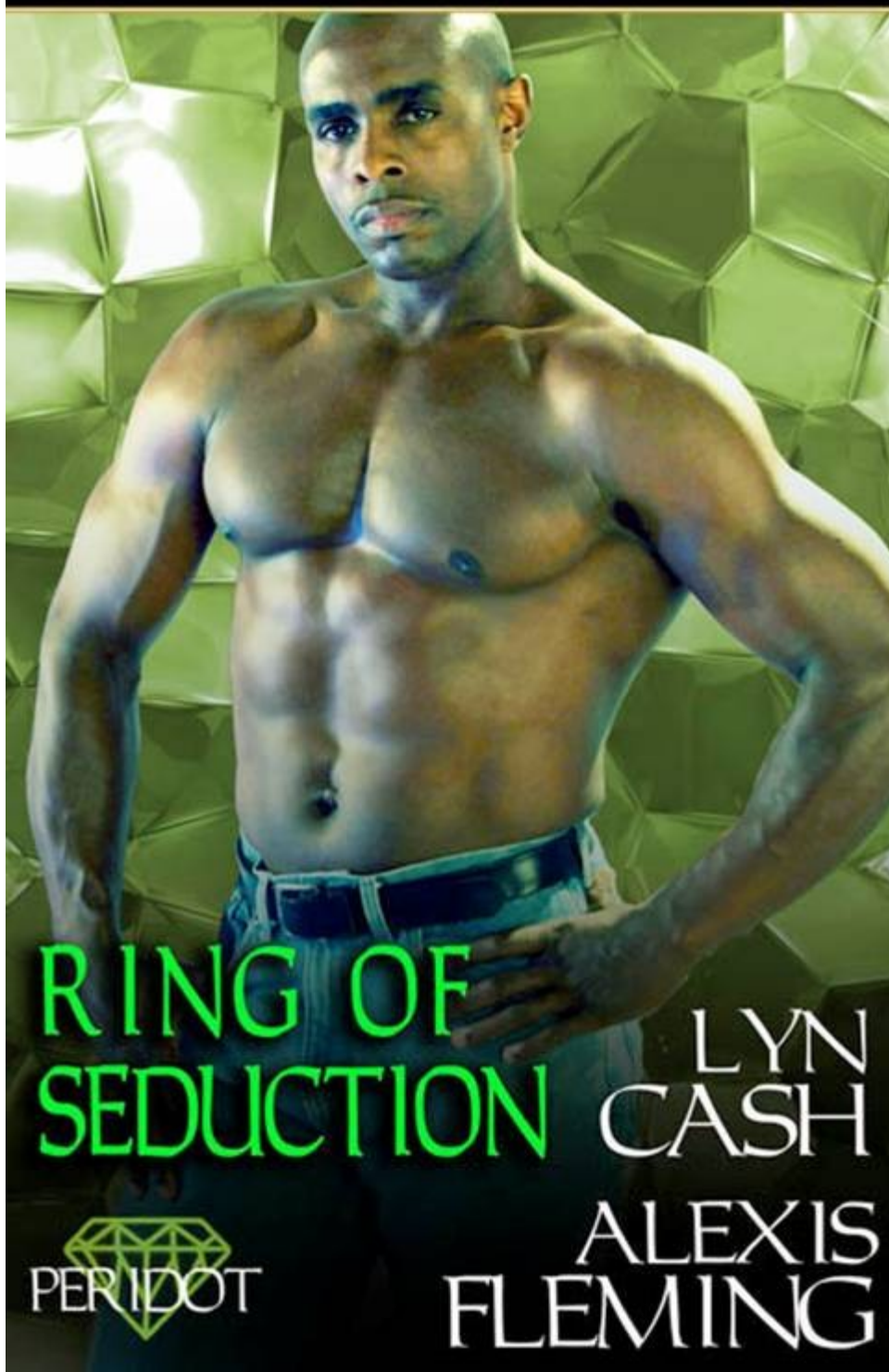


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



RING OF
SEDUCTION

LYN
CASH

ALEXIS
FLEMING



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Ring of Seduction

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RING OF SEDUCTION

Lyn Cash & Alexis Fleming

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Chapter One

“Oh my God, it’s a sexual smorgasbord. Will you look at all those bods?”

Mellika grinned. Tracey was right. Wall-to-wall men. Okay, so there were women, too, but it was the males, dressed as sultans and genies, who caught her attention.

She’d almost decided not to come when Madame Lila, their landlady, had announced she was having an Arabian Nights party to welcome her nephew Zeb to the neighborhood.

Now *there* was a body she wouldn’t mind making a feast of. She’d met Zeb when he’d first started visiting the apartment block and something about him had intrigued her. Right from the word go, she’d wanted to get to know him. Hell, she’d wanted more than that! Without even trying, he’d pushed her buttons. He was the ultimate fantasy. Good looking. Sexy as sin. Every girl’s exotic dream come true. If for no other reason, she could have attended the party tonight just on the off-chance she might be able to spend some time with Zeb.

Besides, she couldn’t say no to Madame. The woman had taken her under her wing when Mellika had first moved into the block of apartments. Mellika had often thought Madame was lonely living here on her own so she’d made a point of checking in on her each day. She was more than happy to spend hours visiting with the elderly woman and sifting through the junk jewelry at her shop. It was amazing what she found there on occasion. Madame had made it her business to find the choicest pieces for her. And if the price for that friendship was that she had to listen to tales of magic and genies, it was well worth it.

“I wonder if one of those genies will grant me three wishes.” Tracey preened in the doorway of the apartment, puffing her chest out to showcase her large breasts in the tiny top that formed part of her harem girl costume.

“Nah, you haven’t got a lamp to rub. What self-respecting genie would respond to anything but a magic lamp?”

Suddenly, a large hand snaked around Mellika’s right side and lifted her arm, turning it palm down. “You have no need for a lamp, my lady. You wear the ring of the sultans. That will bring you your heart’s desire.”

Mellika cast a quick glance over her shoulder. *Zeb!* Madame Lila’s nephew, and the real reason she’d allowed Madame to talk her into attending the party.

“Hey, is that the old ring you bought at Madame’s store?” Tracey cut in.

Mellika tried to concentrate on the ring on her right hand, but she was too conscious of Zeb brushing against her back. His heat seeped into her, streaking through her blood and lodging between her thighs. Without meaning to, she leaned back, allowing him to take some of her weight.

He stroked his finger gently across the top of the ring. “It’s a peridot, a prized gem of Turkish sultans in the Ottoman empire. Set in gold, it’s said to ward off evil and the terrors of the night. But when set in a combination of silver and gold, it becomes something else.” He slid his hand under hers, supporting her palm, his thumb rubbing sensual circles on the sensitive flesh.

She shivered. Resisting the urge to turn into his arms, she focused on the ring. Fashioned of silver, with a gold bar either side of the yellow-green stone, it seemed for a moment as if it glowed every time Zeb’s finger touched the gem. At the same time, warmth seeped into her finger where the silver banded her.

She jerked her hand upward, clenching it into a fist. How weird. When she flattened her palm out again, the illusion disappeared. It was nothing but an old ring she’d found in Madame’s junk jewelry shop. No glow. No heat. But for a moment there...

Zeb slipped both hands around her from behind and cupped her hips. His head dipped and his breath whispered against her cheek. “Now that you know the power of

the ring, do you dare risk what it may offer? A night of pleasure such as you've never imagined?"

Heat rode Mellika in waves, curling up from her gut and invading her whole body. The harem girl costume she'd allowed Madame to choose for her made it easy for Zeb to slip his fingers through the slits in the sides of the sheer, billowing trousers.

She'd balked a bit when she'd seen the outfit. First, there was the tiny bra top. Two small triangles joined by a white satin cord that tied around her back and another halter-style around her neck. Silver sequins and clear crystal beads covered the cups, with strands of the same dangling from the bottom. With it came a white and silver-studded G-string that fit like a second skin. The elasticized band barely covered her pubic area. Hanging from the elastic were strands of the same crystals and sequins, forming a tinkling fringe around the tops of her thighs.

Over that, she'd slipped a sky-blue pair of harem pants that rode just as low on her hips. Made of the silkiest chiffon, the pants were slit from her hipbones to her ankles and then gathered on elastic strips. Silver slave bracelets clasped her upper arms, their gilt matching the slave sandals on her feet. Madame had made her promise to leave her long, dark hair free and had loaned her a silver diamanté band with a sheer blue scarf clipped on one side of it to wear on her forehead.

Taken all together it was an incredible outfit—almost too good to be a mere costume. The moment Mellika had donned it, she'd felt like a different person. Sexy. Sensual. Her movements were different, more flowing, as if in tune with the outer covering she wore.

She suddenly realized she was sinuously swaying against Zeb in time to the caress of his fingers on her upper thighs. At this rate she'd be drooling all over him in no time flat. It wouldn't do to let him know too soon that he turned her on to that degree.

Dragging in a shaky breath, she stepped away and turned to face him. Her mouth dropped open and the breath seized in her throat as fire flashed through her veins.

Zeb had dressed as a genie. Semitransparent baggy pants in an emerald green color, caught in at the ankle. Slippers with curled up toes on his feet. The rest of him was bare, except for a tiny bolero-style vest that hung free and exposed most of his chest. His skin was bronzed, as if he'd spent too long in the sun. His chest, what she could see of it, was free of body hair. Long dark hair curled down the back of his neck and brushed his shoulders. A gold hoop earring glinted in one ear, adding to the erotic picture. His facial features had a patrician cast as did his bearing and manner, but it was his eyes that drew Mellika. A glittering green.

Uncomfortable with the fact that Zeb was looking his fill as she studied him, Mellika glanced down again to his chest. Her hands curled into fists as she fought the impulse to run her fingers over that expanse of naked flesh. Forget propriety. She wanted to throw him down on Madame's Turkish rug and screw the living daylights out of him.

She raised her gaze to his face and focused on his enigmatic smile. *Bastard! He knows exactly what I'm thinking.*

Struggling to regain her equilibrium, she waved a hand at her friend. "Ah, Tracey, I don't think you've met Zeb yet. Zeb is Madame Lila's nephew. Our new neighbor."

"Hubba-hubba." Tracey fanned one hand in a cooling motion. She nudged Mellika in the ribs. "Now I know why you wanted to come to the party so much."

A flash of heat swept up Mellika's face. *Damn it, Tracey, shut up.*

"My aunt is a trifle biased." He grinned. "So what do you think of the party? Aunt Lila has gone to a lot of trouble to make it feel authentic."

"I swear, I could be in a tent in the middle of the desert," Tracey gushed, waving her hand to encompass the costume-clad guests. "Complete with all these sexy genies. It feels just like the real thing."

"If you really want to get into the spirit of it, you need to get the terminology right. In the old world, the word is d-j-i-n-n. As in more than one genie. The singular is djinni —*jin-ne*."

"Mellika, this guy's a keeper." Tracey nudged her in the ribs. "Talk about throwing yourself into a part. He could even be a real genie...er, *jin-ne*."

Mellika cleared her throat, desperate to change the topic of conversation. Trust Tracey to embarrass her. "Um, so Zeb, what makes this ring special?"

He took her hand and rubbed his thumb over the green stone. "Peridot can induce a state of enchantment if not clothed in gold. But that's not all it will do." He gave her a heated smile. "It will attract lovers to the wearer, give you your heart's desire, and fulfill your wildest fantasies." He lifted her hand and dropped a feather-soft kiss above the ring. "What is your secret desire, sweet bearer of the sacred scent of jasmine?"

Tracey gave a trill of laughter. "Hey, this guy is good. Maybe I should be the one wearing the ring. I need some excitement in my life right now."

Mellika felt a renewed rush of heat. How did he know her name meant scent of jasmine? Unless he was interested enough to look it up...

"No reason we can't share." She grinned at Tracey and tried to pull the ring off her finger, but it refused to budge. It was stuck tight. "I can't get it off."

Zeb placed his hand over hers. "It belongs to you. It has called and you have responded. Until your fantasies are fulfilled, you won't be able to remove it."

Turning her hand this way and that, Mellika stared at the ring. It *was* pretty. Something about it had attracted her the moment she'd seen it. She'd planned on cannibalizing it to use in the fashion jewelry she made, but something about the ring itself had stopped her the moment she'd picked up her jeweler's pliers. *This* ring she'd wanted to keep for herself, so badly that her hands had shaken as soon as she'd approached her tools.

She often shopped for bits and pieces for her jewelry-making business. She could spend hours combing through the collection of earrings, necklaces, and bracelets at Madame's shop, looking for just the right piece, but this was the first time she'd felt possessive about anything.

Zeb reached out and stroked the ring again and Mellika found her gaze caught by his glittering eyes. Eyes that seemed to glow with the same green fire as the stone in her ring.

"So, Zeb...as in Zebadiah?" Tracey broke the web of sensual awareness that held Mellika in thrall.

Zeb grinned and turned his attention on Tracey. "No, Zeb as in Zebargad, the old Arabic word for peridot." He bowed from the waist. "The spirit of the peridot at your service, my ladies. For a small price I will grant you your most secret fantasy."

"It's a good line, Zeb." Mellika chuckled and raised her eyebrows. "Your aunt told me you were a charmer. So what price will you ask for a weekend of passion?"

"What would you be willing to pay, sweet Mellika?"

"Depends on what I'm getting." She arched one eyebrow and flicked him a flirtatious glance before catching the sheer scarf attached to her headband and dragging it up to cover her mouth. "Hmm, how about three wishes from a sexy djinni to satisfy my every whim?"

Mellika wondered how far he'd go. For weeks – thirteen weeks to be precise – she'd lusted after him. Zeb had been the object of all her fantasies since Madame Lila had first mentioned that he was taking over her apartment and the jewelry shop when she returned to her homeland. Then, after Mellika had met him, those fantasies had taken on a life of their own. She was tired of climaxing all on her own. Just once in her life she wanted to reach out and grab what she wanted – and right now, she wanted Zeb!

"That could be arranged," he said in response to her outrageous comment. "But only if you do things my way. Are you willing to put yourself in my hands?"

Mellika laughed. Oh, he *was* good.

He flicked a finger at the point of her chin. "Your answer, my lady?"

"Okay, we'll do things your way, but there's a catch. What if I asked for *your* passion for the weekend?" She stepped closer and ran a finger up the center of his bare

chest. “*You* will be my genie, responsive to my smallest command, for the duration of this fantasy.”

He placed his right hand over his heart and bowed from the waist. “That, too, can be arranged.”

* * * * *

Arms crossed over his chest, Zeb leaned against the wall of the living room and surveyed the room. The Arabian Nights party had been a good idea. Nothing like hiding in plain sight.

Everyone seemed to be having a good time, human and djinn alike. Zeb flicked his fingers and refilled the glasses of a few of the guests, although he was careful to make certain it only happened with the nonhuman guests. Living in this plane of existence meant he’d have to be on his guard all the time. Sometimes he wondered why he’d been the one called to be the guardian of the gateway between the two dimensions. Although if he got to spend time with the delightful Mellika, he wouldn’t complain. Maybe there *were* compensations after all.

With a grin on his face and anticipation zinging through his body, he levered himself away from the wall and headed into the kitchen. “Hey, Aunt Lila, can you keep an eye on things? I promised a certain lady a special —”

He ground to a halt, his gaze taking in the scene at a glance. “What the hell are you doing here, Gamil? I don’t remember inviting *you*. And get your fucking hands off my aunt.”

The man in question backed up and lifted his arms high. “Cool it, Zeb. I only wanted to give *my* aunt a hug of greeting. I haven’t seen her in quite a while. Not since way before she took over as guardian of the portal.”

Zeb scowled. Gamil might be as much Lila’s nephew as he was, although from different sides of the family, but he hadn’t shown his face around the encampment for a

damn long time before his aunt had moved to the human plane. And he sure as hell had never been on hugging terms with Lila.

“Good of you to leave the door open for those of us who wished to join the party, Aunt.” Gamil bowed to Lila and turned toward the door. “Guess I’ll go join the fun. Never know, there might be some luscious *bint* out there just panting for a taste of genie.”

“Watch your mouth, Gamil,” Lila snapped at his departing back. “I’m damn certain you’re not using *bint* as it’s meant to be used—as in daughter—and anything else is an insult. I won’t have it, you hear?”

As Zeb watched Gamil leave the kitchen, a flash of rage rolled over him, making the sweat break out on his forehead. “I know he’s related, but I’d like to punt his butt back through that portal.” He glanced over at Lila. “He didn’t hurt you, did he? He was a mean bastard at the best of times and I wouldn’t put it past him.”

Lila rubbed her hand over her upper arm where faint bruises already showed. “He was a rotten little kid and he hasn’t improved one bit. I’m glad my sister isn’t around to see that he’s turned out as one of the dark djinn.”

“What did he want?”

“He wants to be guardian. He’s a little peeved that I’ve chosen you to follow me.” She snorted, the sound one of disgust. “Gods above, if I had appointed Gamil, it would be like opening the door of the henhouse for the fox. Before we knew what had happened, we’d have human women being kidnapped to stock Gamil’s harem. I should have intervened when his mama died. Offered to raise him myself, maybe.”

Zeb slid his arm around her shoulders and hugged her close. “You did the best you could at the time.”

“Hey, Madame, do you need some help in here? I thought I’d—” Mellika skidded to a halt at the entrance to the kitchen. “Um, sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

Madame Lila disengaged herself from Zeb's hold. "No, no, sweet jasmine girl. Come on in. You and Zeb can help carry the last of the food out to the living room." She waved a hand at the platters remaining on the kitchen table.

"Madame, this 'jasmine' bit has really got to stop. I'm starting to get a complex about my name."

A bark of laughter erupted from Zeb. "My aunt is being less than subtle. Maybe she thinks she can go into the matchmaking business now she hasn't got the shop to look after."

Lila slapped a dishtowel against Zeb's rear end. "You mind your manners, boy." She flipped a grin at Mellika. "Jasmine was considered the most erotic perfume for the sultans of the old Ottoman Empire, *and* I happen to know for a fact that it's Zeb's favorite. Amazing what the right scent will do for a man's libido."

Zeb burst out laughing again at the look on Mellika's face. "Aunt Lila, it almost sounds as if you're pimping for me."

He grabbed a couple of platters off the table. "Come on, Mellika, let's get out of here before she conscripts you for my harem." He lowered his voice. "Besides, we have a date with destiny. A weekend of passion, wasn't it?"

He ushered her toward the living room, aroused at the flags of pink color high on her cheeks. Aroused and ready to indulge in a little one-on-one, and if he didn't miss his guess, she was feeling pretty much the same way.

When he brushed against her as they placed the food on the low table situated to one side of the living space, he heard the soft gasp she uttered. Saw the glance she gave him out of the corner of her eye. He straightened, his pulse speeding up at her heightened breathing.

The rapid rise and fall of her breasts in the skimpy, sequined top she wore drove heat through his veins, tightening his lower body. He allowed his gaze to slide downward, over the flat planes of her stomach, to the crystal-encrusted band of her

harem pants. He had a sudden desire to drop to his knees and pull her close. Run the tip of his tongue along the line of jewels that hid her mons from view.

Her stomach muscles suddenly contracted as if she knew what he was thinking. He glanced at her face and caught the glide of her tongue across her bottom lip. Her dark brown eyes glittered almost as much as the fancy band Lila had given her to hold back the luxurious tresses of dark hair that fell almost to her waist. With her fair skin, the contrast in light and dark was a visual turn-on.

A grimace surfaced as he dared a look down. The flowing trousers of the Eastern sultan did nothing to hide his instantaneous reaction. His cock was rock hard, tenting the fabric and giving a clear indication of where his thoughts had centered. *Time to take this party elsewhere.*

"Are you ready for your three wishes, my lady?"

Her eyes opened wide, and a cheeky grin tilted her lips. "A weekend of passion with a hot djinni? You bet! Shame you can't flick your fingers to transport me to your seraglio though." A gurgle of laughter caught her up. "Not that I'd be too happy sharing you with other women."

Zeb took her hand and led her toward the door of the apartment. "Do you want to let your friend know you'll be gone for the weekend?"

"No, Tracey seems to have found her own magic genie for the night." She nodded to where Tracey stood on the far side of the room, happily chatting up another costumed man.

He drew her out into the hallway and closed the door on the party. "Do you want to do this here or would you prefer the privacy of your apartment?"

Her jaw dropped. "Hey, I don't mind a bit of fun, but I'm really not into public displays."

Zeb grinned. "Sorry, I didn't mean it that way." He lifted her hand, the one with the peridot ring, and clasped it to his chest. "Are you willing to suspend disbelief, sweet Mellika? Because what you're about to experience is beyond your wildest dreams."

“Pretty sure of yourself, aren’t you?”

“Would I be so presumptuous, my sweet?” He lowered his head and dropped a light kiss on her mouth.

As his lips met hers, Mellika gasped. Zeb took full advantage, trailing his tongue along her bottom lip and sucking it into his mouth. A moan tumbled from her throat and fire shot through her veins. She pressed closer to him, one arm snaking up around his neck. Zeb released her other hand and wrapped his arms about her waist. He pulled her closer still. Close enough Mellika could feel the heat of his body against her breasts. Her nipples hardened, a visible sign of her arousal. Zeb groaned deep in his chest and rubbed his pecs against the rigid peaks.

He thrust his tongue into her mouth, silently demanding she meet him in kind. She was more than happy to comply. His taste intrigued her. Spicy. Exotic. A fantasy made in heaven and destined to be played out on earth.

His smell inflamed her senses. A mixture of sandalwood and jasmine. Of sex and sin. A combination that drove the tension in her body higher. It ignited nerve endings all over her body. Synapses fired, driving the message home. She wanted Zeb with a hunger she’d never experienced. Her clit ached. Her panties grew wet. Without any conscious volition, her hips thrust forward and rubbed against the hard erection she felt pressed against her lower stomach.

As if he’d finally received the signal he waited for, Zeb deepened the kiss, his own hips taking up the movement Mellika had instigated. He bent his legs until his hard cock nestled between her thighs. Then he thrust his hips in a rhythm designed to drive her to the brink of a cataclysmic orgasm.

The flimsy material of her costume was no barrier against his onslaught. The friction against her pussy made the muscles in her stomach clench. Her breasts felt swollen. Her body throbbed, the ache centered on her clit. And all the while he ravaged her mouth like a thirsty man taking a final draft of live-giving water.

When he finally broke off the kiss, they were both breathing hard. Mellika laid her head against his chest and dragged deep breaths into her lungs. Tension still streaked through her body, making it difficult to think of anything else but fulfilling her fantasy with Zeb. She wanted nothing more than to rip his clothes off and have her way with him. In full sight of anyone ascending the staircase, and the consequences be damned.

Zeb sucked in a hoarse breath and rested his head against hers. "Rub the stone in the ring," he whispered, keeping his arms tightly clasped around her. "Peridot is about to become your slave, but remember, I did say *my* way, right?"

Mellika struggled to catch her breath. When she finally had her emotions under control to a degree, she grinned. She was more than happy to accommodate Zeb's foolishness. "Nothing wrong with a little fantasy in a girl's life," she said in a breathy voice as she rubbed the tip of her finger over the green stone.

Within a heartbeat, the world tilted. A burst of brilliant white light surrounded them, leaching out in spikes of pulsing yellow-green. The passageway outside the apartment receded. Mellika grasped hold of Zeb's arm, an anchor in a swirling blast of wind that threatened to rip the air from her lungs. Consciousness dimmed. Black spots gathered before her eyes. The breath squeezed from her lungs. Then, with a sonic pop, the pressure eased and Mellika blinked her eyes on a totally different existence.

"What in freakin' hell just happened?" she whispered.

Chapter Two

Mellika clutched at Zeb as if he were her favorite teddy bear, both hands now wrapped around his right biceps. She wasn't about to let go until she figured out where they were, because they sure as hell weren't in the hallway outside Madame's apartment. For a moment, she thought she'd pass out. The blood drained from her face and the breath gusted from her lungs in a loud whoosh. Her heart pounded so hard in her chest it was a wonder she didn't pass out. She squeezed her eyes shut and then quickly opened them. Nope, nothing had changed. So...either it was real, or she'd gone stark raving mad. It was time to find out which.

She squinted and stared around. Dragging in a shaky breath, she released her strangle hold on Zeb and stepped back a pace. "Well, this sure ain't Kansas, Toto."

Feet braced slightly apart to compensate for the shifting sand, Zeb crossed his arms over his chest. "Afraid not, Dorothy."

She almost grinned at him getting her reference to Kansas and *The Wizard of Oz*. Almost, but not quite. First, she needed to get her head around what had happened. "Okay, Mister Wizard, where are the drapes? The real wizard worked behind a curtain, and I don't see so much as a cross-stitched pillow in sight."

Undulating sand dunes rode the distant horizon, sweeping down to the oasis in which they'd landed. Date palms, laden with fruit, ringed the large pool of water, creating an illusion of shade in a sunburned landscape. Set in a colorful arc around the edge of the water were tents. Large, small, gaily stripped and plain. One, bigger, more opulent than the others, occupied the prime position at the far end of the oasis.

Mellika, eyes widened, turned her attention back to Zeb. "You... You're really..." Her voice trailed off and she shook her head, shaking off the lightheadedness that engulfed her. "This is really happening, isn't it? Assuming I'm not hallucinating,

somehow you've transported me—us—to somewhere..." Unable to find a description to fit, she allowed her words to trail off.

Zeb grinned. "You wanted a weekend of passion with a real djinni, did you not? I'm giving you what you asked for—your fantasy."

"Well, crap!" Mellika blew out a deep breath. "How? Where?"

He waved a hand around. "Welcome to my world. The world of the djinn people. A parallel dimension few humans know about. I am about to become the guardian of the portal between the two worlds. Until now, my aunt has guarded the doorway."

Mellika frowned. "Hang on, we didn't go through any door to get here. One minute we were at the party and then poof! We're here."

"Your ring." Zeb lifted her hand so they could both see the ring. "Did I not tell you it would grant you your heart's desire? It also allows you to travel from one dimension to the other. As far as the doorway goes, why do you think my aunt spends so much time at her jewelry shop?"

"My God, I don't believe this." She paused. "Well, I do, because I'm living it. *You're* a real genie and *I'm* really here. And your aunt..." She shook her head. "All those tales she told me about genies and magic—they're all true?"

"Do you find it so hard to believe what you can see with your own eyes?" Not waiting for her answer, he clapped his hands and three women who appeared to be about Mellika's age rushed out of the nearest tent. "Prepare the woman for my pleasure."

"Yes, master." All three bowed to him before grasping Mellika by the arms and urging her closer to the tents.

The genuine touch of flesh upon flesh brought Mellika's hazy dreamlike state to an end. This was no 1930s movie, Scarecrow and Tin Man were nowhere to be seen, and there were no red heels to click. "Zeb!"

"My way, remember?" He tapped her gently on the point of her chin. "I promise, it will enhance your fantasy." He turned and strode off toward the largest tent.

"Ohh, mistress, how exciting for you to be chosen to grace the master's bed." The tallest of the females tugged at Mellika's arm. "I am Suli and it is my job to see you properly prepared." She gave Mellika a quick appraisal, her dark eyes bold, despite her demure smile.

"Huh? Since when do I have to be *prepared* to share some guy's bed? A quick shower, a trace of perfume and hey, what else is there?"

The women giggled behind their hands. Suli flipped aside the opening of the tent closest to the one Zeb had disappeared into and lifted an eyebrow knowingly. "It is clear this is your first visit among us, but you will soon learn. It is an honor to be the one to pleasure the sultan of our tribe."

Before Mellika could respond, Suli bent and whipped Mellika's flimsy trousers down her legs.

Mellika tried grabbing her pants. "Hey!"

"You must bathe before greeting master." Suli ignored Mellika's objection and pointed to the other side of the tent where an honest-to-God clawfoot bathtub sat. The other two women bustled in, carrying pails of steaming water and emptying them into the tub. "Come, let me help you disrobe."

She caught her breath. Well, why not? This was a fantasy. She may as well indulge herself. "Go for it, ladies. I'm in your hands."

The women divested her of the rest of her costume, and Mellika climbed into the heated water. Someone had added a liberal dose of jasmine oil. According to Madame Lila, Zeb's favorite scent. It combined with the steam and rose to tease her senses, feeding her brain with a series of erotic pictures of Zeb tasting the perfume on her skin. Dragging his tongue down her belly until he reached... *Whoa*. Mellika stopped her racing thoughts.

The sponges the women used to scrub her with sensitized her skin. The slightest caress of the water made Mellika bite her lip to keep the husky moans inside. She felt like a shaking mass of libido ready to pounce should Zeb appear.

"Sit up," Suli commanded. She reached for a vial and poured a stream of yellow oil into her palm. Then she rubbed her hands together before reaching over and massaging Mellika's breasts.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Mellika fought the involuntary response, brushing Suli's hands from her body and covering her breasts. Her nipples tingled and hardened as the oil seeped into her skin. Fire slid from her breasts and centered in her pussy as if an invisible thread joined both parts of her body. She bit her lip to contain the moan trapped in her throat. "What the hell was that stuff?"

"You like?" Suli asked softly, kneeling beside the bathtub. "It's a special preparation. A stimulating oil to enhance and intensify the erotic sensations. When the master suckles your breasts, you'll feel the heat. When we rub this on the rest of your body, you'll feel like you're burning up, until the master makes you his."

Mellika's throat went dry, her breathing became labored, and her tongue flicked out to wet her lips. She hungered for Zeb's mouth on her breasts. *And* on other parts of her anatomy. She rubbed her thighs together under the water, trying to relieve the insistent ache of her clit. "I think we'll dispense with the oil for now. God forbid, I don't think I could possible handle any more stimulation right now. Much more and I'll come right here."

"Good. It's important that you receive pleasure, too. Before the sun rises," Suli promised, "you will not want for anything."

When Suli indicated she should step out of the bath, Mellika's legs trembled and she was glad when the woman ushered her over to a low divan in the middle of the tent. She should have been embarrassed, but all she could do was lie back and close her eyes, her mind flipping through all the raunchy scenarios it could envision.

Suli patted her down with a soft towel. "And now the hair."

Hair? But Suli had already lifted her long hair over the head of the divan so one of the other women could dry it. What—

“Ouch!” Mellika reared up, eyes snapping open and hands going down to cover her pubic area. “What on earth are you doing?”

“The hair. It all must go.” Suli held up a pair of tweezers. “It is our custom.”

Oh, crap! “Um, look, I got a Brazilian wax job just last week so I could wear that harem costume. Couldn’t you leave me my little landing strip?” She fingered the tiny slice of hair that had remained on her pubic bone after the waxing.

“Ahh, I wondered if you’d have the gumption to go through with it.” Zeb’s deep voice rumbled through the interior of the tent, startling her.

“Yikes!” Mellika rolled off the divan and crouched down behind Suli. “What the hell are you doing in here?”

Zeb raised his eyebrows and stared at her. He’s shed the vest he’d had on and with his arms cross over his bare chest, he seems so much more that he had before. More in charge. More macho. More...sexy. Mellika felt her hormones gather, ready for the charge. The breath caught in her throat and her pulse pounded. Heat seeped into her veins as she studied the little smile on his face.

“It is our custom that our women are free of body hair, but if you can’t hack it...”

Had he just called her a coward? Was she going to put up with that? Not bloody likely. Relying on the fire in her gut to keep her focused, she stood, exposing her body to his view. “You ever had your pubic hair plucked out one at a time, Zeb? Let me tell you, it damn well hurts.”

“And what if I could make it pain-free for you, my scent of jasmine?”

“Hah! What? You offering to do it yourself, with some magical spell to take away the pain?”

Zeb sauntered across the tent and indicated the divan. "On your back, my lady. I can guarantee pain will not be the emotion forefront in your mind." A mischievous grin played about his mouth.

Damn it, he thinks I'm going to back out, that I'm too big a wuss! For a moment, she almost did. Then she grinned and settled back on the divan, hands tucked up under her head. "You think it's seemly for the master to be doing this, my lord?"

Zeb didn't answer. Instead, he hunkered down beside the divan and held his hand out to Suli. Mellika watched as the serving woman uncorked a small green bottle and poured some of the contents into his palm.

"You and the others may go for now," he said to the serving woman. "Come back in time to dress mistress Mellika for the night's feast."

Mellika hesitated. "What's the feast?" Then she sniggered. "Well, I know what it isn't – anchovies."

He frowned.

"A hairy fish." She rolled her eyes. "Forget it, Zeb, and forget your plans to pluck my pussy."

The women scuttled out of the tent, leaving the flap of the tent open. Zeb flicked his fingers and suddenly, with a puff of smoke and a flash of light, the opening dropped, enclosing Mellika and Zeb in the heated atmosphere.

"What other magic feats can you perform?" She chattered for the sake of talking. "If you're so damn good at that, why don't you just poof me a hairless body?" Tension gripped the muscles in her belly. Excitement and anticipation hummed through her blood, driving her temperature higher. She muttered under her breath. "Bastard probably can't conjure up anything for this headache I'm getting either. Pain-free feast, my ass."

"Did you doubt me after our flight through time and distance to get here?" Zeb rubbed his palms together and the scent of jasmine and something spicy rose to perfume the air. "Relax."

"What are you going to do with that?" She nodded toward his oiled hands.

He leaned closer and laid one hand flat on her belly. "This oil has special properties that will ease any pain." With a slow sure movement, he slid his hand down until he covered her mons.

"I told you, the bush stays!"

"Concentrate on the scent," he whispered in a husky voice, ignoring her. Then with both hands, he lightly massaged her pubic area.

Mellika reared up at his touch, dragging in a sharp breath. Goose bumps broke out on her skin. She started to pant, her heart beating so hard it was a wonder it didn't burst through her rib cage. Her head drooped and she flopped back onto the mound of pillows behind her. Each of his hands had her raising her hips in response, hungering for more.

For a moment she wondered if the massage oil was the same one Suli had used on her. Then rational thought disappeared as her body came alive. The oil created a fiery tingle that made every nerve ending sizzle with sensation. Mellika writhed on the divan, trying to find relief from the tension that coiled deep inside her. Liquid heat pooled between her legs and she pressed her thighs together to ease the ache that had set up a distinctive throb deep inside her. Oh God, it was too much. And not enough!

"Spread your legs a little, sweet Mellika." With the tip of one long finger, Zeb drew a line along the edge of the strip of pubic hair that was all that decorated her mons.

She moaned and did what he asked. A rush of air gusted from her lungs when his finger slipped between her thighs. He parted her swollen labia and stroked feather-soft across her clit. Mellika whimpered, riding of the wave of erotic fire that swept through her. At that precise moment, a momentary stab of pain intruded and yanked Mellika from the sensual haze that held her captive.

She jerked upright on the divan. "Fuck!" She stared at the tweezers in Zeb's hand. "You sneaky bastard!"

Zeb chuckled and swept a soft caress across her pubic bone. "Don't be such a baby. It will be all over and done with in no time at all. Focus on what you're feeling rather than what I'm doing."

"Like hell! If I wanted to be as bald as a badger down there, I would have let them rip it all off when I had the Brazilian done." She pointed down at her nether regions. "This little tuft of hair is staying, buddy."

Zeb shrugged, his lips twitching in the beginnings of a smile. "Hey, I thought you wanted authenticity in your fantasy?"

"*This* is as authentic as it gets." Mellika struggled to keep her face straight. It *was* funny when she thought about it. *Whoever thought I'd have a sexy genie tweezing my twat?* As the image flitted through her head, she howled with laughter.

"I guess that means you're not mad at me any longer? And you know something?"

Mellika raised her eyebrows and waited.

"It really is sexy as it is." He leaned over and dropped a fleeting kiss on the smooth, waxed skin between her legs. Using the tip of his tongue, he traced around the remaining pubic hair. "And so is this. I'll leave it."

"Pluck one hair, motherfucker, and you die."

"Shh. I told you I wouldn't."

"Well, just so you know." She willed her body to relax.

Shuddering as sensation overwhelmed her, trusting him, she spread her legs to allow Zeb greater access. He immediately took advantage, slipping to his knees at the end of the divan and dipping his head again. Before she could catch her breath, she felt the swipe of a hot wet tongue along the length of her pussy. Her hips bucked. Her heart pounded. Tremors raced up and down her spine and shook her to the very core.

When he parted her and flicked at her clit, she mewled. The breath gusted from her mouth in a shaky sob. Then he covered her clit with his mouth and sucked, his tongue

flicking and stabbing at the bundle of nerves. Mellika screamed. Tension clawed at her gut. Muscles tightened in response.

He brought his hand into play, sliding two fingers into her creamy dampness. She met his every movement, lifting her hips to drive him deeper. And all the while he tongued her clit, driving her wild, pushing her higher. The pressure snapped, the climax crashed over her. Spasms caught her up, and Mellika convulsed around his fingers. Fire surged through her bloodstream, igniting a conflagration of sexual release.

She gasped when she could catch her breath. "I think I've died."

Zeb dropped a soft kiss on her waxed pussy. "Now *that* I won't allow. Am I not master here? This, my sweet jasmine girl, is only the appetizer. The banquet comes later. Peridot will have his prize."

* * * * *

"That's what I call rotten timing," Zeb mumbled as he vacated the bathing tent. He stepped aside to allow the serving women entrance and then continued on to his own pavilion. Given the chance, he would have whiled away the remainder of the afternoon with Mellika in true carnal fashion, but it wasn't to be.

Most of the tribe had moved onto the summer residence in the hills, but a few of the elders remained and it behooved him to provide for their entertainment this evening. What he really wanted to do was sink his aching cock into Mellika's hot pussy and ride her until she begged for mercy.

He couldn't believe how responsive she was. It had been a long time since a woman had turned him on to this degree. But it wasn't just the sex issue. She made him laugh. Made him feel like he was ten feet tall when he was in her presence. In short, she made him feel special.

Maybe Aunt Lila, with her ability to tell the future, wasn't so far wrong after all. When she'd told him Mellika was his destiny, he'd laughed, until he'd seen Mellika

wearing the peridot ring. That had shocked the hell out of him. The last thing he'd expected was to be paired up with a human woman.

"My lord, you wish to bathe now?"

Zeb shook his head. How long had he been standing just inside his tent daydreaming? He turned his attention to his manservant Faris. "I'll wash up in the pool. Bring me a fresh caftan and towel and soap."

Faris retreated to the rear of the tent, sweeping aside the embroidered curtain that protected the sleeping quarters from view. Within minutes, he returned with the requested items.

"All is ready for the feast tonight?" Zeb asked, taking the fresh clothing from Faris. "It will be the last banquet before we all adjourn to the summer palace."

Faris bowed his head. "It is as you wish, master. The women have prepared a feast fit for a king."

"Or a queen," Zeb muttered as he left the tent and strode out to the oasis.

Within minutes, he'd stripped off his pants and strode into the pool. A shiver shook his body, not so much from the cool water, but from the heat of his skin. Mellika had him hotter than a scorpion fried crisp by the desert sun. He glanced down and grimaced. The clear water did nothing to hide the state of his cock. He needed to get himself together. At this rate, he'd scare the poor girl off before he even had a chance to convince her she was necessary to his future well-being.

Wading to the side of the pool, he grabbed the soap and liberally applied it to his body. The scent of sandalwood mixed with a hint of the erotic scent of jasmine teased his senses. His mind immediately supplied the image of Mellika, legs spread, his fingers buried in her creamy depths. He tossed the soap and dived under the water. If he kept this up, he'd be in dire straits. No way would a silk caftan hide a rampant erection.

Zeb surfaced, shaking the water from his hair. His cock was just as hard. There was only one way to deal with this if he didn't want to go around with a hard-on for the rest of the evening. Soaping up his hand, he slid it under the water and palmed his aching

erection. His head filled with erotic pictures of going down on Mellika, he applied pressure and slid his hand from the base to the swollen head of his cock. Then he reversed the procedure, increasing the speed of the movement.

The muscles in his lower gut contracted. His breathing sped up until he panted. His balls pulled up tight, close to his body. He felt like a spring wound too tight, all the blood concentrated in his lower extremities. With a final glide of his hand, the tension burst and Zeb came in a rush, crying out his release. With a groan, he flipped onto his back and let his mind and his body drift until he regained his equilibrium.

“My lord?”

Zeb jerked his head up. Immediately, he sank beneath the water, surfacing within seconds, spluttering and coughing. He looked up at the downward sweep of the sun in a sky turning from blue to dusky charcoal. He’d tarried too long, his mind caught up in daydreams.

“My apologies, Faris, I seemed to have lost track of time.” He made his way out of the pool and retrieved the towel. Blotting the moisture quickly from his body, he slipped the fresh caftan over his head and slid his feet into soft slippers.

“It is not for that I interrupt your bath, master, although the time does grow late.” Faris grinned with the longtime ease of an old friend. “Much longer and the lady will still find you floating in your memories when she leaves her tent. But no, there is something else. Madame Lila is trying to contact you.”

Without comment, Zeb lengthened his stride, his long legs eating up the distance between the pool and his tent. A quick glance around showed half a dozen low-lying tables had been carried into his tent and placed in a semicircle, with the largest table at the halfway point of the arc. Behind each table were piles of colorful floor cushions in the softest silk.

Artfully arranged on the tables were platters of dried apricots, dates, grapes, melons, figs and pomegranates. Olives, nuts and pungent goat cheese, along with a liberal serving of fried flatbread, covered the remaining plates. Right at this moment,

the women would be busy cooking the hot dishes to accompany the feast. Zeb ran his hair through his dark hair, pushing it back from his face. That would have to do. He had no more time to primp.

Dropping down behind the largest table, he waited, rewarded moments later with the musical chimes from his scrying orb. With a flick of his fingers, the large faceted ball of peridot crystal lifted up from its ornate bronze stand and floated through the air to land on Zeb's outstretched palm.

Zeb waved his free hand over the orb. Within seconds, the green of the crystal glowed. Light refracted off the facets. The color swirled until it was impossible to see through the gem. Then his aunt's features took shape among the tugging currents inside the globe.

"Greetings to you, Lila." Zeb bowed his head in acknowledgement. "May the gods bless your day."

"And you, my nephew," Lila replied. Once the formalities were over, Lila's face took on a concerned frown. "Zeb, Gamil has used the portal again. Gone back to the desert."

"This is a good thing, no? He's back where he belongs."

"Not when he's got Mellika's friend, Tracey, with him."

Zeb scowled. "Tracey went willingly? I wouldn't put it past Gamil to indulge in a little kidnapping if it suited his purposes."

"Tracey is enamored with the whole djinn fantasy. Best I can make out she went of her own free will. I just wanted you to be aware he's back there."

"Then there's not a lot we can do. Although I'd give my eyeteeth to know what devious plan he's got in mind. Gamil has never done anything without having an ulterior motive." Zeb pushed himself to his feet and strode across to the table holding the stand for the scrying orb.

“Zeb, it worries me that Mellika is there. I have a feeling Gamil wants the ring. That’s the only way he can come and go through the portal without being called.”

“I’ll look after Mellika. Go in peace, my aunt.” He bowed his head again. The ball of crystal swirled away the image of his aunt’s face and returned to its crystalline state. He placed it carefully on the holding stand and backed away, his mind on Gamil.

A noise at the entrance to the tent caught his attention. His guests had arrived, and that meant Mellika wouldn’t be far behind them. Fire immediately flashed through his body, hardening his cock. Zeb drew in a sharp breath and struggled to dampen down his libido. He wasn’t about to greet the elders of his tribe with the visible evidence of his state of arousal disturbing the straight lines of his caftan.

As far as Gamil was concerned, Zeb would send Faris to investigate his whereabouts tomorrow. One thing for certain. No way would he let Gamil anywhere near Mellika.

Chapter Three

"Are you ready, my lady?" Suli fussed with the veil that covered Mellika's lower face. "You know you don't have to do this? Master does not expect it."

Mellika smoothed the sheer fabric of her top nervously, careful not to snag a fingernail on the wispy threads and attached tinkling bells. "That's exactly why I'm doing it. Did you send him the message that I'll join him shortly?"

Suli giggled. "He was surprised, although he tried not to show it. He will be even more amazed when you dance for him."

"If I'm to have a fantasy, I may as well throw myself into it wholeheartedly." Mellika tried remembering everything Suli and her friends had taught her during the previous two hours. She studied her costume. "Reveals a bit much, doesn't it?"

Suli nodded and grinned wickedly. "Absolutely."

"You sure you're not another human transplant like me?" Mellika asked. "You sure don't talk and act like I supposed a slave girl would."

"Maybe, like you, I am living my daydream." Suli fanned her fingertips artistically in front of her eyes, as if she were unmasking them. Then she lowered her shoulders slightly, turned her head to the side, feet forward, and gently thrust her hips in a tantalizing, rocking motion.

Lazily closing her eyes and rolling her head as if in a trance, Suli walked toward her in a dreamlike trance. Her lips parted as if involuntarily, but Mellika knew that presentation was all part of the dance, and Suli had mastered the art of entrancement.

She edged closer to Mellika and dropped her head forward. Then, as if by magic, her eyes snapped open, and she advanced with a dramatic, boldly enticing move. She flipped her hair, exposing her neck and parted her lips, lifting her tongue to moisten her mouth.

Suddenly, Suli flicked her fingers and broke the reverie. The saucy grin Mellika loved reappeared. "Want to go over some of the positions again before we leave?"

Mellika nodded. She'd easily grown accustomed to Suli's arms placed over hers and was no longer self-conscious when the other woman enfolded her within the sensual confines of an embrace or helped mold her torso into graceful, seductive poses.

"Arms outstretched," Suli instructed, her hands positioning Mellika's gracefully. "It's as if you're holding a ripe, juicy red pomegranate."

Mellika nodded. "Gotcha. Then a bit of grind?"

Suli sounded pleased. "Yes! Your hips are your greatest asset in belly dancing. They indicate your ability to bear children, to hold and comfort your man, and they represent your womanly mystique. They are your invitation, not just your allure. They and your legs and hands speak for you. That's it."

Mellika bent her legs slightly, making sure she distributed her weight well enough to manage the figure eight move Suli had taught her. Then she took a deep breath, expanding her rib cage, and allowed herself the luxury of leaning slightly against Suli. Opening her mind, she quietly searched and quickly found her inner music, the notes that called to her, beckoning her to listen...and move.

Tilting her pelvis forward, she felt her pussy tingle, as if Zeb's cock were teasing it, requesting acceptance, craving Mellika's contact and contraction. In her mind, her lower body blossomed and welcomed him, slowly allowing him entrance, sucking him inside, where she would harbor and protect.

Suli snorted. "You forgot something." She motioned towards Mellika's sheer turquoise costume.

Mellika looked down. "What?"

"Your feet, for one thing. You forgot your sandals." She pointed to two glittery gold strands of woven thread with crystal beads draped across a jewelry box.

Shocked, Mellika picked up the items. "You're shitting me."

Suli laughed. "Barefoot sandals, as they're often called in the Caribbean Islands. They're foot thongs—you slip the short end over your instep and place the toe ring on your second toe of both feet." She pointed to her own footwear.

"I never heard of such a thing." Mellika struggled and finally got the damn things in place. "Anything else?"

"One more." Suli slid behind Mellika and placed her hands on Mellika's hips. "Stand still—I won't hurt you." She slipped her fingers inside Mellika's sheer harem pants and tugged at the thin string of ribbon thong underwear.

"Holy shit!" Mellika gasped as her pussy muscles spasmed. "What the fuck was that?"

Suli laughed uproariously this time. "Your love knots must've made contact."

"So that's what those are?" Mellika laughed. "Hell, I thought someone had twisted my G-string."

"It's a butt thong with benefits." Suli snorted again.

"Well, it felt like someone with ten fingers on each hand just played with my clit." Mellika gasped again. "How can I walk with those...knots there?"

"Precisely. You glide as if each movement could bring an orgasm."

"With this fucker? I'll be lucky if I don't climax just standing still." She wiggled her hips again, this time knowing the buzz she'd get when the tiny knots of ribbon rubbed against her clit.

"You'd better save some of that for the master."

Mellika jerked to alertness. "What?" She glanced behind her.

Suli had let go of her and was standing, arms folded, with a satisfied smile. "Very nice, but it's growing late. We need to leave."

Mellika felt a moment of panic. "I'm not ready."

"You'll be fine."

"What if I forget and take a bite of the tomato stuff? The ulcer, you know?"

Suli chuckled. "I've sent word ahead that the *tabbouleh* and *loubia* are to be removed."

"And that other..." Mellika snapped her fingers. "You said something about the sandwiches. Quick, tell me again!"

"*Fatayer*—it's a pastry filled with spinach and cheese, sometimes with meat. If you're not careful, it'll dribble, so hold the sandwich with the fingers of one hand and cup your other hand beneath in case crumbs fall."

"Weren't there two different kinds?"

Suli nodded. "The other is called *arayess*, a deep-fried lamb sandwich."

"Right. And the bread—what did you call it?"

"Don't worry!" Suli clasped her arms. "There will be many things to eat, not all of them finger foods, so you don't have to worry about dropping anything." She laughed. "The sandwiches, the breads and dips—I only told you about them so that you might feed the master, not so you'd fret so!"

Mellika wrung her hands. "What if I can't keep all of this straight? What if I spill something onto his lap? He'll zap me like Darth Vader blasting an errant storm trooper."

"Vader was framed." Suli looked up in horror and clapped a hand over her mouth. "Or so I've been told."

Mellika chuckled. "Whatever. If I can believe in genies and slave girls, I don't suppose galaxy warlords are too far a stretch. Where's Yoda when you need him, though?"

At her words, a wizened little gentleman with a hoary face and plump hands opened the flap to their tent and motioned for them to follow him. Both women burst into nervous giggles.

Before they left, however, Mellika adjusted her thong, knowing she'd never be able to walk with those hard knots against her clit.

She trekked through the sand, mumbling about tomatoes, chickpeas, almonds, saffron and eggplant, trying to keep the Arabic names for the foods accurate in her mind. Just thinking of food made her stomach growl.

"What about dessert?" she called over her shoulder.

When Suli didn't answer, Mellika turned. All she saw behind her were rolling sand dunes and the flapping tents. Strange. Suli was supposed to dance with her. Where could she have gone?

"You come." The man leading the way sounded irritated.

Mellika gathered her wits and followed. Surely Suli wouldn't be far behind. Maybe she'd stopped to go to the bathroom. Other women, however, soon joined the human caravan, and they fell into step behind her. These must be the other dancers. She recognized the two women who'd been with Suli when she'd first arrived.

She inhaled deeply, the aromas of the banquet filling her nostrils. Seated on richly embroidered cushions were several men whose dark eyes watched the women carefully, suspiciously, boldly yet cautiously, as if they were eager to discover the pleasures of the dance that awaited them but equally reluctant to show too much enthusiasm.

Men. Mellika marveled at how different yet homogenous they were. They've been this way since they were cavemen. Clannish, tribal in instinct, always conscious of pecking order, rites of passage, where they stood on the corporate ladder, even if said object was one made of sand.

She hid a smile and kept her eyes averted, remembering what little she knew of Arabic customs. To her relief, Suli entered the tent and soon stood beside her.

"I thought you'd deserted me." Mellika's lips barely moved, and she was careful not to turn her head in Suli's direction.

"Never, my sweet."

Mellika fought the urge to turn and stare at Suli. A frown creased her brow. How weird. Suli's voice sounded different, almost creepy. And since when had Suli started calling her "my sweet"? She'd been nothing but respectful throughout the whole bathing process, referring to Mellika as "my lady" or "mistress".

"Are you all right, mistress?" Suli whispered.

"Ah, yes...I guess." Okay, this was getting very confusing. Had she misheard before? No, she was sure she hadn't and there was still something about the tone, the inflection in Suli's voice, that unnerved her. A shiver trembled down her spine and goose bumps broke out on her arms. What on earth was going on here?

She eased her head a little to the right and cast her glance towards Suli. She couldn't get a good look at the expression on her face, but she did spot the smile on her lips. If Mellika had to describe it, she would have said self-satisfied. Like the cat that swallowed the canary. Perplexing...and scary.

"Mistress, keep your gaze downcast until the dance starts," Suli urged.

Mellika did as Suli commanded. Maybe she was imagining things, worried about making a fool of herself in the dance. Hell, she hadn't time for this, anyway. The dancing was about to start. *You're just nervous. Get over it. Suli is your friend – she'll be beside you in case you forget your moves.* She twitched her hips self-consciously, gyrating gently until the love knots were back in place where they belonged, pressed tightly against her mons where they would rub against her clit as she danced.

Soon other women entered the tent and took positions either behind or next to musical instruments that had been propped on a carpet separated from the men. Mellika mentally ticked off the items and her mind's modernized equivalents. *'Ud, tablah, ganum, mijwiz.* Lute, drum, harp, flute.

She took a deep breath and looked where she longed yet dreaded, into Zeb's dark, smoky gaze. His eyes glittered when she connected with him, and the panic she'd felt dissolved. A feeling of empowerment coursed through her, because she knew that he not only approved but was erotically aroused.

Her body began swaying almost unobtrusively at the musical sounds and she became one, a solid yet fluid ribbon of sensuality, encircling everyone in the room, starting and ending with the man in whose arms she'd been only hours before.

Find your inner music. She could almost hear Suli's encouragement. *Let your body talk.* And she knew exactly what she wanted to say to Zeb.

Follow me. She beckoned, fingertips snakelike, flicking expertly, an extension of her arms, her torso, her pelvis and legs. She languidly rolled her head from one side to the other, touching her shoulders first with her left ear, the base of her skull, her right ear. *Love me! Touch me! Taste me!*

She lifted her hair and caressed her scalp then let her restless hands drift downward, barely touching her breasts, stomach, hips. *Fuck me, Zeb! Come inside me and let me hold you closely. Let me arouse you.*

She knelt to let her hands travel from her ankles upward this time, stronger gestures, one crescendo after another, her body moving more assuredly, morphing from willing to wanton. The drumbeats thrummed through her consciousness, and a torrent of aching need ripped through her torso. She felt the heat in her belly growing with every movement she made as the knots drove her wild with need. A moan escaped her lips, but she didn't care. She snapped her gaze upward, catching Zeb's astonished expression, and the fire emanating from him fueled her own desire. Her hands pleaded for him to come to her, to join with her.

Now, Zeb – fuck me now! Make me yours again, forever. I want you – I need you! I must have you.

Mellika dropped to her knees before him, her eyes imploring, her body shivering beneath his heated gaze. She lowered her head and bowed just as the music stopped.

She didn't dare breathe. Reality snatched her sharply from the hypnotic reverie. No. It was him! She looked up when she realized he was holding her arms, his fingers digging into her flesh.

"Mellika, my love!"

Had he spoken? She searched his eyes and knew. He'd whispered the words.

A silent understanding threaded itself from his heart to hers, and she knew that soon they'd be together again and that this time Zeb would have complete dominion over her.

* * * * *

Zeb dismissed his guests, barely aware of their presence. He'd been drawn to her upon introduction, and he'd longed for her before he knew she existed. Now that Mellika was only a breath away from him, he had eyes for no one but her.

Suli stood off to one side, an enigmatic look on her face. Zeb cocked an eyebrow in her direction. "Is there something further you need, Suli?"

The slave girl cast a smile filled with mischief at Mellika before dropping her gaze. "I thought my lady might need help undressing."

"Is this what you desire, Mellika?"

Mellika blushed, but a smile lifted the corners of her pert mouth. "Whatever pleases you, my lord."

"Nooo. This is about what would please you." He deliberately inflected his tone so as not to mislead her, even teasingly. He frowned, only half mockingly. "Hmm, I get the feeling you two are up to something. Do I want to know what you talked about when you were in that bathing tent?"

Mellika sent Suli a cheeky grin then bit her lips before replying to Zeb's question. "Suli's a good friend. She helped bathe me, *per your request*."

"And what else?"

"She...ah, told me what the master likes. How to please him and what to expect."

"Aha." Zeb crossed his arms over his chest and took a deep breath as his curiosity surprised him by turning into annoyance. He didn't want Suli—or anyone else for that matter—teaching Mellika anything. *He* was quite capable of showing Mellika the pleasures of the body.

He shook his head. Jealousy from a djinni? He wasn't some dragon who hoarded sparkly toys and possessions. He looked past Mellika and nodded at Suli. "Thank you for seeing to your mistress's needs. I'm sure I can take it from here and even act as lady's maid if necessary. You may go now."

Suli bowed her head a moment before looking directly at him. "Yes, master."

There was something oddly bold about the servant girl. Zeb wasn't one for paranoia, but he'd never known Suli to level her eyes against his, almost arrogantly. Before he could chastise or question her, she opened her lips perfunctory to speaking, so he kept silent.

Again the audacious glance as she spoke. "First I'll retrieve a robe for the mistress to wear in the morning and then I'll leave you alone."

Suli's eyes held a mysterious glitter that unnerved him, and he wondered at the necessity for a specific robe. Before Zeb could question her motives, a high wind whipped through the tent. Both women yelled out and Suli fell backward on her ass.

The slave girl screamed again, a strange strangled sound, but she was quickly on her feet and looking about.

"You okay?" Mellika asked, going toward her.

Zeb instinctively grasped his beloved by the wrist and drew her toward him. Errant weather wasn't surprising, but there was something about the chill in the air accompanying the high velocity that bothered him.

Suli brushed herself and nodded. "I will return shortly."

Mellika smiled and snuggled against Zeb. "Thank you, Suli."

Zeb indicated the back of the tent, just past the embroidered curtain that hid one of his private quarters. "Leave it on the divan just inside the drapes. And thank you for all your help, Suli."

Suli waved and abruptly left.

"That was weird." Mellika frowned. "Is there a storm brewing?"

Zeb hugged her. "None that I'm aware of, but I'll ask Faris." He scooped her into his arms and strode purposefully towards the back.

Mellika parted the curtain so that they could enter the room, and she nuzzled him. "Were you pleased with my dance?" she teased.

Zeb kissed her passionately on the lips and gently laid her on the bed amidst various velvet and brocade cushions. "Extremely so. Not a bad accomplishment for only a bit of practice." He parted her legs with his and knelt, head against her stomach.

"Maybe I'm a natural-born seductress."

"You didn't eat. I hear your stomach growling."

Mellika laughed. "So feed me. I must warn you, though, that I'm ravenous right now. I couldn't eat before the dance—I was so afraid of making a mistake and embarrassing you in front of all those men." She gasped. "For that matter, I didn't see you eat either. I'd practiced so that I could feed you like some lovesick slave girl."

He captured her hands and brought them to his cheeks, looking up at her. "And are you...*lovesick*?"

He saw her throat pulsate with the hard swallow, heard the tiny gulp and caught the sharp intake of air. Part of him reacted with macho satisfaction that he'd had such a strong effect upon her. "You're blushing."

She writhed beneath him, trying to escape. "I'm just hungry."

"Then let me feed you. But first..." He moved up the bed and reached for the front opening of her top. He'd been driven almost to a breaking point by the tantalizing sight of her breasts through the sheer fabric. His fingers shook as he unhooked it. Her breasts spilled out, the rosy peaks beckoning him, and he wanted nothing more than to taste, but he restrained himself for the moment. He eased her up and slid the garment off her shoulders, the tinkling sound of the bells decorating the scrap of cloth a musical accompaniment that made his libido spike.

When he laid her down again, he could no longer deny himself. He dipped his head and took one hardened tip into his mouth. With a gasp, Mellika arched her upper body, her hands clutching the silken sheets beside her. He rolled her nipple against the roof of his mouth, flicking it with the tip of his tongue. With a gentle scrape of his teeth, he released it and moved to its twin, suckling and licking. Teasing and taunting until Mellika whimpered and thrashed on the bed. Then he stripped the flimsy harem pants from her before sliding down her body, parting her legs further with his hands this time.

Mellika moaned. The joke she attempted sounded flat. "That...is not feeding me. It's eating..."

Zeb growled and dove into the apex she presented, pushing aside the ribbon thong, his tongue flicking hungrily for the taste of her sweet but salty honeyed center.

Her hands broke free, and she grasped his head, threading her fingers through his hair, clutching him each time he thrust into her. Zeb found her clit and suckled, nibbling gently on the minute bulb until Mellika's moans were more audible. *That's it, sweetheart, let me hear your pleasure.*

He withdrew his tongue and pulled her toward him. Then he licked again, beginning at the cleanly waxed mons and traveling down, to better follow the natural lines of her body, to suckle the seam that led from her pussy to her asshole so that he could rim her.

"Zeb!" Her cry invigorated him and his cock swelled, pushing against his clothing.

"Come for me, darling," he coaxed between breathy licks.

She twitched, her body jerking rigorously. Her hips lifted, pressing closer to him. Her luscious breasts rose and fell as she panted, her breathing fast and fragmented. Breathless moans tumbled from her lips, a litany of need that drove him on. She screamed as he pushed her over the top, and the sound buried itself inside Zeb's head. Exciting. Erotic. Feeding his own desire and driving the blood in his body downward to harden his cock even more.

He tasted the first drops of her creamy juices as they sluiced into his mouth. His tongue pierced her again and again, drawing as much from her as he could muster. His body bucked in anticipation of fucking her once she was spent. He wanted to completely drain her then revive her in full force, to give of himself as readily as she'd given to him.

"Remember who holds you," he said softly, kissing the inside of her thighs. He looked up, feeling a huge wave of emotion sting him.

"Oh, Zeb!" Mellika's voice held a catch. "Only you."

He hoisted himself up and forward until he lay beside her. "Darling girl." He brushed hair from her cheeks. "You have bewitched me. You know what that means?"

She shook her head. "No."

"Djinn do not fall in love with just anyone." He steepled his fingers. "Djinn are renowned *ghul*, the night shades who can alter their appearance, often to hide their true feelings – not just their motives. We do have our Achilles heels, however. Once we fall in love, there are ways for our lovers to watch over us, as we watch over them."

Mellika hugged him fiercely. "How? Because I would protect you and guard you jealously if I could."

"Jealously? Why?"

She sniffed indelicately. "I would think it obvious. Because I don't wish to share you with any other woman."

"Do you know how much it turns me on to hear you say that?" Zeb crawled within the sanctuary of her legs and pulled the fabric of her thong aside again, grinning as the ribbon knot glided across Mellika's clit, dragging a breathy moan from her.

He parted her slick slit, working his fingers into her pussy. "You're still wet. Good." He dragged his caftan aside and his cock sprang forward, eagerly seeking entry to Mellika's pussy. "I want you!" He pushed against her, feeling the moist warmth sheathing his cock inch by achingly glorious inch.

Her flesh welcomed his, tightening around him as he continued pressing into her body. When he considerably slowed his entry, she pushed against him, hips bucking to meet his.

"You're driving me crazy!" she said with a chuckle. "All I can think about is you, and this damn costume has just about pushed me beyond sanity."

He fingered the love knots that he'd pushed aside and laughed. "I can give you something a lot harder and bigger than these."

"See that you do." She impaled herself over and over on his shaft, her body moving rhythmically. "You feel so good!"

Zeb's restraint dissolved, and he wrapped his arms about her and held her tightly. She smelled so sweet, and her hot, tight little pussy felt like the only home he'd ever known. How someone so small and feisty could hold not only his attention but his heart amazed him, and he couldn't get enough of her.

His hands moved restlessly across her body, gliding down to grasp her hips. He wanted to dive inside Mellika and never come up for air, to stay inside her sizzling heat until they both passed out from exhaustion.

He was geared for more physical exertion than she, but even he felt his physical body's impending depletion as she tensed in his arms.

"Zeb!" she cried. "More...fuck me harder...I'm almost there!"

He pumped himself into her, filling her until he felt her sticky hot juices against the root of his cock. "Now, baby, now, sweet girl—come with me!"

Her anguished cries of pleasure heralded not only her release but his. He thrust one last time, driving himself deep inside her. His back arched. Muscles contracted. Tension clawed at his gut. Then his world unraveled and he came with a roar, her internal muscles milking him with every spasm. Satiated, he collapsed with his head on her shoulder, his elbows keeping his weight from crushing her.

The only sound to fill the air was the harsh rasp of their breathing. Then he thought he heard soft footsteps and looked up to find that they were no longer alone.

Suli stood inside the room, smiling, her posture familiar, her arms crossed in a manner that reminded him disturbingly of a djinni. She sauntered towards his bed, purposefully stood staring insolently down at them, particularly at Mellika's steamy body.

"What the hell are you doing in here?" he demanded. *The cheek of the girl!* Zeb eased himself away from Mellika, pulling the brocade bedcover over her naked body. Before he could get to his feet and remove Suli from the room by force, he felt himself tossed backward several feet, landing on the floor on the other side of the bed. And in that moment, he knew with certainty who had invaded their privacy.

The metamorphosis was complete within the blink of an eye. Suli disappeared and Gamil stood in her place. Soon Gamil's face contorted and once again, the high winds ripped through the tent, this time with a howl that all but froze Zeb's heart. Gamil bent like dark death and kissed Mellika full on the mouth, punishing her. His hands whipped the cover from her body and cupped her soft breasts, crushing them, because Zeb could see his cousin's knuckles turning white.

Gamil then abruptly broke the kiss and jerked Mellika from the bed, pulling her arms aloft. He brought them forward, wrapping her tightly with her own limbs, with his encasing hers. He laughed, a thunderous, booming discordance that mingled sharply with Mellika's screams.

Zeb knew that his cousin wouldn't harm Mellika just yet, but the murderous glare in Gamil's eyes left no doubt what plans he'd made for his cousin, so Zeb braced himself, throwing all of his energies into self-protection.

Chapter Four

Mellika struggled, trying to escape the arms that held her, but to no avail. Fear burned its way through her. Bile rose in the back of her throat. She breathed deeply and caught the stench of evil. "W-who are you?" she managed, although her voice was nothing but a wispy semblance of its former strength. "I...weren't you the man with Tracey at the party?"

He twisted one arm about her throat, applying enough force to make her gasp for breath. She tried pulling away but he was too strong. Scratching his arm with her nails only resulted in him increasing the pressure.

"I'm the man who will be the guardian between the two worlds...when I get that ring from you. *And* once I deal with my dear cousin over there." He extended one hand in front of him, fist curled. When he opened it, a red fireball danced on his palm. With a flick, he sent it flying toward Zeb.

"Zeb!" Mellika fought to get free, scratching and pulling at her captor's arm. Horror filled her, making her heart pound as the missile headed towards Zeb.

At the last minute, Zeb, now on his feet, flung his arm up and released a green ball of light that blasted the fireball into nothingness. Another ball of green fire appeared in his hand as quickly as the first one disintegrated.

"Let her go, Gamil. You hurt her and I'll make you sorry you were ever born." Zeb moved in a circle around Gamil until he stood between him and the entrance to the sleeping chamber. His cousin twisted to face him, dragging Mellika with him.

"My lord." Faris appeared at his side, pushing back the embroidered curtain. "Suli is missing."

Zeb nodded toward Gamil. "I suspect *he* has something to do with that." He waved the ball of light around but didn't release it.

"Give it up, Zeb. If you try to take me down you risk harming the lady yourself." He threw another fireball only to have Zeb block it with a shimmering green barrier in front of him and Faris.

Zeb's manservant sidestepped the magical barricade and rushed at Gamil. With a quick flick of his fingers, Gamil loosed a ball of fire that hit Faris in the chest. Faris went down, gasping and writhing on the Turkish carpet covering the sand floor of the tent.

Mellika screamed. Oh God, Zeb was next. Gamil would kill him, would kill *her* to get the ring. She lifted her hands and tried to wrench the ring off her finger but it wouldn't budge. Somehow she had to get free to give Zeb a chance. He wouldn't attack Gamil while she was at risk. She dropped, let herself go loose and relied on gravity to pull her weight down.

"Oh, I don't think so, my lady." Gamil tightened his hold around her neck.

Mellika wheezed, her fight for breath loud in the tent. Gamil pulled her upright again and eased the grip on her throat a fraction. She sucked in air with a loud gasp. She fastened her gaze on Zeb, knowing there was nothing he could do to save her.

Gamil's voice dripped with facetious sincerity as he tightened his hold on Mellika. "You could save us all a lot of trouble by just handing over the ring."

She twisted, trying to evade his grasp. "I'm trying to take it off!"

"Not hard enough." This time anger laced his words. "What if it meant Zeb's life? Do you think the ring might come off easier if you knew just how much danger you placed upon him by defying me?"

Mellika cut Zeb a frantic look, one that pleaded for him to save himself, but his face and voice were calm as he spoke.

"You aren't strong enough while your energies are divided, cousin. You and I both know that if you'd wanted to kill me, you'd have done so by now, but you can't as long as your attention is split between your greed for the ring and your hatred of me."

Gamil's face reflected his demonic quick thinking. "Then perhaps I'll get rid of the main distraction." He shook Mellika none too gently, which brought the desired result.

When he laughed, Zeb lunged, only to be held in place. Faris, who still lay on the floor, stretched forth a hand and grasped Zeb by the leg, weakly detaining him.

Gamil took advantage of Zeb's reluctance to advance. "Well, it's been interesting, cousin, but I'm afraid we'll have to say goodbye." Gamil flicked his fingers and a ring of flames surrounded him and Mellika.

A whirlwind of buffeting air howled through the tent, the vortex centered over them. The circle grew tighter, fanning the flames, driving them higher and higher until Mellika could no longer see Zeb. Light flashed, and with an explosive rush that resonated through Mellika's head, what she perceived as reality, at least her new reality, disappeared.

The wind caught them up. She felt herself hurled through space. Pressure on her chest squeezed her lungs, compressing the air until she gasped to stay conscious. Black spots swam in front of her eyes as Gamil tightened his arm about her throat. Darkness encroached on the edge of her vision, the only thing of color the peridot ring on her finger, a bright green beacon in a world gone mad.

When Mellika thought she could hold out no longer the journey ended with a loud thump. Gamil lost hold of her and she crashed hard, despite the fact she could feel the surface under her was sandy. She wheezed, dragging in one draft of air after another until her starved lungs relaxed. When she could lift her head without danger of passing out, she stared at her surroundings.

She was in a cave, the sandstone sides rising high over her head. Burning flares, tucked into carved niches along the walls, illuminated the area around her. In front of her stood Gamil, hands planted on his hips in a gesture of superiority.

"Give me the ring, woman!"

"Go to hell." She sat, shaking her head to clear her mind. She felt groggy, her thoughts confused, but one thing she did know. She wasn't about to give in to this bully and put Zeb in danger.

Legs shaking, she pushed herself to her feet. She almost fell, then tightened her knees to keep herself upright. No way would she give this djinni the satisfaction of seeing her weakness. "Where are we?"

"Far enough away that my cousin can't get to you," he said with a sneer. "Now, the ring, my lady."

Mellika ignored him and looked around for an avenue of escape. A movement at the back of the cave caught her attention. "Suli!" She raced across to her new friend. "And—oh my God, Tracey? What...what—" Both women sat propped up against the wall of the cave, their hands fastened in front of them.

"My bargaining chip," Gamil interrupted. "Do you wish to see your friends hurt?"

Mellika ignored him. "Tracey, are you okay? He didn't do anything to you?"

Her friend shook her head, her eyes filled with tears. "No, he just wanted to use me to get to you. He didn't even care." Her voice broke and she buried her head in her bound hands.

Sorrow took root in Mellika's heart. Tracey had been so looking forward to that party, and now look what had happened. Tracey came across as a confident, self-assured woman, but she had a tendency to rush into relationships before she really got to know a man.

Mellika shook her head. Not that she was much different. Look how quickly she'd fallen for Zeb.

Pushing the thought aside, she turned to Suli and laid her hand on her shoulder. "Are *you* all right?"

"I was more worried about you when *he*..." she nodded toward Gamil, "assumed my persona. Is the master okay?"

"For the moment." Mellika paused, her brow furrowed in thought. "How the hell am I going to get us out of here?"

Suli leaned closer and whispered, "Remember the ring, my lady. Peridot's prize."

"All right, that's enough," Gamil said, moving closer to the women. "The ring." He snapped his fingers and beckoned, palm open, seeming to expect Mellika to deliver as he asked.

Mellika stood and faced him. "It refuses to budge. There's nothing I can do about it."

Gamil lunged and caught her by the hand, pulling her across the cave toward the entrance. "I'll cut your finger off if I have to," he growled.

Her friends screamed. Mellika cried out and fought him, but he was too strong. He dragged her across the cave floor to a large rock and placed her hand on top of it. Then he reached for the scimitar that hung from a cord about his waist. Mellika's mouth went dry. Her heart pounded in her chest. Panic overwhelmed her, and she closed her eyes. For a brief moment, she quieted her racing thoughts and heard the words Suli had just whispered. Remember the ring. *What about the ring?* Remember what? Then just as quickly as she'd shut her eyes against Gamil and the horror she'd expected, she snapped them open. No way in hell was she going to let him win.

Playing Suli's words over in her mind, Mellika knew what she must do. It had to work! Gamil restrained her one hand, but she covered the ring with her other hand, rubbing at the stone for all she was worth. "Zeb—come to me! Find me! I need you!"

Gamil swore and pushed aside her free hand, ready to chop the one he imprisoned.

A flash of brilliant light filled the cave suddenly, a colorful cross between celadon and tea green that glittered brilliantly and accelerated from the pale spectrum of green to darker pigments. The lightshow was accompanied by a thunderous boom that heralded Zeb's arrival, and the murderous look on his handsome face scared even Mellika, who up until now had only known his gentle side.

She jerked her hand away just as the scimitar swung, but Gamil's aim was off anyway, thrown askew by the shock of Zeb's entrance.

"Bastard!" Gamil's once steady, arrogant baritone was now a high tenor scream. "Why won't you just die!"

Zeb tossed a fireball towards Gamil, catching his cousin off guard. "You first!" He advanced, his eyes fixed murderously upon his cousin.

Surely he doesn't mean that! As suddenly as his words chilled her, an even icier feeling crept over her when Zeb looked away from his opponent momentarily, just long enough to share an intense, pleading look with her.

Mellika remembered what Zeb had said about Gamil not being strong enough to destroy him back in the tent because he wasn't focused. So why didn't the man ignore her and concentrate on deflecting Gamil's barbs? Why didn't he save himself?

While Gamil threw himself into annihilating his cousin, Zeb seemed intent upon reaching Mellika no matter the cost to his own health or life.

"Zeb!" Mellika rushed towards him as he fell in front of her. His face was bloody, his eyes creasing with pain. "Fool," she sobbed. "Why didn't you stay on the other side of the cave?"

"Because Peridot wants his prize." Zeb's voice held urgency.

"At last, cousin, I have you where I want you...at my feet, begging for your life." Gamil took a deep, self-satisfied breath. He nodded towards Mellika. "Let's have you start with hers. Shall I kill her or let her live?" He glared down at Zeb. "You heard me, Zebargad. Beg."

"No!" Mellika couldn't bear the thought of her proud genie in such a position, that of a scared animal. "Don't do it, Zeb—don't you dare!"

Zeb turned until he faced Gamil, on his knees. "Gamil, I'm afraid I have only one thing to say."

"What?" Gamil sounded smug.

Zeb continued facing Gamil but turned his head slightly, speaking over his shoulder. "Remember the ring, Mellika."

Gamil screamed—too late. His clawlike hand stretched forth for hers. Mellika dropped to her butt on the sand and kicked at his chest. Once. Twice. Crawling backward using her elbows, she gained just enough distance then rubbed the ring fiercely, chanting her curse. "Gamil, I consign you to hell! Be gone!"

With another scream, Gamil disappeared and Mellika was left sitting on her ass in the sand with Zeb only a few feet from her and her friends still restrained at the far end of the cave.

* * * * *

Zeb turned and crawled to her. He hugged her and kissed her wildly. Then he set Mellika aside and jumped to his feet, grabbing the curved sword and rushing toward the back of the cave. "Suli? Tracey?" He shook his head. He couldn't take it all in. "Are you two all right?"

Tracey could only nod, but Suli was quite vocal. "I am not harmed, but the mistress is one fine fighter. A perfect match, master."

Zeb grinned, relieved to have Suli and Mellika and Mellika's friend safe. "She is that!" he retorted. He quickly used the tip of the scimitar to slice through the leather thongs binding the women's hands, all the time glancing around the cave, his senses on high alert. He still had to deal with Gamil. "What made you think of sending him to hell, my love?"

"I had no idea where that was," she confessed. "I just knew it wasn't here, with you."

Zeb burst out laughing and grasped Mellika by the hand, holding it up so he could see the ring. It glowed softly at his touch. "I can think of only one thing a djinni would consider hell."

He focused on the glow until it narrowed to a pinprick of light. There, amid the facets of the stone, he saw an image of his cousin. Behind him was the sand of the desert and his rightful home. In front of him were the dusty shelves of his aunt's jewelry store. He gave another bark of laughter. "You did indeed consign him to hell. He can go neither forward nor back. He's caught between two dimensions. That no man's land between the land of the djinn, the rolling dunes of the desert, and the door between this world and the next, Madame Lila's jewelry store."

"So he can't harm us any longer?" Mellika pushed closer, her breasts brushing up against his arm.

Sensation hit him, driving heat through his body. His cock rose to the occasion, tenting the front of his flowing trousers. Thankfully, none of the women seemed to be aware of it. He'd never reacted so quickly to any woman.

He grinned. His aunt was a smarter woman than he'd ever given her credit for. If she hadn't made certain Mellika bought that ring...

Zeb bowed gracefully. "Now that Gamil is taken care of, thanks to Mellika, shall we go home, ladies?"

"Yours or mine?" Mellika inquired.

"And why can't we share them?" Zeb couldn't think of anything he'd like better. In this world or the one on the other side of the portal.

Chapter Five

"When will he learn?" Madame Lila muttered. "It does him no good to whine like that."

Mellika turned from her self-imposed task of dusting the shelves in the jewelry store. "Who are you talking about, Madame?"

Madame Lila pointed over her shoulder at the back of the shop. "Gamil. I can hear him from here. Such a willful boy."

Mellika moved closer and pressed her ear against the wall. "I can't hear anything. Are you sure he's there?"

"Oh, he's there all right, caught between two worlds. Maybe in a few thousand years he will have learned his lesson and you can let him out." She flipped a checked scarf about her neck and patted the front of her jacket.

"Me? Why do I have to be the one to let him out?"

"Because it was your magic that sent him there, so only you can release him. Now, time is passing and I really need to go. Where's that boy of mine?"

Zeb appeared from the back of the shop. "I'm here, Aunt. I've sent your luggage through. One of the men will collect it for you at the other end."

She patted his cheek. "You're a good boy, you are, Zeb. Give your old aunt a hug."

As Zeb bent down and kissed his aunt, Mellika chuckled. It didn't seem to worry him that she was treating him like a kid.

"Anyone would think he's twelve years old instead of a grown man."

Mellika turned at the low whisper, meeting Suli's grin. "Don't all men like to be treated like little boys on occasion?"

“Very true, my friend.” She draped an arm over Mellika’s shoulder and leaned into her.

Mellika was glad Suli had decided to make her life among the humans. She couldn’t believe how different the woman looked minus the servant girl clothes, although Mellika had to agree with her that the harem outfits were a hell of a lot more comfortable than jeans and blouses. Nowadays, Mellika couldn’t wait to get home and change into a caftan or loose trousers and a brief top. And it certainly pleased Zeb.

He snapped his fingers. “Hey, you two, stop daydreaming and come say goodbye to Aunt Lila. Then she can go.”

Obedying Zeb’s summons, Mellika hugged the old lady. “Thank you,” she whispered into her ear.

“Remember, keep him on his toes. Does the world of good for your sex life.”

With a chuckle, Mellika stepped back and allowed Suli to say her farewells. A last hug, and Madame Lila opened the door at the back of the shop. At first glance it was a simple exit, until Zeb waved his hand and green spikes of the peridot strobed amidst a sea of dark shadows. Madame stepped into the darkness and flashed out of sight.

Zeb closed and locked the door. “Come on, ladies. Time to close up and go home.”

They bustled about, turning lights off and pulling down the blinds before leaving by the front door. After a short walk, they were back at the apartment block where their adventures had started. Tracey had taken over the apartment she and Mellika had shared, with Suli using what had once been Mellika’s bedroom.

The three women had become the firmest of friends, although there were times Mellika wondered if Suli wanted more than just friendship. The woman was highly sensual and very demonstrative with her affections. Not that it mattered one way or the other. Mellika loved her like a sister.

Putting the thought aside for the moment, Mellika slipped into the bedroom she and Zeb shared and stripped off her clothes before heading for a quick shower.

After she'd toweled off she wandered back into the bedroom and grabbed a caftan. Arms raised, she was about to slip the simple garment over her head when she heard a noise behind her.

"Such beauty," Suli whispered.

For a moment, Mellika felt the warmth of embarrassment then thrust it away. For crying out loud, the woman had bathed her. Ignoring Suli for the moment, she pulled the caftan down and settled it about her body.

"Would you like me to help dress you, mistress?"

"I guess we're going to have to talk about this, aren't we?" Mellika grimaced, praying she'd find the right words and not embarrass her friend. "Ah, Suli, I think —"

Suli burst out laughing. "Don't get your knickers in a twist, my sweet." She flicked Mellika on the chin. "I know which way the wind blows, but you are so much fun to tease. If you could only see your face."

Mellika grinned. "Brat! And here I was worrying about hurting you."

"Hey, don't get me wrong. If you swung the other way, I'd be all for it." Suli grinned and tilted her head to look at the bed. "So what about Zeb?"

"Back off, girlfriend! Zeb is mine and I don't plan to share him. Go find your own man...er, woman."

Suli gave a breathy chuckle and headed for the door. "Either will do. A bit of variety adds to the excitement." Then she disappeared, only to stick her head back around the door at the last minute. "Can I at least watch?"

With a laugh, Mellika picked up one of the pillows mounded on the bed and tossed it at the doorway. "Get out of here before Zeb comes in."

Once Suli was gone, Mellika stared at the large four-poster bed taking up most of the space in the bedroom. A grin curved her lips as an idea took hold in her mind. Not giving herself time to think, she dived for the wardrobe, dragging out the lengths of sheer draperies Madame Lila had given her. Standing on the bed, she draped them over

the posts and looped them across to form a tent, allowing the ends to hang down the corners.

She stripped off her caftan and wrapped the last piece, a rich emerald green, loosely about herself. Then turning the bedcovers down, she climbed in and arranged herself against the mountain of silky pillows. The fabric was so sheer, she could see her nipples and what was left of her pubic hair through it. Very erotic. Now to see what Zeb thought.

She heard his key turn in the lock of the front door and within minutes, he entered the room, stripping his shirt over his head. "I'm bushed. It's been a long day." He dropped the shirt on the floor and glanced across at the bed. His mouth dropped. Red spots highlighted his cheeks. His breathing accelerated.

Oh yeah, nothing like a little imagination. "Does Peridot want his prize?" Mellika whispered.

She had to bite her lip to contain her laughter as Zeb struggled to get his jeans off, hopping from one foot to the other in his haste. Then, like the slave girls from his own dimension, he crawled up the bed from the bottom. She opened her arms to welcome him.

"I thought I'd give you a little taste of home."

"Home is wherever you are," he growled. Lowering his head, he took her mouth in a shattering kiss.

Mellika opened to him, sucked his tongue into her mouth. He tasted of exotic spices and mystery. Of love and commitment. Sensation swirled through her as she gave back some of what she was receiving. She snaked her hands about his neck and pulled him closer, increasing the pressure. Nipping at his lips then sweeping her tongue across the bite to soothe it. When she thrust her tongue into his mouth, he met her, taunting and playing with her.

He slid his hand to her breast and she broke off the kiss, gasping as heat followed where his fingers stroked. Those oh-so-clever fingers circled her nipple but never

touched. The brush of the sheer fabric increased the erotic sensation, heightening the emotions curling through her blood. Mellika moaned, arching her body. Seeking his touch on the hard tips. She groaned and twisted in his grasp, but he moved his hand, denying her what she needed. "Zeb, I'm going to kill you if you don't follow through," she said through clenched teeth. "I'm going crazy here."

He chuckled. "All in good time, my sweet jasmine."

Before she could draw breath, he lowered his head and took the throbbing peak into his mouth, fabric and all. The damp material created its own friction as Zeb sucked on her aching nipple. The scrape of his teeth, the warmth of his mouth, and the strong pull of his lips sent an arrow of heat lancing through her chest until it came to rest deep in her pussy. Her clit ached. Moisture seeped between her swollen lips. Her hips arched and she ground herself against his rigid erection.

God, she wanted nothing more than to have him pound away at her. Fuck her until she forgot where she started and he ended. Two halves of the whole. Then she remembered. This night was for Zeb. Rearing up, she caught him by surprise and pushed him onto his back. She crawled over him, straddling his thighs. "Not so fast, my sexy genie. I've got plans for you."

With a grin, he lay back and folded his arms behind his head. "In my world the woman is there to service her man. Who am I to go against custom? Service me, woman!"

"Cocky bastard." She grinned and before he could say a word, slid down his body until she was eye level with his magnificent cock.

"What are you doing," he asked.

"Just sit back and hang on, my lord. I'm about to take you on the ride of your life."

Sliding her hand around his hard shaft, she lowered her head and licked at the engorged head. "Hmm, it's like savoring an ice cream." She gave another languid lick, probing at the slit on the top.

He snorted. "Just as long as you don't decide to take a bite."

"Oh, you mean like this?" She opened her mouth and took his cock deep, swirling her tongue around his width. Slowly, gently, a fraction of an inch at a time, she scraped her teeth up the entire length of him.

Zeb groaned and arched his hips. "Lady, you're a witch."

"No, just your own personal slave girl, master." With a grin, she lowered her head again and went to work, ready to give him all the pleasure he could stand. She ran her tongue over the smooth head, licking away the glistening drop of pre-cum, only to have it replaced with another. "Hmm, nice and salty," she murmured.

She flicked her tongue along the thick vein under his cock until she reached the base and then slid to the top again. Zeb's breathing had accelerated, the raspy sound loud in the room. His hips moved restlessly. No longer lying there so self-assured, he buried his hands in her hair, hanging on as she took him into her mouth again and sucked hard. At the same time, she slipped her hand between his legs and cupped his balls. When she felt them tighten, she knew he wasn't far from coming.

He tugged at her hair. "Enough, woman! I want to be buried deep inside you."

She grinned at him and gave his hard cock one last lick. "Whatever the master desires."

He reared up and grabbed her under the arms, moving her onto the other side of the bed. "My turn now. On your stomach, slave."

Mellika was happy to comply. She rolled over and watched Zeb raise himself to his knees. It was all she could do to lie still. Pleasuring Zeb had raised her own body temperature. Fire lapped at every nerve ending in her body. Her clit ached and moisture flooded her pussy.

Zeb brushed the hair away from her neck then proceeded to lick and nibble his way down her spine. Mellika writhed on the bed. Goose bumps broke out on her skin and the breath caught in her throat. "God, Zeb, get on with it. Fuck me already!"

He slapped her lightly on the ass. "My turn, my way, my sweet. Now on your knees."

When she'd done so, she felt Zeb settle himself between her thighs. He dragged the tip of one finger along the length of her pussy. Mellika gasped.

"So wet, my sweet," he whispered. "And I plan on enjoying every delectable drop."

One long swipe of his tongue and Mellika whimpered. When he parted her swollen labia and flicked at her clit with the tip of his tongue, she cried out. Her heart thumped in her chest. Her arms trembled and she was in danger of losing her balance. Then Zeb grasped her hips tight and buried his face between her thighs and Mellika started to pant.

His mouth worked her, tongue thrusting deep inside her and withdrawing. Over and over, until tension curled tight in her belly and liquid fire zapped along her veins. When he took her clit between his teeth and applied a gentle pressure, she shattered. Her body convulsed, spasms spreading out from where Zeb loved her with his mouth. She cried out her climax, a wild keening that escalated as she rode the orgasm then fell away in a series of breathy sobs. Her arms gave way and her upper body flopped onto the silken sheets as she fought to drag in a shaky breath.

Before she'd regained her senses, Zeb moved closer, his hard cock probing at the entrance to her pussy. With one long, hard thrust, he drove home, filling her with his length. Stretching her with his solid width. Mellika whimpered and angled her hips, wanting as much of him as she could get. He set up a rhythm, withdrawing until only the tip of his cock remained inside her then ramming home again. Hard. Fast. Until all Mellika could hear was the sound of their heavy breathing and the slap of flesh against flesh. Until she was caught up in a race for ultimate satisfaction.

Mellika reveled in the fierceness of his lovemaking. The scent of her own arousal. The guttural groans he gave and the clench of his fingers on her hips. It drove the eroticism higher. Tightened the tension threatening to rip her apart.

When Zeb slid his hand around to the front of her body and pinched her clit between thumb and forefinger, Mellika lost it. Her climax slammed into her, an

explosion of body and emotions such as she'd never experienced. She trembled. Gaspd for breath. Hung onto consciousness with an effort.

Zeb yelled out and she felt him empty himself deep inside her. He held still for a moment and then pressed a soft kiss into the small of her back before collapsing over her, his own breathing as fragmented as her own. They stayed like that for what seemed like a long time, and Mellika had never felt more cherished.

When the world finally righted itself, Zeb withdrew and helped ease her onto her back. He flopped down beside her and pulled her close. "Magic! That's what it is," he whispered. "Pure magic."

Mellika ran a hand across his stomach, chuckling when his muscles jumped in reaction. "Is Peridot happy with his love slave?"

Dropping a light kiss on her forehead, he pressed her head onto his shoulder. "Peridot is a very happy man indeed," he said on a sigh.

"And so he should be after that ride," said a cheeky voice from the doorway. "That was one hell of a party, my friends."

Mellika lifted her head and stared at the open door of the bedroom. Suli stood there with a grin from ear to ear. Zeb sat up beside her and grabbed one of the pillows, handing another to Mellika. Zeb grinned at her, and with precision timing, they both threw the pillows at Suli.

"Go find your own party," Mellika yelled before she burst into laughter and fell against Zeb.

Zeb's laughter echoed hers as he lay back against the remaining pillows, taking Mellika with him. "Damn, I have got to find that woman a man."

"Or a woman!" Mellika interjected.

Not to be outdone, Suli tossed the pillows back at them. "What's wrong with one of each?" Then when they reared from the bed and grabbed for more ammunition, she turned and ran, leaving them alone to further their quest of one another.

About the Authors

Lyn Cash has published over 50 short stories and confessions and has presently contracted or published 8 novels and novellas. A Midwesterner, she loves to travel, sketch, delve into mysteries and true crimes, and putter about with herbs and flowers when she isn't chained to her computer. She's happiest when petting her rescued canines or chatting with her son, her biggest supporter, and when she's eyebrow deep in writing or meeting fans. Her homes on the web can be found at <http://authorlyncash.blogspot.com/> and <http://www.thebelfrycollective.com/>.

Multi-published author Alexis Fleming's first book was a bedtime story for her children, written and illustrated totally in crayon. She hooked her children and created a new career for herself, a career that gives her immense satisfaction and a lot of fun. She now writes her own bedtime stories, but be warned – these are strictly adults only!

Alexis' first love has always been romance, whether on this world or the next. Hot, sizzling relationships with a dash of comedy and a few trials and tribulations thrown in to test her characters. Alexis writes sassy, fun, erotic contemporaries, as well as paranormals and fantasies where you'll find yourself coming face to face with anything from sexy shifters to beings from other planets.

When she isn't tied to her computer creating sizzling stories to tempt her readers, she helps run a busy motel set on the edge of a national marine park in Australia.

The authors welcome comments from readers. You can find their websites and email addresses on their author bio pages at www.ellorascave.com.

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