



HARLEY AUSTIN

BOOK SEVEN

DECEPTION

AWAKENED SERIES

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HARLEY AUSTIN

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AWAKENED SERIES

BOOK SEVEN

DECEPTION

HARLEY AUSTIN

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*For my beautiful angel;
the love of my life and the very best friend
anyone could ever hope to have.*

*And for Chris;
the best brother anyone could ever hope to have
and my number one fan.*

DECEPTION

PROLOGUE

You're watching *Dominion Signs*, I'm Kimberly Klein.

"Tensions flared once again in the nation's capital as protestors clashed with both police and National Guard troops over the government's heavy-handed treatment of people whom the Centers for Disease Control have been calling an 'infectious nightmare waiting to happen.'

"Often without warning and with little if any oversight by the courts, individuals and even entire families have been detained by state, federal and international authorities, taken to what the CDC are calling 'containment communities' designed to prevent the spread of a deadly 'genetic infection' that has taken the lives of what authorities estimate could be as high as eight million people all over the globe.

“Carriers of the often deadly genetic mutation, often called ‘gods’ or even ‘demigods’, but officially known as ‘Ra’ or even ‘Nephilim’, are seen by many as a way to enhance one’s own physical well-being, but much more often than not, end only in deadly tragedy.

“Here with more about the epidemic, is Dominion’s own Surgeon General, Dr. Benjamin Wells. Thank you for joining me Dr. Wells.”

“It’s a pleasure, Kim. Thank you for inviting me.”

“Dr. Wells, I think the first question at the forefront of everyone’s mind is what *is* this so-called ‘genetic infection’ and where did it come from?”

“We don’t really know, Kim. Since before recorded history there have apparently been a very secluded group of people who called themselves the Ra. Agreeably, they secluded themselves because they understood that they have a rare genetic trait, a kind of familial defect, that has the potential to kill other people—and do so within minutes.”

“Is it like a mutation?”

“Not that we have been able to quantify at this point. No, I would not call it a mutation, but merely a genetic disorder—more akin to a very rare blood type.”

“So these Ra are really a kind of rare and rather isolated race of people?”

“They have been a very isolated race. Yes. And for good reason.”

“We’ve been hearing that their genetics can kill—”

“Within minutes, Kim. The blood of these Ra is like a venomous poison to most people. It’s very dangerous.”

“You say *most* people, Dr. Wells, but what about those people who actually survive the infection, don’t they more or less *become* one of these Ra? Can their blood really enhance people, make them stronger? Like super men and wonder women?”

"I would be careful about exaggerating the consequences of these infections, Kimberly, these—"

"But that is what is happening, isn't it, Dr. Wells? People are using Ra blood to become 'enhanced'?"

Wells seemed to sigh in professional frustration. This wasn't the direction he wanted to go nor what he wanted their interview to turn into. But, the question was now on the table. "Yes, Kim. In what appear to be very rare circumstances the genetics of this group can indeed, as you say, 'enhance' others with increased strength and other attributes we're still studying."

"Do we know where these people came from? Some are suggesting that these Ra are demons or fallen angels? Like we see detailed within the Bible."

Dr. Wells chuckled. "These are not spiritual beings, Kim. They're physical people, just like you and I."

"So you don't believe they are the children of demonic spirits?"

"Whoever is teaching this nonsense needs to be defrocked. There are very rational and logical genetic explanations for who these people are and where they came from.

"Throughout history, simple-minded scribes described people and events within the primitive cultures that they lived within. As such, it is very possible that these Ra would have been seen as gods or demigods to the primitive people and cultures living thousands of years ago."

"Quite a few have begun making the claim that the Ra are in fact referenced within the Bible. They're saying that these Ra are actually the Nephilim."

"That is indeed a possibility, Kim. The Nephilim as described within the Torah and Christian Bibles could very well have been descriptions of the ancient Ra interacting with other people. No doubt."

"Do you think Goliath was perhaps one of these Ra? The Bible describes them as 'giants'; perhaps as tall as twenty feet?"

"I am not a trained theologian or paleographer, Kim. But my limited understanding of the ancient Hebrew could mean that the scribes were simply describing a powerful warrior, not actually a giant. These people are indeed stronger, like Sampson, but not bigger. Not that we've seen anyway."

"You're calling these Ra 'people', Doctor. But aren't these 'people' really more like aliens?" Kimberly asked. "It would seem from the signs of their massive vessels in the skies and orbit around the world that we're being visited by some kind of extraterrestrial life."

"Aliens?" Wells visibly scoffed. "Good heavens. Not to *my* knowledge, Kim. We have no evidence of extraterrestrials ever visiting our world, or even that they exist. The distances between stars are just too great. No. What we are dealing with here are a very advanced genetic family of Humanity. Nothing more."

"And you don't think a hundred-mile long warship hovering over London and Seattle like some a hot air balloon is evidence of extraterrestrial life?"

"No, I don't, Kim. Honestly, these people have existed for tens of thousands of years, perhaps even hundreds of thousands. This is not the first time the Ra have revealed their advanced knowledge to the rest of humanity—and in rather spectacular ways. We have many ancient writings, including those of Josephus, detailing what the ancient authors understood as god-like beings riding in thunderous blazing chariots doing battle in the skies over Jerusalem in the first century."

"Really." The reporter's eyes drew wide. "I've never heard of that."

"Of course you haven't. That's because most Christians only read their Bibles and never do they ever read their own

Christian history—such as Josephus. So now today, two thousand years later, we see once again these phenomenal vessels moving through the skies to show us that they mean us no harm.”

“How do you know they mean us no harm, Doctor?”

“Kimberly. This vessel flew over the Middle East and was ignorantly attacked by Iran and some of her neighbors. The Ra ignored the aggressors. I dare say, a vessel of that size could have likely leveled Tehran in an instant. It was pure foolishness. These Ra mean us no harm. I would say that they simply wish to coexist in peace, as they have done for tens of thousands of years.”

“But Dr. Wells, aren’t we being stalked by an outside enemy; an extraterrestrial enemy? What do you think of the reports by numerous amateur and even accredited astronomers from all over the globe who have been publishing images and evidence of what they say are other alien vessels entering and leaving Earth’s orbit? Including what some are calling the existence of a massive fleet sitting just outside our solar system.”

Wells chuckled again. “Kim, our nations have some of the most sophisticated telescopes and monitoring devices ever created. I’ve seen some of this so-called evidence. These images look like blurry dots that are probably nothing more than debris from our own Kuiper belt. It’s nonsense.”

“And you don’t think our own governments are hiding any of this from us?”

“Honestly, Kim, I’m a well-trained medical doctor and anthropologist with a minor in bio-mechanics. I’m not all that well trained in politics or conspiracy theories.”

“Thank you, Dr. Wells. Don’t go away, Dominion Signs will return in just a few minutes to continue.”

IN THE LAST DAYS
GREAT SIGNS AND TERRIBLE WONDERS
WILL BE REVEALED ACROSS THE HEAVENS
THE SUN SHALL BE DARKENED
AND THE MOON SHALL SPILL BLOOD

THE EVIL ONE WILL DESCEND FROM THE HEAVENS
AND THROUGH HIS POWER HE WILL SUMMON THE GREAT
ARMIES OF RA AND MA-RA TO WAGE WAR
AGAINST THE REBORN OF RA

NO ONE COULD COUNT THE GREAT ARMIES
FOR THEIR MULTITUDES ARE AS THE SANDS OF THE SEA
THE DARK LORD AND PRINCE OF RA SHALL SUMMON THE
HOST OF THEIR ARMIES TO DO BATTLE

ONLY THEN SHALL THE SPIRIT OF RA BE REVEALED
AND ALL WHO WALK THE EARTH
SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF RA AND MA-RA
WILL RISE TO BE AWAKENED

— THE BOOKS OF RA

1

Dark wasn't sure what time it was. An early evening rain fell hard, pouring down in buckets outside. The huge abandoned barn they'd found along the side of the highway in a tall weed covered field leaked profusely almost everywhere.

He huddled with Serena close to himself in a mostly dry unlit corner of the dilapidated shelter while the storm blew wet against the still sturdy structure. But even in the unlit darkness of the old dusty place, each could see and make out details like it was day.

Sleeping during the day and traveling by night, the storm had woke both of them. Snuggled beside each other, the two talked quietly about shards of memory that seemed to return more and more with each passing week.

"I had another dream last night. He was in it."

"That Rion guy?" Dark asked.

"Yes."

"His name sounds familiar. I really do think I know him."

"You said that yesterday. I just can't—remember—who he is." She frowned. "It's like he's special to me somehow."

"Don't worry about it, Serena. We're remembering some things. Slowly. It'll come back to us."

He pulled her closer in a warm snuggle as the two of them sat back against the inside corner of the old barn listening to the rain outside and watching the water drip and splash on rusted farming equipment that would likely never be used ever again.

He sighed. "I'm still trying to figure out what happened to us."

"It was that light. It did something to us."

"I remember. I still say it was coming from you." He mused, looking at her.

She shook her head. "I distinctly remember feeling it coming from you," she corrected.

The light *had* come from him. The memory was still vivid in her mind. They'd been making love in some apartment back in Spokane. It had been an industrial loft with a beautiful view overlooking the falls of the river. She'd just climaxed with his lips gently on hers. And then he'd succumbed to his own euphoria. His fine skin had suddenly taken on some kind of luminescence. As he peaked with his skin illuminated, suddenly she'd felt his light entering her through their intimate connection, a surge of warmth like nothing she'd ever experienced before. It made her climax suddenly all at once again. And then the light seemed to ignite between them, like the most powerful ecstasy she'd ever experienced. He'd felt the same thing. Their feelings, their minds were shared now. She could feel not just his emotions, but his thoughts, and he hers—somehow.

In the weeks that followed, they'd managed to survive by thieving—money, food, clothes. They were good at it—at least he was. A little too good. Like a shadow in the night he could move unheard and unseen. The victims of their pilfering were no match for their agility and strength, or their uncanny stealth. He chose his targets carefully; people who might not be harmed by the loss of a nice wallet or an expensive purse. But then there were the more seedy thefts. He seemed to know where these people would be. Where they traded large bundles of cash for bricks of powder, synthetic rock and small bails of weed.

After weeks in the city and several 'raids', as he called them, on the clandestine dealers, they'd gathered a lot of money and even a few weapons. He was good with weapons. Real good.

But they had also attracted attention to themselves. Someone was looking for them now. Someone that felt dangerous. She'd sensed them even before he could. He decided it was time for them to leave their river city behind. They'd begun heading west now, traveling on foot, staying away from the larger towns, wandering the county roads and highways, always trying to stay out of sight and well hidden. It felt safe now. No one had found them.

It was clear that they were very different from the other people around them. The two of them easily turned heads with how they looked; the way they moved, the strange language they spoke. They kept themselves hooded and covered to blend in. But there were other things about them they didn't understand.

Snuggled beside him, she lifted her hand, spreading her fingers, letting her skin illuminate with the soft golden glow once again. He lifted his hand beside hers, the skin of his palm and fingers taking on the same kind of illumination.

"You're intrigued by this," he smiled.

“Aren’t you?”

“Yes and no. It’s wonderful, but—it makes me feel unsettled somehow. Like its dangerous.”

She nodded. “It feels like that to me too.”

He took her hand in his. He could feel her emotions, her feelings; and she his. His thoughts were also not hidden from her, nor hers from him.

“You should stop worrying,” he spoke softly. “I’ll keep us safe.”

She smiled, sighing warmly as he wrapped his feelings of reassurance around her. He would keep her safe. He’d already proven he could do that time and again over the past few weeks.

Resting comfortably in his embrace and cocooned by his feelings, she was bemused by the thought that she still had no idea who he was. Then again, she could barely remember her own name, and that was only because he had remembered it for her. Whatever the accident had been, few of their memories before it remained.

His name was Dark. And outside of a few other shards and flashes of images in her mind, she knew almost nothing about him. At six-two, he was nicely built. Not like a body builder, but more like someone who actually used his cut build. He had the air of authority. Arrogance. Confidence. And he was kind; considerate of her needs and her feelings. She knew him. From a handful of distant memories, she knew him. She didn’t know how or even where they had met, but it was clear they were friends, a couple. Their attraction to each other was deep; visceral somehow.

But there were other people in their lives as well. Someone named Rion had been moving through her dreams the past couple of days. And, although he never talked about her, Serena could see that there was someone else within flashes of

his own memories. She was cute, in a sophisticated kind of way.

But her reminiscing would have to wait. A vehicle was pulling up the overgrown gravel road to the old barn. Both of them felt it. The two people within the vehicle didn't feel dangerous, but Dark and Serena also didn't want to be discovered. Their corner of the old barn was at least out of sight of most of the rest of the huge dilapidated space. They both watched with some trepidation as the old door of the barn was shoved open and the SUV, with its high beams lit, driven inside.

From their semi-hidden corner, both watched as a couple of teens exited the now silent vehicle with only its parking lights lit to illuminate the space. It was obvious from how the young man and his girlfriend were feeling that the old barn was about to become a secluded makeout place in the midst of the storm.

The rain continued to pour and the old barn creaked and shuddered lightly in the heavy wind outside. Despite its many drizzling leaks the teen couple wasted no time in finding a dry place to cuddle and kiss.

2

Christian lowered the bottle of microbrew from his lips. He watched with amusement while a number of unusually beautiful women began to strip off their shorts and tops. He wasn't the only guy at the party looking at them dress down to some rather skimpy bikinis and then step down into the clear illuminated water. The pool itself was more like a work of art, a mini water park that filled a good chunk of the sprawling back yard of the small hilltop estate, with its waterslide that emerged from a large rock cliff face and immense splashing waterfall. Tiki fire lamps burned all over the pool area with some pop music playing not too loudly as the fifty or so partiers wandered, chatted and now waded into the warm crystal-lit water.

The barbeque pool party had actually been going on for hours, but Christian had only just arrived right as the light was fading over the Arizona hills. The temperature was still in the

eighties, but a cool evening breeze was also blowing making the hot day now tolerable.

"Hey—Christian," Kayla walked up to him, her typical all-business demeanor now noticeably absent and her voice much more sweetly sexy. It was a little different seeing this side of his boss. She was the only reason he was here. "I was wondering if you were going to be able to make it tonight."

"Sure. I wouldn't miss it."

Kayla was one of the women he'd been watching slipping off her shorts. His normally well-dressed boss was now *barely* dressed in a hot little white string number that left little to the imagination of a body that had more than Christian ogling her barely covered curves and nicely sized bobbing chest. She definitely had to wax to wear the little thing.

"You should come into the pool." She smiled at him. "It'll be fun," she baited, smoothing her hand over one side of his broad chest and making sure she'd teased his nipple, just a little.

"Ah. Sure." Christian nodded. He wasn't really sure if seeing his director dressed in a bikini was kosher with company policy, but they weren't exactly at work or a company function, and it wasn't like she'd been hitting on him there. She was far too smart for that. But the up-scale pool party was probably a great place to skirt the rules if that's what she was up to.

"Hey, Kayla; who's your friend?"

Kayla took hold of the large muscular arm of another guy who'd just walked up to them. "Colton, this a friend of mine from work, Christian Jade."

"Hey, Christian. I finally get a chance to meet you." The two very muscular young men shook hands firmly. "Kayla won't shut up about you."

Christian watched Kayla punch Colton in the arm playfully. Christian smirked.

"Ow," Colton feigned pain with a smile. "She hits like a girl. You didn't want me telling Christian that you've been talking about him all week?"

"Ignore him, Christian," she blushed slightly. "Colt doesn't know what he's talking about. I'll be in the pool."

Both of them watched Kayla sashay her barely covered, pear-shaped backside to the pool stairs.

"Man, that is some wicked-nice ass." Colton mused folding his arms with his beer still in one hand. "You get to work with her too."

Christian nodded. "She doesn't dress like that at work, trust me."

"Still. She has the hots for you, Christian." He grinned.

"I sort of guessed that. The invitation to come to a pool party kind of tipped me off. So how do you know Kayla?"

"Kayla's been friends with my sister since we were kids. I get all the salacious news first hand."

"Great. My life is on the Gossip Channel now."

Colton couldn't help but be impressed by how well-cut the twenty-something half-Asian guy looked. Christian was tall, like himself, thick dark wavy hair, and a great handsomely dimpled smile. The way Christian spoke and moved was poised and perfect, like he'd had a very good upbringing.

"Well, looking like you do, Christian, you probably *own* the Gossip Channel at the office. How long have you worked with Kayla?"

"Only a few weeks."

"Oh," Colton nodded like he knew more than he was letting on. "Let me know how it turns out."

"That doesn't sound positive."

"Well, let's just say your boss is *very*, particular, about the men she likes and doesn't like to work with."

"You're being evasive. Am I in some kind of trouble by coming here?"

"Not with me," Colton evaded with a sarcastic grin.

"I'm in trouble."

Colton smirked. "I'll tell you what, Christian. If it doesn't work out with Kayla, you have an open invitation to come to any of my parties. Whether Kayla invites you or not."

"Oh. So this is your party? You're the host?"

"I am."

"Your home is beautiful. I've never been to Scottsdale. I'm usually stuck in the office in Phoenix."

"We'll, it's just me here now."

"You don't look much older than me; and you have a huge home like this?"

"Our parents passed away about ten years ago, Christian. Mia moved in with her boyfriend last year. So, I throw these parties every month or so just to see who comes over. We've all been friends for years."

"What do you do?"

"Nothing at the moment. Still trying to decide on that. Mostly I use the gym, swim, run, bike. Throw parties." Colton grinned.

Christian nodded. "That's why you look like you do. Now that I'm out of school I barely find time to workout anymore."

"Really? You have a really good build; a great build in fact."

"Yea, only because of genetics."

"Don't complain. Some of us have to really work at looking the way you do. Do you compete at all?"

Christian shook his head. "No. Too much of an introvert for that."

"Well, Mr. Introvert, Kayla's watching you. At some point you're going to need to go in for the kill."

"I have a feeling I'm the one that's going to be dinner."

Colton grinned again, nodding. "Probably."

Both Colton and Christian walked over to the area next to the pool where everyone had undressed and laid their clothes. The two young men began slipping out of theirs. Colton began to peel himself alluringly out of his snug shirt. Like he was on stage pretending to be Magic Mike.

"I think you and I have an audience," Christian nodded quietly to Colton. Just about every female and a few of the guys were watching the two of them take their time slipping out of their clothes.

It became a kind of game now with Colton lifting his shirt only so far, showing off his thick abs while chatting with Christian.

Christian slipped out of his long-sleeved black muscle shirt revealing a stunningly detailed jade dragon inked around one of his arms and chest. The beautiful image didn't fully cover him, but instead wrapped elegantly around his left arm and shoulder. It then moved over his chest, wrapped again around his abs before disappearing into his khaki shorts and then continuing down his thick right leg to just above his leather-sandaled foot.

"Dude, that is some really impressive ink. How long did it take?" Colton asked.

"I'm not really sure."

"What do you mean," Colton unzipped his shorts but then just continued to chat with Christian. "How could you not know how long it took?"

"I've always had it. I guess I got it when I was a younger, but, I don't remember it."

"I've never seen ink this detailed. It's really awesome."

"Not too many people have seen this much of it."

Colton teasingly dropped his shorts to around his thighs showing a white cotton designer swim brief that didn't look like it was going to stay all that opaque once it got wet.

Christian only partially unbuttoned and unzipped his shorts revealing his own white swim trunks. A widely parted laced-up front seam very conspicuously revealed a deep plunge into his well trimmed pubic area that finally covered him just above a generously huge package that looked barely contained by the thin material of his swim trunks.

"Dude. Some of the women here are going to want to get laid tonight after seeing you in those." Colton grinned, dropping his shorts all the way off.

Christian grinned back. "It wasn't exactly my choice of swimsuit. Kayla gave them to me this week when she invited me to your party."

"Really?"

Christian slipped off his shorts to numerous gasps he couldn't hear from all over the pool area. The tied-up-the-open-front square-cut shorts felt more like cotton-Lycra underwear than a swimsuit. Like Colton's, he was pretty sure the shorts weren't going to stay all that opaque once they got wet. "Wish me luck." Christian only half grinned.

Colton watched Christian in his all-too-tight swimsuit walk away and then step down into the pool. He frowned slightly. "You're going to need a lot more than luck, my friend."

3

Neither of the clandestine gods could physically see the young couple who had taken up shelter out of the rain within the old barn, but their minds had no difficulty clairvoyantly surveilling the area where the two teens had settled in. Their evening date had quickly moved well beyond making out.

More thinly built and taller, the nice-looking guy was seventeen. His sandy brown hair, cut in a small-town conservative style, had become the playground of her fingers that sported well-manicured nails. Both kissed ravenously while moving deeper into their heating passion. His clothes were simple blue jeans, boots and a sport-logo printed t-shirt, while hers were much more fine, and name-branded.

Neither of the young people were actually in their clothes at the moment. A large picnic blanket beneath them had been spread over several sagging bails of old straw. The place had

become a kind of nest as the two kissed with unbridled heat, her cheerleader body wrapped around his lightly muscled build.

Serena felt Dark rolling his eyes. This wasn't exactly his kind of entertainment. Serena nudged his shoulder with hers; giving him a simple empathic smirk while the two gods looked on, all but helpless to do anything else but watch the inexperienced teens play.

Dark soon saw the invisible tendril leave her mind and begin weaving itself quickly, almost instantaneously across the barn. Her feelings entered the young man.

"What are you doing?!" Dark alarmed in Serena's thoughts. "You'll give us away!"

"Shhh," she calmed in his mind. "They won't notice a thing."

"Why?" he insisted. "Why are you doing this?"

"It's like he's some robot. He's not even trying to feel what she's feeling."

"He's not like us; he can't."

"I'm just—giving him a few ideas."

Lauren sensed something different about Kyle's embrace. He'd slowed his rather mechanical pace. He was still kissing her, but, something felt new; he was touching her now, softly, sweetly; smoothing his hand over her skin like he wanted her to feel him touching her.

Kyle might not have been built like some of the other guys she'd gone out with, but he was the only one who had treated her like a person and not just the daughter of a wealthy corporate grower. Besides treating her nicely, what he lacked in muscles he more than made up for with what he carried between his thighs. The slender guy was not small by any means.

Kyle softly shifted himself; allowing his fine lengthy male to slip into her in a way that began teasing her clit. She gasped into his mouth with the new movements and sensations he now delivered between her thighs.

"*You* are enjoying this way too much," Dark watched Serena play the young man, almost like a puppet. She wasn't actually controlling him, just giving him empathic suggestions the he seemed all too readily eager to try with his sexy, almost blonde beauty queen girlfriend. Both Dark and Serena could feel the new raw desire rising between the two teens.

"So why doesn't *she* do anything?" Dark asked Serena. "She's just laying there."

"She's fantasizing; enjoying him."

"Fantasizing? He's right there," Dark grumbled. "Maybe *he'd* like to be made love to as well?"

Serena watched Dark's own psionic tendril move quickly through the barn and enter the teen girl's mind.

Kyle could sense that he'd revved Lauren's desire by taking things more slowly and trying to feel her, touch her, enjoy her. Her skin was glistening and her heart racing as he teased her all over. He now felt Lauren's hands move with tingling allure over his skin, then his thin but curved ass, gripping him; her fingers then smoothing up his back. She began kissing *him*, not just returning his kisses, but going after his lips. Then, as if taking charge, she rolled him to his back.

"Lauren," he breathed in surprise, his lips on her neck just under her ear. Her fine ass and hips rocked against his while she not only pleased herself but felt Kyle growing more and more tense in his desire as well.

In the couple of times the two of them had rendezvoused like this before, it had been fun, but—awkward. Neither really knew all that much about the body of the other. But being

together again like this was feeling somehow new, exciting—and dangerous.

With Lauren's lips on his, and her larger pert breasts in both of his hands while he mercilessly teased her nipples, Kyle felt himself approaching his edge. He needed to pull out.

"Lauren, I'm about to—" he warned.

But she was already at her own edge and right now, feeling the way she was feeling with Kyle filling her, she didn't care. Not in the heat of *this* moment she didn't.

A deep ecstasy suddenly gripped her. Lauren called out just as her body detonated with a feeling of desire she'd never in her life felt before. Kyle arched his back, driving, gripping her ass, and burying the full exceptional length of his thick and now pulsing cock between her legs. Her body was on fire with the emotion of her sudden release and so was his! She held tightly to Kyle, feeling his male pushing and pulsing deeply into her. Her toes curled as he slid against her very hard and now ultra sensitive clit, making her call out his name again in the pain of deep release.

"Whoo—" Serena exhaled quietly, feeling every ounce of Kyle's euphoria as he continued to expend himself into Lauren.

"You're not kidding," Dark whispered back. He was feeling Lauren's body on fire as she rocked herself against Kyle, trying to drive every last inch of the long guy as deeply as she could between her thighs.

"See," Serena smiled nudging his shoulder again, "that was much better than it would have been."

Both withdrew their empathic connections to the teens.

Still intimately connected and breathing heavily, the two settled into the soft random ecstatic tremors of afterglow.

"Ohhh, God; Kyle," she spoke, still breathless.

Kyle smiled and kissed her open pout, watching her, his cock so hard inside her he felt like it was vibrating. And now his jewels were aching. He'd never felt so empty. Kyle rolled Lauren to her back, then leaned up to watch her afterglow as the rain seemed to pour even harder outside.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

"Do I look alright?" she grinned looking completely disheveled.

"You look like you've just been fucked."

"Maybe you should *fuck* me more often?" She rocked her hips again against his.

"Right, and then your daddy would have me strung up like a scarecrow."

"He would not," she countered.

"You're beautiful when you're being fucked." He smiled handsomely, his own hair wildly tousled, while pressing his cock deeply into her again.

"I'm probably a mess," she beamed.

She was a mess; with her hair going every which way, but she was also incredibly beautiful.

"I love making love to you, Lauren." Kyle lightly kissed her again.

Both Dark and Serena sensed the couple's warm feelings for each other—but they also sensed the presence of others lurking about outside. Several people had quietly driven up the overgrown drive to behind the old barn. Both Dark and Serena watched as several other young men, each a little older than Kyle, entered the old barn quietly through a wide missing slat in the siding. They were quite a bit more athletic than typical youths their age. Serena's eyes drew wide as she looked at Dark.

Kyle and Lauren were suddenly startled by someone clearing their throat. The lights of their vehicle suddenly came on, well illuminating the dilapidated space. Kyle looked up wide-eyed at the faces of several people he knew from school and a couple of those who were now attending the small community college a few towns away. They were friends and teammates; and all of them belonging to well-to-do families like Lauren's.

"What have we here?" One of the young men glared at Kyle while pushing a wooden baseball bat through his hands in a sexually mocking kind of motion. The other young men chuckled. All of them brandished similar axes or thick wooden shovel handles as well.

"W-what are you guys doing here?" Kyle stammered.

"Mr. McCall asked us to keep an eye on you, Lauren. Good thing too. It would be a shame if some hick redneck tried to rape you—you know, all the way out here."

"Get out!" Lauren glared.

"Oh, it's a little late to be making demands, Punkin'."

Two of the bigger guys unceremoniously took hold of the unclothed Kyle and dragged him to his feet. Lauren pulled part of the large picnic blanket over herself.

"Leave him alone, Daren!"

"Oh, so *now* you want to talk to me? You never return my texts or voicemail. And now I find out that *this* is the reason?!" Daren poked the end of his bat into one of Kyle's barely-there pecs. He looked down at Kyle's still firm and slickly wet tall-standing male. "We date for a whole year, then some skinny dweeb long-dicks you, and suddenly we're over? Is that it?"

"We were over a long time ago, Daren," she fumed.

"We're over when *I say* 'we're over'." His eyes glared at her with a stare that was part of the reason she'd left the guy in the first place. He could be really nice—to her—but he totally creeped her out with the way he treated other people when he

got that look in his eyes. “Keep her away from us,” Daren ordered two of the other guys.

“What are you going to do?” Lauren started to get up but was pushed back down on to the blanket. She tried again to get back up, but she wasn’t going to be any match for either of the two burly guys keeping her put.

“Stetson, looks like you need to be taught a lesson.” Daren spun the bat in his hand. “I told you to stay away from my girlfriend.”

“She’s *not* your girlfriend,” Kyle shot back, now being held in the grips of two burly teens from the football squad.

An odd tone rose in Daren’s voice, like it was half nervous and half distant. “N-Not, not my—girlfriend? You don’t know what you’re talking about.” There was an odd quiver in Daren’s voice.

Kyle now saw the look in Daren’s eyes, the one Lauren had told him about. It sent a clammy shiver over Kyle’s skin; like he was staring into the face of someone who was no longer home. It was like a wild animal.

“S-she’s; she *is* my girlfriend! Lauren *loves* me!”

“Daren, we can talk about this,” Kyle assured nervously.

“Yea. Yea. S-sure we can. RIGHT NOW!”

In a quick motion, the muscular youth let out a savage yell, his bat now in full swing leveled straight for the head of the unclothed teen—

Lauren screamed, closing her eyes!

But the wooden weapon was suddenly still—and unmoving.

The once speeding bat in full swing now hovered completely still, mere inches from the side of Kyle’s head. Kyle had cringed expecting more pain than he’d ever known, but the bat had just abruptly stopped. Like it was frozen in mid air.

And now Kyle could see why, as he slowly opened his eyes.

Daren was suddenly aware of someone standing right next to him; that someone's hand had gripped the bat with one hand just above his own two hands. The unknown someone's grip now held the bat still and motionless. Daren tried to jerk the wooden weapon free, but, in the man's grip, it just wouldn't move, like it was stuck in a steel vise. He tugged heavily on it until the base of the bat's grip suddenly moved, striking him squarely in the forehead, dazing him and sending the big teen to the ground, right onto his butt.

The unknown stranger twirled the bat in his one hand like the heavy club was nothing more than a drumstick. He narrowly eyed the two stocky guys holding Kyle.

The tip of the bat stopped spinning and now pointed at the two of them.

"Let him go," the stranger ordered. There was an authority to his voice that none of the older teens had ever heard before. They could *feel* he meant business. Both quickly released Kyle who then ducked behind this new stranger, just as Daren was beginning to get to his feet, his hand soothing the light bump on his forehead.

"Get dressed," Dark ordered over his shoulder to Kyle. The teen didn't argue. He quickly made his way back to Lauren as both began finding their clothes.

Daren finally pulled himself onto his feet again, standing in front of his five senior high school and freshman college friends. He reached out and abruptly took an axe handle from one of them standing beside him. He lifted the end of the handle, pointing its blunt end at the stranger's face. "You're fucking dead, asshole!"

Dark just stared at the older teen, saying nothing.

"Who the hell are you!?" Daren demanded.

"Karma."

“Huh?”

Two of Daren’s friends exchanged some uneasy glances.

“This would have killed Kyle; as hard as you were swinging it.” Dark held up the bat. “Is that what you wanted. To kill someone?”

Daren glared at him.

There was something unsettled about the teen. His feelings were jumbled; unstable. Like his mind was heading in several different directions all at once. Part of Dark was suddenly taking pity on the poor guy; but another part of him recognized the danger.

“Fuck you!” Daren blurted out of his jumbled feelings.

“You’re off your medication, aren’t you?” Dark asked.

“Fuck!” The teen glared at him. It was none of his damn business. Those stupid doctors didn’t know what the fuck they were talking about anyway. There was nothing wrong with him. He didn’t need their fucking meds.

The teen lifted the axe handle with both hands taking a step forward and began to bring it down—hard.

The end of Dark’s bat flashed with blinding speed and struck the young man quickly, bruising a place beneath his under arm with the sound of cracking bone. The heavy-muscled arm of the young man suddenly went numb and then fell limp. He fumbled the axe handle, which Dark caught easily, adding the weapon to his wooden arsenal. Both bat and now axe handle twirled between his fingers momentarily and then solidly stopped, each gripped firmly in both of his hands as if nun chucks in the hands of a martial master.

“I can’t move my arm!” Daren suddenly realized. He couldn’t feel it either. He’d heard something crack but he couldn’t feel it!

“What’d you do to me?!”

“You’d better get to a doctor. They might be able to fix it—or not.”

"WHAT'D YOU FUCKING DO TO ME?!" Daren yelled. But he was already being pulled back by his friends. All of them had seen the stranger expertly spinning the wooden weapons and none of them had any desire to tangle with someone who was moving bats and axe handles as smooth and fast he'd just been. His attack on Daren had been like lightning.

Daren was still yelling and holding his useless arm when his friends stuffed him through the hole in the wall and back into the super-cab truck out in the pouring rain, and then drove away.

Both Kyle and Lauren watched a beautiful brunette in nice but slightly dirtied clothing approach the tall, dark stranger.

"I guess we'll need to find another place to stay," she smiled at him. And then she kissed his cheek. Dark tossed the bat and axe handle away. He turned to look at the two quickly dressed teens.

Both Lauren's and Kyle's eyes had drawn wide, and both were holding on to each other.

"What?" Dark asked, watching them.

"Oh, my God," Lauren blinked.

Kyle pulled Lauren closer to himself. He stood amazed while staring at the stunning couple. Even slightly grimy the pair were incredibly beautiful.

"You're gods." Kyle was still taken by how beautiful they looked.

Dark's puzzled gaze met Serena's.

4

Christian finally exited the pool. Both he and Kayla had been chatting and even making out behind the waterfall with a few of the other couples who were doing the same thing. Unquestionably hot in what she was wearing, Kayla was also unbelievably horny behind the waterfall.

As the two of them kissed in the water like the other couples, another couple was clearly doing more than just making out behind the rush of falling water. Christian and Kayla, along with the few other couples hidden behind the short falls watched in rapt voyeurism as the pair steamily kissed and pretentiously fucked beneath the water until it was clear that both had been thoroughly satisfied. Then all of them went back to making out after the couple had finished and moved on from behind the grotto.

But now Kayla was all over Christian behind the waterfall. The way she was moving herself against him, Christian could

have easily dropped her bikini bottoms under the water and also fucked the woman senseless with everyone watching; but he had an odd reticence about doing so—he couldn't put his finger on it. He actually found himself not all that interested in her for some reason. Not because she wasn't incredibly hot, she was astonishingly beautiful. But maybe Colton's words and the way Kayla was acting now tossed more than a few red flags onto Christian's playing field. He led a very aroused and very frustrated Kayla out from behind the waterfall and then left her mingling with some of her other friends in the pool.

Colton walked up to Christian while he was drying off with a thick pool towel. The white material of Christian's wet swimsuit hid almost nothing of the exceptionally well-packaged, still half-aroused guy beneath them. Christian wrapped himself in the plush towel.

"If looks could kill, you'd be in the morgue right now."

"I'm trying not to look at her." Christian frowned.

"Something happen between you two?"

"No. I think that's the problem. She wants something to happen. But, she's my boss. It doesn't feel right for some reason."

"I get it. If that's the case, you'd better stay close to me, Christian," Colton warned. "Otherwise, she'll have the whole scene hating you by the end of the evening."

"Really?" Christian looked surprised.

"You might want to start looking for another job next week."

"You're not serious?" Christian froze for a moment. He had a sudden sinking feeling in his gut.

"I am, unfortunately. That's Kayla. You just jilted the queen bee."

"So, if she's a friend of your family, why are you helping me?" Christian tried to pat-dry the wet material of his

swimsuit with the thick towel still wrapped around him. Like a wet t-shirt, it still wasn't hiding much of anything about him at the moment.

"She's a friend of Mia's. Don't ask me why."

"I see. I should probably get dressed and go then." The sinking feeling in his gut had him wanting to just leave now.

"I don't know," Colton quickly countered. "You should stick around. Kayla's not the only woman here. Let me take you around and introduce you to the rest of my friends. A lot of us already know Kayla all too well. If everyone sees that you're my friend, you'll be fine."

"I guess I should have stayed home, like I was planning to." Christian sighed unhappily, pulling away his towel.

"No. Don't worry about it. You would have only delayed the inevitable. Besides, Kayla might be shooting daggers at you, but wearing those," Colton glanced at the semi-aroused bulge coming from Christian's still not quite opaque damp swimsuit, "I'm betting there are quite a few women here would probably love to take you home tonight."

"Nice." Christian's frown fell into a grimace.

5

Dark shot a curious stare at Kyle. “Gods? What are you talking about?”
“You do look like gods,” Lauren agreed.
“Why are you calling us gods?” Serena asked.

“Aren’t you?” Kyle was still pulling on his t-shirt.

The comely pair shrugged, almost in unison, curiosity written all over their faces.

Kyle approached the couple holding out his hand. “I’m Kyle Stetson, and this my girlfriend, Lauren McCall.” He shook hands with each of them. His handshake was firm. Lauren was standing beside him, but she didn’t extend her hand. “Lauren, you’re being rude,” he nudged her.

“I’m sorry. I don’t mean to be,” she began. “But people like you are poison.” She kept her arms to herself. “But it’s nice to meet you. And thank you—for rescuing us. There’s no telling

what Daren would have done to us tonight if you hadn't stepped in to help."

Dark nodded.

"Poison?" Serena offered, curious now.

"She's right," Kyle began. "My dad died trying to become like you. Your blood killed him."

"I'm sorry," Dark offered.

What Kyle said to them seemed to spark a distant memory within Dark—a memory that replayed in another tongue, Hebrew:

"I don't believe it. It's true. You. You're one of them; aren't you?!"

"One of who, doctor?"

"Don't bullshit me, Sir. I know what I just saw."

"We need this young man alive."

"I hope to God whatever you just did to this boy didn't curse him for all eternity."

"Me too, doctor. Me too."

Serena felt and watched the shard of memory play briefly within Dark's thoughts. She suddenly discovered that she knew Hebrew as well. She didn't know how or why.

"Yea, me too." Kyle frowned, looking at the dirty floor of the old barn.

Dark felt Kyle's feelings. To him, Kyle now seemed torn inside. Angry about the gods over his father's death but now also very relieved that one of them had just saved him.

"You should find better friends," Dark remarked. It was his way of reminding the teen in a roundabout way that he'd just saved his life. "Daren's not playing with a full deck."

"He's also not a friend, in case that wasn't obvious." Kyle quipped, his tone a little sarcastic. "Thank you for helping us."

"We're sorry about your father, Kyle." Serena's empathy was instinctively all over Kyle, soothing his feelings. Kyle was grateful, but he also had a lot of anger with these 'gods', whoever they were.

Kyle nodded and offered a thankful smile, feeling less upset about meeting the very people he'd wished had been damned to hell for taking his dad.

Both of the gods turned as if in unison and began walking toward the back corner of the barn.

"Wait, where are you going?" Lauren asked.

"Away." Dark spoke over his shoulder. They needed to move on. The hideout was useless now.

"But—it's pouring outside."

"Can't help it." The pair continued to move toward the back of the barn with both Lauren and Kyle following.

"You can't just leave in a storm like this."

"The rain won't last long. We're waterproof. Besides, I think we could both use a nice shower anyway." He smirked, lifting a large forest-green duffle on a strap from the corner of the barn where he and Serena had made their own little kind of nest.

"But they'll find you," Lauren protested. "Especially here."

Both Dark and Serena paused in gathering their things. "What are you talking about?" Dark shouldered the duffle. "Is someone looking for us?"

"The whole state is looking for people like you." Kyle added.

"Why?" Serena lifted her small pack over one shoulder.

Kyle exchanged a curious glance with Lauren.

"You two don't really know where you are, do you?"

Both of the gods shook their heads slowly.

Lauren's mouth opened slightly, as if in deep surprise.

"You know this is Ritzville, right?" Kyle asked.

Dark shook his head slowly. "What's Ritzville?"

"An isolation community." Kyle said flatly.

"What's that?" Serena asked.

"Someone is 'isolating' these gods?" Dark was intrigued but at the same time could feel the trepidation of the two teens.

"We're 'Auschwitz' for people like you."

Somehow Dark knew exactly what Kyle meant. He'd spent time in a place called Auschwitz. The memories flashed briefly in his mind. He'd led a raid on the prison camp, just before the Allies arrived. His people had kept the Nazi's from destroying evidence and murdering even more people than they already had as American and British forced closed in on the horrific stalag. The thought of a place like that even existing now drew up an angry resolve within him.

Serena sensed Dark's feelings and memories. "This, Auschwitz, what do they do there? With people like us?" Her brow raised at the teen.

"No one knows. But they don't ever come back out."

"I want to see it," Dark felt himself say. It was like the voice coming from within him was autonomic. Part of him wanted to run away from the area; but there was something within him that needed to stay, to see what this place was all about.

"We always pass it on the way to my place." Kyle continued.

"Then I guess you're driving," Dark informed with Serena giving him a worried feeling and glance.

Dark and Serena rode in the back of Kyle's Cadillac SUV. The black crossover was very nice, but not exactly the kind of vehicle either of them were expecting a poorer-looking teen to have.

The rain continued to pour as the four of them drove down the splashing wet two-lane highway with the SUV's wipers on full. Through the wet glass, Dark could still easily see the

multiple tall, heavy chain link perimeter fences topped with curled razor wire. Several acres had been cordoned off and populated with two and three-story apartment buildings. The place reminded Dark of a kind of retirement community with tall trees and amenity buildings. It hardly looked like the Nazi concentration camps that still lingered in his memory.

"How many people live here?" Dark asked as they drove past the site, the lights of its guard towers well visible in the distance.

"Don't know," Kyle quipped. "Fifty. A couple hundred maybe; no one knows. We see people in vans going in all the time. No one comes out. Ever."

"That doesn't sound good." Dark frowned. He could see the guards walking the perimeter of their towers, sheltered from the rain by the eaves of the tower rooftops. No one was visible outside. He did see some lights on within the various buildings. Apparently people were home within the apartments. He could feel some people living within the compound, but not many. None of the felt unusual. They all felt mundane, like everyone else.

It was a few more miles before they turned off the highway and onto a tall poplar tree-lined driveway that led to a tree-surrounded homestead in the middle of what were normally very arid fields all around them for miles and miles.

"Is this where your family lives, Kyle?" Serena asked, looking at the well-lit area. "It looks like you have a farm here."

"Barely," Kyle quipped with a frown.

Kyle pulled the SUV across an expansive and nicely paved parking lot and then parked under a thick wooden beamed carport with a white metal roof that matched the large farmhouse home next to it. The rain was just trickling down now for the moment. All of them exited the vehicle under the carport. Dark looked around the empty homestead with gifted vision. It sported several tall metal grain silos, several more

modern looking equipment garages and an out building that looked like a nice farm office.

"What kind of farm is this?" Serena asked.

"A dead one," Kyle scowled. He turned and made his way toward the house. All of them watched Kyle enter the almost new farmhouse by himself.

"What's up with your boyfriend?" Dark asked Lauren.

"Kyle's under a lot of stress, Mr. Dark. I'm sorry. His family's farm is about to go under."

"Why?" Serena asked.

"I think it's because no one really knows what they're doing. After Kyle's dad died a few years ago, everything just started to go down hill. Meredith, that's his mom, didn't know how to run a checking account, let alone a business, let alone a farm, especially one this size. They own one of the largest spreads in Adams County. Some parcels are all the way over by Moses Lake."

"Where's Meredith now?" Serena looked at the modern and seemingly new buildings.

"Living with her sister, in town. She never even comes out here anymore. She just wants to sell the thing and be done with it."

"Why doesn't she?"

Lauren pointed toward the house.

"Kyle?" Dark asked.

Lauren nodded. "Kyle's dad had a will and left both of them with equal shares of the corporation. The corporate bylaws were pretty tight. Meredith can't sell anything without Kyle's approval, not even her own shares."

"So, I take it Kyle doesn't want her to sell?" Serena asked, looking at the silos and other combine equipment parked under large steel carports.

"He's just like his dad. He's a farmer. A corporate one, but a farmer nonetheless. He wants to keep the farm in the family. Like his granddad did with his dad."

"So why doesn't he just buy her out?"

"She won't sell it to him. She doesn't want it and she doesn't want him to have it either, for some reason."

"Huh?" Dark raised an eyebrow.

"Why?" Serena asked.

"I'm not sure myself. Maybe it's because she a lying vindictive bitch. But you'd need to ask her."

"I take it you two have had words?" Serena asked. But she could already sense Lauren's feelings. Lauren didn't actually hate Kyle's mom, but she didn't like her—not at all.

"She has three lawsuits pending against the farm, trying to bust the will and bankrupt the estate. Unfortunately, it's working. Kyle can't keep up with the legal bills. He's almost broke."

Dark sighed, shaking his head, fuming.

"He's almost broke?" Serena asked. "Meredith is part of the estate too, right?"

Lauren nodded.

"You need money to file lawsuits. Where is *she* getting money?"

"Don't know. Kyle's wondered the same thing."

"Another corporate farmer, I'd bet," Dark offered. "Someone who wants to muscle in on the estate and take over, I'm sure."

"That's what we were thinking too, Mr. Dark. But whoever is helping her is staying out of sight. I don't know why."

"We should go inside," Serena offered. She didn't know what it was, but something inside of her didn't want to be staying outside. Dark was feeling it too.

Dark closed and locked the kitchen side door after all of them were inside. Serena immediately went to the windows and drew the curtains, making sure all of the doors and windows were locked.

"What are you doing?" Lauren followed the pair through the lower floor of the nicely furnished but rather empty and somewhat dusty home. She looked out the front door window just as a pair of county sheriff's vehicles were pulling into the homestead.

Kyle moped into the kitchen. Lauren went to him. "The sheriff's outside."

"I saw. I'm sure Daren's dad even called the mayor as soon as he found out."

"What do we do?" Lauren asked.

Dark approached Kyle. "They probably just want to get a statement from you, Kyle. Don't let them bully you. Be polite, answer their questions, but don't offer to go anywhere with them and don't offer to let them into the house or anywhere else on the property to look around. If they start giving you trouble, ask them to leave. You may have to ask them to leave a few times, but eventually they will."

"What are you, a cop?" Kyle asked.

"You should do what he says, Kyle," Serena encouraged.

"Alright."

"You go too, Lauren," Dark instructed.

The girl nodded.

When the two teens had left for the home's front porch, Serena smoothed her hand over his bicep. "I saw what you did with that bat, and the axe handle. You saved Kyle's life."

Dark nodded, listening to the conversation the kids were having outside with the deputies.

"I saw your memory. You were in the military? That doctor called you sir. You're an officer?"

"Apparently." He nodded.

Lauren stood next to Kyle, holding onto his arm.

"... and Daren was hurt pretty bad, Kyle. You want to tell me what happened?"

"Lauren and I were in the old abandoned barn talking."

"Talking?" the officer asked with a smirk.

"Yea," Kyle replied firmly. "Talking."

"Alright," the deputy nodded. The old abandoned barn was a favorite teen makeout spot. He'd been there himself more than a few times, but that was several years back; before he had a wife and kid.

"A couple of Daren's goons grabbed me and Daren was about to split my head wide open with a baseball bat."

"And then what happened."

"Some guy showed up and broke it up. I don't know who he was, he looked like some bum who'd moved into the barn to get out of the rain."

"A transient? Had you ever seen this guy before?"

"No. Never seen him before. He's the one who hit Daren."

"You said Daren's friends grabbed you, why?" the Deputy continued.

"Because they were going to teach him a lesson," Lauren butted in. "Daren thinks we're still dating. But we broke up last year."

The deputy tapped out her statement into his police tablet.

"So according to you two, Daren and his friends started this?"

"That's exactly what happened." Lauren assured.

"I think I'll have a look around," the other Deputy turned to walk around the large porch that circled the home.

"Actually, I'd prefer that you didn't, Sheriff. No offense."

"Oh?" the deputy stopped. "Why would you mind if we looked around?"

“Would you like me to call my high-priced Seattle attorney so you can ask him the same question?” Kyle lifted his cell phone from his pocket, his thumb hovering over the speed dial.

The sheriff scowled. He folded his arms but didn’t say anything and didn’t move from his spot on the porch now.

The deputy who’d been interviewing Kyle wasn’t all that interested in looking around. It was still raining and his shift was almost over. He didn’t want to go into overtime because of some stupid adolescent lovers’ quarrel. Besides, growing up in the tiny town, he knew all about Kyle and his family. The kid wasn’t exactly a problem—unlike Daren Wilson, a well-known troublemaker in the county who had a rap sheet as long as his arm. The only reason the asshole wasn’t in Walla Walla already was because the Wilson family had grower money—and lots of it.

“Alright, Kyle. I think I have enough here to complete my report. You might want to have that ‘high-priced Seattle attorney’ of yours file a restraining order.” The deputy handed him his card and then nodded as the two of them left the covered porch and stepped into the rain.

6

Christian slipped the newly cleaned pan into the cupboard where it looked like it was supposed to go. He finished drying his hands and hung up the dishtowel, nicely folded where he'd found it.

"Thanks for offering to help." Colton finished drying his hands. He leaned against the counter appreciating the look of the nicely cleaned kitchen.

"No problem. I'm usually not the party type, but all of your friends are really nice. I had a great time."

"The invitation is still open for the next one."

"Thanks. I'll be looking forward to it. Kayla coming to the next one as well?"

"If she behaves herself. She's been a friend of the family for a long time, Christian. This isn't the first time Kayla's been in a snit with other friends. She'll badmouth you for a while, like she did tonight. Eventually she'll get over it."

"I guess I'm headed for the unemployment line now." Christian frowned.

"Probably. I'm sorry about that," Colton commiserated.

Christian nodded. He looked around the large and freshly cleaned luxury kitchen. "Well, I guess I'd better get going. It's almost 3:00."

"It's a bit of drive back to Phoenix. You should just stay here tonight." Colton held onto the edge of the stone counter with his broad-muscled arms beside him. Even though it bulged his thick chest, standing the way he was made him look a lot less imposing than the guy really was.

"Thanks, Colton, but I didn't bring any other clothes or anything to sleep in."

"You wouldn't—actually need, anything to sleep in." Colton's eyes met Christian's.

Christian breathed a sudden nervous smile. "I wouldn't want to crash on your couch, Colton. I mean, it looks comfortable—"

"I wouldn't make you sleep on the couch, Christian. You could stay in my room. With me." Colton was suddenly sporting a shy handsome smile.

"So, we'd be sleeping in your room, with nothing on?" Christian now grinned slightly with a raised eyebrow. It wasn't the first time he'd been hit on by another guy.

Colton nodded and then pulled his eyes away from Christian's.

Colton's demeanor was oddly attractive. He was like this thickly muscled, well-cut guy, imposing to anyone, but at the moment, he was managing to look shy and vulnerable. It was a really different demeanor for him. Handsome and cute, actually. The fact was, Christian had been interested in the guy from the moment both had talked in the pool area with Kayla. It was odd. He'd never been interested in other guys before. In

a lot of ways, Colton was like himself. A bit of an introvert, but someone who could host and entertain a party crowd as well.

"So—what exactly would you and I be doing in your room?" Christian pushed off from the counter, a grin slipping across his face.

Colton cutely looked up at Christian. "Making out?"

"The two of us? Making out. In your room. With nothing on?"

Colton nodded, shyly.

Christian's grin broadened into a smile. "I'm pretty sure I've never made out with another guy before." Kissing another guy was something that had never seriously crossed Christian's mind. But, for some reason, the thought was totally crossing it now. He didn't exactly know why. Colton was a beautiful guy; there was no doubt about that. His handsome face had full chiseled lips that drew into a dimpled smile, and deep green eyes with a tossed surfer haircut. And that imposing cut frame of his that Christian had seen earlier in the evening splashing in the pool had easily made every other guy envious and given all of the women fantasies.

But looking at Colton right now, how timid he looked with his cautious smile, wasn't exactly turning Christian off. Christian felt a twinge of desire move warmly through his jewels that made his male warmly pulse beneath his shorts and swimsuit. That feeling easily happened with women like Kayla, not guys like Colton.

"I just thought—" Colton shrugged, still bashfully, "it would be hot; you know, you and I; I mean, if you wanted to."

"You're—ah," Christian walked up to him. His eyes met with Colton's, "not my typical date."

"Really?" Colton watched with some surprise and hopefulness as Christian approached him. "I would have thought that guys would be asking you out all over the place."

"They do. I turn them down—usually."

"Usually?" Colton lifted his glance toward Christian who now stood in front of him.

Christian nodded. "Do you ask out a lot of guys?"

"I've been out with a couple," Colton admitted, straightening up in front of Christian. "None I've actually spent the night with. Truth is, I've been wanting to ask *you* out all night. Since the moment I saw you talking with Kayla."

Christian nodded with a smile. "I noticed you were kind of following me around, even after Kayla left."

"I was, Christian. Trying to get up my nerve, actually. It's just—you're a really nice guy; and nice looking."

"You're cute. Nice looking too, I mean."

"Cute is fine," Colton assured with another of his great smiles.

Christian moved closer and placed his hands on Colton's chest. It was a little different, touching another guy like this. He watched Colton close his eyes feeling Christian's palms moving over his shirt—a shirt that Colton now lifted off to feel Christian's hands move along the bare skin of his wide pecs. Colton's nipples were both already tight and tall against Christian's palms. Colton breathed a soft rippled breath feeling his heartbeat skip and jump.

"I've—never touched a guy—I mean, like this before." Christian breathed a smile.

"You do it well," Colton assured, taking a breath that told Christian his touch was having its intended affect. Colton could feel himself growing firm under his shorts with Christian's exploring hands.

Colton moved his palms over Christian's build, feeling the firm muscles and ridges of his chest and shoulders. Colton's fingers set to work on his nipples, tightening them quickly. Christian lifted his own shirt off and tossed it onto the counter on top of Colton's. He felt Colton's hands moving warmly over his own deeply cut pecs, following the path of the dragon

inked across them. He felt Colton tease his now bare nipples again making them firm and thick. But Colton touching him like this was leaving more than just Christian's nipples firm and thick. The same thing was happening inside his swimsuit under his shorts as well.

Christian moved closer until there wasn't any personal space between the two of them. Each embraced the other, their hands exploring each other's skin while their lips met cautiously, then with a new warmth. Christian was suddenly captivated by Colton's lips. *Jesus the guy could kiss.* Kayla had nothing on this guy. Colton's kiss sent shivers down Christian's body and straight into his groin pushing his male to quickly fill out long and solid. Jesus his lips were talented. He had no idea kissing another guy could turn him on like this.

Sure, Kayla had revved his motor in the pool, to the point that he needed to hang out in the water to let things simmer down under his all but transparent swimsuit. But Colton was making him feel the same way, maybe even a little hotter.

"Ohh, Colt, man you kiss," Christian breathed, his pulse thumping in his chest.

"I like your lips." Colton tasted Christian's again. "Do you want to see my room?"

Christian grinned against Colton's lips. Christian had used the same line on a couple of women in the past while in college and now Colton had just used it on him. "Is it safe?" he smirked.

"Not with you in it, it won't be," Colton admitted.

Colton locked his fingers in Christian's and led him shirtless through the large single-story fine home to a wide hallway ornately furnished and then to a large bedroom, closing the door. The room looked professionally decorated but still had the typical telling signs that it was the home of a college-age guy who had lived and slept here most of his life. Christian was intrigued by Colton's space, but at the moment,

Colton's skin was sliding against his and the thing that was foremost on Christian's mind was having Colton's sculpted lips moving over his again.

Christian's fingers moved through the back of Colton's thick hair as the two eagerly kissed next to his bed. He felt Colton's hand move around to the back of his shorts, gripping Christian's ass and pulling their fronts together.

Feeling Colt's skin gliding over his gave Christian an intoxicating feeling. Colton was not just a good kisser, the way the guy moved, how his fingers touched and wandered over Christian, were tantalizing. Christian's pulse raced while wrapped in Colt's arms as both made out in the dim light of the room.

Christian soon felt Colton's fingers between them, unzipping Christian's shorts until they fell to the floor. It didn't take Christian long to have Colton's on the floor next to his. Both now easily felt the thick firmness of the other beneath their thin swimsuits.

"Jeeze, Christian," Colton kissed while Christian pressed his swimsuit firm against the hard bulge pushing out from within Colton's. "You know you're hung like a stallion."

"You should talk," Christian's fingers were already slipping into the front of Colton's designer swimsuit feeling his thick cock that he now brought straight up so that Colton was jetting well out of the swim briefs. The guy wasn't small either.

Colton carefully unlaced Christian's suit, pulling the cord completely off and then freeing Christian's huge hard male that was now mostly exposed from the 'V' opening in the front his trunks. Christian pushed Colton's suit down to his upper thighs so he could wrap his hard cock around Colton's.

"I didn't know a guy could feel so nice," Colton breathed with a pounding pulse into Christian's open pout.

"Yea," Christian kissed feeling Colton's thick rod sliding next to his.

For long minutes the two of them stood making out with their hands exploring each other's full muscles, smooth firm asses and hard throbbing shafts.

Christian felt Colton's hands slip over his ass under his swimsuit, pulling their fronts tighter together while their hips rocked softly against each other. Colton peeled Christian's suit down to his thighs, then pushed the square-cut trunks to the floor. Colton watched as Christian left their embrace to crouch and pull Colton's own suit off as well. Colton closed his eyes feeling Christian slowly kiss his way back up the inside of Colt's smooth built thigh. His lips then played around his trimmed wide male. Colton's fingers moved through Christian's hair; he groaned with new feelings as Christian's full pout teased him all around his jewels and tall standing shaft.

Christian had teased a few women like this, but he'd never really thought about kissing another guy like this. The new experience drew up swells of emotion from deep within him listening to how he was making Colton feel. He brought the tip of Colt's wide tip to his lips, kissing him with teases, then pulling his thick helmet into his mouth. Colton's thighs trembled with the huge sensation as Christian pulled as much of him as he could into this mouth. He didn't really know how it would affect Colton. He'd never done anything with another guy before. It felt good to hear Colton exhale an audible rippled breath with him filling his mouth. "God, Christian, that's nice—" he complimented.

Christian's lips then climbed Colt's abs and pecs, and were finally over his lips once again as Colton held him with nothing at all between them.

Making out with Christian like this had brought Colton so hard it felt like his cock was going to erupt. Christian's shaft felt just as hard against his skin, but the guy was a lot taller and wider than he was. Although Colton wasn't small, he seemed

that way next to Christian—Christian's aroused male was intimidating. Still, he was pretty sure Christian didn't care about Colton's size. His cock was all over Colton's as both made out.

Christian felt himself being backed against Colt's bed. He fell backward onto the bedding with Colt moving over him. He could feel Colt's thick hard shaft sliding against the inside of this thigh while his own cock bumped against Colt's abs. Christian's heart raced and pounded in his chest while both locked themselves into a superheated, hip-rocking makeout.

Their excited kisses soon had both young men gasping for breath. Christian felt like he was running a marathon as he rolled Colton beneath him. A light glow of perspiration now covered his body, as well as Colton's as both kissed and moved and rocked in unison. Although his first time with another guy, Christian felt lost in Colton's embrace. He needed to fuck Colton, badly.

"I can't—believe what—you do to me." Christian kissed, his chest filling so deeply he could barely talk.

Colton wrapped his thighs firmly around Christian's, breathing just as hard. But Colton could sense something in the way Christian was moving now against his skin, the way his hips rocked.

"You're gonna make me come, Colt." Christian kissed in a whimper.

"It's okay. I want you to."

"I—I can't hold it." Christian's hips rocked more slowly now, like he was trying to hold back and not explode.

"Just let it go."

"I'll come all over you." Christian breathed heavily.

Colton began kissing Christian harder. Christian's hips began rocking more heatedly again; his long thick shaft slipping softly against Colton's.

Maybe it had been all of the hot kissing with Kayla in the pool that had warmed Christian up, but right now it was Colton's hard body that had pushed Christian quickly to the edge.

"Ohhh, Jeeze, Colt!" Christian exhaled deeply through their kiss. "I can't—"

Colton felt Christian's body tense aggressively over the top of his. He'd never been with another guy going off before. But he wanted to feel Christian go off—badly. Colton wanted to make Christian feel ecstasy while wrapped around *himself* and their lips locked around each other's. Colton felt Christian's body tighten harder around his own.

"OH. GOD. COLT!" Christian whimpered softly but with the intensity of a shout.

Colton felt Christian's huge rod suddenly tense and his cock pulse heavily; he felt the sudden wet warmth spilling onto his skin between them, making their skin slick.

"AHHH! UHHH!" Christian continued to cry out in soft whimpers against his lips. "COLT!"

Colton drew Christian's lips hard against his own as Christian's hips and ass rocked in ecstasy over his.

"Ohhh! Uhhh!" Christian exhaled deeply, his hips rocking more softly as he felt the final tremors of the huge release that had just ripped through his thick body. Christian pressed his hips, his rock solid and now slick wet cock against Colt as the massive release slowly subsided.

After long moments, Christian lifted his chest from Colt's embrace, still rocking his hips softly, his thighs still wrapped around Colt's.

"You okay?" Colton asked looking at Christian, the warm wet scent of Christian's spill rising between the two of them.

Christian nodded quickly, catching his breath, feeling the deep relief of his pent-up release and the slick wet splash

between them. "Ohhh, Jeeze. I think all that making out with Kayla kind of overloaded me. Sorry, Colt."

"Don't apologize. I want you all over me."

Christian lifted himself back from Colton's ripped body, sitting up fully with his thick thighs spread far apart over Colton's thighs, the wetness of his spill glistening all over both his and Colton's abs. Christian's tall, thick and rock-solid shaft towered well past his navel.

"I—I can't believe—you just made me—wow." Christian exhaled still breathing heavily and still reveling in the deeply sweet release. He lifted his thick arms, locking his fingers behind his head giving Colton an eyeful of his glistening hot body.

With Christian sitting up the way he was, Colton's eyes feasted on his stunning form. "You're beautiful Christian." Colton's hands gripped warmly over Christian's smooth thick thighs and then over his still rock-hard and impressively tall thick shaft that Colton still felt belonged on a steed instead of a guy.

Christian returned the favor by teasing Colton's own male causing Colt to close his eyes and buck softly beneath him. A moment later Colton felt the tip of his cock moving wet and warm with sudden shoots of deep pleasure bolting through his jewels and down the inside of his thighs, curling his toes.

Colton opened his eyes to see Christian filling his mouth with his thick male again. Something Christian did with his lips and tongue exploded a sudden wave a deep pleasure through Colton and his hips now rocked wildly.

"HUUUH! CHRISTIAN!" Colton felt himself calling out unexpectedly.

The way Christian was spread over Colt's legs kept him from spreading his thighs. He wanted to spread them with what Christian was doing to him, but another wave of deep

pleasure was rocketing through his cock and into his groin making him vocalize each sensation again and again.

“AHHAH! Christian! GOD!” Colton winced with each shoot of intense ecstatic pain. “What are you — doing to me?!” Colton breathed heavily now with dire pleasure, his hips rocking wildly. Whatever Christian was doing to him inside his mouth was killing Colton with intense feeling and emotion he didn’t want to end. But Christian’s talent was also quickly bringing Colt to his edge. He tried to stall it, tried to fight it, but he could feel himself already leaking into Christian’s mouth.

After how Colt had just made Christian feel, Christian felt he needed to return the feeling. Christian had never even seen another guy hard before, but seeing Colton’s smoothly shaved heavy jewels and thick male against his neatly trimmed pubic had been much more alluring than Christian realized. Taking Colton into his mouth had done exactly what Christian had hoped it would. With his tongue and lips moving softly, wetly, teasingly over Colt’s thick shaft filling his mouth, Christian could sense Colt’s desire building. His hips were tossing and rocking wildly now as Christian tormented his cock between his lips.

Colton couldn’t hold back any longer. Arching his back, a suddenly wave of detonating emotion shot through Colton’s body as his cock throbbed with passion, spilling and shooting waves of his pleasure into Christian’s mouth. Colt breathed out Christian’s name while he clawed at the sheets, his hips bucking uncontrollably.

Christian unrelentingly drew every ounce of spill from Colton’s shaft. Even after Colton was finished expending himself, Christian continued; torturing him mercilessly, making Colton whimper with ecstatic pain, begging Christian to stop!

Finally Colton felt Christian release him; he felt himself slip wetly from Christian's lips feeling well drained and even more hard than when Christian had started.

"You okay?" Christian asked, a teasing smirk crossing his lips.

"Do—" Colton took a badly needed breath after being thoroughly tortured. "—do I look okay?" Colt's wide chest was still rising and falling heavily.

"You look you've just been fucked." Christian chuckled, smoothing his hands over Colt's still pinned-together thighs and then gripping Colton's very hard shaft with a gentle squeeze.

"Oh, you think?" Colton finally released the sheets from his grip, sighing deeply.

Christian lowered himself back into Colton's embrace as the two of them covered themselves with the sheets. Still warmly kissing in rapt release, both snuggled kissing until each fell deeply asleep within each other's arms.

7

By early morning the rain had finally stopped as a cool wet dew settled over the tiny rural town.

Both Dark and Kyle had risen with the dawn and now Dark was getting a grand tour of the farm as Kyle led him through a massive warehouse-sized metal garage that housed several neatly parked combine harvest tractors and other larger and smaller pieces of power farming equipment.

"Your dad was obviously quite the businessman," Dark patted the massive rubber tire of one of the harvesters the two of them were walking by. The tire was taller than they were. "This equipment isn't cheap."

"It was more than just business to him, Mr. Dark. It was his dream. He loved building the company. It's why he was so successful at it."

"I was sorry to hear about what happened, between your dad and my people. Honestly, until yesterday, Serena and I didn't actually know who we were."

"How could you not know who you are?" Kyle stopped walking between two of the massive combines.

"I think—" Dark tried to remember, "there was an accident. We were both caught in some kind of explosion. Neither of us remember much about it. But, we're remembering things again, slowly."

Kyle nodded. "Dad wanted to be like you."

"Why?"

"You're not serious? Look at you."

Dark just listened.

"You're built like Arnold Schwarzenegger. Dad always talked about being better looking. He said mom only married him for his money."

"I take it your mom is pretty?"

"I used to think so."

Dark nodded.

"I'm sorry if I seem like I'm indifferent to people like you."

"You don't," Dark assured.

"The truth is—I—don't really like the gods, Mr. Dark. I'm sure you're smart enough to figure out why."

"I'm sure we're not all bad, Kyle."

"If it wasn't for you I'd still have my dad."

"And if it wasn't for us they'd be putting you in the ground right next to him."

"Yea." Kyle looked Dark in the eye. "Thank you, Mr. Dark. For saving my life. I guess I owe you."

"You don't owe me anything, Kyle. I think that's what I do—help people. You've helped me remember some of my past. That's important to me. Thank *you*."

"You and Miss Serena are more than welcomed to stay here at the house, Mr. Dark—but, I have to tell you, since Ritzville

has an isolation community, you're not safe here. If anyone sees you outside of the camp, they'll throw the two of you in there; and you won't be coming back out. Trust me."

Dark's mind flashed a quick memory. There was a sudden throb in his head.

For a brief moment he watched himself being escorted from an officers club. Then a hood was pulled from his face as he stood among other military people in some kind of prison camp. Then the memory was gone.

"Are you okay?" Kyle watched him steady himself against the equipment.

"Yea—" Dark waited for the dizziness and pain to pass.

"You want to go back inside?"

"I'm fine. I'm just, remembering things again." he nodded at the youth. "You're helping me remember things, Kyle. I think we'll stick around for a few days, at least. If you don't mind."

"I think I'd kind of like that, actually."

Dark placed his hand on Kyle's shoulder, gripping him warmly and giving Kyle a reason to smile back at him.

* * * * *

Christian awoke slowly to whispering in the darkened room. It was still early in the morning and he lifted himself slightly up on one arm trying to see who was talking in hushed tones. He suddenly realized that he was still in Colt's bed and that Colton was whispering to a younger woman sitting on Colton's side of the bed. It didn't take Christian but a moment to realize that Colton was probably whispering to his sister, Mia, who'd obviously walked in on the two of them still sleeping.

Christian flopped back onto his pillow still too tired to worry about who was in the room. Then he heard the door close.

"Hey," he heard Colt's softly masculine voice.

"Mmmm?"

"Sorry about that. I forgot Mia was coming over to help clean up."

"So, our secret's out, huh?" he mumbled, too tired to really care right now.

"Yea, but it wasn't much of a secret. You okay?" Colton asked.

"I will be in another few hours."

Colton drew himself back down under the sheet, snuggling close to Christian's skin.

8

Dark looked out the window of the SUV as the two of them traveled across the arid terrain of Eastern Washington on a mostly empty two-lane road toward some place Kyle had called the Palisades.

"I don't get you people," Dark lamented, looking out at the desolate cliffs of the massive gorge the two of them had descended into.

"Get what?" Kyle asked, their vehicle passing through a dusty dry gulch someone had aptly named Rattlesnake Creek.

"You farm in the desert. At least farm where there's water."

"We have water."

"Right, I saw the canals."

"The government built them almost a century ago, during the Great Depression. They irrigate half the state, that is, when the politicians and environmentalists aren't trying to shut it off and put all of us out of business."

"Business and politics go hand in hand, Kyle. I'm sure your dad knew that."

"Dad hated dealing with the idiots in Seattle and Olympia. They make all of these rules about who can use water and how, but none of them have ever actually lived and worked on this side of the state. They treat us like we're all just a bunch of idiots and rednecks out here. It's not even their water."

"Governments think everything is theirs, Kyle. Give a politician an inch and he'll think he owns a mile. It's the nature of the beast."

"You sound just like my dad."

"Wise man." Dark continued to look out at the desolate terrain. It wasn't long before Kyle pulled the SUV to a stop in the middle of dry canyon when he couldn't drive up the old creek bed any further.

"We'll have to hike up the rest of the way." Kyle exited the vehicle.

"What's out here?" Dark asked.

"You'll see."

The two hiked for close to thirty minutes, moving up into a side canyon, around ragged sage brush, and even a few snakes Dark could feel moving in and around the warm rock-sandy ground.

"Dad used to bring me out here with his friend Landis." Kyle walked up to the side of the tall cliff face; it was slightly sloped and well over a hundred feet tall.

"Who's Landis?" Dark asked, walking up to the rock face and out of the sun into the shade of the cliff.

"You mean was. The government took him after dad died."

"To Auschwitz?"

Kyle nodded. "Mom turned him in to the authorities the second she found out he was Ra."

Dark looked up and all around the face of the cliff. He couldn't see anything or feel anything around them. Just dry dusty, rocky desert.

"With Landis gone, I was pretty much dead in the water."

"Was Landis helping you?"

Kyle nodded. "That's why Mom wanted to get rid of him. But after the UN took him, I couldn't get in, not without one of you."

"I don't understand," Dark eyed the teen. "One of—?"

Kyle pointed at the stone face. "It's already open. You just need to walk in."

Dark looked at the solid rock. It didn't look anything like something he could just walk into. He touched the side of the cliff with his palm—but his arm simply disappeared into the solid cliff like it wasn't even there. Kyle moved past him and vanished into the stone. Dark raised an eyebrow and then followed.

Both of them seemed to be moving through solid rock for perhaps twenty or thirty feet. Suddenly they emerged into an opening with both standing in a smoothly arched ancient tunnel ruin of some kind, only the tunnel hardly looked ancient or ruined for that matter. In fact, it looked almost new. Strange small fires burned over randomly cut crystals set within open sconces all along tall-pillared arched corridor casting a fine warm glow over the task-lit tunnel.

"This was Landis' place." Kyle walked deeper into the mountain though the tall ornately pillared corridor.

Dark was intrigued by the architecture and smooth stone surfaces. The corridor looked palatial and its architecture oddly familiar. They began descending wide stone steps that spiraled down deeper into the earth, lit by the strangely wonderful fire sconces.

"Your Landis was a god?" Dark mused.

"Yea. This place belonged to his family, that is, before the Seven found them."

"The who?"

Kyle stopped on the stairs.

"The Seven." Kyle repeated. "The Seven lords of evil. Landis told me about them."

"That—sounds familiar, somehow."

"The Seven are in control of the whole world now," Kyle continued leading Dark down the spiral stairs. "At least that's what Landis said."

"Kyle, you said your dad died trying to become like one of the gods. Did Landis—"

"Yea." Kyle frowned. "It was a stupid thing to try."

"I'm sorry."

"Not your fault. Dad was," Kyle shook his head as the two continued their descent, "infatuated with the Ra. He read everything he could about them. He met Landis a few years after mom and him got married. Mom hated Landis."

"Why?"

"Probably because dad spent more time with Landis than anyone else. Even me."

"I'm sure that didn't make your mom happy." Dark continued to admire the wide-open architecture of the cave home like space. "Was she jealous of Landis?"

"You have no idea."

"But they stayed married?"

"My mom is—not very good with money, Mr. Dark. And she knows it. Dad kept her. I guess they were good in the sack."

"Lauren said he had a will."

"Yea. He knew how bad Mom was with money, so he tied the two of us together with the farm thinking if she couldn't sell it, I could just take care of her."

"I guess your dad didn't count on her coming after you—legally?"

"Mom's not the brightest bulb in the chandelier, Mr. Dark. She doesn't give a damn about me or the farm. There's a whole Columbia River of bad blood between us these days."

The two of them finally entered into a smooth cavernous-like home of tall obelisk-like pillars, finely arched ceilings, trickling fountains, and softly flowing underground brooks that wandered through the carved and modernly minimalist-looking space, with its dark brown hewn-smooth stone multi level sunken and elevated rooms and floors. Tall potted trees and other greenery surrounded fine furniture and glass walls that defined different rooms between the pillars. A soft whistle drifted from Dark's lips as he beheld the grandeur of the magnificently carved subterranean palatial space. Kyle gave him a short tour of the main floor with its different sunken and elevated rooms.

"So why all of the lawsuits? This place—is this what's she after?" he continued to look all around the palatial home.

"No. She doesn't have a clue about this place. This—this is what she really wants." Kyle walked over to one of the large pots that was holding décor bundles of tall thin and golden dried stalks of wheat. To Dark it just looked like fine home decoration. But Kyle picked off one of the dry heads and handed it to Dark.

"Wheat?"

"That's not just wheat, Mr. Dark. It's pure. Fucking. Gold."

Dark lightly crushed the head of golden wheat between his fingers, letting the large grains spill into his hand.

"This looks bigger than normal wheat. It's genetically modified?"

"Oh, hell no. Dad hated that GM shit. The minute you hop into bed with those GM people, licensing their seed, they own you. Dad wanted no part of their bullshit."

"What's different about this?" Dark put one of the kernels into his mouth, chewing down on the hard seed. It had a good flavor.

"It's extinct."

Dark stopped chewing. He looked down into his hand at the small grains.

Kyle grinned. "You just bit into a trillion dollar seed of grain."

"Nice." Dark grumped. He poured the rest of the grains and broken head of the wheat back into Kyle's hand. "Thanks for the warning."

"No worries. There's more where this came from. A lot more."

"So you have these ancient grains stored in here?"

"This house was built about forty or fifty thousand years ago; before the Great War of the gods. It's ten times as old as the pyramids. The old gods who originally built it used it to store all kinds of dried foods from their era. This wheat," Kyle lifted his hand, "Dad and Landis grew a few years ago from some of the grain stores in the cellars beneath us."

"Then it's a unique crop," Dark acknowledged, nodding his understanding now. "That's going to be worth some money—a lot of money."

"Trillions, eventually."

"Until someone steals it."

"Can't. It's a patented organism."

"You can't patent something that's natural."

Kyle chuckled. "And when was the last time the gods ever left something in its natural state?"

"This it *is* genetically modified then—"

"Maybe. Probably. Who knows?" Kyle admitted. "I do know that it grows in half the time and you can't poison it. You can't kill it unless you set it on fire. The bugs hate it; and it kills every fungus it comes in contact with."

"That sounds like something these gods might make." Dark nodded.

"Dad and Landis patented the genome and the growing process, along with a water-based fertilizer the stuff loves."

"So this Landis—he was your dad's business partner?"

"I'm pretty sure they were more than just business partners, Mr. Dark. They spent a lot of time together."

"Are you saying that your dad was gay?"

"It was pretty obvious. Probably part of the reason the town here didn't like him. Dad didn't hide it from anyone."

"How did you feel about that?"

"I didn't care. Landis might have been Dad's drug of choice, but at least he took care of us; which is more than I can say about Mom."

Dark could feel the anger and resentment all over inside the teen. Sure, he was righteously angry about what his mother was doing to the business, but he also had some unsettled feelings about his dad as well. Dark didn't exactly feel like confronting Kyle with his feelings. Maybe Serena would be better at that than he would. Dark could also tell that Kyle liked him; Kyle respected him. The feeling was mutual. The young man had done well holding things together in the face of a mountain of adversity from within his own family.

"So this is why you brought me here?" Dark asked. "To pick up some of this seed?"

"Not just the seed. I can't get in here unless I'm with someone with pure Ra blood."

"Maybe you shouldn't be in here then," Dark offered.

"Landis and Dad were my parents, Mr. Dark. I have more right to be in here than anyone at this point. It's my home now and their legacy."

Dark nodded. He followed Kyle toward the back of the massively expansive space and into an open room that resembled a kind of large walk-in closet. Scores of thin, long,

soft-metal bars of what looked like platinum lay un-stacked all along one of the shelves of the closet-like room. The rest of the shelves were empty.

"I take it this is the vault?" Dark picked up one of the slender bars. It was heavy. He couldn't remember if he'd ever seen a platinum bar in his life.

"Used to be a vault. At one time this shelf was filled with these. Dad and Landis used most of them to finance the farm; bring it up to a prototype stage for the new grain. Landis always said that this was his bank. Using the bars was like taking out a loan. At some point, he'd have to replace the bars he'd borrowed; leave them for the next generations to find and use if they needed."

"I see." Dark placed the bar back onto the shelf. He watched Kyle stuff the remaining bars into a now very heavy backpack. "You should let me carry that."

It was really heavy now. Kyle let the god carry it.

"Mom thinks she's won. The estate ran out of money a couple of months ago. I've just been living off Lauren's family. But now, thanks to you, Mr. Dark—I can keep things running a little while longer. Hopefully long enough to get a crop planted."

9

The clock read well after noon when the two of them stretched awake next to each other under the covers. Christian felt Colton's hand moving over his skin along his abs and chest as he stretched with a quiet groan.

"Man, even your yawn is sexy," Colton breathed.

Christian smiled. "You were pretty sexy last night."

"I've never had anyone make me come like you did last night." Colton was still smoothing his hand along Christian's abs. "That was intense."

"I was hoping you liked it; I've never actually done that—I mean, to a guy."

"You can do that to me again anytime, Christian," Colton assured.

Both drew each other warmly into an embrace beneath the covers. Colton heard Christian sigh.

"Thinking about last night?"

"Hmm," Christian stretched again with Colton wrapped in his embrace. "Just wondering about the two of us."

"Yea, me too."

"After Kayla and I tanked I was thinking about leaving with a couple of the other women last night. But no one was really hanging around. Then you and I sort of happened."

"I know. A couple of times I've woke up with one of the women at the party, but never one of the guys." He chuckled.

"So why me?" Christian asked.

Colton lifted himself from their embrace. "Oh, c'mon, Christian, look at you. You could be an underwear model with the way you're built."

"Everyone tells me that." He grinned.

"So why don't you do it?"

"No way. I'm way too much of an introvert."

"I know people. Mia knows people. We could get you into a great agency."

"I don't know, Colt."

"I'm just sayin'. You might need the work after what happened between you and Kayla last night. So what happened between you two in the pool, anyway? It looked like you totally jilted her."

"I guess I did. It felt like she was trying to trap me."

"She was. That's Kayla's M.O. She traps hot guys right out of school in a great paying job and then makes them her personal sex slave, until she's done with him, and then she fires him. I think you're like number six."

"No one's complained to HR?"

"You're a *guy*, Christian. HR doesn't listen to the complaints of men. Besides, Kayla keeps the whole thing off the clock. She dresses by the book at work. And as hot as she is, none of the VP's will fire her. They're all men."

"Well," Christian sighed, "I guess it looks like I'm heading for the unemployment line then."

"Probably. But I'm serious, Mia knows the head of a modeling agency in Seattle who could get you work."

"Don't you need a portfolio?"

"Sure. But I think once the agency sees you they'll fall all over themselves to help you out."

"You think so?"

"I do. Besides, I'll get Mia to introduce you."

"Ohhh, your sister was in here earlier." Christian lifted his thick arm moving his fingers through his hair. "What did she say—about the two of us?"

Colton breathed a smile. "Oh, I think she was pretty shocked."

"Colt, *I'm* pretty shocked."

"Good, that makes three of us." Colton slipped back down onto his pillow and wrapped himself around Christian again. It didn't take the two of them long to rekindle the feelings they'd shared from the previous night as both sank into another well heated morning makeout.

* * * * *

Mia had long since finished cleaning up the house and pool area along with a couple of housekeepers who now descended on Colton's room once the two of them had emerged.

Showered and groomed, both looked like they were dressed for a magazine shoot with Christian wearing some of Colton's upscale wardrobe. Mia had an amazed look on her face as the two of them entered the kitchen. Her brother was cute, but the guy he'd been with last night was drop-dead gorgeous with some telltale Asian-looking features.

"Colt, are you going to introduce me to your boyfriend?"

"Oh, sure. Mia, this is Christian. Christian, this is my sister, Mia." Both greeted. The twenty-something long dark-haired

but shorter co-ed was cute, like Colt, and had his family resemblance. Still, Mia's expression showed surprise.

"Christian? As in Christian Jade?" she asked.

Christian nodded.

"Well, you're building up quite the reputation, Christian."

"Kayla spreading rumors again?" Colton frowned at her while moving toward the Keurig.

"I couldn't get her off the phone last night," Mia admitted.

"She kept going off about some guy named Christian Jade."

Colton led Christian to a drawer filled with so many selections of K-cups that it made the office break room look under-stocked.

Christian sighed. "I guess my job is toast."

"You never actually *had* a job, Christian" Mia snarked. "The only people who get put into that role at your office are hired to *do* one thing and one thing only—Kayla."

"Told you," Colton bumped his arm as the two of them made some coffee.

"Thanks for the 411, Mia. At least I know now." Christian stirred some creamer into his coffee.

"Kayla's kind of old news with us, Christian. What isn't old news, is you, Colt. The two of you have fun?" Mia's eyes beamed with an inquisitive curiosity.

Christian looked at Colton and then both looked at Mia nodding.

"Well?"

"Well what?" Colton asked, taking a sip from his cup.

"Oh, please, Colt. You're not the shy one here. What happened last night? Are you two are you guys actually dating or just having sex?"

"I think we're just fucking at this point. What do you think, Christian?"

Christian almost choked on his sip of coffee. He couldn't actually speak; his face was now way too red.

"I guess you could say we had a kind of date last night, hanging out together at the party," Colton continued, smirking at how embarrassed Christian was at the moment in front of Mia.

"Colt, I can't believe you spent the night with a guy! That is so, like, way cool." She turned her attention toward Christian again. "Don't take offense to any of this Christian. Our family has never been hushed about anything."

Christian nodded, half grinning and half mortified, and still fully blushing.

"You've dated some guys before, Colt. But you never slept with any. Why Christian all of a sudden?" Mia continued.

"Oh, c'mon, Mia?" Colton smoothed his hand over Christian's thickly muscled back. "He's super cute. And he's got a really nice ass that looks great in a swimsuit." Colt slid his hand warmly over the back of Christian's shorts, palming his rounded cheek warmly.

Christian coughed incredulously again. The conversation wasn't getting any better.

"He's more than cute, Colt. I can see now why Kayla's pissed," Mia smiled. "If you weren't sleeping with Colt, Christian, I'd ask you out. Believe me."

Christian smiled, taking another sip from his cup. He wasn't saying *anything* in front of these two.

"So what was it like, sleeping with another guy?" she asked looking at Colton, as if the highly personal question were about the weather.

"Pretty damned amazing," Colton admitted. "I don't think girls actually *know* what a guy really likes in the sack."

Mia nodded. "I bet that's true. Who better to know what a guy likes than another guy."

Just when Christian thought the conversation could not get any worse—it suddenly was. He was beginning to move into a brighter shade of pink now.

"Relax, Christian," Mia began. "We'll try not to embarrass you too much."

"Ah, too late?" Christian assured, barely able to speak.

"Did you guys kiss?" she asked.

Colton nodded sipping from his hot cup now.

"Everyone says Colt kisses really well, Christian. What do you think?"

"I think I can't believe I'm still in this conversation."

"You'll get used to it," Mia assured. "So does he kiss like a god or not?"

Christian nodded. He might have said that Colt was the best kiss he'd ever had but he was still too embarrassed by the conversation to admit that at the moment.

"So how was it, doing it with another guy, Colt?" Mia continued. "Did you guys get to 'fifth base', or what?"

Christian suddenly flushed red again, almost choking on his coffee—again.

"We just hit homeruns. I don't know that we're quite ready to go there yet."

"Or ever," Christian choked out.

"Hmm, good point." Colt nodded, tapping his elbow against Christian. "I think we're both 'top'. Beside, he's really big, Mia." Colton smoothed his hand over Christian's back again. Christian was suddenly wishing he were back home now and not anywhere near this conversation.

"That's what Kayla was grumbling about last night. After seeing you in that swimsuit she got for you, she really wanted you inside—"

"Can we just like *not* talk about this?!" Christian finally got out some words over the top of his cup.

"It's alright, Christian," Colton lightly bumped his muscled arm against Christian's. "Everyone was already talking about your equipment after seeing you in those."

"And *you're* not helping." Christian now half grinned himself.

Mia pouted. "I'm totally jealous, Colt. Your guy's really cute. Kayla's going to be even more pissed than she is now—OH, Colt!" Mia had a sudden epiphany.

"You're not going to tell her? About us?!" Christian shot a worried glance at Colton and then back at Mia with a sudden look of horror on his face. "Are you?!"

Mia was nodding. "Damn right I am. It'll be totally juicy. I can't wait."

"Mia," Colton scolded.

"Sorry guys, but it's payback time."

"Payback? For what?" Christian asked.

"Kayla's been acting like this queen bee ever since she landed this executive job at the publishing house. She's been insufferable. Everyone saw you two making out last night and how she was all over you, Christian. It's never a good thing when you're so 'unsexy' that you drive your guy into a relationship with *another guy*. Oh, this is just too rich!"

"Kayla's not unsexy, Mia." Christian corrected.

"Christian," Mia began firmly, "everyone's been saying that you were the hottest guy at the party last night. No offense, Colt."

"No. You're right. He was." Colton smoothed his hand over Christian's back again.

"She was all but riding you, Christian, behind the waterfall," Mia continued. "A bunch of people saw that. Madison's date drilled her right in front of all of you; Kayla wasn't about to be outdone by her."

"Jesus, Mia, how—"

"We talk, Christian, get over it. We have our own online tabloid; it's like a private version of Facebook. You've already been all over it since last night. Pics, even a few videos of you in that wet swimsuit of yours," she grinned.

"Videos?!" he stammered.

"Of course. Everyone's talking about you. Don't be surprised if you get asked out this week."

"OHH, you guys are killing me." Christian groaned, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Well, the hottest guy at the party last night not only jilted the queen bee in front of the whole group, but you slept with another guy afterward. Oh! My! Gawd!" she grinned widely. "I'm just dying here!"

"Do you want some pics?" Colton asked. "With the two of us?"

"Oh! Oh, you wouldn't—are you serious!?" Mia's eyes lit with even more excitement.

"What do you say, Christian?" Colton asked.

"Oh, guys, no way. Uh-uh." Christian was shaking his head. "My family would have a cow if they saw me in pics with another guy. Once online always online."

"We wouldn't have to show your face, Christian," Mia peddled the idea. "Just your hunky bod and a little hot tush wrapped around Colt?"

"Fine with me," Colton assured.

"I—don't know."

"Listen, Christian. The woman hired you for no other reason than to eat you up and spit you out after she was done playing with you. You're nothing but her little toy and she used company money to pay for you. Someone has to bring her down a few notches. It's perfect payback."

* * * * *

With Dark and Kyle still away on their road trip to the Palisades, and Lauren back home, the bored goddess took the liberty to tidy up a few things around the house. Not that Kyle was a slob, but the large home obviously hadn't seen a

housekeeper in months. If she was going to be living here, even for a few days, she preferred to live along side a little less dust and fewer dishes in the sink.

By early afternoon Serena gave the freshly cleaned home a final lookover, quite pleased with her handiwork. The once disheveled rooms all but sparkled now.

Serena had just settled into a book from a living room shelf when she felt someone driving up the short driveway and then park under the carport. The red Jaguar convertible was a little out of place for the small town. She watched clairvoyantly as a pretty, middle-aged blonde woman, dressed in nice clothes, exited the vehicle and walked to the home's side entrance. Serena got up from her couch and went into the kitchen. She heard the turn of a key and watched the locked door open. The blonde woman walked into the kitchen where Serena was now standing.

One of the things Dark and Serena had discovered about themselves was that if they didn't want to be seen, people around them wouldn't see them. Whatever it was that made them gods also gave them the ability to stand in broad daylight and not be seen by others standing around them. It was like they were totally invisible. And right now, the woman who had just entered Kyle's kitchen had no idea Serena was standing right there in the kitchen with her.

Serena watched with some curiosity as the woman looked around the freshly cleaned kitchen. She went to some of the cupboards and drawers, opening and closing them. Then she went to the refrigerator and looked inside, noticing the sparse contents.

"Still eating at Lauren's house, I see," the woman mused quietly to herself.

Serena got the vibe that the woman wasn't all that happy about Kyle being with Lauren and her family. In fact, she quite literally hated Lauren. The emotion was oddly deep.

Serena clandestinely followed the woman into the living room.

"Well—" she said with some surprise. "Hired another housekeeper, have we?"

By now Serena was sure the woman walking around the home was Kyle's mom. Serena followed her up stairs as the woman snooped in each of the freshly cleaned bedrooms; even looking into the bathrooms and closets.

The door to Kyle's office on the ground floor was the last place the woman checked. Kyle usually kept the door closed. The woman tried the door handle and appeared annoyed that it was locked. She pulled a small piece of torn paper from her pocket. She punched some numbers into the keypad above the handle. A light on the keypad turned green and the woman entered the office.

Like the rest of the home before Serena had assaulted the mess, Kyle's office was a disaster of jumbled papers, unopened bills piled onto one corner of the desk, and in just as much need of dusting as the rest of the home had needed hours earlier.

The woman ignored the mess and papers, but instead went directly to a tall, black gun safe, ornately filigree painted in gold to look like something from the Old West. The piece of paper still in her hand, she dialed the knob on the safe's door and then lifted the handle.

It was still locked.

She spun the knob several times and then re-attempted the combination. This time the door of the safe clicked and the woman opened the heavy door.

Inside were several rifles and neatly stacked boxes of ammunition. The woman took out her phone and snapped several pictures of the contents of the safe. She pulled open some of the drawers, apparently looking for something. But none of the drawers were revealing whatever it was that she was looking for. She closed and re-locked the safe. The woman

then turned her phone's camera on the desk and snapped several more pictures without touching anything. She then slipped the phone into video mode and began recording the entire room slowly. She watched the screen as the phone's camera scanned past the doorway and then recorded the contents of the rest of the room.

Serena frowned as she stepped out of the way of the woman who now closed and relocked the office door. The woman seemed all too eager to leave the home now. Serena watched as she left the house, returned to her car, and quickly sped away from the homestead.

* * * * *

Colton sped his Porsche smoothly down the winding rural road that led to one of Scottsdale's more upscale steakhouses. Christian rode in the passenger seat completely captivated with Colt's sporty elite ride. A warm dusk had fallen over the city with both young men enjoying the night air with the top down and the wind in their hair.

"You're not all that talkative." Colton dropped the roadster into a lower gear heading up the steeper mountain road.

"I know. Just thinking."

"About?"

"Take your pick. You and me. My now non-existent job. Kayla probably hates me."

"She brought it on herself, Christian. When you treat people like objects—eventually that kind of thing catches up with you. It's about time she got a taste of her own medicine."

"Probably. I just don't know where I'm going to be able to find another job that pays like this one did."

"You won't. It wasn't a real job. She was paying you to be her toy."

Christian nodded, frowning.

Their car rounded the top of the mountain bringing into view an astonishing sight—a massive Ra warship. The huge black vessel hung vast in the lower atmosphere, obscuring a large part of the Phoenix horizon as it drifted quietly through the skies.

“Wow.” Colton slowed the car.

“Where did *that* come from?”

“Looks like the gods are here in Phoenix for some reason.”

“Yea.” Christian stared at the miles and miles of the epic vessel as it drifted silently, slowly across the desert sky like a huge black cloud.

Colton pulled the car off to the side of the road along with other drivers who were now taking pics of the huge epic vessel. Both stood up in their seats to get better images of the ship floating lazily across the horizon.

“Man, I wonder what keeps it up there like that?” Christian asked.

Colton shrugged. “I read an article online that the Ra have technology that make the rest of us look like were living in the Stone Age.”

“I can believe it. It’s surreal how it just hangs up there.”

“Some people are saying that it isn’t real,” Colton offered. “That what we’re looking at right now is a kind of image, an illusion. A hologram. That Ship’s not really there, according to news reports.”

“Really?” Christian looked at the massive vessel again.

“Yea. Look at how big it is. They say nothing that big could ever fly, eve with antigravity. It’s all just a big hoax put on by these Ra to make themselves look like they’re Uber powerful.”

“It looks real to me,” Christian admitted. “I wonder what it’s like, being a god?”

“If you’re up there, I’m sure it’s like paradise. Not so much if you’re down here,” Colton assured.

"I don't get why people hate them so much?" Christian plopped back down into the seat and refastened his belt.

"I don't know either." Colton pulled the car back onto the highway. "But you don't want to be one; not down here. If DHS catches up with you, you get quarantined."

"Do you think those places are really like Auschwitz? I've heard stories about some of them."

"I hope not, Christian. I really thought we'd moved beyond that ..."

* * * * *

It was a little after 4:00 when Dark and Kyle returned from their short road trip. Both of them stood in the kitchen as Serena told them about the visitor earlier in the afternoon and how the woman had let herself into his office.

"That's Mom, alright," Kyle assured nodding from Serena's description. "That's her car too. It's the only red Jag in town."

"She was taking all kinds of pictures of your office. Even recording video of the room."

"You saw her?" Dark asked.

"But she didn't see me. I was invisible," Serena smiled.

"I don't know that our invisibility works that way, Hon."

"What do you mean?" Serena was looking suddenly concerned.

"I think we can still be photographed. Our minds keep people from seeing us, but not cameras."

Now Serena looked worried. "Then when they look at the images Kyle's mom took—"

Dark pulled Serena into his arms. "Then I guess they'll have a surprise." He smiled. "Don't worry about it. I'm more interested in what was she looking for?" Dark asked Kyle, finally setting the heavy backpack onto the floor gently.

"Probably these," Kyle tossed a small cloth bag of seed grain that had been loosely tied at the top. It dropped onto the center of the table like a beanbag, spilling a few grains of its contents slightly onto the middle of the table.

"Wheat?" Serena asked.

"It's more than just wheat," Dark assured. "The place Kyle showed me. I think it has something to do with who you and I really are—where we came from. It's like a huge home under the mountains built by people like us, a long time ago. They used it as a kind of shelter, storing all kinds of things in it, including some different kinds of grains—really old grains now."

"Old grains? You mean extinct?" Serena's mind worked quickly.

"Exactly." Dark nodded.

"Kyle, if that's true, then this small bag of seed would be worth a lot of money."

"Trillions, Miss Serena." Kyle corrected. "Mom knows all about the patents; we own them. What she doesn't have, are the grains themselves. Owning the patent is one thing, but if you can't produce the product," Kyle grinned, "you don't have a business."

"I take it your dad never showed your mom this home the two of you just came from?" Serena picked up one the grains on the table, looking at it with gifted vision.

"Landis wouldn't let him. He didn't want mom even knowing where the place was. She knows Landis' home was somewhere in the Palisades, she just doesn't know where."

"What bothers me the most, Kyle," Dark began, "was that you mother has access to your private office, and even your own safe."

"I don't know how she got the door code or the combination to the safe. She has a key, but because of the

lawsuits there is a restraining order. She's not supposed to be around me unsupervised."

"You have a security problem, Kyle." Dark grimaced at the youth. "I think you'd better let me have a look around and see who's spying on you."

"I'd appreciate that, Mr. Dark."

"Tomorrow I want to go back to Landis' home and have a look around a little more carefully. Maybe there's more about your dad and who this Landis god is—or was."

10

Lauren arrived early at the farm. The day had not grown hot yet, the morning air still felt crisp and cool as she made her way into the house with two handfuls of plastic grocery bags draped around her fingers. She found Serena making some coffee, dressed in some of the new clothes the two of them had found the day before while shopping in Moses Lake. It had been the perfect opportunity to do some shopping while Kyle and Dark had gone off checking out the spread in the next county.

"Oh, good morning, Serena." Lauren set the bags on the kitchen's wide island.

"Good morning." Serena looked at the many bags she was now opening. "Lauren, you didn't have to do that."

"It's fine, I do this every Sunday. My folks shop on the weekends in town and then I bring stuff over while everyone else is getting ready for church."

"You're not going to church with your family?" Serena began helping Lauren take things out of the bags.

"No. Not anymore. I stopped going last year, just after I turned sixteen."

"Oh? Why?"

"It's a long story. It's kind of your fault, actually."

"The Ra?" Serena asked with a smile, sensing her feelings. Serena liked Lauren. She was smart, level-headed, with a touch of type-A to her personality. Probably exactly the kind of girl Kyle needed at the moment. But she also had a yearning for something, something more than being a farm girl.

"Yes. I'd just met Kyle. I mean, I knew about Kyle and his family; everyone knows everything about everyone in town. But I'd never talked to him."

"He wasn't on the football team?" Serena smirked.

"Yes. Touché." Lauren both frowned and smiled at the same time. "Kyle wasn't someone I would even consider taking an interest in."

"Was he part of the nerd-crowd at school?"

"You are just reading my feelings all over the place here, aren't you?" Lauren asked with a smile, putting away a couple of bags of pre-chopped Romaine into the fridge.

"My bad," Serena admitted and withdrew her feelings from Lauren's.

"I'd just broken up with Daren. We'd been making out in his truck after a dance and he'd started getting rough, trying to take my clothes off. He tried to rape me."

"Oh no." Serena's eyes were suddenly wide. "What did you do?"

"Kept my head. Daren's a big guy. I waited until his jeans were part-way off and he was prone over the top of me in the rear of the cab. I gave him my knee really hard; pushed him off of me and then ran and hid in a field."

"Lauren! Did he come after you?"

"He did; but he didn't find me. Eventually he drove off and I started to walk home in just my underwear. My clothes and bra were still in Daren's truck."

"Did anyone see you? I mean, pick you up?"

"Kyle did. I don't know what he was doing all the way out there, but he pulled up in his car and got out."

"I was still in shock, I think. Kyle pulled off his t-shirt and slipped it over the top of me."

"Ohh," Serena emoted.

"My parents were out of town on a church retreat. Kyle took me home and stayed with me, with a loaded shotgun. In case Daren showed up. He didn't leave me all weekend."

"Did you report it?"

"Yes. But Daren's dad is best friends with the mayor. They all treated it like Daren was the victim. The county attorney even scolded me for leading Daren on and getting him into the situation in the first place."

"That is unreal." Serena's face took on a stormy look.

"Tell me about it. The county attorney is also our church's pastor."

Serena nodded. "I see why you didn't go back to church then."

"It wasn't just that, Miss Serena. I'd already been thinking about this whole gods and goddesses thing for a while. And then when Kyle told me about his family and who Landis really was—"

"Who's Landis?"

"Kyle's dad's business partner; before the government tossed him into the prison camp here."

"Is Landis the one who tried to awaken Kyle's dad?"

She nodded. "It didn't work. Kyle's dad never woke up. They finally had to take him off life support."

"I'm sorry."

"I didn't really know Kyle's dad or Landis. Only what Kyle's told me about them. They were both gone long before I got to know Kyle."

"But you knew about what was happening with Kyle?"

"It's a really small town, Miss Serena. People talk. Everyone eventually finds out everything there is to know about you. It's like one really big ugly family."

"Does Kyle tell you everything?"

Lauren gave Serena an odd look. "I think so. But, I'm his girlfriend, not his wife. I don't think he tells me everything. He keeps things from me."

"Loose lips sink ships, Lauren."

"What are you saying? I don't talk about Kyle's business—to anyone."

"No? How did Daren and his friends find out the two of you were in the barn?" Serena watched and felt Lauren's feelings carefully.

"The only person who knew we were on a date was my sister and my parents."

"You have to be more careful now, Lauren. There are things Kyle has probably told you that are secrets; secrets that no one else should know. One innocent post on Facebook or a simple tweet from one of your friends, and suddenly your life is in danger, or Kyle, or even Dark or myself now."

Lauren suddenly felt cold.

"Who have you been talking to?" Serena asked.

"Just a friend, from school. But we've been friends since we were kids. She wouldn't tell a soul."

"No? People think no one talks; but everyone does, Lauren—including you. That's how rumors spread; and that's how you almost got your boyfriend killed. Someone told Daren and his friends where you'd be. I doubt you told your folks you and Kyle were heading out to that barn."

Lauren stared blankly at Serena as the realization of her words began to sink deeply into her soul.

* * * * *

The whirlwind weekend with Colton had finally come to an end. Sunday evening found Christian driving himself home to Phoenix and pulling into his apartment complex. He didn't even plan on going into work on Monday. Mia had promised to put him in-touch with a modeling agency that she was pretty sure would be able to put him to work right away with their office in Seattle—ironically his hometown. It would be a big career change. He hoped it paid as well as the job Kayla had hired him for.

Inside his apartment, Christian clicked on the light and set down his keys and wallet. He moved through the still sparsely furnished living room toward the kitchen when—suddenly, he froze. Someone was sitting in the room.

"Kayla—?" he looked at her with a narrowed brow.

"Miss me?"

"What are you doing in my apartment?"

She got up out of the chair and approached him. There was an odd sort of sexy, wanton look in her eyes. She was dressed in a rather provocative black stretch miniskirt and black top that didn't at all hide a mile of cleavage of her pert bra-less chest.

"You need to leave." He glared.

"You owe me, Christian."

"Owe you? For what? I don't *owe* you anything. Get out."

"In due time. First you're going to give me what you should have given me Friday night."

"I'm not touching you."

"Then I guess I'll just have to take it." She walked right up to him. Christian was easily half again bigger than she was. He hardly felt threatened by her.

He glared at her.

He didn't exactly see her move but he felt her hands on him and through some kind of martial move she sent him onto his back, hitting the thinly carpeted floor pretty hard.

It startled him, but he wasn't hurt.

Kayla seemed to move incredibly fast. She was already on top of him, straddling him and had pinned his thick arms above his head with one hand while the other was tearing and ripping his shirt to ribbons. Christian tried with everything he was worth to break free of Kayla's grip but her hands and fingers were like iron. He couldn't budge them.

He fought her with all the strength his body had, but the girl was far stronger than she looked. She picked up a piece of his shredded shirt and very strongly stuffed the wad of cloth into his mouth. Christian shook his head violently trying to expel the cloth, but without his hands it just wasn't coming out. He tried to call out, but the only sounds he made were muffled shouts.

He watched her with wide eyes as she pinned his arms to his sides between her knees and then slipped off her own shirt showing her bare chest. She moved her hands sensuously over his wide, deeply cut pecs and still flexing biceps and shoulders that she'd pinned between her straddling thighs. Christian tried sitting up and rocking his larger body to push her off of him, but her strength was unbelievable. It was that same strength that was now ripping his khaki shorts away from him like they were no more than mere paper.

Its was like she'd been possessed by some demon he couldn't break free from. He wanted nothing to do with her but the way she was straddling him, the way he was fighting against her, his body seemed to rebel in the exact opposite of

emotion; his cock was growing long and hard as she drew down his briefs with him fighting against her with everything he had. In his futile struggle as they wrestled, Kayla's skirt had cinched up from her spread thighs all the way to her waist revealing her panty-less ass and smoothly waxed pubic skin.

She lowered her chest to his and embraced him in a grip of steel. She rocked her hips, sliding her smooth pubic skin all over his hardening male, but it seemed there was nothing he could do to stop her! Kayla's angry-wanton eyes met his as she deliberately watched him while she sensuously rocked her dampening folds over his thick, tall and now very hard cock.

He could see Kayla watching him; watching his body struggle against her own. He could see her chest rising heavily now as she pleased herself wet against him. She seemed to take some erotic pleasure at watching his eyes while Christian's cock throbbed hard against her spread thighs sliding between her slick feminine lips.

He drew back his hips in vain to keep her now slippery folds away from himself, but he couldn't overcome her. He closed his eyes in defeat as he felt a very wet Kayla slipping tightly over his rock hard cock, moving herself slowly over him, until she'd fully sank his hugely thick-tall shaft tightly within herself.

"Oh, god, Christian," she breathed sensuously. "You are big. Fuck me." She exhaled as if totally taken by the sensation of having the sizable guy buried deeply inside of her.

Christian shook his head in defiance, trying to withdraw himself from her. But with her strength, he was no match for her. She closed her eyes while rocking his thick heavy cock within herself, pleasuring herself with him like he was some erotic sex toy. He didn't want to be doing this. He didn't want Kayla fucking him. But his body wasn't listening. The more she rode him the harder his cock throbbed within her.

But Kayla seemed much more taken with the feeling of passion rising within herself than she was paying attention to her captive. In a desperate attempt and with a suddenly free arm, Christian struck her squarely—right across the face.

The force of the heavy blow should have knocked her out—or at least stunned her but good. But Kayla just turned to look at him again, seemingly un-phased by the heavy blow.

“Oh. Christian. Is that how you want to play?” an evil grin crossing her lips. Then she hit him, hard. Harder than he’d ever been struck in his life. It dazed him for a few moments. He stopped struggling, trying to understand what had just belted him so forcefully.

The side of his jaw hurt like hell and his lip grew suddenly swollen, feeling like it was bleeding. Without warning Kayla hit him again, harder, from the other side, making his vision blur.

He lifted his thick arms over his face to protect himself, but it didn’t matter. Her fists were like iron gloves going off against the side of his head. He tried to scream, but the cloth stuffed within his mouth only muffled the cries. Half stunned and face bleeding, Kayla’s fist caught Christian across his mouth again, splitting his lip against his teeth and making him cough as blood exited his nostrils. With her last strike, harder than all the rest, Christian felt his world sink into darkness.

Kayla heard the subtle crack and felt Christian fall limp beneath her. She raised an eyebrow. His neck was unnaturally twisted allowing the side of his face to rest all the way onto the floor. Both of Christian’s eyes were wide open. That last punch had made her fingers hurt. His thick heavy cock now began going flaccid within her. He wasn’t breathing at all and she couldn’t hear his heart beating like it had been rapidly pumping only a moment ago.

“Dammit.” She frowned in frustration. Sometimes she forgot how strong she was compared to everyone else. She

glared, fuming at him. "Well, I guess that will teach you to fuck with a goddess, Christian. Humph. You lose." She slipped herself from him, dressed back into her shirt, and fixed her miniskirt, pulling the stretch material back down over her thighs again. She stopped before opening the door and then turned to look at him, motionless and still beautiful laying on the floor with nothing on. She frowned, clicked out the lights, locking and closing the door behind her.

* * * * *

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born and raised in the beautiful Pacific Northwest, I've spent most of my life writing. I am, at heart, merely a storyteller. As early as I can remember I have loved stories and loved telling them in my own inimitable way.

Through my teens and twenties, I captivated groups of friends by weaving their role-play characters into fabulous, immersive scenarios filled with intrigue and emotion. The games were more than just rolling dice, commanding starships and slaying dragons. Our weekends together became deeply personal surrealisms.

While those games have now become fond distant memories, the child within who created them lives on, more imaginative than ever.

TWO UNSUSPECTING JOURNEYS. ONE UNBELIEVABLE DESTINY.

Fresh out of school, Christian Jade thought he'd found the perfect new job as a well-paid executive assistant—that is, until his new employer decides to kill him. Feigning death to finger his murderess seemed like a good idea at the time, but Christian soon uncovers more than he bargained for when Justin Pierce takes over his old job. Both quickly discover that being genetically attracted harbors much more danger than working for a power-hungry boss.

All alone and unable to remember who they are, or where they are from, Dark and Serena dive deep into the past to escape an unrelenting archrival. With the assassins just one step behind them, and no memories to fall back on, will there be any salvation for the newly reborn sun gods?

Already facing an invincible enemy, an ancient darkness arises from the arcane past. Caught by surprise and soon paralyzed the calm calculating evil, two divergent shards of fate soon collide, delivering a devastating blow to the newblood gods; leaving their fragile world in the midst of an ominous and ultimately deadly—DECEPTION.