

“Named Well”

Book Two in Namesake Tales

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Chapter One - Gentle Man

I sat watching my sister and father play a game of chance sitting in the shade of our porch of the humid and hot day of mid-summer. Sunfire and Silversong and my bondmate Lazuli had also taken refuge from the sunshine and were curled on the porch railing napping. My mother, whom I had never seen in her true female form that I can recall was sitting in a rocking chair, beading a necklace and sipping from a cool and perspiring glass of orange fruit juice and half watching my father get slaughtered by his daughter on the game board. Joy whooped as she captured another of my father's markers on the board.

He claimed she cheated, she claimed she didn't and my mother just chuckled and said they both tried cheating so they negated each other. As for me, I guess what they say about names marking the future of the bearer was true to some extent. I enjoyed peaceful pastimes. I loved the books my grandfather sent me and I enjoyed sitting and reading quietly to myself. I always longed to see my grandfather's grand library in the Castle in Aegis. I have never been beyond the boundaries of our clan village.

Father called me a tranquil soul. Saying it went as far back to my infancy. Whereas Joy was outgoing and vivacious and into everything as a toddler, I had been the quiet one. He'd told me they'd never had a moment's worry with me, Mama called me serene.

I think sometimes I'm just too afraid to try something new. I'm always afraid I'll do something I'll regret so I tend to shy away from things that my sister embraces. I am a healer like my mother. I see enough folly in broken bones to not want to risk breaking any of my own. I have the beast magic gift from my father, but not to the degree he and my sister share. They are true warriors of the clan. I have just enough of that sense to talk freely with my Lazuli but to work that sort of magery is not among my talents. Mine are healing and it suits me just fine. I'd much rather make someone rest easier who is ill than go out hunting every day like Father and Joy.

I hated learning weapons and by the time I was seven and they realized I was more healer than fighter, my weapons training ended and I was schooled in herbs and being a care giver like my mother. I didn't like killing, not even for food. Any death, even that of a boar or a deer made me feel nauseous. Just like Mama, which was why we didn't hunt. We were tied too closely to the life forces of the earth and any severing of that life recoiled and hit us in a wave that physically made us ill for a short time.

I knew just enough use of a dagger to protect myself in defense. That was more than enough for me.

Joy was grinning as she took my father's last marker and her current suitor of fancy came sauntering over. Yular, a handsome man of twenty and one, the same age as my sister and just as gregarious leaned against the porch rail and struck up a conversation with my father. Yular's bonded beast, Fang, an equally handsome gray wolf curled up at my mother's feet and got a good scratch before he settled down to nap.

Yular was a good match for my sister and he tempered her nicely. My parents approved and we knew it wouldn't be long before my sister and Yular took the oath of partners. I was happy for them both. Yular's patience and quiet but steady personality and Joy's wild exuberance meshed well together. She kept him from being too broody and wolfish and he kept her from trying to fly without wings. It was a very good partnership.

As for me? No one. Not that I didn't want someone for myself, quite the opposite I felt in my heart. However, there just didn't seem to be anyone for me in my clan. I was everyone's friend and no one's lover. It never failed, I'd want more and I was too shy to say anything and before I knew it, my fancy was taken by another braver than I or more often than not, all it took was my rival being female.

That wasn't anyone's fault but nature working as it normally does. Most men want female lovers, it's the way of nature itself. Only a few people were born like I was, disposed to desiring a lover of the same gender.

My father being one, although he was just as inclined to love either gender, my mother wore her male illusion for more than just her desire to be male. My father preferred him that way.

The same for Mage Tigo and his mate Cadence they too were like me. We had a female couple in the clan as well and that was it. I was the sole unattached one with no one else like me I'd ever met my age. I tried not to let it bother me, but when I heard stories of how my parents had been together since early childhood and how Cadence had won Tigo I couldn't help but slip into a melancholy mood. I was seventeen, I had my markings and was considered an adult of the clan, yet I'd never even been kissed or had kissed anyone else.

I had desires like everyone else and spending every night alone in my dwelling up in the higher tree tops with only Lazuli for company as we looked at the stars was lonely.

Yular and Joy and my parents were having a bright conversation, talk of union vows were being hinted at and I listened and tried fighting off the dark mood that threatened to take me again. Before I dampened their happiness with my sudden

depression I excused myself quietly, I don't think they heard me, and I turned to climb the stairs that would lead to my own private dwelling.

I reached my small and secluded hideaway and Lazuli followed me and landed on my shoulder as I went inside and quietly shut the door.

::I hate when you're sad. You're lonely my Peaceful.:: Lazuli nuzzled my hair in comfort.

"I cannot help being sad Lazuli. The mood will pass, I'm sorry I upset you." I apologized and decided to make amends to my Dragon by giving her beautiful blue scales a good oiling.

I had just finished my task when my mother came to see me. He never knocked.

"Your sister is going to take the oath with Yular at last. However, that's not why I'm here. Talk to me dearest. What troubles you?" He asked as he sat beside me on the edge of my bed and wrapped his arms around my shoulders.

"Mama, I'm just lonely. Rather than spoil Joy's mood with mine I left. I don't like to upset any of you with matters that none of us can do anything about. I'll be fine." I sighed and as always my mother sought to comfort me when all I wanted to do was ignore my woes.

"I cannot help but worry about you Peaceful. I'm your mother and I can feel how you hurt. Locking yourself away to pine alone is no solution." He said and I stood and moved to the window.

"There is no solution, just acceptance. Please mama, I'd rather not talk about it, it will only make it worse."

"It's not good to bottle up your emotions son."

"Crying doesn't solve things either. I've shed enough tears. Please, I'd really rather be alone right now Mama. Grandfather sent me a new book, when I read I can forget for a while and that's all I wish to do right now." I said and thankfully my mother didn't push anymore.

"Alright, I won't press." My mother sighed and then left me with his face openly worried.

I settled with my book, but found no joy there either. A few pages in, reading of romantic adventures just seemed to drive home the nail in my heart. So I set it aside and curled up to nap.

::Perhaps it is time to do what you always wished my Peaceful.:: She said in my mind.

“What’s that?”

::Go and visit your Grandfather. You always wanted to see his library, perhaps there will be a book that does not pain you to read.::

“Mother and Father won’t go to Aegis. They don’t like it there.”

::And you are no longer a child who needs permission to go.::

“They’d never let me go by myself. Besides, it takes a ship’s passage to get there and then an overland journey. I have neither a boat nor a horse. I cannot swim that far or walk.”

::Now you make excuses. I know you fear the unknown my chosen, but you would not be alone, you would have me with you. I would not let my chosen get hurt. You will not find your own peace here nor will what you wish come to you. Take a chance or live to regret what might have been. Just because your parents like not Aegis does not mean you will not. You might find joy again.::

“I think about it, okay?”

::Think not too long or else too late to travel when winter comes and you will wait yet another year and another year of your youth wasted.:: Lazuli’s words sat like a weight in my heart.

Fear of the unknown or fear of being alone. I had to weigh which one I feared most and make a choice. Either way I chose, I’d still have to face my fears. Not a pleasant decision to ponder, but I did ponder as I napped and dreamed of what Aegis might be like. I’d never even been to the port let alone a city. I had no frame of reference, no experience. I was very naïve and very undereducated about the greater world beyond my safe little village by the sea in the tall ancient redwood forests of the Dragon Clan.

I think my parents had been scared too. They’d seen war and I think they wanted to keep Joy and I safe and secure and free from all they’d been through at our age. Their hearts had been in the right place, I know they wanted Joy and I to be protected, but it came at a cost. I was totally ignorant of the world, to the point where I was afraid to leave, fearing the ugliness they had seen.

Lazuli was right, I either had to face the world or live in my sheltered loneliness forever. I needed to do at least one thing I wanted in life. I would go to Aegis and see it for myself and decide on my own what it was like. Not out of books or Cadence’s songs, but the real place and the people. I wanted to see a real city, I

wanted to see the ocean from a ship. I wanted to see the Castle Keep in Crown City and view a whole room dedicated to only books. I would go and see it just once. I would go to Aegis.

My parents didn't like the idea in the slightest. My father most especially. "It's a city, it's dirty and noisy and cold. You have no idea what it's like and have no notion of how to live there. I won't have you going alone, absolutely not. Forget it Peaceful, I forbid it." He ended the discussion before it even began.

When I tried to say I'd be careful and go straight to grandfather, he wouldn't hear it. He walked out of his dwelling and went hunting. I turned to my mother.

"Your father suffered much Peaceful, he can be irrational I know. However, he is right, you don't know what a city is like, it can swallow you alive. It's best you leave it Peaceful. He's not going to change his mind. He loves you too much, he won't budge when he's like this. Perhaps you can write your grandfather for more books."

"To read about other people's lives, but not have one of my own. No thank you Mama. Goodnight." I said dejected, I had wanted their approval. I wasn't going to get it and I was miserable as I climbed back up to my dwelling. It seemed even smaller than usual. Confining, suffocating, boring and like a prison suddenly. I felt like the walls were closing in on me, taunting me. Accept your fate Peaceful, this is your life, a redundant healer with no mate and no choice. You will live and die just as you are and this is your fate. Accept.

I didn't hear Joy come in, I was sitting with my back to the door, trying to hold in the frustrated tears that I refused to shed... again. She made me jump when she tossed a bag of coins on my bed.

"Father is wrong Peaceful. Oh I know he thinks he's doing what is best for you but he is blind as all father's are. He sees us both still as the children we were, he forgets that neither you or I are children anymore. He cannot see how lonely you are, he can only see his need to protect us. He cannot see he imprisons you as he was. Physical Torture or Soul Torture, it's a fine line my brother. You have no one here I see that. By keeping you here he condemns you to continued loneliness, to a lifetime lived in regret. Silversong agrees and so does Sunfire if he'd listen to her. If he will not let go, then you must. He must see you are a man so be one. That should be enough money to feed you I hope. I'll cover for you, just go and write me when you get there." Joy said and then hugged me fiercely.

"See the world and live little brother. Find something to make you smile, I've not seen you smile in far too many years. I love you. Go after everyone is in bed and get a good head start on him." She said before leaving me.

Run away, father would never forgive me for that. Joy as right however, I did not need his consent, I was a man and he'd never see me as one unless I stood up for myself and forced him to see me as an adult.

Lazuli agreed with my sister. I had to grow a spine and stand up for myself. I wrote a letter to my parents, saying I was sorry they did not approve of my choice, but I did not need their approval. I asked them to forgive me for leaving without saying good-bye, but they had given me no choice in the matter. I told them I loved them and would miss them, but I needed to do this for myself. I hoped they would forgive me.

I set the letter on my table under a stone so it wouldn't slip and then packed what I could in a small back pack. Clean clothes, my brush and soap. A few of my favorite beads my mother had made, my favorite book and whatever food I thought might keep longest and the bag of coins Joy had given me. I had twenty coppers, I had no idea how much that was, I'd never needed money before. I was a healer and given what I needed in exchange for my gifts that cared for others. I cared for them and they me. I'd never had a coin in my life. I knew not the value of money among other things.

I grabbed a few hours of sleep before I did a final check of my meager possessions and then began the long walk to the main shipping port on the far side of the island. It would take me at least three days on foot and I needed to hurry, my father would surely chase me down on horseback, I needed to be well away before he discovered my flight.

I almost all the way to the port before my father found me. I had just reached the outskirts of the only city in the Southern Isles and I was waiting to enter the gates in a line of traders and merchants checking their goods to take to port with the inspectors at the gate. I was behind a handsome young Aegian, well dressed with almost a caravan full of fine Wolf Clan bolts of silk and Deer Clan cured leathers.

He was occupied with the inspectors, showing his lists of merchandise and I listened carefully as to what was expected. Apparently this youth was well known, for the inspector smiled.

"Lord Urbane, good to see you again. How is the trade?"

"Good as always. I always love a trip south and the silk this time is the best yet. No doubt every lady of the court will be clamoring to get her hands on this shipment. But I'm the Queen's man, she always gets first choice." Lord Urbane laughed and my attention was captured and I shyly cleared my throat.

“You know the Queen?” I asked and Lord Urbane turned his attention to me and smiled.

“Aye, since I was a boy and my father brought her goods from her homeland. A Remarkable woman our Queen.” Lord Urbane said and I smiled.

“Is it a long journey? I am trying to go see her and my grandfather, but I’ve never been and am not quite sure how to get there.” I said honestly and I thought the inspector was quite rude as he laughed. Apparently so did Lord Urbane who just smiled to me.

“It is a long journey, Who is your kin in the Keep?” Lord Urbane asked and I replied truthfully.

“King Justice is my Grandfather.” The laughter around me was mocking and I was taken aback. I hadn’t expected people not to believe me.

Lord Urbane was the only one who did not laugh. “What’s your name?” He asked just as a shout answered him for me.

“PEACEFUL!” My father yelled and I winced and turned to face him as he jumped off his foaming mount and walked over to me. Lazuli startled and hopped onto Lord Urbane’s wagon flapping her wings in agitation. Sunfire joined her to watch my father descend upon me in anger.

“I told you I forbid this! You are going home right now.” My father said gripping my forearm which I yanked back from him.

“I am not. I wish to see for myself and you know this. I am not ten anymore father.”

“No, you’re a foolish boy! A city is no place for you! You will come home this instant, your mother was sobbing when she read your letter. No son of mine will ever set foot in that accursed city! You will go home and stop this foolishness.”

“No I will not. I do not share your fears father. I must see for myself what is outside of our clan. There is nothing for me there!” I shot back and my Father looked furious.

“Are your mother and I nothing? Your sister?”

“You are my family and I love you but I am not a child anymore and it is no longer enough.” I said back and it was a mistake.

“Ungrateful. Not enough to be safe? Not enough to live? I raised you better!”

“Yes, you did and I am not ungrateful, I am lonely. You refuse to understand.”

“I refuse to let you go get killed.”

“How on earth will visiting grandfather Kill me? Aegis is no longer at war and hasn't been longer than I've been alive! I understand your fears of that place, but they are not mine. I know you suffered there, I know what you almost lost. But keeping me a prisoner at home does not justify your fears. You would have me live alone just to pacify your fears and I will not.”

“Prisoner? PRISONER!” My father was outraged and he did something he'd never done before. He struck me. The back of his hand made my head snap back and I felt the tang on blood in my mouth.

The look on my father's face was horrified. He'd not only struck his son in anger, he'd struck a healer.

I reached into my pack and removed the book and the bag of coins and set them aside. I then kicked my pack to his feet, took every bead from my hair, my dragon shoulder perch, my dagger and belt and even threw the clothes on my back on it, leaving just my loin cloth and then ripped the dragon clan earring out of my ear and threw that too at his feet.

“There is everything you have ever given me. I will take nothing from you sir. Take that back with you, I am never coming back. I will not live by your rules anymore. You'd strike me and have me live my life as a celibate to satisfy you. I am fully adult and marked and have never known what you take for granted. You've shared a soul bond since you were a child. I have never known the joy of shared affection. There has never been anyone for me and you are blind to my needs. I need more than my parents, I need more and I will find it. I will not live alone anymore. I cannot accept those terms, a healer without a match is empty, I am empty. You know this well and still deny me my right to seek what will fulfill me. You are my father and I love you, but I will no longer allow your fears to rule my life. I give you back all you have given me, I will make my own way without you and without your help or consent. Goodbye.” I said mustering my pride and carrying just my book and my paltry few coins I turned and walked into the city.

The Inspectors letting me pass with looks of pity on their faces. I ran then, I felt miserable and a terrible gaping hole in the pit of my belly surged forth and with it tears.

I heard my father try to come after me, but I ignored his pleas and shouts and found an alley and sank down into my misery to sob quietly. I had severed my clan ties, publicly severed my bond with my father and was now alone. Truly alone. Lazuli tried to comfort me, but it was futile. I would never see my father,

my mother or my sister again. I would never be welcomed back after I had thrown my clan earring into the dirt at my father's feet. I was clanless, outcast, and rebellious against the man who sired me. I would never be able to face him again. No clan would welcome me again, I could never turn back to what I was. No one wanted a man who was disloyal to a clan. I'd chosen to walk a path that would never go back again to a clan life, I'd never be a clan healer again.

I wanted to curl up and die, I had nothing, just a cloth, a book and a small bag of coins to my name. Even Lazuli's shoulder perch lay in the dust at my father's feet. A gift from my mother to me, now gone. Not a bead or feather left in my hair now loose around my shoulders and my wild curls fell to my waist like my mother's. I felt gutted, I hadn't wanted it to end like this, I felt more alone than ever before. I felt lost and frightened and regretted my actions. I was floundering in a world I had no concept of how to survive in by myself.

"For what it's worth, you were right, Your Highness. A parent's duty is to raise a child and then let them go when they are grown. Don't be ashamed you wanted to spread your wings and fly on your own. To stand up to him like that proves you are no longer the child he sees." Lord Urbane stood in the alley and he knelt and handed me a damp rag for my lip.

"He split your lip, I know he will live to regret striking you." Urbane added and I nodded and just held the damp rag to my aching lip.

"Thank you."

"Don't thank me Prince Peaceful. You didn't do anything wrong and you've got a lot of balls to stand up to Lord Constant."

"Don't."

"Don't what?"

"Don't call me Your Highness or Prince. I'm just Peaceful."

"You're the Grandson of King Justice, Son of Prince Beloved. You are a Prince."

"I have never been that. Besides look at me. I have a book and twenty coppers to my name. Both of those given to me. Not to mention I just severed my clan ties. I am clanless. I can no longer go to Aegis either. If I denounce my parents I denounce the ties to my grandfather. I will find work here I suppose and maybe someday see Aegis as others do, find work there perhaps. I will not shame my Grandfather by turning up on his door penniless and an ungrateful son of his house."

“That’s bullshit. Pardon my bluntness your highness but Aegians would not forsake a member of the family who only stood up for what they believed in. Especially when they are in the right and I’m appalled at Lord Constant’s behavior back there. He embarrassed you and forced your hand. Even his dragon was screeching at him angrily after you left. He treated you like a child and even I can tell from your tattoos you are an adult in years now. Sometimes father’s have a hard time letting go, some more than others. What was displayed back there was a father afraid to let you go and nothing more.”

“Too late now to go back. What is done is done. Thank you for the rag.” I sighed handing the cloth back to Lord Urbane.

“Keep it Your Highness.”

“Peaceful.”

“Peaceful. Will you come with me? I would be honored to see you at the very least fed and clothed again.”

“I cannot accept your charity, but thank you very much for the offer Lord Urbane. Your kindness is appreciated.” I replied, gathering up my composure and heading out into the streets and the unknown.

I was woefully unprepared for the world. My sheltered life had not prepared me for the real world. Word of what had happened at the gates spread quickly and when I stopped at a booth to buy food, I was refused service. I was clanless and people turned their faces from me as the ungrateful son I was.

Only one vendor sold me anything and that was the butcher and he sold me raw meat scraps for Lazuli. The beast was not at fault for her chosen. They would serve the dragon, but not me.

::It is my fault my Peaceful. I urged you to go and did not know you would pay such a price. Forgive me my little love.::

“It’s not your fault Lazuli. Thank you for staying with me, you do not have to.”

::I would never abandon you. I love you my Peaceful.:: Lazuli rubbed her cheek against mine in comfort. Without her, I would be soul lost indeed. I had at least one friend in a world now hostile against me.

I feed Lazuli her meat, my own stomach growling which I ignored as I continued to try and find someone who would sell me food and clothes.

I was unsuccessful all day. At sunset, I began looking for an inn that might feed me and shelter me for the night.

Again, I was turned away at the door. I just felt numb after a while, rejection after rejection ate away at my soul leaving me lost and confused. I wandered down to the oceanfront and found an old scrap of netting that I dragged under an old unused pier and made a bed for the night.

I was just about to settle when a few drunken sailors found me. If it hadn't have been for Lazuli they would have done more than rob me of my coins. As it stood I now had a punch in my empty gut that hurt almost as much as the hunger inside. My bag of coins gone, my dignity and pride shattered. All I had left was my book and it was not worth much. Father was right, I was going to die out here alone, and I'd never see what I desired. I'd never have what I had come to find.

I would die alone and unloved. My worst fears come to be. I sobbed myself sick and Lazuli was agitated and eventually flew off. I'd lost my dragon too. The world never looked blacker.

I crawled into my net bed and let my despair swallow me, I prayed to the White Lady to be merciful and never let me wake up again.

The moon was high when I heard he rushing boot steps on the pier above me, I curled in upon myself hoping the sailors had not come back. It was Urbane, Lazuli on his shoulder.

He knelt in the sand beside me and his face was a mask of concern. "Foolish customs. Beautiful Lady thank you for coming to get me. Peaceful, are you hurt?" He asked kindly pushing my hair from my face frowning as he did so.

"You're a mess. Come with me, I refuse to let you suffer such indignity. How dare they treat a Prince of Aegis with such scorn over something so foolishly trivial, you do not deserve this, you didn't do anything wrong." Urbane said taking a soft silk handkerchief out of his vest pocket to wipe my cheeks.

His hands were large and soft as he wiped my face. Lazuli was still on his broad shoulder looking equally concerned for me.

"Did she come get you?" I asked and Urbane smiled.

"Aye. Spoke right in my head she did. I never knew I had a touch of the sense as she calls it. She ordered me to come help you and told me what happened to you today. It's disgusting treatment of a fellow it is. If anyone should be to blame here, it certainly is not you. All I saw was a man wanting to live his life, where I come from that is not a crime. Please my Prince, please come with me, let me help you." Urbane pleaded with his eyes and I could no longer scoff at his charity,

it was my pride and dignity or my life. I could not have both. So I let go of the feeble pride I had left and accepted his offered hand.

“I cannot pay you. I was robbed.”

“I know Lady blue here told me everything. I don’t expect you to pay me, I want to help you because it is the right thing to do and I am sure if it were me, you’d offer me your hand would you not?”

His logic won and I nodded and took his offered hand as he help me to rise. “You’re shaking like a leaf. Lean on me my Prince.” Urbane said laying his arm around my shoulders as I stumbled out of my netting. The shaking had nothing to do with cold and everything to do with my fear.

“Peaceful.”

“I am sorry, you did ask me to call you by your name. My mother instilled manners into since infancy. I’m afraid they are a force of habit. Forgive me, Peaceful.” Urbane said softly, his rich baritone was as warm as his hand on my shoulder.

He wasn’t that much older than I was. From the looks of him, I guessed him anywhere from nineteen to twenty-two, certainly no more. He was tall like my father and well built in much the same athletic frame. He was richly dressed and his sword at his side was not decoration. I could tell from the hilt, he knew how to use that blade. He took off his cloak and wrapped it around my naked shoulders as we walked.

I was a great deal shorter than he was, I was built like my mother. Father even said at the same age, my mother could have been my twin. Even if her male form was an illusion and mine was natural. We were cut from the same cloth. My head was even with Lord Urbane’s shoulders and his light brown hair was pulled back at the nape of his neck with a bright strip of silk in a bow. His tail of hair hung just below his shoulder blades, not as long as islanders wore their hair, but longer than native Aegians usually wore. He had bright blue eyes, darker blue than islanders, like great gleaming sapphires whereas mine and most clansmen had the blue of the sky or topaz in color.

He was a very handsome young man and his pale skin almost gleamed in the moonlight. I was a rich coffee next to his cream. I hardly noticed any of it, I was lost in my own misery beside him, walking softly beside him and just grateful for his kindness to me.

He lead me to a ship and up a gang plank and we were greeted by the watch. “Tell the Captain we have a royal passenger joining us and ask him to please send to my cabin a decent meal immediately.”

“Yes Lord Urbane sir.” The crewman saluted and went to find the captain and I was lead across the deck to a stately cabin. Inside was a manservant.

“Ah, Helpful. I’m glad you’re still up. Please fetch for me from the cargo stores some of the garments we have that might fit Prince Peaceful and please heat us some bath water.”

“Right away Lord Urbane. Your Highness, welcome aboard. It will be a pleasure to assist you while you are with us.” Helpful said, smiling as kindly at me as Urbane had. He was much older, he’d probably been in service to Urbane’s family many years and he was genuine in his words. I, like my mother, could always tell when someone was being truthful by their emotions.

Helpful genuinely wanted me comfortable and at ease. He cared for Urbane as he would a son and he had every intention of serving me with the same care. I tried to protest being served, I’d never had anyone serve me since I was old enough to see to my own needs. I was at a loss how to act.

Urbane just smiled at me as he sat me at the table in the lavish cabin. “I know clan ways Peaceful. I’ve been coming to the Isles since I was old enough to lace my own breeches. Helpful is more my assistant than my servant. In Aegis and in the business world in general good assistants are worth their weight in gold coins and I pay him accordingly. This is his profession as mine is to oversee trade for my father’s business interests. It will take time for you to get used to Aegian ways Peaceful, I understand that and so does Helpful. However, you are royalty by birth and our custom is to treat you with respect and dignity and it is dishonorable to treat you any other way. It’s damn near treasonous to treat you any other way. Just as it is dishonorable to lift a hand to strike a healer in the clans.” Urbane said, making his point crystal clear while pouring me wine as the Captain himself brought a dinner service on a tray.

“Oh thank goodness you found him Lord Urbane. I nearly had heart failure when I heard what happened at the gates today and then all the gossip in town. No Prince of my Country will be left like that, absolutely not. Welcome aboard the Fair Lady Your Highness. Your comfort and safe passage is my honor to serve you.” Captain Stalwart said as he set my tray down and Helpful returned with arms laden with luxuriant silks.

“These should fit you Highness. I’ll see to fixing nice bath for you while you eat. Would you prefer Rose Oil or Lavender fragrance in your water?” Helpful asked and I suddenly felt overwhelmed.

“E-either is fine. Thank you.” I said and Helpful just smiled at me and bowed and disappeared into an adjoining room where I saw a large tub bolted to the floor which he began to fill with water for me.

“Just eat now Peaceful and relax. You are with friends here who would see you comfortable.” Urbane said and I noticed Lazuli was still on his shoulder.

::I like him, he has a good soul and has strong senses. Trust him my Peaceful, he wants to help you from his heart.::

::I know, I can sense it too. He is very warm and kind of spirit. Thank you for going to get him to help me.::

::It is my fault you were lead here to lose so much. I would not abandon my beloved chosen.::

::I love you too Lazuli, my beautiful little lady.:: I smiled at my dragon and then at Urbane.

“She likes you, she says you have very strong senses.” I said and Urbane sat at the table with me and reached up to stroke Lazuli’s breast and she trilled. She loved to be stroked.

“I never knew I had any. I must admit this lovely lady is most Charming and much lighter than I thought dragon’s would be.”

“She is a blue, she’s smaller than most dragons. Wintermoon, her father, is a White and most large in comparison. Sunfire is her mother and you saw how much bigger she is too. Blues are the smallest of the colors, but the most beautiful and the sweetest singers. Lazuli sings most beautifully.” I said reaching up to touch my beloved dragon’s breast.

“She is a great comfort and dearest companion. Without her, I would be most lonely. She is ever my most true companion. I cannot remember a time without her. She chose me while I was still a baby. She hatched on my first birthday and has been with me since.” I added, feeding Lazuli a piece of the roasted fowl from my plate.

“So I’d heard. Prince Unity and Garnet are good friends of mine. Garnet is her brother I believe?” Urbane asked and I nodded.

“Aye. There were seven in that clutch. Lazuli and Lapis were the blue females. Jade the green female, Garnet and Ruby were red males, Silversong a silver male bonded to my sister and Copperfire was naturally the copper male. Sunfire was not very original in naming her first children. Their second clutch they had six, five of them silver males and one rare purple female. Amethyst is lovely. It is not very often a purple is born, only one is five hundred or more are born that color and for good reason. It is a quirk of nature, purple dragons are blind and deaf. In the wild they would die, they depend on their chosen for sight and sound.

They are also the only females that have magic equal to a queen. They only bond to mages. Tigo's niece Tara bonded with her and they are both learning well together. They are both still children yet." I spoke as I ate and Urbane listened attentively as I rambled.

"Fascinating... I always dreamed as a boy when I first saw a dragon that one day I might bond to one myself. Fanciful dreams of a child in love with their beauty. I have learned I must content myself with lavishing affection on them as they permit me to. My shoulder is ever yours my lady to rest upon."

::Good, Peaceful's shoulders are too narrow. Love him I do, but my little beloved healer is much small.:: Lazuli said for both our benefit and Urbane chuckled.

"He takes after Queen Delicate and his mother no doubt. Much beauty in small measures." Urbane said making me self consciously flush with the compliment as Helpful returned indicating my bath was ready.

I excused myself to bathe privately and returned wrapped in a large fluffy towel to find Helpful had also brought me a new brush and comb and had laid out for me a light night shirt and silk robe in the softest silks I'd ever felt.

They felt wonderful against my skin as I combed my hair and left it free to dry. Urbane had changed while I was bathing as was also in his nightshirt and a robe sipping brandy and petting Lazuli who was curled up in his lap on the low sofa. I could tell from the pillow beside him, he intended on sleeping on the sofa.

Helpful excused himself for the night, leaving me alone with Urbane.

"I am your guest, I would not feel right taking your bed from you too Lord Urbane." I said and Urbane just smiled at me.

"If I am to call you Peaceful, I insist you also call me just by my name. I wouldn't think of putting you on the sofa when you need a good rest. Blue suits you, I thought it would." Urbane said noting the topaz hued shirt and robe I wore. It was my favorite color.

"Thank you. This is heavenly to wear, I appreciate it very much." I said moving to sit beside Urbane on the low couch, tucking me feet under me and watching Lazuli soak up Urbane's affection like a sponge.

Urbane handed me a glass of brandy, I never drank much and it warmed me to my toes as I took a sip. "It's like apricots."

"Aye, it comes from Rustgaard. They make the best brandy. My older brother works the trade to the north for my father. This is my favorite he brings back from

there. I thought you might enjoy it.” Urbane smiled, warmly letting Lazuli sniff at his glass and then help herself from it with a lap to taste. She hated it.

::I like the fruit better.:: was her only comment and again said to both of our mental hearing.

“That’s such a wonder. Hearing her in my mind, she sounds like a young woman with a gentle soprano in her range. Just mesmerizing.” Urbane said and I nodded.

“Aye. Lazuli can be that. Would you sing for us my love?” I asked and Lazuli sat up in Urbane’s laugh and sang.

Her sweet trill floated on the air and visions of crystal clear waterfalls dances in our minds. Mental visions sent to add to the music she sang. Cascading water and tropical birds and bejeweled hued dragons frolicking in the water. It sent gooseflesh down both mine and Urbane’s skins.

I watched him close his eyes and lose himself to my Lazuli’s gentle magic, just listening with his very soul and living in her music enraptured. Urbane did indeed have a good soul and he seemed to appreciate simple joys as much as he appreciated fine silk and brandy. I liked him very much, few men were as at inner peace as Urbane was, a true gentleman in every way as his name implied. He was named very well.

He sighed as Lazuli ceased her song and there was a tear in his eye as he opened them again. “My Lady, there is no words to describe how beautiful an experience that was. If every man could live in that magic, the world would be a far better place. I am humbled.” He said and Lazuli winked one of her lovely eyes.

::You are good soul Gentle Man. Would that more like you I can say the same.:: High praise she gave him and I agreed silently with her.

“I don’t think the night could end any grander than that. You honor me My Lady.” Urbane said turning to me. “Now please allow me to honor you both.” Urbane said setting his glass down and standing to carry Lazuli over to the large bed built into the wall in the room. It had large sideboards so one would not topple out of bed on rolling waves. It was fit for a King, or two or three together at once.

He set Lazuli on the edge of the bed and then he turned to me. “What is mine, is yours Peaceful. Please take my bed and rest well, you had a very long day indeed. It would please me greatly if you accepted.” Urbane said and I stood and walked over to him and felt warm, not just from my bath and the brandy, but in his presence.

“It would please me if you didn’t also forsake your own comfort for my sake. The bed is easily large enough to hold us both. I vow I do not snore.” I said and Urbane chuckled.

“Fair enough then. Climb in and I’ll put out the lights.” Urbane said and all three of us crawled into cool sheets.

I sighed as I sank into the softest mattress I’d ever laid upon, the bed was paradise on my weary soul. Urbane lay beside me and sighed. “It’s suddenly been a long day for me too. Rest Well and Sweet Dreams Peaceful.” He said and I rolled to face him and laid my hand on his arm in gratitude.

“I will and to you as well. Thank you for everything.”

“You’re more than welcome.” Urbane said, his hand coming to rest atop mine.

We fell asleep with his hand still atop mine. Lazuli sharing our pillows and radiating contentment.

“Named Well”

Book Two in Namesake Tales

Author: D. Sanders

Chapter Two - Fated Paths

I slept late, and by the time I came to my senses, I was alone in bed and by the rocking, we were already out to sea and Lazuli was nowhere in sight. When I mentally called for her, she informed me she was enjoying a tour of the deck on Urbane’s shoulder and she stated again for the record how much she liked him and that he fed her beef that morning and she’d liked it immensely. She was almost giddy over a meat she’d never eaten and was like a cheerful sprite when she told me Urbane had promised her more whenever she desired it.

I smiled to myself and shared her joy. Our benefactor was the most gracious and generous of men and treated my bonded like a queen. Urbane chose that moment to come back to the cabin.

“She told me you were awake. Are you hungry?” Urbane asked, walking into the room looking even more handsome than the day before. He wore tan fitted leggings and tall black boots polished to gleaming. His loose white shirt and tan short vest to match his leggings showed a wonder physique and left nothing to my imagination or anyone’s as to what his breeched contained. He was certainly all male and obviously amply endowed.

He was windblown as he swept into the room, Lazuli riding high on his shoulder.

::He is strong too, he’d be Dragon Warrior in the clan. Not afraid of hard work and handsome too. I like him, he is good.::

I laughed. “Yes, I am hungry and Lazuli likes you very much. She just said you would make a good Dragon Warrior.” I said as I crawled out of bed to meet Urbane at the table.

“I’d probably make a poor one. I may know how to use a blade, I don’t particularly care for it. I’d much rather read of adventure than create it.” Urbane said and I smiled.

“Aye. Me too. I love to read.” I admitted as Helpful appeared with a tray of wonderful smelling bacon and eggs, buttery rolls and sweet jams. I ate hungrily as Helpful pulled out clothes for me.

He held up two equally gorgeous short robes. The style that stopped at mid-thigh. “Which color do you favor your Highness?”

“I think the blue one is lovely. I am partial to anything blue.” I answered honestly and Helpful smiled.

“Your highness is suited for Blue. I agree.” Helpful said laying out the short robe and then a pair of the soft leggings like Urbane wore. A mix of Aegian and Southern attire. Then Helpful knelt and begged my pardon as he inspected my feet.

“Your highness might have to go barefoot, I don’t think I have boots that will fit such small feet.” He said and I laughed.

“I do have small feet and it’s alright. I only wear shoes if I absolutely must. I do prefer bare feet or my sandals. I have never worn boots in my life.” I said and Helpful smiled and nodded and then stood behind me.

“May I See to your hair your highness? I have always wanted to try my hand at a healer’s knot.” He asked and I nodded.

“They are hard enough to do with straight hair. I’ll warn you, my curls have a mind of their own.” I said and Urbane laughed.

“I can see that now. You do have a lot of hair and so beautiful. Aegian women would kill for your locks.” Urbane said and I chuckled.

“They’d hate it after a while. Curls never stay contained long.” I replied as Helpful combed my hair.

He conceded defeat after several failed attempts and I laughed and then showed him how it was done. I was used to it after all and there was a specific knack to doing it correctly. First the hair was loosely braided before it was twisted and folded and then held in place with two long stick pins. The ones gracing my hair this morning were the finest I’d ever seen. Bone Ivory with the tips studded in real gemstones and not the glass beads I was accustomed to. Sapphires and diamonds lay against my fine pale cream colored hair.

I had given mine back to my father the day before and where Helpful managed to find a pair for me to use today in such finery was a mystery and when I asked he informed me Urbane had gone to the market before they set sail and purchased them for me.

I thanked my benefactor yet again and he just smiled. “It was my pleasure and they look beautiful on you. I thought they would. Would you care for a tour of the decks after you’ve dressed?” Urbane asked and I nodded and dressed in the finest garments I’d ever worn.

Urbane offered me his arm and Lazuli his shoulder and I saw the wonders of the sea for the first time. I felt like a child seeing the world anew for the first time. The

wind in my face, the salty sea air, the dolphins cavorting in our wake. I felt like I was dreaming and practically danced across the decks beside my guide.

When Urbane pointed out the whales I thought my heart would stop with excitement and joy. I had never seen such majestic creatures, and I watched them surge out of the sea to fall back in again holding my breath.

Urbane's hand on the small of my back where we leaned against the railing to watch. "Marvelous aren't they? The Kings of the sea." Urbane said into the shell of my ear and I could only nod in reply.

I was living a dream I never wanted to wake from again. I was in love with the sea, the rolling of the waves, the flapping of the sails, the dolphins, the whales, the wind, and my benefactor. Every word he said, every wonder he showed me, every tale he told, every touch of his hand and every kindness he bestowed upon me charmed me right down to my toes. I was head over heels enamored unlike I had ever been before.

Lazuli was charmed right along with me and together we both fell in love with Lord Urbane. I never wanted the day to end, I felt swept away with joy, drunk with life and intoxicated with his warmth of spirit.

Yesterday had been my lowest of lows and today I soared to heights I'd never imagined in my entire life. I was walking on spiritual clouds and my happiness was all encompassing.

When we hit a particularly high wave and we stumbled slightly and Urbane's arms came around me to steady us against the railing and they remained his chest against my back I knew right then I'd never want to leave his arms again. I wished with every fiber of my being he might feel the same.

I shoved my doubts away, I knew it was highly unlikely, but I could pretend that the affection I felt from him was love, I could dream that he was mine. So I dreamed and lived in the moment and cherished every second of my time with him. While it lasted I would never complain. I knew deep down it would end with my tears, but for now I let my imagination soar free.

I pretended he loved me and that he was my soul bond found at last.

That evening we shared dinner in the cabin. Urbane had even set a place setting for Lazuli and from a beautiful china bowl she nibbled at bite sized cubes of the beef she had liked earlier while I was served the same, beef. I too had never tasted it and the shredded cuts in a thick gravy and then baked in a flaky roll wish

roasted potatoes and fresh asparagus greens steamed and in a butter sauce was divine.

I'd never eaten food prepared like this and thus my palette along with every thing else was dazzled that day.

"You're very quiet, are you enjoying dinner?" Urbane asked and I smiled and swallowed before speaking.

"I do not wish to talk with my mouth full. Oh yes, today has been the single most wonderful day in my life. The ship, the sea, the food and the company have been a dream I shall remember always. I cannot thank you enough Urbane. I really cannot." I answered and Urbane smiled, his eyes warm as he poured me more wine.

"That smile is more than enough thanks. It pleases me to see the world through your eyes. Everything is new and beautiful again when I see it as you do. One can grow accustomed to sights and sounds that are common for them. But when someone comes who has never seen them, you notice the things that once you too found great wonder in." Urbane replied and we finished our dinner and then took a stroll under the great wash of stars.

Even the night sky was new for me, the stars so very bright and all around us. I never knew the sky could seem so large. We stood way up in the crows nest, surrounded by the sea and sky. Urbane's arms around me again from behind as I leaned back against him to view the stars. "I never want today to end. I cannot describe my joy." I breathed and then I shivered as Urbane's soft voice in my ear spoke and the undeniable feelings of desire he felt washed over me.

"Nor can I. The view and the moment is indeed beautiful. Being with you is a joy I cannot describe either." Urbane whispered and I melted into my shoes. My stomach was awash in butterflies dancing.

::He loves you. He wants you. He is your Warrior my Healer. Accept what he offers and find your soul. I bond to you both I choose you both.:: Came Lazuli's urging in my mind and I was sure she was doing the same to Urbane by the look in his eyes and the lazy smile on his lips as I turned and looked up and met Urbane's eyes. I felt his soul touch and mingle with mine, he was everything I had ever desired, everything I'd ever hoped for. I love him too.

The world and time stopped in that moment as Urbane leaned over me and my eyes shut of their own accord and I tasted heaven as he gave me my first kiss. I couldn't stop the tears that rolled down my cheeks as he kissed me. Then the loss I felt when his lips left mine and his fingers trailed down my cheeks.

“Why are you crying Peaceful?” He asked concerned and I rested my forehead against his strong chest and took a shuddering breath.

“That was beautiful. I have never been kissed before, I didn’t know how wonderful it could be.” I said quietly and Urbane’s arms held me close.

“Nor I when you share one with someone you love. I have fallen so in love with you I am blinded by it I feel ten feet tall when I’m with you.” Urbane said and I held him back around his waist and drank in his warmth.

::It is because the Warrior and the Healer have met and the soul bond made at long last. You are born for each other like none other can experience. I choose the healer and the warrior as my chosen. Urbane for Peaceful, Peaceful for Urbane, this is true, this is good, Dragon King Male and his mate the Dragon Healer. As it always is, as it always shall be.:: Lazuli said to us both making us shiver.

“Really?” Urbane asked and I nodded.

“Aye. My Warrior. My love.” I said and if I had thought my first kiss sublime, I would learn that there were kisses that could set a soul on fire.

My knees grew weak and Urbane urged us both to the floor, grasping me tightly as he stole my breath with his kiss. My heart pounded in my ears and the blood roared in my veins as he proceeded to kiss me until I was incoherent with joy and heady desire.

He broke the kiss and panted and I choked back a sob wanting more.

“Not here, come, lets go back to the cabin and continue in privacy and comfort.” Urbane said and with obviously great effort to control himself. We climbed down awkwardly, both of us in equal states of arousal and then hurried back to the cabin. The door was barely closed before Urbane had me in his arms again.

Rekindling the fire and tearing me free from my clothes and his own as we stumbled across the floor to the bed. His kiss obliterated thoughts from my mind and his hands, his soft warm hands on my skin left a scorched trail in their wake. He was a Dragon, he filled me with power I’d never felt before from another. The magic he created with his desire to mate me was like a wellspring of pure untainted magic and he gave that power to me, his healer. I would be able to work for days with this force behind me to support and sustain me. This was what my father gave my mother and now what Urbane gave to me.

He was so gentle as he made love to me. I thought my skin too tight and my lungs too shallow as he brought unbelievable sensations to body. His touch, his scent, his body joined to mine was nothing I had ever known and knew I would

never lose my desire for. This was what I left home to find, this communion with another soul that went beyond intimacy and affection, that went beyond what words could ever hope to describe.

He could hear my thoughts, he could feel what gave me pleasure, he could taste his own lips against my own. We had ceased being two people and became a combined force. A triad of power. Healer, Warrior and bonded Dragon.

His power erupted around me and the very life creating force of his seed within me made me feel I could heal a thousand men and never need sleep. This was power coupling, this was the unique exchange that only Healers and Dragon Warriors could share. If I had been a woman, I would have conceived just as my mother had with my sister and I. This was forced fertility and using that basic natural wonder to amplify magic.

Sexual magic was always the most potent and a Dragon Warrior had the drive and the instinct to push it even further. He dominated me and filled me and gave me pleasure of not only body, but heart and soul.

To be loved is the simplest magic, but the most divine of them all.

“Is this why the moment I laid eyes on you standing in line at the gates, I became obsessed with you?” Urbane asked as he lazily stroked my chest where we lay tangled in sheets. Sweaty, tired and extremely satisfied.

“Aye and why I found it so hard to resist your kindness at first and why I trusted a total stranger so readily and easily. Why in a single day we end up here together as natural as breathing.” I sighed and Urbane leaned over to kiss my brow.

“You’re so beautiful. I have never in my life felt so deeply or so quickly as I feel for you. I’ve never had a relationship in my life that ever satisfied me. I always felt something was missing. Now I know what that is, I never knew I had the sense and what I needed was another I could share it with.” Urbane said and I smiled and rolled into his arms.

“Magic calls to itself and only finds peace when it meets and joins in circle unbroken. Like links in a chain.” I said and Urbane smiled, the white of his teeth so brilliant in the moonlight.

“That is a very accurate analogy. That’s precisely what it feel like, a chain. Not a binding kind, but like a necklace it gives pleasure rather than restriction.”

“Aye.” I yawned and Urbane chuckled.

“Get some sleep my love. Morning comes far too soon for us.”

“A day I welcome gladly beside you.” I said and fell into contented sleep in the arms of my beloved.

It didn't surprise anyone the next day to hear Urbane and I had become lovers. They knew Urbane well and everyone was glad to see how happy their Lord was with me. Helpful was the most pleased.

“Not seen him so happy in years. He's never had the luck of it with lovers. Only after him for his money and his titles they were. My Lord is the most kin and generous of men and people take advantage of his goodwill. It cheers my heart that he has chosen you to love, I know his heart is safe in your keeping. It would take a blind fool not to see his love is returned in your eyes. Healers always wear their emotions on their sleeves.” Helpful said to me that morning as he insisted on making another attempt with my hair while Urbane went for his morning meeting with the Captain.

“Sometimes we wear not only our own, but other's emotions as well. Sometimes it is not easy to be a healer, especially in large crowds where emotions are powerful and strained. It can be debilitating. My Mother had to be physically carried out of danger many times during the war I've been told. I thankfully only experienced that once when I was a child. My mother and I had been called to the Panther Clan, they had a horrible epidemic and the fear and panic of death was overwhelming. I was twelve then and I could barely stand to lend aid. I spent those first few days in a daze, my father had to lead us around. I barely remember, all I remember was sickness of heart and grief.” I said watching Helpful twist my hair in the mirror. He was doing a fine job and a variation to my normal style.

The ornate jeweled sticks Urbane had bought me had been added to. Helpful had taken from the stores of the cargo some beads that were being sent for trade and using hairpins as I'd never seen placed them in my knot like falling petals of flowers.

“I can see how that would be difficult to endure. We have very little knowledge of the sense in Aegis. It's so common in the Isles whereas in Aegis it is a rarity.”

“The sense is not so rare I think as it is undiscovered or unrecognized. Look at Urbane. A man of Twenty and One and only now finding out he is touched and amply gifted. The sense is something you are born with, you don't wake up one day and feel it's presence, you're used to the feeling as a part of you. It's learning to use it that most in Aegis are never taught. My Grandfather for instance. He had the beast magic, he grew up in the stables a favorite of the hounds, he thought everyone could talk to animals. It was natural for him. It wasn't until my

Grandmother came she named his gift for what it was. I am sure there are many more like him.” I said and Helpful nodded.

“That’s probably very true. How is one taught in the clan?” He asked and I smiled as he moved to sit with me across the table and talk with me.

“From our parents or elders. If our parents do not share our gifts, then we are mentored by another in the tribe who does. In rare cases, one is sent to another tribe to learn. Like in Tigo’s case. Born in Dragon Clan an Adept Mage with no other adept mage to teach him and when still a toddler he was accidentally destroying things, his parents took him to another tribe and fostered him to another Mage. He would travel back twice a year for a visit to his parents, but while he learned, he lived with his mentor. He came home to stay just before his seventeenth year and began mentoring my father then.” I said and Helpful was fascinated.

I hadn’t heard Urbane come in and he had come in during our discussion and then jumped right into the conversation.

“With the population so large in Aegis, mentoring programs would be hard. What we needed is a school where parents can send children with talent to learn from masters. Our gifts would not go to waste then.” He said and I nodded.

“A good idea, but finding students might prove difficult if there is no one to recognize the talent. Like I said, gifts are natural and the students will fail to see in themselves what is always there.”

“Not necessarily. Take me for instance. My mother used to say I was part animal as a child. She said I had the shifty “wary-eye” and I was forever being followed by every stray cat and dog in the city and bringing them home with me, to me it was natural, I just thought I loved animals. It seems I didn’t recognize my gifts, but my parents did. Parent’s notice things that are odd.”

“Good point, very true. Beast Magic is always the easiest to detect. Because the bearers are very much as much beast as they are men. The “wary-eye” as your mother called it was more than likely just you being like the beasts who observe everything around them. I bet no one could ever sneak up on you as a child.” I said and Urbane laughed.

“Exactly.”

“Mage magic can be much more difficult and often times deadly for children. They can irrevocably hurt themselves and others accidentally. A child burning down a house or going mad. Healers, like myself have to be guarded very closely. As I was telling Helpful, we can be overwhelmed quite easily. We are linked so closely with life magic that any death or sickness, panic or terror

situation can incapacitate us. We react on instinct and try to heal what is wrong and as children we're drawn to it like moths to flame. We heal by using what magic we have inside and if we use all we have, which again is easy to do when we are unaware and acting on pure instinct, we can kill ourselves. This is why we do not fight and we are naturally bonded to a Warrior. We need protection as much from ourselves than anything. We need our bonded to pull us back from the brink when we've gone too far. We cannot recognize danger to ourselves while we're working, we depend on being monitored by our protectors. You can give us power to keep us from blowing out like candles in the wind. Untrained, healers die very young. Most not living past infancy. I almost died when I was two when my sister caught the whooping cough. I was asleep and trying to heal her, my mother saved Joy and my father saved me by pulling me out of danger and restoring the power I'd sent to my sister."

"It's that compulsive of a gift?" Urbane asked looking almost horrified.

"I cannot stop healing. I cannot ignore a call for help. It goes against every instinct I have. Which is why training is so very important, I have to consciously keep focus or I'm lost in the storm. That is the extreme, but it can happen." I said and Urbane took my hand and kissed it.

"That explains my own obsessive possessiveness of you suddenly. I get this overpowering urge to bark and snap and protect you from everyone and everything. It's stupid, but every time I look at you I want to growl and say 'MINE!'" Urbane admitted and I laughed.

"I am yours, and yes you're bonded to me all Warriors that are bound to healers are like you. Like my father. You saw him, how he could not let me go easily? He's healer bonded, he cannot help but be protective and overly so at times. You are the same. Just as it's instinctive for me to heal, it's instinctive for you to protect. It goes hand in hand." I said and Urbane leaned across the table to kiss me.

"I can live with that." He drawled and I grinned.

"As can I." I answered and Helpful stood.

"This is just wonderful. At last you'll be happy." Helpful said patting Urbane's shoulder like a father would before excusing himself and leaving us alone to share our moment of intimacy and what was left of our now cold breakfast.

The voyage was fifteen days of spellbinding bliss. I had never felt more at internal peace in my life. The freedom of the open air and my lovers arms around me at night. We had fallen into a type of companionship I had always longed for,

the easy comfort that comes when two people are extensions of each other. He could sense my needs before I could voice them and likewise I could return his desires. We liked the same books, we shared a love of animals and music. We liked tranquil pastimes and could find comfort in simple pleasures.

I loved to please him and it was as simple as whispering I loved him as we made love together or giving his back the attention of a simplistic massage that had him purring like a pampered cat in our bed.

Those moments were sublime for me. I could feel his love and affection for me radiate through my fingertips as I worked his broad strong back. My mate was such a fine man, handsome, strong, fit and so very appreciative of my efforts. I was left in no doubt how much he cherished me, and that alone filled me with indescribable joy.

My Urbane was the epitome of his namesake, never had I met a man so appropriately named. He was the consummate gentleman, Noble and chivalrous and every good quality a man could possess Urbane had in abundance. He treated me like a precious treasure and pampered me even if I protested his excess.

He would not let me lift a finger to work on the ship. He adamantly refused stating my hands were treasures of healing and he would count even one callous an affront to his sensibilities. He was well educated to clan roles, he knew as a healer my needs were usually seen to by other clan members just as my hands were ever theirs to call on in need. He knew my role and he took his as my protector seriously.

Lazuli claimed it was in his nature and that all Dragon Warriors became overly zealous in their vows after they mated. She advised me to get used to being treated like a Queen Dragon. That Urbane was as kingly a warrior as she'd ever seen and if I thought my father had been an obsessive protector I was going to be surprised with my own mate's tendencies.

She had bonded to him too after all, and knew him as intimately as she knew me now. Dragons could read souls better than any other creature and what she saw in Urbane she highly approved of, she deemed him King and deferred to Urbane as she had always deferred to Wintermoon. Urbane was our warrior and Lazuli said she'd never seen a more honest soul.

She was satisfied now that I'd always be protected appropriately. She loved me and had despaired of me finding my mate which was why she had urged me to leave. Now she was content that I'd not only found my mate, but that he was of such noble character.

I felt twice blessed with her love added to Urbane's and I was beginning to see a life ahead of me of utter contentment.

Urbane insisted on dressing me in the finest of his silks, feeding me the best of from his kitchen's and was making expensive plans to dote on me in the future. Every protest I made that I was more than content with just him, he'd smile and just say, it gave him all the more reason to spoil me because I'd appreciate what he did for me.

I did appreciate every gesture, he made me feel truly loved.

When we reached Rockport, Urbane sent a messenger ahead of us. He informed his father he'd arrived safely and that to expect us in Crown City within the next five days. It took longer to travel with a caravan than on just horses. He also sent word to the Queen, letting her know he had the silks she'd requested and he wrote to her in detail over what had happened to me and that I was with him and would be in Crown City within the week.

We would be in Rockport for two days while the cargo was fitted to the wagons and that time was spent with my mate showing me the sites of the port city and showing me his generous nature.

Our first stop was to a tannery, where Urbane commissioned a hasty shoulder perch made for Lazuli. Not only for her comfort for riding on his shoulder, but to spare his clothing from her talons, she was renting the fabric of all his shirts.

From there, he took me to his lovely townhouse in the city. He kept a residence in Rockport since he was so often here on business. The staff of servants greeted us warmly and had lunch served to us in a beautiful courtyard in the back of the house. Potted rose bushes on terra cotta tile, colorful cushioned chairs and flaky white fish in a creamy sauce was served on the most beautiful china I'd ever seen. Urbane loved finery, but not to gaudy excess. You could tell he personally selected his fine trappings with a critical eye. Nothing was garish or ostentatious. It was the quality that made the beauty. The delicate painted ivy china pattern was subtle and it was the delicacy and the simplicity that made it so refined.

The cut crystal glasses that made the wine look like a work of art within. The simple sapphire blue silk of the table cloth didn't need elaborate trimmings and trappings. It was the fabric alone was what made it lovely. Urbane had immaculate taste and a singular eye for beauty that was remarkable.

After lunch, Urbane took me to the market and there I was immediately spoiled rotten by my mate as he saw fit. There were shops for everything imaginable, from pottery, to swords, to jewelry and confectioners. Rockport being the largest port of trade had wares that were both Aegian and Southern and then mixtures of

the two cultures combined. Our first stop was a clothier who had southern robes of every shape and size next to Aegian finery. Urbane was obviously a regular customer, the shop owner dropped what he was doing to personally attend to us.

“Lord Urbane! Such a pleasure to see you so soon. I just got delivered the bolts of fabric you brought back for me. Once again only the finest grade. How can I help you today my Lord?”

“This beautiful creature beside me must be showcased properly. I brought back more than goods this trip, I happened to pick up the love of my life while I was at it. Only your best please Snip, may I introduce my beloved, Prince Peaceful.” Urbane introduced me by my title, which I was getting slowly accustomed to. I knew I’d have to adapt to Aegian culture and titles were important even if I personally saw no need for them I was a healer, that was my true calling in my heart.

“My word, Princess Beloved’s son yes?” Snip asked and I nodded.

“From the tattoo I can see around your neck you’re a healer too. Only healers where the white ink I believe.”

“Yes sir. I am indeed a healer too.” I replied and the man seemed to beam.

“Finally! Pardon my exuberance your Highness, I’ve always wanted to dress a healer. The robes of your profession are simply stunning and it seems a waste that Aegians only wear that style of robe to sit in their bedchambers. A waste of beautiful silk I say. Come, I have just the things I think.” Snip said leading us to a side room where he had us sit and he brought out several robes in the most dazzling array of colors. Each he held against my skin.

“Blues and Purples are his colors, look how they bring out his eyes. Oh yes, this blue here a perfect match indeed. What say you Lord Urbane?”

“I say you are correct and he must have that one and the lavender and pink ones too. Pastels suit him much more than primary colors. It’s all that dark skin, pales colors enhance it.”

Urbane and Snip made me feel like a doll as they dressed me to their satisfaction. The robes were followed by leggings and harem pants to match. I felt like myself again dressing in garments I had been accustomed to previously. Like my mother, I loved loose clothing for freedom of movement and comfort. After all, Healers didn’t have to worry about snagging fabric in trees or tearing silk while hunting. We worked in far more intimate surroundings usually at the bedsides of those who needed us. I felt human again in my new robe. Urbane insisting I wear the sky blue robe and harem pants out of the shop.

He then immediately took me to a cobbler and my feet were adorned with new sandals. Hardly more than leather soles to protect the bottoms of my feet, but I had professed them my preference as opposed to boots or shoes. I liked going as close to barefoot as possible in the summer and only wore shoes in winter to keep my feet warm outside.

Inside during any weather I was always barefoot. Urbane indulged me and my new sandals were lovely and my toes were gloriously free to wriggle about at my will.

I thought we were finished shopping, I was very wrong. I had seven new robes and matching pants and a brand new pair of shoes I hardly needed more and when I said as much Urbane only laughed.

“Love, I’ve hardly even started. This trip is just to get you enough to get us to Crown City.” He said and then lead me down the cobbled streets to a long line of Jewelers.

Urbane stopped at a small shop with a cheerful red awning over the door. Inside was a wizened old man with large magnifying glasses on his nose that made his eyes look twelve times their natural size. He peered at us over the rims and brightened when he saw Urbane.

“Another gift for your mother my Lord?” He asked and Urbane shook his head.

“Nay, a gift for my beloved here. I want a gold band on his finger immediately. We can’t officially marry in Aegis, but per southern customs he’s my husband and I’d very much like to see a traditional bonding band on his finger.” Urbane said and I was more than touched and slid under my mates arm emotionally high.

“Brought yourself back a healer too, always such delicate things healers and I’ve just what you’re after my Lord.” The old man grinned and pulled out a tray of golden rings, each one minutely etched and crafted with no gems, just painstakingly molded and etched gold.

While the jeweler measured my finger, Urbane inspected each ring with a critical eye. Urbane holding each one up to the sunlight in order to watch the play of the sun on the metal. He set aside four he seemed to like and then laid them before me.

“Whichever one you like best my love and it’s yours. You honor me with your love I want everyone to see how much I love you in return.” He said and I wanted to cry as I looked at the best craftsmanship I’d ever seen. This jeweler indeed had a gift and I was in awe of all the rings laid before me.

"I cannot choose, they are all so lovely. I would rather wear the one you like best, considering it is a symbol for your love and your custom, I think I would like to wear a ring that speaks of you most. Please choose for me." I said and Urbane smiled and nodded and selected the one I thought he'd choose.

It was a tiny serpentine dragon, curling around the finger nose to tail, it's wings folded as in sleep and thin as a sliver but even so, each scale was evident in the golden hide. It fit my finger as if it had been made specifically for me. I couldn't stop the tears that rolled down my cheeks as Urbane slipped the ring on my finger and whispered as he did so.

"With this ring, I vow to honor and protect you all my days in this life and onto the next if need be. Let the sleeping dragon on your finger remind you of the dragon who loves you."

I kissed my mate right there in the jewelers and curled my own toes in the process. I couldn't express my love for him in words, but he certainly understood my message loud and clear and he just squeezed me tightly and then wiped my tears with the pads of his fingers.

Lazuli on his shoulder trilled gaily echoing our own happiness.

Urbane chuckled and reached up to stroke her breast. "I haven't forgotten about you either my lovely lady blue. I am bonded to you too am I not? A ring for my beloved and I do think a golden necklace for my lady too is in order." Urbane said and had the jeweler bring out a ladies bracelet. A delicate golden chain with tiny diamond chips inlaid like snowflakes. The jeweler seemed thrilled to fit his first dragon customer and trimmed the ends of the chain and repositioned the clasp so it fit better around her neck and sat like a grand necklace against her bright blue chest. When the jeweler held up a little hand mirror so Lazuli could see herself I thought she's posture herself right off Urbane's shoulder.

She was not quite as vain as her mother, but she certainly had her own fair share of vanity. I personally thought she was even prettier than Sunfire. But then again I was biased. Not only was she my bonded since my infancy, she was blue. She was probably the reason my favorite color was blue. I thought my Lazuli was the prettiest creature in the world. She agreed with me naturally.

"A fine grand lady you are indeed. I think I will endeavor to expand my wears for you in the future. I had no idea dragons liked jewelry." He said and I laughed.

"Oh they are most vain and my father's dragon has more jewelry than my mother." I replied and the old man laughed.

"We'll be back in Rockport in time for harvest fest I believe. You know I like to winter here. If you would be so kind as to make my Lazuli here more to suit her

I'd appreciate it. Some in silver too, the silver against her blue would be stunning. Diamonds and blue topaz and perhaps some amethyst and opals."

"For her blue, absolutely. You'd lose sapphires against her and reds and emeralds would be too garish. Enhance that blue. As always your eye is superb my Lord. I'll make up a good selection and perhaps a few more you might take back to the Isles when next you go. Now that I know Dragons are appreciative customers I think I'm going to expand my business."

"I'd stick with glass stones and not gemstones then. Most warriors could not afford gems but will buy glass for their bonded partners readily. It's the craftsmanship they buy and yours will be most sought after." I said and the old man nodded.

"Good advise I will take to heart." The old man said and we bid our farewells and headed back out into the sprawling market.

It was then I noticed Urbane's smirk. He stopped and placed a matching bracelet on my wrist to match Lazuli's necklace. I hadn't even seen him make the sale. He was underhanded and sneaky and I adored him. "I must have you both match after all." Was all he said with a wink and led me on with a spring in his step as we walked hand in hand.

I was once again lost in the newness of my life. I tasted new foods, and found a sincere fondness for what was called iced cream. I had never had anything like it before in my life. It was cold and sweet and flavored with vanilla and strawberries and the first taste was a shock. I hadn't expected it to be so cold. I loved it and so did Lazuli who stuck her nose in Urbane's cup and licked and professed a desire to have some too.

So Urbane bought her some and the three of us sat at a little café table together and ate the frozen confection as it melted slowly in the summer heat of the afternoon. It came in several flavors and deciding which flavor to try first had been a difficult decision. They had strawberries and peach, blueberry and raspberry, and all manner of fruit mixed with the chilled cream. I had opted for the strawberry since it was one of my favorites. I was not disappointed.

Evening found us back home again over a lovely dinner of slow roasted Lamb and mint jelly with new potatoes in butter and chives and peas and carrots steamed to perfection. Another new meat I had never had before and loved immensely.

After dinner, we shared a fruity wine under the moonlight in the back courtyard then took a long leisurely bath together in a large marble tub upstairs. The tub was made like our hot springs back home. It was a soaking tub with seating and I washed Urbane's hair and simply enjoyed pampering him as he had pampered

me earlier. In the clan baths were usually communal, and I loved being able to finally share bathing intimacy with my mate. I washed him from his head to his toes before he became too aroused with me and decided bath time was over and carried me to his bed where he loved me until I was boneless.

The bed was luxurious and soft and I was exhausted and elated and slept against my lover and lost myself in the sweetest of dreams. Love fueled me and had changed my life. I would surely die if I lost my Urbane. He was my very reason for being, he was all I had ever wished for in my life. A life that would lose all meaning if I lost him. My wonderful Gentle, Loving Urbane.

“Named Well”

Book Two in Namesake Tales

Author: D. Sanders

Chapter Three - The End of Dreaming

The journey to Crown City was rather dusty but otherwise uneventful. We stopped twice at Inns along the way and by afternoon of the third day we passed the gates of the largest and grandest city in Aegis.

Everything grabbed at my attention with wonder. Rockport had been a port city with winding streets and merchants and colorful townhouses the Lords used as they oversaw their business interests.

Crown City however was opulence and grandeur, the prized pearl of the Country. We entered the lower districts first and then headed through the business section of the city where most of the large warehouses and stockyards were. The upper business district had factories and textiles that led into accounting firms and banks and the bookkeeping side of business in large buildings sectioned into offices.

The middle class homes began here, row after row of townhouses all in red brick and the closer we got to the palace, the better condition the houses seemed to be in. Red brick gave way to larger townhouses in bright colors. The upper middle class, obviously lived here.

Then the marketplace opened before us, pretty shops and parks with fountains were everywhere and the market separated the middle class and higher class residences.

We had already left behind our caravan back in the warehouse district and Urbane and I had continued on, Urbane pointing out various points of interest as we traveled inward.

Once through the market, the first of the high class estates began to appear. First came large town homes with flowerboxes full of bright flowers lined the streets. These were the homes of the non-landed gentry. Wealthy merchants and young lords and ladies without ancestral lands or wealth. These homes kept getting larger and grander and further apart as we traveled.

Soon there were wrought iron gated mansions with beautiful gardens on display through the filigreed metal fences. I had never imagined homes could be so large. I had thought Urbane's townhouse in Rockport the largest home I'd ever seen, I was used to a single all purpose dwelling in a tree. The largest building we had in the clan was the communal kitchen and even that could have fit into the ballroom in Urbane's townhouse.

These structures were massive and elegant and were beginning to sprawl like miniature palaces, each one trying to be more extravagant than the next and all of them breathtakingly beautiful.

Urbane stopped our mounts and gestured through one of the gates toward a grand white alabaster stone mansion with rose gardens leading up to the front doors. "This is my father's home, our home Love. We'll come back here after I take you to your grandfather and I report to the Queen I've returned with her silk. The Castle Keep is not far now." Urbane said and I gaped at his home.

"You live there?"

"All my life. Now you do too beloved. Come, let's make our report so I can introduce you to my parents this evening." Urbane said smiling as we continued up the rambling road and up to the massive stone gates of the Castle Keep on the hill that overlooked the entire sprawling city.

It was the largest building of them all and I was jaw agape as we came to the guards standing at the entrance of the Keep. I never knew how big the world was nor how grand it could be. We paused at the gates as the guards asked us to state our names and business.

"Lord Urbane to see her Her Majesty Queen Dauntless, she is expecting my arrival and Prince Peaceful, grandson of King Justice come from the southern Isles to visit his Kin." Urbane said and here was where my wonderment came crashing down around my shoulders.

"You are permitted to pass Lord Urbane Sir. We have orders from the Queen that Peaceful is to remain here. She stated we were to tell Peaceful that he is clanless and may not enter the Keep." The guard said and Urbane exploded.

"What?! He is family!" Urbane shouted and I reached out and laid my hand on his shoulder.

"I told you this would happen. When I left against my father's will and severed my clan ties, I became without kin. I suspected this might happen, Grandmother is clan, she will not let me enter. It's alright, I'll wait here." I said, keeping a brave face even if I felt my heart drop into my stomach and sit like a knot. I had hoped that my grandfather might see me, he was Aegian after all and Urbane had insisted that Aegians did not subscribe to that particular clan custom.

However, his letter had been sent to the Queen, she was clan. She would have read the letter and then passed the order to the gates. I doubt my grandfather even knew I was here. Once a clan tie is severed, you did not discuss the ungrateful, they became as good as dead. She wouldn't even have thought to inform my grandfather of what I had done, I ceased to be in her eyes.

I had expected this. I had hoped in vain but I was not truly surprised to be denied passage into a home of kin I had shunned.

“This is madness. I’ll talk to her, but first, I am not leaving you here to sit at a gate, I’ll take you home first and I’ll come back, this is crazy.” Urbane said and we turned back the way we had come and returned to the beautiful white mansion that was my Lover’s ancestral home.

The reception I received here was a farce. Urbane’s father and brother were away on business and his mother was a grand woman. She welcomed her son home with sincere affection and warmth and when he introduced me and told her that I was his lover and oath bound husband. Her face stayed cheerful, but you could never lie to a healer. She was not happy, she was in fact furious.

Her words were charming and warm and she welcomed me falsely for her son’s benefit. There was no true welcome for me here. She radiated coldness and I sensed a deep foreboding to come. Urbane was in a state of anger as he relayed to his mother the reception I’d received at the keep and she eagerly listened.

I knew nothing good was going to come from her avid attention to her son’s dissertation of events. He told her what he’d seen from my father and I and then described how we bonded and Lady Regalia was truly fond of Lazuli. She thought the dragon riding on her son’s shoulder perch lovely but thought of her like a pet from what I could sense. She really had no grasp of the importance of a bond animal. She didn’t realize a dragon was just as intelligent and perceptive as a human.

::This woman is mixed. She loves her son, she thinks I am a toy and you, I do not like what she thinks of you at all.::

::Nor I, but this is Urbane’s mother and we must respect her regardless Lazuli.:: I said and Lazuli refrained from further discourse, she and I did not want to upset Urbane. This was his mother and he loved her.

Once Urbane finished telling his mother our story, he led me to his apartments in the mansion. Our items had already arrived and my single possession from my clan life, my little book sat on the table in the sitting room. Urbane told me to make myself comfortable and he’d be back as soon as he could. He suspected to be gone several hours. Lazuli went with him to advise him on how to best broach the subject of my situation. I was alone in a strange home and afraid of the emotions I felt churning in the air.

He wasn’t gone fifteen minutes before his mother arrived to see me. The confrontation had arrived.

She sat at the table with me and my dreaming was over, reality had returned. Every word she uttered, shattered my soul.

“I know my son loves you, that is obvious, However, he acts before he thinks sometimes. I am afraid I must be the bearer of ill tidings. First, this unconventional marriage of yours must be severed. While he was away his father and I agreed to a most beneficial marriage for him already. Lady Ardent is a lovely young woman of impeccable breeding. She’d bring to him a landed title in Rockport. He’d inherit the stewardship of the city by marrying her. Not to mention she is a woman, and you could certainly never give him his own heirs. I’m also afraid that if your own grandmother sees fit to disinherit you by your own customs I must do the same. I will not see my husband’s house shamed with you. This is a scandal and you’d bring shame upon Urbane and this house. I must ask you to leave immediately. I don’t want a scene. I also ask that you leave behind all items Urbane purchased for you, and leave as your custom dictates. I don’t want him scandalized if you were found with intimate gifts on your person when he is to marry another. It would hurt her to know you carried those things with you when by right, they should be tokens given to her.” Lady Regalia said and I sat frozen with the most gutting soul pain I’d ever felt.

I could only nod through my tears as I pulled out the jewels from my hair and lay them on the table. I was not a fighter, I would go peacefully without fuss or scene as she feared. I had nothing to say to protect myself, she was right. The truth was the truth and I could not deny it.

Beside my hair gems the bracelet from my wrist and then the most painful to remove from my person, the ring from my finger. I stood with what was left of my dignity and collected my book.

“The clothes too. I have more appropriate attire for you to leave with. I would not send you out naked as you do in the clan, at the very least you should cover your nakedness in Aegis.” Lady Regalia said and she was maliciously loving what she was doing to me, she was enjoying my torment. She felt victorious.

She laid a rough burlap sack on the table. A beggar on the street had more from what I had seen.

I walked behind the screen in the room and held my shattered pride close as I removed the soft silk and sandals Urbane had given me and pulled the sacking over my head.

All I had to my name was my book and the burlap potato sack.

Regalia stood and ordered me to follow her. I was taken outside where a man waited for me, from him I felt nothing but sincere pity. He did not like the task he had been given.

“Will you at least tell him I loved him and left to spare him?” I asked and Regalia frowned.

“You should address me as My Lady and I think not. Better no words said so the parting made easier.” She lied and sneered. I was foolish to think she might care even a little. For her son’s heart if not for mine. She felt disgusted with me, that a man had lain as a lover with her son. She thought me an unnatural savage who had corrupted her son into desiring his own flesh. Her truth and beliefs were like razors against my soul.

“Take him out of the city with speed and get as far as you can before my son comes home and do not return to the city for a week, I want the trail cold for him.” She said and the man nodded.

“Yes, my Lady.” He said and at least graciously offered his hand for me to mount the horse with him. They covered me in a cloak to hide my identity and then I sobbed uncontrollably as the horse thundered out of the city.

He took me north, past the Keep and passed a field and up the main road. I clutched my book to my chest, my one and only possession as my world came crashing down around my shoulders. My dream was over, I’d lost everything and everyone I’d ever loved, including my bonded dragon.

I would not call to her, she was safer with Urbane, he at least could feed her and it was appropriate for the dragon to stay with the warrior. I had no right to her anymore. I had brought this fate down upon my own shoulders and I refused to let her share my fate with me. I’d protect her by leaving silently. I was indeed going to die, just like my father had said I would.

He’d been right all along. However, it was not the land that would kill me, it was the emptiness of my soul that would. There was nothing left for me to live for now. I was named poorly. I did not bring peace to others, I only served to bring familial strife with me, I only hurt the ones I loved most with my selfishness and ungratefulness. I deserved this fate; had I just obeyed my father I would have never met Urbane. I would have never bonded to him and I would have never broken his heart. I knew he would feel just as lost as I and that was what I could not bear. Knowing I hurt him, that it was my fault he would suffer heartbreak brought a despair upon me I would not wish on my most fervent foe.

Everything was black around the edges for me my dream over, my life not worth the air I breathed still. The man came to a halt by a small path that came to the side of the road. We were miles from the City. We’d been traveling at full speed for hours.

“That path there leads to Clearlake Cavern. It’s a cave with a fresh water lake. It’s getting late and that’s a good place for you to shelter tonight lad. The King Himself used that cave the night he escaped the massacre.”

“I know, my sister was conceived in that cave. That is a good place, thank you.” I said numbly, so my grave would at least be a place I had wanted to see before I died. I thought to myself with bittersweet irony as I slipped off my mount and handed the cloak back to the rider.

“Nay lad, keep it. I think it’s right appalling what she’s doing to you. Lord Urbane is going to be furious with her.”

“She’s right though, I’m clanless and Urbane should have a nice woman who can give him children. I should have never disobeyed my father. It is my fault Urbane will suffer and his relationship with his mother change forever.”

“Lady Ardent is just as bitchy and catty as Lady Regalia. Urbane cannot stand that woman and has told his mother so on more than one occasion. He won’t marry her and refused to on a number of previous attempts to get him to do so. His mother lied to you if she told you he was to marry Lady Ardent. Every man has a right to marry whom he chooses or in this case, does not choose. He may not be able to marry you, but he would have lived with you as husband just the same. It’s his right to do so. He’d not be the first man to choose not to marry a woman to live with the man he loved instead.”

“Thank you, you are kind. However, that does not change what I am. I would shame him, I am clanless, I won’t bring him shame. I love him too much. Thank you just the same.” I said turning my bare feet toward the path to the cave.

I heard the rider depart and the sounds of beating hooves fade into the distance. I was more alone than I had ever been before. Plunged into a despair that was so deep I felt my very soul was bleeding out of me. The first time I thought I was alone I still had Lazuli. Then Urbane came and showed me a love that I now wished I’d never known. Because losing it was the most painful thing I had ever endured.

I reached the cave at sundown and walked inside and viewed the beautiful spring lake in the back, the place where my parents had loved one another that horrific night and had conceived my sister. It was a beautiful place.

I sat down with my book; inside its pages was the love story of my parents. The book I had first learned about this cave. About the massacre they escaped from and the events of the war that had almost destroyed my father.

I wondered if his torture had felt like I currently felt. He’d had physical pain but they had never broken his soul. That he had kept, knowing my mother was out

there needing him and carrying his unborn daughter. He'd sent his soul to her to protect her even when he himself was being hurt bodily.

Me? Bodily I was fine, my soul however was irrevocably broken in a million sharp edged pieces. I took up a piece of graphite stone from the cave floor and used the sharp edge to write inside the back cover of my book.

I added my pitiful story at the end in a final soliloquy and epitaph to leave beside my body. My final apology to all those I had hurt along the way.

My name is Peaceful. I am the son of Constant and Beloved who are written about inside this book. I was named poorly. My name should be Sorrow for that is what I bring to those I love most. I am an ungrateful disobedient son who defied my father and sundered my ties to my clan. I am a willful child who sought to see Aegis for selfish motives. I met on the way my Warrior, my beloved Urbane. To him I have caused the most grief and I wish I could say to him how sorry I am. I will not shame him or his family or our shared bond dragon Lazuli. I am clanless I have no right to claim a mate but I did anyway. His mother was right to send me away, Urbane deserves one better than I, one whom he can marry that does not carry my shame. I fear I have forever caused him pain such as I feel.

My soul is rendered without him, our bond was the most precious thing I have ever experienced. I am outcast, shunned by the clan and also by the land of Aegis.

My beloved does not yet know I have been sent away, turned from the hearth of his clan home as I should be for being the blight that I am. My selfishness cannot be atoned for. I can only pray the White Lady gives mercy to my beloved and spares his soul the pain as our bond severs.

Here I will lie down and wait for death to claim me. I do not deserve to live. I ask not for forgiveness from others that which I cannot forgive in myself. I pray the White Lady gives comfort and solace to those that I have caused such pain.

I finished my story and closed the book and then lay down on the cloak. Holding the book on my chest and I shut my eyes. I would not slack my thirst in the lake, I would not hunt, I could not. I could not kill and I had no weapon. I would not forage for food. I would lay here and deny my body until it succumbed to death.

At least I had a beautiful tomb and even that I felt I didn't deserve. I closed my mind to Lazuli, I'd never let her suffer my death.

I wept until I had no more tears left to shed and then lay empty and raw to wait for my end.

Time no longer had meaning I sank into a dreamless sleep, letting what was left of my broken soul drain out of me as first the hunger of my body grew to an ache that matched the pain I felt within and then that faded to a tingling numbness. Like a limb slept on tingled with the slowing of blood flow. Then nothing. The emptiness was total and the grey mists of my mind was all I had left.

It was like a tunnel of confusion, at one end far in the distance was a welcoming light I avoided. I didn't deserve light and the warmth it promised. I deserved the nothing of the mists.

I turned my back on the light and faced into the darkness and stood, hovering between the black void and the light, the grey world between the two was where I stood, waiting.

From the mists, voices so distant I had to strain to hear them began to speak.

"My son, what have I done? What have I driven you to? Come back, oh dearest forgive give."

"Did you read what he's written here? Beloved please, don't leave me please don't leave me."

"Woman what were you thinking giving orders at the gate like that! Don't ever deny my grandchildren entrance to my home again! Clan customs be damned! This is Aegis and I will not turn out a loved one no matter the reason! You've treated him with less charity than a condemned murderer! For what? For acting like a man with a will of his own? Last I looked that is how we raise our sons! To be MEN! And you've killed him for it!"

"Everyone please stop arguing and laying blame! We're all to blame here save Urbane and my Father. My son is dying and I'm trying to find his soul! Dearest come to Mama please. Please my baby boy, don't leave us."

"Beloved, oh please hear me. Don't die I beg you come back. Forgive me, I should have known my mother would try and drive us apart and I failed to protect you, forgive me please. I will never forgive her for what she did to crush you so. Don't leave me, don't leave Lazuli, she's pining for you so. We all are dearest. We're all here, come back."

"He's swallowing the water and the broth, but his soul is lost he's walking alone in the mists somewhere. Let's move him from this cave and get him where his body can rest and recover. Urbane, hold him, keep him close, you are his warrior if anyone can draw his soul back you can. It's his bond to you that keeps him alive and his soul from crossing over. Only you can find him in his soul walking."

The voices ended for a time, I thought it was just the last hopeful fragments of my imagination there at the end. The voices of all those I held dear coming to give me the gift of their love in my passing. I knew it had to be my imagination, my parents were still back in the Isles, they would never come after me after what I'd done. I was dead to them by custom. I knew what I heard were just my deepest wishes being appeased as I died and nothing more.

I accepted the warmth those memories of my loved ones brought to the mists, but did not seek them, just took the comfort offered without seeking more. I didn't deserve more, even from my own imagination. I kept my back to the light and watched my soul shadow against the mist. A long shadow I cast, most of it disappearing into the void beyond the mist. Almost as if my shadow itself is what made up the emptiness I faced.

The light on my back was warm and beckoning and I ignored my desire to embrace the release it offered.

The mists were a far better death for one such as I. The light was for others much more deserving. I had hurt so many in my life, this nothing place was where I belonged in death.

"So this is where you are." Came a voice in the mists and from it a Wondrous lady stepped. Her hair so long it fell to her ankles and in a shade of the most brilliant blue. She came from the void, so the light behind me illuminated her before me. Her gown was also blue and around her throat were snowflakes like diamonds as they twinkled. She was so very beautiful and the voice so very familiar.

"My beloved Chosen, why do you linger in the nothing? Cannot you hear us calling you?" She said holding out her long fingered and elegant hand to me.

I could not speak, I wanted so desperately to fling myself into this strange lady's arms to seek the comfort she so willingly offered, but I could not. I did not deserve her affection or comfort.

"Ah dearest, you are lost indeed. You have trapped yourself in a prison of your own making and I cannot help you beloved if you do not come to me." She said and again I could not find my voice to speak, I could only turn my eyes away from her beauty, it pained me to look upon her. I was so undeserving of the love in her eyes for me.

"Such torment of soul I have never seen, what have we driven you to my love so you would find your own self so loathsome? So tender, so loving, so gentle and so fragile you are and we have pushed you and played with you and your heart too much. You take blame that is not your own to bear and now it burdens you

like chains of despair. You are named too well. For the peace of soul you so seek to give others you would take their pains and mistakes from them onto yourself. You would carry their burdens to free them while casting yourself into the flames. Dearest, let go, come back with me. You are not to blame.”

She pleaded with me and I wanted to go with her, I wanted to believe her and yet I stood silent and rooted in place, I could see clearly the chains that bound me to the mists, anchored to this nothing place in misty chains as strong and sturdy as iron shackles. Immobile and lost I could only cast my eyes down, I could not meet her gaze I could not bear to see the tears in her eyes for me.

“Beloved, what have we done to you? Perhaps HE can bring you back to us and free you. Our bond is not strong enough to break the chains we’ve heaped upon you.” She said with a defeated sigh and then melted back into the void from whence she came.

I wept, bereft again of the loss. I knew her too late. Lazuli’s soul had come for me and I did not even recognize her until too late. Another chain formed to bind me and another piece of my soul died. I had not known my dearest dragon’s soul, hadn’t I known heard her voice all my life? How could I have failed to recognize her beautiful voice and her love for me? I was utterly unworthy of her love.

My chains grew even heavier, my regrets ever sharper, my despair ever deeper and the mists ever thicker.

“Peaceful.” My name was said with joy, with sorrow and with love in a voice I knew all too well. I looked up from my misery to be blinded with such brilliant white light standing before me.

My beloved’s soul was so pure and so powerful that he was light all on his own. His skin snow white scales, his white hair floating on a hidden breeze and horns grew out of his head like a crown and large white leathery wings on his back and his eyes were that rich sapphire blue I loved so well. Only they were larger, dragon eyes looked at me and my King Dragon Warrior stood before me in all his glory. This was what Lazuli had always seen in him, why she called him the most Kingly of Dragons, he was. His soul was beautiful and terrifying to behold. Such power of spirit was massive as he walked through the mists to kneel before me, his loving hands reaching up to cup my face.

“These are not yours my love.” He said and with his bare hands he began ripping my chains free from me, they dissolved like the mists they’d been forged from. With each chain he broke, he spoke a truth.

“This is your father’s fear, your mother’s worries, your sister’s recklessness, my mother’s lies, your grandmother’s mistakes. Let them carry their own burdens, you are not at fault dearest. You never were.” Urbane said as he freed me from

the mire of chains that clung to me revealing my own soul buried beneath them A dull gray I was, yet where his hands touched me the gray fell away to reveal gold.

His touch and his power gave me renewed strength, I wanted to fling myself in his arms and never let go and so I did, weeping and sobbing for my Urbane to hold me, to forgive me, to love me as I loved him.

“I never stopped and never will stop loving you and there is nothing to forgive beloved.” He said as the last chain fell away and I was floating free in his embrace.

Every sorrow washed away by his kisses he rained upon me, I felt again his bond to me, how much he loved me. I felt weak and foolish and he nuzzled my ear.

“Neither weak nor foolish but given no choices to bear you up when you needed me most beside you. It is I who must beg forgiveness for leaving you alone.”

“Nay, Nay. It is not your fault, you could not have known.” I pleaded wanting him to shed his own sorrow I could feel most keenly.

“As you could not have known. Peaceful come back to me.” Urbane said laying me down with him, he hovered over me with pleading eyes.

I looked down and saw my own soul laid bare beneath him. The soft round scaled breasts in gold, my soul was female and my legs were already spread for my lover to possess me, his Queen dragon soul. I was waiting for his power to fill me and to fuel me, I was empty and bereft without him.

He gave me what I needed, his soul took mine with force. Just as a King Dragon captures his queen and plummets to the ground as he mates her, so we fell from the mists. His wings beating to carry us as we fell. My mate driving me onward into the black void, leading me by pushing me toward my body, mating me to fill my lost strength and restoring my soul with every thrust. My skin glowed with his magic, the dull gray and muted gold now shone with his love.

I could not contain my joy, it burst free as my soul shuddered in the ecstasy of his love and a flash of light had me gasping for breath and then my eyes opened. I was in a soft bed with my lover on top of me, weeping as he made love to me physically as he made love to me spiritually. It was my climax in the physical realm that had made the connection to my soul and reconnected my lost soul to a living plane of existence.

Urbane sobbed his own release and his powerful life force emptied into my very weakened body and gave me strength to live again. The last thing I saw was my lover's eyes shining with grateful tears as he kissed me tenderly. “Welcome home beloved.” He said and my tired body, spent from a power coupling fell into

true sleep and not the deathlike trance I had been in. I vaguely heard Lazuli reassure a worried Urbane that I was back and this was genuine rest at last.

My mate held me and even in my sleep I felt his love and warmth continue to fill me, I was whole again and the end of a nightmare began with a new dreaming.

“Named Well”

Book Two in Namesake Tales

Author: D. Sanders

Chapter Four - Restoration

When I truly awoke again the morning sun was shining in through graceful tall windows open to the breeze. The lacy white curtain's blowing softly and making beautiful shadows across the bed. I was befuddled and vaguely remembered what had happened as one remembers a dream. My husband's soft breathing beside me however was a gentle reminder of all he'd done to save me. He'd risked losing his own soul to come and find me and bring me back to myself.

I blinked back the sudden tears in my eyes and Urbane shifted beside me and sat up as if waiting for the barest sign of my wakefulness. "Peaceful, oh thank the White Lady!" He cried pulling me into his embrace and weeping into my hair. There wasn't a patch of skin left on my face he did not kiss gratefully. I was so tired and weak but I clung to him with all the strength I had, crying with a mixture of relief and joy. "Forgive me Urbane."

He silenced me with his finger. "I never want to hear you say that again beloved. I told you before, if any one is to blame for this, it certainly is not you dearest." He said wiping my tears and his own before getting up to bring over a glass of water and he held it to my lips to slake my thirst.

"You rest there, I'm going to have something brought up for you for breakfast. You need your strength, I've been force feeding you broth and water for a week now. We were almost too late to save you and it will do my heart much good to see you eating again. You've lost so much weight and you didn't have much to spare to begin with." He said going to the door and I saw Helpful looking worried in the sitting room and then joyful when Urbane gave him the order to go and fetch me food.

"Where are we?" I asked. My voice sounded scratchy from dryness and lack of use.

"Let me give you events in order dearest, there is much to tell." Urbane said pulling up a chair beside me and took my hand. Lazuli curled herself beside me on the pillow and rested her chin on my chest and trilled. Her joy in my return a balm.

"When I left you and came here, I found your parents had beaten us here. They passed us in Rockport. They'd taken out a ship three days after us to follow us and while we were at home, they continued on before us on horses. They got here just a few hours before we did. When I was called in to see the Queen, they were there and I am sad to say your father and I got off to a very difficult start. I didn't give him a chance to explain before I tongue lashed him to death. It took

the Queen and your mother to intervene to get us to calm down and talk without shouting at each other.” Urbane said and I had to smile.

“My father can be quite stubborn.”

“Love, so can I when I’m angry. Your father and I are a lot alike in many ways there. After we calmed down and began to talk civilly to each other I learned your father had come to beg your forgiveness for forcing you to make such a drastic choice. He’d come to protect you. Your mother, and it’s hard to call a man your mother by the way, it makes my brain revolt.” Urbane said and I chuckled.

“Aye, it does to most. You would not be the first to be confused at the absurdity of it, a woman who chooses to wear the form of a man save for when she decides to breed.”

“Precisely. Where was I? Yes, your mother. He apparently had already done quite a bit of verbal abuse on your father for being a, and I quote, a pig-headed, over-protective ass. It was your mother that finally made him see how he was stifling you. He was the one who opened his eyes that you were an adult and without a mate a healer would be halved. She had said you were right when you told him your parents were no longer enough and your father had to face the facts you had adult needs that he could not provide to you. He still saw you very much a little boy and when faced with your needs to mate, he had a hard time accepting. However, faced the truth he then regretted what he’d done to you in public, forcing you to salvage your pride in the only way you could. Most of all that he struck you, he feels terrible that he hit you.” Urbane said and I nodded.

“I then told them about how you and I met. As if they couldn’t already tell with Lazuli glaring at them from my shoulder. I informed your parents that you were mine and it was up to me to decide how best to take care of you in the future. I made it clear that no matter what happened in our meeting, you were my mate and I acted in your best interests. That alone I think is what won your father over. He knew I would take care of you and that was his biggest fear. I then vented my anger that you were turned away at the gate and I thought your grandfather was going to explode in a rage.” Urbane continued and I listened intently, fighting off my drowsiness.

“He and the Queen argued vehemently he was appalled that he had known nothing of my letter, nor that you were coming and that this was Aegis and not the southern Isles and Aegis customs were what was practiced here. He said he didn’t give a damn about clan sundering and he was proud of you standing up to be counted as a man. His grandchildren were never to be barred from his doors, regardless of what they had done. Because he said in everything, there was always two sides to a story and the Queen hadn’t even given you a chance to explain yourself before casting you out like a murderer. He was livid.”

“My grandfather is strong in his convictions.”

“Aye, he is. Best King we’ve ever had sit on the throne. He immediately sent someone to fetch you and bring you to the Castle. He said that your father and the Queen had acted foolishly and had forced you into a corner and even a wolf in a trap would gnaw his own leg off to escape. Which was exactly what they had done to you. He said he knew enough of clan law to know that if the clan sundering was done against the will of the one cast out, done only to protect one self from unjust persecution that it was not valid. Done under emotional duress you could not be held accountable for drastic measures done in the heat of passion. You are not clanless, your father admitted fault in causing your duress and that the clan would make amends to you for causing such unjust persecution.” Urbane said as Helpful arrived with a tray of fruit and soft porridge for me and he was weeping himself with Joy in seeing me restored again.

Urbane paused in his tale to feed me my breakfast, I could barely hold the spoon myself. I was ravenously hungry and devoured every bite Urbane pressed past my lips. Washing my meal down with fresh and chilled milk was heavenly. Sated and full and resting again, Urbane continued.

“Then the worst happened, the servant returned to the Castle to report that my mother claimed no one by the name of Peaceful was in her residence. I was outraged, so I myself and your father, mother and grandparents went ourselves. My mother was shocked to see me standing in her parlor with the King and Queen no less and all of us demanding where you were. When she told me what she’d done, what she’d told you I nearly died. She’d lied to you, oh yes, she’s wanted me to marry Lady Ardent since I was ten years old. Even went so far as to make me spend a winter with her parents when I was sixteen.

“I thought she was the most inane, vacuous, idiot I’d ever met. The only thing Ardent about her was her desire for a rich husband and someone of my lineage. She gave a damn about me. I was convenient and noble and available. We had absolutely nothing in common, foremost being I knew by then that girls did absolutely nothing for me. I was more attracted to her stable hand than her. My parents have known for years I have no intention of marrying Lady Ardent or any other Lady. My Father accepted that easily, my mother is northern bred and up there they consider people who mate and cannot procreate abominations. She could never accept that her son bedded other men. She ignored it and then when faced with you, she couldn’t get rid of you fast enough, you threatened her living lie. If she didn’t see me with a man, I wasn’t with one. She was delusional.

“I have never been angrier than I was at that moment. I had Helpful pack everything I owned right then and there and told him to take everything into storage. I would never live under her roof again if she could not accept me or my husband. I demanded to know where she took you and she claimed she didn’t know and didn’t ask and only told the man to take you out of the city. She

purposefully had not selected the location so it would be hard to track you.” Here Urbane looked quite cross and his hands clenched on his thighs.

“Helpful came down then and showed me that not only were you gone, everything I’d given to you was laying on the table in our room. Even our wedding band she made you leave behind. When I saw she’d taken the clothes you’d been wearing too I hit the roof. I wanted to throttle her. She cold exclaimed that if the Queen herself would follow clan custom she would too and you’d been sent out of her home with just what you’d come with. I knew that meant only your book. She said that she had at least given you a potato sack to cover your nakedness and wasn’t that kind of her? I thought she was mad, she’d humiliated you, made you believe I was supposed to marry someone else and then sent you out of the door penniless dressed in a burlap sack. I told her if she thought that was kind, she had no concept of the word and I informed her I never wished to see her again.

“She shrieked like a harpy, begging and pleading and telling me it was for my best interests, that the savage I’d picked up would only cause me shame and shame to my father’s house. Here Queen Dauntless stepped in, she said the only shame came from women like her, so kept and inbred they wouldn’t know savage behavior unless it bit them in the ass. She informed my mother that not only had she broken the law by denying me my right to decline marriage and seek a partner of my choosing, but that she willfully lied to a Prince of the Blood Royal and cast him out of her home. She then in turned tried to deny the truth of her actions and in doing so, insulted the Queen to her face. That was a shame she brought on my father’s house all on her own. She would ignore the blemish on my father’s household, but told my mother sternly that she personally would bear that shame and she was not welcome back in the Castle again.” Urbane said with a sigh.

“It took us four days to track down the rider my mother had hired to take you away, we couldn’t reach you, Lazuli said you’d blocked her out of your mind and all she felt from you was that you lived but were soul broken in despair. We knew we were running out of time to find you. He told us how sorry he was and that he had left you at the path to the Crystal Lake Cavern so you’d have shelter and water. He was genuinely upset and was grateful to give us the information. We rode all night and got to you the morning of the fifth day, and what we found I never want to see again.” Urbane broke down in sobs and gripped my hands in his tightly as he kissed them.

“You just lay there, pale as I’d never seen any islander and even your skin had shrunken and was flaking away with the lack of moisture in your body. Your cheeks were gaunt and the stench of death was in the air. Your mother immediately began trying to heal you and I read what you wrote in your book. Ah, by the White Lady I never read anything in my life that destroyed my soul more. How could you have thought this was all your fault was beyond me. Yet, there

you had written your broken heart for me to read. Even in the end, you wished us all peace, your love is so genuine beloved. You were not named poorly, you were named perfectly and I love you so much and am so honored to call you my husband I cannot express it to you in mere words.” Urbane said pausing to compose himself again.

“We got you stable enough to move from the cave and then brought you back here to the Castle. Your body was recovering from it’s deprivation and starvation but you would not respond, your mother said you soul-walked and were lost. Neither living nor dead, but trapped in the nothing between. We all searched for you and Lazuli found you first. When you wouldn’t come to her and she saw how you had chained yourself in punishment and that the chains that bound you were of your own making and comprised of the guilt you were bearing for others she came to get me and told me to take my Queen and force her to come home and obey my will. Only I could free you she said and so I went and did as she told me to.

“I mated you, and it was very hard for me to take advantage of your sleeping body, but Lazuli told me it was the only way I could reach you, that the magic of our mating was a power that would give you the soul strength to return. She was right and I cannot tell you how joyful I was when you responded to my touch and opened to me to mate you willingly. When I saw you in my mind, and saw my golden dragon mired in chains I could only think of ripping you free from them and making that dull gold shine again. Oh your soul is beautiful beloved. I never expected to see you as a woman, but you were and are the first and only woman that has ever made me desirous. No mortal woman can do what my soul one can to me. When I felt you fall back into your body again and you woke up for only those few minutes my world was right again. You’ve been asleep for two days, but a real sleep, not the deathlike trance you’ve been in. I could see you dreaming and you’d sigh and shift of your own accord. I knew you were finally regaining strength again. I am overjoyed to have you back beloved.” Urbane said finishing his accounting and I threaded my fingers through his.

“I can honestly say I am joyful to be back. My Dragon King. Handsome as mortal, terrifyingly beautiful in soul. I could not resist you, your pure soul is devouring and I wanted so to be consumed by you. You were light and my gold only reflects your brilliance. I love you so Urbane. I will ever belong to you body, heart and soul.” I said and was crushed in warm arms that held me close. I fell asleep on his shoulder and knew I’d ever be safe in those arms.

When I awoke again, my mother was beside me, stringing beads while my father and Urbane were out on the balcony talking quietly.

“Rest easy dearest. All is well and you need more sleep yet. Shut your eyes my beloved, trust Mama to watch over you just now.” Was all he said and I drifted back to sleep again.

For the next three days I was in and out of sleep, waking just long enough to each before sleeping again. By the fourth day when I awoke, I truly awoke and felt like I had not in a very long time. I was alert and hungry and wanting desperately to use a bathroom for more than just taking a much needed bath.

My mother and Urbane helped me stagger to the bathroom and I was scrubbed by them both and felt immensely grateful to be clean. Urbane dressed me in a shift and I sat at a table for the first time and ate under my own power again. As I ate Helpful and my mother combed out the sleeping snarls from my hair and rather than twisting it up again, they just braided it neatly so it would not tangle again when I laid back down.

Which was not long after I'd eaten. It had taken a lot of effort to bathe and eat and while I was not sleepy, I was tired.

So while I rested in bed, propped up in fluffy pillows my visitors came. My father was in tears as he begged me to forgive him from striking me and I told him I loved him and would never bear him ill will. I knew he had acted in anger and regretted it immediately. We all make mistakes and naturally I forgave him his. We mended the rift between us, at peace once more.

My grandparents came and my grandmother was just as sorry as my father and again we mended what had gone asunder. My grandfather was always a jolly robust man and he was thrilled I was here and promised me to show me everything he knew I'd always wanted to see.

My Uncle Unity, just three years my senior, looked just like him save for the difference in coloring. He would be a large man when he finished filling out just like Justice. Garnet was chattering happily with his sister Lazuli and eating the grapes from the fruit bowl on the table together. Unity, always a favorite playmate of mine when we were children, promised to take Urbane and I out riding when I'd recovered, he had just bought a beautiful mare in the market and was adamant she become mine during our stay.

I also met Urbane's father. Lord Earnest and he was as kindly and straightforward as his son. He apologized profusely for my treatment and was shamed at what his wife had done. I begged him not to take blame where it was not warranted and finally saw my own flaws demonstrated before me I would not let Urbane's father suffer as I had.

He understood his son's reluctance to return, stating that had it been him, he'd have done the same. He would not ask us to return to his estate, knowing that forever we'd have to live under masked disapproval. Lady Regalia had deep ingrained beliefs and were not going to change. However, that did not mean we were not welcome and that the doors were always open for a visit and that she

could bite her tongue and be civil for the duration of our stay. I thanked him and he just smiled at me and called me beautiful. He said he could see what his son saw in me and he was grateful that his son had found someone that could make him happy and feel loved.

So much of my life had changed so short a time. If I counted the days, Three from my clan to port, sixteen from Southern Port to Rockport, Five more to Crown City, eight days in the cave, seven more laying near death, and the past six regaining my strength again it was only forty-five days, less than two months. So much had happened in those days and it seemed so much longer.

I was moving about again and going for longer stretches without getting tired by the end of the seventh day of my restoration. Day eight dawned and I was in good spirits. My mate had loved me the night before, the first time since our power coupling to bring me back from death's door and our loving had been slow and intimate. He could turn my bones to liquid by just purring he loved me in my ear as he petted me with those wonderful hands of his.

I felt very much myself again that morning and I was sitting at the table, finishing my morning tea and breakfast with Urbane. We were still in our night clothes and Urbane was going over his shipping manifests and grumbling about damages with half of a strip of bacon dangling out of his mouth. Half forgotten as he juggled his business enterprises while caring for me.

My mate was not only overseeing business for his father, but he had his own side ventures and he was a very good and successful at what he did. I had no concept of what exactly he did do other than move goods from one port to another. He said that was it at its very basic concept, he specialized in only the finest of items for very rich patrons and the depths of his own wealth were staggering. He personally inspected every new prospect, if he heard of something that sounded interesting, he went to the source to hammer out trade negotiations. He had his hands in everything from Silk, to coffee beans, to gem mining and to exotic wines. A little of everything he said to keep it interesting.

Helpful, my mate's manservant and personal assistant arrived with more reports for Urbane to go over and the clear our breakfast trays. But first he grinned at me and held a box out to me.

"What's this?" I asked and Urbane was grinning over his reports.

"His Lordship ordered this for you and it's just arrived your Highness." Helpful was grinning as evilly as my mate. They had conspired against me it seemed and were both eager for me to open the box.

Inside was a beautiful necklace, the pendant and sapphire studded image of Lazuli in flight. "Since she complains that your shoulders are too small, I didn't

want you to be without her just the same.” Urbane said and he stood to come over and fasten it around my neck.

“Now she’s with us both.” He said and I cried, I cried so easily anymore. Urbane’s thoughtfulness and generosity always made me weepy in gratitude.

“She is anyway, but thank you beloved I love it. It looks just like her.”

“Aye, I took her to the Jeweler with me so he could sketch her first. She posed like a Prima Donna. She was in on this present too.” Urbane winked and Lazuli let out a draconic chuckle from her new perch platform by the window. Another recent purchase Urbane had made to accommodate her.

Urbane had made several recent purchases the past few days. I had clothes arriving daily, slippers and sandals and shoes custom made for my feet, new night clothes, soaps and perfumes for the bath. He was treating me like a spoiled queen and he just grinned and said he knew it and it was his prerogative to do so and to quit being so worried at his excesses.

I gave up, he did what he pleased when he pleased and I was wasting my breath if I told him not to buy me things. He did anyway. Even Sunfire was a recipient of my mates generous nature. She had liked the necklace her daughter wore and the very next day Sunfire was sporting a ruby choker around her throat and choking my father blue-faced as she postured to show off and make her new baubles sparkle.

There were surprise tokens and gifts for everyone. My mother was given whole bolts of colorful silks and my father a crate of the apricot brandy which he’d loved when he’d tasted it during an evening spent here with us over dinner. My mother had just made an off-handed comment on my robe and how soft the fabric was and the next day she had a rainbow to choose from and make what she would of it. That was my Urbane, he couldn’t not be generous, it went against every compunction he had. It was in his nature to be philanthropic and he enjoyed it greatly.

After the breakfast trays were cleared away by Helpful’s staff of servants, he laid out my clothes, choosing the soft blues to compliment my new pendant and once I was dressed and my feet laced into my sandals, Helpful attacked my hair with glee.

I was sure the man had a hair fetish, from the first day I’d met him he’d been insistent he learn how to arrange my hair. Once he’d learned the secret, he began embellishing on it. Every morning I was elegantly coifed, even if I hadn’t set foot out of this room since I’d been carried into it. Helpful however would not be thwarted and he took his job as seriously as my mate did his. I think he just liked to play with my hair and used his dedication to duty as an excuse. Not that it

mattered to me, he always did a far better job on my hair than I ever did on my own.

My hair hung almost to my knees and it was tight with unruly curls just like my mother's. I had too much hair, but it was traditional that a healer never cut their hair, so I never had and just tried to tame it daily.

Urbane loved my hair, I knew he had a fetish and he readily admitted it he loved to have my lay naked in bed while he fanned out my hair around me. He loved to run his fingers through my hair at night and I let him, it felt so nice to be petted I'd never complain that my husband liked to touch me.

Once I was dressed and groomed a knock came to the door. It was my grandfather. "Ah, good he's ready. I believe there is a room here you have always wished to see, would you give your grandfather the honor of escorting you through my library?" He asked and I cheered. Urbane grinned and stood to take up my other arm for support and arm in arm the three of us walked down the long stately corridors to a set of double doors I swear seemed twenty feet tall.

Inside was paradise. Bookcases so tall one needed twenty wrung ladders to reach the upper shelves. Long dark wood tables and benches and soft padded leather chairs by a large fireplace filled the floors. Books as far as the eye could see on every topic filled the shelves.

"Oh. My." I breathed in wonder and my Grandfather chuckled.

"You always were my little bookworm. This room is always open for you to use at any hour of the day or night. Lord Urbane has graciously consented to remain here in the castle with you. I'm having your wing of apartments made ready for you now, I know the room we have you in currently will not suffice for both your needs. He made mention of a discussion of a school for Aegians who have the sense and go untrained. I would like to see this come to fruition and ask you if you'd help me by being it's first teacher. Peaceful, will you live here with me and help teach a new generation here in Aegis?"

"Oh Grandfather, I'd love to. However, I am only really capable of training other healers. I can recognize other senses in people, but am not capable of training them myself. You'd need more teachers."

"That is what a school is after all Peaceful. I'm sending word back to the southern Isles with your parents and asking for volunteers to send me their applications as teachers. You and I will go over them together and select the teachers for the Aegian Royal Academy of the Senses. What say you?"

“I say when do we begin grandfather?” I cheered and laughed and hugged my grandfather tightly. I felt I had a purpose at last and Urbane smiled and shared my joy.

My new life began that day. My parents left for home a few days later and it was a tearful farewell but not an eternal one. My husband made twice yearly trips to the Isles and I'd be with him for visits.

Our rooms in the castle were palatial. We even had our own staff of servants under the direction of Helpful. Our new apartments consisted of our bedroom and bathroom, easily twice the size of the one we had been in previously. However, in addition we were given a large living room with separate kitchen and dining rooms. An entertaining suite and parlor and a huge series rooms for Urbane to use as his office and storage rooms.

That was just the first floor of the wing that had been renovated for us to use. It was like one of the grand townhouses had been built right into the Keep for us. The second floor had seven guest suites, seven! Each with individual baths and sitting rooms if we decided to entertain overnight guests of a small army. Urbane laughed at my assessment and said there would be times we'd use them, he had a lot of family spread out all over the Kingdom and he had many friends and business associates and he liked to entertain occasionally. Each of those suites was equally the size of the room we'd just come from and that was a large room indeed.

The most wonderful room on this floor was a private library and study just for me to use. Urbane was already giving me orders to fill this room immediately to my tastes. Whatever book I wanted a personal copy of from the main library he'd spare no expense to get for me and I was expected to give him a starter list by the end of the week. He too, had a smaller personal study upstairs for his own private pursuits and hobbies.

The third floor had ten well sized servants rooms for our personal staff and those too had private washing facilities. A nice large communal room for whatever private past times the servants wished to pursue and the household storage room for cleaning supplies and other necessities. The last room was a four bed bunk room, for any assistants our staff needed to house, mainly of the younger foundling and orphaned boys that were often hired to keep them cared for while they were used to run errands and small tasks. Clans also adopted orphaned children in much the same way. They were given a place of their own and cared for by whomever had adopted him as an apprentice and they had chores to perform as part of their daily duties like everyone else.

Only four of the servant's quarters were currently occupied, our new personal head cook and her young apprentice assistant and our new head housekeeper and a chamber maid. The rest of these rooms would be filled with Urbane's personal servants from coming to join him from the Rockport townhouse staff.

He left four servants with family and kin in Rockport to maintain the house for our use twice a year, temporary staff would be hired to assist our resident staff and caretakers as they needed and had a household budget provided by Urbane to see to the hiring of workers as required.

The rest of the staff willing to move to join us in Crown City would be arriving in a few days, bringing many of Urbane's personal items and requests with them in a baggage train of hired pony carts along with their own personal items.

Those remaining in Rockport were the gardener and groundskeeper, in charge of the physical maintenance of the house and its small courtyard. The elderly head housekeeper, in charge of the internal running of the house and the hiring of temporary help and the one in charge of all the other servants and accounts Urbane left in her care. The cook stayed to feed them all and a maid to assist them, she was the Head housekeeper's daughter.

Urbane personally selected his staff and they were loyal and more than just servants to him, he treated each as friends and family.

Six people were coming. Urbane's butler to free up most of Helpful's overload of duties. Helpful was Urbane's personal assistant and the head of our servant household. The Butler would be for running the every day errands and keeping general order of the servants in conjunction with the head housekeeper and the Cook. Two page and errand boys were coming, eager for a life in Crown City, two more maids and an additional male kitchen servant for the heavier duties.

I never knew so many tasks were involved in day to day Aegian lifestyles. I was still getting used to having people do things for me without my asking them to. It was still surreal to me.

Helpful was given a room on the second floor as his own. He was speechless and Urbane just slapped him on the back. "Helpful, you have worked yourself ragged for me these past weeks and you bloody well deserve the rise in rank and station as reward for all you do for Peaceful and I. I'm raising your salary too. I don't want you running off on me." Urbane said and Helpful laughed.

"My Lord, you're sadly stuck with me. It's always my honor to say my liege is Lord Urbane and now Prince Peaceful. Oh no, I'm not leaving either of you until we're all old and gray." Helpful said and I felt his happiness wash over me like a drug. He was well named.

All the staff had arrived in plenty of time for Harvest Festival and Urbane took great joy in giving the staff what he called “Fun Money” bonuses to enjoy themselves. Each servant received fifty coppers in a bright silk purse and told not to trouble themselves for us that day and that we would be more than capable to feed ourselves in the markets amply. Everyone had the day off.

Unity joined Urbane and I and Garnet and Lazuli rode high on their shoulder perches snatching at streamers and garlands as we walked the markets. I had never seen any thing like it in my life. Our first stop however was Urbane’s Merchant’s booth, he wanted to inspect his workers and the goods and the stall was already surrounded by affluent people and buyers snatching up what Urbane called his discounted overstock items. Every year he had his warehouse staff clean out his warehouse and items that were overstocked were turned out at just over cost to make room for next year’s goods.

I nodded and smiled and pretended I knew what he was talking about. Eventually I’m sure I’d understand my husband’s profession, but I doubted it. While he talked with his Warehouse supervisor with Unity who did understand trade and business and was interested in trying his own hand at it and learning from my husband his skills. I looked at the goods. My husband had wonderful aesthetic taste in goods. When he said he dealt in only the best merchandise, he meant it and I could see why this stall was so popular. Everything was stunning and beautiful to look upon and made by the finest of craftsmen.

I paused at a rug. It made my heart long for the Isles suddenly. I had had a similar rug in my old dwelling. The bright tribal patterns woven by expert hands. This one was of a quality I’d never seen, a King Dragon and his Queen cavorted over the waves in a mating flight and every scale looked as real as if the dragons were living and breathing entities in the cloth. The waves, you could almost hear the sea singing her song on the sandy shores. It was a breathtaking artistic rug.

Urbane saw me transfixed and walked over to see what had captured my attention. “God, I forgot I bought that. I fell in love with it about two years ago and I bought every rug that old woman had made. This must have been lost, I sold all the others ages ago.” He said turning to his men.

“Take this one down off the market. Send it up to me at the Castle. This one I must keep, it means too much to me now.” He said and I smiled.

“It was meant to remain with you then if it was misplaced until now. It’s us in a way.”

“That’s exactly what I saw in it too. That one is going in our bedroom above our headboard as a tapestry.”

“Oh, it would look beautiful hanging there. You have such a marvelous eye.” I said and Urbane grinned.

“Of course I do and that eye noticed you right away I might add. I have impeccable taste.” He said kissing my cheek and I laughed. Urbane was utterly charming.

“Is there anything else here you want dearest?” He asked me and I shrugged.

“I don’t know, I really never got past that rug once I saw it. I don’t know what half of this stuff is.” I said as I continued my viewing of the stall. Unity was off on the other end of the stall and already seemed to have a pile of merchandise he was sending a small fortune on.

I didn’t feel too badly shopping in this booth; my husband already owned everything on the tables. If I liked anything all that was required was its removal from sale. I felt like I was sorting through his collection of trinkets and sifting through it like sand for that one perfect seashell.

I found many things from my homeland that I found beautiful and some of these I was able to educate my husband about. He had just found them striking to the eye but really didn’t understand the purpose.

The painted gourd bowl was to keep dried flower petals in for giving fragrance to a room. He thought it just a nice bowl. I told him that it was symbolic and every dwelling had one and that southerners liked rooms to smell like gardens. They would place dried blooms in the bowl and then occasionally sprinkle scented oil on them. I then described the uses of certain oils. Roses to aid in healing the ill, lavender for relaxation, eucalyptus and mint for headaches and sinus woes. Urbane’s eyes lit up avidly and I knew he was taking notes in his mind and I was sure there was going to be a sudden fashion amongst the nobility and gourd bowls were going to be all the rage in their homes because the bowl went into our purchases. Urbane liked the idea of that in his office to work by, he said he often got mild headaches if he had to sit and read boring manifests for too long and my prescription of the headache remedy he’d probably use often.

I told him he’d have no need, he had me to cure his headaches and he laughed but the gourd was still going home with us.

I found buried under a bolt of silk a basket that was filled with hair sticks. In every shape, size and color. I felt like a child who’d discovered hidden candy and I was about to sort through them when Urbane just set the whole basket aside. Insisting I have them all. I learned not to argue with him and proceeded to shop.

A ceramic bowl painted in blue dragons went into our pile because Lazuli wanted it to keep her treasures in so Urbane set it with our selections and bade her to tell him if she saw anything else she wanted and she'd have it as well.

Lazuli chirped and nodded and then hopped off his shoulder to literally walk the tables herself. Sorting goods like a woman looking for a bargain. It was almost comical to watch her shop and of course Garnet joined her.

It was a good thing we let her shop, she uncovered a whole case of scented scale oil; that again Urbane had mistaken for simply perfume. I educated him on its true purpose and he and Unity split the case for their dragons.

Now that I was here I could make them more easily, but waste not what was already made and Lazuli was long overdue for a nice scrubbing and oiling she was getting dry in this climate. I'd yet to teach Urbane how to do it, this would make for a fun afternoon one day. Each of us pampering Lazuli together would just serve to strengthen our bond with each other.

Next I found ivory prayer stones and once again was able to give Urbane knowledge beyond the beauty. They were four carved squares of Ivory bone, each a representation of the White Lady. Fertility, Peace, Prosperity and Health. They were made to be incense stick holders and one would light the incense in the stone they wished to make a prayer for and then left burning beside the bed.

If one wanted children, one lit incense in the Fertility Stone and said a prayer and then made love before the incense burned away. Jasmine was always used for Fertility prayers. If there was fighting in the clan, Peace was lit with Sandalwood. Prosperity for like prayers and Frankincense was burned. Health was sadly always used the most in villages without healers and in it specific incense burned for the nature of the illness. Rose for illnesses of the chest and lungs or those with open sores, Lavender for those who needed rest, eucalyptus and mint for headaches, camphor and mint for sinus ailments or vanilla and cinnamon to comfort the dying.

Urbane was fascinated and the stones went in our pile along with all the incense fragrances I'd mentioned, sans the jasmine.

"I'd have burned many lavender and rose sticks for you dearest that's for certain." Was all he said and his sincerity and spirituality touched me.

::Better get a lot of jasmine, you'll need it.:: Lazuli said and I stopped short.

::Lazuli, it's futile. Impossible. I'm not a woman.::

::Not impossible, you are healer you can wear whatever gender you choose, just like your mother. All healers can. You all have female souls.::

I stood gaping at my dragon, what she said suddenly made me very happy. This made Urbane turn to me in query feeling my happiness.

“What’s caught your fancy to make you so happy I can feel it?” He asked and I just reached over to the incense sticks and dropped a whole handful of jasmine into our pile grinning like a fool.

Urbane’s eyes widened. “You don’t mean? You can... change? Like your mother?”

“According to Lazuli I can. I never tried it and never knew I could do it but certainly intend to try now.”

Urbane’s response to that was to empty the Jasmine container clean into our pile. “Just in case.” He winked and I laughed and we finished our shopping in gay spirits.

We ate like pigs in the food market, and shopped until we dropped in the merchant stalls. My husband spent a small fortune as did Unity, but we were young and gay and having a wonderful day. We stopped and listened to minstrels and watched puppet shows and tumblers. We danced in the square and tasted exotic wines and ate hot bubbly pies. It was decadence, love, joy and youth at it’s finest.

“Named Well”

Book Two in Namesake Tales

Author: D. Sanders

Chapter Five - Jasmine Scented Prayers

I had never attempted a gender illusion magic; I didn't even know I could do it myself. When I asked Lazuli for more detail she told me that every healer could work this magic but only on themselves. This was not something they could do for others. It was too personal a magic and required what Lazuli termed a balanced nature. It had to do with our connection to life and our gifts of the White Lady. Simply, we knew human bodies and our own most intimately and all that was required was a simple request to the magic to shift our bodies to an opposite gender to the one we currently wore. It was that simple of a request but would only work on our own person, like slipping on a new skin coat.

Urbane was shuffling around our bedroom, getting ready for bed and I slipped into the bathroom and closed the door. I wanted to test first to see if I could do it, I didn't want to get his hopes up. I stood naked in front of the mirror and shut my eyes and mentally called for the change.

I didn't feel anything at first and then I just felt warm with power for just a few heartbeats.

I hadn't even opened my eyes yet when I heard from the bathroom door. "White Lady have mercy! You did it! Oh Gods, you look... incredible!" Urbane cried and I opened my eyes. I was a woman.

A very boyish framed woman with small breasts and still quite narrow hips for a girl, but still a girl. My manhood was gone and replaced by very obvious female anatomy. My face had not changed at all, and the rest of me just seemed to have softened around the edges.

"I don't feel any different at all. This is quite different though in the mirror." I said turning slightly in either direction to inspect myself in the mirror. Urbane walked up behind me and grinned at me in the mirror.

"You looked like this, your soul did I mean. Well almost, you're not gold and covered in scales obviously, but this was the female I saw." Urbane said and I grinned back at him in the mirror.

"You did a sight more than see me. If I recall correctly, you did much more to me than just look at me."

"Aye, and it amazes me. Never and I do mean NEVER have I ever been attracted to a woman. Not sexually at least. However..." Urbane said and then

stepped closer behind me and I knew what was poking me stiffly was proof I could arouse him in the flesh as a woman too.

I turned and wrapped my arms around my husband. "My father once said. The wrapping used changes not the gift within. I'm still your Mate, just in different wrappings."

"I think that's it entirely. You're still the soul I fell in love with. Shall we light the Jasmine?" He asked and I smiled.

"Oh yes, and if you really want a baby on me, you'd better bring out King Dragon tonight. You can force fertility, all King Dragons can.

"Dearest how fast can you get in bed?" Urbane asked and chased me from the bathroom into our bedroom where he indeed held nothing back in loving me. I felt torn apart but oh so good. Every pore on my body leaked with his power, I was full to overflowing with his magic. The scent of Jasmine was still strong in the air where our ivory stone sat on my bedside table. Now we would wait and see what happened, it took time and we'd know within either a few hours or up to four days if we had been successful in conceiving a child together. If it was more than five days, we'd know that we'd have to try again. His seed would lose its potency and just be absorbed by my body by then.

I knew by morning, I woke up and checked my womb with my healing magic and sure enough my King Dragon was a Kingly mate indeed. I couldn't contain my excitement as I pounced on my mate to wake him. "You are the King of Kings you are!"

This brought Urbane to immediate wakefulness. "You're pregnant?"

"Oh aye! AYE! You wonderful, fertile man you! Not just one, but two identical life lights I see. Like two peas in a pod! Two identical girls you've sired on me!"

I thought his scream of joy would wake the dead as he laughed and pulled me out of bed to swing me in his arms around the room. He was laughing and crying all at the same time.

"I never dreamed I'd ever have children, White Lady thank you! Thank you! You've just given me what no money could ever buy! Something I never thought I'd have. Peaceful! Peaceful you amazing, wonderful, glorious man, woman, whatever you! TWINS!" Urbane howled and cried and laughed and Helpful was at the door.

"What's wrong My Lord?" He asked concerned with Urbane's outbursts and quickly pulling on his robe he threw open the door and just kissed Helpful firmly on the forehead.

“Absolutely nothing is wrong and everything is fabulously right in the world for me this morning. Congratulate me friend, I’m going to be a father! A FATHER! A HA!” Urbane caroled and Helpful staggered back and then looked around to see me, wrapped in a sheet.

“White Lady you’re a women?”

“I am for at least the next year or more. Aye.” I replied and Helpful fell into a chair.

“This is... Now I know why you call Prince Beloved, Mama.” Helpful said trying and failing to get his brain to catch up to what he was seeing.

“Aye, just in reverse. My Mother was born a female and wears a male skin by choice. I was born a boy and wear a female skin now so we could try to have a baby. We were successful.” I said and Helpful let out a manic little laugh.

“It’s healer’s magic Helpful. I can’t wrap my brain around how it works either, just accept that is does and only healers can do it. I am the luckiest bastard alive!” Urbane said coming back to me to kiss me.

“Dearest, thank you.”

“Don’t thank me, change diapers when it’s time and that’s how you’ll thank me.” I replied and Urbane laughed.

“Aye. A promise.” He said turning back to a look at a slightly insane looking and grinning Helpful.

“I’ll get your breakfast and bless my soul I’m jiggered.” Helpful said staggering out of the room giggling. He was just as happy for us as we were, even if he was utterly confused and confounded.

When we went later that day to break the news to Urbane’s parents I steeled myself. I had not seen his mother since that first day and didn’t know what to expect but she would be my daughters’ grandmother and this had to be done for the sake of the girls. This rift had to be healed.

I was quite obviously a woman, breasts were rather difficult to conceal and even though I still wore my preferred robes and harem pants I always wore, they did hang decidedly differently on me today. There was no hiding the changes in my body.

The butler showed us into the parlor to wait for his parents to arrive. His father was in his office and his mother out in the back gardens.

His mother arrived first and her eyes took in my appearance and I watched the shock register like a sledgehammer.

“Sit down Mother, this will take some explaining.” Urbane said and Regalia didn’t sit, she fell into a chair. Her eyes glued to me and wide as saucers.

Lord Earnest was just as shocked when he came in and saw me. He fell next to his wife and Urbane just grinned.

“Long story, very short. You all know Prince Beloved can change gender, so can Peaceful. It’s complicated to explain it’s just something in the magic that healers have. Only they can do this. However, that’s not why we’re here, we’ve come with wonderful news. Peaceful and I are expecting twin girls. In about nine months, you’ll both be grandparents White Lady willing.” Urbane said and Earnest was the first to shake his stupor and cheer and slap his son on the back and then lean over to kiss my cheek.

“Hope those girls get those eyes of yours.” He said to me sincerely. Just as Regalia finally found her voice.

“Twin girls? You even know that?” She asked and I nodded.

“Yes, I’m a healer my senses are driven by life and I can sense that the life lights I see in me are identical in every way and both female in aura.”

“How can you be a girl AND a boy?”

“Every healer’s soul is female. The wrapping changes not the gift within. I am what my people call naturally balanced. Why I can change my shape and how I can give my mate children. It’s as simple as that.” I said and Regalia just nodded. She’d need much more time to accept.

We had time, it was a start and at least I only felt confusion from her and not the hatred and malice as once before. The healing would be long in coming, but I had hope now it might come with the birth of our girls. Only time would tell.

Autumn turned to winter and I was just beginning to show my pregnancy ever so slightly. Three months and I had the smallest of pouches now showing and I wasted no time in painting that small bump with the body paint’s I’d made. I was

so excited, and Urbane caught me at my task as I used a mirror to see my artwork. Symbols of Health and comfort and well wishes for harmony adorned the little mound in my belly.

Urbane, familiar with this very southern custom came over and took the brush from my fingers. "Allow me?" He asked and I grinned and he took great delight in painting my stomach.

"I am so excited and I cannot wait to see his little bump even bigger. You positively glow these days Peaceful. I've never seen you look more beautiful." Urbane said giving a little flourish in a colorful whorl he added as merely decoration.

"I feel wonderful. Thankfully my morning sickness didn't last long. Now I just feel constantly full. I'm constantly finding myself checking on them and making sure they're healthy and growing well. I'm enjoying very much being pregnant right now." I said and Urbane smiled.

"I can tell, you're radiating happiness all the time. I'm drunk with the side effects. So is Lazuli, she's singing all the time on her perch in my office and making sure to remind me to be a good father or she'll bite me where it will hurt the most and insure I have no more children. She's got an evil streak she does." Urbane chuckled as he painted roses on my belly. He was very artistic himself, my man had so many hidden talents.

"Aye, she does." I chuckled and then reclined to let the paint dry on my belly before I dressed. My grandmother had already brought me all her pregnancy clothes, all cut to enhance my breasts and leave my belly bare for display. Again it was a tribal custom, children were a blessing and it was pride in a woman to display her fertility openly.

I was prey to that pride, it felt wonderful and like my grandmother, I wore my pregnancy with singular pride and joy. I scandalized Urbane's mother who thought a woman's confinement should be kept secret behind closed doors and no one should see her in public while she was pregnant and if she did have to go out, she was covered had to toe in cloth to disguise her frame. Me walking around in the dead of winter in little more than breast coverings and pants with a painted belly to draw attention to my stomach gave her palpitations.

I took sadistic glee in that, it did no one any harm, but I got a sick thrill to know she thought me the most savage and uncouth of brazen women. Half naked and painted and showing everyone that a man had had sex with me. I thought it a silly Aegian custom that women with children thought that hiding pregnancy would make others believe she was virginal. Hidden or open, children were proof of mating and no one was fooled. If anyone truly believed a married couple never had sex together they were delusional.

Then again attitudes toward mating were vastly different in our cultures. In the South it was a celebrated natural part of life. Everyone grew up and mating was an instinct everyone had, every animal on the planet needed to mate to reproduce, offspring didn't come miraculously delivered from the heavens after all. It also felt good, and love was a blessing to share. In the south lovers never hid affection for each other. Nor did anyone care if people mated right out in the open if they chose too.

In Aegis, sex was never discussed openly, Lovers pretended indifference to each other in public. Holding hands was almost a scandal. You weren't supposed to enjoy sex, it was just a necessary evil to endure to have children. I thought it terrible, women were never educated and then were traumatized in their marriages beds when their husbands touched them. Had virgins been told what to expect and that the first time it hurt, sex would not be the fearful thing it was to these young ignorant girls. Boys were encouraged to find women who would open their legs like a mark of honor that he'd taken carnal pleasure and those women were marked as whores. It was a disgusting double standard. It was okay for the man to like sex, but a woman could not.

Urbane agreed with me, he thought it just a stupid as I did. His mother however was the coldest, uptight and most sexually repressed woman I'd ever met. I pitied Lord Earnest, two children was all he had and a wife who after she'd given birth to the second had moved out of his room and had never given him sexual pleasure again. It was unseemly she said to continue since he already had two sons on her.

They hadn't shared a bed in twenty-one years. Not since Urbane had been born. This was the sad reality of arranged marriages. There was no true love and Regalia had never given Earnest a chance to love her before she shut him out of her life once her duty as a wife was fulfilled. I stated had she just let her husband love her she would be much happier. Urbane again agreed with me and then told me how deeply devoted he was to his father. Most men, in marriages as empty as his, often turned to affairs to satisfy lonely hearts. He never did, he was faithful to the vows he took of fidelity and to a very empty wife and had turned his love and emotions to his sons. That made me adore Urbane's father even more and I could see Lord Earnest's influence on his son.

My husband was as noble as his sire. I was so very blessed.

Like my parents and all Healer and Warrior partnerships, Urbane and I shared a birthday. We celebrated my eighteenth and his twenty-second together over a private dinner. Usually bonded couples only had a single year or two to separate them, Urbane was four years my elder, the same age as my sister. That large of an age difference was not common but not unheard of. Just rare. I loved it, my man was all man and filled out nicely. His youth was strong and passed the

awkwardness of the teenage years. He was already well established and secure by the time I'd met him and he steadied me in my final awkwardness and helped me settle gracefully beside him as a partner. My life was more than I'd ever dreamed it could be and I had the love of my life to share it with. My rock to anchor to in the storm and the protector of our hearth and father of my children. I couldn't have asked for better, there was nothing better than Urbane.

Winter was a quiet time, shipping went at a much slower pace, the weather too harsh and too risky so this was Urbane's relaxation season, the time he spent pursuing his personal interests. He'd spend a few hours painting or reading a good book by the fire. He liked to try new foods and taste new wines. He kept personal journals and tried his hand at poetry occasionally. He liked to entertain friends over a a good meal followed by games or dancing. He truly enjoyed life and winter was a his time to enjoy it before trade routes opened again and he'd be busy with business as usual again.

Best of all were our quiet times together, we'd sit and cuddle by the fire and just talk about dreams and hopes, we'd toss around names for our daughters until we finally decided we liked Affable and Amiable the best. Hoping we'd chosen and named them well. Urbane was already calling them Affy and Ami, they were already daddy's little girls and they weren't even here yet.

He was already spending a fortune getting the nursery ready for their arrival in late spring. He'd had one of the downstairs storage rooms next to our bedroom totally gutted and refurbished into a little princess' dream room. From white lace curtains to matching cribs and bassinets, stuffed toys and soft virgin wool fleecy blankets and linens. Everything a baby would need, want or desire was filling that room on a daily basis and was easy access from our bedroom, he'd installed a door from our room to that room so we'd hear them at night if they needed us.

Our daughters would want for nothing, not with Urbane as their father. He was quite anxious to meet them as was I, but there was still five months to go yet.

I began having cravings around my sixth month of pregnancy and thankfully my father sent me the spices I'd been craving along with several applications for prospective teachers I need to go over.

I was in our kitchen showing the cook one of my favorite dishes and how to make it when my husband followed his nose. "What smells so good in here?" He asked and I grinned and held up the bottle of red-pepper spice my father sent me.

I had inherited my father's dragon tongue and it had been far too long since I'd had really spicy food. I was craving it like a mad fiend and was frying chicken in a mixture of flour, egg and my spices.

“Sit down, it’s almost ready. This is my favorite, but I warn you now, be prepared. It’s hot.” I said setting a breast on a plate for my husband and a drumstick on a plate for cook to try.

I think my husband misunderstood me. I think he presumed I meant hot as in temperature and not in spice. “Holy Gods Balls!” Urbane gasped, diving for a glass of water. “That’s liquid FIRE!” He gasped, choking and I laughed.

“I told you it was hot.”

“That’s not hot! That’s strip wall paper spicy! How can you eat that? How can your tongue stand it?” He asked me, wiping sweat from his brow as I ate my breast happily.

“It’s not that bad. This is mild compared to the sauce I make for my eggs. Oh I love scrambled eggs in pepper sauce. It’s the red chili powder, vinegar, salt boiled with a little corn starch to thicken it. Oh, it’s so very good.”

Cook seemed to like it too. “That spice would be wonderful in some ground beef, onions, kidney beans and bell peppers in a stew, give it a wonderful kick it would.” She said and Urbane looked at us like we were both insane.

“You both have abused palettes. I still can’t feel my tongue.” He said and downed a second glass of water.

“Drink milk, it kills the fire.” I said and sure enough, Urbane’s tongue was saved.

“Smells great, I can’t tell you how it tasted since all I felt was pain.” Urbane chuckled sitting down. “I’ll just sit here and smell your snack and pity your poor taste buds shall I?” He said nursing his milk and shocked pallette.

“Wimp.” I teased and he winked.

“I concede defeat to the power of the chili-powder.”

After my cravings were satisfied I sat down to read the letters and applications while Urbane began going over his lists, spring was upon us and it was back to work for my mate and I.

I got halfway through my letter before I squealed with joy. “Urbane! Listen to this!” I cried, running into his office waving the letter which I read aloud to him as I sat myself on the corner of his desk.

Dear Peaceful,

First, your father and I are thrilled to find out you're expecting, so is your sister. It seems you're both due around about the same time and your father is walking around looking as proud and puffed up like he did when I was expecting the pair of you. You'd think these were his children and not his grandchildren. Joy is expecting a boy and he's already a little spitfire of a glow in her, just like his mama. He's going to be a handful with all that bright energy. She certainly was.

Since we got back, we've been sending out word to other clans about the academy and well, we've been talking about it amongst ourselves too. Tigo especially is interested Cadence misses Aegis and Tigo admits he quite enjoyed himself after the war. But he has a dilemma, Wintermoon. He can't go without Sunfire, and Tigo would never dream of parting a mated pair of dragons. So we all sat down and talked about it.

We've all decided home isn't a place, it's the people around you. With you there with Father I've been missing you so much and it feels like our family is just torn apart. Your father and sister agree. So, come good weather again, we're all coming back to help you start the school baby. You're going to be so busy with two babies to handle and my father is getting older too. I don't want to regret missing even a moment of the times we have, neither does your father, this last trip to Aegis set his old demons to rest.

We're all coming. Joy and Yular will be wonderful Beast magic mentors with your father. You and I will be more than enough if we come across any healers, and Tigo and Cadence, Wintermoon and Lapis volunteer to set out on horses and scour the kingdom to see how many people with untrained senses they can find, then send them back to us for mentoring.

If you look at the applications I sent, I marked the ones I felt would be most beneficial. Two of Tigo's former mentors wish to come. They thought this would be an adventurous retirement for them. I heartily agree. Young enough to still have many years left and old enough to be solid taskmasters for wildly talented youths.

We had a lot of beast magic volunteers and since that is the most common sense that manifests I'd recommend bringing at least ten to start, not counting our immediate family. We had a seer who adamantly says she is coming, period. She's seen this in her visions and didn't know what it meant. She said she saw herself in stone and snow teaching children. You don't argue with a seer. Rembi is coming with us. We also had two Leaf Talkers come forward. We should bring both of them, that's another common gift and any farmers with children disposed to being able to make plants grow healthy and strong will be a blessing for the agriculture of Aegis.

Let me know if you concur as soon as you can and we'll round up our staff and bring them with us mid-spring. No later or Joy will drop on the ship.

I love you honey and we'll see you soon. Give everyone my love and tell Urbane I loved the silk and I've made the babies clothes with it already and will be bringing them back with me.

I can't wait to see you both again, tell Father a royal reception is not in order, but a nice hot bath waited will be nice.

See you soon!

*Love,
Mama.*

We both cheered and I went right back to my desk and went over my mother's recommendations and naturally he knew far better than I did and agreed with every one and wrote back immediately then ran to tell my Grandfather the wonderful news.

Grandfather went right to work getting ready for the arrival. The south wing where I lived with Urbane was totally emptied save for our apartments and my parents were given identical lodgings right across the hall from us. My sister and her husband next to them. We were at the far back of that wing. Tigo and Cadence were given a grand suite of rooms and the rest of the new mentors coming also were going to be accommodated like royal ambassadors. The southern wing had been nicknamed "The Clan Corner" affectionately and in the hall, flags of every southern clan symbol hung from the walls to represent all of the various clans. On every door a painted badge of the clan that the resident had come from.

The last four rooms at the end of the hall all bearing Dragon Clan emblems in fresh paint, my parents, my sister, Tigo, and mine.

Urbane went to go meet the Ship coming into Rockport and have the delegation stay in our townhouse that night before escorting them and his shipment coming in on the same boat back with him personally.

I was eight months pregnant and bodily miserable. My lower back pained me constantly and it was nothing I could heal, there wasn't anything wrong with me to heal. It was just that my daughters liked playing "kick mommy in the spine" daily. Urbane was worried to leave me for a week and I told him there was nothing he could do anyway save look at me with that woebegone expression on his face like it was his fault I ached. I told him to stop worrying and to go, I'd be fine.

I worried about my sister, she was just about as pregnant as I was, she'd be miserable too and bouncing around in a pony cart would have my mother doing double duty to make sure Joy didn't accidentally go into premature labor. I knew mother would keep a tight healer's block on her womb to absorb any jolts along the way.

I was positive both Yular and my Father were nervous wrecks, regardless of my mother's reassurances. I wondered how many times Joy had bitten both their heads off in annoyance. My sister had an acid tongue when she was angry and annoyed. I couldn't wait to see her again, my accomplice in so many child hood pranks.

Everyone arrived safe and sound and the happy and amazed faces of those southerners who had never seen Aegis were bright. I knew I still looked like that and I'd been here almost a year. The rooms were a big hit and everyone thought my grandfather was in jest when he showed everyone to their rooms personally. None of them had ever had such finery before and all were exploring their new rooms with joy and wonder.

We had just gotten finished getting my sister into her rooms and I was standing with my parents in her living room laughing as we shared tales of backaches when my whole body constricted and my water broke.

I doubled over moaning and my mother squealed and Urbane panicked.

"What is it?" He asked as he came to support me so I didn't fall over.

"It's time." I said and he was in denial.

"It can't be time, you're not due for another three weeks." He said a little frantically and my mother laughed.

"Tell that to your daughters. Come on, let's get him in bed and settled." My mother said and my father grinned and stood.

"I'll go round up the family." He said and dashed out of the room.

Urbane had never experienced a tribal birthing ceremony and I hadn't thought to tell him that everyone was going to be in the room with me. Women in Aegis gave birth alone with just a midwife. It was unseemly to have people watching your vagina waiting for a baby.

In the tribe it was a celebration of life. I thought nothing of it I, I wanted to share my joy.

Everyone from the delegation sat on the floor on chairs on tables and food was everywhere. It was a celebration after all.

I was naked, spread bare to the world and Urbane was behind me, a worried nervous wreck.

My contractions were getting very close together and the pain was starting to really get to me. My mother sat on a stool and then brought my husband's hands to my vagina. I thought he'd have a heart attack when my mother instructed him on how to ease my pain.

"You want me to do what?" He asked unsure if he'd heard her correctly. My mother just rolled his eyes and placed my husband's fingers on my clitoris.

"I said, rub him here. Give him pleasure, it will ease the pain and help with the contractions. Bring him to orgasm as many times as you can, it will help push your daughters out. Don't husbands do this for wives here?" My mother asked and Urbane gulped.

"We're not even allowed in the same building!" Urbane felt aghast, this was a huge culture shock for him. The thought of fondling his wife to sexual orgasm in front of twenty eager spectators almost too much to cope with. Most men in the tribe opted for more personal aide and were often face first to give pleasure to help in the birth.

"We'll welcome to the tribe Urbane. It's either fingers or tongue, either way you will help your mate, sensibilities be damned. How women must suffer in Aegis over misplaced embarrassment." My mother said and that did the trick. I felt Urbane loose the embarrassment almost immediately.

After a few minutes, Urbane like I didn't see anyone else in the room, we were both focused on each other and our children. My mother whispered. "Most men, like to be there where they can see. Enjoy the intimacy of love and life." She said and Urbane grasped the meaning of this celebration and embrace it. It was a celebration of our love and the culmination of our love in the birth. He moved and hip lips and tongue caressed me in the most intimate of places, pushing the pain of my contractions to the back of my mind and giving me something so pleasurable to focus on. He'd bring me to orgasm and let me come down a little again before bringing me back once more to mind and pain numbing bliss.

"Reach inside, see if they are close." My mother said softly, instructing Urbane how a father brought his own children into the world. I moaned, it hurt as Urbane slid his hand slowly within my dilated cervix. He almost pulled back but my mother stopped his hand.

“Just go slow, it hurts yes but check to see if you feel a head. It’s important Urbane.” My mothers voice was low and the room was now filled with joyous singing.

“I feel it!” Urbane voice was tearful.

“Then pull back now and give her more pleasure, help her push keep checking to see if your daughter is coming closer. When you can see her crowning, gentle help pull her from your beloved’s womb. Guide your child to life. Live in the joy of the life you created together.” My mother was the consummate healer. She could guide new father’s well and give them confidence to complete what they began.

They sired the child, by rights they should guide the child they sired into the world. I didn’t understand how Aegian women did this alone. Love made it so much easier and charged the room with positive energy.

Every Child should be born surrounded by all those they loved. Let everyone rejoice in the blessing of a new clan member born.

“I see it! I see it!” Urbane was crying now and I felt him carefully help guide the baby from my womb and with a cry I pushed and then I felt the resistance break free and my husband’s sobbing laughter as he held our first born.

“Oh White Lady! So Beautiful!” Urbane was a mess of tears and my mother took our first daughter and rubbed her with a towel, she didn’t cry, just made an angry little annoyed noise and my mother laughed.

“So feisty you are. Daddy, go help baby number two. While Grandmama gets this one all cleaned up.” My Mother said and set my daughter on her lap and rubbed the towel around her and cut the cord free. My father holding the bowl that my mother placed the cord into. It was just a few minutes later our second daughter was born and the process completed. The placenta came out with the second child and both cords and placenta were placed in the bowl.

Urbane was shaking like a leaf as my Mother handed him his children. “Announce them to the tribe Father.” He said and Urbane in a torrent of tears.

“My daughters, Affable and Amiable. White Lady be praised.” He choked and and everyone cheered and sang and then the babies were laid upon my breast. I sobbed uncontrollably with joy. They were so beautiful.

A creamy tan complexion, several shades lighter than mine and several shades darker than their father’s a true blending of our tones. Both had my cream colored hair and a shade of blue to their eyes that was again in-between their father’s and mine. Both identical as two peas in a pod.

Urbane was laughing as he stroked their skin. "We're going to have to color code nappy pins to tell them apart right now." He joked and I laughed, tired but happy.

"Aye. Let's say Affy in green and Ami in blue?" I said and Urbane grinned.

"Works for me. Oh Gods, I'm a dad!" He was exhausted, giddy and punch-drunk with joy.

"Yes you are. How do you feel baby?" My mother asked me smoothing my hair back.

"Sore all over and don't care. I'm so happy." I said and my mother smiled.

"Now you know how I felt when I had you. Congratulations dearest." My mother said as he kissed my brow and then both babies.

"Okay, enough hogging the wee ones. Grandpapa wants a look now please." My father said grinning like a fool and Urbane took Ami and handed her to my Father.

"We've got two, who wants Affy?" Urbane joked and My Grandfather was first in line. The babies were passed around and kissed and cuddled and loved on by everyone. Cadence singing a lullaby to Ami while Tigo tickled Affy's chin.

"They're such darlings. Never two prettier babies id I ever see." My Grandmother said when it was her turn.

Urbane must have kissed me and told me he loved me a dozen or more times before the babies were returned to my breast. I nursed one while Urbane held the other and then we switched and he laughed.

"It's a good think you have two breasts. You're going to be a milk machine having to take care of two at once." He said and I smiled, I was so very sleepy now.

"Then be glad it wasn't triplets." I said through a yawn.

Everyone was slowly leaving, letting me get rest and taking the merry making back to my parent's rooms, which was also traditional. They would celebrate all night long. New mother needed rest and they new it.

My mother was the last to leave. "Urbane, come get me if you need anything. Both of you get sleep, you're going to need it now, because you're not going to get any soon enough. Little ones are a lot of work. Congratulations dears and I'll be back in the morning to check on you."

Urbane laid our daughters in the bassinets by the bed, both sleeping for now. Then he returned to me and helped me get comfortable. "How do you feel Love? Do you need anything?"

"I am going to be sore a few days yet. A glass of water would be nice first." He got me a drink then tucked me in and crawled into bed beside me.

"I'm sorry I didn't warn you about the birth, I didn't know either this wasn't done. I'm sorry you were embarrassed."

"Just shocked at first, I felt that fondling my mate in front of others was just, well something I didn't want to share with them really. But now I see the reason, it wasn't about sex, it was about love and helping you. I never in my life felt so much a part of anything as that. I was a part of you a part of our children I was there to put them inside you and damn it father's should be there when they come out again."

"That's it, you understand. It's not about you or I, it's about US and the life we created together. It's about family and love and celebrating it with all those we love too. Family is more than just a father and mother. It's siblings, grandparents, cousins, uncles, aunts and friends. Family is everyone that holds a place in your heart."

"I could not have said that any better. I am glad however that MY parents were not here. They would have both passed out cold watching me perform oral sex on you in public. They would not have gotten the concept at all. My mother would have been screaming scandalized. She's going to have a difficult time as it is once she hears that everyone was in the room with us. Let's leave out the tongue part when we tell her." Urbane joked and I agreed.

"She already thinks I'm a brazen hussy for painting my belly and showing the world I was pregnant and advertising that some man had obviously had sex with me. No, we will most assuredly not tell her details. Bad enough I let a whole room have a view of my vagina, she does not need to know you have mastered loving women as much as loving men." Urbane laughed at my crude humor.

"As much as I love you as my wife... You had such a nice penis and I miss it."

"You'll have it back soon enough. I miss it too." I laughed and that was the end of our talking for the night, I was exhausted and slept like the dead that night.

Urbane and I were both up fairly early the next morning, the babies were hungry and crying and he was pacifying Ami while I fed Affy and my mother waltzed in looking like he hadn't slept all night.

I found out he hadn't. No sooner had everyone left our room, Joy went into labor and mother was there to tell us that she'd given birth about an hour earlier and my daughters had a new boy cousin named Spirit.

"Never let heavily pregnant women together in the same room during a birthing ceremony. They always bloody synchronize and spark each other off." My mother laughed, it was true and quite common.

"Considering Affy and Ami were born just after midnight, they all share a birthday. At least giving them birthday celebrations will be easy." Urbane added smiling and we did the baby trade off and he burped Affy while Ami took her turn at the cow udder on my chest.

"That's true and I am doing a final check on you before I take my turn to sleep." My mother said and I smiled.

"I'm just fine. Sleepy, sore and nervous I'm going to be a terrible mother but otherwise just peachy." I replied and my mother laughed and kissed my cheek.

"Babies don't come with instructions but you'll do fine. You'll make mistakes like we all do, but they won't lack the most important part of their parents. Love. I'm going to catch some sleep now and I'll see you all in a few hours." My mother said leaving and Helpful was outside the door with our breakfast and eager to get a look at the girls.

He set out our tray and brought over a small lap table for me and I smiled and handed him Affy. He took her with a large smile and laid her gently on his shoulder. "I just knew these little Princesses were going to be so pretty. Oh what little angelic darlings." He said sitting down to get a better look at the baby he held.

"Aye." Urbane sighed, heavy bags of a restless night and not enough sleep under his eyes.

"I've already cancelled all your meetings for the next week and everyone sends their congratulations my Lord. I sent a messenger first thing to your parents sir and they'll probably be arriving shortly." Helpful said, never taking his eyes off Affy.

"Thank you Helpful." Urbane said gratefully.

"My pleasure sir. I've ordered cook to have meals brought in today and everyone knows to keep visitors at bay and to not admit anyone without your permission first. Cook is also making formula to help supplement the girls and the bottles are being sterilized now. I've interviewed all the nurses and I've left the best two

applicants names on your desk sir. I personally recommend Nurse Caring, she was Unity's nurse and knows how Southerners prefer to do most of the parenting themselves and won't step on toes. She'll just be on hand to assist with the changing and be an extra set of hands to help."

"I trust your opinion Helpful. Unity always spoke well of her as did my Grandmother." I said grateful I'd have help, two babies were indeed a lot of work and if she just baby sat them for two hours while I took a nap or a bath would be more than enough help.

"I'll call her in then Your Highness and have her a room readied immediately. Do you wish her in the empty store room next to the nursery or upstairs?" Helpful asked.

"Let her choose, I wish her comfortable." Urbane said balancing Ami in the crook of his arm as he ate his breakfast one handed. The life of a new parent was also a juggling act. I couldn't help but get misty eyed as I looked at Urbane. He positively glowed as a father and was already doing a wonderful job at adapting to his new role in life. He looked like he handled babies daily and not at all like this was the first.

"How does it feel to be a Daddy?" I asked and He just smiled at me.

"The best job title I ever held next to Husband." He replied and I melted in bliss.

"I love you too." I returned and ate my breakfast while Helpful made faces at my daughter.

Not a moment later, Urbane's parents descended upon us and as I predicted, the birth of my daughters melted more ice between Urbane's mother and I.

First she came to my side and took my hand and genuinely asked how I felt and was truly concerned. I assured her I felt fine and as sore and sleepy as most mothers and she commiserated with me. "I remember well. How long was the labor?" she asked.

"Not long, I went into labor just after dinner and the girls were born a few minutes after midnight. I had a relatively easy birth compared to some women I assisted. About eight hours in total." I said and Regalia smiled.

"Like their father almost. Only three hours with him, he was ready to face the world he was." Regalia said smiling at her son.

Once she was satisfied I was doing well she settled into my new rocking chair and held Ami and Affy, one in each arm, and she rocked them gently. "My word but they are just so lovely. They have your face Peaceful but your chin Urbane.

Goodness me I never saw such pretty little ones. Grandma's little sweet peas." She cooed and the love she felt for my daughters washed over me and I was happy.

Lord Earnest perched himself on a stool beside his wife and just played with my daughters short curls with his fingers. "It always amazes me how small newborns are, so fragile. I am so glad to see they got your curls Peaceful and I am grateful I had only sons. These two are going to be beautiful when they grow up and I am glad I never had to fight off suitors with a stick."

"Dad, please. I don't even want to think of that right now. We have a few years yet before I'm sending Lazuli out to chase boys away from my girls."

"White Lady yes. However, they'll both be healers, I can feel it now. They have very gentle senses like mine. They'll know when the one for them comes just as I did. I'm not going to worry about them." I said yawning involuntarily.

"Sleep Peaceful dear, we'll be quiet and I know you need more sleep." Regalia said and the use of "Dear" almost shocked me as much as the realization she meant it, my daughters were already working healing magic and they were only ten hours old.

“Named Well”

Book Two in Namesake Tales

Author: D. Sanders

Chapter Six - The Royal Academy of The Senses

I looked up from my papers spread out on the living room table and smiled. Affy and Ami, all terrible twos and not even two yet were riding ‘horsey’ on my father’s back while my third daughter, Charity, just ten months younger than her sisters was walking across the floor holding onto my mother’s fingers. She’d been an accident. My twins had been about a month old and the first time Urbane and I made love after their birth my very fertile King had me pregnant again.

We thought we learned our lesson. I was pregnant yet again. My Twins were Twenty months old, Charity was ten months old and daughter number four, Merry, was due any day.

Yet again, the first time together after Charity was born I was yet again pregnant. I told Urbane that I think I got pregnant if he just sneezed in the room with me and that under no uncertain terms this was the last baby for a while and that I’d tie a knot in his pecker if he even thought of making love to me as a woman. I was now tired of being pregnant and having so many babies so close together was not healthy for me. I was having a difficult time with this pregnancy and my body needed a rest.

I told him that we’d try for a son in a few years and if on that attempt he sired yet another girl that he’d just have to deal with a gaggle of females. It was his seed after all that determined the gender of our children and so far he was four for four with the females. He didn’t mind, he was wrapped around our daughter’s fingers like string and all of them were “Daddy’s Girls”.

They lit up like firecrackers the minute he walked into the room and he’d be buried in babies in his chair the minute he sat down. He was their own personal play set. Not an evening went by without two girls clamped onto his legs as he tried to walk across the floor and the third was on his shoulders.

Bedtime was an event. First the bath, then the tucking in, then the excuses to stall for time. “Daddy can I have a glass of water?”... “Mommy can Lazuli sing us a lullaby?”... “Daddy can we have a story?”

Every night the same excuses and every night Urbane pandered to them. We started getting ready to get them to bed right after dinner, knowing that by the time Urbane finished fetching water and reading stories it would then be the time we actually wanted them to be sleeping.

Oh my girls were clever, but mommy and daddy thankfully were one step ahead of them.

I had no doubt Merry was going to be just as much a Daddy's girl as the other three were. Urbane thrived on fatherhood. I wanted my boy body back. I loved my girls desperately, I was just sick of being pregnant, I had work I wanted to be doing.

We had twenty-seven students so far and Tigo and Cadence were ready to go out on another scouting journey. We only had one healer student and she was still very young, only ten and she was currently my mother's student and lived with my parents along with the three boys my Father was mentoring.

One of them we already knew was Tender's match. Bold was eleven, one year to the day her senior and the instant those two were in the same room together, they'd clicked.

Like my parents, they'd put the two of them together in the same room. Aegian culture be damned, they needed to cement that bond and a healer and her protector would naturally gravitate to each other anyway. Approve it and it takes a natural course, deny it and they force the issue. They were still children and even though they shared a bed, they only slept in it for now. The closeness would give them peace and the love would form gradually. It was inevitable and fighting against it was futile.

Bold was already a fearsome force when it came to her. She was little and shy and born blind. Tigo had found her living in squalor in Rockport, begging for food abandoned and terrified.

My mother went to get her immediately and she even called my parents "mama and papa" she'd needed my mother desperately and my father doted on her just as much as my mother did. They informally adopted her since her situation had been the most drastic case. Bold had latched onto her hand the moment she'd arrived and he led her everywhere she needed to go. He was her eyes and if anyone dared make her upset, he was an eleven year old force of terror.

Bold had come from right here in Crown City. He was the son of a widowed candle maker. His father had died years earlier from illness and Bold had six younger siblings he had helped care for. His mother was so proud of him and it was easy to see why. He was a natural leader and organizer and was an adult in maturity long before he should have been. He needed to care for others and he poured all his energy into caring for Tender.

He even already had a bonded dragon. Wintermoon and Sunfire had waited to take her mating flight until they got to Aegis, knowing if we found a dragon warrior he'd need a bondmate and well, they thought themselves quite clever, bringing dragons to the north. Theirs would be the first dragons born in Aegis.

Sunfire had laid nine eggs in a tower top room dedicated specifically to the dragons. My father had his students tend the room, keeping the fires always burning in the hearth to keep the sand covered floor always warm. The windows perpetually open so the dragons could come and go at will and my father's students duties also included making sure the dragons had fresh meat from the kitchens brought up twice a day.

The now eighteen month old dragons were full grown and the silver male, Quicksilver had chosen Bold. Sunfire was still the most unoriginal in naming her offspring. Their color always denoted the names she gave them.

My father's other two dragon warrior students had also been chosen. Worth the eldest at seventeen was chosen by a red named Flame and Able a gangly but quite comely faced fourteen year old had been chosen by a gentle green named Jade.

There was a reason a White male had been born in this clutch, we had found quite an adept mage. He was poorly named, whomever had named him had been cruel. His name was Catch-Colt. He'd been given a name of the circumstances of his birth rather than something hopeful. Saddled with a name that told everyone he was bastard born. We just called him Colt and he was a handsome youth, sixteen, tall and well put together. He had raven black hair and mesmerizing violet hued eyes. When he finished filling out as a man, he'd be exceedingly dashing. He as already singularly striking. Tigo had found him living in a humble shack literally in the middle of nowhere. His shack was on the far edge of a little village far to the east. He'd never known his parents, he'd been raised by an elderly aunt who had given him his name and treated him no better than dirt under her shoes and a burden and he trusted no one completely.

He was used to being thought of as a disgrace and a shame on the village. Tigo had almost passed him by because his aunt had not let him go to the village to be tested. She'd claimed that no sense would be wasted on ill-gotten born.

His anger and frustration was what Tigo sensed and followed the very dangerous power surges to the source and found Colt alone and systematically chopping wood and chopping it not with an axe, but with his rage. The wood was splintering apart with the power of his mind. Tigo locked him down and immediately brought him back to the Castle.

His aunt tried to refuse, saying the boy was a bastard and it was his duty to do the chores since she fed him all those years and she'd not lose a good set of hands over foolishness from a savage.

Tigo had exploded on the woman and verbally bereted her for treating her own kin like a slave and it was not Colt's fault that his parents had used little discretion. A child could not be blamed for a parent's lust.

He took Colt, refused to call him by any other name, and the minute the youth walked into the doors Frostbite chose him and had been waiting for the youth to arrive. He landed on Colt's shoulder, shocking the youth and then their eyes met and Colt's face became stern and he nodded. Whatever Frostbite said to him, he'd never told anyone. It was personal and Colt was a very private youth.

He was an incredible student, he learned quickly and his mentors were quite pleased with him. He'd been with us almost a year now and was almost seventeen and a dedicated student. He studied hard, his chores were always completed long before the other students finished theirs and his free time was always spent with Frostbite.

There was only one student he ever spoke to for more than was required. That was Fair. Now he was named extremely well. He was Fair in every connotation of the word. Fair skinned, fair haired, fair of face and fair when it came to making choices so that everyone was well... treated fairly. He was fifteen, of noble parentage and had come to the castle on his own because he'd had a dream all his life that he was supposed to come precisely on that day.

He'd been our first student. Rembie's to be exact. He was our little seer, a dreamer, and all his life his dreams had always been vivid and accurate but harsh on him at times. Especially the more troublesome ones, the nightmares he had of possible futures if people didn't heed his warnings had made him quite the insomniac. He was relieved to begin learning how to deal with his visions. He too had been waiting for Colt's arrival. There was no masking what Fair thought of Colt. It was apparent to all the adults that Fair had been in love with Colt for years before they'd met.

I was wondering how long it was going to take Colt to realize he was loved. I gave Fair my mental award for infinite patience. He never pushed his affections and just accepted whatever meager moments Colt spared him. Fair realized that Colt needed space and time to adjust. Therefore, he waited and waited and waited. Seers always knew that waiting was par for the course. The future happened when it was supposed to and not before.

I prayed he got relief soon and that Colt would seek him out for more than a brief conversation or a study partner. Fair was tutoring him in reading and writing and basic other education he'd been denied with his aunt.

Overall, we were coming along slowly, but at a good pace. Grandfather was having a proper university built, with dorm rooms for our students and class rooms. We'd hire regular teachers to school our students in the basics. Reading, Writing, History, Mathematics and the sciences. Several of our students were illiterate and that just would not do. Mentoring time would be split with real classes. A well rounded person needed an education beyond their senses.

The complex was being built in the field beyond the stable walls to the north. There would be a series of townhouses built along the castle wall. Residences for the teachers and mentors.

A smaller office complex for the teachers and mentors to use so their personal homes weren't cluttered with work. A special office being built for the dean of students. That was going to be Urbane. He was a businessman and he knew how to run one. A school was more than just teachers and students. Money had to be raised to fund it and someone had to oversee that the money being spent was spent wisely and for the benefit of the school and students. Urbane had agreed to Justice's private entreaty on the condition that he could also continue to keep his own business interests. They didn't conflict so Justice readily agreed to the terms and Helpful was being groomed as Urbane's Man. Helpful would run the trade and make all the smaller decisions and keep Urbane abreast of his enterprises in reports. Helpful had been with Urbane for many years and he knew his Lord's tastes and Urbane trusted Helpful implicitly and knew his business would be run well in his physical absence.

A student dormitory complete with a study library, communal dining hall and bathing facilities was also being built. It would be able to house up to four hundred students when finished. The rooms were small but individual. Ten foot by ten foot rooms with built in desks, single bed boxes and bookshelves and closets. All uniform and all a student really needed, these were not permanent homes after all. The only exception would be the ten rooms dedicated to bonded pairs like Bold and Tender. Those were sixteen by sixteen foot rooms with double beds and two desks and shelves with private baths.

There was also a graduate student dormitory being built and would house those students who wished to continue with studies and be secondary mentors to younger students. These rooms would naturally be bigger and made for those over the age of Seventeen when other needs would also need to be addressed. These were one bedroom apartments. They would each have a small sitting room, a study room, a kitchen hearth, a bedroom and a bathroom. Each eight hundred square feet. The rooms small but adequate for youths needing a little more privacy and self-sufficiency.

There was a servant's hall being built to house the servants, cooks and laundry and various other much needed helpers to take care of so many children.

A classroom building that would have fifty individual classrooms inside. The top floor and roof dedicated to mage studies.

There was a large stable being built for larger bond animals that could not share a room with their bonded. Like Horses or Deer or any animal just not made to live indoors.

An aviary and Dragon sanctuary was also being built for those dragons not yet bonded. It was a massive undertaking and would take several years yet to complete, but it was a start and for now our wing was sufficient to handle the few students we had.

We were at the cusp of a new age in Aegis, talents long ignored would now have a chance to thrive. It would only mean a bright future for Aegians who would no longer live uneducated in the magic that indeed touched more than we expected.

We of the Isles had discovered and nurtured these gifts long ago and now we would bring our knowledge to those who needed it and magic would flow in Aegis as it did in the Isles. All would benefit and I looked forward to seeing The Royal Academy of the Senses full of students and flourishing.

I saw a peaceful and prosperous future for my children, I had a wonderful husband and a grand sense of inner peace. I was truly named well and was very content and happy with my life.

I was not the boy I had been when I had come to Aegis, broken and confused and shattered. I had found my path and peace and I looked forward to an even brighter future.

--- End Book Two. ---