

Chapter 1

I knew Kane was still with me because he was squeezing my hand so hard my fingers twisted into claws. With each breath I took, an acrid smell, like burning rubber, stung my eyes and nose. The air was stale, as if we were inside a huge balloon, even the oxygen that gave us life felt dead. My ears were filled with cries of pain and howls of anguish. Hesitantly, I opened my eyes then slammed them shut again, not wanting to face this place. I knew exactly where I was.

“Trin! Trin!” Kane shook my arm urgently.

Reluctantly, I opened my eyes and looked at him, forcing my focus away from my surroundings. Kane’s familiar, handsome face was wild with angst. His usually determined eyes were wide and his finely sculpted chin trembled with fear. He looked to me for guidance, for the knowledge I did not possess. “Where are we?” he moaned.

I didn’t want to look, but I forced myself. I would never be able to see Gabriel again if I did not endure the torments of this hellish world. We were in a forest, so dark it seemed as if the trees were growing in a cave. No moon lit the sky and no stars revealed our path. The only light came from distant fire; so widespread it illuminated the ragged mountains in the distance and cast an eerie, yellow glow to our surroundings. I knew this was the same yellow that dwelled in the walls of my bedroom.

“I don’t know,” I replied, doing my best to take control of our situation. But I knew. I knew all too clearly. We were in the door I had noticed on my first day at Turnbull, the one with the bleeding trees, the one with the hiding spirits, the one that had frightened me so badly.

There was a path leading through the gnarled, bent foliage; our only choice. Kane and I walked cautiously. Everywhere I looked were trees that were blessedly dormant. Although there were no leaves, the trees were adorned with something else. I remembered in the carving at school, it looked like the trees were bleeding, but the person who carved those panels had left something out. I could see now that the trees themselves were not bleeding; the horrors hung from above.

Branches interlaced with human bodies were splayed in varying stages of decomposition; some looked like they were merely asleep while others were almost skeletal. Blood, sap and fluids flowed freely down the trunks, drying in small, rancid pools on the ground. The sufferers’ arms were helplessly tangled, interwoven into the tree limbs which bore them like rotting fruit. Some had obviously attempted escape and only succeeded in entangling other body parts. I noticed some bodies hung upside down, successfully freeing the arms only to ensnare the legs in the process. “Kane!” I was shocked when some of the bodies began to writhe and moan, obviously not yet taken by death.

Kane pulled me closer and put his arm protectively around my shoulders. “Don’t look!”

But I did and the eyes of a dying man caught mine. They were bright blue, like Gabriel’s, and for a moment I thought it *was* him. He was hanging by his arms, like most of the others. His torso was dripping with sap and his trousers were soaked with urine. The man opened his mouth to speak, but instead of words or pleas, an angry buzz emerged. In moments, a cloud of large, black flies erupted from his lips. I gasped with revulsion as Kane physically dragged me away from the awful scene.

“I said don’t look!” He tried to shield my gaze by blocking my view with the palm of his hand.

I noticed I was breathing hard even though we weren’t moving very quickly. Maybe it was shock, maybe it was the air clouded with the smoke from the distant fires. Kane guided me down the rock-strewn path and I stumbled behind him.

He spoke loudly, trying to direct my attention away from the trees. “Do you know where we are? Trinity!”

I had to be strong. I had to remain in control. I whispered, the only word that came to mind, “Irkalla.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Kane stopped and grasped my shoulders. He looked at me intently. “Tell me where we are!”

The events of our world came flooding into my mind in torrents...the battle with Seth...the deaths of Michael and Beatrice...the taking of Gabriel. I felt like throwing up.

“I don’t know how I know this, but I do.” I paused for a moment to sort my thoughts, the horrors from the camaraderie. “It’s not quite our idea of hell, but it is a world full of suffering and misery, dominated by Seth’s darkness. There is some goodness here, but it is not here by its own volition; it is trapped and remains hidden from Seth’s stare. We have to seek out this goodness. It waits for us to come closer.

I continued, “This path is leading us to Gabriel. Seth intends to trade my life for his, but not without making us journey through his horrors, hoping we will break, that our focus will crack, that we will surrender before we reach our goal! Then he will kill Gabriel...and you...”

Kane was frightened by my candidness. “What’s stopping Seth from just taking us?” he asked. “God, you saw him...he could take anything he wants...all that power!”

I was immediately angry that Kane did not yet realize this, but how could he? He didn't know that I was able to pluck things from my dreams; anything I wanted...a charm...a sword...a key. He just followed me here out of loyalty, out of concern for his friend Gabriel who was stolen from the arms of victory...my arms.

"What you saw is not true power." He was silenced by my knowledge of our situation. I softened, not wanting him to feel inferior. "He won't take me until we are deeper. Amenta still has influence here, but as we travel deeper into this world, that influence will fade. Once I am dead, I am useless to him. He needs me to travel in my dreams and gather the hidden keys from the worlds he chooses. I cannot do this if I am dead."

"Gabriel isn't dead..."

I interjected, "The human body is frail, easily torn and trampled. Look around you!" I held my arms out toward the trees. "Gabriel is not human. Gabriel is something very special. Seth also knows I will end my own life if that's what it takes to defeat him. He will not allow that to happen. That is why you are permitted to remain with me and Gabriel is still alive. It is like a game of chess. He has his advantages and we have ours. And we must make our moves carefully, only after much thought."

We continued our trail through Seth's forest, afraid to look at anything except the path rambling in front of us. We walked for what seemed like hours, constantly accosted by the empty stares of the dead and the beseeching pleas of those still clinging to life. For the first time in my life I wished I was having a nightmare, but I was certain everything around me was an absolute truth. I focused on the path.

I couldn't be certain, but I thought, every once in a while, I could see things peeping out from behind the trunks of the trees. It was a flash of a face, or the streaming of a length of hair, or a glimpse of a hateful grin. These things, following us along our path, were too quick to be caught with a stare.

Kane noticed them as well. "Do you see them?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"What are they?"

"I don't know, but if they are here, they can't be good."

Suddenly Kane stumbled and I grasped his arm to prevent a fall. I was too late. His body lurched forward and he landed on his knees. I immediately bent to help him up. As he stood, I saw the rocks on the path had torn a hole in his jeans and he suffered a substantial gash. I had wished for water to wash out the wound, but I would not rely on any water found in these depths. I went to dab at it with a tissue I had stuffed into my pocket this morning.

"Let it bleed," he said. "It will help to keep it clean."

"But..."

"Look!" he interrupted, pointing at the ground.

I saw the spot where Kane's knee had left a trickle of blood; it was being soaked up by the dirt, as if the ground itself enjoyed the taste.

Suddenly, something pulled at my hair. I squealed and swatted at it with my hand, not knowing what it was. At first I thought it may have been an unseen tree branch, but they hung well above my head. Whatever these elusive creatures were, they were becoming bolder.

"Kane?" I took his attention away from his cut. A thin stream of blood soaked a path into his jeans. I had a thought.

"Yeah?"

"Do you think something tripped you?"

That statement commanded his full attention and he stood up. He looked at me intently. "You think they tripped me?"

"Yes, and they just pulled my hair." I replied.

Movement behind Kane's left shoulder caught my attention. It was one of the tangled tree bodies. Kane noticed my stunned stare and turned to face this new fear.

One of the hanging people was beginning to move. It was a woman; the only way we could tell was because she wore the tattered remains of a white dress. As we stared in disbelief, the limbs of the tree stretched wide and the body began to writhe and undulate. The branches continued to untangle themselves. The tree was releasing her! Twisting and moaning, she finally dropped to the ground. Kane backed in front of me, holding his arms out as a shield. The body lurched forward. She ambled toward us. Her clothing was no more than rags. Her hair was matted and her mouth gaped open, gasping. It was just like my dream, but this time we weren't in my mother's hospital room. I knew her at once. "Key?" she asked as she ambled toward us. "Trinity...key?"

Beatrice! I was shocked; quickly becoming nauseous with fear. One of my best friends was trapped here. Now I had to make myself believe this creature really wasn't Beatrice. It had to be one of Seth's tricks; a trick to make us falter, a trick to slow us down; a trick to prolong Gabriel's suffering and our own terror.

Kane grasped my wrist. "Let's move!" he yelled, quickly leading me down the path.

I glanced behind me. She was still following us, her arms spread wide. Like in my dream, she dragged her broken leg behind her as if it were a ball and chain. As we scurried down the path I noticed more bodies moving in the trees. How would we ever get out of here? Others were joining Beatrice, following us down the rocky trail. I focused on the road ahead. Kane was fast, but I was able to keep up. The question was how far could we get without running out of energy? As I tried to work out this question in my mind, I heard an unusual, but familiar sound. I slowed my pace to focus.

“Kane pulled on my arm, unwilling to lose any ground between us and our monstrous friend. “Come on, Trinity!”

“Just a second! Be quiet!” I insisted. I listened carefully. It *was* them! The voices from Amenta! They were speaking to me and their message was urgent. “Stop!” I yelled to Kane. He was stunned into silence.

The tinkly voices became clearer, and louder, “Trinity...run into the woods on your left!”

Not risking a longer pause, I grasped Kane’s shirt and pulled him into the thick forest growth. He resisted only for a moment. Bodies still hung above us, but they were much less numerous than before. As we hopped through the underbrush, the little spirits again grasped at our feet and our clothing in an attempt to slow our progress.

I could hear Amenta very clearly now. “Trinity, you will soon come to a clearing. In the corner there is a bush unlike any of the others. Under this bush is a door. Go inside! Move quickly!”

We kept moving, Kane trusting me to lead him to safety, asking no questions. I did not loosen my grip on his sleeve. Just when I thought we had gone too far, we burst through a thin hedge and into a quiet clearing. Although there was no sunlight, there was a different feeling here, dare I say welcoming? There were no bodies hanging, and for the first time in quite a while, nothing impeded our progress.

“Look for a door under a bush!” I said urgently.

Kane wasted no time and started his search. I scanned the clearing and something caught my attention. In a forgotten corner of the clearing, something was sprouting from the dusty earth. Most of the flora here was gnarled and bent, just like the trees, and devoid of life. But this was green, and reminded me of home. Before our eyes, it took just moments for a small hedge to grow and blossom like a beacon of light. I rushed to it, bent, and inhaled the scent of the perfumed flowers of Amenta. Kane followed me closely. I dropped to my knees and searched the forest floor.

“Hurry, Trinity!” The voices urged me on.

I ran my fingers through the dry dirt. In seconds, I felt something hard and very smooth. Groping at the earth, I soon found what I assumed was a doorknob. Kane joined me on his knees. We brushed aside as much dirt as we could in as little time as possible. With a bit of effort, he wedged his fingers into the crack of the door’s outline that was stamped in the earth.

“Go ahead,” he said with a nod of his head, indicating that I should open the door.

I grasped the handle. It was perfectly smooth and as round as a tennis ball. It looked as if it were made of a dark glass. I thought of Gabriel as I turned my wrist. Together, we hauled the door open and looked into the dark void this new entrance revealed. Without stopping, Kane slipped his hand into mine and looked at me hopefully. With his other hand, he held the edge of the door, intending to close it as we jumped. We perched on the edge of the chasm and I smiled softly at him as we slid into the darkness.

Chapter 2

It felt like we fell for hours, but I knew in my heart, it was only moments. I kept my eyes shut tightly and at some point I had lost my grasp on Kane’s hand. Surprisingly I was unafraid because I knew the voices would not lead me into danger.

I was expecting a rough, jarring landing; instead, we fell into a soft substance. As soon as the ground met us, I opened my eyes. The sun shone brightly, so it took a few moments for my eyes to adapt from the darkness of the forest of Irkalla.

“Trin!” I was relieved to hear Kane’s familiar voice close by.

“Over here!” He found me quickly. I stood to join him, shielding my eyes with cupped hands.

I examined my new surroundings and discovered we were standing on a large sand dune. In the distance, sheer cliffs of red stone jutted from the sea of sand like sails on a distant ship. The sky was a radiant shade of summer blue. It was terribly hot, so I removed my hoodie and tied it loosely about my waist. Kane did the same with his jacket.

“So what now?” he asked.

As if Kane’s question was a cue, we were surprised when a strange animal summited our enormous pile of sand. It was a huge beast, even taller than the tallest giraffe I had ever seen. It had an armored body like that of an armadillo. Its small head rested on the end of a long snake-like neck. Its face resembled that of a camel, with dark,

calm eyes, a rounded muzzle and floppy, rounded ears that it kept pressed against the sides of its head. I noticed it lurched when it walked, like the gait of a giraffe, although its legs were rather thick, like those of an elephant. It approached us slowly, unconcerned with our presence.

“Look at that thing!” Kane exclaimed stumbling backward. “Do you think it’s tame?”

“It doesn’t look dangerous...or angry,” I replied, “just big!”

We watched as it got closer and closer. I noticed it had a snake-like tail that ended in a stiff, wide, bony structure that it flicked like a fan. It also bore an intricately woven saddle. A delicate, but useful canopy was erected over the saddle, providing a great amount of shade to the rider. It plodded, ever toward us.

As if it were following unheard commands, it stopped directly in front of Kane and me. It knelt first on one front leg then brought its rear legs down in succession. It turned its head toward us and grunted.

“I think it wants us to get on!” I exclaimed. I looked at Kane with uncertainty, requiring his approval before I made a move. “Should we?”

“What other choice do we have?” he replied. “We’ll die if we try to walk out of here, and I don’t see any dune buggies.”

I reached and grasped the strange animal’s neck and swung my body onto the front of the elongated saddle. Kane followed, sitting closely behind me. As soon as we were on board, the animal grunted, nodded, and lurched to its feet. I looked down and found we were about ten feet from the ground. Luckily I didn’t mind heights, but I think Kane did. He had his arms clamped tightly around my waist.

Nothing but dunes and mountains stretched before us. This ground was very unstable and I wondered how this beast stayed on top of the sand. To satisfy my curiosity, I leaned to the side of the saddle and examined the beast. Its feet were wide and webbed and served the animal like snowshoes, giving it enough surface area to easily remain on top of the sands.

We traveled, swaying over dune after dune, as if we were on the rolling waves of a vast, angry ocean. Eventually Kane spoke, “Do you know where we’re going?”

“No,” I replied, “but I know we are in the hands of Amenta now.”

“So it’s just wait and see?” he asked.

“Yes.”

He paused for a moment. “Trinity, are you scared?”

“Of course I am!” I laughed for the first time in ages.

“I guess that *was* a dumb question,” he admitted with a giggle. “We just spent a day in hell and only now do I ask if you’re scared.”

I shook my head and smiled, “Are you?”

“Hell yeah!” he exclaimed. Two days ago, if you would have told me in the next 48 hours I was going to fight the devil, walk through Hell, be chased by zombies, jump into a bottomless pit and ride through a desert on a camel on steroids, I’d have said you were smoking something!”

It would have been funny if it wasn’t so true and we had not lost three friends and my mother along the way. My thoughts went to Michael and Beatrice then to Gabriel. It was painful to think of their suffering and the only way I could cope was to push it from my mind. My throat tightened and I struggled to subdue my tears, although a few managed to wiggle through my efforts.

I think Kane sensed my stress and decided to remain quiet for a while. He held me tightly and rested his head softly on my shoulder. Feeling his breath on my neck brought back painful memories of Gabriel. I closed my eyes and thought deeply of him. Soon, Kane’s weight changed. He was much heavier on my shoulder and his breathing was soft and rhythmic. He was asleep. I was so tired; I would have happily followed, except I could not risk a dream. I knew we were no longer in Irkalla, but I also knew this place was not Amenta. The animal beneath me knew the way to wherever it was that we were heading, so I thought, perhaps...

“Sleep, Trinity,” the voices chimed. “Amenta is watching.” They reassured me, so I leaned my weight back against Kane’s body. In seconds, I too drifted to sleep.

Chapter 3

In a soft ethereal dream, once again I saw Gabriel. I was in a fog, but it wasn’t cold or frightening. It seemed friendly, swirling, soft, and white, like a cloud. Gabriel’s familiar shadow was approaching, slightly darker form than the surrounding mists. I rushed to him. As he materialized from the veil of mist he smiled and wrapped me in a warm embrace, holding me and whispering that everything was going to be okay. I looked into his kind, blue eyes and he smiled. His face was smooth and unmarred by past battles and torment. It was how it should be.

We held each other for a very long time. Eventually he pulled his head back and caught my eyes. “I have to leave now,” he said reluctantly.

"I know," I replied, resting my head on his shoulder again. I didn't want to let him go. He embraced me tightly, "I won't give up."
"I love you!" I sobbed.
He kissed my forehead. "You know I do," he replied.
"Stay with me!" I begged.
"Trinity, this is just a beautiful dream." With his index finger, he tilted my chin and looked deeply into my eyes. "I would do anything to be with you... but this is all I can do right now."
"Are they hurting you?"
He ignored my question, but answered with a smile that spread up the angles of his cheek. "I once asked you if you trusted me."
"I remember." I replied.
"Now I am trusting you."
"I am coming!" I cried.
"Please stay there...in the city of the sands. You will be safe there."
"No. I am coming."
"Please, promise me." His eyes begged me to listen, but I would not. There was no way I could leave him in Hell. I could not bear to lie to him, so I said nothing.
He began, "I need to tell you..."
"What is it?" I interrupted.
"You are more like me than you think."
"How?" I asked wondering what he could possibly mean.
"You too are of Amenta."
I was shocked. I had so many questions, questions that would have to wait. Our time was waning. I stammered, "Why are you telling me this? Why now?"
"You need to know," he glanced behind him, as if someone were coming. "I must leave now."
Gabriel departed with a lingering kiss. I didn't want to let him go. I couldn't let him go. "But..."
"In time, Trinity," he stated sadly looking into my eyes. He dropped his arms reluctantly and I did the same. Smiling gently, he was again enveloped by the fog.

Chapter 4

I awoke with a start. At first, I didn't remember where I was, and then it all came back in a sickening wave. Kane cradled me tightly in his arms as I leaned back against him. He must have awoke while I slept. I looked up at him, but did not sit up.

"Hey sleepyhead," he joked kindly.

"How long was I out?" I was still trying to comprehend the enormity of Gabriel's revelation. How could I possibly be from Amenta? Why did Gabriel tell me that? Why now? I knew it was something I had to figure out.

"Since I've been awake, I guess it's been about three hours, if the sun moves the same way it does on earth." He held one hand toward the horizon with three fingers together estimating the movement of the sun. "I guess it's about an hour until sundown."

"Do you think we should stop?" I asked.

Kane thought for a moment. He scanned the horizon and our surroundings. "Honestly, Trin...I really don't know."

Reluctantly, I sat up. I leaned toward the animal's large ear. "What do you think, Fido?" I patted him briskly on the side. "Should we stop for the night?"

As if he understood exactly what I was saying, the huge animal grunted then raised its long neck and sniffed the air. Kane and I looked at each other in amazement. It continued walking with its head erect until we crested the next dune. When we reached the top, it brought its head back down and stopped. Bending its knees, it brought its enormous body gracefully to the ground. Snaking its head next to Kane's, it let off a loud gasp that sounded like a burp.

"I think that's our cue to get off." I said, hopping off of its back. I scratched the animal's side, "Thanks for the ride, Fido!"

"Fido?" Kane laughed. "I guess that's about a good name as any." He followed me to the ground. "Getting down is fine by me. I think I'm a little saddle sore anyway." He rubbed his rear gently.

I snickered. Fido then curled its neck toward its own hindquarters. It snorted at two large bags Kane and I had not noticed were tied to the saddle. They were woven of material layered in colorful bands. They looked a little

southwestern and for a moment I longed for Amarillo. Kane walked toward Fido and unlashed the bags. I grasped the top of one as he opened the other and peered inside.

“Looks like this one is full of Fido food,” he said pulling out a handful of purplish grass. Fido was obviously excited and tugged the grass gently from Kane’s hand with his ridged flattened teeth. Kane toted the large sack to the front of the animal and dumped the contents on the ground. “Here you go boy!” Fido replied by munching ravenously.

Kane returned and we opened the second bag. Inside were a wicker basket and a large flask. Kane pulled both from the bag. He handed the flask to me and opened the basket. Inside was a feast fit for a king, except I did not recognize any of the food. It smelled wonderful nonetheless. I twisted open the flask and held it up to my nose, smelling what was inside. I was met with a scent that was floral and spicy at the same time, almost like chai tea. I sipped the contents...delicious. I drank deeply, suddenly realizing how thirsty I actually was. Kane gathered a small, colorful blanket from the bag and spread it haphazardly on the ground.

He wasn’t worried about my flask. Like a typical boy, he had already unwrapped most of the packages and was busy munching away. He saw me looking and said awkwardly, his mouth stuffed with food, “Trin, you gotta try this stuff!”

I smiled, remembering something my dad used to say when he caught me stuffing my face. I giggled and in my best imitation of a German accent, I said, “Augustus, safe some woom for latah!”

He almost choked on laughter and food. “I remember that...” he gulped, “Willy Wonka!” I handed him the flask and he drank deeply. “That tastes great!” he exclaimed, examining the flask for markings.

I sat next to him on a nearby blanket and nibbled at the selection of food. I was still desperately worried about Gabriel, especially after my dream, and didn’t have much of an appetite. I noticed Kane hadn’t touched one of the packages. This one was quite small and sat on the edge of the crumpled blanket. I took and unwrapped it. Inside was a large seed. It looked similar to a milkweed pod with tufts of red fluff poking out of the top. A tag was attached with a short string. I held it up for Kane to see and read the tag aloud.

“PLANT ME”

Kane stopped in mid chew. He scrambled across the blanket and sat next to me. “Plant me?” he inquired. “I might have taken a bite out of it.”

“Like Alice in Wonderland...” I paused, “except this is a far cry from Wonderland.” I held the seed up to the light from the setting sun. “Should we?”

“I don’t know,” he replied unsurely.

I wished we were more decisive. Neither of us knew what we should do because we didn’t know what was coming next. It was going to be a series of guesses. “I think we should. Fido, the food, the drink, the voices...”

“What voices?” he asked looking concerned.

“Never mind,” I replied quickly. I didn’t want to answer any questions about the voices, so I stood and walked a distance away from the blanket.

Kane jumped to his feet and followed me closely, “Trinity...what voices?”

I pretended I didn’t hear him and kept walking.

“Trinity,” he sprinted in front of me and grasped my shoulders. “Don’t ignore me. What voices?”

I had to tell him. I should have never let that slip out in the first place. “I hear voices, from Amenta...Gabriel’s world. They help me when we are in trouble. I think they sent Fido...and the food.” I didn’t tell him I was also from Amenta. I wasn’t ready to share that little historical tidbit yet.

He smiled and hugged me, “I thought I was the only one. I thought I was hearing things or going crazy.” He looked at me and gave me another long embrace. “I thought I was going nuts.”

“You hear them too?” I asked, astonished. “What do they say? It was rather pompous to think I was the only important one in this whole scenario. I realized everyone had a purpose...Kane, Gabriel, Ravie, me...and we would soon find out why we were all here and what role we would play.

“They sound like bells...wind chimes to be exact. They usually encourage me; tell me to move or to get on the camel...little things...helpful things. It’s kind of like they are looking out for me.”

“Me too,” I paused thoughtfully. “Now let’s plant this thing.”

Kane bent and dug a hole in the sand with his hands. I dropped the seed inside and he covered it with sand. “Water,” he said as he uncorked the flask. He poured some of the deliciously spiced water on the ground.

Almost immediately, the ground began to vibrate. Kane grasped my arm and tugged me away from the seed. Suddenly, a tall, glassy post erupted from the ground, followed by another and another. Long sheets of a billowy, white, cotton-like material unwove themselves from the sides of the posts and magically tied themselves down to smaller posts that rose from the sand around the sides of the main posts. As we gaped in amazement, smoke puffed from the sand and blossomed into a small fire surrounded by stones.

Kane grinned widely and put his arm around my shoulders. We waited a moment to make sure nothing else shot from the ground. Arm in arm we walked towards the encampment of billowing white linen.

“Check this out!” exclaimed Kane. There were two tents that sat back from the campfire. One was much smaller than the other. “Let’s save the big one for last.”

We approached the small tent. Kane held one on the large flaps open for me and I ducked inside. This was immediately clear that this was the dressing tent. A chair with a hole in the seat and a chamber pot beneath sat in one corner of the room. The floor was strewn with carpets designed like the tapestries of the Middle Ages, but far more intricate and colorful. Battles, coronations and unknown events played out on the floor in front of me. On the other side of the room was a large table with two blue-gray, glass washing bowls set on top. There were matching pitchers of water as well. Strange perfumes and soaps were organized in small baskets. I began uncapping the wonderfully colored glass bottles and inhaling the lovely scents.

Kane noticed two wardrobes in the rear of the tent. He opened the doors of each. “Trin, look at this!”

I turned and saw the beautiful clothing inside. I assumed one was intended for Kane and one was for me. I set down the perfume bottle and scurried to his side. The clothing was varied and woven of the softest silken material. There were at least ten outfits in each of our wardrobes. I pulled one out. It hung on a structure that resembled a hanger made of smooth glass and twisted to provide a hook. I held up the lovely ensemble and admired myself in the standing mirror between the wardrobes.

The outfit I selected reminded me a bit of an Indian sari, except wrapping was not required. It was woven from a material that felt like soft silk, dyed blue, orange and gold. Odd, but elegant animals were woven into the fabric around the hem of the skirt. All of the pleats and folds were already stitched where they should be. It was astoundingly alien and yet strikingly lovely.

“Kane stopped rummaging in the closet, jeweled sandals in hand. His mouth gaped open. “Trin, that’s amazing! Put it on!” He turned his back. “I won’t peek!”

I couldn’t resist. I draped the outfit over my arm and walked behind a large, woven dressing screen and quickly stepped into my new outfit. I fastened the jeweled clasp on my shoulder and fluffed out the fabric. It was a dress, but not too long or too flowing to be useful in the desert. My arms were bare, but the cloth draped lightly across my shoulders. It fit me perfectly. I stepped into the room again and cleared my throat.

Kane turned and his jaw dropped. The shoes he held dropped and clunked on the floor.

“Thanks!” I twirled around, making the skirt billow. “I really need a shower though.”

He smiled widely, “You don’t know how beautiful you really are, do you?”

I felt a little awkward; I never could take a compliment, so I remained silent.

“Actually, I think there’s a shower next to the toilet. I’ll have to see how it works though,” he added.

“Now you try one on!” I rushed to his closet and chose an outfit of silk. This material glistened with silver on a black and green background; I thought it would match his eyes. I handed it to him and he slipped behind the dressing screen.

“I look ridiculous!” he laughed after a few moments. “But you’re right about needing a shower.”

He stepped from behind the screen. The fabric shimmered when he moved. He wore black pants that fit a little loosely in the thighs and tightly below the knee. A sash of green draped about his waist and rose to cross one shoulder. A black, loose fitting sheer shirt tucked into the sash and anyone could immediately see his body was sculpted as perfectly as his face.

“Pretty gay, huh?” he asked sheepishly.

“Not a bit,” I replied. “It’s just different than you’re used to.” I admired the delicate material of Kane’s outfit and I took a moment to also admire the bravery of the young man inside.

We stood next to each other and looked into the standing, full-length mirror. I felt unseen, but gentle hands grasping my hair and weaving it into braids, before my eyes. Kane and I watched my hair magically transform from unkempt and hopelessly tangled to perfectly coiffed braids in mere moments. We were astounded. As we examined our images in the mirror, I noticed Kane was now clean shaven. He ran his hand across his face in amazement.

“That’s some magic mirror!” he exclaimed.

“I think this is only the start,” I replied.

Kane smiled mischievously, “Let’s check out the other tent!”

He clasped my hand and led me from the dressing tent. The sun nestled between distant mountains like a brightly plumed bird perched on a nest of stone. Twilight was coming. The campfire burned brightly, and I noticed while we were inside, two delicate, but sturdy grey glass chairs had grown next to the campfire. Fido was resting in the shadow of the large tent, peacefully picking at the last of the purple grass.

Kane ducked inside the larger tent and held the flap for me. I followed him inside. It was quite roomy. Two elegant beds dressed with colorful cloths sat on top of a large polished glass platform. Skillfully woven carpets were spread upon the sand and two ornately carved armchairs were set facing each other. A table sat between the chairs and on top looked to be some sort of board game. Baskets of fruits rested almost everywhere and two other tables were adorned with plates of small treats. Kane took a seat in one of the chairs and began popping some of the snacks into his mouth. I clambered on top of one of the beds. It felt wonderful to relax in such soft, decadent materials, and I felt the stress and fatigue rushing from my body. As the sun sank below the horizon, oil lamps hanging from the ceiling blazed to life. I welcomed the comfort by closing my eyes and savoring my relaxation.

I had almost fallen asleep when I felt someone sit beside me on the bed. I opened my eyes and Kane was gazing softly down at me. "I'm going to go sit by the fire. I didn't want to frighten you if you woke and found me gone," he smiled. "Get some sleep. I imagine tomorrow will bring many answers." He leaned over and kissed me softly on my forehead, then stood slowly and exited the tent.

I continued to lie on my bed in the dim light provided by the oil lamps. I had every intention of staying there and resting, but the thought of Kane alone by the campfire forced me to get up. I felt bad that he was even here. Everything was entirely my fault. I stopped and gathered a small plate of treats from one of the tables and I opened the flap of the tent to the evening air.

It was much colder than I thought a desert should be shortly after sunset. Kane sat with his back toward me, savoring the sun's last colorful rays over the distant mountains.

"Hey," I said softly, not wanting to startle his rumination.

"Oh, hi," he replied, shaking off what seemed to be some deep thoughts, "I thought you were asleep."

"I kept thinking of you out here, alone. You've done so much for me, how could I leave you by yourself?" I smiled. "I'm not bothering you, am I?"

"No...not at all...I was just thinking...and enjoying the sunset. I bet the stars, if there are any stars here, are going to be spectacular."

I studied the deepening blue sky and took a seat on the glass chair across from Kane's. I leaned back and welcomed the warmth provided by the fire. We sat in silence for quite some time, marveling about the events that took place today and stealing glances of each other's new outfits.

Kane eventually broke the silence. He looked at me seriously, "So what's going to happen next?"

I thought for a moment. "I wish I could at least give you a clue, Kane. But I know just as much as you."

"Do you have any idea where we might be?"

"No," I replied, "but it's definitely not Amenta."

"What exactly is Amenta?" he asked. "I want to know."

I breathed deeply, wondering where to begin. Several minutes passed before I could begin to describe the beauties of my newfound home. "Amenta is a far away, wonderful world, full of trees, waterfalls, and beautiful, white cities. It is the place where Gabriel, Michael, and Beatrice are from." I left myself out on purpose. I had to understand my role in this before I could even begin to explain it to someone else. My heart ached when I mentioned Beatrice's name. I hoped she was not the face I saw in Irkalla. I hoped it was one of Seth's tricks. I thought longingly of that home, the one I had yet to discover.

"You have been there, haven't you?" he asked.

"I have."

"How did you get there? Did Gabriel take you?"

"No," I pictured Gabriel's handsome face in my mind. The pit of my stomach lurched. "I went there in my dreams."

After a moment, Kane said, "Tell me about these dreams."

"Well, at first they were nightmares. I dreaded having them. These were like the one you were in...with the wolves. I thought I was going to kill one of you through my dreams. I was terrified, so much so that I avoided sleep altogether, but sleep has a funny way of catching you when you're not looking." I continued, "Everything started to change when I travelled to Amenta. It's kind of weird how it happened, but it was almost like it was calling out to me to come. When I was there, I was given the key; the one we used to get to Irkalla."

"The key to hell," he said.

"I guess you could call it that. I was told I would know when to use the key, when all looked lost." I stopped for a few minutes, debating whether to reveal more to Kane. He followed me here, risking his own life for Gabriel.

"Tell him, Trinity!" It was the voices again, yet they were very faint and difficult to hear. I strained. "He will help. Tell him everything!" The voices were right. He needed to know what he was facing.

"Kane," I leaned toward him. His green eyes glimmered in the firelight. "I feel I have to tell you this."

"What Trin?" He seemed eager to hear what I had to say.

“My family is from Amenta as well.”

“What?” he replied, astonished at this news.

“I was hidden from Seth by an entire existence.”

“Are you serious?”

“Absolutely,” I replied.

“God, Trin!” Kane leaned back and ran his fingers through his dark hair as he always did when he didn’t know what to think.

“That’s not all though,” I continued. “There is not just Amenta. There are thousands of other worlds, and I can travel into all of them.”

“What?” Kane leaned toward me. “Not just Earth and Amenta...there are others?”

“Thousands.”

Disbelieving, he stood and began pacing the sands in front of the fire ring. “Trin, why don’t you just go get Gabriel and zap us all out of here?”

“It’s more complicated than that,” I replied.

“Of course!” he said. “It always has to be complicated!”

I interrupted him. “I am the only one who can travel...and it has to be in my dreams. You cannot follow me. Gabriel cannot follow me. Only I have the power to do this.”

“And this is why Seth wants you.” Kane concluded. “Yes. I can go into any world and get any of the hidden keys.”

“How many keys are there?”

“Each world has a key. We have two of them. The key to earth is around your neck.” Kane absently fingered the key that hung below his Adam’s apple. “You will be able to leave, as long we can find the lock. Gabriel pressed that key into my hand just before he was taken.” I paused, giving Kane a moment to understand everything I was telling him. “I have the key to Irkalla.”

His face froze into a mask of fear. “Trinity, for the love of God, get rid of it!” he gasped as I pulled the tiny silver key from my pocket. “Where did you get that?”

“Amenta,” I replied examining it closely. I looked at Kane, “It is the only way to Gabriel.”

He sat in his chair, feeling obviously uncomfortable that I still possessed the key to the hellish world of Irkalla. I interjected. “If you want to go home, I will help you find the lock.”

Kane looked at me, surprised. “Trin, I told you I won’t leave you, and I meant it!” I was relieved. I did not want him to go, but I couldn’t force him to stay with me. “Gabriel is my friend. I will not watch him suffer, nor will I let you face Hell...or Irkalla...or whatever you call that place, by yourself!”

Kane was truly a trusting soul, and a great friend. He stood next to the fire, facing me. I rushed to him and hugged him, looking up into his determined eyes. “Thank you for staying with me through all of this.”

“I would do anything for you Trinity,” he whispered next to my ear as he held me tightly, “anything at all.”

Chapter 5

We sat by the fire for hours. Somehow, it kept burning though we had not added any fuel, so we kept sitting, enjoying its warmth. Kane was right, the stars put on a fabulous show. We didn’t speak much; there was too much to think about and Kane was beginning to fill in all of the blanks by himself, although I did have to answer a question from time to time.

Soon, I excused myself to the dressing tent and explored my wardrobe. A simple, warm, woven robe and matching nightgown caught my eye. I pulled them from the hanger and draped them over a chair. Standing in front of the “magic mirror” I discovered, that not only did it braid hair, it unbraided it as well. I also figured out how to work the shower mechanism. It was basically like a camp shower with a bag that held the water. Interestingly, the water remained perfectly warm. I savored its warmth and used a wonderfully perfumed selection of shampoos and soaps. I lingered on every detail, not knowing when my next shower would come.

A pair of luxuriously soft towels hung from hooks outside of the shower. I dried and dressed for bed. Although I don’t remember taking them from the wardrobe, a set of matching slippers sat on the floor beneath my nightgown and robe. I slipped them on my feet. Eager to try one of the perfumes, I selected one that smelled a little like lilac, my favorite flower. The magic mirror dried and brushed my hair as well. I emerged from the tent, ready for bed.

“Are you coming in?” I asked Kane.

“After a shower,” he replied, looking up from the flames. “I think my stink will kill your perfume.”

I laughed. “What can I say, I’m a girl.”

He smiled and studied the flames again. I could tell he thought deeply of something. I wished I knew what, so I proceeded into the large tent. The oil lamps were very dim, but brightened momentarily until I climbed into bed. No sooner than my head rested upon the pillow, I slept.

I dreamed of Gabriel, but this time, my dream was not so pleasant. Again, we were enveloped in the fog. I waited for him to appear. I rushed toward every shadow I saw, or thought I saw, but he never arrived. After a while, I heard him calling to me. I searched the fog, but every time I thought I was close, his voice called out from somewhere else. The more he called, the more I rushed about. Finally I could take no more. I sat on the ground and sobbed. I felt someone's arms around my shoulders. I looked up and saw it was not Gabriel, but Kane this time. He was comforting me and whispering that everything was going to be okay.

It was then I awoke. It took a moment to separate dream from reality, they blended seamlessly. Kane really was sitting next to me on the bed, arms around my shoulders, comforting me just as he had in my dream.

"Everything's going to be okay, Trinity," he whispered.

I shuddered.

"Are you awake now?" He released my shoulders.

"What's happening?" I asked, looking about the tent. The oil lamps glowed dimly in the darkness. It was still dark outside.

"You must have been having quite a dream," he replied. "You were tossing and turning, and then you sat upright and started to sob!"

I'm sorry." I said.

"It's okay. I just couldn't wake you up, and that alone scared the crap out of me!"

"How long was I like that?" I asked.

"Maybe twenty minutes or so."

"Gosh, so long?"

"Yeah." Kane shook his head and ran a hand through his still-damp hair. I noticed he smelled a little like cinnamon. "You're okay now?"

"I think so," I yawned. "What time is it?"

"I guess it must be around three-thirty, but I don't have a watch and my phone is dead."

"I'm sure mine is too."

"Can I get you anything?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so."

He smiled and looked into my eyes, "Just promise you won't do that again!" The flickering lamps made his eyes glitter in the darkness as if they bore their own flame. I felt guilty admiring his good looks, but with Kane, it was difficult not to.

"I promise," I replied, a little embarrassed.

He plodded back to his own bed, and crawled beneath the covers.

I waited a few moments before I spoke. "Kane, you still awake?"

"Yup."

"What do you think we should do?"

"It took a few moments for him to answer. "You know, I've been thinking about that all evening, and I still don't have the answer," he sighed.

"I guess morning will literally shed some light on that."

"I guess so."

He waited so long to speak I thought he had fallen asleep. "Trin, have you heard the chiming voices lately?"

I thought deeply, "No, not while I was asleep."

"I think I do sometimes, but they are very far away." His tone was sad. "It's impossible to hear what they are saying. Actually, I am starting to think this world may be running a little interference. Every time I think I hear them and I stop to listen, other noises become louder and drown out the chimes. I think we should be careful here."

Kane frightened me with his honesty. "I think that's the best idea I've heard since we left home, I answered.

I lay awake for long hours, trying to hear the voices. I asked them questions. I searched for answers. When I thought I heard them, Kane was right, an owl would call, Fido would grunt, the wind would cause the billows of the tent to flap. I was ashamed I had not noticed it before. Soon I heard Kane snoring softly. I huddled under my soft blankets, becoming ever more frightened of what was to come.

Chapter 6

The next morning I woke with the first rays of the sun. I got out of bed and slipped into my robe and slippers. Kane breathed deeply and contentedly from under a soft pile of blankets. I decided to let him sleep a while longer. We went to bed so late in the first place.

New trays of treats had replaced the ones Kane decimated the evening before, and a warm pot of something that smelled like strong tea was set on one of the tables. I poured a cup and tasted it. It was sweet and creamy and a little spicy. Like everything else here, it tasted wonderful. I took a few treats on a plate and went outside to enjoy the sunrise.

The campfire still burned brightly and the rays of morning crested the distant mountains. I had never seen a true desert sunrise before, and each moment was the height of glory. I sipped my tea and nibbled my breakfast. I felt guilty enjoying my camp life luxuries while Gabriel suffered so greatly in Irkalla. I could not stop thinking of the suffering he must be enduring. I felt so guilty.

After I sat a while, I checked Fido. He snored away the morning just like Kane. I would wake them after my shower, so I proceeded into the small tent. The charm of the unknown perfumes and toiletries had worn off. I just wanted a shower and to get started. Every moment I delayed just prolonged Gabriel's suffering.

I washed myself in the warm water and selected a white outfit. This one consisted of long, loose fitting pants and a flowing tunic. The material contained threads of silver. I thought it would be the best selection to wear in the desert. It covered me from the sun, yet was flowing enough to be cool in the intense heat. I dressed quickly and had my hair braided again by the magic mirror. This time the braids were piled attractively on top of my head. As soon as I finished, I left the tent to wake Kane. The sunlight was already blaring brightly overhead, and the last wisps of cold night air were rapidly dissipating. I was glad to see Kane already enjoying a cup of tea beside the fire. Another plate of food rested in his lap. I took the seat across from him.

He finished chewing a mouthful of food and washed it down with a gulp of tea. "Did you eat?"

"Yes," I replied. "Not that hungry though."

"You haven't been eating much, and getting weak isn't going to help anyone."

"I know," I replied guiltily. "Food just makes me nauseous."

He held his plate of delicacies out for me to take. I gave in and chose something puffy and covered with blue crystals. "Take some meat too." Kane commanded. "You'll burn that sugar off before we even get started."

He selected a dark brown fried looking thing and handed it to me. "Tastes like chicken," he chuckled.

I laughed out loud. Kane always made me feel better, no matter how low I was. "What's the plan?" I asked. "Do you have one?"

"Nothing official until I run it by the boss," he replied.

I must have looked a little confused, because he added in a very deadpan tone, "You're the boss, Trinity."

I laughed again. "Sorry, not awake yet. Shoot."

"Well, I thought we'd just pack up and follow Fido." At the mention of his new-found name, Fido lumbered to his feet and wagged his fan-like tail, just like a loyal dog wanting a walk. "There's really nothing else to consider. We'd never survive more than a few hours out here and Fido seems to know where he's going."

"Let me get a shower. I'll pack up some food, water, and a few outfits...and an extra pair of shoes. We'll have to leave the rest, I guess," he said simply.

Kane headed for the small tent while I went into the larger one. I wanted to get moving so I decided to do the packing. I put as much food as I could fit into one of the woven bags. I re-filled the flask and found a few empty bottles in an obscure cabinet. When I emerged into the sunlight, Kane was already washed and waiting. He stood and I saw that he too chose white as a desert traveling color. He looked amazing in his loose fitting pants and shirt that he had belted at the waist. The other bag, stuffed with some clothing, sat on the chair closest to the fire.

"I packed you a few things," he said. "I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all. Thank you. Do you have your key?" I asked.

"I never took it off." He reached inside his shirt and pulled out the key that would hopefully, someday, lead both of us home.

"I have mine,"

"I wouldn't be too sad if you lost that one," he replied. "What do you say we pack some food and saddle up?"

"It's all done," I held up the heavy pack. Fido must have understood what we were talking about because he ambled beside us in then knelt, waiting for us to climb into the saddle. Kane lashed the overstuffed clothing and food bags onto the back of the saddle.

"We have no food for him," I worried.

"We'll find some. There's no more here."

Fido grunted and we clambered into the saddle, putting all of our trust into our unusual companion. Fido eagerly began our trek, but stopped on the far side of the camp. He dug his nose into the sand and pulled out the "PLANT ME" seed, gently holding it between his even teeth. He coiled his neck and placed the seed into Kane's hand.

"You mean to tell me this is reusable?" Kane exclaimed.

Kane and I looked at the camp. Everything suddenly became a little less sharp around the edges. The billowy cloth of the tents took on a granular appearance. The fire went out in a puff of smoke. An unexpected gust of wind blew from the west and took the fading camp with it, blowing the remains away like sand in a windstorm. We looked again and everything, even the wind, was completely gone.

"Amazing," muttered Kane.

"Totally," I gasped. Kane tucked the seed safely into the pocket of his shirt.

Fido plodded through the desert, up and down dunes all morning. We didn't talk much; it was just too hot. It didn't take too long before I felt a little nauseous. I wanted to stop, but I couldn't bear the thought of wasting more time. I heard that seasick sailors sometimes relied on the horizon. If they focused on the horizon, their seasickness sometimes abated. I had to try something, so I stared at the horizon. Traveling at night wasn't too bad, but in the daytime, when I could see the distant mountains and endless waves of sand, I just couldn't focus. That's what made me feel so ill.

After a while, I did feel slightly better, so I kept my eyes on the distant mountains. Relief only lasted a short while. Eventually I had to insist on a break. It was either that or cover Fido in vomit.

No sooner had we stopped, than I scrambled out of the saddle and was sick. Kane was at my side in a moment. "Seasick, huh? Why didn't you say something?" he asked, almost laughing.

"I didn't want to stop." I coughed and spat, "Sorry."

"I have a cure though," he replied.

Kane took my hand in his. He felt my wrist between his fingers. "There it is," he said, putting a little pressure between a few tendons. He held the pressure for a few moments. "Better?" he asked.

I no longer felt like throwing up, and any improvement was a good thing. "Yeah, I think a little."

"Great!" He rummaged in his pockets and produced a crumpled, worn roll of hockey tape. Only Kane or Michael would have a roll of hockey tape in his pocket. He sifted through a little sand and held up a rock that was as round as he could hope. He pressed the stone in the space he held on my wrist. "Hold that there," he commanded. "Don't move it!" He wrapped hockey tape around my wrist several times. It was sturdy, but not restricting, and he promised wonders for my motion sickness. While I was recovering, Kane gave Fido some water. He drank it heartily.

After about a half-hour of sitting under the saddled canopy he asked, "You ready?"

"Yeah," I replied, actually feeling noticeably better. "How did you know what to do?"

"Well, before my dad died, we used to go sailing off the coast. He quickly found out that I got rabidly seasick." Kane raised his own arm and pulled his sleeve up. He had his own pressure-point mechanism taped to his arm. "I made it yesterday."

I laughed as I climbed back into the saddle, "I really hope this works."

"Trust me," he said smoothly.

Fido began plodding across the sands once again. I fiddled with the ends of the taped stone. It did wonders to relieve most of my motion sickness. After we rode for some time, Kane again asked how I was doing.

"You're the cure!" I joked.

He chuckled, "Just keep it there."

The afternoon passed slowly. Sometime we talked, but then the heat would get the better of us. So most of the time, we just watched the sand pass by from under our protective canopy like waves on a dusty ocean. Eventually Kane caught my attention. "Trin, keep your eyes to the east. Don't be frightened, but every once in a while I think I see figures over one of the dunes, then I wonder if I'm just seeing things."

I was startled to hear him say someone might be here, with us. "I looked for quite a while. When I was about ready to give up, I saw them when we crested a high dune. There were two figures, animals that were the same type as Fido, and it looked like smaller figures perched on their backs, human, I hoped. One thing was perfectly clear. They were heading in our direction. I felt uneasy.

"Who do you think they are?" I asked.

"I have no idea, but I hope they're friendly," replied Kane. "They're still hours away, but they're headed directly toward us." It was hard to judge distance on the dunes since there was nothing to use as a reference point except the endless piles of sand. I remembered my walk to the White City. It seemed like the city was always just on the horizon, no matter how many miles I covered.

“I think we should keep going.”

“Trin, Fido is going to need food and water. We’re going to have to stop for him sooner or later.”

“I vote for later. What do you think Fido?” The animal brought his head back and gave me a grunt as I scratched his neck. “Should we stop?”

Fido grunted again and glanced toward the east. He began plodding a little more quickly. I looked at Kane, uncertain.

“Fido thinks you’re right. Let’s let him decide where to stop...and when,” Kane stated seriously.

“Okay.” My skin crawled with apprehension. I hoped our paths crossed, but did not meet. I hoped this with all my heart.

Chapter 7

Twilight was in full bloom and Fido began to gallop. He often raised his long neck and snorted at the air, obviously aware of the company as well. While we rode, Kane had unfastened one of the bags and pulled out two bottles of water. Fido brought his head back and we poured it in his mouth. He swallowed loudly but did not slow his pace. He continued trotting over dune after dune.

Night descended and we found it extremely difficult to see more than a few yards in any direction. We were grateful when the moon rose. Kane and I scanned the dunes for some time, and thankfully the other riders were nowhere to be seen.

We traveled for a few more hours until Kane insisted we stop for the night. We decided to keep watch, taking turns, until morning. Most importantly, we needed to give Fido a break. The poor thing had finally slowed his gait and plodded over the sands obediently. I guessed it was around eleven when we stopped for the night. We were still concerned about the other riders, but figured there was very little we could do if they planned to harm us. We thought a night-watch would be helpful. Kane and I would each take our turns keeping an eye on the dunes. We also thought that Fido would alert us well before someone, or something, was able to approach the camp.

Kane was eager to see if the camp-seed would work again. We dismounted and he rushed to a flat spot to plant it. To our delight, the luxurious camp again sprang from the sands. In the large tent was a bag of purple grass for Fido. I dragged it outside and went over to the loyal beast. He seemed exhausted and very happy to see the bag of food. His fan tail wagged so quickly, he stirred up quite a zephyr.

I showered and spent a little extra time with the magic mirror. I was tense and needed a diversion. The mirror braided my hair four times before I was satisfied with the results. I guess I just wasn’t in a good mood. We had been traveling two days and still had no idea where we were headed, or if we were actually headed anywhere at all. Maybe Fido was sent to distract us, to keep us from where we really should be going. I couldn’t hear the tinkly voices through all of the noisy events that surrounded me, although I knew they spoke. Worst of all, Gabriel still suffered. I could feel his pain, deep in my heart, though he did his best to keep it from me.

When I went outside to the fire, Kane was alert, but did not seem to be worrying too much. He was much more willing than me to put our lives in the hands of fate. He wasn’t usually a trusting spirit, but this time he was content to believe Fido was here to help. While he was in the shower, I went to talk to Fido.

When Fido heard me approaching, he raised his head and nuzzled my arm. It was hard not to like this strange animal. He seemed to understand us perfectly, although his only communication consisted of grunts and huffs. I scratched the scaly skin under his chin and spoke to him in low tones. “What do you say boy? Where are we going?” Fido huffed and looked to the south.

“Do you know Gabriel?” At the mention of Gabriel’s name, Fido rose his head and wagged his tail enthusiastically. He licked my cheek with his blue, forked tongue.

“Fido!” I giggled. “That’s gross!” I rubbed the slobber off of my cheek with my sleeve. “I just had a shower!”

I scratched behind his ears in an effort to calm him down. “So you know him,” I pondered. There was much more to Fido than met the eye. Maybe because he looked a little like a camel, we treated him like one. This was clearly not the case. He could communicate and just the act of letting us know made me certain he was on our side.

“How much longer do we have to travel?” Fido looked deeply into my eyes, as if he were trying to read my mind. He grunted two loud, distinct grunts.

“Two days?” Fido nuzzled my hand again. “You know, Fido, you’re a lot smarter than you look.” I scratched his ears and could immediately see he enjoyed that immensely. His rear leg started to vibrate, and he stretched his back just like a dog. I laughed at the comparison.

“One more question.” I said. “Is someone following us?” To my amazement, Fido suddenly looked very sad, lowered his head and nodded. I thought I was seeing things. Could he nod yes and no? I wanted to test this theory again, to see if he could really answer a question. But maybe he didn’t want me to know too much or perhaps he was simply finished answering questions because he curled his legs under his body and sat on them. He then coiled his long neck across his back, closed his eyes and yawned.

I heard Kane calling my name. I think he was finished showering and was a little worried. I walked back to the fire quickly. “I’m here,” I called.

“Gosh, Trin! Don’t disappear like that!” Kane was dressed a flowing turquoise tunic. He looked very tired.

“Sorry. I was just talking to Fido. You know, he’s pretty smart.”

“He better be, or we’re just wasting time.” Maybe Kane worried more than I thought.

“I think he knows Gabriel.”

“What makes you think that?” he asked, his voice full of doubt.

“Well, I just went over to give him a goodnight pet, and I started saying what I was thinking out loud. When I mentioned Gabriel’s name, he sat upright, like he knew who I was talking about.”

“Trin, it was probably your tone of voice. Most animals respond to your tone rather than to what you’re actually saying.”

“But when I asked him if someone was following us, Fido nodded his head and looked sad.”

I could see that surprised Kane at first, but he continued casting doubt on what happened. “Trinity, animals can’t talk. That’s why they’re animals. It doesn’t matter what world you’re in.”

“But...”

Kane interrupted, “It’s just silly, Trin. You...we both...want answers, and we’ll look anywhere to get them...even to Fido.”

Maybe Kane was right...but then again, maybe I was right. I could see I wasn’t getting through to him. When he was tired, he was almost always moody. “I’ll take the first watch,” I offered. “You look pooped.”

“I’ll go first. I’m really not that tired.” He tried to insist, but he couldn’t fool anyone.

“Honestly, I have some figuring to do. I’ll be okay!”

He sighed, “Only if you promise not to discuss anything with the dog.”

Any other time I would have chastised him for being such a grump, but I just replied, “I promise.”

“If you need me, just yell.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“Wake me in two hours. Then you get some rest.” He turned and headed into the tent.

Although I had no way to tell time, I was always pretty good at estimating. Sitting by the fire, I watched the stars. Besides Fido, they were the best thing about this ocean of sand. If we had two more nights of camping on the dunes, as I garnered from Fido, at least the camp was lovely. I never was much of a camper, but I could really get into seed camping.

I thought of many things as I sat in the cool night air, but foremost was Gabriel. Where was he? I thought of him for a long time as I stared into the depths of the fire. I tried to send him my thoughts...and my prayers. I soon became so entrenched in my thoughts that I began to see Gabriel’s face in the flames of the campfire. I quickly shut my eyes. I did not like the fire, not after what I saw happen to my mother. I nestled more deeply into my chair, still unable to think of anything but Gabriel, and soon drifted to sleep. I dreamed.

In this dream, there was no fog, and no Gabriel. I had called and searched until I was hoarse. This time, I did not sob. I simply searched for someone I knew was not there. The light was dim and coming from somewhere above, and the ground shifted beneath my feet, but nothing would deter me from looking for Gabriel. Soon, I heard his voice.

“Trinity! You must go back! You’ve wandered too far!”

“Where are you?” I called frantically.

“Go back! Hurry!”

“Where are you? I can’t find you!”

“Trinity! Wake up!”

Chapter 8

I opened my eyes. I must have fallen from my chair because I lay on my side in the cool sand. I sat up. It was dark except for the stars shining above. The fire must have gone out while I slept because it no longer burned brightly in front of me. I thought I should probably wake Kane. He would be angry if he missed his turn to watch.

I sat up and suddenly realized that camp was gone as well. No fire, no tents, no chairs, no Fido, and no Kane! My first thought was that Kane left me. Could he have taken the seed and left me in the desert while I slept? He would never do that! I looked about and all I could see were eerie dunes of sand peppered with starlight.

Realization dawned on me in a sickening rush! Now I understood my dream. I must have been looking for Gabriel and wandered away from camp. I have never sleep-walked before! Gabriel was trying to warn me to go back! He was calling me, trying to wake me up. But now I did not know which way to go. It was so dark! Camp could be just over the next hill, but there was no way to tell! All I could see was sand...mountains and mountains of sand splashed by the cold moonlight. I wanted to run, to reach the safety of the fire, but I fought the urge. My father always told me if I became lost that I should sit and wait for help. If Kane was still asleep, he could be no help! I could mark my path, but it was so dark, and all I had was the clothing on my back. I had nothing to mark my way in the sand, no bread crumbs, not even a pebble! Even if I did have something, a mere gust of wind could bury any mark I made, or blow it away all together. I had to sit and wait, at least until sunrise. Maybe then I would be able to see smoke from our fire, but without fuel, did our fire even give off smoke? I couldn't remember!

I thought of calling out, but I dared not. What if we were still being followed? Fido certainly seemed to think we were. I couldn't give away my location! I couldn't allow them to know I was lost, stranded by myself! I sat on the dune, trying to decide what to do. Every moment was torturous. Minutes passed as if they were hours.

After much thought, I concluded I would climb to the top of my dune when the sun came up. Maybe then I would see camp. I remembered we camped on the crest of a dune, and I thought I would be able to see a better distance if I could get to the top. But for now, it was going to be a very long, very cold night. I sat and wrapped my arms around my legs. I was only wearing a nightgown and a robe, not even any shoes or slippers. Thank God for my robe!

I did not want to imagine being lost, but those thoughts wriggled their way in. I might make it the better part of a day without any water, but there was no shelter. If I wasn't found, chances were I would be dead by tomorrow night. I quickly forced that terrifying conclusion from my mind, although its ghost continued to haunt my thoughts. I shivered. The desert was awfully cold at night. Maybe I would freeze to death even before I saw the light of day. That thought forced me to stand, and I did the only thing I could think of to keep warm...jumping jacks. I jumped a few times, but that didn't last long on the dunes. I kept sliding. What if I broke an ankle? Sit-ups! That was it. I remembered seeing something on television one night at the hospital. A lady who was jogging in a canyon tripped and broke her pelvis. Although it was excruciatingly painful, she did one sit-up every five seconds for an entire night to fend off hypothermia and to stay awake. It worked. She was able to keep her focus. Sit-ups couldn't hurt. Unfortunately, I also remembered she was an extreme athlete and I wasn't. I sat on the dune, with my toes pointed downward. I thought that I would give up quickly doing one every five seconds. I hated sit-ups, so I began by doing one every ten seconds.

Being lost does strange things to your mind, even after a few minutes. After several hours, your imagination begins to get the better of you. I had done so many sit-ups my ribs ached and I felt like vomiting. I had lost all track of time. I could not risk falling asleep, so I stood. I would not let panic take over. I wished the voices were here, and I called to them in a whisper. Every once in a while I thought I heard them, but then the wind picked up and covered their presence. I whispered to Gabriel. "Can you hear me? I guess we're both in a fix. I'm lost, but you know that already. You woke me up. Can you wake Kane or Fido?" I began to cry. "Please?" My tears turned to sobs as I sunk to my knees in the sand. I knew I shouldn't be crying out precious fluids, but I couldn't help it. My legs ached and throbbed from hours of trying to maintain balance in the loose sand. I sat on the side of the dune and sobbed.

When I cried myself out, I felt worn and weary. I was only on the dune for a few hours and it felt like I had already given up. I focused on Gabriel once again. If I didn't survive, there was very little chance he would ever get out of Irkalla. But how could I ever conquer that terrible land when I couldn't even stand in some sand for a few hours. I was disgusted with myself.

After wiping my tears into my sleeve, I stood. If Gabriel could see how weak I was, he would never want me. I began counting seconds to measure the passage of time. It was boring, but it occupied my thoughts, at least for a while. When I was on three thousand one hundred three, I marked that just under an hour had passed. I could not keep my focus on counting, and I doubted I would be found soon.

I sat down once again and immediately imagined I saw shadows. That made me really jumpy. Focus, I had to focus. I hoped Kane wouldn't wake up and start calling for me, at least not until morning. What if he panicked and lost his way as well, but Kane was too level headed for that to happen. I continuously thought I saw the first rays of the sun brightening the horizon, but every time it was just my imagination playing tricks on me. I thought of going back to sleep, hoping Gabriel would show me the way, but what if I wandered even further away? I couldn't take that chance, so I continued my sporadic counting.

I was tired and I longed for the sun. Shadows swirled all around me...the spirits of the dead. I swatted at them, recoiling. Why was I the one with the ability to dream myself out of here, but I did not know how! I had to relax! Those shadows weren't really there! I was imagining them! I wanted to scream. I counted by another hour...three-thousand, six-hundred.

Then I saw it, doubted, then I was sure...the unmistakable first rays of the sun, brightening the distant mountains! First deep red, then roses and pinks and lavenders; I waited until the golds arrived. When I thought I could see far enough, I scrambled up the dune. At first I thought I saw camp, but soon realized it was just a trick of the morning light, a reflection that looked like the billowy white linen tents. I scanned as far as I could; straining my eyes to see any distant clues that might indicate camp was nearby...nothing. My heart sank. It was then that I noticed my deep thirst! I had been lost for at least five hours with nothing to drink or eat. The sun would soon start sapping my strength. If I was going to move, it had to be now!

Panic gripped my heart and I fell to my knees. I was completely lost on the dunes...lost because of a dream! I sat once again, letting the rays of the sun warm my back. In the light of day, it was perfectly clear that my next decision would mean either life or death for both me and Gabriel. Should I sit and wait for Kane, or should I try to find camp and risk getting hopelessly lost. I was so thirsty. The decision had to be made soon!

Maybe I should dream...but where would I go? What would I get? I could think of nothing that would help me get out of here. Even if I did fall asleep and dream my mind to some other place, my body would remain on the dunes...wasting away in the sun, at the mercy of whatever roamed these lands. God...was there nothing?

I stood. I could not sit here and wait for a rescue that might never come. Kane had no way of telling where I was or which way I went. I decided to keep going south. All signs pointed in that direction. Keep travelling south, the direction Fido nodded. I kept the rising sun to my right and I started waking. Progress was slow on the dunes. Every step I took, I sunk a half step backward into the loose sand. It was like walking in deep snow. It did not take long for my toes to cramp and my thighs to tighten with a throbbing ache.

I walked for several hours, not knowing if I was still going south. I had to pee, but did not want that precious fluid to be wasted on the sand. I was unbearably thirsty and the sun beat me with its oppressive anger. I stopped for a moment to rest and reassess my situation. It had to be close to mid-morning. If I didn't find camp in the next few hours...oh...I refused to think about that! I wanted to sit and sob, but I could not afford the tears! I willed myself to keep moving. My feet scorched with each step I took on the burning sands. Soon I could go no further. I stopped and swayed, dizzy with my efforts and lack of water. I could barely remember why I was even here in this blazing land. My vision went black and I fell to the sand in a silent heap.

Chapter 9

I dreamed. This time I was swimming in a cool pond of water. I stopped to look about and realized I was back in Texas, swimming in the spring-fed pond that was on my Grandfather's tiny ranch. His two cows, Blaze and Juniper, stood behind a fence watching me blankly. The water was wonderful. Only a short distance away was the house, a cheery, yellow farmhouse with white shutters and a pointed roof. My grandmother sat and waved to me from the swing on the vast front porch. All of a sudden the breeze picked up and the wind chimes on the porch responded by tingling cheerfully. I ducked my head under water and took a long drink, swallowing the cool moisture as if I had never tasted it before. I surfaced and the wind had picked up even more. The chimes became louder, more like schoolbells than simple chimes. I hoisted myself onto the bank and realized the chimes spoke my name...Trinity....Trinity!

I opened my eyes, on the burning dune once again. I sat up and realized I was no longer thirsty. Had I really drank from the pond, or was I that far gone? With an enormous effort I stood. My clothes were wet, dripping, not with sweat, but with water from the pond. I felt refreshed, revitalized, but it would only last so long. My exposed skin was turning an angry shade of red and I could see patches of rawness on the tops of my feet. My lips were numb and blistered. I realized that I could take a million dips in my grandfather's dream pond, but no matter how much time I spent there, my body was still baking beneath this alien sun.

As soon as I began walking again, the sun was upon me. My skin tightened. Plodding up yet another endless dune, I heard something...something besides the shifting whispers of sand. It was a grunt...unmistakable! I wet my cracked lips with my tongue. My voice crackled like an old hag's, "Fido!" It could have been the animals of the other riders, but I did not care! I summoned all of my strength and I felt the push of adrenaline, "Fido!"

Again the grunt, followed by another...and another. I scrambled toward the noise on all fours. The sun was now high above. Indeed, south was the way to go! Fido continued to grunt. I crested a dune and saw him! Kane sat tall on his back, scanning the distance. He had not heard my cries!

“Fido!” I sobbed.

Kane sat erect and turned in the saddle. His mouth dropped when he saw me lurching toward him. Fido snaked his head toward me and bounded across the dune. When they were close, Kane jumped from the saddle and streaked to my side. He gathered me in his arms and practically jumped back onto Fido’s back. I wrapped my hands around the back of his neck.

“Trinity” he hugged me and kissed my forehead. We both cried and laughed with the joy of being together again.

“Sorry,” I mouthed weakly.

“I thought I lost you!” his toughness cracked wide open and he buried his face in my long, dirty hair.

After a few moments, he lifted his head and looked into my eyes, smiling sweetly. He kissed me on my lips, long and soft. I was surprised, but I closed my eyes and thought of Gabriel. I wished he were here.

“I am so glad you’re back!” Kane reached into the side of the saddle, still cradling me in one arm. He produced a bottle of water that he uncorked and poured over my mouth. It was so wonderful; I coughed most of it back up.

We were soon back at camp in minutes and I was almost asleep. Kane carried me from Fido’s saddle and into the large tent. “No more sleeping alone!” he scolded. He set me gently on my bed and covered me with a few blankets. Sleep claimed me instantly.

Chapter 10

When I woke, it was dark. I sat up, still embraced by the luxuries of camp. Kane bustled about packing the two woven bags. When he noticed I was watching, he dropped everything and rushed to my side. He sat on the bed next to me in the dim light and placed his hand on my cheek.

“What time is it?” I asked

“About four in the morning,” he replied softly

“You should sleep.”

“I did. This afternoon, when we first got back.”

I studied his face, “You look tired.”

He chuckled, “Well I was looking for you for the better part of a day!” We stared at each other without speaking for several moments when Kane leaned toward me. I was a little afraid he was going to kiss me again, but instead he spoke,

“Trin, what happened?”

“I really don’t know,” I replied honestly. “I remember sitting by the fire, watching the stars, thinking of what was going to come next.” I paused, remembering. “I must have fallen asleep. I was looking for Gabriel, but I couldn’t find him. I couldn’t even hear him.”

“You remember this?” Kane asked.

“Yes. I always remember my dreams.” I continued, “I remember the ground in my dream not being firm. I felt like I was getting sucked into it, as if it were quicksand. Now I know it actually was. I was searching the dunes for Gabriel...sleepwalking...though I have never done that before. I also remember Gabriel urging me to go back, but I did not understand. When I woke up on the dune, I knew exactly what he meant.”

“Okay then, we won’t leave you alone,” he said simply. “Maybe we’ll put a leash on you,” he laughed. “I need to be able to see you while you sleep.” He thought for a moment and caught my gaze with his. “Trinity, I thought I lost you. I was ready to search these dunes forever if that’s what it took. I told you I would not leave you and I won’t. We’ll just have to set up a plan where we are never apart.”

I smiled, “I am so sorry!”

“It’s okay...I just hate to think what would have happened if a few more hours went by...” He paused, “I found some ointment and put some on your burns. So far, they haven’t blistered, but you have quite a few on your legs.”

It didn’t make me uncomfortable that he tended my wounds while I slept. I trusted him...like I trusted Gabriel in that wonderful snowstorm so long ago...so long ago it seemed like a dream.

I reached and hugged Kane, “Thank you for coming to get me. I would have never found my way.” I tried hard not to let him see my tears, but it was no use. I owed him my life...again. He held me while I cried myself to sleep.

I woke in the early hours of the morning. I was still tired, but I wanted to get moving. Kane had propped his back against my headboard, but his feet still rested firmly on the floor. He had to be uncomfortable. He held my

hand tightly, afraid I would wander again. I knew that if I moved, he would wake up and I wanted him to get some more sleep.

Ever the tough guy, he would insist on staying awake, even if he was dog tired, and I was content to lie next to him. Allowing him a little rest was the least I could do. He was here for me. He risked his life for me. He traveled for me...and I pined for another. He slept peacefully, chest rising and falling rhythmically, a slight smile rested on his lips. I studied the lines of his face, perfect in every way. His skin was so smooth and unblemished, it begged to be touched.

I reached out and gently brushed his cheeks with my fingertips. His head tilted toward my hand and he sighed softly.

Chapter 10

When Kane began to stir about an hour later, I helped him along. I wanted him to wake up. We needed to get going. According to Fido, we should be at our destination tomorrow. What if that destination was Gabriel? I would not waste any more time, although I was at fault for most of the time we had already lost.

I rested my head on Kane's shoulder, and he curled his arm around me. With my fingertips, I tickled the palm of his hand. After a few tries, he wiggled his hand from mine. His eyes fluttered open and he smiled kindly when he looked at me.

"Finally!" I joked.

"What time is it?" he asked sleepily.

"Time to wake up!" I jumped to my feet and started hopping around the bed like a little girl.

He laughed heartily. "Settle down, knucklehead!"

I bounced one last time and landed on the bed.

"Thanks." Kane said honestly.

"For what?" I truly did not know what he was thanking me for.

"Not kicking me out of bed."

I simply smiled and got to my feet. I hadn't eaten in almost a day and I was famished, so I walked over to the plates of food and selected some bite-sized delicacies. Kane joined me and we ate heartily.

"What's the plan?" he asked through a mouthful of food.

I guess we'll just keep going," I replied. "Were you thinking along another line?"

"No," he chewed. "But I think we have to start thinking a little more intelligently."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"When I woke up and couldn't find you, I first thought the people who were following us came and took you."

"Kidnapped?"

"That was my line of thinking," he revealed. "Then I thought Fido would have grunted or signaled if someone was getting close, but I wasn't sure. That really scared me and I've been thinking about it a lot. Anyway, I realized we didn't have a plan if we were attacked. I don't know who those people were, or where they disappeared to, but I do know they made Fido pretty uncomfortable." Shivers tickled my spine. I had not thought of that circumstance.

He continued. "I just think we need to have something ready to bargain with, and a few weapons."

"I think you're absolutely right. I hadn't even thought about being approached."

We sat for a few moments, thinking. "Any ideas?"

I shook my head. I hadn't thought of a thing.

"Well, we have to have something portable, and valuable," he stated, rubbing his chin.

"We don't have anything valuable," I replied.

I walked about the room looking for something potentially valuable...or dangerous. It took a while to admit it, but there was really was nothing I could find.

Kane continued to look long after I had given up. He steamed, "Nothing's ever easy!"

"We could use the tent poles, but they're made out of some kind of glass," Kane was obviously frustrated.

"That gives me an idea," I said excitedly. "I remember my father took me and my mom camping a couple of times. I just thought it was kind of cool when he did it, and I forgot about it until just now."

"What would that be?" he asked.

"Well, we could take one of the poles and burn it in half if we could get the fire hot enough to melt glass or whatever those poles are made of."

Kane's eyes widened with understanding and a smile bloomed on his face.

“Dad was just playing around, but he kept burning a stick, just for fun, and rubbing it on a rock. In just a little while, he had some pretty mean looking hot dog sticks. Maybe the glass would melt and we could sharpen it on a stone.”

Kane laughed, “He’s right! And you’re a genius!”

I blushed. I would agree I wasn’t a dummy, but *genius* was taking it way too far. I accepted his compliment anyway by saying, “Thanks!”

“We will just do it on a larger scale with the tent pole.” He continued, “We can just take showers tonight and start burning the pole from the small tent. It might take a while. But maybe it isn’t glass and it will melt at a lower temperature...hopefully.”

What about the clothes and the bathroom?” I asked.

“We can move everything except the wardrobes and the showers. I’m sure the dunes won’t mind if we use them for a toilet a few times. We’ll just have to dig holes and bury everything so we don’t leave any scent trails.”

“You’re the only one that’s got to worry about a scent trail,” I joked.

Kane laughed, “Very funny! But I am being serious.”

“I know. I just couldn’t resist.”

Kane got back to planning almost instantly. “Speaking of the tent, remind me to pack up some of those perfumes. Maybe we could trade them if we come across anyone.”

“I think we should take some extra water and food too.” I added. “I bet they’re great bargaining tools in the desert.”

“We can pack everything we can, even extra clothing. Maybe we can tie a few loose items to the saddle with the guy ropes from the tent.” Kane paused thoughtfully. “We can burn the ropes into shorter lengths if we need to.”

“Sounds like a plan,” I said, smiling. We both stood, eager to get to work.

Kane handed me one of the woven sacks. “You can be in charge of the clothing. I don’t want you yelling at me for what you’re stuck wearing.”

I smiled at his sarcasm and stuck my tongue out. He copied my actions then went along his way gathering the food and water. Sack in hand, I left the big tent and went through the flap to the smaller one. I opened the wardrobes and laid outfits all over the place. I only chose items that would be good in the desert, and packed an extra pair of shoes for both of us. I began wrapping perfume bottles in large towels, carefully placing these in the bag as well. While I was rummaging around the dressing table, I came across what looked to be a manicure set. It contained a few sharp tools and a metal file. I thought it was a better weapon than nothing, so I stuffed it into the folds of my pants.

I was distracted for a moment by a bright flash of light. I looked up and it happened again. It came from the magic mirror, a bright, blue-white flash. I had seen that color before. It was unmistakable...the blue of the graffiti on the wall that led to Amenta.

I timidly approached the mirror and stood, studying its depths. The glass became cloudy. It shimmered with a fine veil of mist. I could see shadows in the depths of the mirror, but I could not define them. I stared into the mirror, suddenly feeling incredibly tired, but relaxed. For some reason, I thought of Ravie. She always loved looking into mirrors...at the mall, in school...just about anywhere. Eventually a scene materialized.

It took me a few moments to recognize what the mirror was showing me. It was my parents’ bedroom. Someone was stirring in the bed. My chest tightened; I feared it was my mother, burning again. The person in the bed rose slowly and stretched their arms wide. It was not my mother. I recognized her immediately! Putting my hands on the mirror, I called for her, “Ravie!”

She heard me. She stopped and turned in the direction of my voice. Her jaw dropped as she looked into the mirror that perched above my parents’ dresser. She scrambled toward me.

“Trinity?” She rubbed her eyes to make sure she was seeing things correctly.

“Ravie!” I was so happy to see her that tears formed in the corners of my eyes. It seemed like months since we tucked her into my parents’ bed, but it was only two days ago.

“Trinity!” she was alarmed. “How did you get into that mirror?”

“Long story!” I replied.

I think everything started to come back to her. She stumbled backward with the weight of realization and sat on the bed. I didn’t know what to say. When she looked up, her eyes were wild and frightened. I hoped she would not go into shock again.

“Oh my God!” she was barely able to form the words. “Did that all really happen?” She looked at me, fearfully; already knowing I would affirm her nightmares.

I had to calm her down. “Ravie, it happened, but it’s okay now!” She sat quietly for quite a while. I wanted to call for Kane, but I dared not disturb this encounter.

"I can't believe it. Is this a dream?" Her look began to change, from fearful to determined. She stood again and walked toward me, peering closely into the mirror. "Where are you?"

"I don't know." I replied honestly.

"Are you alone?"

"No, Kane is with me." I smiled as calmly as I could.

"What about the others?"

I did not want to tell her about Beatrice and Michael being dead, so I simply said, "We are looking for them."

"Come back through!" Splaying her fingers to touch my new world, her palm pressed to the glass that lay between us.

I thought I could get her here. I was the key to all worlds. All I had to do was reach through! I was the key to the door that kept us apart. I pushed my hand into the mirror and she grasped it quickly. It was wonderful to see her again. To touch her and know she was real, but I could never leave Kane here. I had to stay on the path to Gabriel! I grasped her hand and pushed it away until my own hand hit the cold, smooth mirror again.

She seemed pensive, much calmer than I thought she would be. "I can come through!" she thought for a moment. "I want to help."

I thought about what I was doing. I could not let her enter into this danger. What was I thinking? "Ravie...why don't you stay there, call my father...your mom. Let everyone know we're okay and that we'll be back soon."

She ignored me. "I am coming through...just like Alice in Wonderland." She held her hand out to touch the glass. I reached to push it away, but she slapped my knuckles.

"Looks like a one way mirror," she stated, obviously intrigued.

"Ravie," I urged. Write a note! Please stay there!"

"Sorry," she replied. "Help me through."

"What about your mom? She'll worry herself sick!" Thoughts of her mother made her pause. Ravie looked around the room and spotted a pen and paper on a nightstand. She shuffled to the side of the bed and scribbled a quick note. She was back to the mirror in a moment.

"Ravie," I pleaded. "There are things here you don't want to see! We can't have you shutting down again!" I was hoping my blunt truth would stop her.

I held my fist up in desperation. "If you try, I'll break the glass!"

Ravie stopped and studied my face. In a few moments she replied, "No you won't. You're lying."

She was right. She called my bluff and began to push on the glass. "Help me through, or I'll just push until it breaks!"

"Kane!" I yelled as her arms pushed through. I tried to push her back with my own hands and thus opened the doorway. She grasped the frame of the mirror and leapt through. I could not stop her momentum. As she landed on top of me, I tottered off of the stool. We landed in a tangled heap on the floor. At that moment, Kane reeled into the tent. I twisted my neck to look toward the door.

His eyes widened. "Oh my God! Ravie?" He rushed over to help us up. He hugged her tightly. As he did so, I caught his eye.

I mouthed the name, "Michael" and shook my head. We had to make sure she did not know his fate, not right away. It would crush her. He nodded his understanding quickly.

"How the hell...?" Kane looked at me, absolutely dumbfounded.

"I tried to stop her," I explained, "but she came through anyway." I smiled uncertainly at my friend. "I just wish she would have listened though."

"Trinity!" Kane looked angry now.

"Don't blame her!" Ravie interrupted. "I brought myself. She couldn't stop me."

Ravie was always ready to defend me, even when I was at fault. I thanked her silently. I was glad she was here, although it meant she was in great danger.

"How did you get here?" he asked, calming a little.

"I came through the mirror," she replied nonchalantly, as if he should have known.

"The magic mirror?" he asked. Without waiting for an answer, he rushed to the mirror and sat in front of it. Tentatively, he reached to touch the mirror, but his fingers pressed against cold, familiar glass. "Somehow, I knew it wouldn't work.

"It wouldn't solve anything," I reminded him. "Unless you want to go home."

"Trin, you know I don't, but it would be nice to see something familiar, even if I couldn't get there."

"Like a home movie?" said Ravie

"Exactly," he replied.