

Chapter Five

Allorana looked helplessly at the woman who had walked into the cabin as her captor walked out. As much as he wanted her to think of him as Llyr, she refused to think of him as anything other than "Her Captor." If it was not for him, she would be home, in her own bed, listening to her mother tell a story about the gods. Teaching her a lesson about them in the form of a tale.

Instead she was on board a ship with these strangers, heading for a land she has only heard about in gossip and the occasional mention from her mother.

She was frightened, tired and most of all, lonely. She just wanted comfort.

She looked at the woman in the room. Or tried to. Ever since this afternoon, everything kept getting hazy. Something was wrong, but she was *not* going to show a weakness to these people. They are her enemies, and the gods knew what how they would use it against her if they knew about it. Travelers who came to her village were full of stories of how strange lands used their enemy's weaknesses against them. And where they already wanted something from her, that is all she would need, is to give them something more to use against her.

The woman smiled at her and said something. For all Allorana knew, she was saying how she wanted to pluck out her hair one by one. Or poke her eyes out with a hot poker. For that matter, it already felt as if someone was doing that! She rubbed her eyes.

What was going on? Things are so distorted. One minute everything was clear, the next the lot was blurry or looking as if it were at a distance. Or squiggly. Or any number of odd things. And it all started today...up until she was taken captive, her vision was almost perfect.

The woman moved to the bunk and pulled the cover down and patted the bed, indicating Allorana should climb in. Allorana looked down at her clothes...she felt all grimy from sitting in the sand and being on this ship...all grubby and dirty. She shook her head and plucked at her *peplos*.

The woman looked at her, and her eyes widened. She nodded. She quickly left the room--careful to bolt the door after herself, Allorana noted, tiredly. She wondered if she had time to...no, she did not. She could hear the woman back already.

Yet, that does not sound like a key in the lock. No. That was definitely not a key. Allorana looked around for somewhere to hide, but there really was not anywhere. Even if there was, it was not as if they would not know where to look for her...whoever it was. Then the bolt slid free, and the door came open.

A young boy came in, glancing furtively behind himself. He quickly shut the door and then stopped, then looked at Allorana. He could not have been much older than she, and he looked surprisingly familiar, though who he looked like, she could not tell. Oh! She knew. He looked like her captor. This must be his son.

She looked at him curiously, just as he stood there looking at here. He took a step closer to her. However, as he did, the door opened and the woman entered, carrying a clean sleeping gown and a bucket of water. She said something to the boy. He glanced again at Allorana and scurried out the door.

The woman placed the bucket of water on the table--as well as the gown--and walked to Allorana. She reached to undo the *peplos* causing Allorana to jerk back in surprise, eyes wide. *What does she mean to do?*

The woman walked back to the bucket and lifted out a rag. She squeezed it and water gushed out and dripped from her hand, splashing back into the bucket. She then mimed washing her arm with the rag and held the rag out toward Allorana. Placing the rag back into the bucket she once again walked behind Allorana.

With trepidation, Allorana allowed her to remove her *peplos* this time. Her mother had always performed her baths for her; she had never allowed another woman to see her unclothed. Yet, here was this stranger doing for her what her mother has always done. It felt as if she was betraying her mother.

She stepped away from the woman and shook her head. She could not do it. Regardless that she would not be able to reach her back, she could not let anyone but her mother--or someone from her village that she trusted at least--do for her what her mother had always done. It was not right.

The woman raised her hands in the air. Shaking her head in defeat, she gave a slight laugh and walked to the closet. Allorana watched her as she sponged the sand, sweat and other grim off. The woman pulled out extra coverings and proceeded to build a little bed for herself on the floor near the door.

After Allorana finished washing her skin, she did the best she could with her hair...running the rag against her scalp, getting what she could of the grim from it. Despite how clean it came, she *did* feel refreshed. She pulled on the sleeping gown and climbed into the captor's bed.

She did not like the fact that she would be vulnerable with this woman and all of these other strangers...but she could not stay awake all the night. *I wonder... she thought, if I can contact the gods...if this woman, this Aphrodite, will be able to tell if I am asleep, or in a trance? That is, if I can contact them at all. I have to try, however. I have to know what to do.*

Reclining on the bed--not the best position to go into a trance, she knew, but it was the best disguise she knew of--she looked over at the woman and saw her looking at her. She turned her back on her and faced the wall. Pretending to fall asleep, she saw the room go dark as the woman blew out the candles. Feeling the dip and sway of the ship, she used that to help lull her into the trance.

She did not have any of the ritual tools, so she used her mind to visualize them.

Closing her eyes, she saw herself kneeling before her small personal altar in her sleeping chamber. On the table was a fire-bowl with smoldering embers. On the table to the left and right of it were bowls with herbs and water. The herbs were a unique secret blend her mother made.

In her mind, Allorana saw herself doing as she had seen her mother do hundreds of times in the past. She reached out her hand and picked up a pinch of herbs. Sprinkling them on the coals, she watched them begin to blacken and curl as the smoke rose into the air. She imagined she could smell the pungent aroma. When the smoke was thick enough, she reached for the water and dipping her hand into it, she brought her now dripping hand over and sprinkled the drops onto the coal and herbs. She watched the smoke curl and dance in response.

Because she had not been taught the more personal associations of the gods--nor had she ever been taught the ritual words--she chose to call on them collectively and generally, seeing who would come in response. Hoping one would come in response.

Keeping the picture of the altar scene clear in her mind, she focused her inner voice on calling to them.

The Gods of Lemuria, I need you. I need you and so do others of your Chimu. Please hear my plea, and answer. I seek to come before you. I seek the Gods of Lemuria.

She kept repeating the cry in her mind. Continually, she repeated it. She could feel her mind detaching; she could feel her body trembling. Only...she began to get a sick feeling. Something was wrong.

She could not *see* anything, but she *felt* something. Something not *right*. It had a slick, oily feel to it. She could feel it wrap itself around her, embracing her. Smothering her.

It was too much for her.

Her eyes flew open and she spun in the bunk and, leaning over the side, she began retching. The vomit splattered all over the floor, spreading in a noxious puddle. Allorana did not need a light to see it...she knew it.

Groaning, she collapsed against the pillow shivering, yet feeling as if she were sitting in the middle of a great fire, all at the same time.

She heard the woman fumbling in the dark until a light finally bloomed. The woman hurried over, carefully walking around the mess on the floor.

Looking at Allorana, she reached out and placed her hand on Allorana's forehead. She said something, which Allorana did not understand, of course, and could barely hear. She touched Allorana on the shoulder, and again carefully stepping around the vomit, she rushed out of the cabin, shielding the light as she did as not to let it blow out as she all but ran.

Allorana lie there, completely miserable--the rank and bitter smell of the bile from her vomit only increased her feelings of utter miserableness. Whatever it was that she had encountered was still with her. Still wrapped around her. In her feverishness, she imagined she could see the inky shadow of it enfolding her. She hoped it was just her imagination, that it was just a trick of the darkened room.

She lie there shivering and sweating. The tremors wracking her little body to the point she was almost thrown off the bunk a few times.

She had no conception of time. One moment she was alone; her captor and a servant beside her the next.

The servant, a boy--but not the one that had been here earlier--was on his knees scrubbing the floor, his face pinched in disgust. The woman stood near the table, staring in concern.

"Allorana," Her captor spoke, drawing her attention. It took more effort that it should have to shift her attention to him. "...with a fever...eyes...bright...passing...Allorana?" She tried to follow, but everything was fading in and out. Every blink took ages, and her vision was growing dimmer by the second. "Rest. Aph...you"

She thought she felt his hand on her head, but everything was so distant and the fever so great by that time, she could not tell.

She surrendered to the dark void that threatened...and the sinister echoing laughter that waited there.