Since she was neither immortal nor the men's wife, the other adults must know the real reason for her presence, but since they still treated her with respect, Raisa found she could accept it as it was no different from appearing at a party as someone's girlfriend. However, Raisa would rather not be responsible for lifting the veil of innocence she saw lurking in certain sapphire depths. "No, but I'd rather Iderea doesn't know. She's still a child."

Damaon's brow lifted. "At sixteen? I remember reading that teenagers as early as fifteen or fourteen have been engaging in sex in your world."

Raisa shook her head emphatically. "But not Iderea and I'd rather she learn about sex elsewhere."

Both men laughed, indulgence coloring their tone.

“All right.” Adamas bent to kiss her mouth. “I can’t wait for this party to be over so we can go to bed.”

Damaon claimed his own kiss. “Same here.” He traced her lower lip with his thumb and winked, then followed Adamas out of the washroom.

Raisa stared at their retreating backs, sure that hunger blazed from her eyes. Damaon’s butt was to die for, but underneath the lust, something else was gathering force within her, something like despair. She slumped against the pillar and bit back a moan of anguish. With each lovemaking session, each expression of tenderness and consideration, the men drew her into a tight web of sexual and emotional intimacy. Yet, in two days, whether she liked it or not, she would be leaving them. The thought filled her with a strange panic.

Once, she wanted nothing more than to be gone from this strange place, even with the threat of joblessness hanging over her back on Earth. But the palace was slowly growing on her. It didn’t seem cold anymore, but warm and—she couldn’t say inviting—comfortable.

How was she going to give up Adamas and Damaon when the time came? What would the rest of her life be like without them?

She had no time to ruminate on these questions because Ida walked in just then, but instead of heading for the cubicles, she remained in the waiting area.

Raisa’s brows lifted as she watched the girl pace. “Aren’t you going in?”

“No.” Ida groaned. “I’m so full I can barely stand, but I need to walk off the food I’ve consumed. I’ll surely grow fat if I stay here on a permanent basis.”

Raisa eyed the girl’s reed-thin figure. “You can still afford a few pounds.”

“For now,” Ida agreed. “Judging by your white gown, you’re here to ask Adamas and Damaon for a favor, aren’t you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re obviously not an immortal, because of your color, so you must be a mortal who has come to ask for help. That always happens, for those who are determined and persistent enough.” Ida nodded knowledgeably and Raisa was reminded of Esmeralda’s story. Better to go along with what Ida thought, as Raisa didn’t want to talk about sex to this child-woman. “And since you wore a white gown, then you must’ve come to Adamas and Damaon, and not to Tap or Orin. Did they give you what you’ve come for?”

As it was *her favor* that Adamas and Damaon needed, and not the other way around, Raisa didn’t know how to answer the girl. So she decided to evade. “Um, the fourteen days are not yet up and —”

“I know. My father works that way too.” Her eyes glinted in mischief. “Have you met any of the servants?”

“Only Dia,” Raisa answered, wondering at the reason for her question.

“There’s also Desmond and Diam and Mondo, and a whole lot of names. I don’t know where I pulled them from.”

Raisa leaned against the sink and stared at her in shock. “You — You’re the one who gave them the names?”

“Yes, isn’t it ingenious of me?” Ida chortled in delight. “I did it last year, when we came over for dinner.”

And all the while Adamas and Damaon thought the deed was done by one of the practical jokers among the immortals. The culprit was much closer at hand.

“Do you think the names were a good idea?”

Raisa focused on Ida’s pleading face, her voice matching her expression. There was a hint of uncertainty there and an unconscious plea for approval that reminded Raisa of how young Ida really was.

The teenager continued, “It would really set me apart from the other immortals, because only *I* gave all the servants back home a name. I thought that after I’m married,

I'll be living here as well, so I might as well start the process early and get used to calling the servants here by name and –"

"Married?" Raisa gasped, shock and pain exploding within her. "To Adamas and Damaon?"

"Oh yes," Ida answered happily. "I've been betrothed to them for a long time now."

Chapter Seven

Those cheating, lying snakes!

All the time they were telling her how pitiful they were, how much they needed her in order to preserve their life, they had a fiancée tucked away somewhere, an innocent, beautiful girl whom they were betraying every time they had sex with Raisa. That Adamas and Damaon couldn't possibly have sex with their fiancée since the girl was a minor didn't assuage Raisa's rising anger much. That they didn't even bother to inform her—

"I found out about it by accident," Ida confessed, her face suffused with the warm, red glow of a blush. "I was rummaging around in Father's safe for some jewelry Mother had left for me when I saw this official-looking document with the signatures of the Sapphire and Diamond Immortals. I thought maybe Father would tell me when I reached the legal age, which would be in about two years time. I was content to wait, but I thought I should get to know my intended before that time, you know."

Heartsick, Raisa nodded, as it seemed Iderea was waiting for a comment. Each word the girl was saying stabbed her like a freshly sharpened knife, the cut piercing straight to the bone. The pain was worse than the anger, debilitating her and almost causing her to fall on her knees. It was only by sheer effort of will that she stayed upright and, she hoped, her face stayed expressionless as she listened to Ida prattle on.

Raisa remembered how she didn't like to think of the women Adamas and Damaon had touched before or those who would come after. With searing hurt thundering in her, she realized she didn't like knowing there would only be *one woman* after her either. No, she liked it much, much less. Somehow, knowing there would be a lot of women after her, where each woman would be nameless and faceless after a while, had

been much easier to bear. If she couldn't touch their hearts, then it was some comfort to know that other women couldn't either.

But now this.

Yet, one logical, objective, reluctant part of her recognized how perfect Ida was for them. As the daughter of an immortal, she already knew the ins and outs of a gem demesne, she knew how to manage the servants, what a good wife needed to do to assist her husbands in the important task of gem creation and management and more importantly, Ida was already adjusted to the idea of a life that stretched into eternity.

All the things Raisa was not.

Damn, what was she thinking? She couldn't go down that dangerous mental path. She had to be clear in her mind—there was absolutely no comparison between her and Ida, none at all. Raisa had no hold on them. As far as she could see, she was just a woman to Adamas and Damaon, someone to assuage their needs, someone to heal them and bring them back from the brink of death this one time. She was a notch on their bedposts, one of the many women the calling star had sent to ensure that the universe would continue to have diamond immortals to serve them with the coveted gems.

It hurt, but the truth always had that effect.

"This is just so perfect," cried the child-woman whose whole life had been mapped out by a far-seeing father. Ida grabbed hold of Raisa's lifeless hands and began to twirl her about the room in ecstatic joy.

Raisa made some excuse to leave the washroom, as she didn't want Ida to witness the tears that she couldn't hold back anymore. Once she had control of herself, she returned to the parlor to find the immortals chatting and laughing as before, Damaon making a ribald joke that had his audience in stitches.

Standing for a moment in the doorway, Raisa felt the widening chasm between the people sitting at the table and her. For them, nothing had changed in the few minutes

she'd been gone, but her world had turned upside down and would never be the same again.

She didn't know how she got through the rest of the evening, when they adjourned to the music room soon after her enlightening trip to the washroom. Ida returned and performed on the piano and Bronwyn took a turn at the harp. Adamas and Damaon sang a few duets, their deep, baritone voices sweeping over her in a melodious caress and she found she couldn't take her eyes away from them. Several times, Raisa felt Esmeralda's concerned, questioning gaze on her, but Raisa pretended not to see and kept her steadfast stare on her lovers. As much as she was still reeling from Ida's revelation, Raisa couldn't help the tinge of regret that her budding friendship with Esmeralda wouldn't bear fruit.

Finally — *finally!* — the immortals made move to leave.

"I'm so glad I met you." Ida wrapped her in an exuberant embrace. "Good luck."

Raisa hugged her back, unable to hate her, because she recognized one important truth — Adamas and Damaon needed Sapphire's daughter. They needed her youthful enthusiasm and cheerfulness to keep the demons at bay. With Ida permanently in their lives, they needn't fear the gradual hardening of their hearts and all its resultant consequences. They could lead normal human lives, or as normal as it was for men who could live for eternity.

For that, Raisa could even love her, because... The sudden realization stunned her and she squeezed Esmeralda so tight the other woman winced.

Not that she loved them. No, she had already guessed that from the amount of anguish she suffered when the news of their impending marriage was revealed. Maybe even before then, when she found herself craving to know more about them, a craving that had gone beyond the demands of her body, a craving that was rooted in her soul.

What startled her was the kind of love she bore for them. An all-encompassing love that made her want only the best for them, even if it meant letting them go and being with another woman, though her heart bled at the prospect. It didn't help that she

didn't have any choice in the matter, that she was powerless and helpless to prevent it. Her control lay in another area—she wouldn't burden them with avowals of her love, because she knew it would be unwelcome. They only wanted her for the service she could give them—had *already* given them. That was very clear from the fact that they had hardly left the bed in the past twelve days. Nor would she cry or beg for them to allow her to stay on after the fourteen days were up, no matter how much she wanted to be with them.

She *would* move on, when it was time.

But until then, they were hers to do as she wished—within reason, of course—and she *knew* just how she wanted to spend the next two days of their time together.

No. A sudden thought stilled all her plans. She couldn't make love with them anymore. They weren't free men, as she had once thought. Pain gripped her as she realized she couldn't touch them anymore, as she willed, or laugh with them or—

“Call me,” Esmeralda whispered against her ear. “If you need to talk.”

Raisa nodded and thanked her, though she had no intention to do so. There was no point in cultivating a friendship that wouldn't last.

“You and Esmeralda seem to hit it off,” Adamas observed as they waved goodbye to the Emerald Immortal and his wife.

“She reminds me of my best friend back on Earth,” Raisa lied, unwilling to let him place any importance on a relationship that could never be. She would only be devastated when the time came. “Maybe that's the reason I feel so close to her. I can't wait to tell Shirley about my adventure here.”

Something flickered in Adamas' silver eyes, but he didn't say anything else.

“Eager to be home?” Damaon shut the door and faced her. His arrogant stance was lazy, though she had the feeling something dangerous lurked beneath his nonchalant façade. The intense way he was looking at her heated her blood, made her forget—almost—about Iderea.

“Oh yes.” *No, I want to stay.* A cry from the heart that wasn’t heard. “I miss the house where I grew up in, my friends, my –”

“Boyfriend?” Adamas asked in a silky voice. “I never asked.”

“No boyfriend. I would never have agreed to have sex with you if I were committed to someone else.” *Which is more than I can say about you.* Yet, how could she believe them to be that kind of men? Could Ida have been mistaken?

“Not even to save our lives?”

Would she? “I think that’s a question best left unanswered,” she answered shakily, not entirely sure how she would’ve responded.

“Fair enough. What we think we would do and how we act when the situation is upon us might not be the same anyway that it’s moot to discuss it.” Adamas slid an arm about her waist and nuzzled her neck. “What say we go to bed? You look so delectable I wanted to gobble you up the moment you returned from the washroom.” He pressed her against his body, letting her feel the stirring hardness against her stomach. “If it wasn’t for Ida’s presence, I would’ve carried you off to bed.”

She delighted in his heat, in his nearness and, for a single moment, she allowed herself to remain in his arms, but with great reluctance, she pushed him away. She paced the hall in nervous agitation, wondering how to broach the subject. “Speaking of Ida, did you know she was the one who gave your servants their names?”

She daren’t look at Adamas, but she could sense his confused frown.

“Why, that impertinent chit.” The admiring tone in Damaon’s voice made her chest hurt. “And to think, I was busy cutting the Ruby Immortal to pieces in my mind for this practical joke.”

“Why would she do that?” Adamas asked in bewilderment. “She has always struck me as a nice, if lively, child. She would’ve asked for our permission before doing anything that might displease us.”

“Not if she’s going to be your wife soon,” she blurted out, seizing the opportunity.

The men looked equally stunned.

Could Ida have lied to her? Raisa hadn't thought of the possibility, as she couldn't detect any devious bone in her. For one stunning instant, she knew she would forgive Ida the torment and anguish the girl had caused her, if Raisa could only make love to her lovers one last time before she left.

"What?" A thunderstruck Damaon asked.

"You didn't sign a betrothal contract with her father?"

"No!" The word burst out of Adamas, who ran an angry, trembling hand through his bone-white hair.

Hope blossomed in her. She hadn't known how intoxicating the feeling was before. She supposed one had to be in the depths of despair to be able to appreciate the emotion fully.

Adamas stilled. "Unless..."

Hope hung in the balance, afraid to move.

"Unless what?" Damaon's eyes narrowed at him, silver orbs daring Adamas to declare that the betrothal existed.

"Unless Iamond, the previous Diamond Immortal," Adamas clarified, shooting Raisa a glance, "signed the agreement."

Hope plummeted.

"And you have to honor his obligations?" she asked.

"Most of the contracts he had signed provided for such an eventuality."

"I see." She summoned a smile and pasted it on her lips. "Well, it seems you have a wedding to celebrate in about two years time, assuming eighteen is the age of majority."

"It is," Damaon confirmed absentmindedly, as he traded a long stare with Adamas. "You go to bed, *shikima*. Adamas and I have a lot to discuss."

And just like that, she was rendered inconsequential, set aside until the day of her departure arrived.

Could she leave earlier, as in now? After all, only two days were left to their bargain and, from what she could see, both Adamas and Damaon had fully recovered.

She wanted to ask, but before she could open her mouth, Damaon had clasped an arm around Adamas' shoulders and led him away, their heads bent in discussion.

* * * * *

Four hours later, there was still no sign of them. Raisa quelled the surge of disappointment and bitterness, then turned to face Dia, who was cleaning the spare bedroom for her. She would've asked the servant to prepare a room for her earlier, but hope that Adamas and Damaon would come and assure her the situation was nothing but a misunderstanding, had stopped her from giving the order too soon. The room was located several doors down the corridor from the one that the men were using and, with a hopeless sigh, Raisa knew she wouldn't be missed, not when Adamas and Damaon had each other, not when they could anticipate their wedding to a virginal young girl they could mold to their own ideal of a woman.

The servant girl tucked in the ends of the bedsheet under the mattress to hold the linen in place. "There." She stepped back to admire the stretched, wrinkle-free ivory sheet.

"Thank you, Dia." The bed looked very inviting, especially to her tired, worn-out self, but she could find no pleasure in it. Any bed without Adamas and Damaon appeared boring and dull. Would it be the same case on Earth?

The maid collected her cleaning materials, then with a shy smile, she asked, "Does Mistress require anything else?"

Raisa shook her head. "No, thank you."

The diamond servant left her to her thoughts and misery.

* * * * *

"I don't get it," Damaon said for what was probably the tenth time in the last hour, when they had finally found the betrothal contract. "Why would Iamond insert the contract inside his diary?"

"Nothing I've read sheds light on the matter yet." Adamas rubbed his exhausted eyes, then turned the page. He was seated in one of the plush, comfortable chairs in his office, reading Iamond's diary, which was a boring detail of how many diamonds were harvested in a certain day, the number that were spoiled and some interesting tidbits on the care of the gems. If they had read his diary sooner, they wouldn't have lost so many crops the first few years they were on the job. *If* they had known the diary existed. As it was, they had gone through the office twice before they discovered the secret compartment on the underside of the desk. "Now be quiet, continue your pacing or whatever."

"Let's tear the book in two and I could help you read."

"You're talking sacrilege. You know I'd never let you do that." But he only said it absentmindedly, his gaze already back on the pages before him. He didn't know what Damaon thought about the betrothal—Adamas was in fact afraid to ask—because should they have no choice but to wed Iderea, he and Damaon would be in the clear regarding their health on a permanent basis. They would benefit greatly from the marriage and yet, something inside him clamored for Raisa. She wasn't just a body to warm their bed at night or the woman sent by the diamond star to heal them—in the short time they had with her, she had become much more to him.

And he was looking through the diary hoping to find a way out of the betrothal.

Would she consent to stay should they offer her immortality? He remembered the look of longing in her green eyes as she spoke of the home and friends she'd left behind and a sick, desperate feeling coalesced within him.

He pushed the thought away. One thing at a time. If the betrothal agreement was iron clad, then there was no point thinking and planning for things that could never be,

when first and foremost, they might need to make the extra effort to persuade Raisa to stay, assuming that Damaon agreed –

“Adamas!”

“What?” Startled, he dropped the diary onto his lap. He glanced up, surprised to see Damaon glowering at him, his skin pale beneath his tan.

“I’ve been calling you for the past minute. If you hadn’t responded just then, I would’ve gone over and shaken you. I thought...I thought –” Damaon glanced away and his hand shook as he ran his hand through his bone-white hair.

Adamas rose to envelop his terrified lover within the circle of his protecting arms. “I’m sorry.” He pressed his lips against Damaon’s cheek. “I’m alive and well. Raisa healed me, just as she had you. I was just deep in thought. I never meant to frighten you.”

Damaon turned his head so that their mouths met in a long kiss of comfort. “Don’t scare me like that again. I can’t take it.” He rested his head against Adamas. Then, as though the words were being dragged from him, he said, “There’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you.”

“What is it?”

Damaon released a short sigh. “Actually, Raisa was the one who pointed it out to me. I thought...please believe me, I thought I was doing you a favor. I didn’t want you to die, in case the calling star didn’t send a woman in time, just like it had happened with Iamond. So...” Damaon struggled out from within his arms.

Adamas released him with reluctance, his confusion growing as he watched his mate pace the room in nervous agitation.

“I lied to you.”

The bald statement sent a wave of shock through his system. As far as Adamas knew, they had never deceived each other.

“I’m sorry, so sorry.” Damaon stopped and faced him, honesty shining from the silver eyes so like his own. “You are every bit as good as I am in the field, Adamas. Even without experience, be assured that the diamonds will respond to you, because you *are* the Diamond Immortal. The only reason I said you were good only for planning and strategies, thus keeping you confined to the office was because—”

“Increased exposure to the diamonds speeded up the pace of the hardening.” Adamas didn’t quite know what he was feeling. Gratitude, certainly, that his lover sought to protect him. Relief because the matter was a small one and easily forgivable. Yet there was a slight feeling of being cheated of the chance to work more in direct contact with the gems that he was supposed to be the caretaker of. Not that he minded doing research and using his brain to concoct suitable planting arrangements. In fact, he quite enjoyed it. He stared at Damaon with a thoughtful frown, which made his mate fidget uneasily. Good. Damaon deserved to be taken down a peg or two. He was too arrogant for his own good. Adamas let the silence lengthened as he strolled back to settle his frame in the plush cushioned seat. “You have to be punished.”

The relief that emanated from Damaon was palpable. “Anything you want. A back rub? Alone time with Raisa?” He hesitated. “If you want me to marry Iderea, leaving you free, I’m amenable as well. No sense in both of us feeling obligated.”

Adamas’ heart sank.

Damaon wanted to marry Iderea?

Chapter Eight

Much as he loved Damaon, Adamas wished they were in the same boat, as the fight would be easier. They'd also make a much stronger case, but how could he hope to convince Raisa to stay if Damaon didn't want her around? Jerking to a straight sitting position in the armchair, he blurted out, "Raisa means that little to you?"

"Hell's gems, Adamas, what do you want me to do?" For the first time, Adamas saw the tormented anguish in Damaon's eyes. "We're hemmed in on one side with this betrothal contract of Iamond and on the other with Raisa's subtle hints of going back to Earth. We can't be without honor." Damaon's hands closed into fists and he paced once again, a helpless fury projecting from him. "And *we can't force her to stay* if she doesn't want to." Damaon dropped slowly to his knees, as though his feet couldn't support his weight anymore. He swallowed hard, a forlorn figure against the backdrop of scintillating diamonds. "I...I think I love her, the same way, yet differently, from the way I love you. Her very presence healed my soul and made me laugh again, but it's more than that." He closed his eyes and rolled back his head. "This emotion is very strange to describe, but I know that if she...leaves, it would devastate me. I want her to stay for always. Yet...and yet..." He slammed a clenched fist against the diamond-studded wall, uncaring that the tiny gems cut into his flesh. "Until this situation regarding the betrothal is resolved, there isn't anything I can offer her, nothing I can say to induce her to stay."

Damaon's every word and emotion scraped over raw nerves and resonated in his heart. "Sapphire has always looked out for us," Adamas spoke slowly, talking out their situation. Maybe if they heard the words, some wild idea would pop into their heads. "Especially during our first few years in the job. He even helped us to clean up our messes. We do owe him a lot and our marrying Iderea would be one way to show our

gratitude. I think Sapphire means to ensure that his daughter remain an immortal forever with such an arrangement.”

“Then all the more he won’t consent to break the betrothal.” Damaon groaned. “He has us by the balls.”

“Then why hasn’t he reminded us about it, with Ida so close to eighteen?” Adamas’ keen brain pointed out this flaw. He shook his head. “Sapphire must have some other plans.”

Damaon threw up his hands in exasperation. “I don’t know. I haven’t been an immortal long enough to know how one’s mind works.”

That was a show of temper. Adamas peered at his mate closely, wondering if the hardening was starting again, which shouldn’t have, as Raisa was still with them. Even if it did, it shouldn’t have progressed so fast.

A moment later, he relaxed. Damaon was just blowing off steam, in light of their predicament. Maybe if he were doing something productive instead of hanging around waiting for Adamas to finish reading...

“Tell you what,” Adamas suggested. “I’m just a few pages away from the end. Why don’t you call Sapphire and chat him up?”

“In the middle of the night?” Damaon asked him in horror, the expression on his face suggesting that Adamas was crazy.

Adamas let a wicked grin lift the corners of his lips. “Give me a better idea to throw him off balance.”

Damaon didn’t know how he found himself in front of the flat diamond screen, waiting for Sapphire to answer his call, while Adamas was safely out of reach of Sapphire’s expected fury, reading Iamond’s precious diary in the corner. Each immortal’s office and bedroom were equipped with such a screen, to make sure they could be readily apprised of things in case of an emergency. Adamas had once thought

the one in the bedroom was for courting immortals, until they learned that only a male could be a gem immortal. Perhaps that was generalizing things a bit, as they drew their conclusion from the fact that all the gem immortals they were acquainted with were males and the women their wives.

Sapphire's sleepy, grumpy face winked into view. "This had better be good, immortal," he growled. The advanced technology in the screen enabled his voice to come out full-bodied and replete with nuances.

It was so rare to see Sapphire exhibit any expression that, inappropriate as it may be, Damaon grinned. "Called you away from a woman?"

"My sleep, which I need more."

"We received some distressing news tonight, Saff, and we thought it's only right that you commiserate with us."

"That's your problem, Damaon. I'm going back to bed." He reached out to push the button that would cut their connection.

"Even when Ida's the cause of it?"

"What did that daughter of mine do this time?"

Beneath the grouchiness ran a hint of fatherly amusement. Any hope Damaon might have that Sapphire would be amenable to break the agreement evaporated. "She knew about the betrothal contract you made with Iamond."

Sapphire cursed, then demanded, "You told her?"

The immortal's reaction was so unexpected that despite himself and his cautions, hope sprang within Damaon again. "No. When Iamond passed over the functions of the job, he neglected to mention this tiny piece of paper." Damaon held up the betrothal contract to the screen. "We found it in his diary, which he kept hidden away in a secret place. It would seem that Iderea found your copy of it though."

"Great." Sapphire closed his eyes briefly. "How do you feel about the idea?"

"Hell's gems, Saff," Damaon exploded, the fury and helplessness rising and coalescing within him in an unpleasant maelstrom. "She's a child who we watched grow up. I know I also speak for Adamas in that it's rather hard for us to think of her in a romantic way."

"My wife was the one who had insisted on it, because she couldn't bear the thought of her daughter dying in her arms. But if Iderea were married to an immortal, she could share his life and we'd all be one big happy family. But Rhea died too soon, from childbirth as it turned out," Sapphire revealed, his face haggard and bitter. "What irony."

Sapphire must have loved his wife very much, Damaon realized in shock, as nothing of a personal nature had thus far been shared between them, despite their many business dealings.

"I never intended to hold you to that contract, Damaon, because Iamond was the one who made it with us. It isn't fair to you or to Adamas. Moreover, knowing that you and Adamas are a couple, I'm not sure I want to subject my daughter to a threesome."

Damaon started to breathe easier. He hadn't known it would be so easy to get Sapphire to break the contract. He didn't even have to say anything. Now, he and Adamas could concentrate on persuading Raisa to stay. There was only one way she could do that, of course. Would she like living a long life? Would she like having bone-white hair and eyebrows? Would she—

Sapphire's heavy sigh brought him out of pleasant daydreams. "But this changes things, Damaon."

"What? You can't..." he stammered.

"I don't like to disappoint my daughter, Damaon. She's obviously not averse to the idea."

"How do you know that?"

"Three years ago, she pleaded with me to join the small gathering Esmeralda was having at her place. I wondered why at the time, because thus far, Iderea had been

content to play with the servants in the palace. Later, Esmeralda applauded me on having a good tactician for a daughter, because apparently, she and Ida had spoken some days before and in the course of their conversation, Iderea had subtly wrangled the invitation to the monthly parties from her. She must have seen the contract then and looked for ways to get to know you both better." Sapphire gave a tired shrug. "That she hadn't voiced her objections to the contract means she approves of you. I know she likes you. Both of you. She's always prattling about the gifts you've given her, the conversations you've had..." He sighed. "I was blind for not seeing the affection she harbors for you is not that of a niece for her favorite uncles but that of a young girl in the blushes of her first infatuation. If she hasn't changed her mind about marrying you by the time she's eighteen, I don't see how I could object. She'll be old enough to make her own decision then."

"But...but..." Words and feelings were all jumbled up inside Damaon and he couldn't arrange them fast enough to articulate what he wanted to say. He was stunned at how swiftly the tide turned against him, just when he thought he had everything he wanted in his hands. "You can't do this to us, Saff. Not only would it be unfair to Adamas and me, you're not doing your daughter any favor. We don't love her—"

"You feel affection for her," Sapphire cut him sharply in rebuke. "That's enough for now. Your affection would soon grow into love. I've seen how you and Adamas cared for her these two years. You've always attended her birthday parties—"

Birthday parties with only Adamas and me as guests. Recalling Ida's happy laughter upon seeing them, Damaon realized that even as a child, she was ever one to see a glass half full. Surely, she wouldn't be devastated should he and Adamas break the betrothal.

Sapphire was still speaking, "And the gifts you gave her delighted her heart—"

"Still, married life is different, Saff." Damaon wanted to tear his hair out and he was sure Sapphire could hear the frustration in his voice. He was fighting a losing battle here, his heart sinking with every word that came out of Sapphire's mouth, obliterating the earlier surge of hopeful joy and anticipation.

“Damaon.”

He turned around and faced Adamas, who was staring at him with a strange look.
“What?”

“I think I know why Iamond placed the betrothal contract in his diary.”

* * * * *

She was a little girl again and her parents had brought her to the carnival. She clambered atop a white wooden horse all by herself and held tight to the pole protruding from the horse’s head. Joy and excitement bubbled within her and she waved to her parents, who waved back at her with smiling faces. The music started, catchy and lively and she swayed in time to the movement of her horse, slow and sure as the carousel wound its way in a circular direction. She passed her parents and waved again, chortling. The horse picked up speed, trotting at first, then cantering, until it was galloping down a green meadow with lush verdant grasses, the wind blowing in her face and streaming her hair behind her. Exhilaration welled up within and she laughed with carefree abandon.

Yet, a vague sense of unease shadowed her happiness, some tragedy she should remember but didn’t.

Bam!

She almost fell from her seat. She pulled hard on the reins, causing her steed to dance about before it stood quiet. She squinted in the distance, where some black smoke was rising. Was that an explosion?

Bam! Bam! Bam!

She jerked awake, heart pounding with fright. She looked around at the unfamiliar room, then calmed when she remembered where she was and why she was sleeping alone. Pain beat at her like a battering ram that was powered by an Energizer battery and though she curled up in a tight ball as she closed her eyes, she refused to give in to tears.

Bam!

Awake, she recognized the sound of slamming doors. Now that she had identified the strange sound, she relegated it to the back of her mind. She remembered her dream. The happy times with her parents had gone, but the memories would live on in her heart. With Adamas and Damaon, however...

She bit her lip as a fresh onslaught of pain surged against her.

Tomorrow would come soon enough and after tomorrow, freedom. The word tasted bitter on her tongue.

She drifted into an uneasy sleep.

She was dreaming again – a different one this time – and she never wanted to wake up. She'd gone to bed alone, empty and aching, but Damaon was now cuddling her against his hot, naked skin. So warm. He dropped a gentle kiss on her forehead and brushed her hair back from her face. She murmured his name and snuggled against him, sighing with satisfaction.

They seemed to be moving somewhere, but she didn't care. All she knew was that she was where she wanted to be.

Through a fog misting her senses, she heard Damaon saying, his voice rumbling beneath her ear, "I don't want to force her."

"She murmurs your name in her sleep, so I don't think any force would be necessary," came Adamas' wry voice.

She wanted to reassure him that she loved them both, that she didn't play favorites, but the slight worry faded away as she snuggled deeper against Damaon's chest. It felt so good to be held like that, as though she was loved and cherished and precious. She would let herself bask in the illusion for a little while longer. It wouldn't hurt, would it? After all, it was just a dream.

Damaon laid her down on a soft bed, but when he slid his hands from her, she clutched tight at him, protesting. He laughed. "I'm not leaving you, I promise."

“Just hop into bed and magick away your clothes,” Adamas said.

“She’s sleeping!” Damaon sounded indignant.

“What does that have to do with the other?”

“I have no hope of controlling my wayward cock without my clothes on.”

“As the Earthlings say, just go with the flow, mate.”

Damaon muttered something unintelligible, then the next thing she knew, he was sliding his bare skin against hers. Sensuous and silken, he made her purr.

What a wonderful dream this was turning out to be.

He buried his face at the side of her neck and kissed his way up to her ear. His breath was hot and tickled her ear, but she lost the urge to giggle when he caught her soft lobe between his teeth. Instead, a raw moan escaped her when he sucked on the appendage and she moaned again when someone—it must be Adamas—ran his mouth up her calf, pausing to place kisses here and there, arousing her with each sure touch and not stopping completely until he reached her aching pussy.

In one dim corner of her mind, she knew something was wrong, but she couldn’t place it. She was drowning in sensations so sharp she couldn’t believe she was still dreaming.

She sobbed when Adamas insinuated his mouth against her wet folds and caressed her most intimate places with short, stabbing jabs of his pointed tongue. At the same time, Damaon’s large hand covered her breast and pinched her nipple, sending a dizzying mixture of pain and pleasure shooting through her. Adamas’ tongue rasped over her clit and swirls of pleasure eddied through her body. She whimpered. He curled his tongue around her clit and sucked and she splintered into a thousand shining diamond bits—

Her eyes popped open and she knew it was no dream. Her body was writhing in ecstasy beneath two firm male forms and one hand clasped Adamas’ head close to her pussy. His skillful tongue never stopped its marauding strokes—

The vague sense of unease coalesced into a hard knot of rejection.

“No!” She cried as she pushed them away. Though she dislodged them a little, they returned to her body with a tenacity that she feared she wouldn’t be able to resist. She gasped out, “Please...stop...”

Their heads lifted and both men wore bewildered expressions.

“Raisa? What’s the matter?” Adamas questioned from between her legs.

She drew her limbs close and tucked her legs under her as she sat up against the headboard of the bed. “We can’t do this.” She leaned her head against the wall and shook her head, despair clamping down on her. “It wouldn’t be fair to Ida. It didn’t matter before, when I didn’t know, but now —”

Beside her, sitting on his haunches, Damaon crossed his arms. “So you think we’re the type of men to have a fiancée waiting for us in the wings, then cheat on her with another woman? Even display that woman under her nose?”

Both his face and voice were stern and angry. She was the one who’d asked them to cease their lovemaking as soon as she’d been conscious. She was the one who’d stopped them from committing a further mistake. She was doing what was right. So why was it that she felt as though she was the one in the wrong?

“I don’t know,” she moaned, miserable, her gaze on the bedspread. It was too much. To love them and want them when they were so appallingly out of reach... She started to inch toward the floor, but Adamas and Damaon cut off her escape route. “I’ll...I’ll go back to my room and...after tomorrow...after tomorrow,” she gasped, then wailed at the hopelessness of her situation, at the way her heart was breaking. “I want to go home...”

“Poor Raisa,” Adamas patted her hand and there was something in his voice, some trace of anguish that stabbed at her heart. “You never wanted to be here, did you?”

She couldn’t reply. When she couldn’t wait to leave before, now she couldn’t *bear* to leave. “Please, let me go...” She couldn’t control herself if she continued to stay here, in this room with them. She might just embarrass herself into pleading with them to allow

her to live with them. But how could she? Every cell and fiber of her was mortal. The palace wouldn't accept her indefinite presence, unless—

Damaon clasped her against him, so tight that her breath whooshed out of her. “No. Raisa, I can't—”

“Da-Damaon?” she squeaked. His voice was reminiscent of the Emerald Immortal's voice, when he'd been declaring the depth of his love for his wife. “I...can't breathe.”

“Not until you swear on Esmeralda's head that you won't leave.” His hoarse voice thundered in her ear, full of desperate entreaty. “I know you miss your home and I don't know how it can be done, but I promise you can go visit every now and then, even if we have to flood Earth with diamonds in the process. I know you don't feel anything for us right now, but you love the sex—admit it!—and we'll build on that, we have eternity to develop our relationship and—”

With each word that fell from Damaon's mouth, a tremulous joy started to spread from deep within her. She had to check her reaction though, because she didn't know if she was hallucinating as a result of being lightheaded from lack of air. Then again, there was Iderea.

“Let her breathe, Damaon.”

Air rushed back into her body, though Damaon didn't release her. His anxious face filled her vision when she opened her eyes. “Raisa? I'm sorry. Are you all right?”

“I-I'm fine. Do you...” Adamas' hand remained on her back, stroking her. She licked her suddenly dry lips and Damaon's gaze latched onto her tongue. She grew warm and she became conscious of him, of his hard body pressed against hers, of his virile masculinity, of a certain body part of his that was stirring to life. *Do you mean what you said?* Unsure if she had just dreamed the words, she changed her question. “Why would you flood the Earth with diamonds?”

He stared at her, nonplussed.

Behind her, Adamas smothered his chuckles.

“Well,” Damaon said with a slowness that made her think he was feeling his way around uncharted territory. “If you were...immortal, you couldn’t just leave the demesne and go traipsing around the universe for security reasons, but we could arrange it so that we’d have to plant diamonds on Earth more often and you could visit. You do miss your home, don’t you?”

Not if home is where you are. She didn’t have anyone on Earth, no family, just a few friends who wouldn’t even know or care that she was gone. “But what’s that thing about Esmeralda’s head?” If she could clear that up, then she could believe he had really said those words and she could contemplate the wondrous possibility that maybe they were starting to feel something for her other than sex.

A puzzled frown creased his brows. “Does it matter?”

“Yes!”

“All right, you don’t have to shout. I know you think well of Esmeralda and if you make a promise on her head, you will surely keep it, for fear that something will happen to her if you don’t.” He shrugged.

“And you want me to keep this promise?” she asked with breathless wonder, finally daring to allow the spiral of joy to well up within her. Maybe they cared for her as a friend. Or something more—delight in a lover who was moderately skilled. Whatever their feelings, they wanted her to stay with them, past the limited fourteen days that mortals were allowed.

“Very badly.”

Was that love shining in his beautiful silver eyes? Yes, she was getting far too fanciful.

“Why? I don’t understand you. There’s Ida, who’s young and lovely and vibrant, the perfect cure for your—”

Damaon shook her. Hard. “Because she’s not you,” he said through clenched teeth, evidently at the end of his patience. He released her so that she fell back against Adamas, then rolled his eyes and glanced up at his mate. “Why did we have to fall for

such an exasperating woman, anyway? Tell her she has no choice, then maybe she'll shut up and let us have our wicked ways with her. And this time, I'm not budging. It's her or no one."

Raisa shook off the feeling of déjà vu and sat up. Every word that dropped from his lips created more questions, more feelings of wonder and joy. *Fallen for her – Raisa. Her and no one else.* "What do you mean? Of course I have a choice!"

"Of course you have." Adamas turned her around, then took her hands in his. His face was solemn yet contained a terrible yearning that touched her. "Do you want to stay with us, Raisa, for eternity? We have the power to make you an immortal, you have but to say the word. There's a potion you can drink. But you should know that if you do accept, you won't ever become mortal again. There's no way to go back, should you regret it."

I won't. This is my dream, my dearest dream come true. She hung on to his words, wanting – *needing* – to know what her future would entail.

Adamas continued, "There's only one way we can offer a woman immortality – if she were to become our wife."

"Your wife!" This was something she didn't expect. "But Ida –"

Adamas' brows drew together in a fierce frown. "What were you thinking? That she'd still be our wife?"

She nodded.

"In what capacity then would you be here?" Adamas shouting. What an oddity.

"As your lover," she replied. "We do have foursomes on Earth and –"

Damaon shook his head. "No," he said fiercely. "Only you, no one else."

"Then how about that betrothal agreement?" she asked, exasperated. "Is it fake? Is that what you're telling me?"

"No," Damaon said. "It's very real and binding –"

“Then of course you have to marry Ida! It’s enough for me that I can stay here with you.” Liar. She wanted them all to herself, but she would learn to compromise. She *would*. “I don’t want you to lose faith with your peers, which is what would happen should they know you’ve broken a formal agreement with Sapphire.”

In a sudden turnabout, Adamas exchanged an amused glance with Damaon. “Speaking like a wife already, isn’t she?” Adamas commented.

Damaon nodded. “Yes, I think we’ve made a good choice.”

“A very good one,” Adamas agreed.

She couldn’t stand it. They were joking about something that could have a monumental impact on their reputation and career. She threw herself against them, one arm around each man’s neck in a three-way hug. “I love you so very much. Please. I can’t bear to see you ruin yourselves because of me—”

Adamas pried away her stranglehold on him. “What did you say?” There was a fierce light in his silver eyes that did strange things to her.

She looked at him with a puzzled frown. “I don’t want you to ruin yourselves—”

“No, before that.”

She remembered. Whether they liked it or not, here was the whole truth of her feelings for them. “I love you, both of you.” She spared a glance at Damaon to find him staring back at her with immense satisfaction. His expression unnerved her for an instant before she continued, “I realized when Ida told me of the betrothal, just as I recognized I have no place in your world. I was anguished, but what was I to do? I’m not the type to force myself where I’m not wanted—”

“You *are* wanted.” Damaon held her hand in a tight grip. “Very much.”

“You’ll have a place here as our wife,” Adamas reminded her. “If you accept. Do you?”

Chapter Nine

She couldn't deny herself what she wanted, but it wasn't her right, not when another woman had first claim on them. "What about Ida?" Seeing the thunder creeping into their expressions, she snatched back her hands and took a deep breath. "Look, we can't deny that the betrothal agreement exists or that it's binding. I meant what I said, I don't want you to be in your peers' black books. But more than that," she continued as a realization struck her, "despite what you say, I know you must feel horrible about abandoning Ida to her fate. I've seen the way you both act around her and my eyes tell me you both love her the way uncles would their nieces—"

"You're right, we do love her that way," Adamas admitted.

"We practically watched her grow up," Damaon said.

"So you see, I don't want to be the cause of this blight on your souls," she said, more determined than ever to explain her side, to make them understand, "which may be worse than the heart-hardening disease. So unless you tell me that the contract has been overturned or—"

"Sapphire agreed not to pursue it," Damaon interrupted her, after exchanging a long glance with Adamas.

Incredulous joy bounded within her. "Why?"

Adamas' black scowl surprised her. "Does it matter if it gives us what we want? You can even confirm it with Sapphire, if you don't believe us."

"I believe you," she said quietly, though her mind churned with questions. She considered the two men and decided there was something they weren't telling her, something they *didn't* want her to know. Being in love with them didn't turn her brain into sheep fodder, though it did make her want to protect them and keep them safe, even from themselves. She had to tackle this topic from another angle. "And I think I

deserve to know how it came about. When Ida learns of your agreement with Sapphire, she will be devastated. She may not turn to me at first, especially since I'm the woman who usurped her position, but when she does come, I want to be ready. I want to know how to give her the answers she wants without angering her further. I want to help her understand that you couldn't be the right men for her and I want to give her hope that out there somewhere, in this vast universe, there will be a man for her –"

"He has to be an immortal," Damaon muttered with a vexed sigh.

"That's the most important requirement," Adamas added.

"What do you mean?" The men's unhappy expressions alarmed her.

"Iamond, the previous Diamond Immortal, and Sapphire were close friends, having been appointed to their respective positions at about the same time. At his wife's insistence, Sapphire made the pact with Iamond when she was pregnant with Iderea to ensure their child's lifespan, because only an immortal's wife can stay with him for eternity."

"What?" The implications tumbled through her mind, shocking her.

Adamas nodded. "That's right. An immortal's children *are* mortal, since he was mortal to begin with and was only made immortal for his position. This means that Iderea would have to leave the Sapphire Palace when she's twenty-five."

Which confused her. "But...but you told me the age of majority is eighteen."

"Yes. Our ancestors aren't inhuman, Raisa," Adamas said. "In this instance, the seven years is for Ida to adjust to a mortal existence. During this time, she can shuttle back and forth from wherever she decides to make her home – be it on Earth or Ragon or one of her parents' home planets. And Sapphire...Sapphire would have to learn to let go of his child and say goodbye."

"For always."

"For always," Damaon confirmed. "But he can always flood a certain place with sapphires."

“How sad.” Both for the father and the child. Raisa wondered how Ida would cope, since the mortal world was so much different from the immortal one.

“It’s life and before you think it, no, you’re not going to help Ida by bowing out and urging either one of us to marry her.” Adamas’ fingers bit into her arm, forcing her to look at him. The fierce expression on his face as he stared down at her made her tremble. “Damaon and I aren’t dolls you can pass around or—”

“I wasn’t thinking of that.” She had thought of it, but almost as soon as the thought had flashed into her brain, she rejected it. She knew the men wouldn’t have agreed—and Sapphire would’ve brought up the suggestion during their discussion—and anyway, it wouldn’t be fair to Ida. The child-woman deserved someone who would love her, not men who were forced to take her on due to an agreement not of their own making. “But maybe we could help her in some other way.”

Adamas blinked and he glanced at the spot where her hand had come up to cover his, for his fingernails had dug deep into her flesh and were hurting her. She was sure he had left marks on her skin—brand marks of possession.

His hold loosened. “Just so we’re clear.”

“We are.” She patted his hand and he turned his palm up and held tight onto hers. Lowering their limbs, he looked stricken at the half-moon imprints he’d made. Before she could reassure him that she didn’t feel the pain anymore, he leaned down and placed soothing kisses on the spot, licked and laved her skin with his tongue. Desire rose up in her, swift and fast, especially as tendrils of his bone-white hair caressed her breast and teased her nipples into tight, aching buds. The passion that always burned bright among them came rushing back like a flash flood and her pussy clenched and creamed in hunger and need.

“Better?” he asked huskily.

She couldn’t say anything, because all she could think about was his mouth on her body, on her breasts, in her pussy and how much *much* better she would feel. But it was as though he could look into her brain or maybe he saw something on her face, because

he groaned and, a moment later, he was covering her mouth with his own. He maneuvered her so that she was lying on the bed and he thrust into her with one unerring plunge.

Time stopped. A huge, soundless void filled her, making her aware of nothing but the iron-hard goodness inside her that was stretching her so deliciously. Love for him swelled in her heart, expanding her chest until she felt she could burst.

He kissed her like she was something precious, something he cherished, with slow flicks of his tongue and unhurried glides of his lips. His mouth slanted over hers to take her into a deeper kiss and she willingly followed where he led. She clasped her legs around his waist to hold him close, to touch him skin-to-skin wherever she could. After believing she'd lost him – them – she was beyond relieved that they were hers after all.

Hers, to do with whatever she wanted for eternity.

The thought sent a wicked thrill down her spine.

“What was that?” he asked, his head lifting and a frown marring his brow. “Are you cold?”

“No.” She smiled at him, an unfettered smile of pure joy.

His gaze softened and he caressed her cheek. “You’re so beautiful.”

“And ours,” Damaon said from beside her.

Her head turned to see him stretched out beside them on his side, his head supported by an upraised palm, one leg bent with foot planted on the bed and his hand stroking his cock in a slow, languid manner.

Her breath hitched. “Funny, I was just thinking the same thing.”

“I hope you won’t get bored, *shikima*, because being an immortal means you get to live a long time.” Damaon’s eyes darkened and filled with a stark need that was at odds with his words. “A *very* long time.”

“Love goes a long way toward curing boredom,” she said, surprised at what she’d said. She’d never been philosophical before, but somehow she knew what she’d said was true.

“And we have ways to occupy you,” Adamas said, causing her to turn her head toward him. He cupped her breasts and squeezed, his thumbs rasping over her nipples and teasing them to tight, hard nubs. “Like this.” He shifted a little so he could draw one turgid bud into his mouth, all without withdrawing from her.

Moaning, she arched into his mouth, encouraging him to continue his deep sucks. Delicious wet warmth enveloped her breast and she plowed her hands into his head to hold him there, the silken strands of his hair trailing over her body in a sensual caress. Heat slashed to her groin and her cream gushed to pool in her pussy, coating his cock with her essence and paving the way for his mating thrusts.

When she was transported here by the calling star, she never expected to find love. All she had thought about was money and a way to buy back the home of her childhood. Her intention was to cling to the happy memories with her parents, because she’d nothing left. Now, she realized she didn’t need her childhood home anymore, because with Adamas and Damaon, she had a whole lifetime of happiness and love and lust to look forward to. New memories to make, not to supplant the old ones, but to add to them. New friends to cultivate and new sights to see. New and wondrous things to experience.

Adamas bit on her nipple and pain mingled with pleasure streaked through her. He soothed the tiny sting with his tongue, which lapped and swirled around first one breast then the other. He delighted in playing with her body and she could see it in the ruddy color on his cheeks, on the expression of sublime happiness on his face.

That she could bring so much joy to them...the thought humbled her.

And Damaon...

Just as the thought of him crossed her mind, he was there, his mouth cool and firm as he kissed her. She released one hand from Adamas’ head to cup Damaon’s and she

reveled in the thick strands of hair that flowed down to envelop them both in their private sanctuary. He savored her like a rich feast, nibbling, licking, sucking.

She couldn't help but compare this to the first time they'd made love. Lust was still in evidence, but there was more between them this time, love that colored their actions with tenderness.

The moment Adamas released her breasts, Damaon was there to take over, his hands plucking at her nipples like a master at his violin. She started to shift, the need building in her making her restless. A need that Adamas fired as he started to move, short, deep moves that made her keen with yearning.

Her pussy clenched around him and that seemed to impel him to move faster. She was so primed that she needed only a few quick, firm strokes before she was hurtling over the edge into ecstasy. She was dimly aware of Adamas giving a loud, hoarse cry before he followed her, his thrusts searing and deep as he exploded in her.

She hadn't finished her tumble through air before Adamas withdrew and Damaon took his place, propelling her up, up, up, even higher this time with his hard pounding. He didn't cease his unswerving attention on her breasts and his teeth bit into one nipple, adding to the relentless pressure until she couldn't take it anymore. She shattered again into a splintering orgasm that rocked her soul. Damaon's harsh shout of release sounded in her ear in tandem with his one last, final surge into her body, his own body arching in a bow at the force of his explosive pleasure.

Streams of satisfaction and languid bonelessness cast her adrift, extreme contentment flooding her body at the knowledge that she would be beside them for as long as forever. A pleased smile lifted the corners of her mouth as the men—*hers!*—spooned her body, Damaon behind her and Adamas pressed close on her other side. She loved them. More amazingly, they also loved her. Though they hadn't said so in words, but with hindsight, she realized how their actions had spoken of it. However, she'd been blind and caught up in her misery. But now she saw and her heart filled with the sweet knowledge, along with an awed disbelief that she had finally found

where she belonged. She felt the men rising and stretching above her and she knew they were kissing, their moans and groans getting louder and more frequent with each passing second.

Just as she opened her eyes, Damaon catapulted toward Adamas, bearing him down on the bed. She watched fascinated as they made love, caressing and stroking one another with fierce intensity. She wouldn't have thought they could get their cocks up so soon, but maybe the immortals were blessed with incredible stamina because one glance at their lower bodies proved they were more than ready, their rigid crystalline lengths throbbing with need.

Beautiful.

She was more than ready to just watch them and admire the beauty of their graceful, sensual movements, but she fell back on the bed, flabbergasted. There it was again, that phantom touch on her breast as Adamas sucked on Damaon's nipple. Her body arched, the same way that Damaon was doing, offering more of himself to Adamas. Ghostly hands glided over her body, arousing, burning, marking. She thought she had been fully satisfied, yet here she was again, hungering, needing, her pussy creaming in anticipation.

A huge phantom cock slammed into her. She writhed on the bed, on top of the silken sheets, her hips pumping upward to meet those strong, solid strokes. Oh God. She was insatiable. Two orgasms, yet she wanted another and from a ghostly cock no less, a ghostly cock that she somehow knew "belonged" to Damaon for the way it— he—drove into her.

She was right.

A glance beside her showed her that Adamas' upraised legs rested on Damaon's shoulders and the latter was pumping his cock into Adamas' hole, his silver eyes scrunched tight in concentration. Her gaze lit on Adamas' cock, which the men were neglecting for the moment and it looked so delicious she couldn't resist.

A *real* cock was better than any phantom one, no matter how hard or huge or thick.

Before she could think too much, she scrambled up from her place on the bed, her hips jerking all the while from the force of Damaon's plunges, and lowered herself down Adamas' cock. God, yes. Mewling cries escaped her when he filled her and she shuddered the moment he was buried to the hilt within her. Now there were *two cocks* buried in her—in the *same channel*—the flesh-and-blood one superimposed over the phantom cock, but she could feel them both—two solid thrusts instead of one, two bodies slamming into her—and the sensations were surreal and wondrous and escalated far too fast for her to process.

She exploded into brilliance, hardly aware of the men's guttural shouts as they urged her toward oblivion.

She knew she fainted for several seconds at least, because when she came to, she was lying facedown on top of Adamas with Damaon beside them and she had no idea how they got into this position. Both men were breathing heavily. Adamas stroked her back. "Brilliant move there, *shikima*. I love it. I love you."

"You do, huh?" A big smile wreathed her face, though nobody could see it. Deep in her heart, she knew they loved her, but it still felt wonderful to hear it.

"I think you already know, judging by your reaction," he returned drily.

"A girl still wants to hear the words."

"I love you too, *shikima*." Damaon turned her head and held her steady for his kiss, his mouth opening over hers with warmth and possession. Her eyes misted at the gentle way his lips moved on hers, as though he was savoring a rare dish of dessert. His tongue touched the corners of her mouth before sweeping in to taste her and play with her tongue. When he lifted his head, his silver eyes were glittering with emotion.

She stroked his back, relishing the sensation of his hard, muscled body. "What does *shikima* mean?"

"I believe it's the Ragnorian equivalent of your planet's 'dear' or 'darling'," Damaon replied.

A sweet, intense feeling welled up within her. "You know what would make me a happy woman?"

"What?" Adamas asked.

"Kiss me like that every day," she said, "And sex, plenty of sex."

Damaon laughed. "I think we can oblige."

She frowned and sat up, remembering. She prodded Adamas' chest with a finger. "I felt it again."

Adamas' eyes popped open. "What?"

"You remember that first day?" she asked.

"Oh." His eyes closed. "You mean your experiencing Damaon's and my lovemaking?"

"Yes."

"It's no big deal," he answered.

"It is to me," she said, determined to get to the bottom of the mystery. "You said you'd do some research. Did you find out anything?"

"I'm sleepy and I've only had two orgasms," Adamas said, his eyes firmly shut. "How come you're still wide awake? Is three the magic number?"

Raisa could sense the conversation going out of control. For the second time that night, she felt the men were keeping something from her.

Damaon made much of a huge yawn. He tugged her down so that she lay between them. "Let's get some sleep. You have to take the Change Potion tomorrow and you need to conserve your strength for that. Your body's going to go through several transformations and— Hmmm..." He touched her pussy with a delicacy that sent her yearning. "I wonder if this will turn white with diamond brilliance."

"Or these." Adamas aimed for her nipples with unerring accuracy and licked them with feathery strokes.

She was almost distracted as they drowned her in sensations. While it was good that they were eager to start work on their promise to give her plenty of sex, she was more interested in answers.

“Stop that.” She jabbed whatever body parts she could reach. Adamas rubbed his head and scowled at her. Unfortunately for Damaon, she hit a rather sensitive part.

“Ow.”

“Serves you right,” she muttered before asking anxiously, “Are you okay?”

Damaon’s silver eyes glared at her. “How would I be okay when you stabbed me so hard? Kiss it better.”

“Then you’ll answer my questions?”

He shrugged. “Maybe.”

“Damaon!”

“Fine,” he said through gritted teeth. “Get on with it.”

She scooted down and placed a kiss on his flaccid cock. This close, she could smell his strong, musky scent. She had stopped being unnerved by the crystalline shade of their cocks, or the fact that their cocks creamed much like her pussy, ages ago. In fact, she rather liked the thought that while the women on Earth could play with dildos of the same color, she was having fun with the real thing. And while they needed to slap on candy-flavored lubricants, she had natural, organic cream from the men’s cocks, salty and tangy enough to stimulate her taste buds.

As was happening now, the tempting cream inviting her to swirl her tongue over the crystalline length or suck him deep into her mouth. She restrained herself with great effort, because she wouldn’t allow herself to be distracted.

“It still hurt,” Damaon complained.

“I bet,” she mumbled, eyeing his stirring cock. She held him and, leaning down, rubbed her tongue over the place where her finger had connected. Oh yum. She almost moaned as she tasted his stirring flavor. She licked and laved him, her tongue venturing

over an increasingly wider area until he grew hard and thick. She sat up with satisfaction. "There, I'm sure you're a whole lot better now." She smiled innocently at him, while behind her, Adamas didn't even try to hide his chuckles.

Damaon merely lifted one brow. "Raisa, you hadn't even begun to soothe the pain. If you want to be a good wife to us, you'd have to try harder. Your audition starts now."

"Audition, my foot." Now she glared at him, though she was finding it hard to resist his waving cock.

"And such a pretty foot you have," he said agreeably, "but it can't solve my problem. Only your mouth can."

Remembering that he promised to answer her questions, she applied herself to the task of assuaging his pain. Bending her head once again, she covered his cock with her mouth, taking him deep into her until she almost gagged.

"Argh." Damaon groaned. "Yeah, *shikima*. You're good, damn good."

Pleased with his praise, she bobbed her head on his cock, sucking and kissing every inch of his beloved length, knowing her actions would bring him pleasure. She caressed and stroked him with her hand and her tongue and her mouth, love for him governing her movements. His fingers clenched around fistfuls of hair, guiding her. She tasted the cream of his arousal, a salty, tangy taste that she found delightful. No wonder Adamas loved to suck on Damaon's cock. She drove Damaon onward and urged him upward until he spilled himself into her mouth. His pleasure spread over her, warming and satisfying her.

"How'd I do?" She sat back on her haunches, her tongue licking around her mouth for stray drops of Damaon's cum. Adamas turned her around to kiss her and she had to share Damaon's cum with him, not that she minded, because she got to taste the beguiling sweetness of Adamas' mouth.

When she and Adamas broke apart, gasping, she turned to Damaon and lifted one brow in query.

"That would've gotten you a free pass to the Diamond Palace for eternity."

His lazy, satiated smile did crazy things to her insides. She thumped a fist into her palm in mock regret. "I should've given you both blowjobs my first day here."

"I want mine now." Adamas pointed at his throbbing cock.

"Later." She wrenched her gaze away and turned back to Damaon. "You promised to tell me the reason I could feel your phantom lovemaking."

"All right," he said with reluctance, shooting a glance at Adamas. "It's a good thing you mentioned the matter to Adamas, because it's the main reason Sapphire agreed to break the agreement."

"You mean he was afraid that when you're making love to Iderea, if you were married, of course," she felt obliged to qualify as Damaon's expression became dark, "I would feel your lovemaking? But I would be on Earth by then and I think the distance would be too great for me to feel your touches."

"That's the thing, we don't know, because nothing of that magnitude has been recorded—"

"And anyway, what does he care about me?" she interrupted, hardly hearing him as she followed her own train of thought. "He would've been more concerned about his daughter."

"The truth is..." Damaon paused a beat, then continued in resignation, "We found Iamond's copy of the betrothal contract in his diary."

"And?" she asked, perplexed at the abrupt change in topic.

"It contained information that...that..."

Damaon was the one who usually rushed into any situation without first considering the consequences, so why was he hesitating? Why did it seem the words were stuck in his throat?

Adamas made a rough sound. "That you're our true mate, the one fated to save us fully from the heart hardening disease."

“What! But all the other women also saved you—”

“For a limited number of years only and each time was worse than the preceding one,” Adamas cut her off. “We couldn’t understand it and we were afraid, afraid that one day, we’d have a woman but she wouldn’t be able to do anything for us at all. Then you came and you were able to do so much for us—much more than all the other women combined—that we couldn’t believe our luck.”

“True mate,” she murmured, dazed. “Wouldn’t Ida—?”

“No,” Adamas said, his voice curt. “She would’ve been able to do only what the other women had, as she’s not our true mate.”

Tentatively, she reached out both hands and placed each against the men’s chests and felt the reassuring normal beat of their hearts beneath her palms. “Fated.” Adamas became so pale she was alarmed. “You’re okay?” she asked, anxious.

“Yes.” Adamas sucked in a deep breath, his chest rising with the action. “Iamond’s diary also revealed that only the Diamond Immortal’s true mate can feel his ghostly touches when he’s having sex with another person. It’s also the reason you felt the calling star’s compulsion so strongly. These reasons convinced Sapphire that he couldn’t stand in the way of our happiness and health, not when the universe itself conspired to bring us together.”

“Wow.” Daunting to think that she was but a small pawn in the great scheme of things, yet important enough that the fates would arrange a love match for her. Well, maybe not a love match, but a true match from which love had grown.

Adamas took her hands in his and she couldn’t understand why he was trembling, couldn’t understand why both he and Damaon looked so sad. No, hopeless. Resigned. “Raisa, I promised you a choice. Damaon and I agreed beforehand that we *are* giving you this choice. Forget about the true mates and stuff, we don’t know if they’re real anyway. As far as we’re concerned, it has served its purpose in getting us out of the betrothal. If you...” He breathed deeply and his entire body quavered. Beside him, Damaon was taut and silent, his silver eyes intent on her face. “If you don’t want to stay

with us, we...we're fine. You can go home two days later. We'll even send you back in our carriage—"

What were they saying? She couldn't understand. She loved them, so of course she wanted to stay with them. Being able to remain here with the ones she loved was a dream she couldn't believe had come true. God must be rewarding her for all those years of uncomplaining filial devotion.

But it appeared as though Adamas and Damaon were thrusting her away and they even had a private transportation that would take her far away in an instant if she wanted. And why should she forget the matter of true mates when it had given her the very thing she wanted?

True mates.

She remembered the word that had caused Adamas to go pale.

Fated.

Then she understood.

When she had first arrived, she had complained of having her choice taken away with such vehemence that Adamas had been moved to give her another one. In the same way, having her destiny arranged by the fates meant depriving her of a choice and, like that first time, they were now offering her the chance *to make* the decision instead of having it thrust upon her. By their action, they were telling her that they wouldn't forcibly hold her here, even though they loved her or that she loved them. They would defy the fates themselves to give her what she wanted.

She smiled, love for them welling up to flood her entire being. "You don't need to offer me another choice, because the moment I realized I loved you, both of you, I had already *made* my choice. I want to be with you, for always, as your wife, your lover, your friend. This is my life now and Earth has no more hold on me. That my choice is in tandem with what the fates had arranged for me is something I would give thanks for everyday of my life. I love you and nothing—*nothing*—is going to tear us apart."

She would forever remember the stunned, disbelieving expressions of incredible joy and relief on their faces before they fell into one another's arms.

About the Author

Employed as an engineer, I've worked in an underground mine that went up—inside a mountain. I've swung over the Ohio River in a tiny cage suspended from a crane in the middle of an electrical storm. I've hung over the Hudson River at midnight in an aluminum boat suspended from a floating barge at the height of a blizzard, while snowplows on the bridge overhead rained slush and salt down on my shoulders. You can't do this sort of work without developing a sense of humor and a taste for adventure.

A relative newcomer to the publishing industry, I read my first romance five years ago and decided to try my hand at writing. Both my reading and writing habits are subject to mood and I usually have several stories going at once. When I need a really good idea for a story, I clean toilets. Now there's an activity that engenders escapism.

I was surveying when I met my husband. He was my "rod man". While I was trying to get my crosshairs on his stadia rod, he dropped his pants and mooned me. Next thing I know, I've got the backside of paradise in my viewfinder. So I grabbed the walkie-talkie. "That's real nice," I told him, "but would you please turn around? I'd rather see the other side."

It was love at first sight.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorasCave.com.

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