

## The Siren of The Desert

“Hot . . . why did it always have to be so hot,” I groaned as I marched through deeper into the desert. It had been several days since I left my village in search of water. With only a pack of rations and a few canteens of water – the last of which my family had to drink – and I set out into the sands. It had nearly been two days since my last drop of water – longer since I had any food. The scarce rations my family was able to bring together had all been eaten in six days. If it were not for a lizard I found scurrying across the sand I would have died yesterday. Its juicy meat was able to satiate my need for water and food and gave me enough energy to continue my journey.

Gazing out in all directions, I found only long stretches of sand. No water, no springs, no oasis's, and no signs of other villages or people. My only sight was the ghostly haze that covered the horizon and a tiny cloud that teased me with the idea of the shade. I looked back to the east and knew my village was there, nestled within the shade of the mountains, dying of thirst and probably of hunger. I knew it was a risk for me to take this journey. That would be one-way if water was not found

We all did.

The oldest son of every family was sent out into the directions of the compass to find help. I was told to walk west. To walk to the sands and follow the sun as it constantly set in front of me. I was to walk until I found water or death. I had hoped for the former of the two, but as my body weakened I felt it would be the latter.

The days were long, and my feet burned against the sun-baked sand. If it weren't for the small strips of leather that were bound around my feet the skin would have burned from my feet the first day my travels began. My hood and heavy cloak gave my torso and my legs coverage while my face turned even a darker brown from the harsh sun. It turned into the skin of my people. Skin that was hardened by the sun and lack of moisture in the air. Skin that showed hunger and thirst. If it weren't for my clothes I would have been baked alive two days into my journey.

At one point I had on other clothes besides my cloak, but they became too heavy and smelly and were left in the sand with my empty canteens days ago. A decision I regretted when the nights grew equally cold as the days grew warm. I could not choose which was worst, it was a day of hell for a night of ice – both horrible in their own ways.

Two days later, when my feet finally gave out underneath me and I fell face-first into the sand. The heat was unbearable as it burned against my skin, but I was too weak to move. When I woke in that

morning I knew that it would be the day that I died if I did not find water. I had prayed to my gods in hopes that one would hear my cries, but as the sun cooked my insides. I knew none had heard my pleas.

As I laid in the sand I could feel the eyes of hidden creatures within the ground as they waited for me to die. Waiting, for their food to become ready to be devoured.

*Would It be the ones from the sky or the earth that got to me first? Would they fight one another for their meal or would they share me?*

“Ooo,” I moaned as I felt the first breeze in days kiss against my face. It was refreshing and gave me what I needed to at least open my eyes. In the distance I gazed and nearly gasped at the sight.

A figure.

One so far away that I could only see the outline as it stalked towards me. Too far to save me. Too far for them to even see that the mound in the distance was a person, dying on the desert floor. I closed my eyes and another breeze brushed my face and I opened my eyes once more and saw the figure had moved closer – supernaturally closer. Every time I closed my eyes the figure was closer as if they jumped through space, closing the distance at a space that I considered otherworldly. It wasn't until they were a hundred feet away that I could see their features and I knew something had heard my prayers but it was not a spirit that I knew.

“Gods above.” I gazed upon the creature's golden skin that seemed to glow from the heat of the sun. The haze of the desert seemed to bow to the creature and give me a clear view of its beauty. Its bare feet stepped along the sand, gentle and soft as if it did not notice the fire that burned beneath its soles. A swatch of fabric hung around its waist, covering but a few inches of its thick left thigh while the other leg was given the full brunt of the sun. I saw no sign of undergarments as the cloth flowed in the wind and the creature's soft member blew along in the wind. Its upper body and face were uncovered, and unbothered by the heat from the way it swayed among the mounds. Even in the heat I could see that the deep tan that colored its body was otherworldly. Pure and untouched by strife or hardship in a land overrun by both. Its hair was white like the sand and flowed along the wind.

*How could they not burn in this heat?*

I blinked and once more it closed the gap at record speed, but showed no evidence of speed or a quickened pace. And as it drew closer I knew for certain that it was not of this world. I could now see the intricate designs of tattoos as they covered its body. Intricate lines and patterned with words that I could not read nor understand. Each marking slithered and moved along its skin like a snake, coiling around its thigh and then uncoiling to find a new location. My eyes closed once more as I felt the heat bake the last bit of life away from my skin and when I reopened them for what I assumed would be the

last time I saw its perfectly symmetrical face just inches from my own. Its white-gray eyes stared at me with the ferocity of a desert tempest. It was so beautiful but the smile – its smile was that of nightmares.

“What are you doing so far from your village mortal?” Its words were like heat personified as it blasted my face with every syllable.

“Water . . .,” I croaked, unable to say anything else. My lips cracked as I licked them, hoping for even a drop of moisture as my life faded. The creature leaned its head back and laughed. Its high voice cracked through the sky like lightning as it cackled at my misfortune.

“Such a mundane way to die.” Its hand brushed along my cheek before it clenched my chin tightly between its fingers. Its hands were warm, no not warm-hot. They felt like fire as they pressed into my face. I worried, would it burn me if it held my face for too long?

*What was this monster?*

“Such a waste of a pretty face,” It cooed as it stroked its hand along my chin. “Such a strong jaw, and large. . .” It looked along my sprawled body, “. . . muscles.” Even through the famine and the hunger my body still grew strong from labor. It grew thick cords of muscles and sharp edges while my brothers grew thin.

It released my chin and my face fell back into the sand, thankful for the cool sand for once in my horrible short life. The creature stalked around me and lifted my cloak. It growled in enjoyment as it stared at my nearly naked body. I was thankful for the undergarments that were tied tightly around my waist. “Such LARGE firm muscles,” it whispered as it dragged its heated fingertips along my bare back. They moved along the grooves of my muscles and stopped at my undergarments. Its fingers danced along the edge as if it were unsure of whether to dive deeper or not. But it did not matter to me. I was moments away from death. I could feel my soul as it began to release from my body. My eyes began to flutter closed for what I assumed was the final time, when the creature spoke once more.

“I will make a deal with you mortal.” Its voice shot through the air and held my eyes open. As if its words had the power to keep me alive for moments longer, just to hear the offer. “I will save your life. . .” The words hung in the thin air. I pushed my eyes open, drawing on the last reserves I had within my body to hear what it had to say.

*Did it actually have the power to save me?*

“. . . but it will be mine. For the next ten years of your life you will work in service to me.” Its fingers trailed up my back, pressing firm into my spine. Each strike of its finger did in fact burn as it dragged their way back to my face.

“Make a contract with me and you will not die today. You will live, not just for today, but for the next ten years frozen in this spot in time. You will not age, or grow sick or weaken. Your body will not be dependent on water or food but will be one with the desert as I am.” It lifted my face once more and its eyes swirled as if filled with a storm of possibility. “The choice is yours mortal. Live or die.” I opened my mouth to accept its offer, but words would not come. I coughed and coughed, wishing for air to fill my lungs. The creatures waited for my answer but when it saw I could not speak its smile turned downward “Pity,” the creature said as it dropped my face into the sand and stood. It brushed the sand from its wrap and began to walk away.

*Speak! Stop it! You want to live! Speak!*

My insides cried for life even as my body shut down, but somewhere within me was one last sentence.

“I . . . want to . . . live,” I said, finding the last breath of air in my lungs which pushed forth the words. Its hand appeared along my jaw once more as if they had never left. Its face closer than ever and eyes that were a mass of storms. I was lost within them, watching lightning crash through one iris and appear in another. Without another word it pressed its lips into mine. Its tongue pushed into my mouth, brushing against my own and breathed fire into my bones, bringing my body back to life. Every sensor in my body came alive as energy was poured into every muscle and bone. The pain would have been unbearable if not for its lips. Its lips, which were soft and full, and its tongue, which was skillful and long, maneuvered around my mouth and created pleasure where there was only pain. I could feel myself grow hard and press into my undergarment as its tongue roamed within my mouth and brought me back to life.

*I would live today, but at what cost?*