

# **When the Moon Over Kualina Mountain Comes**

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*The Doom of Alokai Temple* previously published by Knotted Road Press, and included in the collection *Baker's Dozen*.

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## Prologue

### The Doom of Alokai Temple

Storm stirred the sand with her driftwood cane, smearing the runes and sigils. She didn't deny the future they foretold—she couldn't—but she didn't have the strength to face it just then. Instead, she picked up the long trails of seaweed and flung them into the encroaching waves. The water would purify them, scour them with sand and salt before casting them back onto the land to proclaim another future for those who dared read it.

Painfully, Storm hitched up her skirt to more easily bend down and collect the handful of bright *serat* shells: purple and luminescent in the fading light, still warm against her palm. The *serat* lived for centuries: to kill them when they were so young was cruel; however, the goddess Brikal had demanded an extravagant sacrifice that night.

Storm now knew why.

Finally satisfied that she'd covered her tracks and no one could divine her work or easily spot the trails of blood, Storm allowed herself a few moments to stare across the water. The two moons had yet to rise and clouds blocked the rivers of stars, ominously hiding the sea—if Storm believed in omens, which she did not. Fortunes drawn out of the deaths of small beings, bespelled chalk lines, and weeds coaxed from the depths? Yes. Mere physical phenomenon, without the *geas* of augury? No.

Still, Storm pulled her shawl closer and tighter over her rough blouse as the night blanked out the ocean, until all she knew of it was the soft splashing of the waves. Even when Ty, the smaller moon, rose, its red light barely reflected off the water.

However, Storm didn't have all night to wait for the second moon, Gulik, to rise as well. Instead, she turned and slowly made her way past the logs and ocean debris scattered across the sand to the small path between the scraggly thorns that encrusted the dunes. She'd walked the path so often over the decades that she could do it blindfolded, counting her footsteps as she padded softly to the point of land, then beyond the rough rocks into the open bay protected by coral shoals so the waves merely lapped at the sands.

Only a short distance along the circle of the cove sat Storm's house, its logs encrusted with salt and sand. Inside, the fire was banked, warm red coals that just needed a sprinkling of firedust to spring back to life.

Storm stored her supplies in the nets above her head, hiding the jars of colored chalk beside the long buoy-like gourds and stringy lures. She ignored the way her back ached from stooping too long, forcing her fingers to move nimbly as if they hadn't been working in wet sand and cold all afternoon. Only with the fire blazing, sea- and dew-misted clothing changed for a clean skirt and blouse, and a pot of fish and other bounty reheating over the flames did Storm allow herself to ponder the fortune laid out that night.

She hadn't had a choice about doing the divination, and had resisted the goddess' call as long as she could. The price had shocked her—so many lives. Closing her eyes, she could still see the quicksilver light that had sprung up after the last rune had been drawn, as Storm had closed the circle with the living vines from the sea. The picture exploded in her mind as it had across the bloodstained sand.

Alokai Temple, drowned.

It sat well inland, with wells but no river nearby. However, Storm couldn't deny the towering wave of water that crashed over the grounds. She couldn't tell the direction it came from, if the day had been sunny or storm-filled. All she knew was that the day was soon.

Storm had to warn the priestesses at the temple without revealing her own foresight or showing herself to be a witch. The temple burned witches: pillars of their remains stretched behind the main grounds, stark black smudges beside the pure white stone walkways. She shivered. The taint of burned flesh never left the compound, no matter how the winter winds blew.

The cost of disrespecting the goddess Brikal by not spreading her word was as just as high. Storm would never be able to cast another fortune. What little luck she had would vanish. Brikal did not like to be ignored.

Could Storm claim she'd had a dream when she told the temple priestesses? Maybe she could declare it as some sort of omen.

Possibly that would work, but then her warnings would be ignored, and she herself would be put under more scrutiny than she already was. The townspeople didn't trust her, living alone and so close to the sea. They were suspicious of her goods, though she had pure salt to trade, as well as fish, well-seasoned and smoked. But few enough bought her wares.

More scrutiny could bring the temple guards. It had happened before: she'd seen the guards form a line in front of poor Willow's table so none could get through to her.

A loud knock startled Storm out of her thoughts. No one came to her hut, and anyone who came so late probably meant no good. With a sigh, she swung the pot out of the flames—it might be a while before she got to it, and no sense in wasting good food. She picked up her driftwood cane (though it was more for show) and made her slow way across the room.

"Who is it?" she called out as she neared the door.

A fervent pounding came in response.

Storm threw open the door before it had slacked off.

A soldier stood just outside, tall and proud, one of the king's men. He peered at her with dark eyes, his face partially covered by his plumed helmet. His bare arms bulged with muscles, his chest made broader by the heavy rings sewn to his leather shirt. A sword, a cudgel, and a knife all protruded from his wide leather belt. Though the night was cool, his legs were bare, and his boots only came up mid-calf.

"What do you want?" Storm asked crossly. If he'd come to rob her, well, she wasn't as helpless as she appeared.

The soldier looked her up and down, glanced over her shoulder into her room, then over his own shoulders briefly, as if determining that they were alone.

“I know what you did,” he announced with the finality of a body falling from a cliff. “And I know the prophesy you saw.”

#

Craeg, the king’s guard, refused to say anything until after they were settled next to the fire. When he cast a longing look at the stew bubbling there, Storm offered him a bowl: though the goddess Brikal was strict regarding fortunes, the god Kireg was even more of a stickler regarding the customs of hospitality.

As Craeg sat down on Storm’s footstool, stiffer than dried leather, he drawled, “Now, if anyone comes, this can be seen as a social visit.”

Storm couldn’t contain her snort. No matter how friendly they seemed, no one would believe such a fiction, not if they knew her past troubles with the guards.

Craeg just drew himself up tighter, though he gratefully took a sip of the stew.

The quiet of the night stretched between them. Without his plumed helmet, Craeg stood not much taller than Storm, though her bulk was made up of layers of cloth, whereas his was all muscles. The sword and cudgel lay beside him on the floor within easy reach, while his knife stayed in his belt.

Finally Craeg put the empty bowl of soup to the side.

Storm followed suit. Though she’d been starving earlier, she’d managed only a few bites.

“I know what you did,” he repeated, softer this time, more like sharing a secret. “And I know what you saw.” He paused, then added, “I’ve seen it, too.”

Startled, Storm grew very still. Why would Craeg admit to the gift of foresight? The priestesses would draw and quarter him if they found out. Or was it a trick, designed to get her to admit her own prescience? “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Storm finally said.

“Anyone who has even an inkling of the gift has foreseen the fate of Alokai Temple,” Craeg said dismissively. He took a deep breath and stared hard at Storm. “But only a few have dreamed of the one who might stop it.”

Storm had been careful not to confess to her ability to divine the future, but she had to say something now. “Go on,” she said, nodding yes, finally, *yes*, telling the truth of her talent.

“You can’t do it,” Craeg said. “You can’t stop it. The temple has to go, be washed from the face of this world.”

“How could I stop it?” Storm asked, incredulous. “No one has the power to stop such a force.”

“You do,” Craeg insisted. “I’ve seen it.”

Storm shook her head, denying the stirring she felt in her soul, the rising in her gut, as if the goddess Brikal demanded yet another sacrifice and prophesy.

“You can,” Craeg said again, softer now. “Shoal, the high priestess, will beg for your help.

You won't be able to refuse. But you must. You must not stop the cleansing."

"Why do you bargain with me? Why not just kill me if I'm the only one with the power?" Storm asked, not caring about the death she was courting.

It was Craeg's turn to snort. "Fate cannot be denied that way, as you well know. All but the priestesses of Alokai Temple know that. If you were unavailable, another would take your place, maybe one not so amenable to persuasion."

"So what exactly are you trying to persuade me to do?" Storm asked, raising one eyebrow. "To stand aside as thousands are killed?"

"In the hope of saving ten thousand more souls? Yes."

"It's never that easy," Storm said. "Without the temple, the people will be lost. The kingdom will be ripe for attack."

Everyone knew the western king envied their lands, and would maybe even offer help after such a disaster, sending soldiers with healers, if only to get a foothold here.

"Yes," Craeg said. "The king may get washed away as well."

Ripples of possibilities echoed around Storm. Was Craeg already working for the western king? Was the army planning a coup?

"What would you have me do? I can't deny this foretelling, any more than you could deny coming to see me," Storm asked, too buffeted by waves to see clearly.

"Go to the temple. Tell them what you've seen," Craeg urged.

"What?" Storm had been so cautious all her life. For someone to ask her to be bold, to proudly proclaim her heritage—she'd never expected that.

"You must go. We both know why," Craeg said dryly.

"I know that," Storm hissed. The price of hiding such a prophesy was too high.

"Then, when the high priestess asks for your help, refuse."

Storm shook her head. "The temple can also be very persuasive," she pointed out. Though their persuasion was more likely to involve broken bones and the threat of burning.

"So let yourself be persuaded. Pretend to cooperate. But you must break at the last minute and let the wave fall."

"It will drown me as well." Storm swallowed around the sudden dryness of her throat. She pulled her shawl closer over her shoulders, the realization making her cold.

"You were dead the moment you walked out to the beach and called the seaweed from the waves." Craeg gave a laugh, brittle and harsh. "It's your time to go, grandmother."

Storm looked at Craeg sharply. She'd whelped a son many eons ago, left him behind as her visions had dictated. She didn't feel any kinship to this man, and *grandmother* was a common enough term. She still had to ask. "Are you?"

Craeg shrugged. "Orphaned from birth, raised by the army and the king. I am no one and everyone's grandson. And I'm begging you, for the sake of my own unborn son, let this cup pass you by."

Storm shivered. "I'll try," she promised.

It was the best she'd ever be able to do, the most honest she could be. Death was a powerful motivator, and it appeared that no matter what path she chose, it was bound to encase her soon.

#

Storm stretched her leg out against the packed dirt floor of her cell, seeing if she could straighten it. The temple guards hadn't been kind after her declaration and they'd given her a beating fit for a younger person.

Still, she thought only her ribs were broken. She took another cautious breath, the pain sharp at her side. When they'd thrown her into the cell they'd done her a favor, shoving her left arm back into its socket with the force of her fall. All her fingers worked, as well as her toes.

It was just her knee that worried her. It had swelled to the size of a baby's head. Her cane would never again just be for show.

What had she been thinking, announcing the doom of the temple that way, at the high priestess' morning court? Craeg's words had made her stupidly brave, thinking the priestesses would recognize the savior of the temple in her unveiling. She should have found another way to deal with the *geas* of augury—a way without sacrificing so much of her own flesh.

Storm had also believed Craeg—too much, perhaps—that she now faced her own doom. The puzzles the gods had laid before her were too complex; the games they played far beyond her ken. Maybe she should have accepted their wrath instead and just gone to the southern islands. It was a one-way trip: she'd never make it back to the mainland. But it was rumored that they welcomed any and all people who washed up on their shores.

However, Storm had never merely accepted anything, let alone never being able to walk again.

She pushed at her leg, trying to shift her knee around. The sliding disc of the cap wouldn't set right. The pain made her whimper and her vision darkened. It wouldn't budge.

Storm took a deep breath, then two more, before she begged any gods who were listening to help and *slammed* her palm against the side of her knee. She screamed as the agony washed through her.

When she woke from passing out, the throbbing ache made her want to vomit, but she could finally straighten her leg.

"I could help with that," came a slithering whisper. "Help ease your pain."

Storm squinted and peered into the dark corners of her cell. She didn't see anyone or anything, just straw and the latrine ditch that flowed into open sewers below. There was no cot, of course, but someone had thrown a moldy, lice-infested blanket into the other corner. Storm had already vowed not to go near it. "Who are you?" she whispered after the voice had grown still. "Where are you?"

"By the door," the voice promised.

Storm didn't hold back her groan. Walking that far was out of the question, though it was only a few feet away. "Why would you help me?"

“You’re the temple’s only hope.” The voice changed timbre now, losing its smoky edge and becoming more human. “And the temple is the last hope for the kingdom.”

“From the western kingdom?” Storm asked.

“Yes. They’ve already bought the guard.”

Storm couldn’t help the full-body shiver. So Craeg might have been corrupted.

“And the western kingdom treats its witches much worse,” the voice assured her.

“Worse than burning them at the stake?” Storm asked, incredulous.

“We only burn a few,” the voice said dismissively. “We let all who would leave go south, to the islands.”

“How noble of you, high priestess Shoal,” Storm said, finally identifying the speaker.

The priestess continued, as if she hadn’t heard Storm. “The greatest witches, of course, hide in plain view—priestesses, all of them. They carry the word of god to the people, that they receive through wholesome prayer, not archaic blood rites.”

Storm sat shocked into stillness. She’d never heard of such a thing, not even a hint. The priestesses stood above all but the king—some might even say the high priestess stood level with the king.

And they were witches?

Witches were despised more than undertakers, and feared more than the guard. “How can you do this to your own kind?” Storm hissed.

“Our ancestors made this choice, long ago, based on augury that would turn your stomach,” Shoal said through gritted teeth. “An entire army of soldiers, tricked, trapped, and slaughtered for their entrails. It was the only way we could save ourselves.”

“So all witches could disappear into the temples without being persecuted,” Storm said, still reeling.

“It’s the will of the people,” Shoal recited, as if by rote. “The strongest of us are given the chance to recant publically, coming into the temple.”

Storm had seen that—at least two women she’d known had recanted, shaved their heads, and become nuns in the temple, their eyes always lowered, never accepted by anyone after that. “So that’s what you offer me? A barely tolerated place beside you?” The temple might take care of Storm, but no one would smile at her ever again. Not that many did now, but at least a few of the merchants didn’t give her a cold shoulder.

“No, not merely that. Stand by us as we defy the wave with the will of god—you will be celebrated to the end of your days and beyond.”

A cool breeze fluttered through the cell. This time, Storm didn’t shudder, but stretched as her muscles all suddenly relaxed. She saw nothing; however, cool tendrils massaged her knee, chasing away the pain. A second breeze licked her side, soothing her ribs. Her bruised eyes and split cheek stopped aching, and the swelling across her lips receded.

Storm had never known such a powerful healing. No witch she knew could have done this work without sight or touch.

“A small token of how you will be repaid,” promised Shoal. A will-o’-the-wisp light appeared in the corner, brightening Storm’s heart. A soft blanket, warm and clean, lay beside it.

“I will think on what you’ve said,” Storm promised, wondering: If she saved the temple, could she also save herself?

#

When Storm awoke, all her aches had passed, sliding away with her dreams. If it hadn’t been for the stark cell, the dark stains she knew were blood, and the vile odor of the trench, she might have thought everything that had happened the day before just a dream as well.

The crusts of bread thrown into her cell by the jailor were augmented by a jug of clean water that magically appeared in the corner. Storm used it sparingly, drinking a few teeth-chilling mouthfuls, then wetting the corner of her blanket to scrub the dried blood off her itching skin. She almost felt refreshed by the time she’d finished.

As Storm settled into the boredom of her empty cell, the sibilant voice came again.

“Put it on,” it whispered.

Storm glanced at the door, then back around her cell.

There in the corner now lay a bundle of clothes: an priestess’ habit, bright blue and gold, with its high wimple that covered her hair and a half-veil that revealed only her eyes.

“Put it on,” the voice repeated. “Then come see.”

A loud *click* echoed through the still morning: the lock of her door unlatching.

An unknown nun stood in the dim corridor, dressed in similar robes, though hers were the gray of a teacher, leaving her face uncovered. “You can call me Janus,” she said with a sly grin.

“Janus—the two-faced?” Storm asked, falling into place beside her, walking more strongly than she had in ages.

“I know you have questions about our program, about divided loyalties. Today is a day of truths, so why not give you a name more true than my given one?”

Janus’ honesty startled Storm, but she kept walking. The air was getting more clear, the stench of the jail falling away.

“And I will call you Hope,” Janus continued. “Because there should be more truth in your name as well.”

Storm shook her head. She wasn’t convinced the new name was right, though it pleased her that this youngster thought so. She hadn’t had hope in many decades.

They stayed inside the temple complex, never reaching the common parts of the town. Storm both regretted and was grateful for their path: if she’d found the opportunity to slip away, she might not have been able to stop herself.

The first classroom was to an outdoor classroom. The priestess sat on a carved stone bench while the children sprawled gracelessly before her, absorbing every word of the half-lies she told them.

Storm had always sacrificed to Brikal for foretelling, prayed to Kireg for hospitality and

everything regarding her home, given blessings to Zeka for the storms and the sea, and even whispered to Hyn for good fortune, sometimes.

Yet, here was this priestess, proclaiming that the god of the Alokai Temple, Myat, was superior to all.

Storm didn't even know how to counter such a lie. It was laughable.

However, the children didn't know any better.

Then Janus and Storm stepped into a darkened cubby, far from the sun. A little girl lay on a bench, shivering yet sweating at the same time. A healer in bright red passed her hands over her while prayers were muttered, useless words masking powerful deeds.

They stopped a third time where the children were being asked to pray for miracles, not knowing they were being tested for power, the priestess looking for any glimmer to nurture. The priestess wasn't seeking a witch; no, she sought the *holy*.

By the time Storm stripped off the habit she felt as though her world and everything she'd known had been turned upside down. Witches had been persecuted for generations. It was all Storm had ever known. Yet here, there was community, witches working together to raise water in a well, holding hands and directing their power, being sought after for their help and advice.

If Storm saved the temple, she could join them. She would just have to rename herself: instead of *witch*, go by *priestess* instead.

#

Storm awoke with a start, the darkness of her sleep carried into her waking, no lights in her cell, just the stench of the open latrine telling her where she was.

A woman moaned in the night. She was nearby, and in pain. "No, no, not me, no."

"What happened?" Storm called out. She knew better than to ask what was wrong. Though Shoal had healed most of Storm's wounds, the memory of her beating still ached.

"I don't want to die," the woman whimpered.

"What was your crime?" Storm asked, though she thought she already knew. Little other than witchcraft put a woman in a place like this.

"Being too good at healing," the woman declared. "I don't know why they wouldn't cherish me. I wouldn't hurt a person, I couldn't."

"What about becoming a priestess?" Storm asked.

"Never," the woman declared.

"They're witches, too," Storm told her.

The woman's laughter was dryer than a winter wind. "They'd never ask me to join," she declared. "I'm nobody, with no connections. Plus I'm only a little good at healing, not like *them*."

Storm had no words to comfort her. With the noon bells came the sweet scent of roasted flesh.

When Janus came later that afternoon, Storm confronted her. "Is it true? Do you only save

the stronger witches? Those with both power and connections?”

“That’s true everywhere,” Janus said quietly. “The strong survive.”

“We’re burning our own people!”

“But we’ll survive.” Janus gave Storm her sly grin. “If you help us—join with us and stand with us—maybe you can save more of the weaker ones yourself.”

Though Storm had never been nurturing, she did take comfort in that.

#

Even from the gloom of her cell, Storm knew the day dawned brightly. She’d hoped for yet more days of reprieve from her terrible decision, but a thrumming in the floor under her hands told her it was time.

Janus threw her cell door open, blasting it off its hinges.

Storm scrambled after her. She knew she couldn’t run far enough now to escape the fate of the temple, so instead she followed Janus.

Storm heard the roaring of the wave before she saw it, the mad howling of a timeless beast, no relation to the gently lapping waves at her cove. Storm’s knee ached as she ran; despite Shoal’s efforts, it hadn’t quite healed. Finally they came around a corner and halted.

A long line of priestesses, all holding hands, stood in front of Alokai Temple. All the different colors of their habits would have made the gathering seem festive, if their faces hadn’t been grim.

Janus dragged Storm to the center, where the standing witches made room.

Storm clasped hands with a humming novice on one side, her clear blue eyes shining with faith, and with the cynical Janus on the other side, scared but determined to make a stand.

The power of these women coursed through Storm, binding her talent up with theirs. As sisters, they stood ready to defeat the coming maelstrom, humming and surging with incredible energy. Storm tasted the current in her mouth, dark and coppery, her very bones creaking with power. She felt more alive than ever before.

However, Storm also no longer felt single, solitary, and complete. She was part of something, and she wasn’t sure she could be alone again. And she wasn’t sure she liked that. Witches had always worked alone, in her experience.

Storm wrenched open her eyes, away from the seductive net of power, and looked outward. She’d wanted to see the enemy they faced, as well as collect her singular thoughts.

What Storm saw were the people. No matter the explanation the priestesses had given their current ritual, the people knew: it wasn’t their god, but their magic the priestesses called on.

The man before Storm sneered even as he prayed to their god for survival. The mother to the side hid her children’s eyes from the sin the priestesses committed. Even as they begged for the power to save them, the people of the city had been taught too long to shun it.

The scattered bodies formed long lines, shifting one into the other. Storm recognized the *geas* of augury. The strings of people were like the ropes of seaweed, living bands of divination.

It didn't take Storm but a moment to read their future and the future of all the witches.

Even if the temple survived the storm, the priestesses were doomed. The people would never forgive them for their deception. The decimation would be systematic and complete, worse than what the western kingdom could do.

Storm turned her sight back inward. Shoal, Craeg, and the others had been wrong. She wasn't necessary to defeat the wave; she was quite certain of this, given the power that flowed through her.

However, Storm was the only one capable of destroying them.

With a strength Storm didn't know she possessed, she wielded the black knife of foresight, demanding all the lives surrounding her as sacrifice for her foretelling, cutting through the lines of power generated by the witches, breaking apart their shield as the water crashed down.

Seaweed caught Storm's legs, or maybe it was her sisters turned against her as she had them, holding her under the water.

Storm didn't care, though her body struggled to breathe.

She'd saved them. Her prophesy would come true. She'd made a horrible sacrifice of all of them to ensure the survival of the witches.

The witches had been hiding, denying the blood of their birthright. Now, the temple would drive them out. They'd all go to the southern islands where they'd start anew, in a territory they could defend against the western kingdom, a home they could call their own.

There would be more dooms for the witches to face, Storm was certain, more sacrifices to make. She wished her future sisters well as she let go, letting her soul float away on the sea.

## Chapter One

*Ephanie* blows the petals down  
And marks the end of spring  
—*Northern children's song, teaching the names of the winds*

Ephanie scowled at the tiny *mamapo'o* plant in its woven cup. She squirmed on the hard bench in front of the work table, sweating in her apprentice robe. The bright blue material showed every wet patch—under her arms, across her shoulders, in the middle of her back—even though it was sleeveless and cut short, above her knees.

At least Ephanie was alone in the workroom, no one telling her to stop looking so angry. All the other apprentice growers had left for the heat of the afternoon, either sleeping in hammocks or swimming in the nearby lagoon.

Today, the *mamapo'o* plant wasn't much bigger than Ephanie's small palm. It would grow into a large bush in a few summers' time, with broad flat leaves the color of deep ocean water and bright red berries that fed songbirds all year round.

If Ephanie could make her magic work, she could grow the plant to full size in just a few days' time, just like all the other growers. Even the newest student among the growers—who was only eight and a whole year younger than Ephanie—could coax an easy plant like the *mamapo'o* to bloom. It just wasn't fair.

However, nothing Ephanie tried worked. She stroked the smooth brown stem, tracing a path around the leaves, encouraging the stem to go *up*, but it still didn't spring up. She tugged (*gently, gently*) on the each of the eleven leaves, but they didn't suddenly follow her fingers, lengthen, and grow. She prayed to Caduk, the traditional goddess of all the growers, using both formal prayers as well as sometimes begging for her help.

When Mama and the other teachers couldn't hear, Ephanie even tried praying to Kalluka, Ailani Island's goddess of the jungle.

But the *mamapo'o* plant stubbornly stayed the exact size it had always been, taking its own time to reach full height.

"Growers always take time to grow into their powers," Mama said frequently when Ephanie walked out of the workroom disappointed and upset.

Ephanie had only asked once, "But Mama, what if I'm not a grower?"

Maybe Ephanie didn't have any powers, and she'd have to change into the purple robes of a powerless girl. Maybe she wasn't a grower, a healer, or even a witch who received prophesies. Fortunetellers usually had their first vision by the time they were four, and Ephanie was well past that age. Healing powers generally came when a girl was six, but Ephanie couldn't understand how to close a cut at all, while growing powers came at eight. Now, at nine, Ephanie couldn't get any plants to grow.

Mama had turned her clear gray eyes on Ephanie and drawn herself up so she towered above

her daughter. “You will not say such a thing. You are a witch of the north. Though some of the other witches, after two centuries living here on the southern islands, don’t breed true, *I* have. Your power *will* come. Or else.”

Ephanie hadn’t dared asked what *or else* meant, but she suspected it wasn’t good. She might get sent away to the head temple on the main island, like Nyandar had when she turned eleven and still hadn’t found her powers.

Nyandar had never been allowed to come back home.

Or maybe Ephanie would be forced to live in the jungle all by herself, like Bircha the healer, who in the stories didn’t find her powers until she was old and gray, and then been challenged by a river demon.

So Ephanie sat, hours after all the others had left, begging and pleading with the little plant, sometimes even cursing it, trying to make it grow.

It never did.

#

The first vision pounced on Ephanie one year later, when she was ten. It came at night with heart-pounding surety, its need overwhelming her. She stumbled off her straw-stuffed mattress laying on the floor, the room dark and swaying like a boat staked to the shore when the waves came in.

Ephanie couldn't think, couldn't call out—could barely breathe.

All she craved was the life of something, *anything*, to satisfy the vision clawing to come out.

But what? The sheets at Ephanie’s feet were long dead, though they’d once had been living plants. Pounded dirt made up the floor and wouldn't grow a thing, no matter how hard she'd tried. The thick woven rush mats that covered the dirt were also dead.

Ephanie felt her head turn. There. To the left.

A long, low table stood under the window, covered with Ephanie’s plants. The ones she was supposed to grow. The ones that had defied her. Those green things she’d never been able to shape to her will.

Ephanie gasped. She wasn't a grower! Mama had been wrong. That wasn’t Ephanie’s power. She was a fortuneteller instead—a teller of prophesies that always came true. Why had her powers come so late?

It didn't matter.

What mattered was that Ephanie finally knew what she was, what she was supposed to do. She had found her destiny. She would have important visions. She just knew it.

For now, though, Ephanie had to feed this first vision. Gleefully, she marched over and yanked out the first seedling—another stupid *mamapo'o* plant.

With suddenly clever fingers, Ephanie twisted the stem and tore off the leaves. She threw the bare stem to the ground and stomped on it, pounding the stick into the dirt, squishing out what little life remained. Then, she tore the leaves into small pieces and left the pile on the table.

Teeth bared in joy, Ephanie attacked the next plant. And the next. *Jaikulai. Poihu*. Even the fragile ivy from the mainland, sickly in heat of the southern islands.

When the pile of leaf bits had grown to the size of a small melon, Ephanie stopped. She whined low in her throat, the sound loud in the quiet, moonlit room. She wanted to destroy all the plants, but this was enough. More would be too much, unnecessary. The goddess didn't need them.

Slowly, Ephanie gathered the leaf bits in both of her hands, then turned back toward the room. A prayer that she'd learned when she'd been younger sprang unbidden to her lips.

*O goddess Brikalla  
I delicate these lives to thee.  
Let my telling be true.  
Let my sight be clear.  
Let my victim accept her fate easily.  
So shall it be.*

Ephanie cast the leaf bits into the air. A sudden wind flew from her hands as well, carrying the small pieces out across the room, causing them to fall into a specific pattern on the floor.

The leaves created easy, rolling lines that obviously made up waves. Another line, curved like half a melon rind, sat on top of them—a small boat.

Though the leaves showed just a straight stick resting in the boat, Ephanie knew who it was. She could see his face in her mind, brown and warm, particularly compared with her mother's pale white skin.

Nawai, her mother's lover, was coming home. He'd be arriving in the morning. He had left more than two weeks ago, going to the closest island to the east of Ailani Island to gather more of the beautiful white feathers of the *imuaki* bird, that he used making his cloaks.

Ephanie collapsed onto the floor. Exhaustion slammed into her, as if she'd been hoeing in the garden all day, working in the hot sun.

However, Ephanie couldn't rest. First one arm rose, then another, as if she were a puppet on stings. Slowly, Ephanie dragged herself to her feet.

She had to tell the owner of the fortune their fate. But who? Nawai knew he was coming. The fortune insisted that she tell Mama, though. Because Mama would care.

Ephanie lurched from her room, staggering the three steps to her mother's room.

Standing in the doorway, using a booming voice that didn't sound like her own, Ephanie announced, "Nawai is arriving in the morning."

Now, Ephanie could collapse. The strings holding her up snapped and she sank down where she was, the soft night taking her into dreamless sleep.

#

The next morning, though still tired, Ephanie proudly marched into the fortuneteller's classroom. It was so different than the grower's workroom: instead of wooden shelves

overflowing with plants and growing things, the room felt empty, with bare woven walls, a single wooden table, and four plain reed chairs. No windows opened up to the jungle on one side, or the temple courtyard on the other, making the room feel stuffy. A small altar dedicated to Brikalla sat in the far corner, with a bowl holding a large, purple sea-fig flower in the very center of it.

The two other students—Zakiel and Reyeni—already sat at the work table, studiously mixing purple, red, and yellow powders in small bowls, then adding them to the traditional fortuneteller chalk bags.

Ephanie knew the chalk would be worked with a spell after it was mixed. When an augury came, a witch could use the special chalk to draw out the vision. Ephanie had never seen the chalk made, though, and so went to look. A grower didn't use chalk—she may carve lines to channel power into the dirt, or away from greedy plants, but that wasn't the same.

Reyeni hunched over the table, blocking Ephanie's view.

Ephanie gave a huffed sigh. Stupid Reyeni. She always thought she knew better than everyone at the temple, though she was only fifteen. Zakiel wasn't much better: She was the same age as Reyeni, and the pair of them always were together. Aside from their matching black robes, though, they looked nothing alike. Reyeni had pure white skin—whiter than Ephanie's, which had a touch of brown in it—with a long nose topped by small gray eyes and rounded out with a small pink mouth. While Zakiel wasn't as brown as the southern island natives, she was darker than most of the witches. Her eyes were brown too, though with specks of green in them. Rumor was that Zakiel was a strong witch—stronger than even Sephrhya, the head fortuneteller at their temple.

Before Ephanie could say anything to Reyeni about being able to see, Sephrhya walked into the classroom. She was old, much older than Mama, and would probably retire soon, giving up the gray robes of a teacher for clear white. Her white hair hung down low, braided to her waist. Brown age spots covered her hands as well as her much of her face. Her eyes had once been gray, like the robes she wore, but were now so washed out they almost had no color. She always appeared to be looking down her nose at people, though maybe that was also because she was so very tall.

"I'd heard you'd been moved here," Sephrhya said, glancing over Ephanie.

"Yes, ma'am," Ephanie said. She took two steps forward. "I had a vision last night," she said proudly. Finally, she knew where she belonged.

"Your mother's lover coming home. Yes, we've all heard," Sephrhya said dismissively. "I certainly hope it wasn't a fluke."

"It wasn't," Ephanie replied hotly. She shivered, remembering how the goddess had *moved* through her, demanding the life be taken, insisting that she go and tell Mama of her future. This was Ephanie's destiny.

"Well, maybe another will come to you quickly," Sephrhya said, almost kindly. "Where's your proper robe? To mark your new status?"

“Mama said it would be a few days,” Ephanie said, looking down at her bright blue apprentice robe. At least she wore a black sash, to show that she’d transitioned to being a fortuneteller. She needed new sandals as well: instead of the thin flats that growers used to feel the earth better, that were similar to what the southern natives wore, she needed proper footwear that tied around her ankles, like all the other witches wore.

“Your new robe is important, to mark you as different than the others,” Sephrhya told her. “If—when another vision comes, it’s better for those around you to know why you’re staggering around like you’re drunk, instead of having to guess.”

Reyeni sniggered.

Ephanie’s cheeks grew warm. “I’ll see if Mama can dye my old robes today,” she offered.

“That would be good.” Sephrhya stalked over to the table and examined the chalk jars. “Too much red,” she told Reyeni. “It won’t hold a spell if it’s too colored. Here,” she said, gesturing for Ephanie to come closer. “It’s better for you to learn this as well, even if you never end up using them.”

Ephanie hurried over to stand next to Sephrhya, watching her carefully measure out powdered colors using the ornately carved wooden spoons, listening to her instructions on where the colors came from, how they were made, the amounts that should be used. Ephanie was determined to learn everything she could, because she *would* be using the chinks and everything else they could teach her about having visions. She had a destiny. She just knew it.

#

“Did you hear, Ipo?” Ephanie asked, dancing into the back kitchen area. “Did you hear?” Only one of the seven cooking fires was lit that afternoon: all the flat bread for the temple had been baked early in the morning, before the heat of the day.

The large southern island native slowly turned away from the low cooking hearth. “And what news might that be, *uuka*?” Ipo asked with a sly grin.

Ephanie shook her head. *Uuka* meant “little one” in the southerner’s tongue, one of the few words Ephanie knew. Yet, Ephanie, even at ten, was as tall as Ipo.

Today, Ipo wore a traditional *sulluu*, a single piece of colorful cloth, many yards long, wrapped around her waist and then draped over her chest. The cloth was batik, dyed dark red with cracked yellow and green patterns. Her short hair flared over her head like a sea-urchin’s halo. Ipo was one of the darker southern natives, though she claimed it was the fires that turned her so brown.

“I found my powers! I’m a fortuneteller!” Ephanie announced proudly.

“Really now? I’d heard you’d just told of a journey already known,” Ipo teased.

“I know, I know,” Ephanie grumbled. “The other fortunetellers said the same thing. But it really truly had been a vision.” Why did she have to prove this to everyone?

“I’m sure it was,” Ipo said. She brought out one hand that she’d been holding behind her back. “We give necklaces when a woman comes to power,” she added, handing over simple

black string with a lavender *serat* shell tied to the center of it.

“*Serat* live for centuries,” Ephanie said, taking the necklace reverently. “This must have cost you a lot.”

Ipo shook her head. “No, I just saw the shell. Thought it was pretty.”

Ephanie saw the knot around the shell was crude, and the string was common, not even braided. “Thank you,” she said anyway, holding the necklace in her hand. She’d never wear it—she’d be teased mercilessly by the other students if they ever saw her wearing something so plain.

Ipo seemed to have realized there was something wrong. “Eh,” she said, shrugging with one shoulder and turning back to the stove.

“Do you often see witches come to power?” Ephanie asked.

Ipo looked over her shoulder. “What you going on about?”

Ephanie held up the necklace. “You said you give these when women come to power.”

Ipo shook her head. “Don’t know what you mean.”

Ephanie rolled her eyes and sighed. She was never certain what was wrong with Ipo, who lost her train of thought frequently, denying that she’d done or said things frequently, though Ephanie had just seen her or heard her.

This was just one more strange thing. Ephanie was glad that Ipo wouldn’t remember the shell. Ephanie would never wear it, and would probably exchange it for something useful at the market.

#

Ephanie tugged at her old robe and squirmed in her seat, trying to make herself comfortable out on the wooden patio behind the house. Her latest growing spurt had put her eye-to-eye with her mother, though she had just turned seventeen. Nothing fit right: not her clothes, her sandals, her bed, her calling, her life.

“Do you have to do that here?” Ephanie snapped at her mother as she walked up, carrying a basket of reeds for weaving. Then Ephanie realized what she’d said and put both her hands over her mouth, as if to hide where the words had come from. “I’m sorry,” she said.

It was beautiful that afternoon on the lanai behind the house. The garden bloomed profusely around the wooden patio, as did everything Mama touched, the pink orchards and white-and-orange lilies releasing a heady scent, while the *mamapo’o* plants burst with dark green leaves and brilliant red berries. The thick bush hid them from their neighbors, making the space feel sacred and isolated. Birds sang happily from the nearby trees, their bright plumage adding stripes of color as they flew from one branch to the next.

Unlike the healers or the growers, there wasn’t that much for a fortuneteller to learn or do between visions. Once Ephanie had memorized her prayers, chants, and songs, and made her chalk, all she could do was wait until the next time the goddess spoke to her.

Most fortunetellers had a second career, though nothing Ephanie had tried had worked. She

couldn't weave without breaking the threads, the nets she'd tried knotting had all fallen apart, she shredded any bird feathers she touched for making cloaks, and she had no sense of style, so her beaded necklaces looked ungraceful next to even a child's.

The only time Ephanie's hands turned clever was when she had a vision and had to kill something.

Fortunately, Ephanie had had regular visions, one every two to three months. No one denied her power, though she still hadn't had what she would have called an important vision.

Her destiny would call on her soon. It had to. She just knew she had a special destiny. One more important than her artful, useless name in these islands that had no spring, not like the mainland had, or so the stories assured her.

That afternoon, Ephanie sat out on the lanai making flower necklaces from fragrant white *pikakee* flowers and green fern leaves for *Keereekayah*, the birthday of the god of hospitality, Keereeka.

For the next ten days, neighbors and relatives would visit each other's houses, bringing gifts and celebrating with fancy meals and special drinks. More than one myth told of Keereeka visiting in the guise of a long-lost uncle and judging a house's worthiness. Everything had to be perfect.

As a grower, tradition dictated that Ephanie's mother give out flower necklaces that were exquisitely scented and beautifully made.

The temple had been preparing all week as well. Ephanie had learned how to make a different type of chalk used to purify a hearth. Prince Aumoe was visiting as part of the celebration. He was a minor prince—the youngest son of King Makani, eleventh in line to the throne—but he was still royalty.

There had been a rumor that Jahaka, the high priestess of the witches, would come to their small island as well, but that hadn't turned out to be true.

Mama didn't take offense to Ephanie's tone, though. She placed her basket of reeds down next to Ephanie and sat down. "I take it that the *pikakee* are being difficult?"

Ephanie sighed. "The flowers keep breaking off from the stems." She'd seen the beautiful flower necklace that Mama had been working on for the prince, full of exotic flowers in more colors than she could name. The scent had filled their tiny house and followed her into her dreams, heaping up on her until she was under a mound of flowers, unable to move or breathe.

"I'm sure whatever you do will be fine," Mama said.

Ephanie knew that Mama would merely coax additional blossoms from the stems for any of the necklaces that Ephanie made that weren't perfect.

"And you'll feel better in a few days," Mama added.

"What do you mean?" Ephanie asked. She wasn't really feeling bad, just frustrated. As always. Her destiny was taking forever to come for her, just like her powers had.

"It's just that time again," Mama said.

"What time?" Ephanie asked. It wasn't her menses; that had happened last week, making her

sticky and sweaty and unable to concentrate for a whole day.

Was it maybe because of that old proverb? The southerners had a saying about how madness followed the rise of the red moon, Ty, directly over Kualina Mountain. No one knew what that meant, not even the islanders. Ty hadn't risen directly over the mountain for more than two hundred years, as far as anyone could reckon.

They would all find out what that legend meant, though, much later that night.

Since none of the fortunetellers had had visions proclaiming disaster, Sephya and the other fortunetellers had assured the witches that not much would happen. No directives had come from Jahaka or the council of witches, except to be vigilant that evening.

Mama looked over at Ephanie and blinked. "You're about to have a vision, my dear."

"What?" Ephanie asked. Why would Mama say such a thing?

"You get like this. Irritated. Uncomfortable in your own skin. Just before a vision," Mama explained.

"I do not," Ephanie denied hotly. Sephya would have told her if that was supposed to happen.

Mama merely shrugged. "I've seen it, every time. It might be because you came so late into your powers. But it also might be something you'll grow out of."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Ephanie said, thinking back. She didn't always feel so out of sorts every time she was about to have a vision, did she?

"I am a grower," Mama said sternly. "I trace cycles, longer than yours." She paused, then added in a softer voice, "You have a predictable pattern, my daughter. You should be aware of it, and use it."

"Thank you, Grower, for your advice," Ephanie said, rising. "I'm sure it will help the others who dig in the dirt."

Where were these words coming from? Ephanie couldn't take them back, though. Horrified, she hurried away, away from her home, back to the temple. Back to the quiet classroom of the fortunetellers, to pray at the altar of Brikalla that this vision would come quickly and be easy to tell.

It couldn't be her destiny, not yet. Ephanie was certain she'd feel more grand if that were bearing down on her.

#

Ephanie hurried from the fortunetellers' classroom, back out into the bright afternoon sunlight. Her classroom had repelled her: it was too stuffy, too sterile.

No life there for her.

She found herself fingering the black obsidian knife that all fortunetellers kept at their waist. The blade had never been bloodied: none of Ephanie's visions had ever demanded a great deal of life. Nearby plants had always been enough. Plus, Ephanie had always been able to push off a vision long enough to prepare, so she'd never had to cut herself and give her own blood to the

goddess.

Only poorly trained fortunetellers did that. Their scars marked them as untrustworthy for the rest of their days.

Had Mama been right? Was Ephanie so restless because a vision was about to pounce on her? Sephya had said that as a witch matured, she'd know when a vision was coming. But her teacher hadn't described the pounding headache that made everything sound too loud, the way Ephanie felt she just had to keep moving, never settling, and how everything irritated her and she couldn't keep a civil tongue in her head.

Maybe Ephanie should go back to the classroom. Collect up some jars of chalk and carry them with her.

But she couldn't go back there. She couldn't breathe in that room. She had to go somewhere, do something else. So she hurried along the path, out behind the temple complex. The jungle grew to her right, dark and dangerous, while the whitewashed wood buildings were grouped together on her left, orderly but stale. She didn't see anyone else on the path, which was good: she'd always remembered Sephya's comment about lurching as if she was drunk while in the throes of a vision.

Finally, after more than an hour and circling the entire temple complex twice, Ephanie felt as though she could breathe normally. The afternoon sun had sunk further below the trees. Birds sang more loudly as dusk approached and bugs came out in the still humid air.

Something smelled good, there, just ahead. She followed her nose along the dirt path, the large-leaved *hanumau* plants bursting along the edges, bright spikes of birds-of-paradise flowers sticking in between them, along with huge purple blossoms of sea turtle flowers.

The kitchen? No, that wasn't it. She was being drawn behind the kitchen.

Not the smell of fresh-baked fish, no, that made Ephanie's stomach turn. Instead, the scent of fresh blood, some kind of kill—*that* was what drew her.

Behind the plain, white walls of the temple kitchen lay large heaps of compost from the kitchens, buzzing with flies and other insects. They smelled rank, overly sweet with decay. The growers covered the mounds every night with fast growing vines that would help the refuse decompose quickly.

Large wooden barrels, half filled with water, stood beside the door into the kitchens. The pounding in Ephanie's head grew more shrill. She lurched forward, plunging her arm into the rank water of the barrel, coming back with a single fish, a small gray *kapooku*, with a gaping mouth and sharp scales.

Ephanie threw it to the ground and eagerly reached back into the water.

Her hand came up empty.

The others had already been slaughtered, taken into the kitchen for the dinner meal.

The vision pounded at the back of Ephanie's skull, louder than any dance drum or crashing wave. A single fish wasn't enough. Ephanie quickly stepped on its head and slit it from neck to tail, splitting it in two. She rubbed her fingers in the oily "blood" that oozed from the fish,

smearing lines across the hard dirt.

It wasn't enough. It wasn't nearly enough to paint the vision in her head.

Whining low in her throat, Ephanie dumped the barrel over, hoping another fish lay hidden at the bottom.

No luck—and the water washed away the first two lines she'd drawn.

Frustrated, Ephanie marched over to the compost heaps. But everything there was dead or dying. She couldn't catch enough flies to take their lives.

She needed something more. Something bigger. And soon, or this vision would overwhelm her, demand her own life for it.

Ephanie looked out into the jungle. One of the trees might work, but she didn't have an ax nor the strength to chop it down. Pulling up plants wouldn't be enough, nor destroying the flowers. And she didn't have wings or patience to try to capture a bird.

She needed something that bled. Entrails. Chalk would help, but she couldn't go back to the classroom to pick it up—she must have something *now*.

Heat poured over Ephanie, threatening to burn her up. She had to find something, *anything*, to paint this vision.

Without meaning to, Ephanie found the knife in her hand turning toward her other hand.

“No,” she pleaded quietly, tears already gathering in her eyes. To cut herself, to gain those scars, would mark her as a poor fortuneteller, unprepared. The other witches would always look down on her.

What else could she do? No friendly *poi* dog came crawling out of the woods, begging for her knife, like in the tale of Lalalina. No fish formed out of the water and threw themselves at her.

All she had left was her own life's blood.

The line of fiery pain down Ephanie's arm hurt, but it also brought relief. The blood welled instantly around the cut. Before a single drop could fall to the ground, Ephanie caught it with the dull edge of her blade, the sweep of the knife against the injured skin making her gasp.

Ephanie swung her knife away from her, wide and hard, flinging the blood from the blade. It fell into a pattern on the ground.

It wasn't enough. The picture wasn't complete.

Like all fortunetellers, Ephanie's blood had already started to congeal and the skin to close—they always healed fast. With gritted teeth, she started the second exquisite cut. Pain mingled with joy and addictive release. Her face grew hot with embarrassment but she continued with that superb cut.

“Stop!” came a male voice.

Ephanie didn't bother to look up. Her need was too overwhelming, the pain too delightful. She *must* complete her vision. She was only now fully alive.

Rough hands grabbed hers, pulling the blade away from her arm.

Ephanie gasped, then growled, unable to form words. She struggled to bring the blade back

to her skin, but the hands holding hers were too strong.

“It’s not worth it. You shouldn’t kill yourself,” the young man said.

Words would not come to Ephanie’s lips. She yanked on her arms, trying to get away, shaking her head.

“I can help,” the young man said. He was from the southern islands, with brown skin and soft eyes. Like most natives, he was shorter than she was, his head only reaching her shoulder.

Ephanie didn’t care. The blade turned in her hands without her own thought, driven still by her need.

If she couldn’t have her own blood, she’d have his.

Using her legs, Ephanie pushed forward, no longer pulling away from the young man, but suddenly driving into him.

Surprised, the young man fell back, stumbling.

Ephanie tried to redirect the blade, to send it into his shoulder. But it was all happening so fast and her need was too great.

The blade plunged into the young man’s neck, easily slicing through his soft skin. The blood welled and Ephanie greedily gathered it with both her hands, twisting the knife to get more.

Then Ephanie turned and flung the blood against the ground. It splashed with intent, the vision forming clearly. She sank down to her knees, eagerly reading the signs.

Ships. Many ships. From the west. Coming to attack Hilani, the main island, where the king lived, where high priestess Jahaka lived. At the end of the *Keereekayah* festival. In ten days’ time.

The vision required that Ephanie tell Jahaka, the head of all the witches. She must also tell the king. They must both know the attack was coming. But she must tell Jahaka first, this she knew.

As the vision receded, Ephanie sat back on her heels. She knew she’d be able to rest a little, but then she’d have to be on her way to Hilani, the big island in the center region, where the main temple was. She started planning the journey—it would take two, maybe three days to get from the eastern islands to the center region. Would the temple buy her passage on a boat, or would she be expected to go by canoe, hiring a single rower? How long did she have to tell the people involved before the vision drove her completely mad? Maybe Sephya would know.

A groan behind Ephanie brought her back to the blood-spattered area.

With horror, she turned.

The young man gasped again, then breathed out his last breath.

Why had he tried to stop her? Why didn’t he know about fortunetellers, and how dangerous that was? She hadn’t meant to take his life. By Brikalla’s Holy Word, not only had she cut herself, she’d killed someone, in the throes of a vision.

No one would ever trust her again.

Ephanie crawled over to the body, too tired to stand. What had he been thinking? What was she going to tell his family? What would Mama say?

Why was he wearing the yellow robes of royalty?

“What happened?” Zakiel, the other fortuneteller student, came rushing forward, out from the jungle. “What did you do to Prince Aumoe?”

“He tried—he tried to stop me,” Ephanie said. “I was having a vision and—”

“You killed him?” Zakiel asked. “Why did you kill him? Did the vision need his life?”

“No,” Ephanie said. She would never lie about that. “He just got in the way.” The vision needed blood and some life. It hadn’t required his. Only two or three cuts on her own arm would have gotten her all the blood she’d needed. She shivered in the cooling air, echoes of her own need still resounding in her.

“You’ll be punished for this,” Zakiel declared. “I’ll see to it.”

Ephanie looked up, surprised. Why would one fortuneteller turn on another? There were so few of them, and no one really liked them anyway. They had only each other. Then she watched Zakiel tenderly brush back the prince’s hair from his face.

Without warning, a new vision poured into Ephanie, showing her what was supposed to have happened. She’d never heard of additional visions striking a fortuneteller after the first had occurred. Maybe it was because she’d used so much life—life she wasn’t supposed to take.

The prince and Zakiel were meeting back here, behind the kitchens, without anyone accompanying them, so they could go off into the jungle together as lovers.

“He never would have loved you back,” Ephanie said with certainty. The vision kept rolling over her, the years reeling out like fishing nets. “You would have been left here with his child. He never would have acknowledged it. Or you.”

Zakiel turned to look at her. “Not everyone takes lovers like your mother,” she spat back.

Ephanie laughed, as bitter as a dried orange. “No, most witches just breed.” She paused, then added, “But you wouldn’t have bred true.” She could see the child, a brown-skinned girl, broken and battered by her mother’s disappointment.

However, though Ephanie had seen that part, the augury hadn’t required that she tell Zakiel more about the child. Or the rest of what she saw, how her own life would change.

Ephanie’s destiny had found her. She didn’t like it one bit.

“You’ll be killed for killing him,” Zakiel said smugly as she stood. “The king will have you cut to bits and strewn out across the water, no way for your soul to find a home.”

Ephanie looked at the poor prince, dead for no reason other than he’d mistakenly tried to save her from herself.

“No, I won’t be,” Ephanie said. At least, not at first.

There was no way for Ephanie to explain to Zakiel about her visions, that Ephanie’s living would turn out to be more of a curse.