

The Slave Princess...Chapter 8

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Kayla ascendant !

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Although the desert sands stretch far Beyond the silent, pale horizon, Their immensity is as nothing To the new-born damselfly. For fear and anguish are to her unknown, Above the desert's vastness all alone. - The Canticle of Menkeret. We are captives; bound and almost blind, Jaano and I, and virtually helpless. Our captors are not unknown to me; they are the minions of Darrakhai. A beastly, half human breed, fit for nothing else it seems, than to do the bidding of their cruel masters; coldly and unquestioningly. They act with habitual brutality and totally without scruple but often they fumble and fail. Their stupidity is their greatest weakness, indeed it is their only weakness but it is a fatal flaw. So there may be some slim chance of us escaping them. My hands are tied but the hood over my head only serves to annoy me. I can just see through the weave in the rough cloth – enough to tell that we are in a passageway lit by torches. The spacing of the torches matches those in the rest of the House of Heshuzius, although this corridor, off the Lapis Chamber, is unknown to me. Next to me I feel Jaano's body; he is walking steadily and breathing hard. To reassure him I whisper his name and immediately a minion slaps my posterior, telling me to shut up. The thing has a gruff, bestial voice and its command is greeted with concurring growls from its companions. I estimate that there are five of them – not a great number and with the aid of my powers I could perhaps defeat them or at least surprise them long enough for us to make an escape. But I will wait. As we are still alive, there is obviously some purpose to our capture. Minions, as a breed, are stupid and lack the motivation to undertake almost anything on their own. Volition is something the Darrakhai have long ago bred out of them. But they are obedient and our abduction surely serves the designs of some master – a Darrakhai master. My curiosity is aroused and while I admit I do feel some fear, it is superseded by my desire to know why two inoffensive slaves were abducted from the house of Lord Heshuzius. We are his property by definition, making this a crime against him rather than merely a deprivation of our liberty. There is an irony for you. As we walk and stumble, I feel Jaano's shoulder brush against mine; he is still there beside me and I am comforted. Now we pause and I hear stone grinding upon stone, followed by a cool draft – a door has opened and we soon emerge into the night air. I hear horses and the creak of a cart or wagon. The minions it seems are gathering human cargo, for I soon hear the sobs of a woman before she is sharply reprimanded in snarling, bestial tones. There is silence

and I stand still until I feel rough, clawed hands lift me and place my body on wooden planks which move beneath me. We are in a wagon. I feel Jaano's body next to mine as he settles his ample frame down. I move closer to him once I am able to do so and he instinctively settles back against me. Soon I hear harshly spoken commands and the wagon moves. We follow a smooth cobbled road, so it seems that we are keeping to the confines of the city. The journey is uphill and of rather short duration; I estimate that only half an hour passes before the wagon reaches its unknown destination. Rough hands now haul us from the wagon and my feet touch cobbles. It seems that we have arrived. We are quickly pushed forward until other hands guide us through a stone door. I have worked my hands free and I carefully run my fingers along the width of the stones. I find that it is considerable. It seems we are in some fine old house. We now descend a steep stone stair for several minutes; the air is musty and I hear the sound of dripping water nearby. We are underground. At length we pause and I hear a heavy iron gate swing open on rusty hinges. I am pushed forward and my hood is suddenly removed. Although the light is poor the first thing I see is Jaano. Three other slaves are forced into the cage behind me and the door is slammed shut. The minions lock it and I see them quickly depart as though they are aware that they have just committed a series of crimes. Seeing that Jaano is unharmed, I scan the faces of our fellow captives. There are nine of us in total; four men and four women – all young and healthy and one frail old man. I recognize a pair from the House of Elalashaan and after making brief enquiries amongst the others, I discover that all the pairs taken from other houses. The old man is a keeper of books and comes from the office of the Darrakhai state archives. This is most curious, as is the fact that we are all slaves from the upper echelons – musicians, skilled pleasure slaves, dancers and personal servants of the chamber. None of the slaves have any idea what fate awaits us and the fear they feel is palpable. I advise them all to be calm and quiet while Jaano and I settle down where we can watch the room's two entrances. One is an arched portal without a door; whence we entered. The other seems to be the entrance to a passageway. Dim light comes from it and I can see the flicker of torches just beyond the threshold. The iron cage we are held in reaches to the ceiling and occupies one corner of this solid stone room – making escape highly unlikely. The room is otherwise damp and featureless. Hours pass and little is said; the silence is only broken by the distant drip of water. I estimate that the hour of dawn must be close at hand. Jaano suggests that I sleep; I refuse then find that I make the same suggestion to him a few minutes later. He smiles with some irony and puts his arm around me. His smile warms my heart and is as welcome as a lone flower in the desert wastes. Some of the others settle down to sleep but I remain vigilant. There is some great evil here; all my instincts tell me so, but until the time comes when we must confront it, we can do little but wait. Faintly now, from somewhere in the depths of this subterranean place I hear a sound; it is a scream. My fellow slaves do not hear it and Jaano only notices that I am suddenly tense. The sound rings out again after a while; seemingly louder and this time, several of the slaves notice it. They tremble and stare at the corridor. There is silence until approaching torchlight is seen and a group of minions emerge from the tunnel carrying a heavy, covered form between them. The shape is that of a body but the volume of coarse cloth covering it does not allow me to confirm this. The foul minions carry their burden up the stone stair clumsily and

exit; disappearing, I presume, into the early morning gloom. The slaves huddle closer together but they wisely remain silent. Moments pass and there are further faint screams from beyond the corridor; male screams, indicative of some dire fate. Jaano looks at me and I do my best to reassure him but all we can do is wait and watch. After several minutes the minions return and hurriedly enter the corridor. When they emerge again, they carry another covered form. One of them looks at us and smiles – their faces are profoundly ugly but never uglier than when they grin. This is a cruel, mocking grin; one that says – I know what will befall you. Once the creatures are gone, Janno draws me close and whispers, “Whatever fate awaits us Kayla, whatever horrors lie beyond that door, I cannot allow myself to go to my death without telling you that you are the quintessence of beauty, the soul of courage and the epitome of charm. You are a woman like no other that I have ever encountered. I fear our time together is short but if your face is the last thing I see before I die, I go to join the gods a joyous man. Kayla, I love you.” Again he smiles and it is as the sunrise. I look into his eyes and there the sweet sincerity of his words is reflected. “Such eloquence and such touching sentiments Jaano. I cannot but pay attention when people tell me that they love me and do it so beautifully.” “Not people Kayla; it is I that tell you this in earnest.” “I know it...I know it. I know that your heart speaks true. We have endured much my friend, you more so than I. The brief moments of love-making that we shared were sweet, nay, they were beautiful.” He smiles again and I see the autumn mist in his eyes; tranquil, melancholy and mysterious. Tears roll down his cheeks and to his credit; he does nothing to hide them. “Red blood, salt tears and hot sweat”, as we say in Mentrassanae, “are all a warrior sheds.” “You have shed all three.” I gently lick the tears from his cheeks and his salt becomes one with mine. Silently I recite the rune, Salt of my salt, blood of my blood, heart of my heart; this is Jaano, this is my love. Another trio of minions emerges from the inner rooms and once again, they bear a heavy, recumbent form swathed in coarse cloth. This time though, the leader halts his underlings before us. He turns his unspeakably ugly features and grins. He then abruptly pulls back the shroud with a vicious growl, to reveal a head lolling sickeningly on a broken neck. But it is the horror stricken face of the corpse that strikes me most. It is twisted, bloated and discoloured beyond description. Jaano holds me closer as I stare at it mute with anger. Shudders escape the throats of several of the slaves, causing the lead minion to show his yellow fangs and chuckle obscenely. The corpse is covered again and hurriedly taken up the stairs. It seems that there is some murderous schedule in place here. Once the minions have departed I fall to my knees and pray. Jaano understands and stands back; talking quietly to the other captives. I invoke Menkeret, Lord of Illuta, my god, and lines from his sacred canticle immediately enter my mind. I recite them silently; “Thine are the powers of earth, of sea and sky, Thou art the soul of truth, the universal eye With which all things behold themselves In harmony and know themselves divine; All mysteries, all subtleties are thine.” I repeat the words again and again, as is my custom, but as I prepare to say the next few lines, my mind’s eye sees a golden spindle of light. Rays of countless colours emanate from it and it shifts and glows with inner fire and life. Slowly, from the heart of that golden spindle, there emerges an otherworldly eye – penetrating, unblinking, dark and all-seeing; the holy Eye of Menkeret. Never before have I had a vision such as this! The beauty and the majesty of it are overwhelming; I am

awestruck. A voice speaks to me; it is not my own voice but a voice that is lilting, subtle and serene. It merely repeats the previous words and continues with the lines that follow, "With thundercloud and tempest, thou art one; The moon thy sister, thy glorious brother sun, The enchantments of all-embracing night, The pure, exultant glories of the light, All hearts, all minds yearning to be free, All these are manifest in thee." I find myself repeating the words, but, instinctively, I make them refer not to Menkeret but to me. "Mine are the powers of earth, of sea and sky, I am the soul of truth, the universal eye With which all things behold themselves And know themselves divine; All mysteries, all subtleties are mine ... Are mine!" The shape of the spindle shifts again and it spins faster and faster to form a figure; a form of resplendent light and colour. The eye at the centre of the figure's face looks through me to my very heart and it nods its head in assent. I am humbled. I open my eyes and stand. "Criminal of Darrakhai! Slave thief! Show your butcher's face I say!" I speak with such strength that I startle Jaano and the other slaves. I repeat what I have said at the top of my voice and Jaano looks at me as though I have taken leave of my sanity. Two grunting minions soon emerge from the inner passageway and hit the cage with the butts of their spears. This only serves to annoy me and I yell wild abuse at them; using words which they scarcely comprehend. A woman now appears; tall, distinguished, beautiful and dressed in a flowing black gown streaked with iridescent green. Her voluminous hair is as dark as mine and she wears curving black quills on her shoulders. I recognize her immediately; it is Karissha, the Lady Krotallis. I have seen her only once before but her evil reputation is well known to me. I am not surprised that she is at the heart of this crime. I raise my voice again, "Unspeakable creature, what is the meaning of this? You will have to answer to our masters." She glares at me in silence; unable to believe that such language is coming out of the mouth of a slave. Finally, through clenched teeth she hisses, "Silence! You dare to defy me!" I bow my head and remain motionless. "Seize her!" orders Krotallis and the minions fumble with the keys to the door of the cage. Jaano steps forward; ready to confront them. His courage touches my heart; truly this is a man worthy of me and deserving of my love. He grasps my hand and I press his palm reassuringly. "Let them take me," I whisper and he relents. He said earlier that I was the soul of courage. Now I must prove it. The minions swing the iron door open and pull me out roughly; fully expecting me to resist. Instead I grip their arms and try to ignore their offensive odor. "Into the chamber with her!" The minions take me down the narrow, torch lined corridor into a spacious room with a roaring fire at the far end. Krotallis follows close behind; her boots tapping confidently on the flagstones. I am led to the centre of the room where a huge table stands. It is covered with books and all manner of instruments, bottles and apothecary's jars. I glance at the labels on some of the bottles and I find that they all contain poisons. The Lady Krotallis, it seems is experimenting with deadly substances. This is the reason for her need for slaves! I do my best to look unconcerned. She orders her minions to stand back and I drop my shoulders to seem humble before her. "Show me your hands slave," she orders. Her voice is low but retains its menace. I comply with humility and she steps forward to look at my hands. "You do not seem to have done much manual labour. From where were you taken?" "From the House of Heshuzius." "And how did you serve there?" "I was...I am private secretary to Itellysia, Lady Heshuzius." I look her in the eye fleetingly and there detect a note of

anxiety. Perhaps her minions in their stupidity have exceeded their orders in raiding the house of Lord Heshuzius. Krotallis now walks around me and finally grasps the turquoise necklace that I still wear. "A costly bauble. Your service must have pleased Itellysia greatly for her to have awarded you this." "Indeed mistress, to serve is my only desire." "You call me mistress humbly, yet earlier you were grossly insolent." "Mistress, forgive me, but I do not want to share the fate that befell... those others." She stares at me coldly; tilting her head to the side. "You are exquisitely beautiful but your features are not those of Naeuss or Zonovon or Krotonae and you are far too refined to be an islander. Where are you from?" "Alas mistress, I do not know. I am an orphan. I was cast ashore at Archelon in Naeuss, lashed to a ship's timber. I was as naked as you see me now. A priest of the order of the Kemenivary found me and brought me up. I served in their chapel before the Darrakhai conquest." She seems unconvinced by my claims and continues to stare at me in silence for several long moments. Finally she asks, "What is your name?" "Kayla." She does not question me further but walks to the table and returns with an ivory box. Opening it, she removes a thick, disc shaped, silver object on a chain and hands it to me. "Do you know what this is?" I look at the object and I am filled with awe. It is an ancient Mentrassan reliquary of exceedingly fine craftsmanship. Wrought of silver and adorned with agates, onyx and carnelians; it is a hallowed object that would have been owned, prized and venerated by many generations of my people since the time of its making. I turn it over and over in my hands, pretending not to take too great an interest in it. The reliquary is engraved with brief texts and although the language is archaic and obscure, I glean that it is sacred to the serpent god Nehebkaui, the Bestower of Dignities; a protective deity. "Well girl? Do you know what this object is?" "No mistress, but it looks valuable." "Obviously," she sneers, taking the reliquary and placing it back in the ivory box. Her tone swiftly changes to one of gentle ease and I find this most unsettling. "Come, Kayla, sit with me here and I will talk to you." "Aye mistress." She leads me to a huge, fur strewn bed near the fireplace. We sit. "My, you are most exquisitely beautiful. It must have been hard for you being an orphan and the Kemenivary are such an austere sect. Whatever distant land gave you birth my dear, it must surely be a place of wonders. Do you have no recollection of it?" "My Lady is most kind. As to my homeland..." "Yes." "Sometimes I dream, I dream of soaring cliffs and of turquoise seas, of dark mountain ranges and splendid, shimmering cities on the edge of vast jeweled deserts." "Is that all?" "No, above all this, high above the very sun himself there is....there is an eye, the eye that sees all and knows all, the eye that is subtle and watches eternally. But mistress, I do not care for these dreams, they frighten me. And the voices, the voices relentlessly call me to return but I know not where. I hate my dreams!" Krotallis stares at me, her eyes wide with fascination. I have obviously pleased her. With a note of condescension she says, "Hush child, such as we do not fear these things. They are revelations from the gods." "Such as we?" Now she smiles, thinking that we share some common bond. She is grossly mistaken. "Aye, we are much alike you and I. You must stay with me here Kayla. I would hear more of these dreams of yours and perhaps I may be able to help you interpret them." As she says this I feel her gloved hand running down my back. It seems my fatal charms are at work once again. I smile at her and she is pleased. Now she pushes me back onto the luxurious furs; they are so soft and cool that I shiver pleasantly. She meets my mouth with hers

and I kiss her tenderly for an instant. She withdraws and gazes deep into my eyes; seeking some acknowledgement. I smile and take her hand. I carefully remove her glove and I place her white hand upon my tanned breasts. She rubs them and tweaks my nipples. "Ah, if only I possessed true beauty such as this." "You do my lady, you do." She says nothing but smiles coldly. She turns and I unfasten her shimmering gown. Her body is pale but her breasts are fine and her skin is smooth. She is shapely, after a fashion, and soon my curiosity gets the better of me and I let my hands explore her body. Our mouths meet and I taste her perfumed breath. Fine as the Lady Krotallis is I am ever mindful of her evil ways and that my life, Jaano's life and the lives of the others may depend upon what I say and do here. Now I slide her dress further down to reveal a lick of black hair above her pussy. Her legs are long and quite decorous, but white as though she habitually shuns the light of day. Now our eyes meet and I make a great show of licking my hand. My tongue is broad and honed upon many a fine cock; my lips glisten with the ripe juices of my mouth. I slowly paint a line between her breasts, down her body and finally my fingers rest at the entrance to her pussy. I begin to rub it and the Lady Krotallis reciprocates by swaying her hips in time with me. Up and down I press her labia and soon her juices flow, wetting my fingers. I smile. "You have a fine, sweet pussy my lady. I yearn to taste it." "Proceed," she answers with such formal coldness that I find it disturbing. I can do nothing but smile and slowly work my fingers past the threshold into her silky depths. Once she is wet enough I smear her juices onto her clit and work them in. Circling around it and making her moan at last. I press my fingers into the flesh of her thighs and gently spread her pussy. It is a beautiful thing. I lap at it gently, letting my tongue dip inside to savour the richness there. I would be lying if I said I do not enjoy tasting a woman. After several minutes I apply more pressure with my lips and tongue, slipping one then two fingers into her drenched slit. Krotallis responds by pressing my face closer to her pussy. Soon she is bucking and moaning; her strange eyes aflame with passion. She comes easily and I am glad. In pleasing her I may have bought myself some time. Once the waves of her ecstasy have subsided, she rubs her breasts and settles back on the furs, still breathing hard. I can see from the look upon her face that she is sated. "Ah Kayla, you know your love craft." I smile and bow exaggeratedly but secretly I dread what this woman will do next. I know that she is prone to violence. Indeed I could easily kill her but that would be unwise at this juncture. "Kayla, you will perform for me. Let me see just how skilled you are in the lover's arts." Again I bow and she claps her hands. A young female slave appears and is ordered to fetch food and wine. Then, with a sly smile, Krotallis adds, "Tell Etrek and Paask to join us, and hurry!" We sit quietly while Krotallis catches her breath. Unknown to her, I enter the state of arru-sha and with my invisible tendrils of energy I seek out her heart. Black and stony though it is, it beats delicately and resonates in my mind like a crystal sphere struck by the nail on my finger. I would shatter it gladly. With another tendril I seek out the pleasure centers and sensitive nerve endings in her pussy. These I stimulate subtly while reluctantly letting go of her other organ. Her time will come. The food arrives as does a goodly measure of wine. I am disappointed to see that there are only various fruits upon the platter and only one goblet. It soon becomes clear that the Lady will not share the bounty of her house. But these thoughts are soon dismissed by the arrival of Etrek and Paask. They are tall and lean; athletic after a fashion and

handsome. One is dark and his features could be those of Zonovon but the other is like no man I have ever seen; having golden hair, fair skin and pale blue eyes. I am pleased with both of them but the golden haired fellow intrigues me. That they are slaves is obvious and it makes me happy to know that I will give them pleasure. "Kayla, you shall perform for me. Use these two as you will, command them if you wish but entertain me and I will reward you well and not with mere trifles such as those that Itellysia gives you." "My lady is most kind." I stand and approach the pair. I can see in their eyes that they desire me and I am pleased. "Which of you is Etrek?" The dark featured one answers and I recognize the accents of the Zon language. I meet his eyes and smile then I nod to golden-haired Paask, acknowledging him also. I stand between them and run my hands over their muscles. They are firm and heavy like the limbs of trees in their prime. Now I remove their few garments and drop to my knees. I marvel at how fine their cocks are and already, even before I have touched them, they are hardening. I look up and smile at them both as I take hold of each cock. I slide their foreskins back in unison and each cock begins to grow in my hand. Both men look down at me in expectation and I do not hesitate. I take Etrek's cock in my mouth first; tasting his sweet manhood. They are both anointed with rare scents and taste delicious. Etrek's cock fills my mouth and I do my best to lick its entire length starting at the hard head and working my tongue all the way along the underside of his shaft. His cock is thick and curves up in a pleasing arc. Already I am imagining that arc filling me and stretching my pussy to its silky depths. The men's hands are not idle either and I feel them caressing my hair. After several long moments working the underside of Etrek's cock, I turn my attention to its head. I lick it all over, working my tongue upon it in circles, making it as wet with my sweet juices as I can. Once I am satisfied, I grasp the head of Etrek's cock with my hand and continue to pump it. I now turn my attention to Paask's cock. It is long and points upwards at a most pleasing angle. What is more, his balls are heavy and ripe; swinging free like choice fruit. Paask's cock feels totally different to Etrek's; it is slender and smooth, thick at the base and tapering. He tastes wonderful, making my mouth water and I feel his hand gently stroke my cheek; such is the kinship of slaves. I am glad to repay his kindness and I lick his cock with growing relish. My hand reaches up and grasps his balls; I massage them gently, teasing him and fanning his growing arousal. My mouth is aflame and I lick and wet the entire length and width of Paask's cock with growing delight. I hear him breathing and a bead of sweat drops from his brow. I am pleased. I am the fire! Krotallis has told me to take charge of these two and so I will. When I am satisfied that each of them is hard enough, I order Paask to lie on his back and I position my clit over his mouth and bend my knees until I reach his lips. He wastes no time and soon tingles of pleasure are racing up my spine. Now I take Etrek's arm and make him stand behind me. I pull my pussy lips apart enticingly but Etrek needs no encouragement. I feel him rubbing the head of his cock between my pussy lips then he plunges into my slit, filling me beautifully. I am already wet and dripping and he slides in with luxurious ease. Paask has a very skillful tongue and I feel him circle and stroke my clit lovingly as he caresses my thighs. Shivers of pleasure now flood over me and I moan and sigh. Etrek meanwhile grips my hips and thrusts his cock deep into me; slowly and strongly, showing immense self control. I thrust back with each of Etrek's strokes while Paask does his best to lick my pulsing clit. After glancing at Krotallis and seeing that she is enjoying

our play, I decide to call a switch. I lie down and order Paask to fill my pussy while Etrek hovers over my mouth and I take his glistening cock between my lips. Oh how gloriously wet it is with my juices! Soon I have licked it clean and I grasp it by the base; squeezing it hungrily. Etrek is so hard that I feel he may be close to the brink. I pump his cock for several long minutes; increasing the speed and pressure until I feel him tense. Beads of sweat fall from his brow onto my face and delight me; there is fire in his soul. I put all of my energies into Etrek's cock and soon spurt after spurt of thick white erupts from its tip and snakes across the space between us; four, five, six times until he is spent. I rub the remainder sensuously into the skin of his cock and I hear Krotallis howl with satisfaction. Evidently, my lady is pleased with us. While Etrek rests I grip Paask's shoulders. He is indeed a finely built man and I call upon the gods of his homeland; whoever they are, to protect him. He does not smile but gazes into my eyes with deep passion. I smile faintly back at him and open my mouth to lick my lips. This is his cue and I now feel his cock cleave its way deep into my slit; my ravenous, burning pussy. I buck up against him hard and he is encouraged by this to thrust even harder. I am no delicate flower. Now I grasp his neck and marvel at his long, golden hair as it falls over his shoulders. My legs wrap around his waist and I feel the full impact of his hips bearing down upon my pussy. I am wetter than I have ever been; a limp but willing doll in the grips of a machine. But I am in command, so I order Paask to stop and he is quite content to do so. Etrek has meanwhile worked his cock into readiness and I lie between them. I instruct Paask to enter me from behind and Etrek to fill me from the front. With both cocks in my slick pussy I enjoy the rare sensation of unequalled fullness. By now I have worked them both up into an ecstatic frenzy so with no hesitation, both men thrust into me. They do so alternately; attaining greater and greater force as they give themselves over to lust; lust for me. My pussy is wet and ravenous and I grasp my breasts and lick my lips while turning my body totally over to the skill of these exquisite examples of male flesh. Waves of pleasure soon fill me to my core and my eyes roll back into my skull. The faster and faster the two cocks work inside me, the more and more do I want them. I tingle and I heave as their arms hold me; rubbing my ass, my breasts, my shoulders and my thighs. Their hands are firm, strong and sensual, like the waves of the ocean; this ocean of our making, this ocean of flesh. At last pleasure overcomes me and my body sings in ecstasy. Golden waves pass through my every fibre, settle into my very soul and only slowly fade. I am sated. Now I feel the thick cords of man inside me tense and harden to that last degree. In no time at all, I feel gushes of warm white filling me and overflowing in their bounty. Both men groan and sigh; their sounds and mine are an ode to our prowess as lovers. Krotallis laughs; she too is obviously delighted. "Oh well done, my pets, well done. I will reward you all well. Now Paask and Etrek, leave us, I would be alone with Kayla." Not without a tinge of regret, I watch as the two men bow to her silently and leave. Fare thee well my dear friends, may the gods of thy fathers watch over thee. "Now Kayla, your little performance was so entertaining, so appetizing in fact that it has left me hungry for more. More of your fingers, tongue and lips." * * * * * I stare at Krotallis' sleeping face for a long time. She is beautiful, but her beauty is not of Mentrassanae. Her hair is course and her skin is pallid and thin, as are her lips. Were it not for the copious powders, khols and rouges that the women of Darrakhai apply to their faces, her veins would show. Hers is a face that the

sun knows not, the face of a shadowy, subterranean creature; a troglodyte. I smile cruelly at her naked slumbering form. "Troglodyte," I whisper disdainfully as I swing my legs to the floor. I walk into the middle of the great room silently. The minions and the girl-slave all seem to have retired as have Etrek and Paask. I am alone. My eye now falls upon the ivory box. It lies upon the table amidst a variety of nameless, arcane and indescribably obscene objects. I can only surmise that the Lady Krotallis has pretensions of becoming a witch or at the very least an arch-poisoner. I pick up the box and remove the reliquary. What a beautiful object it is; a jewel and a potent symbol of power. It may contain a tiny consecrated stone or shell or a sacred sycamore leaf. My hand trembles as I look once again at its inscriptions. I am unfamiliar with the rites of Mehenkau but my intuition tells me that this object could be of great value to me. To the right of the stairs I notice a heavy iron door. I approach it cautiously and try the handle. It is locked but the lock seems to be old and of crude manufacture. Quickly I place the reliquary around my neck and it comes to rest snugly between my breasts. I place my hand upon the lock and enter the state of arru-sha. I am amazed when the lock immediately clicks open and I feel the reliquary humming faintly against my skin. I imagine that it must act to amplify and focus my powers. This is sorcery indeed! I push the door gently open and step into the room. It is a long, dim ante-chamber and I can see light and another, larger room at the far end. Stored along and upon the walls of the ante-chamber are many fine weapons and all manner of precious objects: the plundered wealth of those hapless peoples conquered by the Darrakhai. Precious stones, silver and gold gleam even in the dim light and it seems that every object my eye falls upon is lavishly adorned with turquoise, sardonyx, carnelian and lapis lazuli. At the end of the room there is a short flight of stairs. This leads me to a sunken, circular chamber and I immediately recall the Lapis Chamber in the House of Heshuzius. But there the comparison ends. The sights that greet me in this room fill me with horror. Row upon row of raised stone benches fill half the room. Upon most of these there is a human body – and all are dead. They are naked, twisted, tortured and discoloured. I approach one and stare into his face. It is a man barely older than me with dark blotches disfiguring most of his face. But the expression he wears chills me to the bone. I look at several more and they are all the same; men and women, all slaves and now mercifully dead. As far as I can ascertain their ages vary as do the build of their bodies but they are united in one thing; the horror struck expressions on their faces – desolate faces, devoid of hope, forever lost to the twin evils of war and thralldom. My attention is now drawn to a huge glass and metal box in the centre of the room. The poor quality glass that this receptacle is chiefly made of indicates that it is of recent Darrakhai manufacture. The lid is securely locked. 'T is well too for inside are numerous smooth, grey globules, each about the size of a large grapefruit. They move about slowly as though on stubby legs. I crouch down to peer at them more closely. They are indeed alive and only slowly do I realize what they are – ulwy. The ulwy is a rare, poisonous, parasitic tick but at their largest they grow only to about the size of a pea. Their bite initially has a narcotic and hallucinogenic effect but once they settle down to feed, their poisonous saliva causes their victims great pain and suffering. Even after one is removed, the unfortunate victim has only a slow, agonizing death in store. I look back at the bodies. Krotallis has bred these to attain monstrous proportions, possibly over many years and at the cost of who knows how many lives. They are clearly

two hundred times their natural size and I estimate that their poison is also that much more virulent. Suddenly I feel the reliquary of Mehenkau tingle against my skin. "So, my pretty slave, I see you have discovered my secret vocation." I whirl around to find Krotallis facing me flanked by two of her minions. "Murderer!" I spit at her. Surprisingly, she looks a little hurt by my accusation and in an almost weary voice replies, "I prefer to think of myself as a seeker after truth." Her expression then changes as her eyes notice the reliquary about my neck. Now her face is filled with triumph. "I was right! You do know what that object is. It is no mere pretty bauble. You are a Mentrassan!" I say nothing but simply glare at her and back slowly away. I know I am trapped. The minions advance instinctively but Krotallis holds them back. Her tone is conciliatory. "Kayla, listen to me. I knew straight away that you were no mere slave. I have read about Mentrassanae, about Menkeret and your people's total mastery of sorcery. I would learn more. Stay and work with me and you shall have riches, power and freedom. Together we can be lovers and in time we can rule Darrakhai and carve out an empire the like of which the world has never seen." I listen to her empty words, dripping with insane ambition but I continue to retreat. My situation is desperate. Quietly I ask, "What does one such as you know of Menkeret?" There is now a fervent note of hope in her voice as though she is already at the threshold of undreamt of power. "I know that he is the source of all mysteries and the door of all subtleties, the wellspring of magic and the god of love." "Every Mentrassan child knows that...you have much to learn." "You must teach me!" I am now standing with my back before the wall of the chamber. There is no escape. Krotallis stands still, keeping her distance and the minions are right behind her. There is a look of deep yearning in her eyes; her desire for knowledge is admirable but the means she has thus far used to attain it are abhorrent. Suddenly the reliquary hums and my attention is somehow drawn to my right. There, lying upon one of the stone benches, I see the shattered body of an old woman; her long grey hair, pendulous earlobes and deeply lined face are as familiar and as dear to me as my father's wise green eyes. It is old Talhrana. I stare at her face; disfigured by the ulwy's venom; her mouth frozen in a silent scream, and I am mute with rage. "Well, what is your answer Kayla?" I place my hand upon the reliquary and enter the state of arru-sha. Immediately the next lines from the canticle enter my mind and again, I intuitively change the sentence endings to refer to me. As I speak I raise my arms theatrically and address Krotallis. "With thundercloud and tempest, I am one; The moon my sister, my glorious brother sun, The enchantments of all-embracing night, The pure, exultant glories of the light; All hearts, all minds yearning to be free, All these are manifest in me!" Krotallis looks understandably confused and as my voice reaches a crescendo with the last line, I become aware that two spindles of light have appeared on either side of me. It is pulsing, multicoloured light as in my vision earlier. I am greatly surprised and only now do I notice that the reliquary is warm, humming and pulsing strongly next to my skin. Krotallis sees the twin lights and now there is a note of fear in her eyes. The spindles quickly resolve themselves into tall figures; composed of indescribable colour and incandescent light. I step back against the wall as the figures advance upon the Darrakhai woman. "What treachery is this? I offered you a kingdom, I offered you power over multitudes!" I say nothing as the figures raise their arms and bear down on her. I hear Krotallis order her minions to protect her but instead they flee. She shouts

abuse at them but soon her shouts turn into screams. The light is now blinding in its intensity and I turn away, crouching down behind the stone bench upon which Talhrana's body lies. Krotallis howls in agony but her pains are short lived. Suddenly there is silence and the light fades. I peer around the bench and see only a dark crumpled form where she stood. The unearthly figures have vanished and the reliquary has returned to its former inert state. Slowly I emerge from my meager refuge and walk up to the form on the floor. While it retains the outline of a human body, it has totally turned to dust and is unrecognizable. "I reject your offer my lady...the price is too high." In their vast container, the ulwy too are turned to dust; it is just as well. I leave the chamber of death and do not look back. In the long antechamber I pause to select a slender sword and a matching leather gauntlet studded with iron. The sword is balanced and feels good in my hand. The fleeing minions will have raised the alarm by this time. So if I encounter any foe, I will be prepared. But the dark chambers of Krotallis are silent and empty. Perhaps the minions have fled the house, fearing their mistress' wrath or dreading her fate. In any case I am mightily pleased and when I emerge from the narrow passage I am greeted by the astonished faces of the slaves; none of them more so than Jaano's. I raise my hand for silence. "With the gods, I am triumphant my friends. I will set you free." "But do you have the key?" asks one old man. "No need." I place my finger upon the lock and I enter arru-sha for but a second. The lock clicks open loudly and the slaves emerge. Last to do so is Jaano; helping the old man to his feet and guiding him out. I am then barraged with questions, "- We saw the minions flee in terror, did you summon a demon to defeat them?" "-I prayed to the goddess Khemnaia to deliver us, are you the goddess?" "Silence! Hear me. Now you are all free to go. Return to your masters or take your chances and run. Fare thee well." Without further ado, I open the upper door; the slaves rapidly exit and disappear into the cool late morning light. Before leaving the old man turns to me and bows, "I know you now for the goddess that you are my lady. Forgive me, I can offer you nothing but I thank you for my deliverance." "There is no need my friend. Now away with you, be gone." Jaano smiles as we watch the old man shamble down the street. I feel his arm entwine my body. He kisses my cheek. "And what are we to do Kayla?" "We are going to return to the house of Heshuzius." "Oh?" "Aye, to rescue the Princess Raia of Zonovon, your future queen." * * * * * Thine are the powers of earth, of sea and sky, Thou art the soul of truth, the universal eye With which all things behold themselves In harmony and know themselves divine; All mysteries, all subtleties are thine. With thundercloud and tempest, thou art one; The moon thy sister, thy glorious brother sun, The enchantments of all-embracing night, The pure, exultant glories of the light, All hearts, all minds yearning to be free, All these are manifest in thee. - The Canticle of Menkeret. Coming soon...Chapter 9 of The Slave Princess.