

KATE SEXTON

*Awakening
the Essence*

A Novel

BOOK ONE OF THE SIREN CHRONICLES

Praise for
Awakening the Essence
Book One of The Siren Chronicles

..Kate Sexton explores a fascinating alternate universe with a radical past that isn't entirely unbelievable, thanks to strategic interweaving of known historical fact. Rory is an exquisitely three-dimensional character: the relevant parts of her past are explained, and her present situation and the new abilities she seems to have developed are rendered flawlessly, allowing readers to experience each new sensation as Rory does. Sexton's premise, that of an ancient feminist culture decimated by male sociopaths, a history remembered only by the last remaining members of an ancient race, will surely appeal to many new age, modern-thinking women.

—Holly Scudero, *San Francisco Book Review*
Four Stars out of Five

It is an exciting and engaging multi-layered story that just might entice readers to do their own research on the ancient ways—or at the very least, to enjoy the next volume, due to be released in 2013.

—Kristine Morris, *ForeWord Reviews*
Four Stars (out of Five)

“In *Awakening the Essence*, Sexton brings us a very readable romp, painting a picture of ancient history and bolting us forward to current L.A. and France. This playful novel blends fantasy, mythology, history and the human experience, at once, urging you to keep reading for both the knowledge and the fun of it! Lots of symbolism, mystery and subliminal sensuality, something for everyone, including language, anthropology, music, and even theology! Enjoy the essence!”

—Madeleine Dow, co-founder,
Boomers Book Club

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Book One of the Siren Chronicles



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Dedicated with profound love to my mother, Dorothy Brailey Sexton, who passed away at age ninety-six as this book was being readied for publication. She was a daily testament to the incredible spirit of a strong woman. When I was young we did not always agree, but having her live with me these past eight years as I wrote *Awakening the Essence*, she opened my eyes to another perspective on what is strength; that it can be gentle yet firm, protective yet freeing.

Mom, you and Dad gave me a superb childhood, allowed me to follow my dreams, and supported me in all my fanciful adventures. I am grateful for your perpetual love and belief in me, even when you weren't 100% sure what I was doing or why. You both were always there for me.

Dorothy Brailey Sexton 1913 to 2009
E Ray Sexton 1912 to 1998

*When the Power of Love
Overcomes the Love of Power
The World Will Know Peace*

Jimi Hendrix

CHAPTER ONE

And then the dream changed...

Twilight descended as he carried her outside into the warm night air, rich and pungent with the fragrances of the wild. Her body pulsed in his arms, sensations racing through every fiber of her being. They crossed a vast meadow. He laid her down on the ground near the edge of a cliff. Rugged, odd-shaped mountains stood etched against the horizon. The last rays of the sun colored the clouds with vibrant ribbon of magenta and coral. A cool night breeze blew his long blonde hair gently across her face.

He left her now and crossed to a large pile of stacked logs and ignited a fire. Flames engulfed the entire mound soaring up against the darkening sky. He returned to her, whispering soothing words as he lifted her into his arms, placing a soft kiss on her forehead. Her cheek rested on his chest as he began to chant, the rhythm so hypnotic she drifted in space. A warm glow enveloped her.

His arms tightened as he pulled her closer against his chest, his breathing changing. His fingers laced through her hair, pulling it.

He was crying.

“Why are you crying?” she asked. “Please don’t cry.”

Waves of pain poured forth from him, and she felt a tremendous sadness surround her. She strained to say something, to comfort him, but he did not respond.

His anguish increased, frightening her with its depth. He cried as his whole body shook in tormented convulsions with her trapped inside his arms, his strength enormous as she struggled to free herself.

“Stop, please stop,” she begged, but he continued, pressing her head into his shoulder with such force he rendered her helpless. His other hand was on her back now, pressing it tight against his body. Panic gripped her.

“Stop, stop,” she pleaded, trying to turn her face, but his grip grew stronger.

“I can’t breathe,” she gasped. “Why is this happening? Why are you doing this?”

Rory Forsythe awoke with the force of the dream still surging through her body. She could feel the man’s strength as if he was holding her, the strange sensations emanating from him flowed through her body. Her mind wanted back in the dream, back to that beautiful meadow as the sun set and a fire blazed. Slowly, she opened her eyes. The moon shone through jagged branches above her, revealing her resting spot. She lay sprawled across a tree whose broken, prickly limbs stabbed her back. Stiff, in pain and exceedingly thirsty, she pulled herself upright. Her shoulder-length blonde hair matted and tangled, was snagged on a branch. She winced as she yanked it loose, strand by painful strand.

Scattered clouds floated in the night sky while a few stars pulsed and twinkled. The air vibrated between her and the heavens, as if it were thick and breathing. She waved her hand and watched a current ripple before her eyes.

Rory took stock of her situation; no broken bones, but her head vibrated from the sounds and scents of nature. Her entire

body ached a deep penetrating pain through her bones.

This couldn't be the meadow in my dream, Rory thought. *Where am I?* Gradually she struggled to her feet, but her leg muscles cramped and she fell onto the cold ground. Somewhere in the darkness lay her Jimmy Choos, but they weren't made for hiking on mountains. Holding onto the tree, Rory drew herself more erect. A blast of cool moist air lifted her bangs from her damp forehead.

Where's Vivianne? Weren't we cruising through the French countryside? Hadn't we been celebrating her win as Best Actress at Cannes? Had they been followed to this secluded spot and robbed? She touched her wrist: her beloved Rolex Pearlmaster was still there. *What's going on?*

The moonlight exposed the rocky ground around her. Headlights from a car passing up the hillside flashed out across the sky.

Climb up; get help, her foggy mind commanded. Her senses in hyperdrive, she heard the tiny sounds of animals scurrying away as she climbed to the top of the ridge. Below lights shimmered in the distance, marking a village.

A car rounded the bend. Rory stumbled into the road, waving her arms.

"Stop, please help me!" she yelled.

The car swerved to miss her and sped away out of sight.

"Hey, thanks a lot," she screamed after it.

Another car approached, its engine not revving as fast as the first. She positioned herself near the road's edge and waved her arms. This driver slowed to a stop, his headlights shining on her. She stumbled toward the left side of the car.

"Help me, please," she said, as the driver rolled down the window.

"You hurt, *mon ami*?" he asked in a French accent.

"Nothing broken, but I am banged up."

"I take you to doctor in Cagnes-sur-Mer. It there," he said,

gesturing to the lights below.

Rory felt in her pockets and retrieved an electronic room key with the inscription, *Majestic Barrière – Cannes* printed on the front. Vivianne would be at the hotel, and worried to death about her.

“Please, I must get back to the Majestic in Cannes.” She showed the key to the man.

When he hesitated, she sensed he was nervous and unsure of the battered woman at his door.

“I will pay you,” she offered, waving her key. “I do have money, but at the Majestic Hotel. Please, I need your help. Will you drive me?”

He sat for a moment, staring at her. “Oui, I drive you,” he said as he got out of his aging Fiat and helped her into the car.

She didn’t speak French, which made for little conversation with the driver. She rode the thirty miles in silence, though her mind jumped and whirled so much she could not organize her thoughts. The engine sounds fractured her hearing. Her head throbbed as the raging sounds overwhelmed her. Trying to ignore the claustrophobia of the tiny car took most of her energy, so she concentrated on reconstructing what happened.

I must have a concussion, she decided. I’ll have a doctor come to the hotel after I find Vivianne. Were we kidnapped or robbed? Weren’t we together?

She was extremely hypersensitive, which made her anxious. Normally, she was the calm cool one. *Relax and it will all come back. Once I see a doctor, he will stop all of these sounds in my head.*

When they arrived at the hotel, Rory asked the man to come in with her for money, but he shook his head no and drove off. She entered the grand lobby and staggered past the tall marble pillars toward the elevator.

I must look a wreck, she realized by the stares of the few people in the lobby. It was well after 3 a.m.

Fortunately, Maurice was behind the front desk tending to paperwork, his head down. He had been her nighttime contact the past ten days on whether the paparazzi were waiting in the lobby to attack Vivianne.

“Thank God you are working tonight, Maurice,” she gasped. “I’ve forgotten my room number.”

Maurice looked up, shock streaming across his face.

“Do I look that bad? Not sure what happened, but I need a bath and probably the police. I think I was mugged. Have you seen Vivianne?”

Maurice grabbed the telephone, punched a number and whispered into the receiver, nervously glancing at Rory.

“I have my key,” she said, waving the plastic card. “I’ve just forgotten the room number. Will you tell me, please?”

Henri Lamonte, the hotel security chief, rushed to the registration desk. He had been there every night to keep aggressive fans at bay.

She smiled. “Hi Henri.”

Both men stared at Rory.

“OK, what’s the matter? You both know me,” she stated, sensing bewilderment from Henri, and fear from Maurice. The vibrations penetrated deep inside her head.

Henri touched her shoulder, tilting her head up which caused her bright turquoise eyes to refract the light back. “It’s really her,” he whispered. “Only *Mademoiselle* Forsythe had these eyes.”

“*Sacrè Mère*, it is a miracle,” Maurice stammered, making the sign of the cross.

“What’s going on here?” Rory was on the verge of losing her patience. Terrible waves of emotion washed over her from the men, pounding, contradicting, and battering her.

“*Mademoiselle*, I am so relieved. I do not know what to say. Please forgive me.”

A wave of pain swept up through Rory’s legs. She put one hand on the desk to steady herself.

Henri reached out to her. “Ah,” he said, expelling a deep breath. “There’s been a terrible accident, a terrible mistake.” He picked up a newspaper from the desk, folded to the front page, and handed it to her. “Look here.”

The paper had a photograph of Vivianne, a second photo of a burnt skeleton of a car on a mountainside, and near the bottom of the page, was a small picture of her. “What’s this all about?” she asked.

“Everyone thought you – well, there were two bodies in the car, and you both left that morning together,” Henri replied, regaining his composure. “Please, let me take you to your room.” He took hold of her arm. “Maurice, call the police and our general manager. Both need to come here immediately. And call Dr. Guyerre.”

“What body in what car?” She could not read French, but a solid wall of horror and sorrow washed over her from the men. “Where is Vivianne? I want to see Miss Raye right now!”

“I’m very sorry *Mademoiselle*. Miss Raye was...in the car.”



Rory swam through a multitude of emotions. She met with the police, the hotel manager, and a doctor. They said she had been missing three days and that her mother was to arrive in two days to retrieve both bodies and their belongings.

The police had retraced their excursion, first to Grasse, then east to Tournettes-sur-Loup where she and Vivianne had eaten lunch. Little by little Rory reconstructed the afternoon, including them offering a vacationing schoolteacher a lift after her car broke down by the side of the road. Rory had been asleep in the back seat of the convertible when the accident occurred. She awoke to the car tilting in the air and throwing her into space. From that moment until waking, she remembered nothing.

After forty-five minutes of questioning, the doctor ended the

meeting, ordering her to take a sleeping potion. Rory called her mother before the news hit the wires that she was alive.

“Please get here quick, Mom. This is a nightmare. Everything is out of sync—eerie, very crystal-like and sensitive.”

“I’ll get the first possible flight,” said Anne. “Papa and Grandma will be thrilled to learn you’re alive.” Anne paused. “I can’t find Christine. Just like her to disappear when her daughter dies. Are they sure Vivianne is really dead? There’s no chance this is all a mistake?”

“I know she’s dead. The police have her necklace.”

Since her birth twenty-three years ago, Vivianne Raye had been an integral part of Rory’s extended family. Vivianne’s mother Christine was one of Rory’s many “cosmic aunts,” so ordained by her mother. As a rock-and-roll publicist, Anne was a keeper of lost women who floated through her life and work.

Christine was a notorious, aging groupie who’d spent the last twenty-five years touring with rock stars, travelling too much to ever hold a job for more than a month or two. She and Vivianne lived with Rory and Anne most of the time, making Vivianne more a little sister than a friend. Multi-talented since she first could speak, Vivianne sang, danced, and acted. Since seventh grade, there had been no turning back. Vivianne Raye was going to be a star.

Rory took her leap of faith onto the speeding Vivianne express when she accompanied her on a commercial audition seven years ago. With no fear or hesitation, Vivianne nailed the audition and walked out the door with the part. Rory never regretted her decision to become Vivianne’s manager, even though it meant quitting a coveted marketing job with MTV.

Using her innate sense of timing, and years of publicity training gained through osmosis by watching her mother, Rory conceived and executed a career plan for Vivianne. Phase One was to select strong roles with real dialogue — no airheads or teenage horror queens. When *Elmwood*, a searing portrayal of the dysfunction

of suburban America as seen through the eyes of a truth-seeking sixteen-year-old, arrived on her desk, it became the vehicle for Vivianne. Phase Two culminated a few days ago with Vivianne winning best actress at the Cannes Film Festival in 1998. Phase Three was to start this week – a march to the Oscars.

“How did it happen?” Anne asked cautiously, snapping Rory out of her memories.

“I don’t know,” Rory said, pulling away from her thoughts. “I climbed in the back of the car to go sleep. This woman was in front with Vivianne. I was in the back without my seatbelt. When the accident happened, I was thrown free into a tree.”

“It’s amazing you’re alive.”

“I know. The doctor was surprised. The police want me to go back out there and see if I can remember anything else. I’m not even sure where it happened.” Rory paused. “What are we going to do now without her?”

“I don’t know. She was so young, so talented,” Anne’s muffled sob came over the line.

A wave of grief swept through Rory that she was not prepared to accept. “I’ve got to get some sleep, Mom,” she said, not ready for more powerful emotions. “Get here as fast as you can.”



Julien Weiss stared out the window as a gray dawn lightened his beloved Swiss Alps, guilt-ridden that he had not contacted Aurora. What made him decide that thirty-five would be an appropriate age to bring her home? Why did he think no harm would come to her?

“You’re losing it, old man,” he scolded himself, running his fingers through his wispy salt-and-pepper hair. Had he grown so arrogant in his private world of manipulating money that he had mistakenly played with Aurora’s life?

A knock on his sitting room door broke his thoughts. “Herr

Weiss?"

"Enter."

Wilhelm, his personal assistant, peered around the door. "Sir, there is very interesting news,"

"What news?"

"There is word from the police station in Cannes of a survivor."

"Survivor?"

"Security Director Martini's informant just told him the actress's manager walked into her hotel about an hour ago. The police are there now questioning her. Miss Rory Forsythe was the manager, yes?"

"Yes!" Julien exclaimed, his spirits soaring. "Get Martini on the phone." He lifted a framed picture off his desk. A young, green-eyed woman with long, dark chestnut curls smiled at him as she had for so many, many years.

"I swear, Lydia, this time, I will bring her home."



A new erotic dream disrupted Rory's sleep. She'd been on a high rooftop overlooking the desert. It was a very hot night and she was in the arms of the most amazing man whose scent was filled with spices and mint. She awoke to sheets soaked with sweat. What were these news dreams, filled with so much sexual tension? They were so unlike her.

Must be the head injury, she thought. And I've got to get a sex life someday. Another thing for the To Do list.

Still aching from the accident, she rose and pulled on a long summer dress. Being inside was overwhelming, as if her energy bounced off the walls and assaulted her. Opening the French doors to the terrace, Rory stepped into the cool night air. She took a deep breath and drank in the calming aroma of the Mediterranean Sea.

Then like a tsunami, harsh reality crashed down on her. She braced herself against the terrace railing. Poor Vivianne, burning in that car...

I'm not ready yet, she thought, pushing thoughts of Vivianne deep inside. The sky and plants all pulsed as she looked out across the beach to the water. The moon glimmered on the sea like a giant lit walkway, inviting her to venture out.

The air was thick with the fragrance of spring flowers, shifting her focus to a small garden below. If she could sit outside for a while, she'd gather her thoughts before seeing the authorities. She and Vivianne had sat in the garden just the other night with friends and watched the sunrise. She...

"Concentrate on the present," she said to herself. She grabbed her room key and took the back staircase to the garden.

Rory sat on a wooden bench sheltered under a mimosa tree. Suddenly, her pulse soared like in the dreams. A man stood in the shadows on the far side of the garden where a path led to the sea. She felt him looking at her, studying her from a distance. Then a deep orgasmic sensation surged through her being and tingled up her spine. It felt like some of her recent dreams only more intense.

The stranger walked with a determined yet graceful stride out into the moonlight and down the path toward her. Intimidated by his presence, she rose to leave when a calming instinct told her to sit still. As he approached, a scent that was pleasurable and very sensual flooded the garden, overpowering the flowers. The blood rushing through her ears dampened his voice when he spoke and introduced himself or so she thought. What little she heard was French.

"I'm sorry. *Je ne comprends pas*. I don't speak French," she said, looking up at his angular face. Lustrous black hair framed his head, highlighting large dark eyes. He was about her height, dressed in an elegant Italian suit.

"Excuse me," he said in a rich, melodic voice as he bowed his

head. "I have mistaken you for someone else. My apologies."

"No problem," Rory said, hoping he wouldn't leave. At that moment, she did not want to be alone.

As if reading her mind, he straightened himself and looked directly into her eyes. "I am Babak Bazargan of Afsaneh and Farhaad." He took a card from his jacket and handed it to her. "May I join you?"

The card was engraved on high-quality paper with a very old-fashioned design. She slipped it into her dress pocket. "Yes, I'm Rory Forsythe of Los Angeles."

"Oh, California," he said, a broad smile spreading across his exquisite lips. "I love California. Are you in Cannes for long?"

She fumbled for the right words, "...I must leave soon...for work."

"Work?" a hint of disbelief in his voice. "I would think someone with your qualities and family would never need to work."

"Wish I was a trust fund baby, but I'm not." She enjoyed the erotic tension flowing from him. It comforted her in a curious way. Then Rory sensed an odd probing sensation coming from Babak.

Tilting his head to one side, he asked, "You are of Giselle, no?"

"No," she replied, perplexed by his question. "I'm from California."

"I mean your family, your mother's heritage. I can sense it in you, of Giselle, I mean."

"I don't understand. My mother lives in Malibu."

Babak became very still, continuing his penetrating stare into Rory's face. She wondered why such a simple statement seemed to hold enormous significance for him.

"They were talking in the hotel bar about an accident," he said in a low, serious tone. "A woman thought to be dead has come back to life. You are she?"

"It was nothing like that. I was thrown free, landed in a tree

and was unconscious.”

A flicker of concern crossed his face before it went blank. Rory felt as if a wall smashed down between them.

“I have made a terrible mistake. I must not intrude any longer.” Babak dipped his head and bowed. “Good night, *Mademoiselle*.” He hastily retreated down the moonlit path and out of the garden.

“What was that all about?” Rory asked herself, rising from the bench and returning to her hotel room. From her terrace she looked back across the garden and inhaled another deep breath, still able to capture Babak’s scent.



Anne Forsythe arrived the next day. She was a tall, fierce woman who took no lip from anyone. The local solicitor she retained sped them through the French paperwork and expedited the return of Vivianne’s body.

As the actress’s manager and business partner, Rory had full power of attorney and could exercise it since Vivianne’s mother was still missing. Anne trained Rory to be prepared for any circumstance. She had learned after years on the road as a music publicist that you never know what you might find in a hotel room. Anne’s strength and resourcefulness carried her through a world of macho men and chaos. She passed that knowledge on to Rory.

The Fiat driver came forward, taking the police to the point where Rory flagged him down. There were no skid marks, which the police took to mean Vivianne hadn’t been forced off the road. They concluded she must have been driving too fast, causing the car to become airborne and travel so far that it cross a switchback of the road far below. This explained why the rescuers had missed Rory, hundreds of feet higher up the mountain. She couldn’t remember a single useful fact, so they stopped questioning her.

An accident. Who was to say otherwise? No doubt the other body would be identified soon.

“Mom, I can wheel my own suitcase,” Rory complained when Anne tried taking her carry-on from the hotel limo driver at the airport. “It’s embarrassing having someone fussing over me.”

“You’re always so independent. Let me help.”

“Look, the cuts are almost healed,” she said, extending her arm.

“You’re still in shock.”

“The hotel doctor didn’t think so.”

“I wouldn’t trust a stray cat with that man. He just filled you with drugs.”

Rory became silent. She could not fight the truth. This extraordinary sense of sound was growing by the hour, turning her hearing from a mild buzz to a roar. Her vision was clearly altered, enhancing her sight. Her sense of smell was hyperactive, bringing in odors she never knew existed.

She buried her fear. Maybe it was her own way of dealing with Vivianne’s death. If Vivianne hadn’t insisted on picking up that woman, she might have missed whatever caused the accident. Maybe they should have relaxed that day by the pool and not gone anywhere. She kept repeating every minute of those last days over and over in her mind but that didn’t change anything, especially her guilt. She had survived. Vivianne was dead.

While they changed planes at the Heathrow terminal, Rory felt the sensations from the garden begin surging inside her again. These were stronger, more intense and with a totally different scent. No cologne this time, just deep, earthy smells like a forest in the morning.

She recognized the presence drawing closer, coming at her so fast and vibrant it penetrated her being. Then she spied him, tall and muscular with ivory skin that glistened in the light. He stared at her with vivid green eyes accented by wavy copper

colored hair. The heat emanating from him shocked Rory. It was as if he pumped waves across the corridor straight through her whole body causing her to go limp.

Anne caught her before she fell. “What’s wrong?” Anne demanded, tightening her grip around Rory’s waist.

“Get me on the plane, Mom,” Rory said, wanting to get away from the man.

She held tight onto Anne’s arm as the sensations continued to rage. At the jet way entrance, Rory glanced back, still feeling the man. He stood not fifty feet away, probing deep inside her as though he knew her, recognized her fear and confusion. His presence generated vibrations inside of her that surged down her spine creating a tingling. She could tell that he knew it. She watched as he smiled, winked, then disappeared into the crowd.

CHAPTER TWO

Deirdre La Montage jogged along the old road with her trainer Armando, up the hillside from the Rhone River. Beads of perspiration tickled down her back beneath her dark, curly ponytail. Approaching the east side of her farm just north of Condrieu, she slowed her pace.

“Faster, my sweet,” Armando urged, his body stretching his sparse running suit. “Running is having a terrific effect on your bottom, which is rising up tight and firm”

“I didn’t notice,” she jabbed, as she sped up.

“You missed those farmers by the crossroad staring at you?” he asked. “Their eyes were only one place.”

“Hasn’t reduced my hips,” she said turning onto the gravel driveway of her seventeenth-century French farmhouse lined with an ancient mulberry grove and low flowering azalea bushes. The large stone house dominated a low rise of the hillside.

A sensation swept down the driveway engulfing Deirdre, momentarily halting her. An essence, the sensory signature of her

people, raced deep and familiar inside her being. She peered up at the house, opening her consciousness to embrace it. The rich earthy tones at such a strong vibration meant only one person could be waiting for her. She slowed the last few yards up the drive.

“Is something wrong?” Armando asked.

“We have a visitor,” she said. “My brother.” She stopped at a stone bench piled with fresh towels. “I must see him. So we’ll cut out the morning exercises.”

“But, your fitness schedule. The tour begins in five weeks.”

“I am training, but not this morning,” Deirdre said with the authority of an employer, not a lover. Armando’s face responded with hurt feelings that amused her. “Didn’t you just say how well I’m doing, darling?” Sweetness filled her voice as she blotted the sweat from his brow.

“A few hours,” Armando grumbled. “I’ll be in the rehearsal room. Ciao.”

“Ciao, darling,” she said, shifting her attention to the terrace above.

A copper-colored head appeared over the edge. Gunnar, her wayward brother, peered mischievously down at her. His tall, powerful body leaned against the wrought iron railing.

“What a surprise,” Deirdre called out as she climbed the outside staircase. “Why didn’t you call?”

“Didn’t have the number, but I figured you’d be here,” he replied in his deep melodic voice. “Am I intruding?”

“Don’t you always?” she said as she reached the terrace.

“Ah, my loving sister. You never change.” He extended both hands and took hold of hers. He kissed her flushed cheeks.

“Sister D.”

“Brother G.”

“Or must I call you Lina now, your latest alias?” he asked, mockery lacing his voice.

“How did you find out?”

"I'm back in France less than two hours and there is your marvelous voice streaming out of car radios. Everyone is talking about Lina LeCoque. You're going to be a big hit."

"Thank you, dearest. That's the plan," Deirdre said, as she sat down at the table.

"Then what? In five or six years, another tragic rock star dead before her time?"

"Who knows?"

"So you will live off the royalties on some tropical island?"

"Not an island with the seas rising. I have other plans."

"How are you funding all of this, or have you found another rich lover?"

"Why so many questions?"

"Well, aren't you going to include your dear brother in all this fame and fortune?" Gunnar towered above Deirdre.

"Why, so you can sell drugs to my roadies?" Deirdre responded unfazed. Unlike most who met him, she had never been afraid of Gunnar and his height did not intimidate her. "So you can bring your ghastly South American friends on tour? No thank you."

"You have a new accomplice for the final act?"

"No," she replied, pouring a glass of water from the pitcher on the table. "I planned on your help. You are so very good at getting lost." She flashed her dazzling smile up at him and felt Gunnar falter, a perpetual victim of her charm.

"Quality costs, you know," he countered.

"I expect nothing less from you." She rose to kiss his cheek, then paused, sensing a dark undercurrent in his essence, something upsetting and personal. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she tried to read his emotions. Yes, he's worried.

"My new career didn't bring you here. There's something else."

"I can never keep anything from you," he replied, his mood darkening and expanding.

"It's serious."

“Yes, we have a big problem.” He paused as he looked into her green eyes. “The American has awakened.”



Back in Los Angeles, days melted and blurred together for Rory. Between funeral arrangements, dodging the media, lawyer meetings, and doctor appointments, her life was spinning out of control. The new full-body rushes that raced up her inner core did not help. Twice in meetings they surged through her and she could discern someone was near yet not in the room with her. They seem to be walking somewhere close but she never saw who it was.

The doctors found no physical problems, nothing unusual. Their diagnosis was stress related to Vivianne’s death and the emotional trauma Rory suffered from the accident. Rory knew she was grieving for Vivianne. She would break into tears at the slightest of things, like a favorite song on the radio would trigger a memory.

But she was convinced something else had changed inside her. It was like her whole being was a giant beacon that caused the heightening of her senses. Babak and the London man were not illusions, nor were the dreams that woke her in a frenzy of uncontrolled desire or fear. She’d not mentioned those to the doctors because the sensations frightened her. Would a medical professional believe her or would they want more tests, not to mention sending her to a shrink. She didn’t want to do that.

Vivianne’s mom, Christine, appeared on Anne’s doorstep five days after their return. She was so emaciated Rory barely recognize her. Anne sent Christine into a two-week rehab to clean her up, which meant Vivianne’s memorial would be delayed.

While they waited and planned the service, *Elmwood’s* producer rushed the film into worldwide release. It was a box office sensation on four continents. Rory detested the macabre

way people flocked to see the dead actress.

Taking meetings and even just talking with people became an enormous burden. They all seemed insignificant. So many were ghouls trying to attach themselves to the legend that was Vivianne. Rory trudged forward as there was so much to wrap up. Only she could do it. This was the downside of being Vivianne's manager, wrapping up the estate of her best friend, who happened to be her only client.

Driving into the underground garage at the Grossman Agency in Century City, Rory received another phone message from her attorney, wanting to know where she was. What is so urgent, she wondered? She was ten minutes late for another round with Bud Peck, producer of what would have been Vivianne's next movie.

The moment she entered the well-appointed conference room, she realized things had changed. During earlier meetings, she, her attorney and the Grossman team took the opposite side of the table. Today, Bud and his entourage of attorneys were seated there, with the Grossman people next to them. Both members of her team were alone on the wrong side of the table. Since Peter Grossman was a fanatic about the politics of sitting arrangements, this was a huge red flag. Rory didn't like Peck. He was being contentious. Nor was she happy that Grossman couldn't wrap up a compromise about Vivianne's contract.

"Sorry I'm late. I hit traffic on PCH," she said as she looked around the room. A few new faces joined the opposition.

Peter Grossman took the lead.

"Rory, we are at a crossroads with this negotiation. With the unfortunate passing of Vivianne, the agency no longer has an obligation to you, as you are not a client."

"Excuse me. This is not about me, but an obligation you signed with Vivianne and these people," she responded.

"Actually, that no longer applies because as of this morning we are now representing Mr. Peck."

Rory felt everyone's vibration levels leap in unison, sweeping

out and briefly paralyzing her. She realized that this statement surprised the others in the room, except for Grossman, Peck, and one of his attorneys.

“You’re changing teams midstream?” Rory asked. She was furious she had been set up, but she tried to conceal her anger. She never won when she was angry.

“Not really,” Peck chimed in. “There is additional revenue that you and Vivianne’s estate will make off her current release, which by the way, is making lots of money.”

“What do you mean,” Rory demanded.

Grossman leaned across the conference table. She sensed his delight that he was about to spring something. He licked his lips, like a big Komodo dragon. She mentally braced herself.

“Have you forgotten that handsome little clause you added at the last minute about gross percentages? Well, that money is now owed to our client as his film is ready for production with no star.”

“That’s not what I hear,” Rory countered and stared straight at Bud Peck. “Natalie will make a lovely replacement as long as you make her a blonde.”

“I’ve spent a great deal in preproduction,” Peck said, ignoring Rory’s comment. “And, a fortune in promoting dear Vivianne, which is benefiting her current box office.”

“OK, send me a bill for your marvelous PR effort,” Rory said, “including all documentation that it originated with your people. Emails, postage receipts, whatever.”

“That’s not the point,” Grossman said. “You are personally responsible for what has transpired.”

A malevolent wave from Grossman flooded the room. Rory could literally see its shadowy tentacles wrapping around everyone.

“How am I responsible?”

“That’s easy. Vivianne’s dead thanks to your negligence.”

Rory leapt to her feet. “What!”

“As her manager, you allowed Vivianne to drive when she didn’t have a valid international driver’s license. Therefore, you are responsible for her death.”

The evil oozing from Grossman repulsed Rory. She stared into his eyes, a man she worked with for three years, and saw nothing but darkness. How had she missed this?

“There must be some middle ground here,” Richard, her attorney, broke in, trying to assert himself, though she could read he was terrified and anxious. “We can work through this.”

“No, you can work through this. I’m finished,” Rory declared, snapping her briefcase shut.

“Rory, Rory,” Grossman cooed. “Why don’t you, Bud, and I sit a while, and see if a better conclusion is possible?”

Rory hesitated. He had something up his sleeve. This was just the setup. Bet he still had not read the full Peck contract. Grossman was notorious of leaving the fine print to underlings. He doesn’t realize there is the same gross profits percentage clause in Peck’s contract, only it is with Aurora Productions and not tied to Vivianne’s participation.

“Everyone, please give Bud, Rory, and me a few minutes,” he asked. All the attorneys and junior agents filed out of the room. Richard hesitated, but Rory nodded for him to leave. He was useless today.

Grossman circled the table, pulled out a chair next to Rory, and sat. He rocked back in his chair, ego glowing all around him as she had never seen before.

“Rory, what are you going to do now with your life?” It seemed a natural question, though Rory could discern a dark undertone.

“It’s too soon to make any decisions,” she replied as she sat down.

“In reality, it’s a very opportune time. Bud knows a few actors that need your expertise at developing a talent. What you accomplished with Vivianne is rare. We believe we have an opportunity

to help you continue with your management career.”

She looked at him. There was darkness forming inside him, and she was sure she would not like it.

“Go on.”

Grossman’s delight zapped to high as if he had cornered his prey. Peck’s emotions were riding right beside him -- two evil predators. That she could sense both men so clearly amazed her.

“I am willing to commit three very talented young actors, two girls and a guy, who will sign long-term management contracts with you,” Peck said.

“If they’re so hot, why don’t they have management?” she asked.

“They do, but they’re willing to change for a chance at working with you. What you’ve done is something very few people can pull off. You’re a hot property.”

Something about the roundness of his face and the way he grinned made Rory envision the Disney Cheshire Cat. Never liked that cat.

“And your involvement, Peter?” she asked in an innocent voice.

“The agency will represent all of them. The three of us can work together on packaging a few good movie and TV deals.”

Rory swirled in her chair to face Grossman. “You expect me to work with you after you just accused me of killing my best friend?”

“It’s a tactic, Rory. You’re good at them,” Grossman stated in a sarcastic voice.

She looked at these two men, both powerful in Hollywood. Well-dressed, neatly manicured, and pleasant facial features masking raw, ugly, and malicious souls. How had she become involved with these guys without seeing their real sides? Her new powers or whatever they were helped her at this every moment.

“And, if I don’t agree to this generous offer for my future?”

“Then your ass is in court and you walk away broke,” Peck

responded.

Rory rose and edged around the table dragging her coral-tipped fingernail across the mahogany. She stopped behind Peck, put her arm around his shoulder, and lowered her face right next to his.

“Tell you what I’m going to do. First, I have no interest in your actors, but thanks for the concern about my future. Second, I’m not responsible for Vivianne’s death and no court would ever rule in your favor based upon that theory. And third, expect to see me on your set, Bud, ol’ buddy.”

Peck jerked away from her. “You have no reason to be on my set.”

She pierced him with a glare. “Read our contract, Bud. That percentage deal on Vivianne’s film you’re trying to steal? Well, there is one on your film.”

“What are you saying?” Peck demanded.

“No!” Grossman pounded the table. “Vivianne is, well was, the chair of Aurora Productions.”

“Yes, but I now own ninety-five percent.”

“Pete, what did you put in my contract with this bitch?” Peck demanded.

“Ol’ Pete’s too busy to read all that fine print, Buddy. Trust me, it’s there.” She grabbed her briefcase and headed for the door.

“You’re toast, Rory, you are over,” Grossman bellowed.

“Oh, too bad. I’ll never eat lunch in this town again, is that it?” She forced out a laugh as she sauntered into the hallway with her bravest face on, trying to conceal from sight the utter devastation and betrayal brewing inside. If they went forward with their plan, she would be ruined.



Rory stormed into her mother's house perched above the beach in Malibu. "The Grossman meeting was a disaster. They now represent Peck and they're going to sue me. In their twisted logic I am to blame for Vivianne's death."

Anne seemed to erupt out of her office and into the living room overlooking the ocean. "What?"

"You heard me. In their twisted view of the world, I killed Vivianne. Now I have to pay them for Vivi's death. I don't have the money for a real legal fight, especially with Grossman having thirty lawyers on staff. They'll ruin me."

Rory collapsed onto the sofa. "The confusing part was sensing the anger at me, the weird pride at turning on me, and the evil lurking inside Grossman."

"It was as though I could sense their internal reactions, like an intuition. When they dropped the bomb, I was overwhelmed by the confusion of emotions rushing at me from some people and yet, I could sense glee from Peck and Grossman. I could sense their motivation. I've never felt such venom directed at me, or the outright betrayal. All of it amplified by my new—whatever they are—abilities."

"How could you tell?" Anne asked, sitting on the couch.

"I don't know. I felt it, could almost see it. Sounds kind of crazy doesn't it?"

"Not if it's what I think."

"What do you mean?" Rory asked, sitting up.

Anne inhaled, and then let out a sigh. "Your father used to say he could do that, could sense certain people at a distance, even see their emotions."

"Really? You never told me this before. It's a rather major talent, Mom."

"How was I to know if it was true or not?" Anne replied. "I was stoned half the time we were together. Sometimes I could see the texture of the sky the way he described it. After he died, I buried those memories."

“You’re saying I inherited this ability?”

“I don’t know. But your father could read people, judge them correctly on first sight even in a crowd. And he told me about the body rushes that zapped up his spine and made his body tingle when certain people were around him. He called them zingies.”

“Zingies? You’ve known a name for this and not told me?”

“It’s not a medical term. I’ve been waiting for things to calm down before dropping this new information on you, but things just don’t seem to ease up, do they?”

Rory leaned her head back onto the couch. “Zingies. Not a bad description.” She heaved a deep sigh. “I wish we knew more about his family.”

Anne gently touched Rory’s hair. “Me too, but no one ever answered the letters I sent after he was killed. All I had was an address outside of Paris.”

Rory got up and walked out onto the deck overlooking the Pacific. The small strip of sand below was disappearing as the high tide rushed in, making waves crash underneath the house. Anne followed her and waited in silence.

“One of my last conversations with Vivianne,” Rory said softly as she looked down at the waves, “was about how we were both fatherless. She so hoped her father knew she was a star.” Rory turned to face Anne. “Mom, I love you and Papa and Grandma. But, I have this other half of me I know nothing about and, if these abilities come from Dad’s family, I need them now.”

“When the memorial service is over, why don’t you go to Paris and try to find his side of the family? I know I have that letter still. I’ll start looking after dinner.”

“Might be a great way to find the rest of my life,” Rory said, thinking about her future.

Since she was twenty-one, there had been one focus—Vivianne’s career. Seven years later, the future was utterly blank. Maybe Grossman was right; it was time to think about Rory.

CHAPTER THREE

Screaming voices ripped through the night air, reverberating off the cave walls. Multitudes pleaded and cried, beasts screeched, letting out deafening roars, all creating a maddening cacophony of sound. Then, as quickly as the calamitous noises came, they vanished into silence. Amiro's wiry hair formed a dark halo around his head, brushing against Tara as they lay still in their furs, holding tight to each other, waiting for the terrible sounds to return.

None came.

They crept from their sleeping robes and ventured to the edge of the cave. Others in the cave joined them, all stunned by the violence in the voices.

"Who is missing?" Tara asked, focusing her senses on locating all under her protection, but she could not detect any member in danger. No one was missing; the clan was safe.

A strong wind howled down from the north and brought with it a driving, pelting rain. Lightning struck a tree outside the cave, splitting it in half while thunder roared through the valley.

Few slept much that night. The devastating storm drove rain into the front of the cave. In the darkness, the young ones woke crying from terrifying nightmares filled with the voices and Tara had her first vision of a giant mountain of water.

As the pounding rain continued the next day, many dreamed of the screaming voices. On the third day, Amiro led a band of men out into the deluge in search of firewood and fresh meat. They returned at dusk with soaked branches and no kills, but many stories.

Around the fire that night, the first tales were told of the streams flowing backwards, of flooding in the lowlands. This went against the way of nature and disturbed her. Could it be the new star, coming from the mouth of the tiger, affirmed an ancient sign of pending disaster? She'd watched the star grow brighter at night. Old stories told of such a star that had brought destruction long ago.

She and Amiro ventured out in the morning to the main creek; they climbed down the steep rock slick with rain so she could see the stream. It simply flowed backwards, with water surging upstream from the valley.

"This is not the way of the Great Mother," she said as they stood on the cliff overlooking the reversed creek.

"Yet every stream is like this, Tara," Amiro said. "When we searched to the edge of the crescent valley, we found water flooding all the land."

Suddenly her vision of the mountain of water surged before her eyes, and the screaming voices filled her ears. The pain was excruciating. She braced herself against the rock so that she would not fall.

The vision was a sign.

As she realized the repercussions of that thought, the meaning of the vision changed.

"I must speak with the other mothers from the neighboring clans in council."

By the time the council met six days later, rising water had forced four clans from their caves. Nothing could be found in the deep memory of the great mothers that explained the storm, the streams

flowing backwards, or the flooding. Nor the screaming of voices that continued to plague everyone's dreams.

The council decided to send out five Guardians to search for other tribes and discover how far the flooding extended. And what of the people who lived in the lowlands?



Rory awoke, frightened by the dream, sensing the gravity of Tara's fear, its intensity pulsating through her body.

"What's going on?" she muttered as she rose and went into the bathroom, turning the shower on hot. Tears erupted and cascaded down her face. She stepped into the shower, waiting for the water to wash away her pain. *Why am I so sensitive? What is with these dreams? Oh Vivi, this is when I need you to talk to and sort this out.*

A crushing pain filled her chest and more tears flowed. She wrapped her arms tightly around her body. So many things distracted her now that had never reached her radar before. She slid to the tile floor of the shower weeping.

Is it grief that brings me to this bathroom floor crying or something else?

She had always controlled her emotions. Dealing with fear and these rampant sensations disturbed her. A lack of fear was her virtue that gave her courage and strength. With fear now raising its wicked head, she felt defenseless. She must learn to filter or eliminate much of the sensory input she received.

She turned off the water, climbed out of the shower, wrapped a towel around herself, and sat on the edge of the spa tub. At some point soon, she must face her loss of Vivianne.

First she needed a guide or mentor to help her in understanding these changes, if they came from family. With Christine in rehab for another ten days and Vivianne's memorial service on hold, she had a brief window. Gradually, Rory rebuilt her confi-

dence despite her tears.

She flipped open her mobile phone and punched AA into speed dial.

“American Airlines? When is your next flight to Paris?”

CHAPTER FOUR

The clear night sky created a glimmering backdrop for Paris as Rory's taxi maneuvered through the rain-slick traffic heading for the heart of the city, Les Champs Elysees, and her hotel, George V. Throughout the flight, her determination to find her father's family crystallized. She must locate some relative or face the possibility of madness.

Paris was an exciting place for her every time she visited. Maybe now she could confront her loss of Vivi, and find new relatives. Vivianne had been the heart of her family. Now she was gone.

Anne was confident she still had the old letter and was searching the house for it. If she could find the letter, Rory would go to their door and knock. After that, she wasn't sure, but she must at least see the house and whoever answered the door.

While packing, she found Babak's card with a Parisian phone number. Because he was the first person she sensed in this new

manner and he acknowledged the sensations, he would be her starting point. He might be able to answer some of her questions while she searched for the other Forsythes in France. After settling into her room, Rory dialed the number on Babak's card.

The phone rang twice.

"*Bonjour*," a woman's voice came across the line.

"Hello," Rory replied hesitantly. "Ahh, *parlez-vous anglais*?"

"Yes, I speak English," a heavy Scottish accent replied. "May I help you?"

"Yes. I'm trying to reach Babak Bazargan."

"One moment please." Rory heard the phone being set down and the echo of footsteps. A minute passed and her anxiety rose.

"Hello. This is Babak."

Rory took a deep breath and plunged ahead. "This is Rory Forsythe. I don't mean to intrude, but you did give me your card when we met in Cannes three weeks ago."

"Yes, I remember you," was his guarded response.

"I just arrived in Paris and I'm trying to learn more, ah..." Rory stammered, unsure how to proceed. "Well, you were the first person who I, ah, well... reacted to, after my accident. I thought you might shed some light on my...condition."

A silence engulfed the phone line. Rory felt she'd made a terrible blunder and was about to hang up when Babak asked, "Where are you staying?"

"The George V."

"I can be there in one hour. Meet me by the lobby entrance to the garden."



Babak fretted as he pulled out onto the darkened Rue de Babylon. These past months since Helene allowed him back into her life were his happiest. As the image of her delicate, vanilla colored body floated in his mind, he realized how much she truly meant

to him. Now she had rushed off to her mountain home and he felt cut off.

What's so critical for her to leave, he wondered? It was unlike her not to be home when he returned from a business trip.

He would broach the subject of retreating together from the outside world for a while. Maybe an extended vacation with no visitors. He knew just the place. There he could prove himself worthy to father her next child. She must find it in her heart to forgive his past transgressions and accept him without conditions.

As he entered the hotel, Babak's senses were engaged by the intoxicating scent of an Utnapishat woman's essence nearby. He swept the lobby until he isolated the source—tall, blonde, a true Nordic beauty. A smile crossed his lips. *If not for Helene, this one would be my next conquest.*

As Rory turned in his direction, he found himself staring into the most exquisite turquoise eyes. He acknowledged her, and then her panic struck him.

And young in our ways, he thought, absorbing her intense essence. The woman was alluring. Her long legs and classic peach-tinted skin reflected a moist glimmer under the harsh indoor lights. She stood quivering near the garden entrance, fear emanating from her.

"Are you all right, Rory?" he asked when he reached her. She glanced up at him, frightened, with confusion in her eyes. "Let's go in the bar, alright?" She nodded and he guided her inside the hotel bar to a dark table in the back.

Babak reached out to comfort her. She jumped at his touch, and then melted her body into his hand cupping her shoulder. Slowly she raised her face to his and the pain in her eyes cut into his heart.

What horror haunts this lovely lady? How could she be in such pain? He sensed every ounce of her being was on fire, full of fear and confusion.

"I'm sorry for imposing," she apologized.

"Would you like to talk?" he asked, half out of concern, half from curiosity.

Tears trickled down her cheeks. "I don't know, my mind is..."

"*Ma chérie*, I know." He gave her a white linen handkerchief embroidered with a Persian emblem.

"You...you know?" Rory gazed into his eyes and he felt her searching, probing, then severing her connection.

She possesses intense powers and doesn't understand their range.

"It's these dreams," she said, "sensing everyone, my friend's death, it's all too much,"

"Let's be honest, Rory. Your fear exists outside of dreams. When I entered the hotel, you looked at me and panicked."

She flashed utter amazement. "You felt that?"

"You are doing it again, only now you are not as frightened; it is carried on your essence."

A look of genuine bewilderment filled her eyes.

How could it be that she doesn't comprehend any of this, he pondered? In this day and age, how could she live so long without knowing something fundamental to our people?

"Do you know what I mean when I say essence? Do you know the term in relationship to these sensations you feel?"

She shook her head.

"Let me try to explain. You felt me in the garden in Cannes and again tonight, right? Why did I frighten you?"

"Because they're new and overwhelming. All of these intense smells, the body effects, sensory perceptions, everything."

"New? New since the accident?"

"Yes, since the night I woke from the first nightmare, and there you were in the garden, someone I could sense and smell."

Babak sat perfectly still, but his thoughts were racing. *Could this be true? Was this gorgeous woman a Kallig, a lost child? If so, her*

fear was certainly justified. Maybe I should stop and leave her to her own destiny.

Then he cast off that notion. He was born to become a Guardian. His very existence demanded he protect Utnapishat women, especially ones this naïve and vulnerable. Even if she reacts strangely, he must make an effort.

Babak took Rory's hand. She raised eyes damp with tears and peered into his.

"There is something terribly wrong with me, isn't there?" she whispered.

"No, my dear, there is something beautiful." Babak patted her hand. "You and I both have this special gift we inherited."

"My mother told me how my father could read people."

"Your mother?" Babak asked, surprised.

"Yes, my father was killed in an auto accident when I was a baby."

"May I ask your full name?"

"I go by Rory Forsythe, but my legal name is Aurora Birka-Forsythe. My father was Erik Birka-Forsythe. I don't know much about him except that he grew up in Europe. I've come to Paris to find his family."

Babak was shocked. Erik Birka was legendary amongst his people. "I know of him."

"You knew my father?"

He quickly recovered. "Of the Birka family, if he is the same man."

"In Paris?"

"Cousins, nephews or nieces, I believe." He examined Rory's features, considering this new information. His instinct had been right. She was related to Giselle, Erik's daughter.

"You have his, I mean their, coloring and height. I'm not sure where they all live, but I could make a few phone calls. Would you like that?" Babak asked.

"Yes, thank you, I would." She settled back, staring off into

space.

Babak's mind sped. He was right. She had no inkling what she was. He dug back into his memory. *If Rory is Erik's daughter, then who is her mother? Surely not this woman who raised her.*

As far as Babak knew, Erik spent most of his life with the renowned Lydia du Simmonier, the wild Celt beauty and Helene's half-sister, who passed some years ago. Helene was distraught for months after she received the news. Babak studied Rory. Her coloring and eyes dominated her face that it was hard to distinguish her more subtle characteristics.

Erik's face was the archetypal Norse god—strong chin lines, clear skin with a distinctly masculine nose and mouth, hair so thick and pale women envied him. It sprang from low on his brow, but stood straight up and away, framing his face like a Viking chief on the bow of a ship, the wind blowing his hair.

Rory turned, and flashed him the brightest, most enchanting smile. There was only one woman who possessed that incredible smile... Lydia du Simmonier. Bewildered, Babak struggled to understand. *Had Lydia passed away giving birth to this child? If so, who was this woman claiming to be her mother?*

Rory picked up her cup. "This is all so hard to believe. We've never been able to locate my father's family."

"May I ask where your mother meet Erik?"

"Classic sixties story, at Woodstock."

"You must look like your mother."

"Oh, no. Mom says I resemble Dad, though I don't see it from the picture she has. He was quite handsome, with long, flowing blond hair, and wore a fringed leather jacket. They could have been the poster couple for the Woodstock generation."

Babak stifled a yawn and stretched. "Excuse me, Rory, but I am quite tired. I returned late this afternoon from a business trip. May I suggest a plan?"

Rory nodded.

"Why don't we rest tonight and tomorrow I'll try to find the

relatives I know? How is that?”

Rory’s eyes glowed and he could sense his words touching deep inside her, opening a dark space locked up many years ago. The mystery of her father was an extremely painful, gaping hole inside her, unresolved, but never forgotten.

CHAPTER FIVE

Deirdre descended the worn stone steps carrying a bottle of Chateau Neuf du Pape and two glasses. The steps once led to a pond but now a new limestone patio and swimming pool resided there with panoramic views to the west into the hills and north down the narrow valley. Gunnar lay naked on one of the chaise lounges, his long legs stretched out, a towel carelessly covering his belly.

Deirdre set the bottle on a table. "Would you like a drink?"

"Have I ever refused?" Gunnar sat up and lit a cigarette.

He never changes, which is both refreshing and boring, Deirdre thought as she waved the smoke away from her face. For all of his many disgusting habits, he was the one person she could trust. "So, dear brother, will you join me on my world tour?"

"As long as I'm not involved with finances, I'm interested. Will your mystery money honey have to approve of me?"

"No, he's too busy with his new dot com companies to worry about details."

"You like this guy, don't you?" he asked.

She gave no response. Gunnar's overly protective ways could be suffocating. In all their years together, he had been the one rock she could count on. But like all people you need to rely on, it came with a cost.

"Will you do Lydia's song for Erik? It's the most beautiful love song I've ever heard."

"*Forever* will be my second American single."

"If you are doing *Forever*, then you will be an international hit and I want on this adventure. It'll be fun to have the old team back in action again." Gunnar raised his glass. "A toast to my incredible sister, whom I will gladly join on her latest adventure."

"Thank you, my darling." She kissed him on both cheeks, refreshed their glasses of wine, and sat down on the adjoining chaise. "Now, there will be a few rules."

"I knew it. This was a trick!" Gunnar slammed his fist on the table.

"No my dear, just no drugs. You can't be my biggest liability, not with so much at stake."

"I've been clean for almost two years."

"How did this miraculous transformation happen?" she asked. The last time she had seen him in Miami, he was lost in a cocaine-induced haze and extremely aggressive.

"Uncle Harald."

"Why should he care?" She had little contact with Harald and rarely thought of him.

"Look, it's a long story. We were ambushed south of Kiev, and I killed two guys who were going for his head. I didn't think it was important. But, Harald did."

"Obviously."

Reclining on their lounges, Deirdre and Gunnar savored the wine. Deirdre reached for the wine bottle, refilled her glass, then heaved a deep sigh. Darkness descended over her spirit.

"So, we have a baby sister out there who's passed through her awakening," she said, knowing this day would come, but

reluctant to have it interfere with her current plans. “How do you suggest we proceed?”

“With a better plan than you used on other family members. Look what happened to Brigit.”

Deirdre rose defiantly. “Her religious fanaticism has nothing to do with me. She should’ve outgrown her Cathar experience. Brigit clinging to the cross is of her own creation.” Dealing with her younger siblings always presented problems that Deirdre tried to dispatch as permanently as possible. Short of killing them, she had isolated herself away from all, especially Mikael, her other brother. Gunnar was more from her mold, stronger, more daring, more ruthless.

“How strong was her essence?” Deirdre asked turning to face Gunnar and better evaluate this information.

“Intense, deep, yet wild and erratic. She was terrified and panicking as I approached her and the woman who was with her was clueless.”

Deirdre laughed. Gunnar’s ability to adopt any society’s colloquialisms and claim its language as his own, had always impressed her.

“Father didn’t train her very well if she responded like that. Could you tell anything else about her?”

“Not much, though I did try. Her fear was very difficult to penetrate. It was blocking everything. And, her eyes were hard to look at with their intense turquoise color.”

“Turquoise?”

“Like a tropical sea. She’s tall, well-dressed, late twenties and was heading to Los Angeles,” he replied. “I tried to get on her flight, but it was sold out. I flew there and spent a few days wandering around the city, but never sensed her again.”

“Did you get her name?”

“No, not that I didn’t try.”

“I wonder why she was so frightened, unless Father warned her about us.”

“I didn’t get that from her, nothing guarded or protected, just fear, raw fear.”

Deirdre pondered what Gunnar said. With any family guidance, no one should demonstrate stark fear when greeting another of their family. She’d never experienced the kind of terror Gunnar was describing. With Lydia dead, Erik would have focused all of his energies on this child. It was his way.

Deirdre said as she refilled his glass. “Did you do something to frighten her?”

“No. Nothing about her felt right.” He rose and pulled on his jeans that lay in a pile at the foot of his chaise. “She gave no sense of recognition.”

The siblings gazed into each other’s eyes searching for an answer. Then Gunnar began shaking his head. “No, it can’t be true. He must still be amongst us.”

“Not leaving a frightened child behind, not Lydia’s last.”

Silence cloaked the two; both were lost in rapid thoughts analyzing what this might mean. Deirdre rose and placed her hand on Gunnar’s shoulder. “Could we be free of them at last?”

CHAPTER SIX

After five months of meetings, haggling and threats, Kelsey O'Keefe was safely back in Europe. Having smuggled his forbidden cargo through Syria, and accounted for every piece in the warehouse in Mersin, he was ready to liquidate the ancient treasures secured by Saddam Hussein's Republican Guards. Hidden in secret compartments beneath his yacht's stateroom docked in Marseilles lay a treasure of Babylonian and Sumerian antiquities.

Kelsey inhaled the spring air and filled his lungs with the fresh scents of flowers bursting into bloom after a rainfall while he sat on a park bench waiting for Babak. The rain cleansed layers of humanity off the bricks and stones, granting Mother Nature a brief moment for her to infuse the air uncontaminated by smoke, exhaust and human filth. A wind blew small leaves into his dark, brown hair, catching in its curls. He shook his head to free the leaves.

His BMW was parked down the street, loaded and rigged

against thieves. Kelsey chuckled as he imagined a car thief trying to steal that car. An electrical charge would surge through him, leaving him alive, but severely stunned.

His last transaction with Babak had taken place some time ago; beautiful, ancient Sabrathan pottery the owners wanted out of Libya and Quaddhafi's reach. These were his regular clients, not like the company he had climbed into bed with now. If the money wasn't so tempting or he so broke—Kelsey forced self-flagellation out of his mind. The past was the past. Just learn from it, and don't end up that way again.

Babak rounded the corner at the end of the block behind a group of people. It was four years since last they met, but Kelsey recognized Babak's familiar easy gait that symbolized the classic Utnapishat way of walking. They were men of the same breed.

"How's business?" Babak asked, shaking Kelsey's hand.

"Unbelievable. A vast quantity of ancient artifacts," Kelsey said, then lowering his deep Irish brogue. "But, I am under time constraints. That's why I told you it was urgent."

"It is always urgent with you."

"Aye, but this time it's for real. I'm fronting for a group of world class thugs and they don't extend deadlines."

"How close are you to the actual items?"

"They are under my control. I moved the lot into a secure warehouse."

"Excellent. We can do business quickly. Come, let's walk." They headed across the middle of the square.

"Babak, this is very private business," Kelsey said. "I need you to get me to the House of Gaspari."

Babak stopped. "You have never required the use of their services before. What is this you are trading?"

"Will you help me or not?"

"One does not go to The House without items of great value."

"The items are ancient, the owners ran a government, and

they are expecting cash.”

“And, the provenance can’t be produced?” Babak quipped, shaking his head. He started walking across the square again and Kelsey fell in beside him.

“Oh, it exists, but the world does not look favorably on this country at the moment. This must be done with the utmost discretion.”

“It can’t be accomplished overnight. You don’t call and have them pop over with a purse full of gold.”

“I know, but can it be done within ten days?”

“Depends. How soon can we deliver sample specimens?”

“I have everything within reach.” Kelsey said glancing back at his car.

“That’s good. It may take me two or three days to arrange a meeting.” The two men walked on through the park, passed office workers eating lunch in the park. Babak was excited about a great deal coming his way, but he did have to deal with Rory until Helene returned. Maybe Kelsey could be useful, he thought.

“My contact with the House is out of town. In the meantime, there’s a woman I need you to entertain for the next few days. She’s one of us, but she’s unaware of our nature, which makes her very vulnerable.”

“Oh no, I’m no babysitter!” Kelsey protested.

“Do you want my help or not?”

“Yes, but...” Kelsey drifted off, distracted by the powerful essence of another near by. He glanced over at Babak.

“She’s waiting for us at the cafe across the street.”

“How can we sense her so far away?”

“Because she is the last Siren from a very ancient line.”

“What do you mean?” asked Kelsey, confusion on his essence.

“Did you not know your mother?”

“No, I was orphaned.”

“No one told you about the Sirens, the mothers of us all, when you passed?” Babak stopped and turned to face Kelsey.

“I’ve heard the term. I thought they were talking about the mythical creatures and their allure for sailors.”

“You’ve not been tutored by a Guardian?”

“Guardian of what?”

Babak threw up his hands. “Now I have to deal with two Kalligs. Come on, there is a lot to learn and you two might as well do it together. I’ll explain it all later. For now, I need you to watch over this woman, protect her from any others who might take advantage of her innocence. And, you cannot touch her.”

“Why is she so special?” Kelsey asked, but he did not wait for an answer. He felt Rory’s hot essence intensify as they neared her. He reached out with his essence, found her sitting in the cafe and fell into her vibrant tropical blue eyes, the most striking he had ever seen.



How French, Rory thought as she sat in an outdoor cafe sipping wine on the Left Bank. From their brief encounters, she gathered that Babak always wore very sophisticated suits so she wore white linen trousers and a coral Vera Wang silk top. She wanted to impress him. She wasn’t sure why, but, if he could help her, she wanted nothing to distract him from finding her family.

‘Cool’ in L.A. did not translate to the same in Paris, she realized, watching the parade of smartly dressed women strutting by the cafe. Even Cannes was not up to this level.

The internal heat and throbbing struck as Babak’s essence surrounded Rory. It seemed stronger, but she did not panic. She focused on the energy emanating from across the square. She tried to locate him inside the crowd.

All at once she sensed another energy floating above Babak’s that was intense, energetic, and clean smelling. She searched and

found Babak strolling toward her with another man, both deep in conversation. Maybe he was a relative of hers. She could recognize his essence just as she did Babak's.

As the two men stepped to the curb across the street, Rory tried to get a better look at the man with shaggy dark hair. He was utterly, drop-dead gorgeous and walking straight at her. His rugged aura reached out to her and excitement overtook her cool exterior. She could not stop looking. Then he stared straight at her with intense eyes, piercing deep inside her.

Whoa, we both can feel each other. His warmth stimulated her, sending zingies racing up her spine.

"Rory, how lovely you look," Babak said as he kissed her blushing cheeks. "May I introduce a business associate, Kelsey O'Keefe? He arrived in town unexpectedly. I hope you don't mind, but I asked him to join us."

"Not a problem," Rory replied, with a bright, inviting smile.

"My pleasure to meet you," Kelsey said, his brogue in full bloom as he extended his hand. When she did not move, he cautiously stepped forward, and kissed both cheeks, touching her. She absorbed his essence and appreciated its stimulation.

"Shall we share some wine?" Babak asked, breaking their awkward greeting. They separated and Babak signaled the waiter.

"Is this your first visit to Paris?" Kelsey asked, settling into a chair across from her.

"No, I've been here on business." She blushed, and then turned to Babak, "I hope you don't mind me asking, but were you able to reach anyone about my father today?"

"My primary source is out of town, but I will be following up," Babak replied. "I must leave for one or two days. Since you will be in Paris alone, I asked Kelsey to escort you around town. I hope I wasn't too forward?"

"Of course not," Rory blurted out. Spending a couple of days

with this dark hunk might cheer her up or at the very least distract her.

Kelsey smiled at her. "I prefer the older neighborhoods, less frantic than here."

"They sound wonderful," she said. "I haven't spent much time looking around, except for the usual the tourist attractions."

Babak rose, checking his wristwatch. "I must leave or I'll miss my train. I need to go over a few business matters with Kelsey before I depart. Will you excuse us for a moment, Rory?"

"Of course," she replied as the men walked back out to the sidewalk.



Babak put his arm around Kelsey. "What do you think of Rory? I am trusting you with her."

"She's beautiful." Kelsey smiled as he glanced back at Rory. "But, I don't think this is the right thing for me to do."

"Just be sure she is safe and do not take advantage of her, no matter how tempting."

"I'm not comfortable doing this. My last experience with a strong female of our kind was a miserable failure."

"Please be careful what you tell her. Say her relatives can best explain these things. Her aunt will return before the end of the week."

"Aye, I'll do it," he said, reluctant to become involved. "But, when this is over, will you tell me about Sirens and Guardians? I can't tell her something I don't know."

"Deal. I will get you to the House, and we will both make a tidy profit. After that, we can settle in for a few days to improve your education. I hope you enjoy your sightseeing."

Babak winked at Rory, waved, and then departed.



“Babak seems like such a nice man. Are you in business together?” Rory asked.

“We’re both dealers,” Kelsey replied, sitting down.

“Like drug dealers?”

Kelsey let out a whopping laugh. “No, no, we’re in art and antiques.”

Rory was embarrassed. “I’m sorry. I just assumed. At home, they’re everywhere and very up front about what they do.”

Rory sensed Kelsey studying her, gently probing. She was intrigued at meeting someone this attractive who she could feel so deeply. He seemed uncomfortable with something. Silently they both flipped through the menu.

“Have you ever been to the south of France, down to the coast?” he asked. “I’d like to stop back at my boat in Marseilles. If the weather holds, it’s a beautiful drive.”

“Well...” Darkness slid over Rory.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“My best friend was killed in a car accident outside Cannes a couple of weeks ago.”

Kelsey took her hand and a pleasurable surge of zingies charged up her arm. His touch lifted her feelings of grief.

“I’m sorry,” he said, still holding her hand so she could tell he truly meant it. “We can go somewhere else. Would you like to visit Lyon? It is a beautiful old city, what I consider more French than Frank, very different from Paris. I know more restaurants in the South.”

“Ah, that is what I sensed from you. You don’t like Paris.”

“Or any mega city.”

“Living in L.A., I just block it out.”

“Yes, but when you block, you lose much that makes life special. It’s a way to survive in a hostile environment. Doesn’t mean it’s right.”

The waiter approached with his pad and pen at the ready.

“Are you hungry?” Kelsey asked.

“No.”

“Then, let’s leave for Lyon. The sun won’t set for five hours. It will be a great drive and this evening we can enjoy the finest French cuisine. Shall we go?”

About the Author

Kate Sexton embarked on the journey that would lead her to write this book at age ten when she confronted local religious leaders, refusing to become baptized without verifiable justification for dedicating her life to Jesus. Over the next four years she voraciously studied world religions, often forced to hide books inside the covers of others at the library, until she reached her own conclusions about life and god. In the end, she shared her Aunt Nell's core belief that nothing lasts forever.

These findings satisfied Kate until a boyfriend introduced her to *Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell. This began a ten-year quest for knowledge that would lead to the first drafts of *The Siren Chronicles*. The deeper Kate delved, the more she detected a theme - the mysterious origins of the Indo-Europeans, the destruction they wrought in their quest to dominate the civilized world, and their brutal suppression of women.

During her years of research Kate discovered Marija Gimbutas' groundbreaking archeological findings, Bryan Sykes genetic work, numerous authors on linguistics and the origins of Indo-European languages, Merlin Stone, James George Frazer, and so many others whose works, each dog-eared and marked with highlighter, now fill seven bookcases.

A proud fourth generation workingwoman, Kate Sexton volunteers and works with local visual, literary, and performing art groups supporting programs for young people to find their bliss through art. She resides in Ojai, California.

Book Two of The Siren Chronicles, Sirens of the Sunset Realm, is planned for 2013 release.

For information on story development, reference materials, the Sirens' history, and Kate's blog, visit www.TheSirenChronicles.com.

Millennia ago women were honored as matriarchs and the leaders of nations. Respected and powerful. Today women fight for an equal role in society, their power suppressed, their intelligence hidden, and their voice muffled. Why? Was it simply the vagaries of history or a secretly executed plan?

Demonstrating a gift for the creation of legend, author Kate Sexton delivers a hypnotic novel of mysteries and profound knowledge based on fact, and brings to life a legendary dynasty of strong women. This is the tale of a family given to history and mythology, to murder and forbidden wisdom, to song and philosophy; a family that is itself haunted by a dangerous and secretive enemy.

Rory Forsythe, a beautiful woman and successful entertainment executive, awakens from a car accident to discover she has acquired sensory abilities that both mystify and frighten her. Unsure and shaken, she is catapulted violently into a worldwide power struggle that began eons ago.

With handsome Irishman Kelsey O'Keefe at her side, Rory takes up the hunt for the hidden location of a venerable family fortune. As these two – fiercely drawn to each other, fall in love and set out to solve the mystery of her past – the novel moves backward and forward in time from today's Los Angeles and Lyon, France to atop an ancient temple in Babylon and a tribal circle of judgment held 8,000 years ago.

Rory's increasingly inspired yet dangerous moves in this ruthless game bind her to her heritage and the priceless legacy she was born to protect – The Siren Chronicles.

With a dreamlike power, the novel draws us through circuitous, dusky paths to the present. And always – through peril, tension and escape – there swirl around us echoes of eternal war; innocence versus evil, sanity against madness, life versus death.

Based on twelve years of research, Kate Sexton weaves a story filled with truths drawn from findings in archeology, linguistics, anthropology, myths and religions to reveal a stunning conclusion about the true history of the western world, the women who created the original civilizations, and the men who destroyed it.

Journey through time and history as The Siren Chronicles are revealed.

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