

Descendants of the Light 4: Finding Eden  
Eve Vaughn

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## Prologue

H'trae: Tiearen, 494 H'trae years ago

Dyshira looked over her shoulder, expecting to see one of the hated Shadow People jump out at her any minute. "Hurry! We must get out of here now!"

Pushing one of her people through the portal, she stole another quick peek to make sure no one was behind them. A wave of sadness washed over her as she viewed the devastation. Children cried, houses were destroyed, their crops had been burned, and bodies lay on the ground. Some of the people had been taken as slaves.

She hadn't arrived fast enough to save everyone. The Shadow People had wreaked total havoc on all

she loved and held dear, killing those who dared to stand against their will.

“Hurry!” she screamed.

After she was assured that Garm was no longer breathing, Dyshira had taken off for the Temple of the Light to beg for intervention. Even as she pleaded her case with the Ancient Ones, Tiearen was under attack. She’d been told that, although she wouldn’t be able to save all of her people, she could at least save some of them, but that would mean leading them through a secret portal to another world -- called Earth.

Once she’d learned the whereabouts of this portal, which happened to be just behind the Falls of Tiearen, Dyshira raced to her homeland. She knew this was only the beginning. The Shadow People would attack again and again until nothing was left in their wake.

She breathed easier as the last three The’Rans made it through the portal. It should have given her a sense of relief but something wasn’t right. Someone was missing.

Father!

Bulbo had been at the rear of the line, helping her get everyone safely through the portal. She couldn’t leave him. Turning to her people who now looked back at her with anxious eyes, she gestured them forward. “Keep going and don’t look back. I’ll join you shortly.”

And with that she turned to go in search of her father.

“Father! Where are you?” she cried out, tears streaming down her face because she had a feeling that something terrible had happened to him.

“Run, Dyshira! Run!”

The voice belonged to her father. It sounded weak and defeated. How could he think she’d leave him when he was in trouble? She ran toward his call, growing more frantic with each passing second. The sight she stumbled upon chilled her to the bone.

She shook her head in shock. “Garm... you... you can’t be here. You’re...”

The tall dark-haired Ceyan threw his head back and released a throaty laugh. “Dead? Did you think your poison would kill me, Lady Wife, when I have your very power running through my veins?”

Two Ceyan guards flanking Garm stared at her with menacing silver eyes. What made her heart race with fright, however, was the sight of Garm casually holding her father against him. One large hand spanned Bulbo’s throat. The Ceyan King had a look about him that made Dyshira realize he’d snap her father’s neck at the slightest provocation.

Lifting her head and standing tall, she looked her husband in the eye. “Let him go, Garm.”

Garm lifted one dark sinister brow. “Let him go? Now why would I want to do that? What would you give me in exchange?”

She knew exactly what he wanted, but would he let her father go if she did surrender to him once more? “I will come back to you if you’ll let him go. Please. You have no need of him. It’s me you want.”

“You barter with what is already mine. You will come to me now, and your punishment for your crimes won’t be as harsh.”

She shook her head. “I’ll come to you when you let him go.”

Garm’s eyes narrowed before he barked out a harsh command to his guards. “Seize her!”

The two guards stepped forward, each grabbing an arm before she could turn to flee. “I beg of you, Your Highness. Let Dyshira go!” Bulbo pleaded, struggling against Garm’s grip.

“Hold your tongue, old man.”

“Please, Your Highness,” Bulbo continued on as though uninterrupted.

The quiet menace in Garm’s voice should have warned her something was about to happen, but she wasn’t prepared for what he did next. His hold tightened on Bulbo’s throat. Before a word of protest could escape her lips, Garm gripped the older man’s head with his free hand and yanked it roughly -- breaking Bulbo’s neck.

Dyshira screamed in horror. “Father!”

Garm released the old man, letting the lifeless body hit the ground. “I told him to be silent. I will not have my orders disobeyed. By the time I’m finished with you, you’ll wish you had shared your father’s fate.”

“You killed him,” was all she was able to whisper. Not even she would be able to save her father now. Dyshira thought of all she’d endured these past years at the hands of this beast. He’d blackmailed her into marrying him, humiliated her in front of his people, beat her, raped her. He was the cause of Tiearen’s destruction, and now he’d killed her father. Something within her snapped.

Hot rage tore through her body. “I call upon the Ancient Ones to seek vengeance on those who have harmed their chosen people!”

The ground began to shake.

The two Ceyan guards holding her let go of her arms as though scorched by fire. Garm advanced, his hand raised to strike her. “Stop this at once, you useless female.”

“Strike me, Ceyan, and you’ll only end up hurting yourself.”

Maybe it was the booming sound of her voice that stopped him, or the determination he must have read in her face, but Garm backed up, slightly. “Cease this now, woman, or you’ll only make your punishment worse.”

“No punishment you can give me is greater than what I’ve already suffered. I lay a curse on your head and on those who have harmed the chosen people. Your people will know physical pain and suffering until our land is restored, and you will die.” Dyshira threw her arms to the sky, bolts of lightning appearing as if from nowhere, striking one Ceyan guard and then the other.

Fear entered Garm’s eyes. His wings spread as he prepared to take flight, but huge lightning bolts, larger than the first two, struck him down. This didn’t kill him, but the next series of flashes did.

Only when she was positive Garm lay dead did Dyshira drop her arms, feeling more exhausted than she ever had before. Walking over to where Bulbo's body lay, she knelt down and gathered his now cold frame in her arms.

"I promise you, Father, Tiareen will be restored."

## Chapter One

Rohman strode purposely to the bedroom, his woman squirming over his shoulder. He smacked her smartly on the rear. "Cease your wiggling now, woman," he muttered.

Eden yelped. "Ouch. That hurt, you big bully."

"Then stop moving so much." He couldn't get to his room fast enough. He had the need to be inside of this exquisite woman right now. His cock was painfully hard and nothing would ease his discomfort except burying himself between Eden's silky thighs. No woman had driven him to experience such primal lust.

When it was decreed by the Ancient Ones that he and his brothers would have to take The'Ran brides in order to save his people from a mysterious ailment that had befallen them, he'd balked at the idea. The last thing he wanted was to have some woman foisted on him, one who probably didn't know her place.

Of course he knew he'd have eventually taken a mate in order to sire an heir, but it would have been on his own terms -- with a woman who wouldn't make demands on him. By having to join with a woman who could possibly be the savior of his people, he'd feel beholden to her. That would probably give her ideas above herself.

There was nothing worse than a woman who didn't know her place. Hadn't his father once taught him that women were nothing but treacherous whores, none of them having a loyal bone in their bodies? At first, Rohman had railed against his father's teachings. However, his world came crashing down around his head when he learned his father had only spoken the truth.

The very person who'd taught him that hard lesson was his mother. Rohman had no use for women beyond that. For some reason though, Eden made him mad with desire. What made her so different from other women? Not even his mistress, Ani, who he favored above the other wenches he'd lain with, made his body react this way.

Practically kicking the door open when he reached his sleeping chambers, Rohman hurriedly dumped Eden onto the bed, only sparing her well formed body a moment's glance before covering it with his own. She was so tiny -- so beautiful and she was his.

Rohman captured her lush lips in a hungry, fervent kiss. By the stars she was sweet, unlike anything he'd

ever tasted before, feminine and hot. It pleased him to hear her moans of acceptance. The last thing he wanted was a reluctant mate, but his cock was *sodemmed* hard that any protest would barely register anyway.

The soft lips beneath his felt like flower petals. Her warm body, squirming beneath him, only fanned the flames of his desire, sending a jolt of pleasure through him unlike anything he'd ever experienced.

Eden twisted her head away, breaking the contact of their mouths. "Wait!" she groaned breathlessly.

His first instinct was to grab a fistful of her hair and hold her head still while he continued the kiss, but her sudden movement revealed the dark expanse of her neck. It was too tempting to bypass. He buried his face against her throat, planting kisses against Eden's heated flesh. Rohman couldn't get enough of her. The feel of her silky skin wreaked havoc on his senses.

He rubbed his cock against her thigh, wanting to bury himself deep inside her channel. Cupping her breasts and squeezing the succulent globes in his hand, Rohman reveled in the silky texture of her skin. He wanted to touch her all over -- and he did.

Eden wiggled and writhed beneath him, her tiny hands planted against his shoulders almost as if she were trying to push him away. Even if she was, there was no way he could stop now. His cock ached too much.

"Stop," she panted, still squirming furiously beneath him.

Was she serious? There was no way he could stop, not now, not ever.

Teeth sunk into his shoulder -- hard. "*Dem!*" he yelled, pulling back to look into her face. "Don't you ever do that to me again, woman!"

She wiggled from beneath him and got to her knees, hands planted on curvaceous hips. Her proud breasts jutted forward, dark nipples tempting him beyond all reason.

When he reached out to pull her back to him, Eden flinched away. "And don't you dare treat me as if I'm some whore."

Rohman's jaw dropped, eyes narrowing. She spoke the words quietly enough, but who was she to dictate the terms of how things would be between the two of them? He was in control and it would behoove her to learn that quickly lest she suffer the punishment meted out to females who did not obey their men.

Gritting his teeth, he steeled himself to remain still and enunciated every word out of fear of strangling her. "Who... do... you... think... you... are?"

She raised one perfectly arched brow, lifting her small, determined chin in defiance. "I think I'm someone who's been insulted. Maybe you're used to treating other women like this, but you won't do it to me."

Eden, no matter how exquisite, had to be absolutely mad if she thought he'd allow her outspokenness.

This time, she was unable to elude his grasp when he reached out and grabbed a fistful of braided hair, winding it around his hand to pull her closer. He leaned forward until their faces nearly touched. "I have

claimed you, which means you are mine to do with *what* I want, *how* I want, and *when* I want. You will obey me in all things!”

A sad look entered her big brown eyes and, though it shouldn't have, it bothered him. She lifted her small hand and cupped the side of his face, her touch producing feelings unknown to him. “Is that how you want it to be between us? Do you want to use me like a piece of property instead of your mate?”

He flinched away and she pulled her hand back as if she'd been stung.

How could he answer that question? She *was* just his property, and it would be to her benefit if she learned her place sooner rather than later, but the words wouldn't come. The look in her beautiful eyes held him back from saying what was on his lips.

Silence filled the room as their eyes locked. Rohman took in the lovely contours of her delicate features, the large eyes, tilt-tipped nose, full luscious lips, and dark skin so smooth and rich. He couldn't tear his eyes away from her.

Eden was small but exquisitely formed. Everything about her screamed perfection from the tip of her head, to the generous swell of her breasts, down to the delicate curve of her tiny feet. No woman had ever made him feel so unsure before, and Rohman didn't think he liked it one bit.

It was Eden who finally broke the silence. “You didn't answer my question. Is that how you want things to be between us? I would rather we at least be friends if we're to be bound together for the rest of our lives.”

“I have no use for friends and I have no use for you, beyond what you can do for my people and perhaps to get an heir from you.”

The pensive look that crossed her face made him wonder what was going on inside her head. He delved into the recesses of her mind, reading her thoughts. Rohman's grip tightened in her hair as he saw that she was thinking about a man -- who wasn't him.

Pressing his forehead against hers, he glared at her. “We have not even joined yet, and already you are unfaithful to me in your thoughts? Is there no woman who can be trusted?”

A brief look of guilt crossed her face. “What... what are you talking a-about?”

“You're thinking about my brother,” he accused through clenched teeth. Jealousy ripped through his body, threatening to choke him. He'd vowed to himself that he wouldn't let this woman get under his skin, but already that vow was broken.

“So what if I was? You're not exactly what I expected.”

“You don't deny it?”

Eden shrugged. “Why should I? It's the truth.”

“Either you're very honest or very stupid. I think it's the latter.”

“You're not exactly a prize yourself. You may be a dream to look at, but you're a nightmare in reality. I don't know who hurt you or what happened to make you treat people like this, but you really need to get

over yourself.”

“You’ll soon learn that my word is law around here. It’ll go much easier for you if you do.”

Eden shut her eyes as though blocking out his words. “Who hurt you, Rohman?” she asked softly.

Her question caught him off guard. How was he supposed to answer that, and why did it affect him this way? He owed her no explanation, but something within made him want to confess all.

No. She was a woman. Someone not to be trusted, *dem* her. “What are you talking about, woman?”

“Why do you hurt? There’s no reason to lie to me. I felt it.”

“I don’t want to discuss this. You talk too much. The only thing I need from you is to lie back on the bed and be silent while I plant my seed within you.”

“Is that what you really want, for me to lie down and let you have your way with me?”

“Isn’t that what I said? I’m not in the habit of repeating myself.”

Her dark eyes narrowed slightly, her chin coming up with a defiant tilt before her eyelids drooped. He noticed the way her small fists clenched and unclenched as if she wanted to hit him. Not that she could do much damage to him anyway, but he had to admire her spirit.

“Fine. Please let go of my hair and I’ll do as you ask.”

He didn’t know what, but Rohman felt that something was lost in that moment. There was no point in dwelling on futile emotions however. “I’m glad you finally see things my way.” She moved to break his grip, but he wouldn’t let her go. “No, wait. I want to taste you again. Open your mouth to me.”

Eden stilled, compliant under his kiss but not an active participant. He found that he didn’t want her passiveness. He wanted her response. Thrusting his tongue between juicy lips, he sampled the warm recesses of her mouth. Rohman’s cock throbbed with need for her. By the stars she was sweet. She excited him more than he thought anyone possibly could, and he didn’t want the kiss to end.

He could tell she didn’t want to respond to him, but the stiffening of her nipples against his chest gave her body’s betrayal away. The heat emanating from her nearly scorched him.

Rohman tilted her head back to deepen the kiss, his hands starting to shake with desire for her. His entire body tightened in anticipation of joining with this gorgeous creature. There was something about Eden that produced tender feelings he quickly pushed to the back of his mind. He only wanted to concentrate on how she made him feel physically.

The tangy scent of her pussy drifted to his nostrils, and Rohman felt he’d explode any moment, without even sticking his cock inside of her. He couldn’t put his finger on why a simple kiss would make him feel this way, but he knew to further analyze it would be asking for trouble he didn’t want.

Rohman lifted his head to look at her. “You taste good, woman. I wonder how one so small can make my cock *sodemmed* hard,” he said more to himself than to her.

He pushed her back on the bed, straddling Eden to feast his eyes on her perfectly formed body. It still



amazed him that such a wee woman could have such a beautiful form, from her full breasts that nearly filled his large palms, the impossibly tiny waist that flared out to curvaceous hips and her shapely legs. Her dark skin fascinated him as well. There were women of many skin hues on H'trae but not with this particular shade, and it only fueled the fire within to see his lightly tanned body against her dark one.

She squirmed beneath him, and he stilled her wiggles with his mind.

“Let me go,” she groaned, fighting against his telepathic hold.

He could tell she was self-conscious and wanted to cover her breasts, but he wouldn't allow it. It was his right to gaze upon her as he pleased. She was his! “You will not hide from me what is mine. I wish to see all of you.”

Rohman palmed her breasts, rubbing his thumbs over responsive nipples. His breath caught in his throat as he drank in the sight of her. “Lovely,” he murmured. “They are large and fill my hand beautifully. They will suckle my heirs, but now they will suckle me.”

He bent down to take one pointed tip into his mouth. He laved it with his tongue, taking his time, wanting her as hot for him as he was for her. Nipping the tight peak between his teeth before sucking it roughly in his mouth, Rohman was pleased to hear the soft moans coming from her throat.

He knew she'd been prepared by the necromancers to take the full length of his cock, but her size gave him reservations because he didn't want to hurt her. He needed to make her as slick and ready for him as possible.

Rohman transferred his attention to her other breast, giving it the same treatment as the first, licking and nibbling it until her head thrashed back and forth. Her verbal response to him was driving him insane with passion. Intangible heat coursed through his veins, pulsing along every single nerve ending.

“Let me touch you,” she moaned with an impassioned plea, the sultry sound of her voice sending shivers up and down his spine.

More than anything, he wanted to feel her hands on his body. He released his mental hold of her and groaned around her nipple when Eden's finger glided along the contours of his chest, leaving a trail of fire behind where she touched. Rohman shook when she explored his shoulders and grazed the edges of his wings. The deliciousness of her touch was nearly more than he could take, but he willed himself not to tear his covering off and plunge into her damp heat.

Rohman lifted his head, unable to fully give her the attention he wanted to when she touched him so gently. There was wonder within the depths of her dark eyes, and he couldn't help but think once again how lovely she was. “You're so exquisite. So small but so perfect.”

He cupped her cheek and was pleased when she leaned into his touch. With her he wanted to do things he'd never wanted to do with another woman. He actually cared how she felt when he touched her. His cock pounded more than it ever had, but her pleasure came first. What kind of power did this tiny woman have over him?

Rohman kissed the valley of her breasts, her neck, shoulders, face, and anything he could get his lips on. He couldn't get enough of her. The insatiable hunger within wouldn't allow him to stop touching her entire body with every part of his body. Needing inside of her moist cunt, he knew if he held out much longer it would be over before he even began. With a loud grunt, he hunched his shoulders, allowing his wings to

retract inside his body.

Her eyes widened in apparent surprise. "Why did you do that?"

"So that I can do this." He rolled onto his back, pulling her on top of him so she straddled his hips. "You're so little, I didn't wish to crush you."

Her eyes were downcast as she looked away, and Rohman felt an unfamiliar twinge in his heart. What was this feeling? Maybe he was coming down with the mysterious ailment. No, he felt fine, so what was it? He refused to believe it was anything other than a temporary aberration.

She gave him a shy smile. "I won't break so easily, you know."

"Perhaps not, but surely you can see how much larger I am than you."

An annoyed expression temporarily marred her lovely features. Briefly touching her mind, he discovered that her size had always been a problem for her. Yes, she was smaller than most women he'd ever had dealings with, but he couldn't think of a single one who could stir him like this.

Before he could tell her so, she stared down at him with challenging eyes. "I'm not fragile."

"Hmm, you look fragile."

"I'm much stronger than I look."

"Is that so? You're not much bigger than my cock. Do you think you'll be able to handle me?"

"I'll give it a good shot."

She smiled at him, and for the first time since their acquaintance and to his own surprise, he smiled back. Whatever hold she had over him, he'd think about it later. "Undo the ties of *myjaytu*."

Tentative fingers unlaced him, freeing his cock. Eden's eyes widened as she let out a surprised gasp. "Oh, dear Lord. I imagined you'd be large, but this is... I mean... you're a monster."

When she made a move to wiggle off of him, Rohman gripped her hips, holding her firm. He lifted a brow, feeling amused. "You were prepared to take every single inch of me. Where's the bold wench of a few moments ago? Don't tell me you've lost your nerve."

A slight smile touched her lush mouth. "No... I just..." His fingers delved inside the slick folds of her pussy, thumb gliding against her swollen clit. She gasped. "I can't think properly when you do that."

"Perhaps that was my goal." He circled her clitoris, rubbing it until she moaned. Eden threw her head back and scooted her hips closer to his. Rohman needed her now. With fingers digging into curvaceous hips, he positioned her over his cock, letting it rest at her entrance. "I want inside of you now."

She reached down and parted her labia, preparing herself for him. "I'm ready," she whispered, her eyes shut tightly.

He wanted to slam her down on his rod, but knew he'd have to go slowly, although it would take all of his willpower. Rohman eased her down on his cock, lifting his hips at the same time to slide into her. By

the stars, she was tight.

Eden cried out. "I don't think I can take anymore, you're so big."

"Easy, little one. Just let it happen. Relax and take me inside of you. Your pussy is dripping with your need for me. You're ready for this," he whispered, trying to calm her down.

His words seemed to work because she took a deep breath as he continued to pull her further down on his length. When she straddled his thighs completely, his cock buried deep within her, Rohman thought he'd shoot his seed right then and there. The exquisite sensation of her tight cunt wrapped around his pulsing erection was nearly more than he could stand.

Impatiently he waited for her to adjust to him, studying her almost as if for the first time. His breath caught in his throat. Once again he couldn't help but think how lovely she was with her teeth nibbling her lower lip, her eyes squeezed shut, and her full round breasts thrust forward. She was a sight to behold. Unable to help himself, he reached up and squeezed the large mounds.

Eden arched her back into his caress and moaned. "Oh, Rohman, that feels so good."

When she gyrated her hips over him, any thoughts of waiting disappeared. Dropping his hands to grasp her hips again, he lifted her up and down. "Move with me, Eden."

She placed small palms against the broad expanse of his chest and bounced on his cock, her pussy muscles clenching around it. Gritting his teeth, he willed himself to hold on, but the deliciousness of the movement threatened to end their mating before it had barely begun. Their gazes locked. She bounced as he thrust, meeting each other halfway, both falling under the spell of the moment.

Electric currents of lust soared through his frame, making him shake. Nothing had ever felt quite like this before. This woman titillated all of his senses. He couldn't get enough of her -- the sight, sound, feel, taste, and scent of her. She was everything a woman should be, but he dared not trust these feelings. No, he had to remember to separate what his body felt from what he knew to be true about treacherous females. For now, he'd live for this moment, with his shaft planted deeply within her channel.

Their bodies grinded, melded, and slid against each other, the friction only making them hotter. Sweat popped out of his pores as his grip tightened and he slammed harder into her. All reservations about taking things easy were gone. His completion was near, and by the sound of her throaty groans, so was hers.

"Rohman, I'm going to come," she screamed.

Eden shook and shuddered, her cunt tightening around his cock, making it impossible for him to hold back any longer. The most intense orgasm he'd ever experienced tightened his balls, shot through his body, and created a large explosion from within. His hips shot up, pushing his cock deeper, his seed shooting into her hot channel. He grunted with ecstasy. "Yes!"

"Rohman, Rohman, Rohman," she panted before collapsing on top of him, his arms immediately wrapping around her. After such an explosive joining he didn't want to move. All he wanted was to remain as one with this woman, but he couldn't help but wonder what it was about her that was so different.

## Chapter Two

Eden rested her head against Rohman's chest, still unable to believe all she'd just experienced with this magnificent specimen of a man -- her mate. He was hers and it would take some getting used to. On the flipside, she now belonged to him as well, and conflicting feelings ran through her. She could already tell he had a possessive streak, but that wasn't what bothered her the most. He seemed to have an inherent mistrust of women. It was something she'd have to ask him about later.

The warm sensation of Rohman stroking her back sent shivers up her spine, making her toes curl. Being held against him was almost as intimate as the act of making love. His ripe male scent filled her nostrils, but it wasn't unpleasant. There wasn't much about him that she didn't find attractive.

Men in this world were taller than most Earth men, but Rohman and his brothers were virtual giants, especially to a woman who didn't quite reach five feet. He had to be one of the most stunning men she'd ever laid eyes on with his beautifully sculpted features that looked like they'd been carved from granite.

His deep piercing silver eyes, an unusual shade where she came from, seemed to look through her soul, and his taut, muscular body would have put the most disciplined bodybuilder to shame. With just a glance at this perfect man, her body shivered with awareness.

The sex had been hot and in bed would be one place they were definitely compatible, but there was so much more to a relationship than that. Someone had hurt him terribly and she couldn't figure out who, but whenever she touched him, she felt this great sadness festering within him. She could tell that the hardened warrior image he liked to project wasn't him. In her dreams, Eden had pictured her mate to look exactly like Rohman.

When she'd laid eyes on the arrogant king, she began to have doubts. The man she'd dreamt of was gentle and kind. It had thrown her to see he had an identical twin, and it made her wonder if Aarik was supposed to be her mate instead. It was only when she joined with Rohman that her doubts were eliminated.

He shut a part of himself away from people, but if she had anything to do with it she'd find the key to his heart. It was true she'd only known him for a very short period, but it never took the heart long to know where it wanted to be, and she wanted to be here with him -- with his faults and all.

She sensed there was so much more to him than the person he portrayed to his people. It was obvious he cared about his brothers from the brief glimpse she'd had of their interaction, and just by touching him, it was also apparent the fate of his people rested heavily on his mind.

This was now her home and she'd have to make the best of it. Thoughts of H'trae brought to mind her original purpose. She'd been brought to this planet was to save the Ceyan people from the mysterious illness that slowly diminished their numbers.

"That was like nothing I've ever experienced."

That confession surprised her. Lifting her head she looked into her husband's eyes and saw the sincerity there. "That didn't come easy to you, did it?"

"What do you mean?"

"It sounded as if you had a hard time getting the words out."

He pursed his lips together briefly, as he absently stroked the back of her head. "These feelings within me are strange, but it just felt right to say it. Don't mistake them for softness though. You are now my queen and you will act accordingly, and you will not go against my say-so. I expect you to learn your place."

She lifted a brow. There he went again with his chauvinistic ideas. "And what exactly do you think my place is? Where I used to live, women were treated equally, and they were valued just as much as men."

"Hmm, I suppose it was a good thing that it was Kal and Thane who ventured to Earth because it sounds as though I wouldn't have had much patience for the place."

"You wouldn't know until you tried it."

"Why would I want to go to a place where the women are above themselves?"

"Above themselves? Do you hear yourself speaking? Women are not cattle. We have minds of our own and feelings." When she made an attempt to roll away from him, he held her firm.

"Eden, I don't know why, but I feel that you and I can rub together tolerably well. I won't ask for much of you as my queen except to love my people and obey my every wish."

She gasped. Not ask for much? Was he kidding? "You say you won't ask for much, but that sounds like a lot to me."

"My word is law around here."

"And will you do everything I ask of you?"

He gave her an incredulous look as if she were the crazy one. "You speak foolishness. You are a woman, therefore your rights are few."

"Even as queen?"

"Even more so as queen. I will not have you embarrass me or my family's name. Once I place *mycheka* around your ankle, everyone will know you are my woman."

Eden felt like she'd been transported back to the early 1900s where women were supposed to remain barefoot and pregnant and live in the kitchen. She would have given him a piece of her mind right then and there, but something stopped her. It was weird, but she instinctively knew there was a lot more to him than this Cro-Magnon attitude. Right now, it was probably just best to humor him.

Placing her head back on his chest she tried to figure out the enigma that was Rohman.

“You’re silent,” came his quiet observation.

“Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“Yes. No. Confound it, woman, I don’t know how I feel. You confuse me.”

“How so?”

“These odd feelings make me feel uncomfortable and you’re the cause.”

Eden buried her face in his broad chest to hide a smile. He didn’t realize it yet, but they’d made a connection. Now more so than ever she was sure her union with this powerful Ceyan was meant to be.

Just as she was about to say something to her husband, there was a loud knock on the door. Rohman frowned. “Who is it?” he roared, making Eden flinch. He really needed to work on his people skills.

“It is Lusio, your majesty,” the voice on the other side of the door called.

Rohman turned his head toward her, his eyes raking over her body. Eden could read the lust in them. She felt a blush spread from head to toe, warming her. “Cover yourself, woman. I don’t wish for others to see what is mine.”

She could have argued that the outfit she’d been given was so see-through it didn’t matter. Not only that, everyone had already seen her nakedness at the ceremony. Eden knew she had valid points but decided against bringing them up. She didn’t want to start an argument on the first night with her new mate.

When she slid under the satiny sheets of the bed, dragging the covers over her breasts, Rohman bade Lusio to enter, but not before giving her one last sweeping glance. She shivered in reaction to his gaze. She’d never reacted like this with anyone before and it both excited and frightened her at the same time.

A tall Ceyan guard entered the chamber, his dark head bowed. “Your majesties,” he greeted humbly.

Covering her mouth to stifle a giggle, Eden looked away from the guard, unable to make eye contact after that greeting. Majesties? She was a queen now, and that would take some getting used to.

The king stared at the guard imperiously, a look of impatience flickering in his eyes. “I hope you have a good excuse for interrupting us, Lusio.”

“It is urgent, your majesty. Queen Daliah --”

Rohman stopped the guard’s flow of speech with an angry glare. “You have interrupted us with news of my mother? Get out of here!” he roared, his face turning a bright angry shade of red.

Eden didn’t particularly care for the tone of his voice. She knew he was the king, but that didn’t give him the right to speak to people any way he wanted to. It was obvious why everyone was so scared of him, and she found it frustrating. Attempting to calm him down, she placed her hand on one broad shoulder. “Rohman, you shouldn’t --”

His head snapped around so fast, he could have been a stunt double for Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*. “Be silent, woman,” he hissed before turning back to the trembling guard.

“But, your majesty, your mother has fallen ill and is rapidly deteriorating.”

Eden gasped. The color left Rohman’s face. “My mother has contracted this ailment?” He jumped out of bed and hurriedly threw on his *jaytu*. “Stay here,” he ordered in a tone that left her in no doubt that he’d listen to no arguments, but she had to try.

“I should come with you. Maybe I can help,” Eden protested.

“Stay here!” Rohman left with Lusio.

Alone, Eden was furious. Who the hell did he think he was to treat her like that? She wasn’t some damn concubine, she was his wife! Wasn’t the main reason she was brought to H’trae to help his people? What was the point of having this special gift if she wasn’t allowed to use it? It just didn’t make sense. Why did he want to shut her out, and what was the strange vibe she’d felt whenever he talked about his mother?

Could it be he didn’t want his mother to get well? Suddenly she was hit with a powerful vision. She saw a woman who looked almost identical to her but it wasn’t her. The woman in this vision was arguing, no pleading, with someone who was obviously Ceyan. He had dark hair and an angry scowl on his face. “Please let me help your father,” the woman cried. Not only did her plea go unanswered, but she was backhanded with a mighty blow.

The scene seemed so real it nearly knocked Eden backwards. Trying to clear her head, she shook it vigorously. What in the world? What was that all about? All her life she’d had dreams about this land, but never a vision this powerful. What was the meaning? Was it trying to tell her that Rohman was like the man with the black hair?

Well, she wasn’t going to sit around and do nothing. She had a purpose and she’d fulfill it. Eden climbed out of bed and walked over to the large walk in closet. She’d been shown around earlier and knew this room was filled with beautiful *lisa* gowns. She grabbed a short pink toga style gown and donned it as quickly as she could despite its complicated knots.

Leaving the room without hesitation, she stepped out into the hallway. It would help if she actually knew how to get to Queen Daliah’s chambers. She walked down the opulent castle hall until she ran into a tall slender blue woman.

Eden had never seen anything like this person. Sure she’d been waited on by women with cat faces, but seeing a blue woman wasn’t an everyday occurrence where she came from. Naked to the waist, revealing large coconut-sized breasts, the blue creature wore a short sarong style skirt that barely covered her privates. Long red hair flowed to her waist. Eden had been a fan of comic books when she was younger. The woman reminded her of one of her favorite characters.

Standing at least a foot over Eden, the woman looked down on her with yellow eyes, the small smile on cobalt lips not quite reaching her eyes. There was something chilling about this being, but there wasn’t much time to dwell on it. Perhaps the woman could give her the information she needed.

“Umm, would you happen to know where I can find Queen Daliah’s chambers?”

“Actually, she’s in a little dwelling outside the palace walls. I can take you there if you like... your Highness.”

The woman's voice sounded like a synthesizer. Although she had no reason to feel this way, Eden didn't like her. Maybe she was just being silly. Pasting the best smile on her face she could muster, Eden craned her neck to look up to meet yellow eyes. "Thank you, I would like that... er... What's your name?"

Revealing sharp white teeth, the woman shot her an eerie look that made Eden take a step back. "My name is Ani."

There was something ominous in the way those four words were spoken. Again, maybe she was imagining it. *Stop being silly, Eden*. "Well, Ani, I would really appreciate your assistance. I need to get to Queen Daliah's chambers because I may be able to help her."

Ani snorted. "And what makes you think you can do anything?"

Eden didn't care for this woman's tone, especially when it was unwarranted. Was she just being too touchy? Were her instant feelings of discomfort around the yellow-eyed Ani clouding her perception of things?

Eden took a deep breath before she answered. "I don't know if I can help or not, but I have to try. Now will you take me to her or do we just stand here? I don't think we can afford to wait around when the king's mother is gravely ill."

Ani shrugged one bony shoulder. "Of course, your majesty. Anything you want. However, whether you can help or not may not matter that much to Rohman."

Rohman? That simple word caught her off guard. Eden wasn't totally familiar with the customs around here, but she was pretty sure the servants didn't go around addressing the royal family by their first names. Was this woman what she appeared to be or was there something here she wasn't picking up? "What did you call him?"

Ani giggled. "Your majesty, it's quite all right, you know. The king and I have an understanding. It's the way of things in Zerus. I'm sure you'll learn soon enough."

Placing hands on hips, Eden glared up at the woman. Was this heifer for real? "Are you by any chance insinuating that you're my husband's mistress?"

"I didn't insinuate anything. I thought I made it quite clear. Now, as you said, there's no time to waste. Will you follow me or just stand there?"

Eden knew there was a reason why she didn't like this woman, and now her suspicions had been confirmed. She'd never thought of herself as the jealous type, but finding out Rohman had a mistress so soon after what they'd shared was a blow to her heart.

Was this truly the way things would be between them? Maybe this was the custom of the Ceyan people, but there was no way she would share her husband with this blue bitch. It was on the tip of her tongue to tell Ani off, but she thought better of it. Now wasn't the time. She had to get to the queen, but when her path crossed with Ani again, she would definitely not let the issue die.

"Take me to Queen Daliah," Eden said tightly through clenched teeth.

A triumphant smirk crossed Ani's thin lips, and Eden wanted to slap the expression off her face. *She*



*thinks she's scored a victory on me, but she'll soon learn I'm not as big a pushover as she thinks .*

“Follow me then.” Ani turned abruptly and Eden had no choice but to follow. Her shorter legs made it difficult to keep up with the other woman, but she did. Just barely. It was only when they were outside, several feet from the massive structure, that Eden began to suspect something wasn't on the up and up.

Ani shot her an impatient glance when she stopped. “Come on! We don't have much further to go.”

“I'm not going any further until you tell me where she is. I'll just find my own way.”

The malevolent yellow eyes began to glow, almost like a cat's in the dark. A forked tongue snaked out and it looked like the woman was actually spitting venom. Eden backed away not sure how to react to the sight before her. “Oh no you don't. You're coming with me.” Ani reached out, grabbing a handful of Eden's braids as she turned to leave.

Eden fell to the ground, fighting against the tight grip. Her enemy was powerful. Too strong for her to break free. She struggled as her nemesis dragged her several feet by the hair.

Raking her nails down a long blue arm, Eden was rewarded by a brief respite when Ani screamed out in pain. Scrambling to her feet, Eden took off, but with her longer legs, it wasn't much of an effort for Ani to catch up.

A fist hit Eden on the side of the head, the blow temporarily stunning her. It was enough for Ani to put her in a chokehold and drag her in the original direction they'd been heading. She struggled and clawed, but to no avail, literally hefted off her feet.

Ani stopped when they reached the edge of the cliff. Fighting in earnest now, Eden knew exactly what was about to happen, but the blow to her head still left her slightly dazed.

“You think you're clever don't you? Rohman can never care for you like he does for me. You're an insignificant nobody. You're not even a full grown woman. I hope your death is slow and painful.” And with a powerful shove Ani sent Eden over the cliff.

Her life flashed before her eyes. Thoughts of her gentle mother, her sister Genesis, and Rohman flickered in her mind. In all her visions of this world, Eden had never imagined that things would end like this.

### Chapter Three

When Rohman stepped inside his mother's bedroom, he didn't know what to expect. Seeing her pale, still figure, lying there as if the life had already fled, hit him harder than he would have thought possible. Thane and Kal stood by her bedside with their mates. The two women knelt beside his mother with their hands resting on her body.

“What is the meaning of this?” he asked pointing to Raven and Genesis.

Thane’s head jerked around to glare at him, a frown marring his face. “If you’ve come in here to cause trouble you can leave right now. I won’t have you coming in here upsetting Mother.”

The vehemence in his younger brother’s voice made Rohman take a step back. There were times when he and Thane didn’t see eye to eye, especially when it came to their mother, but his brother’s low opinion of him hurt.

Quickly masking his feelings, he glared back. “This is my palace and I will go where I please. Do you wish to challenge me? Do you think you can throw me out of here? I must say, little brother, I won’t make it easy for you.”

Thane made a move to charge forward, but Kal shot out his arm, holding him back. “Now isn’t the time for this, you two. Our mother is dying and you two stand there arguing. Get a hold of yourselves or you can both leave,” the redhead hissed. Kal was a warrior of few words, but when he spoke, it was almost always profound.

Although Rohman didn’t take orders well from anyone, what Kal said was wise. Despite their differences, he didn’t wish to see his mother come to any harm and he didn’t want to argue with Thane.

Thane’s mouth tightened. He didn’t look as if he wanted to back down. “I will keep my thoughts to myself... for now, but only for Mother’s sake,” he said tightly before turning back to the bed.

Why did it have to be this way between him and his brothers? Rohman wished he were closer to Thane and Kal, but they just didn’t understand the awesome responsibility of being king. His position was ja fluke of birth. If he could, he’d give it all away to be a carefree man, but that wasn’t to be. When his father died, he knew he could never go back to being the man he once was.

Rohman spoke softly. “Tell me what’s happening.”

“As you can see, she’s in a bad way,” Kal answered. “Raven and Genesis are doing the best they can to sustain her, but she’s deteriorating rapidly. We don’t know why, but the illness is working faster than it has been. I wish I could say it will turn out well for her, but I don’t know. Aarik has been summoned along with his mate. It’s my understanding that she may be the key we’re looking for, although it wouldn’t hurt to have all four women here.”

Rohman looked over to see the two The’Ran women with their hands still resting on his mother’s body, their heads bowed and a strange glowing coming from where their hands lay. “What... what are they doing to her?”

Kal briefly glanced to where the women were gathered and released a long, tired sounding sigh, worry lines etched in his forehead. “Mother has been writhing and crying in pain. When Genesis and Raven laid hands on her, it seemed to soothe her. At least now she’s resting.”

If he didn’t know his stoic brother better, he could have sworn there was a tear in Kal’s eye. It was times like this when Rohman wanted to throw his arms around his brother’s shoulders and assure him things would be all right, but he couldn’t let his emotions get the better of him. Letting himself feel things he had no business feeling would only cloud his judgment. He had to be the strong one.

Merely nodding, Rohman walked over to the bed to get a closer look at his mother, breath catching in

his throat when he noticed how weak and helpless she looked. Emotions raged within him. On one hand, this was the woman who'd caused him so much pain but she was also the woman who'd given him life. At one time they'd been close, but things changed with the death of his father. Now looking at his mother, so near to death, he wondered what all the hate was for. He realized how much he didn't want to lose her.

"Can you help her?" he asked gruffly of the two women.

Kal's mate, Genesis, looked up at him and then her eyes briefly scanned the room. "Where is my sister?"

"In our bedroom. What of my mother, what can you do for her?"

"There's only so much the two of us can do. I feel her pain. It's coming from all over her body. I'm just learning about my powers, so I don't know how much help we'll be for her. She's delirious right now, but Raven is able to communicate with her. We found that if we touch her, it helps temper the pain a little, but it's not doing anything in the way of healing. This is merely pacifying the illness. We need Hope and Eden."

Just as the words left her mouth the door burst open and Aarik stormed through the doors, Hope scurrying behind him. She looked pale and drawn, and almost like she couldn't stand.

Raven asked, "Hope, are you all right?"

Aarik held Hope steady as she nodded. "I'm fine, just a little tired. One of the guards is also sick, and I was trying to help him and then..." A deep blush surfaced on her face.

Rohman could very well imagine what she and his twin had been up to after that, but he was more interested in hearing how she'd fared in healing his guard.

"You more than helped him. By the time we left the room, he seemed a lot better," Aarik explained.

"We need you over here, Hope. If you were to lay hands on the queen as well, it may help. We'll need to get Eden too. She's barely hanging on. I'm absorbing as much of her pain as I can, but it's draining," Raven beckoned.

Hope nodded. "Of course."

She wasted no time making it to his mother's side. Kneeling down next to Genesis, she placed palms against Daliah's legs. Rohman stood back to see what would happen and it didn't take long before Hope's hands also began to glow. Then, to his surprise, the blonde woman's head fell back and he could only see the whites of her eyes. She began to shake.

"What's happening to her, Aarik?"

"This is the same thing that happened when she touched Silvius. I think if we give this a moment, we may see some improvements in Mother."

Rohman was a little skeptical, but kept his opinions to himself. He watched in fascination as the other two women also fell into this trance-like state, eyes rolling back and heads lolling from side to side.

To his amazement, color returned to his mother's face and the shallow breathing began to sound more normal. Was it possible these women were the key after all? The men stood silent, watching their women minister to Daliah.

Suddenly, Hope fell back as if hit by a powerful jolt. Aarik rushed to her side, lifting her in his arms. "I feared this would happen," he muttered.

Rohman frowned. "What's going on?"

Hope shook her head. "I'm fine. Really I am. It's just... I think I've done all I can do. I don't know why, but whatever it was I did, just stopped."

Genesis and Raven both stood up, drawn looks on their faces. "What's going on? Why are you no longer helping her?" Rohman demanded of them.

Raven, who looked as if she would collapse any moment, narrowed flashing green eyes at him. "We're doing all we can for her, and to be honest, I don't think the three of us can do much more."

"What do you mean? She seems much better. Maybe you've cured her," Thane said with a hopeful note in his voice.

Fingers raked through her midnight tresses and she shook her head. "I'm afraid we've only helped her temporarily. I feel this ache all over her body, although I can't tell the source. After Hope touched her, most of your mother's pain was alleviated, but the illness is still there. Almost like it's in remission, but it will come back. We need Eden to see what she can do."

Genesis nodded. "Yes, we need Eden. I know she can help us. At least I think she can. When we were children, there was something she did that I always figured was one of those freak things. She picked up an injured bird. At the time I thought it was dead because it wasn't moving, but she held on to it and seconds later it flew out of her hand. I thought maybe the bird had just been sleeping, but there have been a lot of special things she's done over the years since then that make me question it. Please, get her. If you want your mother to live, Eden may be our only hope."

"Yes," Hope chimed in, albeit weakly. "I can only do so much. The pain relief is a temporary thing. I can't completely heal her. We need more manpower."

Aarik sent him a pleading look. *What are you standing there for, Rohman, bring her back here. This is our mother!*

His twin's voice reverberated harshly in his mind. Aarik had never spoken to him in quite that way before and it spurred Rohman into action. It was on the tip of his tongue to order the guard standing at the door to summon his queen, but he remembered the state of undress he'd left her in. No. It was best that he fetch her himself. "I'll go get her."

Leaving the room with purposeful strides, he hurried back to his sleeping chambers as if he were being chased. If what Genesis had implied was true, then Eden just may be the one to help his mother. He already knew there was something special about her touch, and it wasn't just the intimacy.

Rohman burst into his bedroom and to his surprise found it empty. Where was she? She was only a wee thing, but surely she couldn't have gotten lost in here. He looked in every nook and cranny, his ire rising steadily. He'd told Eden to stay where she was and already his orders were being disobeyed. A strong

wave of disappointment washed through him. For some reason he thought she would be different, that they'd made a connection on some level.

Why did she have him believing in something that wasn't quite real? *Dem* ! He imagined... well, it no longer mattered what he imagined. He was about to leave the room to find her, when there was a tentative knock on his door. Was it Eden?

"Enter," he called out with more hope in his voice than he'd wanted to project.

Instead of his wee queen stepping through the door, Ani, the serving wench, came inside. He frowned. What did she want? He'd told her that once he took his mate he'd no longer have use of her services -- at least the sexual ones. It was the way of their people to stay true to their mates even if it was his right as king to take a mistress. Despite what his brothers believed of him, he was a man of honor. Besides, after joining with Eden, he doubted anyone else would ever satisfy him quite the way she did.

His cock stirred just thinking about Eden's lush form and how good it felt to be inside of her. Cupping his hand over his groin, Rohman remembered that Ani stood before him, a sly look in her eyes. She was up to something, that was certain, but what?

"What are you doing here? Didn't I tell you already that once I chose my queen, you'd no longer be needed?"

The blue woman flushed, a frown bending her lips temporarily. "I understand that your queen comes first, Rohman, but --"

"I didn't give you leave to use my name so freely. I may have let you when we fucked, but it would serve you well if you learned your place. Now don't waste any more of my time. I need to find Queen Eden."

Ani stepped forward. "But... your majesty," she began, sounding as if she had a difficult time getting the words out. "She's the reason I'm here. I know she's gone. I saw her leave. She... she said she's running away and wants to go home. Your majesty, you have me, you don't need her. She can never know our ways like I do, and she can never satisfy you like I can."

When Ani gripped his wrist, he yanked it away. Had this woman lost her mind? "You forget yourself again, woman. Tell me which way she went. I'll bring her back, kicking and screaming if need be."

"She's not worthy of you."

Ani looked flustered, annoyed even, but he brushed it aside. He had other things to worry about right now. If he could, he'd read her mind to gage the truth but she was Fherenji, able to cloak her thoughts from him.

He knew as well as anyone else that she was a bit of a troublemaker, but all women were dishonorable. It was easier to deal with Ani because she didn't go to great lengths to hide her true nature. Besides, he only had himself to blame for her behavior. He'd allowed her too many liberties as his mistress. He'd kept Ani, however, because at one time she greatly pleased him sexually. Now, looking at her, Rohman couldn't imagine what he'd seen in her. She was no Eden.

Where had that thought come from? His treacherous wife would pay for her defection when he got his hands on her, but first he needed to deal with this insolent wench. "I will remind you, once again, to

remember your place. I may have allowed you liberties in the past, but no more. Just because you warmed my bed before doesn't give you leave to criticize my choice in mates, nor will you ever disrespect your queen again."

"She's no queen of mine!" the blue woman hissed.

If he had the time, he would have throttled her. "Again you get above yourself. I'll deal with your insolence later, but for now you'll tell me where my queen is or else I'll have you flogged!" With each word his voice rose. Ani's yellow eyes widened. He didn't believe in lashings against the weaker sex, no matter how deceitful they were, but his worry increased with each passing minute.

He suddenly remembered that not only was she roaming through Zerus unescorted, but he had yet to put *hischeka* around her ankle. Any unmated Ceyan male could lay claim to her without it. The thought of another man touching her made his blood boil. She belonged to him and him alone!

Angrily, he grabbed Ani by the forearm, his fingers digging into her skin.

"You're hurting me, Ro -- your majesty," she whined as he dragged her out of his room.

"You'll hurt even more if you don't tell me which way she went."

"But... I don't know. She walked out one of the side entrances. I didn't see which direction she went from there."

Rohman may not have been able to read her mind, but judging from the shifty look in her eyes, she knew exactly which way Eden had gone, had perhaps even urged her on. "Which exit did she leave from?"

"I can't be sure, it was done so quickly -- ow!" she exclaimed when his grip tightened. "Please, let me go. I only meant to help and this is how I'm treated? I thought I meant more to you than this. Why have you let that insignificant little woman come between us?"

"Us? You've taken leave of your senses. There has never been an us. Yes, you warmed my bed, but that didn't make us a couple. Tell me which way she went, or I'll make you wish you never existed."

Tears welled in her eyes. "How can you be so cruel to me?" She began to sob uncontrollably.

Rohman let go of her. Nothing disgusted him more than a female who used her tears as a weapon, and he wasn't fool enough not to see through her ruse. Was this some kind of stall tactic? Had she aided Eden in her escape?

"Enough! You will stop your senseless wailing. I have neither the time nor desire to hear it. Where is my queen?" he roared, probably loud enough for the entire castle to hear.

"I... All right, I didn't want to say anything because I was trying to keep my promise, but she told me not to tell you where she was going. She wanted to get far enough ahead of you before you came looking for her. I told her that you'd find her, but she wouldn't listen. Can't you see now why I would hold contempt for her? I love you! I would make a much better queen than she could ever be, but my status as slave in your palace has made it impossible for you to take me as a mate and... well, I wanted her to leave. I was jealous."

Rohman's eyes narrowed. "You didn't want to tell me where she went, not because you wanted to keep

your promise to her but because you were jealous?"

She nodded her head vigorously. "That's exactly it. I know what I did was wicked, but it's only because I love you so much, majesty. I care too much about you to see you with a woman who calls you a brute behind your back."

His heart twinged with an unfamiliar feeling, breath catching in his throat. It took Rohman a few moments to respond. "Are you saying she called me names behind my back?"

She tilted her head back, yellow eyes looking up at him with pity. "It pains me to tell you this, your majesty, but yes. Forgive me, but I told her she wasn't worthy to be your queen because of the awful things she said about you."

"And what did she say about me?" he asked tightly.

"She called you a brute, of course, and then said she mated with you to make you compliant. But in my opinion, when she realized you wouldn't bend to her will she decided to escape. Please, your majesty, I'm only guilty of my love for you."

Rohman tightened his lips. He was sure there was much more that she was guilty of, but he couldn't help but dwell on what Eden had said to her. Had she really said those things about him? Did she think him a brute, after she'd given herself to him so beautifully?

*They're all treacherous, son. Never trust a single one of them.* Those had been his father's words.

And to think she'd so easily fooled him into believing there was something different about her. His patience was now threadbare. He'd waste no more words with Ani. He would find his errant bride with or without this wench's help.

He turned to go, but a blue hand stopped him. "Wait! She went to the east, your majesty."

He stared pointedly at her hand until she let go. "If I find that you've lied to me, you do know what that could mean, don't you?" he asked quietly.

She nodded her head vigorously. "Of course, your majesty, but you know I would never lie to you."

"I can only hope for your sake that's true. Now get out of my sight."

\* \* \*

Ani scurried away, but halted when she was sure he could no longer see her. She realized what a lucky escape she'd had from that incident. In order for him to believe her some truth had to be revealed, but not all. Sure that there'd been no witnesses, she felt confident no one would discover what really happened.

Eden's broken lifeless body probably rested at the bottom of the cliff by now. She smiled. Now that the little woman was out of the way, Rohman would be hers once again. If only she could convince him to take her as his queen, all would be right again. In her former homeland of Hustrem, she'd been the pampered daughter of her king's advisor.

King Orso'd had eyes for her and would have made her his queen if they hadn't lost that *demmed* war.

She was born to rule. No one would stop her. Not even Rohman.

## Chapter Four

Eden felt something damp on her forehead. Her head pounded and she didn't want to open her eyes, but knew she had to. Struggling to lift her lids, she was startled to see a pale woman standing over her.

"By the stars, you're awake."

Wanting to respond, Eden found her throat too dry. "Wat... wat..." Trying to say water hurt.

"You poor thing, you must be thirsty. Let me fetch you something cool to drink and soothe your throat." The woman left her side, leaving Eden alone in the semi dark room.

Memories came flooding back and she wondered how in the world she was still alive. She was sure she was a goner when that evil blue woman threw her over the ledge. When she tried to sit up, Eden winced. Her body ached.

"No, you mustn't make any sudden moves. You took a pretty nasty tumble. Here you go. Take small sips at a time."

The woman held a cup to Eden's dry lips and she eagerly wrapped her hands around it. Wanting to gulp the cool refreshing beverage, she took her caretaker's advice and sipped.

"That's it. Don't stop until you drink it all."

Eden happened to catch the eager gleam in the woman's eyes and the cup slipped from her fingers, but her hostess quickly caught it. The woman was being nice to her, but again she had the feeling that something just wasn't right. The last time she didn't trust her first instinct she'd been thrown over a cliff. What was this woman up to?

"Oh, no. You have to finish your drink. I mixed it special. It has Elven medicine in it to help you heal."

"Why are you helping me?"

"Why wouldn't I help you? Enech could hardly leave you on the cliff like that."

"Where am I? Better yet, how did I survive the fall?"

"Why, Enech saved you. He was at the bottom of the cliff collecting firewood when he heard your scream. You fell against a slope, knocking yourself out, and when you would have plummeted to the ground, you landed on a lower ledge. Then Enech climbed up to fetch you."



“Enech?”

“My husband. He’s as anxious for your well-being as I am.”

“Are you? Why?” Maybe the potion was starting to work because her headache was beginning to subside and some of the aches she felt were melting away.

“I bet you’re feeling better already. Here, drink the rest of it. Drink it all up.” The woman held the cup to Eden’s lips, practically forcing it on her. By now she felt so relaxed and uninhibited, it was difficult to hold a coherent thought.

When she finished the last drop, her caretaker smiled. “Now that should make you feel better. You’ll be healed in no time.”

Eden’s tongue felt heavy all of a sudden. The room began to spin and her eyelids grew heavier with each passing second. “I... I need to get back to the... Queen... sick.” She had trouble getting the words out.

The woman frowned. “The palace? Are you by chance a servant at the king’s palace?”

Beads of sweat popped out of her forehead. Did someone turn the heat up in this house? Eden tried to shake the cloudiness in her head away, but to no avail. “Queen is sick. Must... help. Ceremony... King... me, please.” What was wrong with her? What had they done to her, and what the hell was in that drink?

The woman mused, “Hmm, you’re not wearing *acheka*, so you’re obviously not a claimed woman, and if you were a servant of the palace, you’d have the brand. Who are you?”

“Queen,” Eden whispered before the darkness overtook her.

\* \* \*

Seri stood over the tiny dark woman, studying her. What manner of race did this woman belong to? She could be a member of any number of the several hundreds on H’trae, but her features were hard to place. Whatever kind of being she was, there was no doubt that the little woman was a beauty. Men would pay a lot of coin to possess her.

She looked toward the door after a sound broke her out of her silent musings. Enech stepped inside to look at the woman he’d rescued from the cliffs. “She lives?”

“Yes, I gave her some medicine to take care of her wounds. It’s a wonder there were no broken bones. This wee one is more resilient than she looks. It’s lucky for her that she landed on the lower ledge, otherwise the damage would be far worse. She might even have died.”

“Aye. I thought I just heard voices in here. Did she wake up?”

“Briefly, but I gave her a concoction to put her under, just long enough for her wounds to heal. It will also keep her compliant in case she wants to put up a fight when we take her to Rozak.”

“She’s such a tiny thing, need you worry about her fighting you?”

“One can’t take that chance. She survived a fall from the cliff and we don’t know what manner of

woman she is. Her size might belie her strength.”

Enech looked distinctly uncomfortable, and Seri’s lips tightened. “You’re not going to back out on me in this are you? She’ll bring us a lot of coin if she’s sold.”

“But... look at how she was dressed when I brought her here. Only royalty or the very wealthy could afford such expensive material.”

“She wears *nocheka* and she doesn’t bear any mark that says she’s a servant at the palace. Besides, wouldn’t you like to see me garbed in such fine material? I could have married a royal guard instead of a simple farmer, then I would live in a much better style.”

Enech sighed. “You seem to take pleasure in belittling me, but I grow tired of it.”

Who was he to chastise her? She’d at one time been the most sought after female in their village and she’d foolishly given her heart to him when any number of men could have made better providers for her. “Then be a man and take care of our family. I bore you three sons, work this farm day in and day out, take care of your home, and you seek to criticize me?”

“But what you want to do isn’t right. She could belong to someone.”

“If she belonged to anyone, she’d be wearing *acheke*. No, I say we do things according to plan and that when we go to Rozak, sell her to one of the slavers. We can make a lot of coin with this one. You can hire some more help around the farm, perhaps buy Kiles a uniform to begin his training as a guard, and then buy some pretty trinkets for me, maybe some *ilsa* cloth.”

“Seri, you have been a good wife to me, that is true, but sometimes you do think above yourself. Whatever possessed you to come up with this scheme is beyond me.”

“We’ve sold things in Rozak before,” she pouted, changing tactics. There were times when Enech did dig in his heels and no amount of wheedling would stray him from his course. She didn’t want this to be one of those times.

“Yes, we’ve sold farm goods at Rozak, not people.”

“This woman is a nobody. She isn’t even claimed. What will be the harm?”

“Do you know what could happen to a woman like her if she’s bought by a harsh master? Would you wish that on her?”

“Once the deed is done, does it really matter who she is sold to?”

“I believe it does.”

“You worry overmuch for this woman. I begin to wonder if you defend her for your own selfish reasons.”

Enech’s silver eyes narrowed to slits. “Seri, you know you’re the only woman I’ve ever cared about.”

“Then prove it. Do this one thing for me. If your concern is whether she’ll be sold to a harsh master, you have nothing to worry about. Just look at her. One such as she wouldn’t waste a single day with hard

labor. No, she'll probably be some wealthy man's mistress and get treated like royalty. Judging from her mode of dress, I wouldn't be surprised if she hadn't been some man's leman already."

"You seem to have given this a lot of thought, wife. Like I said, she could belong to someone."

"What of the missing *cheka* then?"

"It could have fallen off when she fell from the cliff or maybe she took it off."

"If she took it off that's her problem. What about us? Will you put this stranger above your own family? When I chose you as my mate, you told me you'd always provide for me, but things have been rough lately, what with this illness spreading and the crops not doing as well as they should. But just because we've experienced these setbacks, it doesn't give you the right to shirk your responsibilities. If you won't do it for me, at least think of your sons. They all have the chance to serve in the king's army. Would you deny them that chance because of your concern over this woman who may or may not be someone important?"

"And what if someone does come looking for her? What then?"

Seri shrugged. "Then we'll just deny it of course. Besides, by the time anyone comes looking for her, we'll be in Rozak with the coin safely in our pockets."

Enech had a look on his face that Seri recognized very well. Defeat. Victory would be hers this time. She decided to go in for the kill. "You only have to look at this woman to know she'll have a pampered lifestyle as someone's mistress. She'll probably end up better off than us. If you think about it, we're doing her a favor."

He sighed, as though giving in would be better than to continue arguing. "Fine. I'll do it. At first light, we'll take her to Rozak to sell her to one of the slavers."

\* \* \*

Genesis did not take the news of her missing sister very well, throwing a fit to the point where Kal had to escort her back to their room.

"You can't keep me here. We have to find her. She doesn't know this world. What if something terrible happens to her?" Tears streamed down her face and she was unable to bear the thought of something occurring to the one person other than her mate that she loved.

Kal circled her body within the warmth of his muscular arms and she broke down. She couldn't remember ever sobbing like this. "Shh, it's all right, *jihar*, we have our men scouring the land. I'm sure she'll be found soon," he whispered against her head, and kissed the side of her face.

It felt good to be held by the man she loved, but it didn't diminish the worry over her missing sister. What was worse, she had a feeling Eden was in trouble. What bothered her was Rohman's reaction. He seemed to think the blame lay at her sister's feet, but Genesis was no fool. Something smelled fishy. "It's been several hours. If so many men have been sent out to search for her, in the sky at that, then why haven't you found her yet?"

He stroked the back of her head in a soothing motion. "I'm not really sure why either. She's a small woman who isn't too familiar with our world yet so she couldn't have gotten that far. Thane seems to

think that maybe someone has taken her in. Our guards are going door to door asking for her. If my brother's theory is correct, it's only a matter of time before she's found. I know you're worried, but everyone is doing the best they can."

"I feel so helpless."

"You're not helpless. You're very strong, and I admire that in you. I noticed your inner strength right away. It's one of the reasons I was attracted to you."

Genesis couldn't help cracking a smile. "And I thought it was for my devastatingly beautiful looks," she joked weakly.

He grasped her chin, tilting her head up so that she looked up at him. "I did notice your beauty, right away, but there is so much more to my attraction for you than the physical." Silky red hair framing his face as he bent, his lips grazed hers. She felt a familiar stirring in her pussy.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer, her tongue shooting out to trace the contours of his lips. Kal pulled back. "No, Genesis. You've just experienced a great amount of strain, and you have a lot on your mind. I think you should rest."

"No. While my sister is missing, I don't think I'd be able to sleep a wink. What I need most is you. I want you to annihilate this emptiness and pain I feel inside right now. Please. I need you, Kal. Make love to me."

"You don't know what you're saying. You're tired."

She stepped up on tiptoes and kissed his jaw line. "I know exactly what I'm saying. Please."

He groaned. "You know I can't resist you, woman."

Long fingers dug into her hair and his mouth smashed against hers, forceful and hungry. She pressed her body against him, nipples puckering to tight peaks against the hard plane of his muscular chest.

Her fingertips bit into his shoulders. She wanted to be as close to him as possible. If anyone would have told her she could feel like this for any man, she'd have laughed. Not too long ago, she was a doctor in a busy hospital wondering if she'd be able to keep her job because she went against company protocol. Now none of that mattered.

Earth was a distant memory and H'trae was her home, and her place was at Prince Kalian's side. No one excited her quite like he did.

She squirmed against him, trying to get closer still. Dampness formed at the juncture of her thighs, a burning pressure at the base of her spine slowly working its way through her body.

"You're so beautiful," he muttered against her mouth. Kal let his hands trail down her back until his large calloused palms squeezed her bottom. She could feel the bulge of his cock straining to burst from his loincloth. Genesis wanted him inside of her now.

Anxious fingers fumbled with the ties of his *jaytu*, loosening it until it dropped to the floor, revealing his pulsing member. It was so long and thick -- so perfect. Unable to help herself, Genesis twisted out of his grip and dropped to her knees, feeling the sudden urge to taste him.

Wrapping her fingers around his girth, she pressed kisses against the velvety pink cap of his cock.

“Genesis,” he moaned, grasping her head between big hands.

She ran her tongue around the tip before taking it between her lips. It was so large. She knew she couldn't take his entire length, but it didn't stop her from trying. Taking inch by delectable inch of him into her mouth, she savored his unique, musky, but not unpleasant scent and taste. He was all male and she loved it.

He made it possible for her to explore her wildest fantasies. Her feelings of love only intensified the elation of sexual gratification swimming through her. Kal guided her head as she bobbed back and forth on his cock. Moaning and groaning, he showed his pleasure with each shudder and utterance of her name.

It got Genesis off to hear his delight because she knew when he was pleased, she was rewarded. She tasted his seed on the tip of her tongue and knew he was close to bursting.

“*Dem*, woman, I will explode in your mouth if you don't stop this now.” His voice sounded hoarse with passion, but his words went unheeded.

She continued to suck his cock as if her life depended on it. When he released his grip on her head and bent over slightly to place his hands on her shoulders, she knew he was about to pull her up, but her hand tightened around the base of his cock. Genesis wouldn't let up until he came in her mouth. Going at a frenzied pace, she knew he was close to his peak.

“I can't hold back!”

Cupping his balls with her free hand she gave them a gentle squeeze. Kal stiffened. Stilted breathing rushed from his mouth. His fingers clenched on her shoulders in a vise.

“Genesis!” he yelled, shudders racking his body.

He shot his load into her mouth, filling it. She drank and swallowed as much of his seed as she could, some of it dribbling down her chin. Kal emptied his balls while she slid her tongue along the length of him, trying to catch every single drop of his jism that she'd missed.

“I love you so much,” he sighed.

That simple statement melted her heart. When he reached down to lift her this time, she didn't resist. Lifting her into his arms, Kal strode the short distance to the bed where he lay her down.

She started to work on the ties of her *ilisa* gown, but he swatted her hands away. “No. I want to undress you myself. You had your turn, now it's mine.”

Genesis lay back as he disrobed her, his eyes moving over every inch of exposed flesh. She trembled under his titillating gaze. He made her hot with just a glance. Her nipples were painfully tight, and more than anything she wanted him to take them into his mouth.

He positioned himself between her thighs, laying half of his body over hers. As if he'd read her mind, Kal cupped her aching breasts, rubbing his thumbs over the rigid tips.

“I love your breasts. They’re small but so responsive to my touch. And they taste good too,” he said, dipping his head and nipping the side of her breast with his teeth.

Genesis cried out in pleasure-pain. “Stop teasing me.”

Kal lifted his head, an amused look in his eyes. “And do what *jihar*?”

“You know what I want.”

“Do I? You know how I like you to say the words to me.”

“Take it in your mouth. I want to feel you suckle me.”

He chuckled, placing a light kiss on her nipple. “With pleasure.”

The warm wet tugging of his mouth on her taut peak sent erotic charges of heavenly delight through her very core. Pussy clenching with need of his cock, Genesis writhed beneath him.

Stroking his long red hair, she moaned. “Oh, Kal, that feels so good.”

“And you taste good, woman. I don’t think I could ever tire of you.”

“You’d better not because there’s no getting rid of me now,” she chuckled, her mirth soon turning into moans of desire.

Kal transferred his attention to her other nipple, licking, nibbling, and sucking. Genesis felt like she’d burst. Kal released the tortured tip before pressing a kiss to the valley of her breasts.

“Beautiful. So beautiful.” Steadily, he moved down her body, leaving a trail of kisses as he went. “I love your dark, sexy skin. The Ancient Ones were smiling on me when I found you,” he whispered.

Genesis thought her heart would combust with love for this man.

He pushed her thighs open and parted her labia with his fingers. Running his long hot tongue against her clit, Kal filled her with animalistic yearning to be claimed.

“Fuck me now. I need your cock inside of me.”

He lifted his head, a slight smile on his sensuous lips. “You teased me, so now it’s my turn. I will not stop until I have your climax.” And with that he sucked her clit into his mouth.

She clamped her thighs over his ears. No one ate her pussy quite like Kal did, and Genesis knew he would make her come in no time.

“Yes.” She sighed with pleasure when he slid his middle finger into her channel. Though she preferred his cock, this would do for now. She bucked her hips against his face. “This is sexual torture,” she gasped.

He slipped another finger inside her cunt and fucked her harder, his mouth never letting go of her clit. Genesis squirmed and wiggled against him. She had no doubt in her mind that Kal knew exactly what he was doing. The stimulation of his mouth on her pussy was unbelievably hot. Ungovernable flames of

passion licked at her nerve endings, driving her insane.

The more she shook and moaned, the more intense his mouth and fingers became. When orgasm came, it started in the tips of her toes. It traveled up quivering thighs, hitting her pussy with such great force that spots of light danced before her eyes.

Falling. That's what it felt like, into a state of utter bliss. "Kal!"

His tongue lapped her juices until she lay limp and weak from the satisfaction he'd given her. He wasn't finished with her yet. Before she could recover, Kal shoved his thick cock into her wet channel. "You're so wet and tight."

"And your cock feels wonderful inside me." Genesis clenched her pussy muscles around his member, making him grunt with pleasure in the process.

"You'll be the death of me, woman."

"But it's the good kind isn't it?"

"Of course. Wrap your legs around me, *jihar*. I want to be as deep within you as I possibly can."

She complied with his impassioned moan, the shift of her legs allowing him to go deeper still. His thickness stretched her pussy walls beautifully. She sighed with contentment. Kal stilled himself as though allowing her time to adjust, but Genesis would have none of it. Pushing her hips against him, she forced him to move.

Kal laughed. "So eager."

"I'm always eager for delicious Ceyan cock."

He lifted one dark red brow. "The only Ceyan's cock you'll ever have is mine."

"Of course, my love," she said, projecting as much contrition into her voice as possible. On Earth, nothing turned her off faster than a jealous man, but it didn't take long for Genesis to figure out possessiveness was a part of the Ceyan man's makeup.

"And don't you forget it," he growled.

His cock worked in and out of her cunt, slowly at first before picking up the pace, pushing her to the edge again. Their sweat-slickened bodies slid against each other, melding and rubbing. Genesis felt like she'd faint from pleasure.

"Fuck me harder, Kal."

She didn't have to tell him twice. He rammed his thick member into her earnestly and forcefully. This is exactly what she wanted. She wrapped her arms around his back, and legs around his hips. She couldn't get enough of the exquisiteness of the moment.

Silver eyes locked with hers and she saw many emotions swimming in their depths -- lust, possessiveness, and love. Racked by a torrential burst of pleasure, Genesis screamed her release. Kal continued to thrust into her as if the world would end that very night, not stopping until he came inside of

her.

Her cunt clenched around his cock, milking it of every single drop of his seed. Kal wrapped his arms around her, rolling over so that she lay on top.

He gave her a long lingering kiss. "I love you, Genesis, and no matter what happens, we'll deal with it together."

Their coming together had been as explosive as usual, but her last thought as she drifted off to sleep was of her sister.

## Chapter Five

Rohman held the strip of pink *ilsa* cloth in his hand. One of his guards had found it near the cliffs and there was no doubt in his mind it belonged to Eden. Had she gone over the cliff? They'd searched the bottom of it and found no body, so what could this mean? How far away from him was she now?

He stared down at the drop of blood on the cloth and felt a deep sense of regret. That one time they were together touched him more than he cared to admit. A connection had been made. He'd spent the past day trying to figure out what it was. The more he thought about it, the more he didn't want to accept Ani's version of what happened, but each time he spoke to her the story remained the same.

Pacing the meeting room, his body ached with the sudden need for Eden's warmth. Nothing had ever felt quite as good as being inside of her. When she touched him his heart beat faster. He couldn't begin to understand the mind of a woman, but why she ran away still baffled him.

He was so deep in his thoughts he didn't hear his twin enter the room. "*Mehier*, has there been any word on Eden?" Aarik asked anxiously. His eyes were bloodshot as if he hadn't slept in days.

Silently Rohman handed his brother the scrap of cloth his guards had found.

Aarik frowned as he looked it over. "What does this have to do with anything?"

"It belonged to Eden."

"Where was this found?"

"At the cliffs, maybe a mile outside the castle grounds," Rohman answered tightly.

"You don't think... she didn't fall over the cliffs did she? No. They would have found a body by now but... I'm confused."

"As am I."



“You were the last person to see her before she left. Was there something she may have said to give some kind of clue as to which way she might have gone?”

Perhaps it was time to tell his brother what he'd been holding on to since he found out about Eden's defection. “I wasn't the last person to see her before her disappearance. Ani was.”

“Ani? Why are you just saying something now? What did she say?”

Rohman relayed what Ani had told him. His twin's expression went from intent to incredulous. “And you believed her? What is it with you and her? You mistrust women yet you take your whore's word just like that?”

“She's not my whore, and I didn't say I believed her. I just can't prove she lied to me.”

“I see your point. She is Fherenji, which rules out the option of looking into her mind to get out the truth... unless...”

“Unless what?” Rohman asked, feeling anxious. If there was some way to get the truth out of his deceitful servant he'd go for it.

“Thane mentioned something to me earlier that makes me believe Raven could be of some help in this dilemma. He says she has a way of 'seeing' people.”

“I'm afraid I don't follow. What do you mean by seeing?”

“She may be able to discern the truth from Ani. It wouldn't be a mind reading. It's more like a seeing into the inner being.”

“Ani has made herself scarce lately. Hmm, I'm sure I could draw her out if I make mention of wanting her to warm my bed. Not that I have any need for her.”

“I know your reason for having her as a mistress in the first place was because you feel she's more upfront than most women, but to automatically take her word puzzles me.”

“At first I didn't, but then she began to tell me things Eden had mentioned to her. You have no idea how humiliating it is to find your mate of less than a day has run away from you because she believes you're a brute.”

“Is that what Eden said to you?”

“No, but it's what she supposedly said to Ani.”

“That doesn't sound like her.”

“And what do you know of my mate?”

“I've had little interaction with her, but from what I've observed, I don't believe she would do that. Why do you let your inherent mistrust of women get in the way? I know you refuse to talk about it, but now is as good a time as any. It's time for you to let go and forgive yourself.”

Rohman frowned. "Forgive myself? I don't know what you're talking about," he grunted.

"Don't you? You have all this anger bottled up inside of you about what happened that day, and you've always pointed the finger to Mother when deep down you've been blaming yourself. It wasn't your fault and it wasn't Mother's. You're letting this thing drive you."

"If you know what's good for you, Aarik, you will drop this subject. I have no wish to speak on it anymore."

His twin shook his head with a determined expression on his face. "No. I won't. For so long I've kept in what I've been wanting to tell you for fear of how it would make you feel, but to be honest, I'm tired of this. Everyone around this castle is extra careful to please you. Thane and Kal care deeply about you and Mother aches for you, but does this even register with you?"

"Aarik --" he gave a warning growl.

The other man advanced, poking a long finger in the center of Rohman's chest. "Don't you dare 'Aarik' me! For once you're going to listen to what someone else has to say so shut up!"

No one had ever spoken to him like this before, save his dead sire. "Have you taken leave of your senses, brother?"

"No. I've finally come to mine. This is something that has needed to be said for quite some time now. Our father did this to you. You never used to be like this. When Treyu died, that was when the seed was planted. The heir to the throne killed by a treacherous woman right? At least that's what Father wanted you to believe. You know just as well as I how mean spirited our older brother was. He took after our father, but you worshipped him. He could do no wrong in your eyes, but he was a horrible man."

"Stop it. Treyu and Father are not here to defend themselves any longer, and you defame them."

"Listen to yourself. Treyu was a hateful man. He was always deliberately cruel to us, and Father couldn't care less about the well-being of his other sons. He treated Mother abominably. There were times when she'd stay in her room for days because Father had left bruises on her, but he'd tell us she'd been disobedient. He'd say it was always her fault but never his. Treyu took after him and you know it."

Emotions he thought he'd locked away long ago threatened to resurface. Rohman didn't know quite how to deal with this. "Stop," he whispered.

Aarik continued unmercifully. "Our father had always been a little unbalanced, but the day Treyu was killed by his mistress was the day Father went insane. Our brother had been the one person he truly cared about other than himself. He had that poor woman flayed to death before our very eyes. What happened to her wasn't right."

"That *poor woman* killed our brother... in his sleep, no less. She didn't give him a fighting chance. Our mother would have done the same to our father if given the opportunity."

"Are you listening to yourself? Peaha didn't deserve her fate. Unlike Mother, she didn't have the luxury of hiding away from us when our brother bruised and beat her to the point where she could barely be recognized. While I by no means endorse her methods, I can't hold her fully responsible for what she did."

“She murdered our brother! Since when is plunging a knife in someone’s heart while they sleep an honorable thing?”

“She saved herself from his brutality. I never said it was an honorable thing, but like any animal who has their back in a corner, she lashed out. Everyone knew how Treyu treated this woman, but we did nothing.”

Rohman shrugged. “She was a servant to do with as he pleased.”

“I know you don’t actually believe the words you’re saying. This is Aarik you’re talking to. There’s not much you can hide from me, *mehier*. You know Peaha was forced to take action because if she hadn’t, Treyu would have ended up killing her. Papa was never the most enlightened in his opinions, but with the death of his favorite son at the hands of a woman, it pushed him over the edge. He went from being abusive to our mother to deadly. I noticed this, but you were -- are her favorite, and she took great pains to hide what he did to her from you.”

“That makes absolutely no sense. Why would she do that?”

“Because with Treyu gone, she knew Father would turn his attention to you. You were heir and had other responsibilities to worry about. She didn’t want to burden you with her problems and cause friction between you and Father. He knew, and used it against her. Father deliberately set out to sabotage your relationship with Mother.” Aarik paused with a sigh, raking hands through blond hair so like Rohman’s own.

This was too much to take in. Rohman found himself collapsing in the nearest chair. “Why would he do that? She’s my mother.”

“You know he inherited the throne through her and not the other way around. He was a prideful, spiteful man who resented that Mother garnered everyone’s respect while people merely tolerated him. Haven’t you commented on the many times he would belittle her in public for no apparent reason? He knew Mother could have married much higher than him, but she chose him for her king. Much of this story is Mother’s to tell. Talk to her before it’s too late. There’s only so much the women can do for her.”

“What would I say to her? How can I face her after how I’ve treated her?”

“Mother will forgive you, but can you forgive yourself?”

“I killed our father,” Rohman whispered, finally saying the words he’d held in for so long. “How will Thane and Kal react when they know it was I who delivered the death blow?” His eyes clouded with unshed tears.

Aarik knelt before him. “It’s time you forgave yourself. I know our brothers will understand if you explain to them what happened.”

“Maybe. I don’t know. I have to think on this. But first, we have to renew the search for my bride.”

“What did she do to you?” Aarik asked.

“What do you mean?”

“There’s something different about you. Before the ceremony I wouldn’t have thought to bring this

subject up with you, but now I sense a change. Could it be that she's your heartmate?"

Rohman stood abruptly. "I'll have no talk of this heartmate business. I liked Eden fine, and she'll make an adequate queen for me, but that is it."

His twin gave him a knowing smile. "I would say there is more to it than that, but I will let you figure that one out for yourself. In the meantime, we'll summon Ani. I suspect she's hiding out to see what will happen next. I have an idea."

\* \* \*

Eden felt woozy and nauseous. It seemed like every time she gained enough of her senses, someone put a cup to her lips, forcing her to drink some nasty concoction. She was sure she was being drugged now, but why?

Lifting her head slightly, she realized she was moving. Her body rested in the back of what looked like a horse cart. Where was she and where was she headed?

Two figures sat in front of her driving the cart, one of which she recognized. It was the woman from earlier. If she strained hard enough, she could hear them talking.

"I bet we'll fetch a lot of coin for her at the bazaar. Just imagine all the wonderful trinkets and *dilsa* cloth I can buy with that," the woman gushed.

"I thought the point of selling her in Rozak was to use the money to help out the family, not so you could fill your coffers with pretty things. If that's the case, I swear, Seri, if this is all about you, I'll turn this cart around right now and go home."

"Enech, you will do no such thing. We've come this far and I won't turn back even if I have to drag her there myself. You've already agreed to do this so there's no changing your mind now. We'll sell her as planned. I have a contact there who will be our go between. If we use him, we can get a fair price."

They planned to sell her? No! She had to stop them somehow, but her body felt so weak she could barely move, probably a side effect from the drugs. Maybe she could appeal to their better sides if they had them. What kind of people would just sell someone like this without even knowing a thing about them?

"Please," she croaked weakly. Her throat was dry, but she dared not ask for water because they'd probably feed her more of the drug.

Her voice apparently didn't reach their ears. "Please," she tried again, louder.

"Did you hear something, Seri?" the man asked.

"No. Keep your eyes ahead of you. The last thing we need is to get into an accident before we even get there."

Eden attempted to sit up but only managed to shift some of her weight so that she was propped on her elbow.

The one called Seri looked back, turquoise eyes shooting a look of annoyance, before it was carefully

masked. “Well, my word. She’s awake. Would you like something to drink? I have a sheepskin filled with something refreshing for you.”

Eden shook her head. “No. Please. Listen to me.”

Seri’s lips tightened slightly. “Well, could it wait? We’re almost to our destination.”

Again she shook her head to alleviate some of the fogginess. “No. This is important. I need to get back to the palace.”

This time the woman frowned openly. “The palace? As in King Rohman’s palace? What ever do you want to go there for?” She turned to Enech and whispered something to him.

Before she realized what happened, Enech pulled the cart over to the side of the road while Seri climbed back to sit with Eden, a large sheepskin pouch in her hands. “Your throat sounds a little dry. Why don’t you have a drink?”

Trying to slide away from the woman, Eden grimaced. Damn. What kind of drug had they given her to make her so sluggish? “No. I don’t want anything to drink. I want you to listen to me.”

“Of course I’ll listen to you, but first you must have a drink.” Seri smiled tightly before opening the pouch.

“No. I have to get back to the palace to help Queen Daliah. She’s fallen victim to the illness and I know she’ll need my assistance.”

Seri laughed nastily. “What could a little creature like you do? Why, you’re not much bigger than a gnome.”

“I may not be a big person, but I’m also King Rohman’s mate. He chose me in the Feast of the Flesh ceremony.”

“You lie! If you were the new queen, you’d have the king’s *scheka*. What manner of being are you anyway? You’re much too small to be Ceyan, and your skin is like nothing I’ve seen before.”

“I’m The’Ran, formerly of a world called Earth. The reason I’m not wearing the king’s *scheka* is because he didn’t have a chance to put one on me before being summoned away. I promise if you take me back to the castle I can see that you get some kind of reward.”

“The’Ran? The ancient race that was obliterated years ago? For one so small, you have many grandiose ideas. Now stop this senselessness and drink this.”

When Seri attempted to force the drink on her, Eden somehow found the strength to push her hand away, knocking the pouch out of Seri’s hand.

“Now look what you’ve done! You’ll pay for that. I was going to tell my contact in Rozak to make sure you get a kindly master but not anymore. We rescued you from the jaws of death, and this is how you repay our kindness? I would slap your ungrateful little face if I didn’t fear leaving a welt. The buyers would rather have their slaves unmarked,” Seri screamed, her voice so shrill it made Eden’s head ache.

It was then that Enech decided to intervene. “That’s enough, Seri. Leave the woman alone. She could

very well be telling the truth. Remember what she wore when I brought her home.”

For the first time Eden noticed she wasn't wearing the soft *ilsa* dress she'd donned just before leaving the palace. In its place was a coarse cloth dress that reminded her of a burlap potato sack. It rubbed roughly against her sensitive skin, chafing her.

“You are a fool if you believe her. I'm sure she'll say anything to escape.”

“I believe her,” Enech said firmly.

“Be silent, you fool, while I take care of this.” Seri grabbed a fistful of Eden's hair and retrieved the pouch, forcing it to her mouth. “You will drink this *demmed* potion!”

With one last-ditch effort, Eden dug her nails into Seri's skin, and then something amazing happened. Some sort of electric current shot from her body into her adversary's. Eyes wide with shock, Seri fell back before slumping down into the cart.

Eden gasped. “Oh my God, have I killed her?”

## Chapter Six

Ani walked to Rohman's chamber with a smug smile on her face. He'd finally come to his senses and called on her. It had been a long torturous time without his warm arms around her and his cock in her pussy. She knew that little pest Eden wouldn't hold his interest for very long. She wouldn't be surprised if he gave up the search for her after a while.

As she passing one of the other serving women in the hallway, her smile widened. Feya, one of the women who openly disliked her, sneered back. “What are you looking *sodemmed* happy about? Have you grown used to being the king's castoff?”

Ani's eyes narrowed, raking over Feya's cat-like features. “You've always been jealous of me, haven't you?”

“Why would I be jealous of a lazy whore?” Feya laughed, twirling whiskers between her fingers.

She wanted to scratch the woman's eyes out but thought better of it. There'd be plenty of time to have her revenge. Once she convinced Rohman to make her his queen, she'd have all of her naysayers whipped, banished, and then sold to the harshest slavers in Rozak. “You may think I'm a whore, but I'm hardly cast off. I'm going to his chamber now. I've been summoned.”

“Ani, you're a liar. Why should I believe anything you say?”

“Oh, really? Why don't you follow me? You can see for yourself how much the king still wants me. You

didn't possibly think that insignificant little woman would satisfy his needs like I can, did you?"

Feya shook her head. "I had the honor of serving Queen Eden before the king chose. I think she will make our sovereign a fine mate. When she's found, you'll be very sorry."

"What makes you think she'll be found? Who's to say she isn't dead?"

Feya's lips curved derisively. "I begin to suspect that maybe you had something to do with the queen's disappearance. Perhaps I should let the king know of my suspicions."

"If you dare, you'll regret it."

"Oh, I don't think so. So let's go. Take me to the king, and we'll see how much he wants you once I voice my suspicions."

"Forget it!" Ani scurried off down the hall making sure Feya didn't follow. She'd make them all pay! Not bothering to knock on Rohman's bedroom door, she opened it, a wide grin on her face.

That smile immediately fell when she saw Rohman, along with all three princes and their mates. "Roh -- your majesty. You summoned me in here. What did you want me for?"

"Is that how you address your king, wench? Bow!" Prince Aarik bit out.

She always knew the princes didn't like her, but she couldn't do anything about it. When she became queen, things would change around here.

Biting the inside of her lip to stop herself from speaking her mind, Ani bowed as she was commanded. Why didn't Rohman say anything? "Your majesty?"

"We have some questions for you, Ani. It's our understanding that you were the last one to see Queen Eden before she left," Prince Kalian began.

What was this about? "Yes, Your Highness. I don't know where she was going though because she was in such a hurry to leave the castle."

"You goddamn liar! What have you done to my sister?" The one called Genesis charged forward only to be halted by the strong arms of Prince Kalian.

Ani tried her best to remain calm. Had someone seen her? Did they guess what had happened? Why was everyone staring at her with accusation in their eyes? And why had Rohman tricked her like this? "Your majesties, I wouldn't dare lie to you. I don't know where she is."

Rohman looked over to the pale woman with long onyx-colored hair, speaking for the first time. "Raven, do you think you can discern the truth?"

*Tela*-colored eyes darted Ani's way and an impending sense of doom swept through her. Should she make her escape now? What did they mean to do to her?

Backing away from Princess Raven, who marched over to stand in front of her, Ani was surprised when her arm was grasped. A jolt of some kind shot through her and the other woman let go immediately. Before she saw it coming, a fist slammed into her face.

“You bitch!” Princess Raven screamed.

Ani crumpled to the ground, more out of surprise than from the pain shooting up the side of her head.

When the princess would have reached out to grab her again, Prince Thane pulled her back. “*Jihar*, what is it? What did you see?”

“She led Eden out of the palace and threw her over a cliff.”

“No!” Princess Genesis screamed. “Not Eden. No!”

Ani didn’t know how it was that this woman was able to know exactly what she’d done, but if she wanted to leave this palace with her life she had to get out of here now.

Ani was about to slink off, but Rohman strode forward and grabbed a handful of her hair, pulling her up roughly. “I knew there were many things you were capable of, but never this. If Queen Eden isn’t found alive, your life will be forfeit.”

For the first time, Ani understood the enormity of what she’d done and regretted it. Not because she’d taken a life, but because she’d been caught. She’d throw Eden over a cliff hundreds of times if she could get away with it.

“Have you nothing to say for yourself?” Rohman sneered, and she realized then that no matter what she said or tried to do, he’d never be hers. It was all over.

She was Fherenji and wouldn’t degrade herself by begging for her life. “There’s nothing I can say except that even if she’s alive, there’s no way she can do for you the things I did. If you expect me to plead for my life, you can forget it.”

His eyes narrowed. An incredulous expression appeared on his face. “I don’t expect you to beg for your life because there’s nothing you could do to save it if you’ve murdered my queen, but you’re right on one instance. Eden never could do the things that you do to me.”

Ani smiled triumphantly. “Yet you choose her over me, a superior being?”

“You didn’t let me finish, Ani. Eden couldn’t do the things you do because she does them so much better.” He turned away from her then and for the first time, she noticed two guards standing in the corner of the room. “Guards, take her to the towers and lock the door so she won’t escape. We’ll deal with her later.”

Ani struggled against the vise grip the guards had her arms in as they dragged her out. Shooting one last look at the king, she shouted in spite, “I only wanted you for your crown. You’re a terrible king and an even worse lover!”

\* \* \*

Rohman stood frozen to the spot. He was still trying to digest what he’d just learned. Eden dead? No. She couldn’t be. Impossible. He flinched when a hand fell on his shoulder. Even without turning, he knew it was his twin.



“Will you be all right?”

“Yes. I feel she’s alive. I don’t know why, but…”

Rohman turned around to see the collective looks on everyone’s faces in the room. Kal was holding a limp Genesis in his arms. The news was too much for her to handle. It was nearly more than he could deal with. “Kal, you should take Genesis to your room. This is a shock to her, but let her know there is still hope. No body has been found anywhere near the cliffs. I need time alone to think. We all need to get some sleep. In the morning, we’ll renew the search. This time… we’ll all look for her.”

He then gave a tentative smile to Thane’s mate. “I must thank you for what you did.”

The look on Thane’s and Raven’s faces said it all. Raven looked taken aback, and Thane looked downright suspicious. Rohman knew he had a long way to go with his youngest brother, but now wasn’t the time to dwell on it.

“It was nothing.” Raven touched his arm, *tela* eyes looking earnestly up at him. “I may not have known Eden very long, but there’s something special about her. She’s a good person, and I care about her. For what it’s worth, I believe she’s still alive. Don’t ask me how, I just know.”

Rohman nodded. “I appreciate that. Now, if you all will excuse me, there’s something I need to handle.”

He walked out of the room, leaving them behind, his strides growing longer as he drew closer to his mother’s chamber. Poking his head inside, he saw two servant women attending her.

“How is she?” he asked, opening the door wide enough to slide through.

The women were immediately on their feet, heads bowed reverently. The older one called Myera stepped forward to answer his question. “Your majesty, Queen Daliah has been swimming in and out of consciousness, but she’s much better. Whatever the princesses did helped greatly. She’s breathing easier, and her fever is not quite as high.”

He nodded. “Please leave us for a moment. I will summon you when I’m finished.”

“Of course, your majesty,” the two women answered in unison before scurrying out the door, a gentle click indicating its closing.

Fear held him to the spot. What now? Did he dare ask the questions that had been on his mind, and in his heart, for so long?

Taking a deep breath, he walked over to her bed and knelt down beside it. Not sure what to do next, he watched her. She was so pale, yet her beauty held true. When he was a boy, he didn’t think he’d ever find a woman as beautiful as his mother. He’d sit on her lap for hours and play in her glorious golden hair while she regaled him with stories of warriors of old. His mother had told the most magnificent stories. He could also remember thinking he’d never care for another woman as much as he did for her.

Then it all went wrong. Terribly wrong.

Daliah’s breathing remained even, but she looked so sickly. Rohman couldn’t help but wonder how long she could remain like this if Eden wasn’t found.

Eden. That was another worry plaguing his mind.

Without realizing he did so, he took his mother's clammy hand. "I broke my promise, Mamu. I found a woman as beautiful as you. She's got the loveliest skin I've ever seen, rich and creamy. I can't stop touching her. Her name is Eden. She's a wee thing, but her spirit is enormous. She makes me feel things I didn't think I was capable of. Only a few days ago, I didn't think I could ever care for someone like I did her, but in that short time I was with her, I knew my life would never be the same. Of course, me being my stubborn self, I didn't realize my feelings for what they were. I wish you could see her." He snorted. "I wish this hadn't happened to you."

He paused. "Mamu, I... I don't know where to begin. Seeing you like this has made me realize just how much I care for you and love you, and I'm... I'm sorry for all the things I've done and said to make you sad. I think when I said harsh things to you, it was because I hurt so much. That's no excuse, of course, but I want you to understand what I felt in here." Rohman placed her hand over his heart.

"You loved me unconditionally, never expecting me to be anything other than myself, while Father only cared for Treyu. I never said so, but it made me sad. I loved them both so much, but I was just an insignificant younger son. I know I was your favorite, and I should have been content with the love and attention you lavished on me. Deep down, I couldn't accept that Father wasn't a good man."

He leaned his head against the bed, emotions threatening to overwhelm him. It took several moments before he could speak again. "When Treyu was murdered... well, I can't really say that, can I, because Peaha did what she could to survive and you saw that. You cared about Treyu but you knew his true nature, didn't you? That's why you begged for her life, isn't it?" Rohman knew his mother couldn't answer, but he pretended that she could.

"I think it was then things changed between us. Father was devastated by Treyu's death, but he felt betrayed that you'd beg mercy for the woman who killed him. Deep down I understood why, but I so desperately wanted to please Father that I took his side. As the next in line, he turned his attention toward me. He filled my head with his hate-filled rants about women and how good for nothing they were, and forgive me, I started believing it myself."

Nearly choking on his words, he paused. Unburdening himself was harder than he thought it would be, and his mother wasn't even responsive! He squeezed her hand in his, wishing she were awake so she could hear this as she deserved.

Needing to go on, he continued. "I knew Father was a harsh man. Nothing I did ever seemed to please him, but I took it in the hopes that one day he'd come to care for me just a little. I believed if I acted like him, he'd at least think of me as worthy to follow in Treyu's footsteps. In his eyes, I would never measure up to his true heir. Despite how I began to treat you, you were always there for me."

Rohman reached up to push a stray strand of hair resting on his mother's face. Had her head moved? No. He obviously imagined it. "When Father began to intimate that you were unfaithful to him, I stood up to him for the first time. I told him you'd never do something so dishonorable to shame him and our family name. He called me a fool, yet without proof I didn't believe it.

"Then... then he took me to the bazaar that day, knowing where you'd gone. When I saw you in the arms of that other man, my faith was shattered. I didn't know how to react so I lashed out at you. And later that night, when I walked by your room and heard your screams... forgive me for even thinking this, but I believed you were getting what you deserved. I couldn't ignore it though. Despite what I felt was your treachery, I couldn't let him hurt you."

A tear slid down the side of his face which he hastily wiped away. Reliving these memories was something he'd fought hard not to do. "I think he would have killed you had I not intervened. Whether it was right or wrong, I had to step in, only I didn't think one blow would be the end of him. I didn't mean to kill him and I've lived with that guilt and shame for so long, but instead of taking responsibility for what I did, I blamed you.

"Father accused you of being weak, but you were the strong one. He was weak, just like Treyu... and me. I've failed you, and now I may lose you before you know I never stopped loving you. I was to blame, not you. I should have defended you, stood up to Father more. I've been hard on my brothers and sometimes I just hate myself. I love you so much, Mamu. Please don't leave me now. My mate is missing, and I don't think I could take it if I were to lose you too."

Unable to contain the immense pain he'd held in for so long, Rohman bawled as though his heart were breaking. He couldn't remember crying like this since he was a small child, but even then not quite like this. Body racked with sobs, he rested his head against his mother's body.

He cried for the misguided boy he used to be, for the lost closeness between him, his brothers and mother, and he cried for Eden. Their time had been very short together, but the connection between them was strong. If -- no, when she was found, he'd tell her exactly how he felt and would treat her like the queen she was.

He jumped when a hand stroked his hair. Jerking his head up, he saw his mother's eyes were open, a slight smile on her white lips.

"Rohman, my little *kitite*, my little boy. I love you too, and I've never stopped loving you." Her voice was weak and he had to strain to hear her.

"You heard?" he asked with a sniff.

"Every word."

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"I thought it was just a beautiful dream. You have no idea how long I've wanted to hear you say those words."

"That I'm sorry? Well, I am. You can't know how much."

"No. Not those words."

He frowned. "What words?"

"That you love me. It does my heart good to hear them. I love your brothers more than life, but I always knew there was something special about you. Treyu, well... he was my first born, but your father kept him from me and taught him to hate me. But you... well, you were my first little boy that I could hold and shower my love on. I could do the same with Aarik, but there was a time when you were the sensitive twin." A cough tore from her throat.

"Are you all right?"

She coughed again. “Yes, I’ll be fine. I don’t know what my three new daughters did for me, but the pain has numbed. I do hope I get to know them better. They’re all so lovely. I especially can’t wait to see your mate.”

“Ani --”

“Let me guess. She had something to do with Eden’s disappearance? I’ve always suspected that one to be up to no good. I know you don’t like hearing me speak against her, but I think you should get rid of her before she causes more harm.”

“I intend to. She’s put our people at risk. Eden may be our last hope to save those who have fallen ill.”

Daliah’s smile widened. “You must love this woman. She’s your heartmate.”

“Maybe. I don’t know. I need to spend more time with her, but she makes me feel unlike anyone I’ve been with.”

“I imagine. If you’re lucky enough to find your heartmate, don’t ever let her go. I had angry words with mine. There was a big misunderstanding and... well, I ended up choosing your father instead.”

“He knew he wasn’t your first choice, and that’s why he was so cruel to you. That was the reason, wasn’t it?”

“One of them, but it’s a little more complicated than that. The reasons why aren’t important now. There is one thing I wanted you to know. I wasn’t unfaithful to your father. In my heart maybe, but not physically. I never crossed that line. Gereth --”

“He was the one you were with in the bazaar?”

Daliah nodded. “How did you know?”

“There was a look in your eyes I didn’t understand until now.”

“Yes, it was him but it’s too late now. I’ve missed my chance at true love, but you have this opportunity. Don’t let it slip away, son.”

Rohman brought her hand to his lips, kissing it reverently. “That’s a promise I won’t break.”

## Chapter Seven

“She’s in a deep sleep, and I think there’s no lasting effects from it,” Eden assured a hovering Enech.

“Your majesty, please don’t hold it against her. It’s just that Seri sometimes has a hankering for pretty

things that I can't give her."

"It's understandable, but you can't go around kidnapping and drugging people. I know your heart was in the right place, but your wife is seriously nuts. How in the world do you put up with her?"

Enech wrung his large hands together, an anxious expression on his face. "She has her faults, but I love her. Believe it or not, she's not always like this. She cares about her family, and she doesn't always show it but she cares about me too."

Eden suspected the only person Seri truly cared about was herself but decided not to disillusion the contrite Enech. She sensed his sincerity, even if his wife was a bitch.

It was good to finally be able to think straight, without the cloudiness.

When she fought Seri and a charge shot out of her hand, it had temporarily paralyzed the other woman. Eden was learning a little at a time about her powers and realized this was some kind of hidden defense mechanism. Feeling Seri's forehead, she knew the woman would be all right.

For Enech's sake, she'd do what she could to make sure he came to no trouble. She was sure Rohman wouldn't take kindly to what these two tried to pull, but she couldn't very well let him punish the man who saved her from death. She shuddered as she thought about what Ani had tried to do to her. Eden only hoped the other woman would be exposed for the maniac she was.

"I know you're worried about her, Enech, but she'll be all right."

"How can you be so sure? I mean you no disrespect, your majesty, but she's been unconscious for a very long time."

"She'll probably be out for a while but no longer than a day, I suspect. I'm just learning my powers, you see, so the jolt I sent through her was stronger than it would have been had I been able to control it. I can't apologize for what I did though."

"I understand. Should we be heading back to the castle?"

It was on the tip of her tongue to say yes, but something stopped her. What was it? Eden knew her sister well and realized Genesis would be out of her mind with worry, and then there was Rohman. What would he be thinking? There was a connection between them. She would go as far as saying it was love at first sight -- at least with her, but what did he think?

When he touched her, stroked her, whispered words of worship, she was almost positive her feelings were returned but couldn't be sure. Something compelled her to answer in the negative. "No, I can't go back to the palace yet. There's somewhere I have to go. Now. Could you take me there?"

"Well, do you think we should leave Seri here alone like this? I mean, my sons are around but they don't know anything about taking care of people."

"She'll be fine. By the time she wakes up, you'll be back." She placed her hand on his thick forearm and looked up at him imploringly. "Please, Enech. It would mean a lot to me if you could do this."

The Ceyan man looked torn, eyes darting between her and his wife. "I..."

“Please?”

“You know you make it difficult for a man to say no. Yes, I’ll take you.”

She threw her arms around him. “Oh, thank you! You’re the best.”

Just then the front door crash open, and storming into the room flanked by two guards was Rohman.

\* \* \*

His heart felt like it was being ripped into several thousand pieces. He’d been so worried about Eden he hadn’t slept a wink when she was gone, and to find her here in the arms of another man made him angrier than he could ever remember being. So upset in fact, he could barely speak.

She jumped away from the man, a look of guilt on her face. “Rohman!”

“At least you remember my name. Come here, Eden,” he commanded tightly.

She shook her head. “Not if you’re going to be angry with me. I know how this may look, but before you jump to conclusions, can I please explain?”

“What is there to explain? We’ve sent out search parties for you. Everyone has been concerned since your disappearance, not to mention your sister has made herself sick with worry for you. Yet, I find you here all cozy as if you have no cares in the world with this man, in his home. What would you have me think?”

“I would have you believe that this is completely innocent because it’s the truth. How... how did you find me?”

“Why? Did you not want to be found?”

“Of course I did. I was trying to get back to the palace.”

He laughed derisively. “Funny, that’s not what it looked like to me.”

She sighed, rolling her eyes. “Can we not have this conversation here?”

Rohman had to agree with her on that. He didn’t want people to witness his shame. Striding over to where she stood, he reached out for her but she flinched away. When he grabbed for her again, she didn’t get away in time. This wasn’t the happy reunion he’d envisioned. He’d thought she’d be happy to see him, but her reaction said otherwise. That was what hurt more than seeing her in the arms of another man.

“Enech, I have to go but thank you for your hospitality. Please don’t hesitate to find me at the palace if Seri doesn’t come to in a reasonable amount of time.”

Rohman’s nostrils flared. She dared to invite her lover into their home. And who the *farken* was Seri?

The man called Enech, trembling visibly, bowed his head. “Thank you, your majesty.”

“Who is Seri?” Rohman wanted to know.

“Seri’s his wife. She... she was injured and I was tending to her. Enech was the one who saved me at the cliffs, and I was out of commission for a little while. But when you came in, I was thanking him because he was going to take me back to the palace.”

He had the distinct impression she wasn’t telling him everything but decided to hold his questions until later. Already his body was starting to react to her nearness and he could barely stand it. His cock throbbed. He’d found her in a compromising situation, his mother was gravely ill, yet he still couldn’t stop wanting her.

Turning to Enech to give the other man his iciest stare, he said, “I suggest you tend to your own wife. Don’t go far. We may be back.” Then, dragging Eden along with him, he strode out of the house, not bothering to take into account her much shorter legs.

“Wait! Slow down!” his mate huffed, wrenching her arm from his grip. “What’s wrong with you? How dare you treat me like that?”

“Have you taken leave of your senses, woman? I dare because you belong to me.”

“But you’re angry when you have no reason to be.”

“You don’t think I have a reason to be angry? I fooled myself into believing you were my heartmate only to find you in someone else’s arms, and you don’t think I have a reason to be angry with you?” He noticed his guards looking on and silently cursed. “Let’s at least speak of this in private as you suggested earlier.”

Leading her to his closed carriage, he helped her inside before climbing in. “Now you can answer my question.”

She lifted one perfectly arched brow. “I’m not your dog to command at will, Rohman. I’m your wife.”

“Then act like it.”

Eden gasped. “That’s not fair. I explained what happened.”

“Yet you’re not telling me the entire story?” For the first time, he noticed small bruises around her neck. Because of her dark skin one could easily overlook them, but there wasn’t anything he didn’t notice about her. Reaching out, he pulled her into his lap. “Who did this to you?” he roared.

“If I told you, would you believe me?”

The look of uncertainty on her lovely face shamed him. He’d gone about this all wrong. Why hadn’t he listened to her when he stormed into that house instead of showering her with accusations? Just because their reunion hadn’t turned out as he’d planned, it didn’t mean she was guilty of any wrongdoing as he’d implied. It would take him a while to dispel all of his misguided beliefs about women, but he was willing to put forth the effort.

“Yes, I’d believe you,” he said softly, caressing the soft skin of her neck.

“Your mistress did this to me. She tried to kill me. She told me she’d take me to your mother’s bedroom because I wanted to help, but instead she led me to the cliffs. I tried to fight her, but she was much too

strong for me. That woman is dangerous, and I won't stand for her being around."

"I doubt she'll be trying anything else. She's been banished. We found out what she did, and you don't have to worry about her anymore. I'm sorry this happened. I found her amusing at one time, but once I saw you... there was no one else for me," he said gruffly, still not quite comfortable sharing his feelings.

Cupping her face, he touched her mind with his. He saw it all. Every single thing. "I'll kill them both!" he roared as he moved to exit the carriage, dropping her to the floor.

"Wait! Where are you going?"

"Did you think you could keep it from me?"

She looked baffled. Could the woman be so daft? "Keep what?"

"What they tried to do to you. I read your mind, Eden. Why did you try to cover up for them and let me think there was something going on between you and that oaf?"

Her full lips pursed into one tight line. "Maybe I wanted you to believe me without question. You're going to have to learn to trust me. I know there are things in your past that have shaped your opinions, but there's a little thing called faith and you have to start having more of it. The reason I didn't want to tell you was because I suspected you'd react exactly this way. Sometimes situations call for mercy."

"Mercy? You think I should show them mercy when they tried to sell my queen?" When she placed her palm against his arm and looked into his eyes, Rohman felt like slaying several dragons for her.

"Sweetheart, they didn't realize I was the queen. You had yet to put your *cheka* on me, remember?"

"Sweetheart? Is that some kind of Earth saying?" It was foreign to his ears but he liked the sound of it on her lips. "What is its meaning?"

Eden smiled, revealing white teeth. His heart flipped. "It means you're the mate of my heart. It means... well, I know we've only been together for such a short time, but it means I love you."

Rohman didn't know how to respond to this. She loved him? Could this be just a beautiful dream? "You're not just saying that are you?"

"Look into my mind -- and my heart."

Her honesty and love shone through his cloud of doubt. Although he returned her feelings, it would take him a while to work himself up to actually saying the words. Instead, he pulled her to him, falling back on the seat with Eden on his lap again before crushing her lips with his own.

He dug his fingers into her scalp, tilting her head backwards so he could deepen the kiss. "Open your mouth for me *jiharia*," he muttered against her lips.

Eden's lips parted under the gentle assault of his tongue as she sighed into his mouth. She was so sweet and tempting he couldn't get enough of her as his tongue explored every crevice of her mouth, tasting all she had to offer.

Her hands slid up and down his arms. His body shook with passion from her touch. She fumbled with



his *jaytu*. Rohman had been with women far more skilled than his wee queen, but no other had ever driven him to the brink of such insane lust.

He tore at the roughly sewn dress, ripping it from her body. "When we get back to the palace, you'll be garbed in something more befitting to your station. Such beautiful skin deserves only the best," Rohman said before pressing hot kisses against her neck.

She arched her back, leaning into him. Her hands freed his cock, grasping it in her fist and gently stroking it up and down.

Groaning with delight, he cried out her name. "*Dem*, woman, you will be the death of me, but I didn't get to do all I wanted to the last time. I want to taste you."

Flinging her across the opposite seat, he knelt in front of Eden and pushed her legs apart as wide as they'd go. Already the outer lips of her pussy were damp with dew. Shoving his middle finger inside of her hot cunt, Rohman looked at her face to catch her reaction.

He loved the way she bit her bottom lip, shaking her head from side to side. "Don't hold back. Let me hear you moan for me."

"Oh, Rohman. That feels so good. More. Please."

Unable to resist, he dropped a kiss on top of her pussy, nuzzling his nose in the nest of her pubic hair. Even the womanly scent of her was like none he'd ever sampled. Before this ride was over, he intended to taste every bit of her. Easing another finger inside of her, Rohman ran his tongue along the inside of her thigh.

She wiggled in response, and he placed his palm against her stomach to still her. "*Patience, jihar*. Let me take my time with this. You have no idea how long I've wanted to do this to you."

"Not as long as I've wanted you to do it to me."

"Aww, so you're a saucy wench. Tell me what you think of this."

Burying his lips inside her pussy, Rohman captured her clit with his teeth, gently nipping the hot little nub. This caused Eden to squirm even more, but he didn't let up, sucking the core of her desire voraciously all while finger fucking her.

"Yes!" she yelled, mashing her pussy into his face, covering it with her juices.

The heady taste of her essence sent sparks of pleasure through his body and sent him on a journey of rapture. Within him raged so many emotions he could barely contain himself.

"Harder," she begged.

Eager to do as she asked, his fingers stabbed into her sopping wet channel. It turned him on to know she was getting off from what he was doing to her. Licking and whirling his tongue around her clit, Rohman wanted to taste her even more.

She whimpered when he removed his fingers. "Please, don't stop... more," she groaned.

“Don’t worry, *jiharia*, I haven’t finished yet,” he assured her.

Lifting her hips, he brought her cunt to his mouth. Rohman thrust his tongue into her tunnel. It entered and retreated in long broad motions, moving at the same pace as his beating heart. He enjoyed eating her pussy nearly as much as he enjoyed fucking it.

“That’s it. Give it to me just like that!” she screamed. Fingers dug into his hands, tightening with each push of his tongue.

He wouldn’t stop until her climax was his. His cock throbbed, eager to be inside of her. Words of endearment and love tumbled from her lips, making his heart swell with his feelings for her. He wished he could express himself as freely as she could, but he knew with this rare gem by his side, he would learn.

When her body started to shudder uncontrollably signaling her orgasm, instead of slowing down, he increased the intensity.

“Rohman! Rohman! Rohman!” She screamed her release. Her sexual secretions flowed into his mouth, filling him with its honeyed deliciousness.

She panted, apparently trying to catch her breath, which made him chuckle. “It’s not over, my beautiful one. Now I’m going to fuck you.”

Eden had never experienced anything quite so mind blowing. Just like the last time they’d come together, it was explosive. She wasn’t quite sure she could take any more pleasure, but it seemed like this gorgeous hunk of a man had other ideas.

She still found it hard to believe someone so aesthetically perfect belonged to her. There was a difference in him this time, however. A lot of the anger he’d been holding inside was gone. She didn’t know what had happened while she was gone to change it, nor did he give her time to dwell on it because the next thing she knew Rohman was pulling her onto his lap, her back to him.

Cupping one breast in his palm, he fingered her with his free hand. She leaned her head back, allowing his lips to caress the side of her neck. “That feels so wonderful, Rohman.”

“Not as wonderful as my cock sliding into your tight hole. Would you like that?” he whispered in her ear, grazing his lips against its contour.

She’d come again before he even fucked her if he kept this up. By the time this was over, she knew she’d be a quivering mess.

“Take me inside of you, *jiharia* .”

Lifting her hips, she grasped his thick member before positioning it against her pussy. She hesitated momentarily, rubbing it against her slit, savoring the blissful sensation of his velvety cock head against her.

“Yes, that’s it. Give me that sweet pussy of yours.”

Moving down his length, she took inch by delicious inch until his cock rested inside of her to its hilt.

“By the stars, you’re tight. This pussy is something special, and it’s all mine.” Rohman buried his face in her hair, grasping her hips to guide her over his shaft.

Her pussy had never been stretched so exquisitely before, and she felt like crying with desire. When his hand reached around to play with her clit, she thought she’d die of pleasure.

A slow buildup worked through her, starting in the pit of her belly. “Rohman, I love you,” she couldn’t help saying. She wouldn’t stop speaking it, even if he never said it back to her. She had to be true to herself, and there was no denying her feelings for him.

Rohman thrust up, meeting her halfway as she bounced happily on his cock. What started out as a leisurely fuck became more intense. Heat flooded through her, igniting the flames of passion. Her breath grew frantic as the pace picked up yet again, her mate grunting his enjoyment.

“Mine,” he moaned. “My pussy, my woman.”

There was something endearing about his possessiveness because she knew without a doubt that just as she belonged to him, he belonged to her. There’d be no other woman in his life besides her, not without a fight there wouldn’t be, but something told her she wouldn’t need to worry about that.

Little electric sparks flickered along each nerve in her body, heightening the sensation. When her climax came, it was like fireworks on the Fourth of July, especially when she felt his seed shoot into her, signaling his own explosive orgasm. Clenching her vaginal muscles around him, she squeezed his cock, pumping him dry.

She fell against him limp and exhausted. Rohman continued to kiss her neck and stroked her hair and face. “Beautiful, so beautiful,” he whispered against her skin.

Eden didn’t want this moment to end, but a thought suddenly occurred to her. “Rohman! Have your men been waiting outside the carriage the entire time?”

“I suppose they have,” he murmured, nibbling on her ear.

“They’re probably wondering what we’re doing.”

“I’m sure there’s no doubt in their minds about what we’re doing, but I see your point. We have to get back to the palace.”

“I’ve been meaning to mention that to you. I don’t think we should go back just yet. There’s somewhere I feel I have to go first.”

“What do you mean? My mother needs you.”

“I don’t dispute that, but I feel a pull to this place. I have to go there. It’s a large white structure, big columns in the front and a bright, almost blinding light.”

Rohman frowned. “You speak of the Temple of the Light. It’s where the Ancient Ones are.”

“They’re calling to me. I don’t know why, but something tells me I must go there first.”

“What if you’re wrong?”

She wiggled off his lap, his cock sliding out of her. Eden knelt down in front of him. "You'll have to trust me. Can you please do this one thing for me? Take me to the Temple, and I think we may find the answer to this illness that's devastated your people."

"You're the answer."

"Perhaps the cure, but don't you want to know why it's happened? I think our answers lay there." She looked up at him pleadingly.

He gave her a stony expression before sighing heavily. "All right, we'll do this your way. But if we don't find the answers you seek, we're going back to the palace so you can take care of my mother."

Something told Eden she wasn't wrong.

## Chapter Eight

*Who dares enter the Temple of the Ancient Ones?*

A loud voice seemed to surround them as they entered. Rohman pulled her close as though trying to protect her, but she felt no fear. In fact it almost felt like a homecoming.

Before she could speak, however, her husband beat her to the punch. "I'm King Rohman of the Ceyans and with me is my queen, Eden, descendant of the The'Rans."

*She's your queen, yet she's dressed in rags,* a female voice observed.

Eden felt self-conscious holding the torn dress against her. "It's a long story. These are not my clothes. We come here to seek your wisdom."

*Tell us, Eden, can you be happy with this king?* Again it was the female voice that spoke.

She looked over to her handsome Ceyan King and tentatively slipped her small hand into his much larger one. "Yes, I can be happy with him. I already am."

Another voice spoke up, a deeper male voice. *Has he honored you in the way one of the chosen people should be?*

"What is the meaning of these questions?" Rohman asked with a ferocious frown on his face.

*Quiet, Ceyan, we are addressing the queen and the queen only. You will remain silent or feel our wrath,* the feminine voice roared like thunder, this time making Eden jump in surprise. *Well, Queen Eden, does he honor you?*

“I... I’m not really sure what you mean by your question, but I do know that it’s an honor to be his mate.” Turning to look up at Rohman, who stared down at her, seemingly anxious for her reply, she smiled. “I also know there’s no one I’d rather be with. It was my honor and privilege to be chosen by him.”

“Do you mean that, Eden?” he asked softly, his hand cupping the side of her face.

“Of course I do. I love you.”

“And I lo... I love you too.”

Tears welled up in her eyes. These were the words she’d longed to hear for so long. “I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything, *jiharia*. Your eyes say it all.”

“It pleases me to know this is a union of love. I didn’t have that privilege when I mated with my Ceyan,” a woman said as she approached from out of nowhere. The voice sounded familiar though.

As she drew closer, Eden and Rohman both did a double take because standing before them was a woman who could have been Eden’s twin sister. Draped in a flowing white robe, a light emanated from her, the woman possessed a force so great, it was almost overwhelming.

Eden was the first to regain her voice. “Who... are you?”

“Dyshira of Tiearen.”

Rohman’s mouth fell open. “Queen Dyshira? Impossible. You should be...”

She smiled. “Dead? Well, actually I’m no longer of body. You’re only seeing an image of what I used to look like.”

Eden stared in amazement. “I’m not really sure I understand.”

“Did you not hear my voice in the Temple?”

Rohman ran his fingers through his glossy mane. “You’re one of the Ancient Ones? But how? I’ve always understood them all to be older than time.”

“That used to be true, but as the ultimate chosen one, when my spirit passed to the next level, I took my rightful place alongside those who reside in the temple. Perhaps you two would like to have a seat and I’ll explain all to you the best I can.” She turned and walked further into the temple, as though she expected them to follow.

Dyshira left confusion in her wake. It was still hard to wrap her mind around what was going on, but now she’d have answers. Eden wondered if there was a particular reason this woman looked so much like her.

They followed the regal woman to the back of the temple, the light growing brighter with each step they took. She led them to a little room.

“Have a seat on the bench. This is where the chosen people used to come and lay offerings of the land,” Dyshira said, pointing to a large stone altar in the center of the room.

Rohman pulled Eden close to him as they took a seat. Again that warm feeling of love shot through her just being near him. Glancing up at him briefly, she found him looking at her too. The look within the depths of his silver eyes reflected her love.

“It pleases me to see this is a love match. I’ve been watching you, King Rohman of Zerus,” Dyshira began. “I knew Eden would be what you needed. Now, let me start from the beginning. As you know, I was once The’Ran. We were a peaceful people, the chosen ones. We took care of the Temple of the Light and gave homage to the Ancient Ones. There was a time when Ceyans and The’Rans lived in harmony together.” She paused, as if she were making sure they understood everything she said before starting again.

“A ritual called the Feast of the Flesh, not very different from what you do today, was performed. There was more purpose behind our ceremonies however. You see, there were these shape shifting creatures called the Shadow People who lay in wait to pillage our line. We made a deal with the Ceyans to protect us, and in exchange we’d give them twenty of our women for each ceremony.” Dyshira paused.

“Please, tell us more,” Eden urged.

“Patience, my child. The pact was broken by the man who claimed me for his wife. King Garmonian had evil in his heart. I knew from the beginning he was trouble. If I’d had a choice, I wouldn’t have mated with him, but he blackmailed my people, making it impossible for me to decline. Life with him was far worse than I thought possible, but I endured for the sake of my people.”

Eden felt sad for what Dyshira must have gone through. Understanding how helpless the former queen’s situation must have been, her heart twinged. “I’m sorry.”

Dyshira nodded. “It’s past now, my child.”

“But what happened? What did your mate do to break the pact?” Rohman asked.

“He felt that his army would be better served if he didn’t have to spare the men who guarded Tiearen. He withdrew Ceyan protection and then told the Shadow People. This was his intention all along, because he wanted Tiearen and Lai, the homeland of the Shadow People, but he wanted the Shadow People to clear up Tiearen. Then he planned on conquering Lai. The Ancient Ones showed my people a way out. We escaped to a place called Earth, but not before Garm killed my father. I’d finally reached my breaking point. I cursed the Ceyan people for what King Garmonian had done to mine.”

“A curse? Do you mean to tell me my people are dying because of what some king did hundreds of years ago?” Rohman asked incredulously.

“It wasn’t merely a curse. It was a cleansing. Most of the Shadow People were immediately wiped out, but those who survived escaped to another world. The Ceyans, however, were another matter. I wanted their devastation to be slow and painful. For every The’Ran that died over the course of the years, ten Ceyans died, and then that number doubled, and then doubled again.”

“You see, not all The’Rans fared well on Earth. Some died right away while others grew ill from human diseases. Homesickness was the main reason so many didn’t last. I eventually joined with a human and

bore him four children. When he passed away, I grew ill. I wanted to die in my homeland so I ventured back to the temple where I was taken up to be a guardian. That's what we call ourselves by the way. Others refer to us as the Ancient Ones."

Again she paused to pace the white marble floor, her bare feet practically gliding across the floor. "The'Ran blood had been diluted so much that most of the powers my people once possessed were nearly gone, but there were four more carriers."

Turning to look at Eden, Dyshira nodded. "It was you, Genesis, Hope, and Raven. The four of you were the last of the chosen people. The ones who I personally picked to help restore Tiearen to its former glory."

"One thing I don't understand is why you made it a condition that we mate with these women in order for you to tell us their whereabouts?"

A smile tilted Dyshira's lips. "There are a few reasons, actually. The first being that these were the last four women who held the powers of the light. They needed to be in their homeland in order to use their gifts properly, and in order for them to carry on the line, they'd need mates. What better mates for these women than royalty?"

"I've kept my eyes on every one of you, and it was destined that the eight of you would come together. By taking them as brides, you're giving them your protection, and, in essence, resealing the pact our forefathers made. As of now, the curse has been lifted. No more Ceyans will fall victim to the illness as long as our temple is honored and Tiearen is restored as was promised."

It was finally making sense. Eden shivered when Dyshira walked toward her. She felt so overwhelmed and humbled in this majestic woman's presence.

"Eden, if you haven't guessed already, you and your sister are my direct descendants. You have been granted the great power, but that also comes with a responsibility I know you can handle. There are still sick Ceyans who need to be cured. Heal them." With one last wave of her hand, Dyshira looked at them both with a smile. "I bless this union." And with that she disappeared.

Rohman turned to her then and gave her a slow kiss on her mouth. "Let's go home."

\* \* \*

Energy flowed through her body as she pressed her hands into Mother Daliah's chest. Her sister was on one side, with Hope and Raven on the opposite end of the bed. Eden knew that if she really wanted to, she could heal Mother Daliah by herself, but her powers still weren't at their most potent and doing so would take everything out of her.

Besides, she was glad to have the other women with her. There were many more people to heal throughout the land and each of their skills was a tremendous help.

It took several moments before she knew for certain the illness was gone. To her surprise, turquoise eyes flew open. Daliah looked around as though trying to get her wits about her.

"Welcome back, Mother," Eden greeted.

A weak smile crossed the dowager's face. "You must be Eden. You're just as beautiful as Rohman said

you would be. I thank you from the bottom of my heart,” she whispered, a tear sliding out from the corner of her eye.

Eden smiled back. “It was my honor to heal you.”

“No, that wasn’t what I meant. I thank you very much for giving me back my son.”

\* \* \*

Raven lay in the arms of her husband, sated after another round of passionate lovemaking. “I’m so proud of you.” Kissing him on the chest, she snuggled closer to him, reveling in his nearness.

“Why do you say that, my beauty?” Thane asked, his voice laden with contentment.

“I’m proud that you were able to accept your brother’s apologies for his past transgressions. He’s really not a bad guy. I actually kind of like him.”

“I’ve always loved Rohman, but there were times I didn’t like him very much. I didn’t realize what a heavy burden he carried. I only wish he had opened up to me sooner. I would have been there for him.”

“You make it sound easier than I’m sure it probably was for him. Keep in mind it was a huge cross for him to bear.”

Thane dragged his knuckles down the side of her body. She shivered with delight. Seeing the make-up scene between her husband and his oldest brother was touching. She knew they still had a long way to go, but they had to start somewhere. Raven believed they’d made a pretty good start.

“When the others and I have healed the rest of the sick, will we go to your palace?”

Thane’s face lit up. “Yes. I think you will like it there. I must show you my relics. I’m a collector of many beautiful things, but I only recently found my greatest treasure.”

“And what was that?”

“You.”

\* \* \*

Genesis sat on her husband’s lap as they gazed at the stars from their balcony. She rested her head against his broad chest, content to have him stroke her hair. It felt nice to feel his long fingers threading through her short mop.

“Don’t be sad, *jihar*,” Kal muttered, kissing the side of her neck.

“I can’t help it. I’ve never lived away from Eden before. When this is all over, it may be a while before I see her again.”

“We can always visit. My palace isn’t very far away and we come back every season.”

“I know. I guess I’m just being silly. It’s so hard to believe my baby sister is grown up, let alone a queen.”



“I think she’ll make an excellent queen. Look at how much she’s changed Rohman already,” he observed. Raising his hand to tweak her breast, he squeezed her nipple through *theilsa* .

Genesis groaned. “Are you deliberately trying to distract me?”

“Maybe,” he chuckled.

“This is serious business here. I’m going to miss my sister.”

“But there will be other things to keep you busy, like my children.”

She turned around to look into his eyes. “Oh, I’d love children.”

“There’s only one condition.”

She twisted her lips cynically. Oh, boy, here it comes, she thought. “I suppose you want a whole horde of sons.”

A smile split his lips, lighting up his handsome face. “On the contrary, I only want daughters, because if they’re anything like you, I’ll be the happiest man on H’trae.”

\* \* \*

Hope washed Aarik’s back as they soaked in their large tub together. “You seem much happier than before.”

The grin Aarik was already wearing grew wider. “And why shouldn’t I be happy? My mother is better, our people will be saved, my brother is on his way to being his old self, and my wife is the most beautiful woman in all of H’trae.”

“You’re just saying that, but it’s appreciated.”

Turning abruptly he gave her a stern look. “You still doubt that you’re beautiful. I know what you experienced on Earth, but the past is the past. I love you, and to me, there is no one lovelier.”

Her heart swelled with love for this man. With him, she did indeed feel beautiful. He didn’t care that she could stand to lose weight or that she wasn’t a glamour queen. He loved her for who she was. No man had ever looked at her with such love and adoration in his eyes before, and she returned it tenfold.

She knew there was no sweeter fate than the one dealt to her. She’d made three amazing new friends, was a princess, and had a hunk who loved her and she loved him back.

Hope used to believe she was the queen of bad luck, but it seemed like her luck had changed.

\* \* \*

Eden straddled her husband’s hips, her breasts jutting out in silent invitation. Rohman immediately grabbed them, fondling and squeezing her soft mounds. Arching her back against his touch, she felt pure bliss.

He chuckled. "I'm surprised you want to make love again so soon. That will make four times tonight. While I'm up for it, I need to catch my breath."

She giggled. "That's all right. I'll just have my wicked way with you until you come around."

"How about I hold you for a moment? I like you next to me." Engulfing her in his arms, he pulled Eden down against his chest, bringing her mouth to his.

Her tongue pushed past his lips, swirling and tasting him slowly. When she pulled back his eyes were passion glazed. "Have you changed your mind yet?"

"No," he said stubbornly, a twinkle in his eyes indicating that he would play her little game.

She licked the side of his neck. He shivered. "How about now?"

"No."

She leaned over and began to nibble his ear. "How about now?" she whispered.

It must have been the final straw because with one abrupt movement, he flipped her onto her back, pinning her beneath him. "You win," he growled, his cock poking at the juncture of her thighs.

"No, I think we both win," Eden said, feeling so much love for him she could barely contain it.

"I must be the biggest winner because, before you came into my life, I thought being king was a burdensome responsibility. But with you by my side as my queen, I will look forward to each day. I thank the Ancient Ones for sending you my way. I love you, Eden, and look forward to the rest of my life with you."

"And I with you."

Things may have started out rocky, but now they couldn't be better. Eden realized they would probably have their ups and downs as most couples do, and they also had the great task of restoring Tiearen to its former glory. But with Rohman, the sky was the limit and she couldn't wait to soar.

Eve Vaughn

Eve Vaughn has enjoyed creating characters, and making up stories from an early age. As a child, she was always getting into mischief so when she lost her television privileges (which was often), writing was her outlet.

Eve likes to read, bake, make crafts, travel, and spend time with her family. She lives in the Philadelphia area with her husband. She loves hearing from her fans, so feel free to contact her at

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