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To all my loyal readers with thanks

PART I

Polyxena

One

Every morning, even so Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) early in spring, the young men ran in a mob out of the king's house to the practice field. There was still snow in the hollows; the mountains above them were white from crown to foot. But as the sun came up, it warmed, and they stripped off their chitons and ran and fought and Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) danced naked on the new grass.

One particular morning, the late king's daughter watched from the hillside, hidden in the shadows of the sacred grove. She should have been down in the temple, sweeping the floor and tending the lamps like a proper acolyte, and so she would be before anyone happened to catch her. These Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) few moments were hers, stolen from the day and its duties.

The air was almost as warm as summer. It would not last: her bones could feel the cold at the back of it, the final blast of winter waiting to roll off the mountains. Still, today was blessed with beauty, like the men playing at war on the field below her.

The unaccustomed warmth made them lazy. Their dance was slower than usual, their blades clashing almost softly, without their usual ringing clangor. Sweat ran down the long muscled backs and flew like sparks from the curls of hair and beards.

Polyxena leaned forward slightly. Her breath came quick; she was warm inside, melting from her breastbone to her knees. Her hand pressed against rough bark, but in her heart she stroked smooth living flesh. She could feel the blood pulsing in it, and the muscles rolling under the skin. Her tongue curled as if it could taste the salt of sweat; her nostrils twitched at the imagined musk.

She thrust herself away from the tree. Something in the air was making her thoughts all strange. Instead of simple pleasure and appreciation of art well performed, she Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) could only think of what a man's body was best suited for.

It must Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) be that it was spring. The mares were all in season, and the heifers were lowing for the bull. She wanted a bull of her own, a man as strong as she: a hero, a king, a god.

There was no such creature here. As lovely as these young men were, they were merely mortal. She wanted more.

She turned her back on the field. The clash of bronze on bronze went on behind her. Her fingers twitched of their own accord, remembering the weight of a sword.

Deliberately she stilled them. Swiftly, almost running, she descended the hill to the temple that stood in the grove's heart.

* * *

Nikandra watched her brother's daughter as she swept the sanctuary. Polyxena seemed unaware of the scrutiny: her head was bowed, her face hidden behind a curtain of red-gold hair. Her movements were brisk, not quite angry; her back was a fraction more upright than it strictly needed to be.

She had been Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) as cross-grained as a she-bear in the spring since well before winter's snows retreated to the mountains. Last spring she Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) had been very much a child still, with a child's frets and rebellions. This was different: Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) she had grown into a Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) woman, and the powers that woke in her were strong, as befit a daughter of queens.

Too strong, Nikandra thought. If the girl discovered what she truly was, or more perilously, if others discovered it ...

She, and they, would not. Nikandra had labored long and hard to make sure of it. And so she would do again, as she had done so often before—for the girl's own good, and for everyone else's, too. She wrapped shadows about her and withdrew from the shrine.

* * *

Polyxena dawdled as long as she could over her sweeping. She had known all too well that Nikandra was there, watching her. When that keen scrutiny withdrew, she was only slightly reassured.

Her aunt was plotting something. There was a little too much tension in her, and rather too sharp a sense of decisions made and plans set in motion.

That had been true ever Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) since Polyxena could remember. It was a little stronger now, the strangeness a little clearer—as if everyone else knew a secret, but no one would share it with her. Often she felt eyes on her, as if someone or something watched her from afar, and waited, and bided its Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) time; but it was never more than a feeling.

It could drive her mad if she let it. Anger she would allow herself, but madness, no. She was never as weak as that.

She pondered the wisdom of slipping away and hiding in the grove until her aunt's thoughts turned elsewhere, but she had not been born or raised a coward. The floor gleamed as brightly as grey stone could.

Pilgrims were already straggling into the shrine, waiting with varying degrees of patience for the day's priestess to come out of the house she shared with her sisters. There were no great embassies today, no wealthy man or woman with chattering retinue, and no prince or archon in silks and gold. Mostly these were simple people, come to ask the god of the grove or—more rarely now—the Mother to give them good fortune and sage advice.

It was not Nikandra's day to interpret the omens, or she would have stayed in the temple and Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) Polyxena would have Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) had a day's reprieve. She paused to greet the eldest of the temple's snakes, which had come out of its Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) basket to greet the sun. Its tongue flicked her hand, dry and soft; its scales were as smooth as beading under her finger. She bowed and murmured a reverence, then made her way out into the clear morning air.

Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great)

* * *

Just past the threshold she met the eldest priestess, whose name and title was Promeneia. Polyxena bowed as she had to Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) the snake. The old woman stared through her, lost already in the half-trance of her office.

Someday, if Nikandra had her way, Polyxena would walk that same path and perform those same duties. The prospect did not strike Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) her with horror, but in her heart she knew she was meant for other things.

Nikandra was in the priestesses' house with the second eldest of the three priestesses, dark Timarete. They stood at the tall upright loom, weaving the tapestry that had been taking shape since Polyxena was old enough to Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) remember. Every time she saw it, it was a little different: larger or smaller, simpler or more ornate, full of fire and shadow or bright with sunlight and greenery.

Today a skein of fire ran through the new green of spring. It began in darkness and bloomed into the brilliance of a sun.

Polyxena's breath caught. For a moment she was dizzy, reeling as if cast into empty air. Then the earth was solid under her again, and the weaving was simple colored threads on the wooden Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) frame of the loom.

She sat, or rather sank down on weakened knees, on the stool by the door. Timarete smiled in the way she had, as if she knew everything there was to know about everyone she saw—and good or ill, none of it troubled her serenity. She ran the shuttle through to the edge and lodged it there, nodded to Nikandra, and left the two of them together.

Polyxena waited for Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) the blow to fall, for there must be one. Nikandra was clearly in no hurry to strike. She studied her brother's daughter for some time, with no expression that Polyxena could read.

At last she said, "Fetch your veil and come with me."

Polyxena's head was full of questions, but she knew better than to speak any of them aloud. She found when she stood that her knees would hold her up; her steps were steady as she retreated not only to find her veil but, on consideration, to put on a less threadbare Bring Down the Sun (Alexander the Great) gown. When she emerged from her tiny box of a room, Nikandra arched a brow at the transformation but offered no objection.

Bring Down The Sun Alexander The Great

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