

SHADOWS of ATLANTIS

By Mara Powers

Preview

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Once a golden city stood upon a chosen site.
Built within a sacred spring within the ocean's might.
Rings of land and rings of sea, crafted circles, three plus three.
Reflecting off the world it ruled, it lives eternally.
And to the rounded city fair, a painted lady came one day.
Bade to love the people, for eternity to stay.
She would hold their hopes and give their dreams
a place to live.
She would take their story for a future world to give.

Leaving the Dreamvale would mean Brigitte would gradually forget growing up on the rocky shores of the mystical islands. She stood in her favorite place high above the dreamclan village watching the ocean dance with the cliffs. It would be her last chance to behold the glory of sunset before boarding the galleon bobbing in the cove below.

Evenings were always a masterpiece of color, the best time to behold the splendor of nature's art. Clouds of rainbow prisms had the look of creatures billowing in the sky. But in the distance, a wall of storm opened like the jaws of a predator, drifting ever closer to the peaceful, green island.

"Brigitte." A male voice echoed through her contemplation. She felt a pang of disappointment. Leaving would mean the beginning of a journey she had feared all her life. With one last lingering view of the panorama, she held her breath, reached out her arms and leapt from the cliff. As a mass of dancing particles, she bounced down the ragged rocks toward the village, one with the wind. Taking her time would be rude, so she kept moving until she filled the inside of her room.

Her brother Lukias was a dreamseer, finely tuned to the invisible. As usual, his hair was a shock of chaos that pointed in every direction. The amber of his eyes sparkled with gold flecks as he stood over her body with arms crossed. He looked right at her dream form. "The council has called us," he said with a hint of impatience.

Brigitte sank back into her body and opened her eyes.

“I warned you not to dreamwalk too much.” He turned his back as she reached for her travel clothes. “You could separate from your body and forget how to return. Especially here in the Dreamvale.”

“It hardly matters anymore.” She watched the sun’s rays shoot dusty light through holes in the walls. She thought about the pattern it made every day at this time, the royal symbol of Atlantis. “In Atlantis we will be bound to our bodies.”

Lukias reached out a caring hand and patted her shoulder. “There will be ways to dreamwalk in the realms of matter. It will just be more... challenging.”

She smirked, knowing he always loved a challenge. He could always find humor even in the grimmest of circumstances. They exchanged a few moments of unfolding memories until, with the final boot in place, she stamped her feet and started for the door. “You coming?”

Together they walked to the center of the village where the council was gathered in a semi-circle facing a woman. She wore the leather of seafarers, her face shaded by a wide-brimmed hat. With one hip thrust to the side, her demeanor was unruffled with a twist of amusement.

Their father Denikon raised his booming voice for all to hear. “Captain Ofira Pazit of the Dreamship *Vex Voyager*, I give you my daughter Brigitte, emissary to Atlantis. She is the first true Moirae born into our dreamclan for seven generations.”

The captain wrinkled her chin. “Impressive. Embodied Watchers are rare, even among dreamclans.” Her chameleon eyes shifted in the fading light. “If you are ready, I think it wise that we set sail before that shadow storm arrives, don’t you?” Her eyes slid toward the horizon. “This storm has struck more than one dreamclan. All of them were to send emissaries for the renewal of the Telluric Treaty. None of them have been heard from.” She turned back to the council. “Are you certain you want to risk staying? It would be a tight fit, but we can evacuate the rest of you.”

Brigitte glanced at the grim face of her tutor Indrius. The mysterious Atlantean woman had always been a curiosity to the clan. Though she had spent many years among them, she was never one of them. She was riddled with tragedy from a past she never spoke of, a past born in Atlantis.

Denikon answered, “Those who remain have chosen to face the shadows.” His voice was steadfast though regret lingered in his eyes. He exchanged a nod with Indrius. “I am sending Lukias, my son and heir, to accompany his sister. If we fall, he will be the future of our clan. But trust me, we will not go down without a fight.”

The council had argued for many moon cycles, trying to decide the fate of their people. It was important for Brigitte to escape. Her path was evident. The first ships had already departed, taking women and children to places of refuge. The rest stayed, devising a strategy. Though they were hopeful, they worked with the solemnity of people who faced their demise.

She squinted at Lukias as he and Indrius said their goodbyes. Theirs was always a close relationship. But everyone liked Lukias. Her time spent with Indrius was always strained at best. She offered him a gift. The sun flashed off a crystal dangling from a silver chain. Brigitte could feel the telluric consciousness radiating from the multi-faceted quartz. It pulsed with a longing that made her fidget.

After a whispered message to Lukias, the white-haired woman turned to look at Brigitte. Her green eyes were gray with emotion. She brushed Brigitte’s cheek with her fingertips. “You know your task,” she began. “Remember your Watcher powers. It has become exceedingly difficult

to travel between realms on this planet. I fear this shadow storm will make it even more difficult. Atlantis is suffering from a disease. It will try and take you, too. Do not be attached to your human wishes and emotions. For humans, attachment can turn to weakness and suffering. This only serves to feed the shadows. Your path will not be easy.”

“I will do what it takes to find a cause and a cure for Atlantis. I will be mindful of your warnings.”

“Therein lies the trick. As you descend deeper into the Meridian Realm, you will forget my warnings. Take steps to hold them in your heart.” She lingered in Brigitte’s eyes for a few awkward moments. “I have prepared you as best I could, my child. I regret how I’ve treated you.” She faced Brigitte and held her shoulders. “Know that I loved you like my own daughter. My treatment toward you was an attempt to prepare you for the task you face. Atlantis will not be kind to you.”

“I understand, Indrius. You had no choice.” Brigitte wanted to cry. But her tears had long since dried up.

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Fire burned on the horizon. The storm stretched its tentacles to consume the peaceful cove. The *Vex Voyager* made a hasty departure. On deck Brigitte and Lukias watched their clan gather on the shore to take a stand against the approaching elemental threat. Her eyes fell on the white dress of Indrius. She held a dabrina in her hands. Together with the remaining magi of the clan, she played its chiming chords to mingle with their singing spells. A bubble of light appeared above them.

The dreamship let loose its sails to expedite their escape. At its curved bow stood their navigator. Her dark hair was bound into wild tendrils. It was her job to gain favor with elementals and direct the ship’s course. This one was a rare arcane practitioner with supernatural talent, and the reason Captain Ofira had a functioning dreamship.

The navigator held up her arms with eyes closed. Three magi surrounded her. Their incantations joined with an ethereal chorus drifting from the ocean. Brigitte leaned over the railing. Surrounding the hull of the dreamship floated the colorful heads of oceanids, sea-people who were the denizens of the Oceanus Realm. They gazed at her with blinking silver eyes. Their hair rolled in the tide, a cascade of iridescent fins. Brigitte lifted her hand to salute them. Their answer came telepathically. They, too, were in the service of the Watchers, and would infiltrate Atlantis in their own way.

Brigitte shivered. Elementals responded immediately to their summons. Fog rolled in around the ship, lifting from the ocean like rolling steam. A celestial wind gathered the sails. Brigitte grabbed hold of the railing as the ship lurched and picked up speed.

The storm closed around the shores of the island. She buried her face into Lukias’s shoulder. The crystal that now lay at his chest sent her a pulse of comfort. She stared at it in wonder, allowing it to become a focal point of distraction. Lukias looked back. But all he saw faded to a blur. Propelled by the songs of the oceanids, the ship seemed to fall off the edge of the world. The sails at its sides tilted, and the ship took flight into a starlit sky where they became wrapped in a muted silence.

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Shrill screams and curses punctured the afternoon's sunny stillness. Emerging from a flower-framed archway, a man ducked to escape missiles of pottery aimed at his head of messy curls. His childlike expression beamed with amusement as a woman's voice pursued him into the narrow street.

"You have no business showing your face here!"

D'Vinid rarely expended energy unnecessarily. Even in flight his movements had a feline elegance, which carried him lightly to the end of the lane where a set of twins waited purposefully, perched on a low wall. Their faces were painted with smug amusement as he exploded from the fragrant corridor, his long legs expediting his escape. They rose to their feet with light applause, thespian admiration written on their faces.

Adorned with bright noble attire, the twins stood out among the commoners, turning the heads of all who passed. Both had long sharp features and devilish eyes. Thin beards framed their wrinkled smiles.

D'Vinid stopped to straighten his clothes and adjust the floppy hat that flattened his wild curls. He reached back with momentary panic to make sure his musical instrument was still safely strapped to his back.

"What are you two doing here?" he asked, his eyes narrowed.

Kayden Aello had slightly wider features than his brother. It was the only means by which to tell them apart, though sometimes if they were not together, even that difference could fail to distinguish one from the other. "Good job, D'Vinid!" he cried. "As usual, you never fail when it comes to getting the show started!"

Jensyn, the other twin, always prefaced his words with a dramatic gesture of some sort to emphasize his "thoughtful" nature. "We've come to make sure you keep your appointment to perform at our father's revelry tonight." Jensyn draped an arm over D'Vinid's shoulder with a genial smile.

"I was on my way there!" D'Vinid protested. "Your father does not have to monitor me." He trailed off, looking back at the seldom-used corridor. "How did you find me? A locator-crystal? I don't seem to recall imprinting one for you."

Their looks were too innocent for anything but guilt.

"You say you were on your way to Father's revelry?" Kayden interjected with an index finger thrust into the air. "What a coincidence! That's where we're heading. We can go together."

D'Vinid smirked and took one regretful look back at the florid home of his attacker. With a sigh, he waved his hands in surrender and stepped into the bustling market.

D'Vinid intensely disliked being held to his appointments. But he understood their father's caution. He had become notorious for getting swept away on other adventures, which often led him to spontaneously cancel his musical appearances.

In fact, just this very day while heading for the Aello estate, somehow his feet adopted a mind of their own and walked him to the outer ring of the citadel. Today he blamed it on thoughts muddled by a maddening dream that awakened him far too early. It pointed to aspects of his fractured past and propelled him on a mission. Thus far, however, it had proven more difficult than he could imagine. Apologizing to those he had slighted with his negligent nature seemed to generate the opposite of the desired effect.

The old dabrina strapped to his back made it more difficult to dodge through the crowded marketplace. Though it was as homely as dabrinas came, he believed its depth of tone to be the

reason for his popularity. No other resonance could compare to that which came from the heirloom passed to him by his mother. Though he could not remember her face, sometimes when he played he imagined her laughter in its ethereal song. Throughout his life, the instrument had become his most steadfast and loyal friend.

D'Vinid inhaled the salty air. It had been a misty morning, characteristic of Atlantean days. As always, music danced in his head, and soon his brooding thoughts were swept into the silent melodies only he could hear.

A cold gust whipped through the corridor of buildings. D'Vinid shivered. He noticed the world slow. Feeling dizzy, he reached to steady himself on a nearby wall. A flood of emotion smacked him into a funnel of buzzing darkness. He wanted to run but had enough presence of mind to keep his wits about him.

He closed his eyes. In the darkness a vision was burnt into his mind like he had been staring into a light. Blood red eyes gazed at him with sinister menace. He cried out.

The world was suddenly back to normal. Just as he thought his mind was playing tricks on him, he froze at the sight of cloaked figures standing at the entrance to a side street along the twist of a canal. Though he could not see their eyes from the shroud of their hoods, he knew they stared right at him. Their faces were covered in what seemed like painted runes, and their arms wrapped in the bandages of death rites. He stumbled backward.

Kayden reached out to steady him. "You ok? Too many elixirs?" He laughed.

D'Vinid looked again at the dark figures. They were gone.

Flanked by the twins, he slowly made his way, as if escorted toward a prison sentence. He looked over his shoulder, stumbling as he walked.

The twins reached into satchels at their hips and produced golden hover-discs, inlaid with gems and geometrical patterns. As if in rehearsed choreography, they tossed their discs with the same flippant flick of the wrist. The discs clicked open as they fell, and a magnetic force cushioned them a few inches above the ground. They leapt atop the gleaming contraptions, which bounced at their added weight.

"Where's your hover-disc?" Kayden, the twin with the wider features, called out while hovering in a fluid pattern. Jensyn joined in, and soon the twins circled like jeering hecklers.

D'Vinid shook his head, replying, "I don't have mine anymore, remember?"

The twins jumped to the ground and stomped on their discs to make them bounce back into their hands. The movement automatically retracted the footholds with a click.

Jensyn leaned in close. "You don't *have yours*?" he marveled after a contemplative pause.

"It was taken away in the renegade revelries," D'Vinid admitted. "But I thought you knew that."

"You were one of the great hover-tricksters! How could you not get a new one?" Kayden exclaimed, throwing his hands out.

"You forget what happened to me when King Koraxx, in all his wisdom, decided to ban hovering outside the road mounds." D'Vinid sank into a dark expression. "Being so close to his sons, I was too high-profile, and he made an example of me. I am not allowed to even possess one."

Jensyn crossed his arms in a puzzle. "I'm sure your banning period is over by now. Koraxx isn't even king anymore. Just go through the mediators and get it resolved. How do you even get around?"

“Please spare me the questions! You don’t know how hard it is to break the bond with a hover-disc. I still haven’t gotten over it,” D’Vinid admitted, though he knew there was a real truth he always avoided. As much as he tried to hide from King Koraxx, his son and successor, King Kyliron, was far worse. D’Vinid would do anything to avoid his attention. “I’m in no rush to get anywhere, and if I am, I just take the vailix needle,” he pointed up at the shining bullet-shaped public transport, silently gliding on its wire around the city ring.

D’Vinid started walking, throwing a tentative look over his shoulder. He wove in and out of people gathered along the busy streets. The twins tucked their discs into their hip bags and followed closely. As they approached the Grand Esplanade, which cut through the rings of the city, a gathering crowd blocked the bridge across the water ring.

Jensyn threw up his hands.

“See,” teased Kayden, “if you would only just allow our father to get you a new hover-disc, we would be past this in a hurry.”

D’Vinid stared at him as if he were a lunatic. “How would that help right now?”

Kayden shrugged indifferently.

Jensyn rose to his toes, trying to catch a glimpse over the many heads. A parade of noble mediators inched along the esplanade, displaying their fancy hover carriages and feathery regalia.

The market was bubbling with festival fever. Banners and streamers billowed in the gentle breeze, and a general cheer abounded. It was the week of Ka-Ma-Sharri, when Atlantis celebrated the beloved myth of the separated Watchers, Belial and Kama, soulmates who vowed to unite only when they needed to act as a bridge for humanity’s evolution.

All Atlanteans celebrated by taking a lover at the height of the festival. It was the most exalted time to join a couple as life-mates, or take on a nameless lover, offering oneself up as a channel for the divine beings to possess. The passing parade was a display of debauchery, signaling the start of the night’s festivities.

Ka-Ma-Sharri lasted three days and happened repeatedly through the seasons when the sun and moon met in the sky. Human separation was represented by the celestial bodies that brought day and night to Sophaiya, and great celebration ensued when the two divine lovers could again merge during an eclipse. It was one of D’Vinid’s favorite festivals. He often pondered the deeper meaning of the Ka-Ma-Sharri and wondered why many citizens had begun to objectify the ritual to a point of greed and lust, rather than the celebration of divine union as it was meant to be.

With the passage of time, though, he had begun to tire of the ritual. The temptations and pleasures of beautiful women were all just a part of his daily routine, and the pattern had begun to repeat itself enough that he was losing interest in the excitement of the festival. There was only one explanation he could think of to justify his endless string of lovers: D’Vinid was in love, and he did not know with whom. Somewhere along the line he had been struck with apathy, and it had spread through his entire being like a disease.

Guilt had taken up residence in his heart. Dark times had fallen over Atlantis. Everything felt wrong. For a long time, D’Vinid thought his uneasiness came from his own gloomy depression, but the feeling was beginning to seem more widespread. Perhaps the whole city felt it. An image from his dream flashed again in his thoughts. *A woman, standing at the bow of a ship. She was surrounded by clouds and swirling colors.* It was her. Or at least he thought it was her.

Who she would appear as next was always a mystery, an enigmatic vision that captured his heart like no other. She would materialize periodically in the eyes of a lover, only to be replaced in the laughter of another. She was the ever-unreachable, unattainable object of his desire. And try as he might to keep a steadfast heart to those he met, he always followed the trail left by that abstract lover.

His eyes landed on a strange phenomenon along the horizon at sea. One of the clouds seemed to take the shape of a ghostly galleon rising out of a cloud bank. Magically, like an image in a dream, the enormous cloud drifted ever near the central city of Atlantis. He fell into a trance. Focusing on the horizon, his eyes flashed orange as he quietly began singing words that popped into his mind, as words always did for him.

“On a ship of clouds and air
came she unto Atlantis fair.
Traveler from o’er the sea,
come to us and set us free.
For we are full of sorrow true.
Listen!
Atlantis calls to you!

The maiden of the moon is she,
the lover of Belial.
Seer of the shadow storm,
revealer of denial.
We shall wait to hear from you.
Listen!
Atlantis calls to you!

Where one rose grew are truly three,
and only one shall stand alone.
Its path begets the fourth and final,
fallen back to home.”

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Waves of sun-drenched chestnut hair blew across the contours of Brigitte’s face as she stood at the bow of the shifting galleon. “Listen, Atlantis calls to you,” she whispered. The ruling city of Atlantis was called Poseidia. Situated on the island of Atlas, it rose like a gem against the sky as they approached. They marveled at its glimmering radiance and majestic elevations.

Standing by her side, Lukias melded with her thoughts. He heard a melody spinning in her head, one neither of them could remember having heard before. Perhaps it was one of the Atlantean songs Indrius used to sing to them. But the words weren’t familiar.

Dressed in the loose travel clothing of their clan, Lukias was short of stature. His dreamseer eyes revealed the depth of his perceptions. In many ways the siblings looked alike, with the same high cheekbones and almond-shaped eyes the color of amber. Though Brigitte kept herself impeccably groomed, he often neglected his appearance. Both had a presence that cast

a spell over anyone they crossed. Even the most charismatic of souls would become tongue-tied in her presence.

They had stayed on deck from the moment they sighted Poseidia. The city was perfectly round, built into a mountain with alternating rings of land and water, forming a target pattern with each ring stacked higher toward the center. Magnificent terraces and impressive spires stretched into hazy heights, cradled by an expanse of rolling hills. As the galleon reached the ocean entrance, they marveled at the massive golden gates that marked the water channel leading up to the circular citadel.

Reconstructed in an age when wars with foreign lands were considered a thing of Atlantis's past, these gates remained rusted open as a sign indicating all were welcome in her mighty ruling city. The entry channel stretched for five miles across farm and trade communities known as the Outlands. Most sea commerce took place along those bustling banks until the channel opened into the citadel's golden rings.

Brigitte gnawed on a thumbnail. A crosswind billowed the sails, pitching the hull abruptly. She slipped her hand across the rail, gripping tightly while widening her stance. Along the journey she had discovered the secret of sea legs: allowing herself to stumble in whatever direction the deck would present itself, in an always-random sense of stable ground.

Brigitte savored the moments remaining before she would have to adopt city fashion and take her place at the side of the man bound as her betrothed by the Watchers. Their joining as mates would serve the Telluric Treaty, a marriage of necessity for the good of all. Her thoughts swarmed, wondering what his young face had grown to become. He remained in her dreams since their meeting as children. She wondered if there would be love.

Obscured by elemental magic, the shifting ship of clouds went unnoticed by port authorities. They anchored offshore away from other vessels. She closed her eyes, trying to block out the memory of their flight from the Dreamvale.

Lukias touched her hand, and she startled back to the present. "You will soon forget," he assured.

She stifled the swell of emotion. "We will never see them again." A tear slid down her cheek. "I still don't understand. Why did they attack our people?"

"I believe it is the alliance between Atlantis and the dreamclans they want to destroy. The only thing you can do in retaliation is stay alive and fulfill your destiny." His eyes fixed ahead. "Leave the revenge to me."

She glanced at him. "That's your plan? Revenge? Perhaps you should focus on bringing to light these shadows of Atlantis."

He chuckled. "I knew you would say that."

She scooped up the crystal into her fingers. "Indrius gave you this?"

He snatched it away. "She said it would lead me to someone she wants me to find."

"Who?"

"Someone important." He tucked it into his shirt.

"Oh, I see! I'm not good enough for her secrets."

Lukias messed up her hair with a sideways smile. His eyes clouded over with the dreamseer's haze. "You will know him before I do. And soon you will have your own secrets to keep."

A gust of wind gathered the sails, propelling the dreamship toward shore. The captain stood on the highest deck watching them with her shifting eyes. In a single acrobatic motion, she



deftly moved from where she stood, down the stairs, and onto the main deck. “The magi are preparing to send you ashore.” She looked at them searchingly as she spoke. “I am not sure I feel comfortable sending you two alone. I don’t feel like my job is done until you get to the palace.”

Lukias glanced at his sister before explaining. “Captain Ofira, you have been a generous deliverer. The Watchers have chosen you wisely. They also directed me on this path. We must have faith in their guidance.”

Ofira gave up. “Then allow me to increase your list of allies.” She snapped her fingers in a spiral, and a vial of blue liquid appeared in her hand. “This will allow you to see the signs of the conclaves.”

Brigitte reached for the vial and examined it. “What’s in here?”

“Various plant medicines with a base of sha’mana.”

“The Treasure of the Watchers.” Brigitte’s eyes widened as she swirled the elixir. “Who are these conclaves?”

“Some call them the Children of One. They are the future of Atlantis emerged from the secrets of her past.” Ofira’s expression illustrated her care toward the matter. The captain had demonstrated unwavering integrity in their short time together. She nodded toward the elixir. “This will allow your eyes to see the blue-dream frequency where they alone can tread.”

Brigitte nodded and swallowed the contents of the vial. Ofira produced one for Lukias, who followed his sister’s lead in trusting the jaunty sea captain. Brigitte made a sign to Poseidon as the liquid slid down her throat and a tingling sensation spread through her body.

This was the moment for which she had prepared all her life, her arrival to Atlantis. She hardened herself to the fear. Dolphins and oceanids circled the ship’s luminescent hull. Sea birds danced in and out of misty obscurity.

A circle of sulfur was cast on deck. The magi awaited them, held entranced by chanting. In the blink of an eye, they would be teleported to shore.

The crew of the dreamship gathered silently. Brigitte and Lukias exchanged telepathic respect and farewells with their brave deliverers. Brigitte nodded to the captain. She sucked in a deep breath as if preparing to leap into the ocean. Lukias took her by the hand, and they stepped together into the circle. The magi maintained their chanting cadence to will them to another place.

The chanting escalated to a loud drone. Sunbeams bent inward around them, casting radiant rays to brush their faces. Mist swirled in a vortex. The voices gradually disappeared. Molecules danced, effervescent across space. Fog poured around them, sweeping their vision into gray.

Moments later they found themselves inside a circle of standing stones where many road mounds intersected. Their bodies buzzed. In the center was a ten-foot tall obelisk made of solid quartz crystal. A ball of polished quartz balanced on its tip, held in place by a spiral of copper wiring. Sunbeams poured through patches of fog. Tiny particles of radiant light swarmed around their heads.

On the island of Atlas, the majority of the populace dwelled in the countryside. The heart of the ruling city was a citadel, with the outer ring serving the working classes. The central ring was reserved for learning and leisure, and the inner ring housed the opulent estates of mediators, those born to the ruling elite. The island apex of the target pattern was home to the royal palace and the Temple Sect.

Brigitte and Lukias had not appeared far from the entry channel connecting the ocean and the canals of the citadel. Esplanades with their numerous markets bordered both sides of the waterway. These were the main thoroughfares for land passage. Road mounds were carefully formed along natural telluric lines in the surface of the planet. Using magnetic propulsion, Atlanteans were able to activate their levitation devices, allowing them to hover along the mounds and transport themselves, or carry loads of goods from place to place.

The siblings stared at the obelisk, knowing it was one of the nodes of the Crystal Grid that powered Atlantis. These were resonant capacitors that stored the mindlight donations of the people, so the Grid could be supplied with psychic power. Brigitte placed her hand against the crystal surface, feeling its great age, and the life force it exuded. Lukias did the same, and for the first time, both of them connected with the mighty Crystal Grid of Atlantis.

Brigitte startled when Lukias batted her hand away from the obelisk. "It's in their Grid. The shadows came from here. This is what came to destroy us. Come," he encouraged, attempting a smile. "Let's get to the city as soon as possible. The Watchers will deliver us to where they wish us to go."

The road mound they followed snaked through rolling emerald hills slanting toward the ocean, whose shifting surface sparkled in the sun. The rugged country was shadowed with towering green crags and cliffs. Parcels of patchwork farmland and circular villas framed their destination. The citadel gleamed like a formation of crystals.

They passed villas overgrown with vines and fragrant hanging blossoms, making the structures seem as outcroppings of the land. The sound of an approaching vehicle could be heard coming from behind as they entered the valley. An older man appeared, floating on a hover-disc along the road mound. A wire connected his disc to a larger sled carrying a covered load. A group of boys sat on the back of the sled with their feet dangling over the edge. Their chatting and laughter rose above the gentle hum of the vehicle.

The mound joined with the market and led to the esplanade along the main waterway. Children ran in packs along the streets among colorfully clad pedestrians. Vendors barked their wares. It was hard to distinguish between the clattering of goods, the bustle of foot traffic, the din of voices, and the hum of levitating vehicles. To a person used to quiet, such racket could be maddening.

Traffic along the wide road parted at the passing of the travelers. Brigitte's cycles of silent studies and teachings left behind any need for peace. She allowed herself to enjoy the excitement and exchanged a glance with Lukias expressing her secret hunger for this adventure.

A flimsy purple scarf wrapped her hair. The scarf's edges fluttered in the warm salt breeze whipping through the corridor made by multi-storied buildings. She began to relish the elation of walking among crowds. The brush of their memories, hopes, and dreams rippled across the surface of her emotions. The feeling gravitated to the core of her soul, and she bathed in it as if swimming through a sea of consciousness.

They passed rows of shops and street carts nestled in sunken courtyards. Here, merchants displayed foods and exotic crafts for trade. Sinuous alleys and side streets wound off the esplanade. The crowd's energy was thick with activity. Brigitte could hear their thoughts, a noisy chorus of intent, focused on purposes and destinations.

It was alluring and overwhelming at that same time. She burrowed her face in the scarf to hide, even though not a soul took interest in their passing. She was amazed at the extent to

which Atlantean telepathic presence seemed diminished. They did not have the awareness of the dreamclans. They were much more self-absorbed than Brigitte was accustomed to. The Crystal Grid kept them connected, though she sensed its very existence had made Atlanteans less aware of their once keen telepathic powers. The Grid had become a mental crutch.

She stopped to watch an older man shambling down the street. Equally perplexed, Lukias did the same. The man's dark-rimmed eyes swiveled in his head as if he had lost control of their movement. His face was dimpled with creases, his skin was blotched and faded. Everyone who passed pointedly ignored him. He begged for their attention in a nearly unusable voice.

As he drew near, Brigitte could not bring herself to look away, and the very act of looking drew his focus. His eyes pleaded for her to give him comfort. His stumbling steps propelled him toward her. Instinctively, Brigitte reached into his mind. Tears stung her eyes as she felt the utter loneliness and madness holding him prisoner inside his own head. She opened her eyes to dreamsight and recognized the shadowy creature that had attached itself to him. Trembling, she stepped closer to Lukias. "These people don't even know these shadows are taking over their minds!"

As the man reached out to grab at her cloak, Lukias stepped between them.

Brigitte could tell the shadow had become symbiotic with the man, feeding off his dark emotions, while at the same time stimulating them so it could constantly feed. It was a parasite.

Desperately, she tried to stifle her own fear, so she wouldn't accidentally react, as she had so often done growing up. She remained transfixed, as the hand of another gripped the invalid from behind and turned him the other way. "Here you are, sir," a man's voice said calmly.

Brigitte watched the stranger produce a piece of bread, which captured her assailant's attention.

"If you sit over there, you can eat this without being disturbed," he spoke as if to a child. Something about him seemed to soothe the helpless old man.

As Brigitte examined her savior's face, it lit up with a dashing grin, and she marveled at his stunning features. He was dressed in sloppy courtier fashion, with a loose-fitting tunic of dark green tied at the waist by a thick sash. A floppy hat rested on a head of dark curls falling to the middle of his neck. Strapped to his back was the hump of a dabrina. The depth of his brown eyes captured her heart. His smile reached into her soul. Lukias took note of a pair of twins nearby causing a scene with wild gestures and raised voices.

"I see you two are new to the city," he chimed in a cheerful voice, regarding their clan travel garb. "You should try and stay away from the madness. Some people say it's contagious if you touch them." He winked with a crooked smile. When he saw she didn't find his humor appropriate, he shook both hands at her. "I don't believe that myself, though." He noticed her lingering shock with compassion. "I see you haven't witnessed the madness yet."

Brigitte shook her head. "I don't understand why they are not taken from the streets and cared for. Why are they just ignored? Doesn't the Temple Sect have healing centers?" she demanded, glancing at her brother, who had gone into a dreamseer trance.

The handsome stranger fidgeted with his hip bag. "So many questions." His teasing smile made her stomach flutter. He pulled out an orange fruit. "You see, the healing centers are full. There's not much that can be done about it, and they're not much of a danger to the community, anyway, just to themselves. Although," he leaned in, looking around to make sure

no one could hear, "sometimes the warriors come through and take them. But no one knows where to." He casually placed the fruit into the old man's needy grasp. "It has been said there is no cure. It's rather sad considering the advanced healing techniques of the Temple Sect. That man is probably someone's father or mate. He probably wandered away, and they can't even find him. Not that they would even recognize him if they did. The madness twists them into empty shells of who they were." He shivered visibly.

Brigitte felt drawn to the stranger's carefree manner. She could not take her eyes off his face.

Lukias focused inward. His lips moved as if he were muttering silently. He fidgeted with the crystal pendant.

The stranger's eyes flashed, entranced. "Is that a soul-crystal?" His demeanor shifted to seriousness.

"I don't know this term," answered Lukias.

"You should hide it." The stranger's voice wavered as he looked around. "The use of soul-crystals is banned in the city. Tool-crystals are used all the time, but they are not the same as soul-crystals. This will be taken from you if one of the king's guardians sees it." He turned to leave. "Well, I have a musical engagement to attend. My patron will be furious if I don't show up." He tipped his hat. "Be careful out here. You never know what trouble you can get into on Ka-Ma-Sharri. You and your mate should have a lovely time." He hesitated, looking at Lukias with a hint of envy.

"Brother," she said with forced reserve. Something about this stranger was alluring and terrifying at the same time.

"Excuse me?" The stranger leaned in closer. Her body buzzed at his proximity.

"He's my brother. Not my mate."

The stranger smiled. "Is that so?" He paused. "I would invite you to the revelry where I am playing...if you would like to attend."

"We are not here for revelry," interjected Lukias.

"Well, you came on the wrong night," he laughed in response.

Through the crowd, the twins came stalking toward them, waving and smiling. "Oh, D'Vinid! There you are!" one of them bellowed.

D'Vinid bowed and took her hand to his lips. A spark erupted at their touch, igniting a memory of some long-forgotten dream.

*An unfolding rose glimmered in the sunlight. A twinkling tree swayed in a moonlit courtyard. A great hole into a starry sky opened in the base of its trunk.*

Brigitte and D'Vinid jumped apart.

"Thank you for your assistance." She made a sign of farewell, pulled by her brother's mental summons. "Be well, stranger."

"Wait! I think this is for you." He opened the dabrina case where a red rose was tucked away inside one of the open cavities of the instrument. With a sigh, he handed the rose to Brigitte. She stared at it.

"It's yours. As a...a welcome-to-Atlantis gift."

When she took it he seemed relieved. He muttered the traditional blessing of the festival, "Happy Ka-Ma-Sharri. May your soul find union," quickly closed the case, and continued on his way.

Everything about him turned her stomach in knots. She dared not look back as Lukias led her in another direction. She resolved to try and forget how electrically peculiar he made her feel. As she brought her purpose back into focus, she sniffed the fragrant aroma of the rose, and thought it was just as well she would never see him again.

2

In the arms of prophet's song  
while singing words of destiny.  
Free-will is a shadow in the crying song of misery.  
Once along a passing phase  
in life and love and more.  
Distant words of yesterdays appear there on the door.

The sun sank toward the horizon. Brigitte and Lukias reached the last neighborhood before the circles of the citadel. Here the market faded into residential areas where the channel branched off into coves. Careful to blend in as they moved through pedestrians, they navigated by his dreamseer instincts.

The crowd parted ahead to avoid a woman of stately composure standing in the middle of the esplanade. She wore a hooded overcoat falling to her ankles with wide sleeves almost touching the ground. The hems were lined with light blue embroidery. Its swirling patterns stood out from the dark blue of the fabric. Her hair was uncommonly blond for an Atlantean, though she had it covered with the pointed hood of her coat.

She focused on Brigitte and Lukias with large blue eyes that absorbed the world like a dreamseer's.

Lukias headed straight for her. "Greetings," he spoke, bowing respectfully. It was the first exchange he had chosen to have since they entered the city. "I believe you are waiting for us."

She nodded slowly. Her glacial eyes studied the travelers. "I am Allondriss. I have seen you in my visions." Her eyes bounced to Brigitte.

"And you have been in mine," he responded steadily. "I am Lukias, High Seer of Poseidon's dreamclan. The Watchers have guided us to your care."

Brigitte flinched. It was the first time he had introduced himself as the high seer of their clan. With their father gone, the title had fallen to him.

Allondriss hesitated, taken aback by the implication of his dreamseer mastery. "My master is loyal to the Watchers and their dreamclans."

"Your... Master? Are you not of the Temple Sect?" asked Brigitte.

"I am a servant to an influential mediator household, my lady." She bowed.

Brigitte found her station a curiosity. From what she understood, a fair-skinned maiden with fair hair would be seen among the high-born Temple Sect, not as a lowly servant. Her mannerisms were deliberate, as a servant's would be, yet graceful to suggest the delicate training of the temple priesthood. Neither did her clothing allude to a lesser status.

To avoid curious glances, she led them through a side alley to the gates of a private estate along one of the coves. Allondriss peered back over her shoulder before running a crystal

bracelet over the locked gate. The motion set off a clicking mechanism, and the gate swung open.

“A stranger told us soul-crystals are banned for use here. How is your crystal different?” Brigitte asked.

Allondriss pulled it from her wrist and handed it over. “This is a tool. A crystal-accessor, to be exact. It is merely a hollow shell, because its telluric consciousness is harnessed into the Grid. Our entire Grid is run by crystals. Our hover technology is run by torsion-crystals and imprinters. These are all tools. We can connect with soul-crystals far deeper than we can with tools. Only the Temple Sect is allowed to use them, but only to program them.”

Brigitte pursed her lips in thought, handing the bracelet back. “Is there a reason for this ban?”

Allondriss pressed her lips together. “One can take the official reason for truth. The technology was being abused by the few, and therefore forbidden to the whole. But then there is the unofficial reason.” She motioned for them to enter, then led the way through a tunnel of creeping vines, which opened to a breathtaking view of palatial gardens and serpentine paths built around one of the coves. Their pace was no more than a promenade, which gave them the chance to absorb their surroundings.

“What is the unofficial reason?” Brigitte pried, as they curved around the water.

Allondriss took a moment to examine Brigitte, pondering the openness of her mind. “It is said the rulers of Atlantis do not want the people to have their personal power, that slowly the rules have been changed to take it all away from us. But most say this is the stuff of paranoia. It is said these are simply stories made up to try and undermine the wise powers that govern us.” Her voice began to take a sarcastic tone. “The fact remains we have been denied the freedom to use the gifts that nature has given us.” She lowered her voice to a whisper, “But nature always finds a way.”

The main estate came into view along the edge of the water. Curving walkways extended from the house over the cove they had been following, bridging a series of stilted walkways and dome-shaped bungalows over the water.

“My master is celebrating the Ka-Ma-Sharri. There are guests at his court for the three days of the festival. He is very fond of revelries.”

Lukias motioned for her to lead on. “If we may see him in private...”

“I will be happy to arrange that,” the servant answered, her blue eyes surveying them carefully.

Having grown up with her brother and father, both dreamseers, Brigitte understood the subtle intricacies with which they conducted their affairs. They seemed to be aware of everything without even speaking. Allondriss had the same look to her. She guided them along the waterline toward the main house until they reached a round black door. Brigitte ran her fingers over the edges of golden glass embedded in its dark wood. It formed a symbol she recognized with profound awareness.

Allondriss watched, curiosity overcoming her aloofness. “You like the artistry?”

“This pattern...” Brigitte mumbled, her thoughts flying away.

Allondriss’s expression darkened. “It is the symbol of the Order of Nexes.”



Brigitte glanced toward Allondriss, speaking softly. "The Archives Nexes. Given to the people by Belial. The key to the Crystal Grid." She buzzed with a familiar tingle. "Is your master a member of the order?"

"It's always fashionable to discuss Atlantean origins among social circles. My master tries to be the most fashionable at all times. The order is an elite society of families who follow the ancient teachings. This symbol can be found throughout the city. It is built into everything."

"The teachings of old Atlantis," Brigitte's voice flew away. "A fascinating subject." She traced the outline of the symbol, two serpents coiled up the center of a six-pointed compass within a twelve-pointed star. Twelve stars encircled the symbol. Allondriss's eyes remained on her.

"The serpentine mother of all knowledge and wisdom, as given to you, oh children of the sun, by the nations of light beyond the stars!" Brigitte delivered the passage from Belial's Cantos, breaking the spell with a cheerful lilt.

"Sometimes the Nexes Order is called the Order of the Serpent," Allondriss admitted. "The serpent humanoid was the original form taken by Belial and his brother. They were the Anunaki who designed the human project. One became the overlord. The other, the liberator."

A wordless eternity passed as Allondriss studied Brigitte. An unspoken bond formed between them. Lukias looked on in clouded dreamsight. Allondriss broke the moment, and cordially directed them into the house.

The large room beyond spanned nearly the entire structure of the main house. It featured a lush indoor garden with fountains of polished stone and hanging greenery growing in all directions from large baskets. The high ceiling displayed a checkerboard pattern, alternating amber glass with smooth, onyx tiles.

"If you'll excuse me for a moment, I will fetch my master." Allondriss walked to an alcove across from the entrance, braiding her hair quickly, her gaze on Brigitte. "Please make yourselves at home in the atrium until I return."

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Mediator Pan Aello had a habit of talking incessantly. He was engrossed in his own story when Allondriss approached. He excused himself mid-sentence and turned an eager expression to his servant.

No words passed between them. She nodded, and he nodded back. Without a word to his guests he strode toward the house, hands clasped behind his back, a smile forming on his lips. "So, my special guests have arrived just as you said they would!" he exclaimed, clapping his hands and rubbing them briskly, a movement he often made in excitement. His long stride quickly brought them to the atrium.

Pan Aello was an older man with gray-streaked hair, which he usually kept swept back and tied behind his head. With a stroke of his goatee, another of his many idiosyncrasies, he greeted his guests with twinkling eyes. Many deep smile lines made his nature apparent.

Brigitte noticed Pan's aristocratic composure. She probed him closely, remaining quiet. Her brother stepped up in greeting.

"I am Lukias, High Seer of Poseidon's dreamclan." A silence opened at his words.

"High Seer?" Pan's thoughts flew away. His expression fell for a moment. High seers had the power to guide entire dreamclans. This was a man of great importance, despite his apparent youth and unkempt appearance. "My servant is a perceptive one," Pan continued, regaining his

pace. "She knows the Lemurian dreamclans are forever welcome in Atlantis. In fact, she had a vision of your arrival earlier! I am most pleased the Watchers have brought you to us! I bid you welcome to my Outlands estate, and to Atlantis!" He bowed deeply. "I am Pan Aello of the royal line of Atlas, mediator of the fireball games. You are just in time for my grand revelry."

"I wish I could tell you our visit is for leisure and revelry," said Lukias tiredly. "We have been traveling for quite some time now, and, to be honest, the Watchers have guided us here because we require your assistance. My sister is an emissary of the Telluric Treaty. But our clan has been decimated by dark sorcery. Whatever sent that storm has enslaved the elements and used them against us."

Pan's smile faded. Standing straighter, he adopted a serious expression. Feeling needed was what he lived for.

"Your mediator line champions the Warrior Sect," Lukias continued.

"Only one aspect of the warriors," Pan corrected.

Lukias nodded. "I believe this is why our journey has brought us to you, Pan Aello. We need a warrior escort to reach the palace."

Pan seemed confused. "Our Crystal Grid keeps us linked telepathically so no one can bear to hurt one another. You could enter with a royal parade if you wish! I will arrange one if you would like. Parades and pageantry are what we Atlanteans love best. Dreamclans have immediate audience in the palace at all times." He paused from his rambling, reconsidering for a moment. "Why would you feel you need protection here? Inside the Grid you should feel safe."

Lukias lifted an eyebrow. "How do you know the storm didn't come from your Grid in the first place? You may not be aware of the dangers lurking in the shadows of your beautiful city, Mediator, but this doesn't mean they don't exist. When the dreamclans send emissaries to Atlantis, our coming often marks a change of history. You and I are both aware of this fact." He leaned in closer to Pan's fading smile, "and you must be aware that the Telluric Treaty is in jeopardy. Our coming is anticipated, and yet someone or something is trying to prevent it. We must reach the palace unknown and unhindered." His pitch raised into steady urgency. "You must believe me when I tell you we have great need for protection."

Pan made it his business to remain aware of the machinations of the Watchers. Their domain was Dreamtime, the subtle fabric surrounding reality, like water surrounding the ocean floor. It permeated everything, and Watchers existed in it comfortably as mere humans could not. People traveled there in their sleep, the only time they might release hold on a world shaped by eons of thought-created reality. Dreamseers had the ability to navigate Dreamtime consciously, and as such, they were the link between humans and Watchers.

"Of course, I will help you," Pan spoke clearly. "It is my duty." He studied the chestnut-haired beauty, the emissary. A ferocity burned in her eyes, which grabbed him enough to venture a second look. He admired her strong jawline, softly curved nose and the fullness of her lips. Both had a lighter skin color than the average brown Atlantean, though the sun had given them a golden hue. "I will summon a warrior escort for you immediately. But I would suggest, if you sense danger, that you wait until morning to travel. Night is the time when the shadows are thickest, after all. And there will be much chaos on the streets this night."

Lukias nodded in grim agreement.



“Please accept my hospitality!” Pan clapped his hands together and rubbed them briskly. “You may join the revelry, if you wish. I have some of the finest musicians in the land entertaining my court this night. I have spared no expense for the Ka-Ma-Sharri.”

“Pardon us, Mediator Pan, but we are not here to attract attention, or to celebrate,” Lukias protested again.

“Well, that’s okay, my young foreigner, this is why we have revelry disguise in Atlantis. I will see to it my servants supply you.”

“I’m afraid it is not humans we are hiding from.”

A movement at another entry to the atrium interrupted their debate. Brigitte’s heart lurched. The stranger from the marketplace made an animated entrance followed by the same pompous twins. Their noise surged, then immediately ceased when they noticed who was standing in their path. The light in his eyes had seared her soul since they had parted. With a shiver, Brigitte silently cursed the Fates for joining their paths again.

“Ah! My sons! I see you’ve brought D’Vinid!” Pan exclaimed, throwing his arms open in delight. “Well done, boys! He is a difficult one to procure.”

The twins waved off his praise, eager to find an elixir to soothe their tired muscles. “We had to walk the whole way because D’Vinid won’t get a new hover disc,” Kayden complained.

Pan waved off the comment. “My dear guests. This is D’Vinid, known as the Prophet Singer. He is the finest dabrina player in all of Poseidia, and in my employ for the revelry. He will be entertaining you this night.”

Lukias observed his sister’s reaction. His hand slid to the crystal pendant, which he had hidden beneath his clothing. It sent a jolt into his finger and he drew his hand back, surprised.

D’Vinid scowled at the rose Brigitte still held.

Pan clapped once again. “Allondriss here shall guide you to your chambers. And my sons will hand-deliver word to my associates in the Warrior Sect at once. Do not even think of wanting for anything. I shall ensure you are well cared for.”

Jensyn’s expression faded. “You want us to do another errand? We just spent the whole day getting D’Vinid!” His hands flew out to his sides in protest.

When Kayden realized what was being said, his eyes widened. “But the revelry!” he exclaimed.

Pan raised his palm at them with a feeble giggle. “All the more reason to leave with expedience. Look on the bright side, this time you can hover.” He turned to Brigitte. “You must excuse their rudeness. They are fatigued and have forgotten their courtly manners. Alas, I find myself needing to remind them of their current punishment, and how this errand will perhaps erase it.”

D’Vinid chuckled. The twins were always in some sort of trouble. But his attention shifted again to the strangers from the market. She was his muse come to life to once again haunt his heart. Whoever she was, her presence made him tremble. He quickly excused himself with a wink in her direction.

His dabrina needed to be tuned without delay. It was a plausible explanation for a hurried exit. Her amber eyes pursued his escape into the blinding sunlight, urging him to turn around. When he reached the doorway, he succumbed to her silent demand and immediately regretted the queasy feeling she aroused.

If he would choose anyone to be his Ka-Ma-Sharri lover, it would be her. But it seemed the Watchers had chosen her for him. He resolved to resist their temptation at all costs. With a wrinkle between his brows, he turned and walked away.

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Sunset washed the city with gold. Business traffic faded on the Grand Esplanade. Shops closed. Every evening the gentle resonance of crystal-nodes engulfed the city rings. Their radiant song called the citizens of Atlantis into silent contemplation. Lights began illuminating the streets.

Pan's servants had spent the late afternoon setting up tables and cushioned lounge spaces throughout the gardens for the festivities. Exotic women, scantily clad and overflowing with charm and hospitality, led guests to tables and took orders for any number of intoxicating services, from oil massages to flower-essence oxygen treatments, tonics, perfumes, and mood-enhancing elixirs. Pan treated his guests like royalty.

D'Vinid and the other musicians set up their instruments on the deck of a larger bungalow over the cove. He sat tuning his dabrina strings while dolphins chattered in the water, doing tricks around the kitchen where servants tossed fish for their evening meal. He watched the city's starry lights come to life amid the song of the crystals.

The nodes were resonant capacitors that harnessed Atlantis's power through the focused thoughts of its citizenry. These mindlight donations fed power to the Great Crystal. For so long, D'Vinid had neglected his duties to meditate during illumination rituals. It was yet another source of his recent guilty conscience.

"This song reminds me of the oceanids," Brigitte's voice interrupted his brooding.

He caught his breath and turned to face the woman who had not left his thoughts since their meeting. "Sunset is always my favorite time of day," she admitted.

"Mine, too." His smile brought out the dimples in his cheeks. "Evenings have always held my heart. The song of the crystal-nodes, the color of the horizon, the lights of the city. Wait until you see it from the rings of the citadel. You will be amazed."

She gazed around with delight, sighed deeply, then smiled, unsure how to react to the feelings his presence aroused in her. The resonant chiming continued.

"That sound!" she gasped.

"It's the Temple Sect sending resonance through the nodes. We call it nodesong." It was a sound he loved to the core of his being. "It's supposed to call us to illumination rituals, though I'm afraid most of us just listen to it these days."

As they absorbed the sound, it seemed that every part of them reached toward one another, like water flowing downstream. Their tenuous silence was consumed with the desire to succumb to the pull. The longing bordered on pain. They knew it when their eyes met. He wanted desperately to resist the temptation. Had she stayed away, he would have eventually purged her from his thoughts. But the Watchers were clever. Women were his greatest weakness.

She cocked her head, wishing to ask him many questions. It seemed much easier to link telepathically, but this was not something Atlanteans did anymore as they had in their history. It was a burden for her to think about communicating with only words.

He returned her examination, feeling strangely at ease under the caress of her entrancing eyes, despite his initial urge to run away from her. He brushed aside a lock of hair that had fallen over her eye. Her dangerous beauty blossomed even more as he examined her face.

"You know," he said, "this is the height of Ka-Ma-Sharri, the night when Belial's mate, Kama, comes to him. I am always moved by the thought of their union... The tragedy of lovers separated forever, and the glory they must feel to be united once more." He raised an eyebrow. "It is customary to take a lover during this festival." His eyes betrayed his admiration as he looked back at the twinkling lights. "There is a woman who haunts my dreams. She is a light within the dark, a queen on a hilltop whom I cannot touch. She holds my heart somehow. But she is ephemeral. She appears for moments in the eyes of a lover and then disappears again."

Brigitte began to tremble. She could feel the pull of his words. The story of Belial and Kama made her anxious. She longed for this man without reason. Though he was devastatingly beautiful, it made no sense how she could love him so immediately and entirely.

He gently cupped her fingers and lifted them to his lips, holding her gaze with a roguish spark in his eyes.

Her stomach turned to knots. "I go to the bed of my betrothed tomorrow," she blurted, breathless.

"Why are you not with him tonight? To perform the joining ceremony at the height of Ka-Ma-Sharri is the most exalted moment to take a mate. Obviously, the *Watchers* have other plans for you."

She puzzled over his question. Her hand buzzed in his light grasp. Her inner dialogue argued with his words. She shook her head and lightly pulled her hand away.

"Do you know him?" he asked softly.

She shook her head again and looked downward.

"I didn't think so," he jeered. "Our ways are civilized, yes? What sort of alliance do the *Watchers* have in store for you? Will it be pleasurable? Will there be love?" His hand slid to her hip. Panic gripped her throat. His lips brushed in a whisper across her ear. "Love and familiarity should be the basis of mating, not perpetuating bloodlines based on genetic alliances. We're dealing with peoples' lives here."

"Some of us are born to the task!" she protested, pulling away in muted anger. "In case you forgot, mating is the only known method for perpetuating bloodlines."

He laughed at her offense. "The Fates can be amended, my lady. Free-will is our highest law, after all. This is why our genetically controlled Mediator Sect takes on kallistas. Our *civilized* ways have made it so love can at least be tasted, even if these betrothals deliver a mate we despise. So, our dream kallista gets all the love, while the one bearing our bloodline is emotionally rejected. You can take on a kallisto lover if you wish," he suggested alluringly. "It is the Atlantean way."

"I must not venture down that path. It is my choice to meet my betrothed with a clear heart."

D'Vinid laughed. "A clear heart! Do you suppose the *Watchers* have that planned for you, as well?"

"I do as the *Watchers* bid."

"And what if it was they who brought us together? How else do you explain it? I ask you again, why are you not with him right now?"

She watched every move he made. Her desire grew stronger. Suddenly her voice seemed to escape her lips without permission. "If a kiss would not break my betrothal..."

Without letting her finish, D'Vinid took her into his arms. His eyes flashed an eerie orange as he lowered his lips to hers.

Everything went black.

*They floated in a vision among a million shards of starlight falling to the planet. She stood by his side on a hill, overlooking pyramids in a lush jungle valley below. In the span of one kiss, their love transcended all time and space.*

His eyes glowed a brighter orange. "Beloved Kama," a strangely familiar voice escaped his lips. "I have waited for you, my love. It is time for my return, and for us to unite once more."

Brigitte caught her breath and stepped back. It was as if a different person had suddenly appeared before her. She knew him, and she loved him beyond measure.

He shook his head. The light in his eyes faded. "What happened?" D'Vinid pressed his fingers to his temples.

"I don't know... You changed," she stammered.

He reached to steady himself on the railing.

She placed her hand on his back for support. A wave of apprehension rippled over her body. "I'm sorry, I... I couldn't help it."

"Neither could I." He collected himself, taking note of his surroundings once more, feeling pulled in impossible directions. Vertigo flooded his head as he stepped away. He touched her cheek, drinking deeply of her beauty. He could barely control his body. He had not meant to kiss her.

"This is Watcher trickery," he said. Something had overtaken him, and it only ignited his resentment for those meddling Fate weavers who stole away the free-will of the people. "You're right. We cannot continue."

He looked out over the cove with his jaw clenched. He had vowed to never be manipulated by them. "You should go," he grumbled, and tore his eyes away to avoid her reaction.

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The streets of the city filled with revelers wrapped in their finest regalia. It was customary to wear dark jewel tones for the height of Ka-Ma-Sharri. As such, the crowd was a rainbow of dark colors. Elaborate lace masks covered their faces. It was a night to be anybody but themselves.

A group of foreigners skirted the edge of the revelry, winding through the back streets of the Outlands to avoid the amorous chaos. Their leader, Torbin, was shorter than the rest, stocky of build, his head covered with a brown hood. By his side was his daughter Loressai. She was a woman of exceptional beauty, dark and sleek. She scanned their surroundings, her eyes fixed in nervous caution. They were accompanied by four magi who cast an energetic net around them.

As they passed onto the esplanade running beside the Grand Canal, they tried to remain discreet. But they couldn't avoid noticing the needy attention of the madness. Something had stirred the zombie victims of the strange ailment. Revelers ignored them, focusing on the intentions of their own lustful desires. Citizens had become used to the mutterings of those who had fallen to the epidemic.

Loressai and her father, however, took note of the strange behavior and shook their heads at the disgusted ignorance the city dwellers cast on the misfortune of their own people.

In one of the plazas, a group of ragged people suffering from the ailment shuffled toward them, calling out in desperation. The foreigners pulled into a tight circle. Loressai glanced around and froze in terror. On the edges of the plaza stood strange hooded silhouettes. The beating of her heart pounded at her chest. She had seen them before. Their faces were covered in black runes, and their limbs wrapped in the bandages of those who were prepared for sacred death rites. They were shadows, incorporeal, phasing from sight as if they were but hallucinations. She blinked, hoping they would disappear. But they remained, staring at her, empty and ominous.

Their whispering thoughts consumed her mind in a chanting chorus. As if in a trance, she walked toward one of them, who reached out his bandaged hand to touch her forehead. *"Queen of the Blood Triad, we welcome you."* His voice sliced into her mind. The rest of them bowed in reverence.

"Loressai!" Her father's voice interrupted the trance. She turned around, realizing she had wandered away from the safety of the magi. She pressed her fingers into her temples. The air felt like thick liquid. Obeying her father's summons, she hurried back to the magic circle. She knew then that she should have stayed in the safety of their home in Subterra. Every time she journeyed to the surface into the Grid of Atlantis, she suffered from memory lapses. Gripped by a chilling fright, she allowed her father to lead the way to the estate of Pan Aello. Looking back, she realized the black figures had vanished.

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"Brigitte?" Lukias called across the walkway. "There you are!" He jogged toward them. A spark jolted from the soul-crystal. He stopped in his tracks and studied D'Vinid, squinting.

The musician glanced at her. There was at once banishment and regret in his eyes. An anxious burn heated her body until she was red in the face.

Lukias spoke. "You should get back to the bungalow, Brigitte."

"I was heading there, anyway," she answered.

D'Vinid's regret soured his expression. He nodded toward the shore. "It's for the best. Good night, my lady."

She stormed off. Dolphins leapt from the water, following her path, chattering persistently. A planter of flowers mysteriously withered at her passing.

D'Vinid watched her departure. His mouth hung open by the time she reached the shore.

Lukias studied the dolphins' peculiar behavior. His eyes blurred into Dreamtime, revealing the subtle currents of light swirling above the surface, the same currents dolphins could see naturally. He took a step back to widen his perspective. A cord of light extended between Brigitte and D'Vinid. "Who *are* you?" he asked in amazement. The crystal pulsed on his chest.

D'Vinid returned to tuning his dabrina strings with more attention than was necessary. "I'm no one special," he muttered. "Just a musician. But your sister... No one makes dolphins act like this." He stopped tuning and looked toward the planter of withered flowers. "She is not entirely human, is she?"

"I know what my sister is." Lukias shook his head. "But you, I don't know. You are marked by the Watchers."

D'Vinid stood from his instrument, standing close enough to Lukias as to make the dreamseer shift his feet. "Free-will is my master and mistress. I choose to live a simple life. I choose to *not* be marked by any Watchers. And it is my right to choose this."

Lukias traced the lingering subtle currents with dreamsight. They trailed after Brigitte as she disappeared in the direction of her bungalow. He eyed D'Vinid carefully. "I don't think you've ever had free-will, my friend."

"Nonsense. All humans have free-will."

"My sister is the Moirae of our dreamclan. She was born for one task."

"I'm afraid I've never heard this word before." D'Vinid sat again and picked up the dabrina.

Lukias clutched the crystal at his chest. "Our people are the ancestors of Lemuria. We live on the border of Dreamtime. We carry the blood of the Watchers. When Watchers are born among us, they are called Moirae. They are the weavers of fate in human form, and she has been chosen by virtue of being born. She doesn't have free-will. She is ruled by her destiny, one that she chose before incarnation."

D'Vinid dropped his head, cursing his decision to get out of bed that morning. "I'm sure you're both noble people. And you will do as you must. I would very much prefer to be left out of it, if possible." D'Vinid struggled to speak the words. His interest in Brigitte scorched his soul. He tried to keep himself from shaking. This word *Moirae* seized his heart in panic.

Lukias eyed him. "My sister and I were raised by a woman from Atlantis named Indrius. Does this name mean anything to you?"

D'Vinid's head tingled at the sound of the name. But he had never heard it before.

"Where did you learn to play dabrina?" Lukias added.

"I've always known." He tuned another string, listening carefully for the proper tone.

"Interesting," Lukias smiled slightly, and without another word strode off in pursuit of his sister.

Alone at last, D'Vinid lost himself in a chord progression. His head spun. Fragments of the dream that awoke him that day fractalized in his psyche. It had to be prophetic. He focused his thoughts on Belial. Being the patron of free-will, he was the only Watcher D'Vinid felt comfortable praying to. Somehow the thought of Belial always calmed his mind. He felt as though he sat in the eye of a storm, plucking out a melody at the end of the world, somehow knowing it was a pointless project.

Night transformed the estate into a glowing forest. Guests wandered around the bungalows as they flooded into the revelry. The dreamseer's words made him think of the last time he saw Prince Bavendrick. He thought of their exchange, remembering every detail as clearly as if it happened at this moment.

*"What is it they call you these days? The Prophet Singer?"*

*D'Vinid recognized the voice. His heart leapt at the sound of it. He turned with a grin.*

*"Another name given to me by your mother."*

*Prince Bavendrick lowered the scarf covering his face and clapped D'Vinid into a brotherly hug. "She always liked to give you names. She used to call you 'Prince of the Sea.'"*

*"She only liked me because I was her captain's son." D'Vinid looked around at the interior of the queen's flagship, Dafni's Enigma, which had been his home most of his life. When the queen died, the ship was decommissioned. And here she sat in permanent berth, transformed into a social hub, a monument to the beloved queen. D'Vinid played music on the stage since he*



retired from his days at sea, unsure how to proceed with his life. Despite increasing notoriety for his music, he felt lost.

*"She loved you because you didn't have a mother. She was always a sucker for orphans."* Bavendrick laughed, running his finger on the etchings in the carved wood of the stage. Even wrapped in sadness, his handsome face had a glow to it. In that sense, he was much like his mother.

*"I must say, it's good to see you, brother. What are you doing out of the palace?"*

*"I figured I would give your free-will credo a try for the day. It's been liberating, I must admit."*

*"For the day? Oh, come now, buddy. This is your chance! There's an entire world out here for you to explore."*

*There was sadness in the prince's eyes when he laughed. "Believe me, I've given that some thought."*

*D'Vinid longed to ask him for a recap of their time apart, but leaving the courts was a reminder of the stack of guilt that was beginning to weigh on his soul. Kyliron was king. It should have been Bavendrick. And as monarch, the young king was gradually ridding himself of all those who truly loved him. His actions promised to take their father's folly to an entirely new level of mishap.*

*"I brought you something, D'Vinid." Bavendrick produced a glimmering rose from his pack. "I found this growing in my mother's shrine. When I took it, I had a vision of you. I don't know why."*

*D'Vinid threw his hands up as if touching the rose would burn him. "I can't take this! It's Watcher magic!"*

*"Then give it to someone. A lover, perhaps." He offered it again. "Go on, take it."*

*D'Vinid absently reached for the rose. His eyes flashed orange.*

*Bavendrick took a step back. With silent reverence, he made a sign to the Watchers, but chose not to address it. "Kyliron hasn't been the same since you left."*

*"What are you talking about? Kyliron hates me."*

*"He's jealous of you, D'Vinid."*

*"Why? Because Loressai wanted me and not him? He couldn't have her. I did him a favor. He's got a betrothal obligation and she wasn't a kallista."*

*"You don't need to talk to me about betrothals." Bavendrick laughed. His eyes glazed over. Negotiations for his third were under way. "D'Vinid, if I go through with this joining, it would be going against the Telluric Treaty. My generation is supposed to join with the dreamclans. Kyliron wants to unite the ten kingdoms. The only way to do this is to join with Og." He cradled his head in his hands. "He should promise his firstborn to Og, not his brother. I have an obligation to Atlantis." He threw up his hands. "I don't want to bore you with politics."*

*D'Vinid patted him on the shoulder. "Why is Kyliron even king? What happened?"*

*Bavendrick closed his eyes. "Our father named him successor. What else could I do except for strongarm my way in there? Ignore my father's last wish? I am not my brother."*

*D'Vinid rolled his eyes. "Koraxx had the madness, Bavendrick. How could his decisions be taken seriously in the end?"*

*"Perhaps all of Atlantis suffers from the madness," Bavendrick sighed.*

*“Don’t let your moral code be the downfall of us all. If Kyliron plays dirty for his politics like your father did, then you need to stand up to him. Don’t let yourself wallow in self-pity like I do. You’re supposed to be king, stupid.” D’Vinid grabbed him by the shoulders and gave him a shake. “You were born to be a leader. Kyliron pretends to be able to lead. That’s the difference between you.”*

D’Vinid sighed. What he said to Bavendrick on that day made him a hypocrite. He had confirmed the dreamseer’s assertion that the Fates overruled free-will from the moment of birth.

He thought of the rose. He was finally rid of it, and yet it had come back in the hands of a Watcher in human form. He hardened his thoughts with indignation. He accepted that perhaps those with birthrights had fates. Someone like Bavendrick. Or perhaps Brigitte. But not someone like him.

### 3

Singer’s song to silence meet,  
amid the shadow’s site to greet.  
Rest his head to quell the fear,  
the meeting of the muse is near.  
Magi whispers words of fate,  
flying to its primal mate.  
Underneath the dying lights,  
standing in the darkest night.  
Calling in the violet flames,  
they can find the shadows’ names.

Gossamer drapes fluttered in the window of the guest bungalow. Smells of blossoming flowers wafted across the open-air patio and into the single circular room. The air was cold. Such a sudden change in temperature was unheard of in Atlantis. The Crystal Grid did not allow the ten kingdoms to suffer the same cold as the rest of the planet’s icy reaches.

Tortured by her confinement, Brigitte chose to retreat into meditation. Slipping into a lotus position, she stilled her mind. Her eyes opened to dreamsight. She had not yet tried entering dreambody in the Meridian Realm. How hard could it be? Her soul stretched and squirmed in its heavy shell. She lacked the intensive training of her brother. But as a Watcher, being in dreambody was her natural state. She tried again, breathing slowly. Soon her agitation melted, and she was drifting above the bungalow.

She floated above the cove like a ghost. What she saw filled her with terror. Despite their cheerful demeanor, the courtiers had shadows swirling around their heads. The creatures reached invisible tentacles into their dreambodies, feeding off their essence through gaping holes. The people seemed helpless, paralyzed as if bitten by venomous creatures subduing their prey. Their only escape seemed to be the pursuit of sensory pleasures.

She noticed the arrival of a small group at the entrance of the estate. They were dressed in simple travel clothes. One of them was a woman. Examining her, Brigitte recoiled. The woman was consumed in shadow, but this was no ordinary shadow. It had the look and feel of an original Nephilim, half Anunaki Watcher and half human. These Nephilim were dangerous, and



had been banished from the Meridian Realm, doomed to wander as demon spirits, much like the shadows. Or perhaps the shadows were like them. Brigitte sank deeper into Dreamtime and watched with fascination. She never thought she would see one in her lifetime.

When the original Nephilim lived on the surface of the planet, many became drunk with power, and participated in the subjugation of humanity. It was Belial who had banished them from the Meridian Realm by activating the Fire Crystal of Atlantis to destroy their oppressive empire. But in so doing, he also set the elements off-balance and nearly destroyed the world. The icelands were what was left of the Nephilim empires.

Since then, the knowledge of the Fire Crystal was sealed among the highest initiates of the Temple Sect. Meridian settled into a denser vibration. Thus, in order to take physical form, all Watchers and, by proxy, their Nephilim offspring, needed a human shell. Brigitte knew this was impossible unless they entered through the birth process, thereby accepting the amnesia of birth.

She had taken incarnation the easiest way possible by entering through the dreamclans. They maintained the lineage of Lemuria, and the original bloodlines of humanity as created by the Anunaki. Until now, she had allowed herself the ignorance of surrendering to her human condition. As much as she wanted to wait, she knew it would soon be time to awaken.

This creature was trying to create a Neter. This would entail possessing its host while fully conscious of the process. The only way to do so would be to spend time altering the host to its vibration, then finding a way to eject the soul that had already taken up residence in the body. Unless the soul was willing, this was exceedingly difficult, and could take decades.

There was a third way for a Watcher to dance with physical incarnation, and perhaps the most common – the taking of an Avatar. It involved sharing a body with a human host. The control of the Watcher was limited at best. An Avatar could be the beginning of a Neter, but the process was undesirable.

The Neter woman had been blessed with profound beauty; eyes of coal, jet black hair and a golden complexion. But her auric field had been all but consumed by darkness. The creature had come a long way toward its goal.

She was accompanied by a group of magi. As they entered the compound, the woman excused herself and headed into the revelry. If an original Nephilim had returned, Brigitte knew without a doubt its intentions had to be discovered. It was hard to tell who exactly was in charge, the woman or the demon creature. She drifted higher to avoid being detected and followed the woman into the revelry.

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“And what, my friend, makes you think you can come here at the height of Ka-Ma-Sharri and interrupt my revelry? I realize you Subterrans don’t celebrate our celestial events.” Pan Aello flipped his hand toward Torbin. He was keymaster from the realm beneath the surface of the planet. “What do you have down there to mark your sacred revelries? Constellations of bioluminescent moss? Or do you forego sensory pleasures and study all the time?” He grinned widely, kicking up his heels on the desk of his private reception chamber.

A picture window allowed them a view of the gardens below. Pan surveyed the revelry, hoping to catch a glimpse of something delightfully scandalous. Torbin was a man of Pan’s age, though younger in appearance, as all Subterrans lived to be thousands of years old. He was of

stocky stature with hair grown out long and smooth. This was an antiquated style, but it suited his features, so Pan chose not to chide his old friend for not being able to move with the times.

“Subterra has a staying power you will never have on the surface, Pan Aello. One day, when Atlantis is merely a myth, we will live on and still be as we are today.”

“Sounds positively boring. So, what brings you to ruin my revelry this evening, my dear, boring friend?”

“It isn’t I who brings ruin to your revelry, Aello. But perhaps I can save it. I’m afraid this celestial event of yours has brought about a doorway between realms,” Torbin admitted solemnly.

Pan leaned back in his chair and stroked his chin, letting himself sink into deep thought. He loved all things secret. The Order of Nexes always had a sense of exclusivity that enticed him on every level. Torbin was also a member of the order, but obviously for different reasons. He was of the Luminari, who acted as liaisons between Subterra and Atlantis. The man never made a visit without purpose. He only called on Pan in times of need on behalf of the order.

“The signs are all in place, Pan. Belial has returned to Atlantis. It is time to prepare for what is to come.”

“Excellent!” Pan sat up, rubbing his hands together.

“Belial must enter through a human host,” Torbin spoke as he paced, his arms folded in front of his chest. “He will not return through the birth process. He will hide behind the identity of whomever he infiltrates. A living avatar. Perhaps a Neter.”

Pan contemplated, stroking his goatee with a smile.

“But he must enter at the height of Ka-Ma-Sharri when the celestial doorway is open. Unfortunately, there seem to be other Watchers trying to enter through the same doorway, ones who may not have the best intentions.”

Pan stood up and strode to the window, wondering what excitement he’d missed at his grand revelry. He placed his fingers in a steeple. “Let’s not get carried away with conspiracies. All will become clear in time.”

“If we can find out the entry point of the Watchers with dark intent, we may be able to tip the scales in favor of Belial’s arrival.”

Pan smiled wickedly. “Don’t be too sure the evil doesn’t enter right under your nose, my dear friend. It is easy to be fooled by the darkness.” He poured an elixir and swirled it around in a crystal goblet. “But rest assured, Belial is a master of the Cunning. Whatever scales you wish to tip may already be tipped. His arrival will be glorious. You can depend on that.” He took a swig of the green liquid. “In Atlantis, our existence is about leisure and pleasure and love. To be afraid of this is to invite darkness into the soul. Fear makes itself stronger, especially with the state of the Crystal Grid these days! You need to get out of Subterra more often and into the light of Ra, my friend! Come now and enjoy my revelry. I have spared no cost to celebrate Ka-Ma-Sharri this cycle.”

Torbin’s seriousness melted.

Pan strode toward the door with a gracious smile and the intention to leave.

A knock sounded as he approached. He threw the door open with a flair. Allondriss waited on the other side, accompanied by a man behind her on the stairs. She seemed unfazed by the immediacy of his response, but she was used to his antics.

Allondriss was Pan's favorite little toy from the servant house. Engaging a fair-skinned temple outcast from the house of servants bordered on black market affairs, but to appease the balance of karma, he had vowed to one day set her on another path more suited to her talents.

"Master Pan." Her ocean blue eyes dug into his soul. "One of Master Torbin's companions wishes to speak with him."

Pan backed up with a sweeping bow to present them to Torbin, all the while keeping his eyes on Allondriss. The man who entered bore the emblem of a Subterranean magi. His eyes were wide with anticipation. The magi bowed to Torbin and glanced hesitantly at Pan.

"You may speak for him to hear," Torbin permitted with a wave of his hand.

"My friend! I am flattered!" Pan laughed. "Let's hear what he has to say!"

Torbin knew Pan's manner. He was not inclined to trust the scoundrel. But Pan was initiated into the higher levels of the Nexes Order, and so was entitled to their findings.

"Master Torbin," the magi spoke gravely. "There is a Watcher here."

Torbin perked up. "Explain."

"We detected a powerful dreamwalker here on these grounds. It is a very advanced level of training. We would not have noticed it, but we were tuned to dreamsight to see what danger was here."

Pan prepared another elixir, listening intently.

Torbin turned to Pan. "May I have your permission for my magi to ignite the violet flame over your estate?"

Pan nodded in the midst of a stretch. "Yes, do as you will. I would not want my revelry spoiled."

Torbin looked to the magi. "Ignite the flame immediately. And find my daughter."

The magi nodded and left the room. Torbin turned again to Pan. "The Queen Impending is in the city somewhere. Our dreamseers have seen terrible visions of her demise. We have taken it on ourselves to find her."

"You mean Kyliron's betrothed, *from the dreamclans?*" he emphasized the phrase over-enthusiastically. "Why would she not go straight to the palace for Ka-Ma-Sharri?" Pan seemed to have an idea. He fumbled with his clothing, comically intoxicated. "Perhaps she also suspects she is in danger and has perhaps found refuge somewhere the Watchers deem safe." He answered his own question with an index finger pointing upward.

Torbin nodded, amazed at the conversation Pan was having with himself. "By your leave, then, I shall go collect my daughter, and when the magi are done, we shall be on our way. It is imperative we find the Queen Impending before the height of Ka-Ma-Sharri."

Pan bowed dramatically and ushered Torbin out the door. After the Subterra Keymaster descended the spiral stair, Pan whispered in Allondriss's ear. "Please see to the safety of our special guests at once."

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Music began in the gardens. Atlantean classical music was designed to weave the delicate harmonies of nature and emulate frequencies from the universal spheres. It had evolved in modern times to a more primal reminder of human existence, with multi-layered rhythmic pulses as its basis. It had become popular at revelries to feature the dark, grooving textures of

percussive instruments run through resonance amplifiers. The dance style to this tribal heartbeat music was an individualized expression of character and personal power.

D'Vinid, like all dabrina players, studied classical music. His unique contribution was to run his instrument through the same resonance amplifiers to modulate universal frequencies. The ensuing melodic textures were in juxtaposition with the fierce, pulsing rhythms. His legendary ingenuity had started a trend, and he was well known as the inventor of the fusion.

He was at war with his desire. All he wanted was to find Brigitte in time for the Ka-Ma-Sharri. The draw was so powerful he almost felt he would be sick if he didn't follow it.

The garden had been set up with swirling lights and long, draping streamers to disorient revelers and give the feeling of walking in Dreamtime. Revelries were a cultural mainstay all through Atlantean history. They believed it to be their birthright as humans to enjoy the pleasures of sensory perception, while reaching for the bliss of higher consciousness. They had found the best way to do this was through revelries.

D'Vinid wandered aimlessly, pacing through the gardens in unsettled thought. He lowered his head to avoid laughing courtiers as they chased through the garden pathways. He thought perhaps an elixir would soothe his torment. Just as he had the thought, the path emptied into a small patio where a mixologist had set up a portable case of tiny glass vials on a low, round table.

Courtiers relaxed on cushions around the woman's tiny costumed form. She had a painted face that glowed in the twinkling lights, and a feathered headdress with plumes rising into a collar. Her eyes landed directly on D'Vinid as he appeared on the patio. She gestured a delicate hand toward an empty cushion. The other courtiers gazed up at him with eager eyes and mimicked her gesture, urging him to join in their search for just the right form of intoxication.

"What is your pleasure?" she asked in a singsong voice. "Are you sad and lonely?" She waved her hand over the vials, pushing their tops gently to make a fragile chiming sound as their various glass shapes clinked together. "Do you need me to slip you a feeling of sexual arousal? Are you longing to see the other side? Or perhaps you need some excitement and adrenalin!"

D'Vinid carefully thought of his answer. Pan had the best elixir mixologists, and any feeling he wished to have, she would deliver. "I need to not care."

Her expression darkened. "This is a specific feeling you ask for. You have many things haunting your thoughts. Do you wish to forget? I can give you temporary amnesia."

One of the courtesans rubbed his thigh and leaned in to whisper in his ear. "Go for arousal. I will help you forget." She giggled and fell back, landing in the arms of the man behind her, who caught her up in a greedy kiss.

A commotion caught everyone's attention for a moment, but drunken agendas gradually distracted the group again. Refreshed and ornamented, the Aello twins swaggered into the lights.

"D'Vinid!" Kayden exclaimed with a wave.

D'Vinid returned the greeting with surrendered resolution. He tightened his jaw as he spoke and leaned in closer. "Do you have anything to counteract the feeling of guilt?"

She sat up straighter. "I see your struggle. You have been infected by a sweeping guilt that makes yours feel stronger. Everything you have done that you regret feeds this guilt. I have just the thing for you. Fendesia. It will numb your feelings and raise your spirits so you can join the

revelry." She ran her fingers over the vials and plucked a multi-faceted jeweled bottle sealed with a cork.

The twins found their way into the midst of the quasi-orgy, amplifying the din around them. D'Vinid leaned in closer to the mixologist, narrowing his eyes to slits. "Will it make me do anything stupid?"

"Only you can do that." She moved closer and breathed his aroma, electrified by his natural sensuality. She pressed his fingers around the vial. "The side effects of fendesia may cause you to see with dreamsight. If anything else, a light euphoria will linger a few hours. Your mind will be numbed enough for you not to care about whatever brings you guilt."

He nodded and opened the cork, took one last look at her painted face, and swallowed the purple liquid. The debauchery continued around them. Music pulsed in the distance. Colorful lights flashed. Jensyn and Kayden tag-teamed a valiant story, capturing the attention of those who felt obligated to pay respect to their hosts. Before too long, they ventured into intoxicated politics.

Jensyn positioned himself closer to D'Vinid, dragging one of the women with him. She tumbled into his arms, giggling wildly. He swiveled his head to stare at each of the gathered courtiers with intense punctuation.

"It is Bavendrick who should be king." The creases of his face deepened as his smile spread, and he lifted an elixir to his lips.

"Long live King Bavendrick!" the others mimicked.

D'Vinid raised a glass of tonic. "For that you will get no argument from me. Long live King Bavendrick."

The fendesia began to kick in. At first, D'Vinid felt light-headed, and then his heart seemed to burst into a million shards of unspeakable ecstasy. He scanned the garden and coiled back in astonishment. His vision swirled into dreamsight. The air seemed as if it had transformed into liquid. Bright waves of colors outlined the people.

The mixologist began slithering toward him, her lips searching for a kiss. He reached out to embrace her, gently exploring her slender curves. He skimmed the surface of her skin with his lips, succumbing to the beast of passion he tried to keep locked away.

A movement at the entrance of the courtyard distracted him from the mistake he was about to make. A woman came into view. Her simple robe lacked the pageantry of the others. Beguiled by her raven beauty, his eyes summoned her to join him until he realized who she was. His heart stopped. She glared at him. He released the mixologist, who landed in a heap of pillows. He quickly rolled to his feet and followed Loressai into the garden.

It was the perfect test of the fendesia. If anyone would make him feel guilty, it was Loressai. They walked quietly, wrapped in memories of their past. Theirs was a tumultuous affair that ended with his leaving the palace and never speaking with Kyliron again. Her appearance was yet another thread in the trap he was being lured into by the Watchers. She was so out of place that he hoped she was a hallucination. But then she spoke, and the reality of her presence was made real.

"What are you doing here, Loressai?" he said.

Dark circles framed her once beautiful eyes which now devoured him, flashing between anger and pity. "I came with my father's contingent. They're here to consult with Pan Aello. I heard you were playing music. It makes sense to find you here in the arms of a woman

instead." She frowned and waved off her annoyance. "There's something wrong with me, D'Vinid. I should not have left Subterra. Here it grows stronger. This city is cursed." She stopped and faced him. "But I had to come. I had to warn you."

"Me? Warn me? Why?"

"They want you, too. We are Kyliron's weakness. Both of us. To control us is to control him." She raised her hand to see that it was shaking. She quickly tucked it under her arm. "You can still stop it, D'Vinid." She lowered her voice to a breathing whisper.

He stepped away. Her body tensed. Her eyes shifted. A reptilian gleam sparked in her expression. She stepped closer to him. "Unite with me for Ka-Ma-Sharri." Her voice was different. She kissed his neck. He lit up at her touch, remembering all too well the intensity of their passion. There was no guilt to make him stop. He was helpless in the trap of their attraction. The elixir was working the wrong way.

The light of the moon dimmed as the shadow of the planet began its Ka-Ma-Sharri journey. The taste of her lips became irresistible. His mind shifted to Brigitte. His eyes flashed orange. With a sudden burst of strength, he pushed Loressai away.

~\*~

As much as the wounds were festering, Brigitte could see a flicker of light at the core of the Neter woman's soul. She was fighting the possession. Her spirit was strong, and Brigitte knew she needed help. Shadow tendrils imprisoned her like she was the woven feast for a spider. When she spoke to D'Vinid, the shadows enclosed around her throat. The tentacles reached toward him as if they intended him for their next victim.

Brigitte had learned to create dreamlight with her thoughts. Gathering drops of luminescence from the fabric of Dreamtime, she wove them into a pattern. When she was satisfied with her creation, she sent it hurling to ignite the dull flame in the woman's heartlight. When it hit, the flame sparked into a blaze. The woman turned away from D'Vinid.

The black tendrils withdrew from him and closed in to strangle her newfound strength.

"Please don't feel rejected," he pleaded. "I didn't want to stop kissing you, Loressai. I just..."

"D'Vinid, shut up! I can't... be near you... It gets stronger. It wants us both." She began jogging away. He tried to follow. "Go away!" She warned. "Do not come near me again." She picked up speed and ran toward the entrance of the estate.

When she reached the gate, a swath of violet light appeared out of nowhere, sweeping through the grounds in a flaming burst. In Dreamtime, the shrieking of shadows could be heard as they were ripped from their hosts by the passing of the light. Brigitte recognized the chanting of magi as they cast their incantation to purify the revelry.

D'Vinid clutched his head as if he had been freed from a spell.

He stopped, staring after her, bewildered. Brigitte could feel his confusion. In dreamsight he was surrounded by an orange outline of light. She noticed a displaced dreambody around him. It beckoned and gazed at her with fiery eyes. An ancient passion sparked in her heart. She recognized the feeling it caused her. The orange displacement turned toward her and smiled with a pointed finger at its lips.

It was then that D'Vinid noticed she was floating beside him.

~\*~



Loressai ran from the estate of Pan Aello, desperate to escape. Every cell in her body burned to stay with D'Vinid for Ka-Ma-Sharri. The voice in her head tormented her to stay. *"You can have D'Vinid,"* it screamed. *"He is your chosen mate."*

She covered her ears and squeezed her eyes shut. The streets blurred. Her feet carried her as far as she could go. A growing mound of anger, despair, jealousy, rage, and betrayal threatened to bury her once more. The pile of resentment grew past the point of no return, until she forgot where it was coming from in the first place. It was part of her now.

She finally came to a stop on an empty balcony overlooking the Grand Canal. Small watercraft gathered below in a cluster of floating revelry. Everywhere she looked, couples were kissing, celebrating the union of Belial and Kama. She wanted all of them to die. But her own death would do nicely.

As she placed her hands on the railing of the balcony to throw herself in the water, white heat consumed her trembling body.

A symphony of chanting rose up in dissonant refrain. Beings in black materialized from the shadows and enclosed her in a shrinking circle. She tried to scream as she felt her consciousness struggle against the sensation of falling. In one final cry for help, she felt herself disappear, and all turned to emptiness.

~\*~

"Who are you?" D'Vinid stepped back in awe. "You really are a Watcher!" he breathed, recognizing Brigitte's ghostly figure. His skin melted into effervescence. His vision washed with a veil of orange. He grabbed his head. The light faded for a split second, and a profound chill of fear overloaded his soul.

The apparition of Brigitte began to fade. Her ethereal limbs wrapped around him, enticing him forward.

His legs moved against his will, directing him toward the eastern bungalows. His human mind was unsure where she was, but his body knew exactly where to go. The dome bungalows were framed by smooth waters reflecting the starry sky.

With her dreambody again merged with her physical form, Brigitte moved to the deck overlooking the cove. A sudden gust of wind sent her hair blowing wildly as she leaned against the railing. Dolphins gathered below, smiling up at her. D'Vinid watched the curves of her outline as she emerged. She was a sight to behold against the starry night. His heart raced as he neared the bungalow. Sensing his approach, she moved to open the door.

~\*~

Allondriss stood nearby in the darkness. She took a few steps toward the door of the bungalow, unsure what to do. A heavy hand fell on her shoulder, and Lukias regarded her with warning. His mess of hair caught the fading moonlight as the eclipse began to reach its height. He shook his head slowly. *"This is meant to happen. Can't you feel it, young dreamseer?"* His thoughts became one with hers.

"My master wanted me to check on you..."

"We are fine," he interrupted and then paused. "I have cloaked her so no one can find her in Dreamtime. We have no further needs for the night."

Allondriss nodded slowly, entranced. His face in the dim garden lighting seemed just as captivating as the sight of Brigitte and D'Vinid uniting in the entrance of the bungalow.

In dreamsight they were illuminated by a golden beam as they kissed under the eclipse of the moon. At the height of Ka-Ma-Sharri, the world pulsed with life. Allondriss blinked, perplexed as flowers and vines began to visibly bloom around them, just as the light of the moon became covered in shadow.

The crystal pendant flashed on Lukias's chest like the light of a star. She could not help but stare at it. Her blue eyes glowed in the crystal's light. Lukias raised her face to look at his and shook his head.

"A soul-crystal." She wondered at its brilliance.

"You should go now, little dreamseer."

Without argument, she turned and wandered into the garden, stopping only to look back at Lukias's outline in the eerie garden lighting under the eclipse of the Ka-Ma-Sharri. For the first time in her life, she wished she could participate in the ritual. But she lowered her head and stepped into the darkness of the night without a word.

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As Brigitte closed the door, D'Vinid pinned her against it, placing a hand above her head. He looked her solidly in the eye. He was himself, and yet entirely unbridled. His hands shook. The same otherworldly force seemed to take over his movements again. Tears poured from his eyes, and he pulled her into his arms. All time seemed to stop. A wave of passion erupted from the depths of their souls, and they swept one another into a tender, ravenous kiss.

Golden light saturated the room. Brigitte pulled away, panting. His eyes burned with a fiery glow, holding her suddenly motionless. The presence within the room seized her in a state of euphoric tension. The air warped. She wanted desperately to move. Every limb ached to be in his embrace.

She recognized her situation and capitulated, allowing her mind to surrender to the hopeless web in which she had become entangled. An ethereal orange light illuminated the whites of his eyes as a smile crept onto his face, a smile Brigitte somehow recognized. "*My love...*" His words echoed through her mind, triggering distant, faded remnants of memories, leftover dreams lying dormant in her subconscious.

She felt Dreamtime close in around her, encasing her in an invisible chamber of serenity. "Belial," she breathed.

D'Vinid's voice laughed, its pitch shifted with possession. "*I am he who the Watchers fear and protect. I am he who brings knowledge from the stars and gives it to humanity. I am he who walks through Dreamtime. The traveler of worlds. The fallen star. Protector of that which all hold dear. I am darkness within the light... the lightness within the dark... Master of the Cunning.*" His words trailed with an ethereal echo.

"*I have watched, too, my love. And I await the end times with great anticipation, when we can be reunited at last. On this night, the eve when these fine people celebrate our reunion, let us be one again.*" He sank to his knees, clutched at her hand, and kissed it as if it were the source of nourishment to a hungry man. "*As above, so below. As within, so without.*" His voice dripped like honey in her thoughts. "*You are the light in the darkest night, Kama, protector of humanity, mother of Atlantis. Let your seed maintain the Telluric Treaty.*" He pulled her closer,



running his hand through her hair, and squeezing her scalp with his fingertips. She leaned her head into his touch.

His burning hand reached to touch the skin on her side. She erupted into blue ethereal flames. Passing a hand before her eyes, she inhaled with apprehensive fascination, watching the flames incredulously.

Their movement together was as natural as two streams of water uniting. Their limbs intertwined, and a connection was made like that between atoms. As two primordial beings, passionate for one another and parted for centuries, they combined into a burning pillar of rapturous bliss.

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The Nephilim sank into its human vessel and used her lips to smile. The shadow of the planet reached to swallow the moon. Her eyes glowed red in the moonlight. The ancient creature had trouble maintaining its hold on the body of its host. The daughter of Subterra was strong-willed. Hollowing her out with the shadows of human suffering was a long process. But now that she was separated from the protection of her Subterranean Luminari brethren, she had fallen into the creature's snare.

"Shadowmancers," she croaked in her new voice. "The convergence has begun. I have failed to retrieve the host of my mate this night. We will take him when we can. For now, we must prevent the arrival of the dreamclan emissary." They watched the shadow grow across the moon, chanting in preparation for the celestial portal to open all the way.

When the phenomenon was almost complete, the circle parted, and two cloaked figures stepped into the center. Each held captive a man and woman. She stepped toward them. With a surge of desire, she took the woman by the hair, extending her head to look into the eyes of her prey. Sniffing deeply of the surging blood, the fear made her stronger. She nodded to the captors and took a step back as they reached up knives to the throats of their prey.

"Receive this sacrifice, oh queen of the Blood Triad. May you gather strength from this sacré moré and seal your hold on this human vessel as shadows eclipse the light." The shadowmancers began chanting, a rolling serpentine cadence.

Then to the shock of all, their prisoners shifted weight, disarming their unsuspecting captors. In one confusing moment, they turned from prey to predator. A flurry of bursting light rippled through the plaza. Free from the grasp of those who would sacrifice them, the couple gathered light to the movement of their hands.

A new resonant chorus interrupted the evil blood ritual. Blue mist materialized out of Dreamtime, revealing translucent silhouettes on all sides. The flash of crystals raised to their ethereal lips revealed the source of the sonic attack. The black-cloaked figures shrank from the sound and realized they were outnumbered.

Loressai began to feel her body again. Her consciousness fought to escape the sticky black ooze that trapped her in a psychic prison. Her hand fought against her as she raised it, trembling to her face. Her body hunched into writhing pain. The creature fought to keep her contained. The eclipse grew darker.

With the finesse of a dancer, one of the shadowmancers tucked into a tumble. His movements drew shadows to his hands. The others resumed their chanting. The area was obscured by swarming, dark masses with yawning and treacherous faces.

Just as quickly, the translucent attackers changed their pitch, and beams shot from the crystals at their lips. A web of light threaded through the plaza. The couple, now free from their impending death, summoned light to the weaving movement of their hands. The light turned to a glowing sword in the hands of the man. The woman now wielded the shape of a round blade that she held up as a shield.

They flanked Loressai. She fought furiously to gain control. Doubled over with the pain of the fight, she ripped the hood from the shadowmancer closest to her. He had a shaved head, and black death runes covered his skin. She bent her arm to hit him in the temple with the pointed force of her elbow. He fell to the ground.

The ones who had come to her rescue saw that Loressai was on their side now. The man began speaking to the shadowmancers. "You were warned to stay out of Poseidia. You had to know we would track your blood magic." He held the light blade up, illuminating his face. He was dressed in wealthy attire. His dark eyes shone in the reflection of his sword.

"It would be in your best interest to understand our intentions," one of the shadowmancers hissed. "We have all been chosen to purify Atlantis. You are chosen, too, brother. The shadows can be your servants, not your enemies."

"From where I stand you just tried to kill me. I don't think your intentions will be in alignment with me or anyone else in the ten kingdoms of Atlantis."

"You survived, didn't you?" The shadowmancer sneered. "You are among the strong. One of the purifiers, the chosen ones. It is the life force of the weak that must be used to allow the Blood Triad to help us cleanse the Grid. We can harness the shadows and correct the mistakes of those who have become their sustenance. It is their lazy arrogance that has allowed the shadows to corrupt the Grid."

The eclipse reached its perigee.

"Step aside, Children of One. The rulership of Atlantis has failed us. Oh Blood Triad! Accept my blood to increase your strength!" With a smile of release, the shadowmancer lifted up his hands. The shadows swarming around him formed into a wavering blade. "Let the shadows be your tools, brother." He reached the swarming dagger to his throat and stabbed himself. Blood spurted from his neck.

As he crumbled to the ground, the tattooed runes on his face wriggled and turned to wavering movement. In the eerie light of the lunar eclipse, shadows twisted free from his skin and formed a spiral around his twitching body. Like a liquid whirlpool, it flowed toward Loressai. The creature's icy touch took hold of her heart once more.

"Stop them!" she cried.

But it was too late. The others copied their leader. Their tattoos came to life and wrapped around Loressai. The two Children of One withdrew, frowning at her with wrenching regret. They fell back from the plaza now swarming with shadows, and into the relative safety of their companions. The blackness closed around Loressai as the moon's light disappeared at the height of Ka-Ma-Sharri. The celestial doorway was open. Once again, Loressai was hopelessly trapped inside the relentless prison of her mind.