

## Aladdin: A Frakked-Up Fairy Tale

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# **Aladdin: A Frakked-Up Fairy Tale**

by [Innibis](#)

## Summary

The story of Aladdin. Only with pilots and their implausibly hedonistic friends.

## Notes

I'm moving all my (ancient) stuff over from LJ. For posterity I guess?

For my always fabulous beta in a bottle, workerbee73 with my sincere thanks.

## Part I

Shadows of two shrouded figures stretched across the endless desert. "Here it is, Felix," Tom Zarek spoke into the stillness of the moonlit night. He threw his hood back to reveal hard-set eyes, "the entrance to the Cave of Wonders."

Felix Gaeta pushed his cloak off his shoulders and onto the ground. "I'm ready, Advisor Zarek."

"I know you are," Zarek said and began the incantation it had taken him years to find, years of combing the darkest of secrets in desperate search for a weapon that could bring about a new world order. The twisting consonants and sibilant vowels carried, the only sound on the chilled night air. He stopped as precisely as he had begun and the silence closed around them.

A grumbling in the sand began, faint enough to be imagination, but it grew louder, shook harder, and the men stumbled back as the ground started swirling underneath them. A whirlpool made of sand. From the depths of the earth, a lion's head emerged, impossibly huge and roaring before it settled and quieted, mouth open.

Gaeta removed the six-inch blade from his boot and limped forward to the lion's maw. "Touch nothing but the lamp," Zarek called out, and Gaeta nodded, continuing slowly but steadily toward the mouth of the cave.

The moment Felix stepped from sand to rock, the lion growled, making him stumble back. "Who disturbs my slumber?" A voice, rough and low rolled from within the cave's lit depths.

Zarek stepped forward, voice steady and clear. "Cave of Wonders, we have sought long and hard for you. What would make my servant worthy to enter?"

"Know this, sorcerer. Only one may enter here. One whose worth lies far within, the Harbinger of Death." The lion roared a final time before, sinking back into the desert floor. The sand shifted until all evidence of the Cave of Wonders had been erased, leaving only Gaeta and Zarek.

Gaeta stared at Zarek as he made his way back towards him, but the Advisor's face remained impassive as he pulled up his hood and turned toward the city.

\* \* \*

There was no one left in the market place as Ahmed hurriedly closed his booth down for the night. He wasn't usually out this late, but he had been speaking to friends and then had encountered a few late customers in search of fresh fruit. He was well overdue for dinner and his wife was going to kill him.

The eerie silence in the normally bustling center was suddenly punctuated by the sound of footsteps approaching. Ahmed reached under his robe for his knife, but stopped. A tall

woman emerged from the shadows, her stride easy and swinging and gaze predatory. She walked right up to him, a vision in red. One side of her mouth curled up in amusement at his stupefaction and she leaned forward to breathe in his ear, "Are you alive?" she teased, lips brushing his cheek deliberately as she pulled back to stare into his eyes.

She was breathtaking and Ahmed was beguiled as she leaned in and captured his lips with her own. He found himself kissing the woman in red. Time passed but did not register until she disengaged lazily and walked away.

Ahmed watched her disappear, frozen in place with his hand on his lips. He slowly shook himself into awareness and turned to finish packing for the night, catching the faint echo of feminine laughter in the air.

\* \* \*

"I couldn't have done it better myself," Kara Thrace grinned, teeth sinking into an apricot as they walked home, part of the bounty from the loot she had snatched while the merchant had been making out with Caprica Six.

"No kidding," Caprica said as she strutted next to her partner in crime. "Seductions aren't exactly your thing. More like a fist to the nose and a knife to the gut."

"Gets the job done," Kara said cheerfully, enjoying the cool juices from the fruit rolling down her chin.

"Such subtlety," Caprica said, holding out a hand to grab the date Kara handed to her.

"Kicked your ass," Kara said.

"You most certainly did not," Caprica protested.

"Did too," Kara grinned and threw the apricot pit over her shoulder before reaching into her bag for more fruit, "and I can do it again."

"You punched me when the police were holding my hands behind my back," Caprica said indignantly.

"And you went down like a drunken harem girl," Kara countered. It was an old fight, one they had been having for years, since the first day they met as teenagers on opposite sides of a street brawl. Caprica sighed her disdain as they approached the entrance of the abandoned, decrepit building they had been squatting in for the past three months.

They climbed their way up the rickety stairs to the top floor, the sack of fruit over Kara's shoulder. She placed it in the corner that got the least amount of sun during the day before walking over to the enormous hole in the wall that Caprica insisted on calling a window and slid the ragged curtain to the side. There, gleaming in the moonlight, was the palace where Sultan Adama and his two sons lived.

"Must be the life," she said as Caprica joined her.

"Everyone has problems," Caprica said, leaning out to catch the breeze.

"Yeah, well going days without eating isn't one of theirs is it?" Kara shot back.

"No," Caprica said thoughtfully as she began getting ready for bed. "But having no expectations thrust on you isn't always a bad thing."

"Isn't exactly a good thing either," Kara said, still staring at the flickering lights of the palace from the hole in their wall. "We had no expectations. Look how far that's gotten us." Caprica didn't say anything, but Kara hadn't wanted her to.

\* \* \*

Lee Adama's jaw clenched as he felt a strong, square hand catch his arm and yank him around. "You will not walk away from me," Sultan William Adama growled into his face.

"My apologies, Your Grace," Lee said, sketching a bow to his father as insincerely as possible. "I thought that this conversation was over."

"It is," the sultan said, letting go of Lee's arm and stalking back to sit rigidly on his throne. "The law of the land states that a prince will be married to a princess by his thirtieth birthday. You are a prince. You are thirty in a month. End of discussion. I did not, however," Adama said, his voice rising as he saw his son start towards the door again, "dismiss you. As you were, Prince Leland!" he barked out, face stony.

Lee threw his shoulders back and lifted his chin, but he remained standing obediently before his sultan. "Dad," he began, "you have dictated my entire life. I have never left the walls of this palace, I have learned everything you have asked me to, performed every feat you set for me, I have been a good son." Lee waited, but his father remained silent, not even tacit agreement in his expression. Lee ignored the old dull twinge of disappointment with practiced ease and continued. "I ask you one thing, the only thing I will ever ask of you and that is to not force me into marriage to fit some arbitrary timeline."

"Well I would never accuse you of being perfect," Adama said with a half smile on his face. A peace offering like only the Sultan would offer, and Lee closed his eyes briefly wondering why it was always so hard between them.

"Understood, sir," Lee said quietly. "Is that your final word?"

Adama looked at his son closely. "It isn't meant to punish you, Lee," he said. "This has been the law for a thousand years, written by the prophet, Pythia, inspired by the gods."

"You don't believe in the gods, Dad," Lee replied.

"No," Adama said, standing up and walking to his son. He put his hand on his shoulder and spoke with conviction, "but our people do. Life is hard beyond the walls. They need

something to believe in beyond this existence. We follow Pythia because it gives them hope for something better."

"There are more effective ways to give hope than me getting married," Lee pleaded softly. "Ways that could help them right now, in this world."

"I know you believe that, son." Adama said and clapped him once more on the shoulder before heading back to his throne. "And when you are on the throne, you can implement whatever changes you see fit. Until that day, I am the sultan and you are the prince," he paused and looked at Lee sympathetically, "and you need to get married in a month. Dismissed."

Lee bowed and walked quickly out of the throne room, feeling his brother fall into step behind him, not saying a word, but staying close until they reached the gardens of the palace.

"Please don't do this, Lee," Zak said, handing over a bag as Lee unceremoniously stripped off his rich attire and pulled the homespun garments out of the bag and put them on. "You aren't just leaving dad and the palace, you're leaving me too."

"Come with me, Zak," Lee said. "Think of the freedom, the things we could do."

"Stop it!" Zak snapped. "You two put me between you and treat me like a rope in your little game of tug of war. Dad's a pain in the ass and I don't agree with forcing us to get married, but I also don't agree with just running." He grabbed Lee by the shoulders when he started turning away. "You taught me about duty and honor and family, about not shirking responsibility, no matter how hard it is to face it. You taught me that, as much as Dad ever did. So what are you doing?"

Lee stared into his brother's eyes. "It's not enough." Zak let go of Lee and stepped back, looking so disappointed in him that Lee's heart dropped out of his chest. "I'll be back," he found himself promising.

"Oh yeah?" Zak asked coldly, turning his back to his brother. "Last I heard you couldn't wait to get away."

"Zak, that was just talk, just blowing off steam," Lee said dropping the bag and moving to stand in front of him. "And I was never trying to get away from you. You know I wouldn't abandon everything. I just need some space and some time. I need to get out of here." It was a lie of sorts, Lee didn't really want to come back, but the pull of obligation was too strong in him, his father's call to service too deeply embedded, his brother too important.

"When are you coming back?" Zak demanded, an echo of the child whose father had been constantly gone on war campaigns.

Lee sighed, rubbing his eyes. "Give me a week. I'll be back a week from today."

"That's it?" Zak asked, surprised.

"Yeah," Lee said dully, "That's it. I have princesses to interview and I have to do some more research – see if there's something to get me out of this marriage business."

Zak smiled and offered what he could. "I'll poke around, ask Advisor Zarek to tell me about all the eligible princesses and start the weeding out process, keeping the best ones saved for my own consideration of course."

"Of course," Lee said dryly. "I notice you didn't volunteer to look through Pythia."

"I'll leave the joy of hunting for loopholes to you and check out the women instead. I'm your brother, Lee, no sacrifice is too great."

Lee laughed. "Sure you won't come with me?"

"I'm sure. Someone needs to keep Dad calm," Zak said. "He is going to be frakking pissed."

"Yeah, I know," Lee said and reached out to pull his brother into a warm embrace. "I'll miss you."

"Me too," Zak said gruffly, patting Lee's back before stepping away. "Be careful out there, Lee," he said, walking with him to the lowest part of the garden wall. He gave Lee a boost to the top of the wall. "See you soon."

"Bye Zak," Lee called back before dropping to the ground on the other side. He took a deep breath of night air. It smelled the same as the air behind the palace walls, but it felt entirely different. Not bothering to contain his grin, Lee walked steadily away from the sultan.

\* \* \*

"I call upon the sands of time. Reveal to me the one who can enter the cave," the Sultan's advisor intoned in the dankness of the palace's lower levels.

Felix watched as the saffron colored sand in Zarek's hourglass spun into the shape of a young woman who appeared to be scaling the side of a building. "Is that her, Advisor?" he asked, running the edge of his thumb idly over the blade of his knife. "Is she the one who can help us to overthrow the tyrant Adama?"

"Our little Harbinger of Death," Zarek mused.

"How do I find her?" Gaeta asked.

"This one doesn't look like she's too far underground," Zarek said, watching the woman swing up onto the roof and throw her head back in laughter. "Do your job," he said. "Be patient. Ask questions. That's how you'll find her. The lamp's been hidden for hundreds of years. Our revolution can wait a little longer."

Felix bowed and left the room.

\* \* \*

Kara was drinking deeply from the communal well's bucket when Caprica sidled up beside her and said, "Fresh meat."

Kara handed the bucket to the next person in line and pushed a hand through her sweaty hair. "It's half time," she said, gesturing to the makeshift Pyramid court where the players of the pick-up game were milling around.

"And you can't look and perspire at the same time?" Caprica asked. "Over by Azza's."

Kara sighed but turned, looked toward the local tavern and froze. There he was. Absolutely no question in her mind that the man standing there, looking overwhelmed, was the person Caprica was referring to. "He's not your type," she said immediately, sensing the consideration in Caprica's gaze and weighing it against the deep tug of want in her own gut.

"He is everyone's type," Caprica said. "Go back to your game, Kara." She straightened up to her full height and shook back her hair. "I've got better things to play with."

Kara's hand shot out on its own accord, grasping Caprica's arm before she could walk away. They both looked down in surprise, but Kara recovered quickly and stared a challenge into her friend's eyes. "Why don't you sit this one out?" she suggested softly, a warning edge in her voice.

Caprica looked at her appraisingly, her lips turning up into a smile that Kara ignored. "By your command," she said mockingly. They turned to consider the strange man as he walked slowly through the square, head on a swivel, eyes wide. "Where on earth did he come from?" Caprica asked, amused as he stooped to talk to a filthy urchin.

"Oh frak, what is he doing?" Kara asked, alarmed as he reached to the cart next to him and grabbed a handful of dates to hand to the child. The merchant lunged forward and grabbed him, calling for the police when it became apparent that the man didn't have any money. "Caprica—"

"On it," she replied and sprinted toward the pyramid courts as Kara hurried toward the rapidly raising voices.

"—a child!" the man was yelling. "I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking and I understand that you have to make a living, and if you let me go, I will come back with payment." Kara winced at the flimsy attempt to escape prosecution.

She walked up behind the man and spoke quietly and quickly in his ear as the merchant continued to yell for the police, not looking at his prisoner. "In about thirty seconds, an enormous fight is going to break out. Follow me when it does." He ducked his head in a covert nod. She shifted her weight to the balls of her feet, praying that the pretty boy in distress could at least run.

Right on cue, pandemonium broke loose in the square, looking like a pyramid brawl gone



awry. Kara watched tensely as Caprica shoved an innocent by-stander into the merchant and Kara wrapped her hand around her rescuer's free wrist and tugged to keep him upright as the merchant crashed to the ground. "Go, go, go!" she shouted, letting go and sprinting into the crowd, trusting that he was behind her.

She twisted through the square, throwing the occasional look behind her as she started turning down random alleyways and running up others. He was still there, as were a couple of rather determined policemen. "Frak," she panted and turned abruptly into a building and pounded up the stairs. He stayed right behind her, breathing heavily as they pushed past startled residents in the building, up eight flights until they burst into an occupied apartment.

Kara ran to the window, ignoring the startled cries of the family in the kitchen and saw the clothesline stretched across to the next building. "Up for it?" She turned and found herself mere inches away from the man she was trying to save from himself and, despite its determination to pound out of her chest from exertion, she felt her heart do a slow, liquid flip in response to his proximity. His eyes were steady on hers, and she found herself drowning for a moment before she shook herself free.

"Yeah," he said breathlessly and then more firmly, "Yes."

"Out the window then," she said. He nodded and swung out the window after tugging on the line to see if it would hold. He hung onto the rope and began moving quickly hand over hand toward the window across the alley. Kara waited until he got there before waving to the family watching in disbelief and proceeding to cross the alley herself. She didn't need his help, but she let him take her hand and pull her into the window anyway, looking over her shoulder as the police burst into the apartment they had just been standing in.

They ran past the startled couple whose window they had just climbed into, down the stairs and out into the alley where police officers were emerging from the door of the first building. "C'mon," Kara said and sprinted down the alley, back the way they had come. She turned into a dense crowd trying to get away from the fight in the square and slowed to a fast walk, weaving through people and carts and the occasional goat.

She glanced over her shoulder, shooting a quick grin at Lee, who was still doggedly tailing her, before searching behind him for police.

"Look out," Lee said suddenly, tugging on the back of her shirt and pulling her against his chest. Her eyes snapped front as they stopped abruptly at a busy intersection, a caravan of camels passing before them.

She leaned back into him for a heartbeat, catching her breath before straightening up. "This way," she said, and turned into the flow of the caravan, edging along the buildings to keep as far away from hooves as possible. They made their careful way down the street, turning at the next block.

Kara watched Lee sag against the building into a squat, breathing hard and smiling wide. "You are beyond insane," he laughed, wiping sweat off his forehead with his arm.

She leaned on the wall next to him. "So, where can I drop you?" she asked, looking down at him. "I'm pretty sure we shook 'em, but I don't want you to get lost or stumble into any cops."

He shrugged. "Anywhere," he said. "I have nowhere I need to be right now."

Kara let her breathing and her heart slow down, let her face cool. It wasn't everyday the gods were good enough to drop someone interesting into her life and she had never been one to over think her inclinations. "Let's go," she said, pushing off the wall and reaching a hand to pull Lee to his feet.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"My place," she said, not quite catching his eyes as she started down the road,

He followed her up and down the maze of streets until she was completely sure they weren't being followed and brought him to her and Caprica's current residence. "It isn't much," she said awkwardly, self-consciously, as they stood in the middle of the shabby room, "but the view's great." She pulled aside the curtain so he could see the palace and watched his eyes go blank. "Um, didn't catch your name," she said.

He turned his attention away from the palace and entirely back to her. "Lee," he said, "and thank you for rescuing me." A self-deprecating smile crossed his features and Kara found herself unaccountably charmed.

"My pleasure, Lee," she said. "I'm Kara." She held out her hand, and he took it in more of a grasp than a shake before letting her go. "So, where are you from?"

They were interrupted when Caprica burst through the door, Athena and Helo nearly tumbling over her when she stopped short. Kara rolled her eyes as her friend slid into full on slink mode, marred a bit by the black eye and the sack slung over her shoulder. She glanced at Lee whose eye brows were raised in the usual combination of surprise and admiration Caprica inspired. "You just can't help it, can you?" she asked her roommate dryly. "Lee, this is Caprica, Helo and Athena," she said. "They helped stage the fight so I could get you out of there."

"Uh, hi," Lee said, wrenching his gaze from Caprica's unabashedly sexual lean against the wall to nod at Athena and Helo. "Thank you," he added.

"No problem, man," Helo said easily, moving past Caprica to shake Lee's hand. "We've all been there."

Athena nodded her agreement and Caprica straightened up into a more normal posture, dropping the bag and shooting a grin at Kara to let her know that the display had been entirely for her benefit. "Card game tonight at Azza's" she said. "We all managed to take advantage of that fight, so we have booze and baklava."

"And fresh meat," Athena added with a grin at Lee before motioning to the two lamb

haunches Helo pulled out of his own bag. “You two in?”

Kara looked at Lee, who shrugged his acceptance. “We’re in,” Kara said.

\* \* \*

“C’mon, Lee,” Kara prodded him with her toes.

He swung his legs absently, bumping his heels off the side of the wall, sitting with his feet dangling out the side of Kara and Caprica’s apartment. The city spread out beneath him – stretching toward the lights of his home, the palace white and shiny smooth, rising above the poverty and the want, placating the people by sacrificing princes to marriage on the alter of Pythia, providing opium to the masses. A surprisingly sharp toe dug into his ribs again.

“You wouldn’t believe me anyway,” he said, looking over in the dark to where she leaned against the wall, wind off the desert ruffling her hair. He saw the gleam of her teeth, the hint of her smile.

“Sure I would,” she said, stretching out a little further so that her feet rested in his lap. He curled his fingers around the strangely delicate bones of her ankles, slim and fragile looking on such a strong, competent body. “You can’t lie for shit, as you proved tonight when your bluff failed spectacularly,” she said and passed him the bottle of ambrosia she had won at the card game. “Where are you from? Sure as frak isn’t from around here.”

Lee took a deep pull of the bottle, enjoying the buzz, the company, the softness of the skin he held in his hands and the generosity of being allowed to share in it all. “Not so far, actually,” he answered, tracing the veins along her foot, “but a different world all the same.” He passed the alcohol back to her.

“And you’re going back at the end of the week,” she stated, accepting the bottle, but just holding it for the time being, rolling the neck between her palms.

“Yeah,” Lee sighed, letting his body slump until he was lying on his back, looking straight up at the ceiling. “That’s all I get. One small taste of something else before it gets locked down and locked in and there’s no escape.”

“Gods, Lee,” Kara’s voice floated over him from the shadow and he tightened his hold on her feet to remind himself that she was real. “You’re so dramatic about it. If it’s so awful, just don’t go back.”

“Not an option.”

The feet shifted out from under his hands, out of his lap. “There’s always an option.”

“Sure,” Lee agreed, “but of the options, the choice to go back is the only one I can make and not let anyone down. Not my brother or my father or . . . everyone.”

A warm body suddenly sprawled next to him, Kara staring at the ceiling in parallel. “What

the hell are you going back to?”

“Family business,” he said. “Arranged marriage.”

She was silent, but he could hear her breathing, something solid in the dark; something not polished and shiny, but infinitely warm and real, and brilliant in its own right. “No happy ending for Lee then?” she asked, sounding mostly rhetorical.

“Not necessarily unhappy, just not. . .” he trailed off.

“Just not what you want.”

“Right,” he agreed, courage heightened, tongue loosened by booze and their finite time together, and the wonder of talking to someone who seemed to care and wasn’t Zak. “No card games at the local bar, no brawls in the streets, no beautiful rescuers, or passing out with my feet hanging out a hole in a wall. All there is is right now. And then it’s over. So I’ll take what I can get and be glad that I had the chance.”

“So why don’t we?” she asked, and he looked over to see that she was facing him too, heads turned toward each other as they lay on their backs.

“Why don’t we . . . what?” He asked, distracted by the soft mouth whispering temptations.

“Take what we can get.” She rolled onto her side and propped up on an elbow, leaning over him. “Stay here the week. Let me show you around.” She rubbed her thumb thoughtfully over his bottom lip. “Be with me for a week.”

“Why? You don’t know me,” Lee said weakly, pulled to her against all sense of reason.

“Because I want you to, and I know enough,” she said, with the hint of a smile. “You could tell me the rest, you know. I promise I won’t think you’re crazy.”

“You will,” Lee said. “You really will, but I’ll stay with you, if you’ll have me, and I’ll tell you who I am the day I leave.”

Kara’s hand tangled into his hair and her mouth pressed hot and hard against his, “Oh, I’ll probably have you more than once.” He pulled her down on top of him, tasting the ambrosia on her kiss, the glimmer of the palace hidden from sight by her hair.

\* \* \*

Kara blinked awake in the morning sun, her head on Lee’s chest as it had been the past six mornings. She tightened her hold around his waist slightly before releasing, her body feeling heavier at the knowledge that this was their final morning together.

She couldn’t regret the time, seeing the routine things through Lee’s oddly naive eyes; having the colors and textures of her life play in the almost greedy expressions on his face. He drank it all in—her, the city, the food, the life.

He played a surprisingly mean game of pyramid, lost astonishingly often at cards, made Caprica laugh, and kissed with a dirty, desperate sort of sweetness. It was only a week, but it had been enough for Kara to fall, and fall hard, for a man with a mysterious past and future. She had to laugh, even with the ache in her heart, at the cliché of it all. What a frakking wild ride—an unexpected gift, something cool and refreshing in her dusty life.

Lee had stirred at her laughter, mumbling a little before kissing her hair. She tilted her head up, rolling slightly so she could rest her chin on his chest. “Time’s up, Lee,” she said. “You owe me a story.”

He smiled at her sadly, tracing the line of her cheekbone lightly with his fingers. “Fine. My full name is Prince Leland Adama and I jumped over the wall of the palace to experience what has turned out to be the best week of my life. But now I have to go home. I have to marry someone I don’t love because Pythia demands it and wait for my father to die to fulfill my purpose in life.”

Kara blinked. He wasn’t lying. She knew when the bastard was lying, and he wasn’t lying. “You’re frakking out of your mind,” she exclaimed loudly, sitting up, and then winced, looking to the opposite corner of the room where Caprica slept behind her gauzy curtain.

Lee smiled almost smugly. “Told you,” he said. “There was no way you were ever going to believe me.” He kissed her firmly and then stood, arching his back. He pulled the curtain aside and stood, naked, looking out toward the castle. She admired the clean lines of his back even as she worried about his sanity.

“I don’t—” she paused. “I have no idea what to say.”

He walked back over to her, leaning down to kiss her again, hand wrapped around the back of her neck. “There’s nothing to say,” he assured her.

She stood up and looped her arms around his waist, pressing careful kisses along the line of his collarbone before resting her forehead against his shoulder. “Well, wherever you’re going, the palace ... the nut house, I’ll miss you.”

He nuzzled into her ear with a laugh, “I’ll miss you too.” He pulled back, getting room enough to look at her intently. “Thank you,” he said simply.

“Yeah, yeah, I expect you to return the favor when I decide to take my next vacation in the palace,” she stepped away and started searching for a shirt.

“Hey, anytime,” he grinned. “I’d take you with me today, except that I’m in serious trouble with the old man and I doubt he’d be very welcoming.”

Kara almost choked. “I can’t believe you called Sultan William the old man,” she said.

He shrugged expansively, fastening his pants, “Well he is. Old. Also a Man.”

“You do nothing to convince me of your sanity,” she said, quickly braiding her hair in deference to the heat already rising. “So, let me buy you breakfast, and then we’ll send you on your way.”

Lee was suddenly in front of her again, in her space again, filling her senses in that completely overwhelming yet completely comfortable way of his. “If I had one wish,” he said, very seriously, taking her face between his palms gently, “I’d take you back with me.”

“I’m sure your future wife would love that,” she said with a shaky smile, pulse fluttering.

He shook his head, brushing off her attempt at humor, a stubborn, solemn look on his face. “I’d marry you, Kara. If you’d have me.”

She allowed herself one moment—one moment to imagine that Lee really was the prince, and that the sacred scrolls of Pythia didn’t specify that he must marry a princess and that he wasn’t some delusional man with a charming smile and that she wasn’t the worst kind of fool. “I’ve already had you, Lee,” she said, bumping her nose against his, and then figured, what the hell? “I’d say yes again. If . . .” She trailed off, not knowing what else to say.

“Yeah,” he stepped back. “If you believed me. If my father listened to me. If.”

Kara offered him her hand and tugged when he took it. “Let’s go, Prince Leland,” she said lightly, but not entirely mockingly. “You have a kingdom to run and I have merchants to swindle.”

“So, busy day all around then,” he said, and let her lead him out of the room.

\* \* \*

Felix Gaeta stared as the woman he’d been searching for over the past week sauntered past the fountain in the square he had been resting by, holding a grape leaf in one hand and the missing Prince in the other; the one person in the city who they needed to bring about the rise of the people arm in arm with the next generation of oppressive royalty.

He rubbed absently at his leg while considering his next course of action, the throbbing pain his truest and most constant companion since the day that a royal cousin had gotten paranoid on a military campaign and shot Felix’s knee with a crossbow at point blank range. Zarek had managed to save his limb. The advisor who existed on the edge of the court circles had always made him uncomfortable, but when no apology had been made by the royal family, no visitors had come to him as he lay in agony, nothing to distract him but the seductive whispers of revenge, of the end of class rule and worship by accident of birth, of the people rising. Zarek sustained him on a steady diet of potions and revolution and, in the end, Felix had walked again. Every step an agony and a surety, the constant reminder of the carelessness of those who would rule them.

He pushed off of the wall he had been leaning on, this was going to be easier than he had imagined. He turned to the palace guards accompanying him, Skulls and Racetrack, Zarek sympathizers, who had come with him and motioned with his head. “Arrest her. And bring

the prince along. Do it gently.”

The guards walked purposely into the square, people moving quickly out of the way, Felix limping behind them. They approached the pair from behind, Skulls moving suddenly and getting a two armed grip around the Harbinger’s body while Racetrack lowered her crossbow. “What is the meaning of this?” the Prince shouted, every bit the Adama in spite of the peasant clothes.

“You are under arrest,” Felix’s voice rose over Adama’s outrage, “for the abduction of Prince Leland Adama.” The police in the square within hearing distance came toward them at a run as the woman struggled in Skulls’ grip. “Your highness, you are addled and confused,” he spoke calmly to the irate prince, “we will take you home.” Racetrack got a firm grip on Adama’s arm. “You,” he motioned to the nearest policeman, “Go to the palace and inform Advisor Zarek that the prince has been found in the company of a woman of interest.” The man ran toward the palace.

“Get your hands off of me,” the prince was demanding, jerking away from the guards’ grip, but Felix took the prince’s other arm as the police handcuffed the woman’s hands behind her. He knew that Adama wouldn’t shake him off roughly. This prince had guilt in his eyes whenever he saw Felix limping through the throne room or across the palace grounds. “Gaeta, I am perfectly safe and Kara did not kidnap me.”

“Yes your highness,” Felix said smoothly, “but you must see how it looks from our side. Let’s all go back to the palace and figure it out there.”

Adama stared hard at Felix, measuring him Felix noted with some amusement, before he reluctantly nodded. “Alright,” he said finally. “I understand why you might think that. Kara,” he called over to the still struggling woman, the true prize. “We’ll go back and get this straightened out at the palace. It’ll be fine.”

Felix watched with interest as Kara stilled with visible effort and looked into the prince’s eyes. “So you aren’t crazy,” she stated.

“I promise that I am not crazy and can straighten this out at home,” Adama said earnestly.

“Always wanted to see the inside of the palace anyway,” she said with a hint of a smile, even as her body remained straining on the edge of action.

“Well now’s your chance. I’ll have Zak give you the tour while dad chews me out.”

“Oh sure,” she said, “and then we’ll meet you for tea in the dining hall after.”

Adama smiled, warm and genuine at the clearly lower class woman, surprising Felix into loosening his grip. “After you,” he bowed his head in Kara’s direction and she and her escort turned toward the palace.

\* \* \*

The doors of the palace were flung wide open as they approached, and Advisor Zarek strode out. “Your highness,” he said, “we were all so worried.”

They entered the coolness of the marble hall and Lee hurried to Kara’s side, pressing a hand between her shoulder blades in reassurance. “Advisor Zarek,” he acknowledged. “I am sorry to have worried you. Didn’t Zak tell you that I had left on my own accord?” He silently held out his hand and Skulls dropped the key to Kara’s shackles into his palm.

“Prince Leland, you must step away from that woman,” Zarek said urgently. “She stinks of dark magic.”

Lee sighed as he freed Kara from the cuffs, drawing the tips of his fingers over her reddened wrists. Zarek was on the sultan’s council as a representative of the southeastern most population of the city, a district that constantly rumbled with unrest and superstition. The district that Lee worried about the most when trade routes were occasionally cut off by sandstorms or bandits, leaving the city hungry. The district that Lee and his father fought most often about. The sultan believed that the people could be placated into obedience with virtually powerless representatives, speeches on holidays, successful war campaigns and following the letter, if not the spirit, of Pythia, preferring to focus ability and attention on the things he understood, like the military. Lee ... Lee didn’t believe what his father believed and made an effort to listen to members of the council, or to at least be courteous to the representatives of the people.

“I appreciate your concern, Advisor,” he said, “I assure you that I left, and was coming back, of my own volition and that Kara Thrace is no more of a dark sorceress than I am.”

“I would win at cards a lot more often if I were,” Kara said, stepping toward Zarek. “Advisor, I didn’t kidnap him. I didn’t even believe that Lee—his highness—was actually a highness until about half an hour ago. I just thought he was crazy.”

“Reassuring,” Zarek said dryly, “but I will have to insist on you staying with me while the prince speaks to his father.

Lee tensed. “Kara is staying with me.”

“Prince Leland, do you really want to bring your—companion in front of the sultan right now? He is not in the best of moods.” Lee winced. He could only imagine how furious his father was with him right now and he didn’t need any witnesses to the carnage.

“You’re probably right,” he said reluctantly and took Kara’s hands in his. “Stay with Zarek, I’ll be back soon,” he smiled ruefully. “Dad’s probably mad enough to explode, so it shouldn’t take too long for him to eviscerate me.” Her eyes widened at that and Lee wondered briefly what sort of stories the people who didn’t live in the palace heard about them. “Not literally,” he added hastily. With a blushing defiance, he brushed his lips against Kara’s. “I’ll be right back.”

“Good luck,” she said, tentatively.



He nodded and turned to Zarek, “Advisor—”

“I’ll see to her, your highness.”

“Thank you,” Lee said and, shooting a final smile at Kara, he strode off bravely to get yelled at by his dad.

\* \* \*

“So...” Kara said, and stopped. She wasn’t sure what to say, her mind still reeling in shock that the man who had been sharing her bed for the past week was the heir to the throne. She was startled to feel hard hands close on her shoulders, keeping her still.

“Kara Thrace,” Advisor Zarek said, moving closer, “so you are the key.”

“The key to what?” Kara demanded, squirming against the tight hold of the guard behind her. “Let go.”

“I don’t think so,” Zarek said pleasantly. He pulled a handful of what looked like sand from his pocket and blew it into Kara’s face. She choked on the fine granules, struggling to breathe for one suspended moment before she felt the world close in around her.

\* \* \*

Zak was waiting for him when Lee finally managed to escape his father’s disgusted wrath. “Hey, kid,” he said wearily, resting his head on his brother’s sturdy shoulder for a moment when Zak pulled him into a fierce hug.

“So how was it?” Zak stepped back, his light words belied by the concern and relief in his eyes, but Lee played along.

“Same old, same old,” Lee said, unable to stop the large smile of satisfaction, “Chased by police, learned how to steal nectarines from market stalls, slept in a decrepit building with an enormous hole in the side of the wall with two beautiful women, played cards and pyramid and got drunk. . . the usual.”

“Back up to the two women,” Zak demanded.

“I only *slept with*, slept with one, but the other one was there too,” Lee grinned, but then backed peddled, slight guilt swamping him. “It was more than that though, Kara’s amazing, she took me in, showed me the city, kept me from being arrested.”

Zak rolled his eyes, “Far be it for me to even think that you would have sex just for fun, Lee. Gods forbid.”

“Well, it was a lot of fun too,” Lee said. “She’s here though, Kara’s here. Do you want to meet her?”

“Meet the person who managed to get you to lighten up and have fun? Lead on,” Zak said. “Too bad she’s not a princess.”

“Yeah, too bad,” Lee said wistfully. Zak shot him a sharp look but thankfully just launched into an account of the palace gossip instead, lingering on, and no doubt exaggerating, the more salacious parts as they walked toward the entry hall which was. . . empty except for the watch.

Lee frowned and called for closest guard. “Racetrack, where did Advisor Zarek and Mr. Gaeta take Kara—the woman who came in with us?”

“No need to worry about that one anymore, your highness, the Advisor took care of it.”

“Took care of what?” Lee asked tightly.

“She won’t be bothering you again, Prince Leland.”

A knot of dread was forming in his stomach and Lee found himself unable to speak through it.

“Racetrack, please go find Advisor Zarek and bring him here at once,” Zak said, watching her leave before focusing on his brother. “What’s going on?”

Lee shook his head, “Gaeta was convinced that Kara had kidnapped me when I first saw them in the market. He had her arrested and we decided to figure everything out here. Zarek said he’d take care of everything.” He looked at Zak in alarm. Zarek had been known to act where he felt was appropriate without permission from the sultan before, a trait that had not always led to good outcomes. “You don’t think—”

“Prince Zachary, Prince Leland, you wished to see me?” Advisor Zarek stepped into the hall.

“Where is Kara?” Lee demanded.

“Kara? The black witch who kidnapped and ensnared you?” Zarek asked “I told you that I would handle it, your highness, and I did.”

Zak put a restraining hand on Lee’s arm. “How exactly did you handle it, Advisor?” He asked.

“I had her throat slit, of course,” Zarek said in a puzzled tone as Lee felt his knees go weak and his vision grey out.

“You slit her throat?” Zak demanded, grip tightening to a bruising pressure on his brother. “You murdered a woman under our protection?”

“Your highness, it is written in Pythia that thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. As a member of the royal family, upholders of the sacred scrolls, surely you understand the importance of acting immediately and in accordance with the law in such cases.”

“She was not a witch,” Lee gritted out between his teeth, shaking off Zak. “I *told* you that. I told you—” he advanced toward Zarek, watching as the man stepped back from him.

“Lee, stop!” the Sultan’s voice rang out and Lee stopped—years of following that commanding tone ingrained deeper than his rage.

“Sir, Advisor Zarek executed an innocent woman who was under my protection,” he said, a feeling of hopeless impotence washing over him. She was already gone. The blindingly bright light of Kara Thrace had been extinguished, and nothing would change that.

“A witch, your majesty,” Zarek proclaimed with his usual self-assurance, “A witch who confused your son and took him away from us.”

“Advisor Zarek, my son is more than stubborn enough to be responsible for his own actions,” the sultan said, anger in his eyes. “We have spoken before about your tendency toward preemptive action, but you have completely overstepped your bounds this time. How dare you execute one of my people without my consent?”

The shouting match rolled over him. Lee didn’t have to listen to know the outcome. Politics. The royal family’s lives were dependent upon a house of cards built on religion and cursory nods toward citizen representation. To maintain the illusion, the sultan would have to maintain the advisor. Kara’s death would go unpunished and unremarked in his father’s court, but for the hole in his own heart and the sympathy in Zak’s eyes.

\* \* \*

Kara awoke in a rush, gasping sharply as she sat straight up. It was a dark room, the single lit candle barely adequate to see by. She wasn’t alone.

“Lee?” she called out tentatively.

“Harbinger,” a man answered. She saw a dark shape moving toward her and tensed for a fight. “We mean you no harm, Kara Thrace.” Another candle was lit, closer to the narrow bed she was sitting on.

“Then why did you bring me here? Where’s Lee?”

“The prince is unaware of your whereabouts.” The door to the room opened, spilling in more light from the hallway. Advisor Zarek walked in. “He thinks you’re dead.”

“Now where would he get an idea like that?” Kara asked, scanning her surroundings, noting the heavy looking candlesticks that could be used as weapons, straining to hear movement out in the hall.

“I told him that I had you killed,” Zarek shrugged. “Our prince is now mourning you, not planning a rescue. We won’t be disturbed.” He smiled at the other man in the room, the one who had arrested her in the market square. “Felix, would you please light some more candles

in here? The Harbinger needs to be fully awake and aware.”

“Harbinger?” Kara asked. She was surprised to find that she was not in the least bit addled by the dust that Zarek and blown in her face earlier.

“You are the Harbinger of Death, Kara Thrace,” Zarek said.

“Well that’s. . .” Kara trailed off. She didn’t know what that was, but she was pretty sure she didn’t like it. “Couldn’t you have come up with a better name?”

“It was not my place to name you, merely to find you,” Zarek said. “Mr. Gaeta here did a credible job bringing you to me.”

“He brought the prince,” Kara corrected, “I was just along for the ride.”

“Do you really think I cared if the prince was in the palace?” Gaeta asked, venom in his tone. “He just happened to be helpful for the first time in his royal existence.”

“Enough, Felix,” Zarek said and then turned back to Kara. “You are the only person worthy of entering the Cave of Wonders.”

“The cave’s a myth,” Kara said. “People have combed the desert for it for centuries.”

“And I found it,” Zarek said with pride. “I am a seeker, Harbinger. I found the secret of the cave, I found the cave, I found you, and now you will bring me the lamp that resides in the cave. You have a special destiny, Kara Thrace.”

“Kara Thrace and Her Special Destiny,” she muttered. “Sounds like the name of an Assyrian folk band. What’s in it for me?” she asked bluntly.

“I won’t kill you where you stand,” Zarek said.

“So say I get this lamp. I give it to you, and then what?”

“Then nothing,” Zarek said. “Then Felix brings you back to the city and everyone moves on with their lives.”

Kara didn’t want to help Zarek. She didn’t want to crawl into a mythological cave to fetch a lamp. She really didn’t want to be called the Harbinger of Death, but it seemed that she was backed against a corner and this was the way out. Maybe when she got out she could get a message to Lee to let him know that she was okay.

“Alright,” Kara said. “You’ve got a deal. One lamp for my freedom.”

“Excellent,” Zarek said, and Gaeta’s eyes lit up as a grin stretched across his features.

\* \* \*

Kara suspected that she might be on an acid trip. She had unknowingly fallen for a prince, been drugged by an advisor to the sultan and his lackey, and then an enormous lion cave had roared its way out of the sand and she had walked into its open jaws to fetch a lamp after promising not to touch any of the treasure inside because she was the Harbinger of Death. Or something like that. The torch in her hand guttered as she leaned ever so slightly over the edge of the stone stairs curving down from the mouth of the Cave of Wonders. Too dark and too deep to see the bottom. She took a steadying breath and continued downward, studiously ignoring the blackness pressing in more closely as she wound farther down and away from the entrance to the cave into the stillness below.

After minutes of blind descent, she came to the bottom of the stairs, her feet slipping slightly in cool, loose sand as she stepped from the stone. A faint pink glow began to emanate from all around her, steady as sunrise, spreading rosy fingers up pale cave walls, racing up to the vaulted ceiling, illuminating the space, catching on trees made of silver and emeralds, skittering across haphazard piles of gold and rubies and pearls. It was a beautiful place. A dead place. Not a sound but the harshness of her breath, not a movement but the shiver down her spine.

And at the far end of that room, barely discernible from where she stood, at the end of a meandering path of plain sand lined by gem stone trees, rose a platform. “Right,” she said to herself, to cut the stillness and give her courage.

Kara picked her way carefully along the path of sand, mindful of Zarek’s warnings. He could, possibly, be full of shit about touching nothing in that cave but the lamp on pain of death, but she wasn’t so greedy as to test that theory. The gleam off the sharply carved surfaces of the sapphire plums hanging from the trees were a temptation she could withstand without trouble.

When she got to the platform, she found that it was bigger than it had looked from afar. It was made of gold, with twelve steps to climb to the top, upon which rested a truly ugly lamp, the brass made harsher by the soft gleam of precious stones and metals around it. Kara hesitated at the bottom, reluctant to leave the relative safety of the sand – Zarek had specifically instructed her not to touch any treasure. It wasn’t like she could pick up the platform and tuck it in her pocket to be sold in the city square, but it was still gold.

Sudden movement at the corner of her eye caught her attention, and she whirled, heart in her throat to find a slightly tattered Persian rug floating hurriedly toward her. It came to a stop right in front of her face, tassels quivering.

“Uh, hi?” she asked. Flying carpet. Sure. Why not? The day had met its quota of weird shit hours ago, so this hardly seemed to register.

The carpet rolled itself up and spun before straightening out and coming to rest at her feet.

“I’m not supposed to touch anything,” she told it.

It lifted a corner tassel and shook it at her rather insolently, then flopped deliberately down on top of her sandaled foot.

“Frak!” Kara yelled and jumped back. Nothing happened. The carpet floated up into the air and circled around her, stopping to nudge at the back of her knees.

“Guess you’re my ride?” she asked tentatively. It hit behind her knees more forcefully. “Alright, I got it.” She sat gingerly back as the carpet rose to meet her. It felt as solid as sitting on the floor, so she scooted back until she was fully on top, shifting to get her knees under her. The carpet’s front, right tassel reached back and patted her thigh and then they were moving through the air. Kara scooted toward the front of the carpet, laughing at the sheer wonder of it and, when they were close, grabbed the lamp in one careless swipe, the heel of her hand brushing against the gold of the alter.

“No,” She heard the lion roar again, this time from the inside, “Oh, no, no, no.” She waited for the carpet to fall out from underneath her, but it flattened out and shot toward the spiraling stairs. Kara got low and gripped the lamp and the frayed edges as they began a steep climb, wondering briefly why the carpet was helping her, but too grateful that it was to care too much about the whys.

The lion’s jaws were closing—she could just make out the figures of Zarek and Gaeta before the mouth slammed shut and the dark closed in definitively.

Kara felt the dejection run through the carpet’s length as it slowed to a stop and began drifting slowly back down to the floor of the cave, rocking gently from side to side. “We’re not dead yet,” she said to it soothingly, stroking a hand along its worn surface. “I’ve gotten myself out of worse.”

Kara wasn’t entirely sure that she had actually gotten herself out of worse, but there was no reason to panic yet, and admitting her fear would only scare the carpet.

They settled on the ground, the lights coming back on as soon as they did. They looked dimmer than before. “But at least we’re not in the dark,” she said to the carpet as she stood up and stepped off of it to explore the cavern, trying to find another exit.

It felt like hours later when she made it back to her spot by the stairs, she had searched along the walls of the cave as best she could, studiously avoiding touching anything but the sand and the carpet that followed after her. The fear had been growing as she ran out of places to search. To die in a cave of dehydration and hunger, far away from Caprica, who was probably worried by now, and Lee who thought she was dead. She would never see them again. They would never know where she was, and her bones would sit here until the next fool stumbled in, in search of the ugly lamp.

She picked the thing up from where she had left it, turning it over in her hands, rubbing at the dirt. She figured that if she couldn’t find her way out in a couple of days, she’s just pick up one of the gemstones and see what happened. It had to be better than just sitting there. The lamp grew suddenly warm between her palms and she watched, startled, as mist began to pour out of it.

The insidious blue smoke rose, curling suggestively around Kara's hips and slinking between

her thighs slyly before whirling into a small cyclone and abruptly vanishing, leaving the figure of a slight man wearing silk and an oily smile.

"Well, hello," the man's evocative accent spun like silk into the air. "I am the great and powerful genie of the lamp. How may I service you, Master?"

"You have got to be frakking kidding me," Kara said, staring at yet another impossibility in front of her.

"I assure you, darling, I am not." The genie stepped toward her. "I assume you know the rules, but I'm contractually obligated to go over them with new masters. You don't seem to be going anywhere any time soon, so I'll just begin, shall I?"

"Hold on," Kara said, wrapping her confusion around her like armor and squared her shoulders. "I'm supposed to believe that you're a genie and I'm your master." She shook her head. It was really too much.

The genie let out a long, condescending sigh but otherwise ignored her, "As the genie of the lamp, I will grant you three wishes. Anything your heart desires. My only restrictions are that I will not grant more than three, I cannot make anyone fall in love, and I cannot raise the dead." He rolled his eyes at Kara's prolonged and defiant silence. "Honestly, you might as well wish to be freed from the cave. If I'm merely a hallucination then you'll still die a gruesome death and no one will ever have to know about your humiliating descent into madness."

"If you're real then that wastes a wish," Kara countered.

"If you want to be trapped in a cave for the rest of your life, by all means," the genie made a mocking little bow. "It doesn't bother me one way or the other." He looked over his shoulder to see the frayed flying carpet and crooked a finger at it. It unrolled and hovered a few feet off the ground in front of the genie who promptly climbed on and sat, cross legged and straight backed, looking unconcernedly at Kara.

She looked around once more, checking for other avenues of escape or possible witnesses. "Fine. Genie, I wish to be freed from this cave."

"That's it?" the genie said with disbelief. "Well you didn't hold out for very long." Kara opened her mouth to protest but the magic carpet was already whirling around her, the genie hauling her on. "Hang on," he advised, and the carpet shot up nearly vertical toward the roof of the cave. The genie waved his hand lazily and the rock became transparent and the carpet shot out of the darkness of the cave and into the less oppressive darkness of a starlit night.

\* \* \*

Zak hauled himself out of the window and onto the roof and settled next to Lee in the dark, close enough for their shoulders to bump. Lee handed him the half empty bottle of ambrosia and he took a swallow before passing it back.

He waited.

“I think I could have gotten Dad to let me marry Kara,” Lee said, voice slurred.

“Lee,” Zak said on a sigh.

“No, no, really,” he insisted earnestly. “The princess stipulation wasn’t added until three centuries after the original text—it was an addendum, not actually Pythia.”

“Lee—”

“Dad’s not completely unreasonable, he would want me to be happy. He would let me if he could just *see*—”

“Lee,” Zak said firmly, despite his throat closing up. He groped blindly for Lee’s hand, not able to look at his brother’s miserable profile. “I’m sorry.”

“Right,” Lee said on a shaky breath, handing Zak the bottle. “It doesn’t matter.”

Zak hurled the bottle off the side of the roof and wrapped his arm around Lee’s shoulders, pulling him hard against his side. “It matters,” he said softly.

“She’s dead,” Lee’s head dropped like a stone onto Zak’s shoulder.

“I—” Zak wasn’t sure what to say or do but. . . He rested his cheek into Lee’s hair. “It matters.”



## Part II

### Chapter Notes

All Hail the Sultana, workerbee73, First of Her Name.

It was almost worth the genie's insufferable smugness to fly through the window of her apartment and startle the unflappable Caprica. Kara strutted off the carpet. "Captured by the palace guard, forced into the Cave of Wonders, buried alive, conjured a genie," she stretched her arms high above her head and felt the pull all the way down her back. "I think that covers the high points."

"You—what?" Caprica gaped.

"Allow me to introduce myself," the genie oozed toward Caprica, shaking back his shoulder length hair. "My name is Gaius Baltar and I am the genie of the lamp." He took hold of Caprica's hand and kissed it. "Terribly brilliant and misunderstood, you understand," he added giving her an appreciative once over. "A servant to capricious masters until they need me no more and then banished back into a solitary existence. It's agonizing, I assure you."

Kara was slightly appalled to see Caprica's face breaking out into a rare, genuine smile. "It's a pleasure to meet you Gaius, Brilliant and Tortured Genie of the Lamp," she teased without edge. "I'm Caprica Six."

"Caprica Six. What a lovely and unusual name," the genie all but purred, inching closer, smiling wider while Kara's eyebrows rose.

"I'm a lovely and unusual woman," Caprica replied huskily.

"For the love of the gods," Kara exploded. "I'm sorry to get in the way of love at first sight, but we have a genie and we have two wishes left so put your hormones on hold while we think about this, alright?"

"Speaking of love and hormones, where's Lee?" Caprica asked pointedly.

"Not here," Kara said.

"Who's Lee?" Gaius asked.

"None of your business," Kara replied.

"Kara's lover," Caprica clarified.

"Not anymore," Kara said. "And also, do not use that word!"

"Well he should be," Caprica said, clearly unmoved. "I never understood your deluded, Only For a Week, nonsense. Now where is he?"

"He wasn't in the cave," Gaius observed helpfully.

"He's at the palace," Kara said through gritted teeth.

"He's a prisoner?" Caprica asked, horrified.

"I wouldn't exactly call him a prisoner," Kara said.

"Cages come in all shapes and sizes," Gaius noted, "sometimes they're even lamp shaped."

Kara rounded on him. "Will you shut up? We're not talking to you."

"That was very rude," he said, looking aggrieved. "I haven't talked to anyone in a thousand years and now you want me to sit in a corner like a good genie?"

"Kara, don't treat Gaius like that; you know better," Caprica said, frowning and putting a comforting hand on the genie's shoulder, "and what is going on with Lee?"

"After she's done with her wishes, would you like to be my new master?" the genie asked Caprica, half hopefully, half suggestively.

Kara pressed her fingers hard into her temples and breathed deeply for a full minute. The carpet, which had been idly floating where she and the genie had left it, settled on the floor and slid over to lay a tassel on her foot. "Right," she said finally, then directed her gaze to Caprica who was staring at the carpet. "Here's the deal."

\* \* \*

"Two wishes," Caprica mused, running her fingers lightly through the genie's hair where he was lying with his head in her lap.

"You are so not helping my headache," Kara told her flatly from the other side of the room—far, away from the spectacle of the genie and Caprica love fest. She turned her back to them and yanked the curtain open and let herself consider the possibilities while looking at the palace. "You know Pythia at least as well as I do," she started, and then stopped, not quite knowing where she was going with this. Not quite believing the wish forming in her mind in the shape of one Lee Adama.

"I do," Caprica said, her voice directly behind her. Kara turned to look straight into her friend's eyes. "One of the perks of being brought up in the orphanages—all those pious types teaching you religion."

"Do you—" Kara stumbled over the words, "Do you believe that Lee has to marry a real princess, like the scriptures say?"

Caprica looked at her speculatively. "Define real princess. Pythia doesn't say how long you have to have a kingdom or how blue your blood has to be. It wouldn't be breaking the rules,

just—”

“Bending them a little, yeah,” Kara said, dizzy with possibility.

“Besides,” Caprica smiled, “Lee knows who and what you are. If he doesn’t want you, it isn’t like he has to marry you.”

Kara grinned back broadly. “Oh he wants me all right,” she said with complete and utter confidence. “Hey, genie—Gaius—whatever, I wish for you to make me and Caprica princesses.”

\* \* \*

Lee had woken up that morning on the roof with his brother drooling on his shoulder, completely hung over, and Kara dead so he figured that he could be forgiven his absolutely foul mood and, therefore, less than diplomatic response to his father’s summons to meet, not one, but two princesses applying for his hand in marriage from a tiny kingdom he had never even heard of.

He was still contemplating ignoring everyone and jumping the wall to go talk to Caprica when Zak came to his room, looking so frakking understanding that the older brother part of his psyche reasserted itself and he put on a brave face. “Coming to see the princesses from. . . somewhere?”

“Galactica,” Zak said lightly, taking Lee’s lead, “and yes. Word is they’re hot and there are two of them. Two.”

“I don’t even want to know what’s going on in your head right now.”

Zak handed over the mug he was carrying, “Drink. Chamallah tea. Perfect for princes who are too hung over to see the possibilities of two ladies in one bed.”

Lee swallowed down the bitter tea and with it the anger and resentment and grief and Kara that was pounding in his head, flowing through his veins. He closed his eyes and took a calming breath, and then another. And another. Until he was concentrating only on the way his lungs inflated and deflated. The way his chest rose and fell—one breath at a time. One heartbeat at a time. One second at a time, minute, hour, day. He opened his eyes to find Zak looking at him, all concern and that comforting, horrible grief for Lee. “I’ll be fine, Zak,” he said, setting the empty cup on a table. “Promise.”

“Course you will,” Zak said, schooling his face into carelessness and slapping him on the shoulder. “Princesses?”

“Princesses,” Lee confirmed.

They made their way through the living quarters to the main throne room, and Lee forced himself to concentrate only on Zak’s conversation and nothing more than that. They reached their father faster than he liked, but all there was left to do was get this over with. “Son,” the

sultan stepped forward and embraced Lee, rough and quick, but Lee felt the wild edge of all his emotions rising up at his father's care.

"I'm fine, Dad."

"Then let's get this over with." Lee and Zak exchanged a glance at the grim tone.

"Is there something wrong?" Lee asked.

"Other than forcing my son who is mourning the loss of a woman who was important to him to meet potential brides to fulfill his duty?" the sultan snapped. "No. Nothing."

Lee and Zak took their places, standing on either side of Bill Adama who was seated on his throne. "It'll be okay," Lee said, though to whom he was speaking, he wasn't sure.

The door opened and a man with long hair floated into the room on what looked to be a flying carpet. Zak swore his surprise softly, but Lee knew that his father's face was as non-reactionary as his own. The man hopped off the tightly woven fabric to bow gracefully when he reached the throne.

"My name is Gaius Baltar," he spoke with an accent Lee couldn't place. "It is my great privilege to present Princess Caprica and Princess Kara of Galactica."

Lee heard an oddly wounded sound come from his own lips, but couldn't be bothered to care, with the blood rushing to his brain making him feel faint and short of breath. "Who?" he heard himself demand.

"Princess Kara and Princess Caprica, Prince Leland," Kara's voice rang out from the entrance to the throne room. "Weren't you listening?" He was moving before he could register it, tripping down the marble steps of the dais, pushing past the strange man and the even stranger carpet and shouldering Caprica out of the way so that he could get to her. Then she was in his arms. Warm and real and alive. He buried his face in her neck, feeling her answering embrace, her startled, soothing words. "Okay. Okay. Me too."

"What are you—" he started, pulling back and taking her face in the palms of his hands. "How—" She was staring up at him with startled eyes. "Kara, you were dead. He said you were dead."

"Lee." He ignored his father, unwilling to let go of her for even a second, sliding his hands down her neck to grasp her shoulders.

"Prince Leland!" He turned them both so he could see his father and guards closing in around them. "Step away from her Lee."

"Oh frak no," Lee said. "Last time I did that she was killed," he turned to look at her again. "Kara, Zarek killed you."

"No," Kara said, "no, I wasn't dead. Zarek lied. He didn't kill me." She pulled free from Lee. "Sultan, this isn't witchcraft. I wasn't killed." She was scanning the room and stopped

pointedly on Racetrack and Skulls. “They were there when he drugged me,” she said pointing. “They know.”

“What do you know?” the Sultan asked the uncomfortable looking guards.

“Nothing, your Grace,” Skulls said. “We did see her drugged and brought her to a cell for the Advisor, but then we were dismissed. We assumed she was dead, just like you did.”

“Bring the Advisor to me at once,” the Sultan commanded. Skulls and Racetrack spun on their heels and exited with a purpose.

Lee didn’t believe either of them, but he had no proof, just Kara and talking and “Princess Kara?” he asked suddenly, and suddenly Caprica was by his side.

“Lee, how wonderful to see you again,” she slid her arm through his, sliding her fingertips gently over his wrist in blatant caress. “Please introduce me to your father and brother.”

“That doesn’t work on me—” Lee started to say to Caprica with exasperation, but her grip had changed to one of warning, a strong, brief, twist of her fingers where they rested, broadly implying an ability to break his arm if she so chose. He didn’t think she would do it, but it was enough to make him pause.

“We do have a lot to catch up on,” she smiled, her eyes intent, “but let’s leave the specifics for the time being.”

“Alright,” Lee said, willing to play along for now. He reached out and caught Kara’s hand and pulled both women forward. Sultan, Prince Zachary, this is Ca—Princess Caprica Six and Princess Kara Thrace of Galactica.” He shot a puzzled look at Kara, but her eyes were straight forward and she was smiling.

“Your Grace,” Racetrack said, running into the room, “the Advisor is gone. He’s vanished from the palace.”

The sultan rose to his feet, anger painting his craggy features. “Find him!” he snapped. “Turn the city inside out—I want him in front of me ten minutes ago.”

Racetrack saluted, jerked her head at some of the other guards and sprinted out of the throne room, leaving a stunned silence and the sultan practically vibrating with rage.

“Sultan,” Caprica interjected smoothly. “I know that this is a disturbing situation, but there isn’t much that you can do at the moment. Why don’t you tell us more about your city? My cousin and I had heard great things about your home and Prince Leland, but we find that no one knows the true measure of a leader until they have spoken to their people. We were trying to get the lay of the land when we ran into your son and spent the week with him.” Just as well she was doing the talking, Lee thought as Caprica and the odd Gaius Baltar kept up a steady stream of soothing conversation, she was a better liar than Kara was, and whatever was going on, it sure as hell wasn’t the story they were spinning. He thought that he might be some sort of blind idiot to be letting this farce continue, but Kara’s hand was in his and, when he turned to look at her, she mouthed the word “later.”

The sultan was still looking decidedly skeptical by the time Caprica and Baltar had finished talking, but had been forced to concede a little in the face of the various deeds and information about the kingdom of Galactica so he called for refreshments. Lee sat between Kara and Zak at the round table, Kara with her hand firmly on Lee's leg. She and the sultan were getting along well, so he turned to watch Caprica sitting between and flirting with Baltar and Zak indiscriminately, not that either were complaining. Lee laughed to himself a little as Zak took a date from Baltar's hand, his finger deliberately brushing the other man's lips before pulling it away from his mouth to feed it to Caprica. So maybe not two princesses for his little brother but. . . Kara's hand inched up his thigh. Definitely not two princesses.

"You're quiet," Kara said softly.

"Just thinking," he said, taking a sip of wine.

"I owe you a story," she said, squeezing his thigh.

"That you do," Lee said, settling his hand on top of hers. "Tonight?"

"Want to go for a ride?" she asked. "We can take the carpet out for a spin."

"Sounds great," he smiled.

\* \* \*

Kara felt a sort of proprietary satisfaction that Lee and the flying carpet seemed to be equally delighted with each other, the carpet even going so far as to roll itself up and flip itself vertical to lean into Lee's shoulder affectionately, petting his head with a tassel as he laughed and practically hugged the thing. Then they had climbed on and cloud surfed for awhile until the carpet decided on straight and level. She hadn't kissed him yet—she wanted to, but it hadn't felt right. Not without explaining things when he'd been so completely accepting of her presence without even knowing the story. She had even summoned Baltar, pulling the lamp off her belt and rubbing it in front of a bemused Lee's nose as a demonstration before sending the genie back to do whatever it was he was doing.

"So, you're a princess by wish?" Lee asked finally, dazed, but seeming to take everything as truth—having the genie appear in mid-air while flying on a carpet in the moonlight had been a pretty effective demonstration.

"Yeah," Kara said. "It's a tiny little place—not much land or much of a population, but it's on the shore of a sea and the people seem happy enough as fishers—as much as I could tell in our very short visit this morning anyway. Our palace is nowhere near as big as yours, but I like it."

"How does that work, exactly?" Lee asked.

Kara shrugged, enjoying the breeze. She stretched out on her back next to Lee's cross-legged figure. "Magic?" she ventured "I have no good explanation, I'm just glad it happened."

Lee reclined back on his elbows, looking straight up at the stars. “Me too,” he took a deep breath. “So now that you’re a princess, and you’ve effectively made a claim at my hand in marriage. . .” he trailed off expectantly.

“Yeah about that,” Kara said, trying to sound stern but smiling hard. “I did all that work. I became a princess for you, Lee. Sacrifices were made and you haven’t even bothered to declare your intent.”

“Yeah, becoming a princess with Caprica was an enormous sacrifice, I can tell.” She opened her mouth to reply, but Lee knelt up. Back straight and arms outstretched he shouted into the rushing air, “My name is Lee Adama, and I love Kara Thrace!” His heart was wide open, and he was beautiful in his joy. Sheer happiness bubbled up and out of her into loud peals of helpless laughter. He grinned back at her, “I love Kara Thrace! And I don’t care who frakking knows it!”

“Get down, get down,” she giggled, tugging at his arm. “You’re going to fall off.” He tumbled back into her, over her. His mouth was on hers suddenly, hot in the cool night, and infinitely preferable to talking. She stretched her arms about her head and just gave herself over to flying with him.

The silk of the carpet’s tassels against her wrist teased Kara into another cackling laugh against Lee’s mouth and she willingly extended her hand farther out along the ancient weave, feeling the strands wind strongly around, anchoring her to the corner even as they slid through the liberty of the sky. She broke lip contact just far enough to catch his eye and tilted her head in the direction of her captured hand.

His grin turned positively feral as he brought her free hand to the other side of the carpet so that her shoulders and back were flattened against the thin fabric, arms stretched out, suddenly feeling tethered to the stars by the flimsy bits of string wrapping around her pulse points and Lee’s warm body.

“Better hang on tight Lee,” she smiled, and he moved over her, stretching out until he was locked to her, fingers entwined, lips connected, her legs holding him close while the carpet continued to fly across an unending sea of sand.

\* \* \*

Kara had decided to show a modicum of restraint and only kiss her post-coital and windblown fiancé goodnight as opposed to climb into his bed like he had offered, but she had also decided to walk into the palace to her guest room as opposed to fly through the doors—couldn’t go around pissing off the in-laws quite yet, although they seemed startlingly easy to talk to for royals, or at least for her perception of royals since it wasn’t like she had been in the habit of talking to kings and kings’ sons before a week ago.

The carpet came to a stop and Kara stepped off, laughing as it rolled itself up and tucked itself under her arm.

She didn’t see her attackers coming until it was too late.

\* \* \*

“This looks familiar,” Gata said to Zarek as they looked down at the unconscious body of Kara Thrace, slumped on a narrow cot in a dark room.

“It’s completely different,” Zarek said, staring down at the lamp in his hands. “The Harbinger of Death has served her purpose after all.” He slid his fingers lingeringly over the lamp’s battered surface, and then began to rub in earnest.

\* \* \*

“Frak!” Baltar swore, and Caprica looked on in alarm as he started fading out of sight, clearly struggling as opposed to simply popping out of existence to do Kara’s bidding. “Someone else has the lamp,” he said urgently. “Someone else has the—” He disappeared.

Caprica dressed hastily, sliding her seven knives into various pockets, boots, sliding one into her bra between her breasts. Kara had told her where Zarek had kept her captive, pointing out the stairs leading down to the lower levels. It was the logical first place to look. Caprica might not know exactly where she was going but the palace wasn’t nearly as big as it looked from the outside.

She pulled her hair back from her face and ran out of the room to go find her friend.

\* \* \*

Zak nearly tripped on his way to his rooms as the foundations of the castle began to shake. He broke into a run, colliding with his brother and falling on his ass. “What’s going on?”

“The palace is rising!” Lee said.

“What?” Zak lurched over to the nearest window and looked down. The palace was indeed rising, being pulled from the ground like an errant weed. “What the hell is going on here?”

Lee shook his head grimly, “I think I know, but it’ll take too long to explain. We have to find Kara.”

“Not so fast.” They whirled to see Racetrack, Skulls and three other guards surrounding them in a half circle with their swords drawn and pointing at their chests.

“What the hell is going on here,” Lee barked, and Zak had to admire his attempt to pretend that he was in control of the situation. Skulls moved in and unceremoniously pulled Zak against him, holding his sword across Zak’s chest.

“We don’t answer to you anymore, Adama,” sneered Racetrack. She pushed the sword point into the hollow of Lee’s throat, the sharp point drawing blood, the skin denting in, flesh beginning to rend, Lee’s back against the stone wall.

“No,” Zak choked, struggling against Skulls’ hold, feeling the bite of the blade just under his collar bone. He didn’t have Lee’s ice water drenched veins. He felt the haze of panic set in, the belief that he was going to watch his brother die in front of him, when suddenly, the



restraining arm was gone and blood was spurting down his shoulders. He looked over his shoulder to see Caprica wiping a short, steel knife on her shirt, Skulls' body at her feet, throat slit ear to ear.

"Skulls!" shouted Racetrack with such despair that Zak could have almost felt sorry for her if she wasn't about to murder his brother. A knife whizzed by his air, embedding itself into a different guard's chest. The guard collapsed on the floor.

"Just evening things up a little," Caprica said. The remaining two nameless guards faced her warily as she pulled a knife out of her cleavage and used it to casually file a thumb nail.

"Your prince is going to die!" snarled Racetrack. Zak's eyes widened as he saw Kara appear around the corner, silent as the grave and sword in hand. "I am going to separate his head from his body and we are going to play pyramid with it in the market square."

"His head's much too big to fit in the goal," Kara said conversationally, and then swung sharply, taking Racetrack's head clean off her shoulders.

After a silent pause, the two remaining guards fled.

"Forget something?" Kara asked Caprica, sounding annoyed as she pulled the sword out of Racetrack's dead hands and offered it to Lee, hilt first.

"I was on my way to find you," Caprica said defensively, in turn handing Skulls' sword to Zak. She paused to kiss him hotly and then addressed Kara, "I ran into these two instead."

"Good thing you did," Kara said, lightly touching the cut on Lee's throat. "Hi," she added, addressing Lee, "are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Lee said softly, curling his fingers around her wrist. "What's the situation?" and Zak suddenly noticed that the palace wasn't shaking anymore.

Zak moved to the window again. "We appear to be floating," he reported. "I don't think we're moving anymore; just sort of sitting in mid air."

"I take it Zarek has the lamp?" Lee asked Kara.

"Probably," Kara said, tugging Lee's shirt collar up and holding it against the cut dribbling blood. "I didn't actually see anything, just woke up alone in that same room I did the first time he kidnapped me." She frowned. "That's twice he's done that."

"Okay," Lee said. "Those guards are going to raise the alarm that we're armed and together. We need to get that lamp back."

"What lamp?" Zak demanded finally, confused.

"Long story," Caprica, Lee and Kara answered him at the same time. He scowled at them.

"They'll tell you on the way," Lee said.

“Where?” Zak asked sharply.

“They?” Kara asked, even more sharply.

“I have to go find Dad,” Lee said. “You guys need to get the genie back on our side.”

“Genie.” Zak said flatly.

“Gaius,” Caprica said. Zak paused, that did sort of make sense.

“I’m still stuck on the whole we’ll go one way and you’ll go another,” Kara said, leaning into Lee, ignoring Caprica and Zak. “You don’t do so well on your own. I’ve had you rescue twice this week.”

Lee kissed her. “I can’t leave my dad,” he said. “The priority is to secure the lamp, but I have to save him if I can.” Kara nodded and they rested their foreheads together for a long moment before Kara stepped away from him.

“Alright, littlest Adama,” she said to Zak, “show us the sneakiest way to the throne room.” Zak wordlessly reached out to clasp Lee’s hand.

“Be safe,” Lee said, “All of you.”

“Good hunting,” Kara returned. “Let’s go.”

Kara and Caprica moved out without further backward glances. Zak held Lee’s gaze for a moment longer. “Keep him safe.”

Lee nodded, “I will.”

“Little Adama!” Kara barked.

Zak grinned at his brother, “Coming, Princess,” he called back, sketched a salute to Lee and chased after them.

\* \* \*

Felix forced himself to keep standing even as his leg throbbed its protest, it appeared that he had traded one king for another and this one didn’t have Adama’s sense of humor.

Zarek had ensconced himself on the throne, idly fingering the lamp that had brought about his powers, the genie standing behind him with dead eyes, waiting for his next command. Honestly, Felix had no idea what else Zarek could want from the magical creature, having been granted the wish to be the most powerful sorcerer in the world. As far as he could tell, Zarek could do whatever the hell he wanted to on his own now.

“Advisors,” Zarek said with a pomposity that was so thick it was nearly edible, “Today we begin the new world order—one free from the shackles of sultans and princes.” He paused and Felix wondered if it was for applause that did not come. “I have removed us from the city so that we may start our new social contract with no outside distractions.” Felix straightened

suddenly. From his position slightly behind and to the left of the throne, he saw the movement of the guards loyal to Zarek, the only guards left free in the palace, coming closer to the gathering of the eleven other advisors. Pain came hot and sharp at his sudden motion, but he ignored it, a sense of foreboding rising.

“What is the meaning of this, Zarek?” one of the advisors asked, irritation dripping from his voice.

“The meaning, Advisor Tigh, is that you’ve become obsolete.” He nodded and eleven guards came swiftly forward and ran the eleven advisors through with their swords.

Felix’s breath came out in harsh bursts as he watched the massacre before him, the blood smearing pink stains into white marble. He had never intended this. Never meant for this to happen.

Zarek’s eyes were on him. “Felix, you knew all along that sacrifices had to be made. I don’t take any joy from this.” His eyes gave lie to those words, manic with power and conviction. “Keep it together,” he advised. “We still have the small matter of the sultan to attend to. I believe that I’ll make it a public trial—let the people enjoy our triumph.”

Not knowing what else to do, Felix nodded and addressed the nearest guard. “Bring us the sultan,” he said, noting the swiftness at which he was obeyed. Though the methods of the coup were grating on his conscience, the sultan still had a lot to answer for with his leadership through platitudes and playing favorites and barely concealed contempt for the working class. Felix wrapped himself in his anger and hardened his heart, turning his head from the suddenly inquisitive gaze of the genie.

\* \* \*

Lee was astonished to find that, not only was his father still in his rooms, but that the door was guarded by a single person whom Lee was able to dispatch rather easily. He shook his head as he relieved the body of its sword—it had been foolish to leave the sultan so lightly guarded.

He opened the door and walked in, only to be caught in a strangle hold, an arm crushing his windpipe from behind. “Dad,” he croaked out and felt the arm loosen immediately. He was turned around and wrapped in a hug.

“They told me they were going to kill you,” his father gasped into his shoulder. “I thought you and your brother were dead.”

Lee moved his hand soothingly down his father’s back, keeping both swords well clear with the other. “Zak and I are fine dad. Kara and Caprica made sure of it.”

Adama pulled back. “Thank the gods,” he said. “Is that for me?” he asked, reaching for a sword.

“I can’t believe you hadn’t gotten out of this by yourself—one guard?” Lee said speaking quietly as he stuck his head slowly out into the hall, checking. “It’s clear,” he added.

The Sultan followed him out into the hall. “I didn’t know what was happening,” he said, as they paused to peer around another corner. Shit. More guards. Lee jerked his head in the other direction and they hurried away. “I didn’t want to walk into anything blind. Gaeta and Zarek burst in here and declared the beginning of the new order. He made us. . . fly somehow and said he had sent Racetrack and Skulls to execute you boys and hit me on the head—I had just regained conscious when you came in.”

“Like I said,” Lee continued. “We’re fine. Kara and Caprica to the rescue.” The way ahead was clear and they kept moving in the direction of the throne room. His father wasn’t asking questions, the warrior in him showing strong as he followed the lead of the person with the most knowledge of the situation—not asking unnecessary, time consuming questions.

“Please tell me you’re not so stubbornly hung up on the unfairness of Pythia that you won’t marry Kara,” the Sultan groused.

Lee sighed inwardly, “Is this really the time, Dad?” he asked. They had come to a quick stop in an empty solarium and Lee wedged his sword point into a crack in the floor. The sultan added his sword and leverage to the effort and soon they were looking down into one of the many entrances to the ancient tunnels under the palace. No one knew who had built them; only that they had always been there. It was a secret kept by members of the royal family.

The sultan dropped into the hole, ignoring the stairs, and looked up, scowling at Lee as the lights rose up around him, like a sunrise, illuminating the tunnels with rosy warmth. “You will answer me, Leland.”

Lee landed with a thump. “Of course I’m going to marry her. We’re going to the throne room now, by the way, if you want to worry about the more pressing issue of a coup.” He was halted by his father’s hand on his arm.

“Zarek said that the people wanted this. That it was time for a government that stood for everyone. You’ve said this to me before. Many times.”

“I have said that, and I mean it,” Lee said, steadily meeting his father’s direct gaze, “but not this way.”

The Sultan nodded once and then started moving toward the throne room again. “Now fill me in on what the frak is going on in my palace.”

\* \* \*

The tunnels beneath the palace reminded Kara strongly of the Cave of Wonders. Zak had said they spread for miles and that no one had ever found the end of them. It made her wonder, but it was something to be wondered about later. Just like she would sleep again later, not just lie unconscious in the dungeons, just like she was going to worry about Lee’s safety later. There was a time and place for everything.

She took a deep breath and nodded to Zak who climbed the stone steps in front of him. This was not a bad plan. It just wasn’t a very good one either. “Zak,” she hissed suddenly, halting him feeling like she should say something sister-like. “Be safe out there.”

Zak shook his head at her, smiling. “Good hunting,” and pulled the lever to open one of four underground entrances to the throne room and then stepped out, with swagger she noted. She glanced over at Caprica who was halfway to the next entrance, waiting to see if they had just exposed themselves needlessly. “Advisor Zarek,” Zak’s voice rang out, “Keeping my father’s chair warm?” and Caprica sprinted the rest of the way down the tunnel. Kara saw her start climbing the stairs before she in turn ran to the trap door she would be entering from, a minute after Caprica, three minutes after Zak.

She kept her count steady in her head, too far from either of the open entrances to hear what was going on, but trusting in Caprica. Trusting in Zak. Her internal clock ran down and she took a deep breath and pulled the lever.

It slid open silently and she could suddenly hear the noise in the room above her. Caprica always did make an entrance. She inched her head out of the hole behind the throne, keeping it on a pivot, her heart pounding in her ears. She couldn’t really see anything, being behind the throne, and she decided that it was a good thing, going with the old, if she couldn’t see them, they couldn’t see her theory.

Then she saw feet coming around the dais and the noise faded away. Those feet probably would notice her very soon. She looked straight up into Felix Gaeta’s astonished eyes. She stayed silent, trying to stare him down to submission, firmly holding a knife in one hand and a sword in the other.

Amazingly, and she would be thanking every god and goddess on bended knee later, he turned his back to her and stared resolutely out onto the chaos. Kara didn’t pause to consider her good luck, she wasn’t one to refuse a gift from the gods in a situation as dire as this, so she just climbed out of the trap door quickly and quietly.

She waited in a crouch behind the throne. Her heart slowed down and she could make out Caprica’s low pitched taunts and Zak’s less restrained mockery and—just what the hell were they doing out there? But she refocused on the mission at hand, shuffling over to the side of the throne not blocked by Gaeta to peer out.

Caprica was surrounded by guards and Zak was lost in the crowd, but she could still hear him. Zarek was standing right in front of the throne, lamp grasped loosely in his hand, the genie kneeling at his side. Kara felt sick—no wonder Baltar was so screwed up, every three wishes he was subjected entirely to the whims of another. That Kara had let him wander around was probably an unprecedented freedom. Or at least something he didn’t see very often.

Kara rose as high as she could behind the throne without being exposed to the room and slid the knife into her boot. She was only going to get one shot at this. She watched as Zarek held up a hand and Zak suddenly rose from the crowd, spinning slowly on display.

She broke her cover and swung hard and sure.

Zarek screamed in pain and blood gushed.

Kara dropped to her knees, sliding on the bloody surface and grabbed Zarek's severed hand, pulling the dead fingers from the lamp.

She was suddenly hit with an enormous force and tossed down the stairs, into a pile of corpses that were in the center of the confusion of the throne room. She maintained her grip on the lamp, and pulled the last of Zarek's fingers off it, leaving it completely in her possession.

Zarek shot a lightening bolt into the crowd, setting people on fire. It had been a good guess, but he couldn't see where she was exactly—throwing her into the crowd had been a pain fueled mistake.

"Genie, I wish that Advisor Zarek be stripped of all his wishes!" she shouted, hoping that Baltar could hear her.

Zarek screamed at the same time that the Sultan's voice boomed across the throne room. She had no idea what he said, but it made the noise stop. Even Zarek fell silent.

"I took the liberty of silencing and freezing everyone but us," Baltar explained, "I also put the palace back down where it belonged." He waded into the crowd to help Kara to her feet. "My sincere thanks," he said, bowing over her hand.

"I wish I had another wish," she blurted. "No, not like a wish, wish. I just wish that I had another wish to free you."

"I appreciate the sentiment," the genie smiled, releasing her hand.

One by one, he touched Caprica, Zak, Lee and the Sultan, releasing them from their invisible bonds while everyone else looked on with varying degrees of dismay. The carpet sped into the room, over their heads, flying loops of relief.

The sultan moved among the bodies of his advisors, sadly straightening clothing and closing eyes. "They were good people," he said gruffly. "They deserved better than this." He addressed the genie, "do you happen to know where the people loyal to me were kept? Or were they all slaughtered as well?"

"I believe there are quite a few people in the dungeon," Baltar answered. Kara watched Zak run out of the room, presumably to free the prisoners, seeming no worse for the wear. She gingerly stepped her way over to Lee who was frowning at the members of the rebellion.

"Hey, you made it," Kara said.

"Not in time," Lee replied bitterly, watching his father tend to the bodies.

"It's not your fault, Lee," she said.

"No?" he asked. "Then whose is it?" he shook his head sharply. "Ignore me," he said and she watched the burden settle onto his shoulders with an uncompromising thud. "Thank you for saving the day, yet again."

“It’s kind of what I do,” she said. “Although it wasn’t remotely just me.”

“Zak and Caprica,” he nodded.

“And Felix Gaeta.”

“What? He was a conspirator.”

“I also wouldn’t have been able to get to the lamp if he had sounded the alarm when he saw me,” Kara said. “Guy’s a creep, but he did help.” Lee nodded slowly, starting to come into himself. He suddenly felt touchable again, and she wasn’t one to deny herself. “It’ll be okay,” she said, reaching out a hand, and just like every other time, he reached back.

\* \* \*

Bodies were cleared out and were being prepared for burial. The guards who had revolted, The Revolting Guards Kara called them, were cooling their heels in the dungeon, waiting for trials, and Lee wanted to sleep for a week. He couldn’t imagine how Kara was still standing at this point, but here they were—still milling around the throne room.

“We have one more thing that will be addressed this moment,” William Adama in full Sultan voice. Lee stifled a sigh and exchanged a glance with Zak. Their father was sitting on his throne. “Bring the co-conspirators forward.”

A guard pushed a badly limping Gaeta forward while another dragged the passed out body of Tom Zarek to slump in front of the sultan. He hadn’t regained consciousness since the genie had stripped him of his wishes. “In accordance with the rules of our land, handed down from Pythia, the prophet of our gods, I sentence Thomas Zarek and Felix Gaeta to death by exposure. They shall be staked in the desert and left until dead.”

“Exposure isn’t appropriate for both of them,” Lee protested automatically, the injustice of it burning past his desire to see this all over with. “We wouldn’t have been able to gain the upper hand if it weren’t for Gaeta.”

“Pythia is very clear,” Adama said, “Treason is treason, no matter what his later actions were.”

“Dad—” Lee started, looking over to Gaeta who remained standing silently, unmoved, unsurprised.

“Enough,” Adama snapped. “We are all aware of your feelings on Pythia. Zarek and Gaeta are sentenced to execution by exposure. If the gods want to strike them down between now and then, they are welcome to it, but no one under my rule will raise a hand in mercy.”

Lee opened and closed his mouth silently, knowing there was nothing else he could say to his father, who was practically radiating anger at . . . the situation, at himself, at his mouthy son, Lee wasn’t certain.

“Lee,” Kara said, the softly spoken word cutting through his haze of helpless frustration. He turned his head to look at her, to give himself a measure of comfort. She was dusty and tired

and sweaty and sympathetic. And she was holding the lamp.

“Kara,” Lee said holding out his hand. “May I borrow your lamp?” The left side of Kara’s mouth curved up.

“Sure,” she said, walking over to stand directly in front of him and putting the lamp in his hands. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

“Thank you,” he said, kissing her cheek.

“I wish Felix Gaeta to die painlessly,” he stated clearly.

“Just drop it,” his father said wearily, unthinkingly, as the genie moved away from Caprica’s side, pausing to look appraisingly at Lee before nodding. Kara’s fingers laced through his, but all of Lee’s attention was on Baltar.

“Felix Gaeta,” the genie said gently. He put his hands on Gaeta’s shoulders and leaned in closely, kissing the troubled young man on the brow and pulling back slightly.

Gaeta blinked slowly. “It doesn’t hurt anymore,” he said, a tentative smile stretching across his features.

“Sleep,” Baltar said running his thumb along Gaeta’s cheekbone, and then kissing him on the lips. When he pulled away, Felix Gaeta dropped to the floor, dead.

The sultan stared at the body before turning his glare to Lee. “You always have to push it, don’t you, son?”

Zak, blessed, sunny, peacemaker Zak, slung an arm around their father. “Well at least we can foist him off on Kara now,” he said cheerfully, turning his father away from the guards who came forward at his sharp nod to remove Gaeta’s body and tote an unconscious Zarek out to be staked to the desert sand.

Kara, taking her cue, chimed in, “It’s a thankless job, your Grace, but between the three of us, we can probably keep him out of trouble,” and Lee was slapped with the amazing reality that Kara was going to be his wife. And that she and Zak were probably going to gang up on him at every opportunity.

The sultan shook his head at all of them. “Princess Caprica, we may be the only sensible people in this room.”

“I couldn’t agree more, Your Grace,” she smiled. “You should go relax for the rest of the day. I know that I’m planning on taking advantage of that wonderful hot spring cavern of yours that I have heard so much about. Would you care to join me?”

Lee was startled to hear his father laugh loud and long, “You’d tempt a saint, young lady, but I am going to go to bed.” He inclined his head courteously, “I will see you and the rest of your motley crew tomorrow morning.” The sultan squeezed Zak’s shoulders briefly before ambling out, his royal guard trailing sleepily in his wake.



“The Sultan has the right idea,” Kara said, stifling a jaw cracking yawn in Lee’s shoulder.

“Just one more thing first,” Lee said, remembering her wish.

\* \* \*

Kara groaned into Lee’s shoulder. She was going to have to have a little chat with her beloved on the concept of time off. “Tomorrow,” she said firmly, or as firmly as she could through another yawn. “Sleeeeeeeeeeep.”

“Just one more minute, I promise,” he said.

She sighed and pulled away. “You have sixty seconds. I’m counting.”

Lee smiled briefly at her before turning his attention to Gaius Baltar. “Genie, I wish for your freedom.” The lamp crumpled into sand and poured through Lee’s fingers into a heap on the floor. He looked at Baltar, who was looking exactly the same, if completely shocked. “Was that it?”

Baltar made a pained face and shut his eyes. “I’m trying to float. Am I floating?”

“You are definitely not floating,” Zak said, moving toward Baltar, who still had his eyes closed. Caprica sidled up behind the former gene and laughed lightly into his ear.

“You can open your eyes now, Gaius,” she said. Kara sighed, but did manage to refrain from rolling her eyes, at the sultry undertone, but then grew very, very still as Zak moved in entirely too close to Baltar for Kara’s peace of mind.

“Do you think everything still works the same?” Zak asked, smiling as Baltar opened his eyes to see the younger Adama prince inches from his face.

Lee muffled a laughing “very smooth, Zak,” somewhere behind Kara’s back. She would have turned to glare at him, but she was too busy being rooted to her spot in shocked dismay.

“I hear there’s a lovely hot spring,” Baltar said, leaning back into Caprica and smiling lazily at Zak. “Would you be so kind as to show it to us?”

Zak stepped back and made a sweeping gesture to the door. “After you.” He glanced over his shoulder and shot a truly dirty smile at his brother before loping after the swiftly exiting pair.

“Did that just happen?” Kara demanded, whirling to face Lee who was shaking his head in obvious amusement.

“Oh yeah,” he said grinning.

“And you’re just . . . fine with this?” she asked, thinking that maybe Lee had somehow missed the point. “It’s totally cool for your brother to be seduced like that?”

Lee laughed, hooked an arm around her neck, reeled her in close and placed a smacking, affectionate kiss on her forehead. “Who do you think was seducing whom in this scenario?”

Kara opened her mouth, but an unbidden vision popped into her mind of steam rising around Caprica's long, elegant fingers stroking through Zak Adama's hair, kissing the nape of his neck as Zak leaned forward to bite the ex-genie's collarbone. She shook her head violently, opened her mouth to speak and then closed it abruptly. There were really no words to communicate the horror.

"Stop picturing it," Lee said, his voice relaxed and drenched in humor as dry and warm as a desert breeze.

"Yeah," Kara answered, pulling away from the bad, bad thoughts. "Yeah, okay." She slumped into Lee's solid body and let him hold her up, the exhaustion finally settling in, bone deep, she could feel the dust in her pores and the dried sweat tightening her skin. "Just give me a minute."

"No hurry." Lee's arms were around her, his pulse a constant drumming in her ear, the heat of the day pulling her down further and further and further.

\* \* \*

Lee felt the second Kara slipped over the edge and fell asleep on her feet, face pressed against the side of his neck. He held her steady and watched the magic carpet perform a large, lazy loop, ending inches from their knees.

Looking around at the now empty throne room, checking for witnesses, then back to the expectant carpet, "Okay," he said.

It circled behind and underneath and, without quite understanding how they ended up that way, Lee found himself scooped up, lying flat on his back with Kara tucked into his side, completely undisturbed.

The magic carpet paused, floating in mid-air. "Wherever you want to take us," Lee told it, nosing sleepily at Kara's hair. "We have nowhere we need to be right now."

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