

*Magic &
Demons*



Cucur's Story

K.A. Turnbull

*Magic &
Demons*



Cucun's Story

K.A. Turnbull

All characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the author and have no relation whatsoever to anyone bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the author, and all incidents are pure invention. Any resemblance is purely coincidental, and if created from the author's imagination and are used fictitiously.

Copyright © 2021 by K.A. Turnbull
ISBN: 978-1-7779138-1-6

Cover photo by: Toprak Babacan from Pixabay
Photo modified by: K.A. Turnbull

All rights are reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or part in any form, is forbidden without the written permission of the author.

K Turnbull.com

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my parents for always believing in me, and not giving up on me even when others said they should. You have been a great inspiration to me, and encouraged me every step of the way, to me where I am today. I would also like to thank my dog for, not so patiently waiting, for his walks when I've lost track of time, you are always a great alarm clock to keep me from being stuck in one spot for too long.

CHAPTER ONE

Not much is known about the lives of cat demons. The thing is, there are more cat demons than regular cats on this planet. What you may not know is that our form depends on where we are born. Though humans can not get into the underworld, we cat demons can. There are two forms of cat demons. One looks like the regular cats of the world. The other a human-cat hybrid, where we can stand on our hind legs, much like a human, with a human-like build. Only our faces and paws have cat-like features. Not to mention our fur. Our color is from the rare tints of our parents and ranges from blues, reds, yellows, even purples.

I am one of those human-cat hybrids. My name is Cucun, and my mother had me on the edge of the underworld. My mother, however, was one that looked like a regular cat, pure black. She worked and looked after the humans in her city. They praised her like a Goddess, but in reality she was more like a spy, a slave to Bast. Bast was one of the nicer Goddesses that remain here in Egypt, she always had that tie that could never be broken. As a regular cat demon, they are bound to the Gods and Goddesses, required to do their bidding, no matter how big or small the task.

My father was more like me. He was a human-cat hybrid. He had no ties to any of the Gods or Goddesses. He could roam freely, both on Earth and in the underworld. It was the perfect life for a demon, which was why the two types of demons never got together. The human-cat hybrids always looked upon the other form of demons as lesser to themselves. After all, the other type did not have control over their own lives. And many of the regular cat looking demons never cared for the other, for looking down upon them. They always felt like they were given the greatest gift of all. Purpose.

My father had a different view about them, much like with everything

else. He did not follow in their gathered thinking, from the cat demons to most of the other demons that roamed the underworld or even on Earth. He felt there was always that chance that some of the regular looking cat demons only came to be, because their mother couldn't reach the land of the underworld before their birth. Being a regular looking cat demon, was not a choice that they made for themselves, but a choice, or mistake forced on them by their mother and they should not be punished for such a thing. Not to mention that they never chose to be controlled by the Gods or Goddesses, it was just imposed on them at birth, again another thing they could not control themselves.

It was during one of my father's journeys that he met my mother. It was not a journey that he liked to talk about. At least not about the reason why he was out of the underworld, for it was not for something good.

CHAPTER TWO

My father had traveled to a kingdom called Laquar. He made it there at night. People were not too fond of us cat demons. What little did they know demons already infiltrated them. I assume it was because it was easy to tell that we were demons, unlike our cat like counterparts.

There, before he could even enter the gates, laid my mother at the top of the wall, her tail dangling over the side, just swaying back and forth. My father said that if it was not for her tail moving, he never would have seen her in the darkness of night. She blended in so well. She was a larger than normal cat demon. Most only got to the size of twenty pounds, but her, she was closer to hitting the hundred pound mark, the build of a panther. It was not normal for cat demons of this region to be of this size, but there she was, defying all the possibilities. I think that was the first thing that intrigued my father about her.

He said her eyes glowed as bright as the full moon. "You do not belong here," were the first words that my mother ever said to him.

"Neither do you," my father said.

My mother jumped off the wall to meet him, her shoulder reaching up to his waist. "I belong here more than you. I will protect this place with everything that I have. The likes of you may not set foot behind these gates."

"That is not up to you. I do not have any intentions of fighting you. We do not have to be enemies. I am only after one person. One who does not belong in this world. There do not have to be any other casualties tonight," my father told her.

"You enter these gates and there will only be one casualty. And it will be you, by my hands," my mother bellowed at him. Her growl thundered through the air. He said he could even feel the vibrations in his chest.

My father went down on all fours, looking directly into her eyes, and

smiled. "You would truly risk dying for a single person in this kingdom, even when you know not whom I may be after?" he asked.

"It matters not whom you wish to kill. I will not allow it. As long as I still breathe, the people of Laquar are safe."

"And so they are," my father replied, standing back up, turning away.

"Is this some sort of trick?" my mother asked him.

"No trick. I have no intention to fight you. But I assure you, this will not be the last time you see me," he said, walking into the darkness of the night, leaving my mother there to watch him walk away.

CHAPTER THREE

Father went back every night. And every night my mother guarded that gate. Little by little they talked about more than just my father wanting to enter those gates. They got to know one another. My father said he enjoyed his nights with my mother, even if they were not always the most pleasant at the beginning.

"Tell me why you keep coming here? I doubt it is to keep talking with me. Unless it is your ploy to get past these gates," my mother asked.

"I have a duty to fulfill, and one day I will have to complete it, or there will be unspeakable consequences. Though I will admit, speaking with you has become one of my guilty pleasures as of late," my father replied.

"You are quite the dramatic. Who is this person who needs to be killed so badly, that there would be dire consequences if you do not complete the task?"

"The Great Wife to the King. She is not of this world, and she will cause the world to become unbalanced. Releasing the worst of enemies upon this world," my father explained.

"You can not be serious?! She is the Great Wife to the King! Not only is she the most powerful woman in this kingdom, but she is also the most gentle. You can not tell me that somehow she can be the cause for future destruction to this world!" my mother snapped at him.

My father placed his paw on my mother's shoulder. "You might not see it happening. And it has nothing to do with her personality. It is just who she is. She does not belong here," he told her, trying to console her.

My mother shrugged his paw off her shoulder, "and how would you know such a thing? Because your demons told you? It would be them that will try to tip the balance of this world. If it was truly the Great Wife to the King that was the problem, then the Gods and Goddesses would not

wish for her to be alive either. But yet they entrusted me to protect her. She is meant to do wonderful things. She will bring a whole new peace to this world. You know not what you speak of."

My father just sat there, looking at my mother. He knew she believed what she was saying. And maybe she was right. Maybe it would not be the Great Wife of the King that would put things out of balance. But did it matter who would be the one to take the first step, if the turmoil could all be negated by taking the life of one soul? "I do not want to argue with you, especially since I do not even know your name yet."

My mother sat back down beside him. Not as close as before, but it was better than nothing in my father's eyes. "My name is Nawmay."

"Nawmay, what a beautiful name. Not a common one that I have heard," he told my mother, looking away from her, "I can tell you care for this woman very much, Nawmay. But you have to realize, that even by now, the demons will know that I have not killed her myself. They will send someone else to kill her, and they will not hesitate to go through you to get to her. Though I do not want to do this, it would be better if it was me who did the deed rather than another demon. I would at the very least make sure that it would be a painless death."

"Is that supposed to comfort me somehow? I am just supposed to fall for that and let you waltz right into their kingdom, and let you kill her? What makes you think that any of the other demons that your clan sends will be able to get past me? Will get past her? Do you not know what she can do?" she asked.

My father looked at her, "what do you mean, do I know what she can do? She is only from another world, there is nothing special that she can do."

I smile crept over my mother's face, "you are wrong. I already knew that she was not of this world. She uses her powers in secret, but not secret to me. She even knew I was a demon, unlike all the other cats within the kingdom. She has spoken to me many a time. And she has been here for years. But yet only now does your clan wish for her to be gone. Why do you think that is, you fool?"

"I am not a fool. I may be many things, but that is not one of them," my father told her.

"Fine then. What should I call you then?"

"My name is Norik."

CHAPTER FOUR

My father went back the next night. He said he had to see Nawmay one more time before saying goodbye forever. He said that he would not kill the Great Wife of the King. That it would hurt her too much, and he could not stand doing something like that.

Nawmay had told him that night that she told the Great Wife to the King that the demons were going to attempt to kill her. They wanted her dead because she was different. The Great Wife to the King had reassured her that everything would be fine. She would not let anyone harm the kingdom, herself, or her unborn child. Nawmay explained that the Great Wife of the King was going to put up a barrier, not allowing any demon to enter, unless invited in by one who belonged in the kingdom. She said not to worry. The barrier would know if a demon tried to appear as a human and deceive a person into allowing them in. They would have to admit that they were a demon, and still be invited in before they could enter the gates of Laquar.

My father agreed it was a good course of action, and he hoped for my mother's sake that it would work.

After all the formalities, he said it became the most intimate night they had ever had. He would not go into details. Even though it was the best night of his life, it was also the hardest. He was about to say goodbye to her forever. As she would stay with the kingdom of Laquar, and he was to roam the deserts, knowing that he could never go back to the underworld. Not if he wanted a chance at life.

Two months after that, my mother left Laquar in search of my father. She went to the only entrance to the underworld that she knew. It took another month for her to make it there.

When she arrived, she had me. My father said she wanted me to be like him. She wanted me to meet my father. But he was not there. Instead,

she came upon the cat demons of his clan. They knew I was Norik's son.

"Why are you here?" they scorned her, as she curled around my tiny blue body.

"I have brought him here for his father. I know him as Norik-" my mother started.

"We know the traitor. He has not returned to the underworld, and the likes of you are not welcome!" one of the male cat demons hissed at her.

"That is enough. The child is innocent. The child is part of our clan. And she is its mother. Give her a moment to rest. Then she must leave. It is the courtesy that we show all mothers," a female cat demon stated, stepping in between my mother and the other cat demon.

He growled, turning away, not saying another word. The rest of the clan followed him, except the one who defended my mother. "You need to leave. Norik is not here. He is my brother, and for him not to fulfill his duty, there must have been a reason. I also know that if you are here having this child here, that he does not know that he was to be a father. But yet I believe that both are for the same reason. And that reason is you. You have till nightfall in the human world to leave. Scour the desert to find Norik. By now, he may not even be in Egypt anymore. You will have a long journey to find him. I wish you well," she told my mother, never looking at her.

CHAPTER FIVE

My mother did not argue. By nightfall, she took me into her mouth and searched for my father. It was difficult to search for him. He was talented at keeping himself from being found. Not to mention, it was not like you could ask anyone if they had seen him.

We had searched for him for ten years. We finally found him. He was no longer in Egypt, but just on the outskirts. It was still hot and dry, but the water was more plentiful. It was night when my mother approached him. I hid behind my mother's legs, not sure of what to do.

"I have finally found you, Norik," my mother told him. Looking up in the tree he was sleeping in.

"You should not have come looking for me. It is not safe for you to be anywhere near me. You should be with your kingdom," he replied.

"But if I stayed at the kingdom, you could never meet your son," she told him, looking back at me, moving to the side so he could see me.

My father turned, looking down at the both of us. I think it shocked him to hear the news. He almost rolled off the branch he was lying on. "Son?" he questioned.

"Yes. I tried to meet you on the day of his birth at the bridge to the underworld. But you were not there. He is like you. A hybrid. He is not linked to any of the Gods or Goddesses like I am. He is high born, just like his father," she explained.

My father jumped down from the tree, trying to look me over. My mother saw I was still trying to hide behind her. She grabbed me by the back of my neck, forcing me to meet him. I barely reached over my father's knee. I shook on the spot, trying to stay still. This was the moment that my mother had been talking to me about for as long as I could remember. I should have been ecstatic, but he terrified me. I did not know what to expect.

My father put his hand out to me. "Its alright. I will not harm you. You do not have to be afraid of me. I will protect you," he told me, his voice low, soothing my fears.

I went from being scared to feeling tears stream down my cheeks, "father!" I burst out, wrapping my arms around his large, muscular arm. He pulled me into himself, wrapping his other arm around me. My mother joined, placing her head against his, and purred. It was such a peaceful night, under the clear skies and full moon.

CHAPTER SIX

Morning came fast enough. I do not think my parents slept that whole night. They talked the entire time. I tried to stay awake, but I was too young and too tired from our travels. My father told me there was nothing important that they talked about. Just about what each of them was doing over the years. That they had a lot to catch up on. Everything seemed fine. It felt like everything was going to be good from now on. Until late morning hit.

"Where do you think we should go from here? We can not stay here," my mother asked.

"We can-" my father started, looking in my mother's direction. It was then that he saw what was coming, and there was nothing he could do.

Within seconds my mother fell to the ground, an arrow through her back. My father went to her, pulling her into himself. I just stayed where I was, crying. I did not know what else to do. I was just a child then. I did not even move towards either of my parents, like my feet were frozen to the ground.

It did not take long before I could tell what my father noticed before my mother dropped to the ground. "We found you at last, brother. Did you really think you could hide from us forever?" It was the cat demon my mother described to me that had spared her life the day I was born.

"Neeha! What did you do? She did not deserve this! Why would you try to kill Nawmay?" my father growled at her.

"Do not act like she did not have something to do with you not being able to complete your mission. Besides, if I wanted her to be dead already, trust me, she would be. She needs to hear the news I have. News that you must pay for," Neeha replied.

I thought my mother was already dead, but I saw her move her tail. What the demon was saying was true. She was still alive. I ran to my

mother, burying my head in her stomach, crying like a blubbering mess.

"Looks like the runt will hear of both your short comings. The Great Wife to the King of Laquar is dead," Neeha stated.

"No," my mother said, trying to move her body to face Neeha.

"If she is dead, then why come after us? Why should it matter whose hands it was done by? You had no reason to wound Nawmay!" my father yelled at her.

"Silence! You fool. If you would have killed her when we had told you to, then the King of Laquar would not be in the process of opening the gates to the underworld! It will throw the balance into chaos because you could not do the deed with your own hands!" Neeha yelled at him as she got closer to all of us.

My father shifted, trying to curl his body over both my mother and me. "But it was not the Great Wife that had to be killed. If it is the actions of the King that are causing the shift in balance. How can you say that if the King would have been taken care of, that the Great Wife of the King would not have been able to keep the balance?" my mother asked, gasping for air.

"Because it is due to what the Great Wife of the King can do, that corrupted him in the first place! And you, Nawmay, are the reason my brother, Norik, the traitor of our clan, could not proceed with his duties! You are both to blame for this mess. And no one can fix it. Not with the barrier up, keeping demons out of Laquar, so we cannot reach the King before he finishes opening the gate," Neeha explained.

"But, what does the gate even do? How does the gate being open change the balance of the world?" I asked, taking my head out of my mother's belly.

"He is a stupid little one, is he not? Or have you taught him nothing? But I guess a mother, a slave to the Gods and Goddesses may not know, and it being the first day with his father, maybe I should not be so harsh on him," Neeha stated, leaning back, sitting on the sand, trying to look me in the eyes, holding her bow to her side. "What the gate does, is it keeps demons in the underworld, and all other living creatures out. Once that gate opens, it will be a free bridge for anyone to cross back and forth as they please. That was only ever to be something that either species of cat demons could do. We are supposed to be the only tie between the underworld and the land of the living."

"But someone must have made the gate before. Why is it not possible for someone to make a new one and balance the world out again? Why does my mother have to die if it can be fixed?" I whimpered out.

"Your reasoning is logical, young one. But it is not possible to do. No one knows who made the first gate, or what we would need to make another one. Thus, if this gate is broken, there is no fixing it, or making a new one. That is all that we have. And it is because of your parents that this is the fate of the world. A world that they were supposed to keep safe from the things that the living do not understand. And because they have forced this fate on the world, they must be punished," Neeha said, getting back up to her feet, charging at my father.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Neeha hit my father in the shoulders with her front paws, pulling him away from my mother and I, pinning him to the ground. "You will come back with me to the underworld, brother."

"I can not believe it is you who is doing this, sister. Why you?" my father asked, trying to gain back control, shifting his legs back and forth, trying to get Neeha off balance. My father was much bigger than her, but with where she had her paws, my father could not use his full strength against her.

"It had to be me! I was tested because you are my brother who betrayed the clan. They had to make sure I was not like you. That I would not turn my back on the clan like you did. They will not punish me for the choices that you have made!" Neeha yelled at him, lifting her one paw off his shoulder, moving her bow over my father's throat.

I ran at her. I was not sure what I was planning on doing at that moment, but somehow I felt brave, "leave my father alone!"

Neeha looked back at me, trying to shift her weight, to place her other hand on the other side of her bow, but to keep my father's shoulders pinned at the same time. Once I got close enough, she swung her large, deep purple tail at me, hitting me in the chest. It flung me back to my mother, taking the air out of my chest.

My mother tried to turn to see me, but only her front paws could move, and it was there that I could see the arrow was lodged in her spine. The bottom half of her body being paralyzed. "Do not fight her. You can not win. You should run. Make sure that you stay alive," she cried to me, her voice getting weaker as time went on.

I wanted to reply to her, but I could not. I had to wait until I could feel the air filling my lungs.

"Your son may be brave, but he is stupid. He would need much

training before the clan could ever accept him," Neeha said to my father, looking back at him.

My father wrapped his tail around her foot, pulling her back. She lost her balance, landing against my father's chest. He could finally move his arms, rolling her off of himself, and onto the sand. He wrapped his hands around her throat, "you will never have my son! He will never be put through that training, by you or anyone else!" my father growled at her.

I saw her lips move, but no sound came from her. But her claws glowed red, stabbing into my father's side. I could smell the searing flesh. It burned my nose. My father tried to keep a hold on her neck as her claws kept inching deeper into his side. My father had to let go to grab her wrist to keep her from burning more of his flesh. Because of that, she was able to pull herself out from under my father, hitting him in the face with her back paw. He fell backwards, his head beside me and my mother. "Father?" I squeaked out, still having a hard time being able to breathe. He did not respond, and his eyes would not open.

"Though my brother is a traitor, and she is the cause of it all, I can not just allow a child to die," Neeha stated, grabbing her bow. She took something off her waist that I never noticed before and walked over to my father. "You will learn what happens to traitors first hand. Maybe then you will not have the same fate as he will." Neeha put something on my father's wrists, it coiling around them. Tears built back up in my eyes, and I turned into my mother, grabbing onto her fur as tight as I could.

I could feel Neeha grab onto the back of my neck, her nails still hot from when she was fighting with my father, but not hot enough to burn through my flesh. She tried to pull me away from my mother, but I didn't want to let go. She yanked me even harder, and my mother's fur slipped through my paws.

"You are too young to resist me. You do not have the strength to fight. There is no point in doing so," Neeha said, holding me up so my toes barely touched the ground. I dangled in her grasp, swaying back and forth, seeing her dragging my father with her other hand as she walked around my mother.

"But what about mother?" I cried.

"Her punishment is to die knowing her lover is damned for the rest of his life, and her son fated to watch over his father until his dying breath, and there is nothing she can do to stop it. May her Gods and Goddesses have mercy on her to have a swift death," Neeha said.

"Mother! Mother!" I screamed repeatedly. Even after I could not see her anymore. How could everything have gone so wrong?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Neeha forced us back to the underworld where they locked my father and I in cages, awaiting to hear what was to be decided about our lives.

"Your mother never gave you a name. She said it was always tradition for the father to give the name. We wanted to tell you together what name we had chosen for you. I know you have gone so many years without one, and it will take time to get used to your new name. But I wanted to make sure, that no matter what happens, that you got to hear what name we had chosen for you. Your name is Cucun. No one should ever have to live their whole life without a name."

I did not say a thing in response. I was not sure how he could think of such a thing at a moment like this. Mother was dead, and from how Neeha was talking, I did not think there was a possibility of living through this day. So, what would be the point of having a name? I never thought it was strange to begin with. But then again I did not know any better, or know that a name had any meaning.

"Enough with the talking. Your fate has been decided. It is time for you to hear what is to be done with you, Norik," Neeha said, opening the door to our cage.

She grabbed my father's arm, "but what of my son?" my father demanded.

"You will find out soon enough. And then so will he," Neeha stated, dragging him out of the cage. I tried to get out with him, but Neeha shoved me with her foot, forcing me to the back of the cage, closing it the moment she got my father out.

I ran at the door, gripping onto the metal bars, "father!" I cried. I didn't know what else to do. I felt like that a lot. Even though I had always depended on my mother for my entire life, the moment I met my father, I could no longer depend on anyone, and I was just a child. There

was no way I could depend on my own strength. It just was not available to me. And now, I was supposed to wait to know what was going to happen with my last living family member. Even if Neeha was my father's sister, she was not my family.

CHAPTER NINE

Time passed. I do not know how much. There were no indications of time in the underworld.

Neeha brought my father back. He was covered in blood, his eyes were swollen shut, and he could not walk.

"What did you do to my father? What did you do to him?!" I yelled at her, as she opened the door.

"It is his punishment, for what he has done," Neeha told me, tossing him to the ground. I looked him over. I did not want to touch him out of fear that I might hurt him even more. "He should be the one to tell you what your sentence is. But clearly he cannot do that for some time. So it will be I who tells you. We damned your father to be broken. He will have daily beatings until his soul is broken. Only then will he be able to set foot out of that cage. But he will never be free again. He will obey the clan until the day he dies. And your sentence is to watch him be broken, so you will learn to never betray the clan. Once your father is broken, that will be the moment you will be trained in the ways of our clan. Only for as long as you do not show your father's traits in deceiving us. We will keep a close eye on you," Neeha explained, locking the door to the cage, walking away before I could say anything.

"Do not worry about me, Cucun. They may break my body, but not my mind or soul. I made my choices because of who I am. They can never change who I am. They have always known I differed from them. It was why I could do more than them. I was not stuck in the olden ways, and nothing will change that. Now it will be time for you to decide who it is that you wish to be. It will be hard for you. I know that. But you will have to choose who you want yourself to be when you get older, and it will be best for you to make that choice now. Once you do, it will not matter what they do to me. Knowing who you want to be will give you

the strength you need to withstand this torture. And trust me, it will be torture for you to see what they will be putting me through," my father explained. His voice raspy and weak, making him cough once he finished. Droplets of blood spraying out of his mouth.

I did not know how to do as he asked. I had not lived long enough to know who I was or what I wanted to be. And now, any opportunity I would have had, is lost. I was to be turned into a puppet, and the only hope my father gave me was something I could not do.

CHAPTER TEN

Years went by, and I grew bigger. I think it was the only reason I knew it was years. Each day blended into the next. Sometimes I wondered if they took my father multiple times in one day. But then again, they could have just taken him at different times each day, just to make the torment even worse. And there was nothing I could do to change a thing.

As I grew, they separated my father and I. I was not sure if it was because we were not leaving much room between each other, or if they were getting worried that I was getting large enough that I could decide to fight back. It was not like they were treating me poorly. They would feed me and give me plenty of water, at least compared to my father. But I still do not believe that I would have been able to take any of them on in hand to hand combat. They were all much more skilled than I was.

I have to admit, the sound that I hated the most over everything else in the underworld was the sound of a lock clicking. I knew it either meant that they were going to take my father again, or that we were truly trapped in here. But with each of my father's beatings, he said no ill wills about Neeha or any of the other cat demons of his clan. He never said much of anything, and when he did, it was always about his past with my mother. Those times got fewer and farther apart and it made me wonder if he was able to talk at all anymore. I was not sure how much more he could take. I did not even know why he would not just give in to them and let the beatings stop. Why was he so determined when there was nothing left to fight for? One night I asked him that exact question.

"Giving up, and throwing away the thing that makes you who you are, because someone else is trying to force you to, is a fate worse than death. I would rather be dead, then to live even a minute, in a life like that," he told me. His voice was soft and raspy. I do not think they gave him any water today. There were many days that they would not. He only got

enough of either to keep him alive, nothing more. His body withered in front of my eyes. He no longer looked like the same demon I met that day with my mother. So much had already changed. I could barely even remember that day anymore, even though I once thought it was the happiest day of my life.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Neeha came back without my father today. Instead, she took me from my cage, and brought me somewhere I have never been before. Everything glowed orange. It was hotter here than it was in my cage. I am sure that if they had put us here at the start that I would have found it unbearable. But I must have adapted to the temperature to not have noticed anymore.

Neeha kept pulling me behind her. I did not feel like my legs had much strength to them. I was not sure if it was because I had not walked any distance in a long time, or if it was because I was already breaking from seeing my father be tortured. I did not know how he could have lasted so long, or what was coming next. Neeha never took me out of my cage before, not since they separated father and myself.

I could see other cat demons standing around on higher ledges than the one I was on. Neeha kept me walking forward until I could see that where I was walking was going to be ending soon. I was not sure what was waiting for me, but I was certain I was going to be finding out what was below soon enough.

I tried to stop my movements, but Neeha was much stronger than I was. With one last tug, she threw me down. The ledge was not very deep, but I hit the ground with my face, and my body landed on something else that was not stone. I got on all fours, looking up at the clan. I was not sure I wanted to know what I landed on. Somehow thinking that if I did not look for myself, that I would not learn what it was. But somehow I think I already knew, without ever needing to see or be told.

"Your father's torture has ended today," one of the male cat demons stated. "His body was weaker than his soul," he continued. My heart sank. It felt like I had a ton of stone lodged in my stomach. I already knew it was my father I had landed on. I tried to keep myself calm, but all I could

do was look at the ground. Tears rolled down my cheeks.

"We had hoped you could see what obedience would look like. But clearly that did not happen, since Norik is no longer with us. And with your reaction to this news, it is certain that you have not learned what you were needing to before we could start your training. Your heart is still with Norik, and we can not trust you if that is the case. You must go through another trial, if you are to join this clan. If you fail, we will kill you. There is no point in you living, if you cannot be trusted to keep balance in the world. No matter what it takes to accomplish that," a female cat demon said, that was not Neeha.

"And what will be my trial?" I growled, still not looking up at any of them.

"We will charge you to bury Norik, in the human world. The trick will be finding a place where his demon energy can be put to rest, and not be disturbed by any human, or any other creature," the first demon stated.

"And how will I know where that location will be?" I asked, finally looking up at them. My eyes burned, my cheeks even more so.

"There is no way we can tell you that. You will just know," another male cat demon stated, sounding much older than the first.

"Then how will you know I have accomplished this? And why must his body be undisturbed? You did not care about that when Neeha killed my mother!" I screamed. I knew it was not a good idea, but I could not help it.

"The likes of your mother was not our business. That would have been for Gods and Goddesses to deal with. Not like she could have been called a demon. Not in the form she was in. A slave. You are just lucky enough she delivered you here, in the underworld, so you would not have to live the same cruel, disgusting fate as she," Neeha burst out.

"Then what do you do for your own humble, demon clan?" I asked, hating every moment I was there.

"That is enough of your questions!" the other female demon snapped.

"No. If we are to hope that he can fulfill this task and come back to us, he may know the answer," the elder cat demon stated. "The cat demons of our clan are buried here in the underworld. Because your father is a traitor, he will not receive the honor of being buried here with the rest of the clan, or his family. That is why it must be taken care of, and you must find a special place for his body to be buried, so it can not taint our ancestors, or corrupt the living. That is why we are giving you this task. We must see if you have the eye to see how to keep balance. No matter how large or small the task is. Your father already broke the balance

between the underworld and the living. He did not see what he was doing by going against us, and falling for your mother. And this goes far beyond just Egypt. No one knows how far the underworld reaches. Causing the break in those gates was the last thing we could afford, and now we must figure out a new form of balance. We have already been trying, but to no avail. So, now, you must be the next possibility in creating balance and order."

"And what if I refuse to do this task?" I asked, hearing Neeha jump off the ledge standing just behind me. I was certain she was already pointing a weapon at me.

"You have no choice. You will do this. Or die here. Neeha will prepare your father's body so you may carry it. By morning, we will send you into the world of the living, where you will wonder until your task is complete. And I assure you, we will be watching. If you step out of line, we will take you out of the picture. But you are still a young demon, two hundred in human years. You have so much to learn, and I am sure that you would prefer to learn them, then to be put into an early grave," the elder stated, nudging his head towards me.

Two other cat demons jumped down towards me, grabbing my arms and picking me up. They dragged me back to my cage, dropping me through the opened door, closing it behind me before I could even get back up. Not that I wanted to get up off the floor. I had lost the last thing I ever cared about. Nothing else mattered.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I have been wandering the desert for days. I do not even know if I am going around in circles. I have not been able to find water yet, and the sun is beating down. I believe it is hotter here than it ever was in the underworld. And it does not help that I carry a large sack with my father's remains in them. I do not know how Neeha got them to fit in the sack, but I do not want to look. I have not slept, and I have never put it down. Not once, since they cast me out of the underworld.

I do not know where I am or where I am going. I am not even sure if I want to get to where it is I need to be. I do not think I am ready to lay my father to rest. I could use his words of advice right now, even though I know it is not possible.

Today the weather is even worse than it has been. The winds have picked up, and the sand is pelting me in the face. The winds kept picking up as the day went by, and there was no shelter in sight. Not that I would know if there was any, as I could barely see my feet while I walked. The sand got up my nose, and any time I tried to breathe through my mouth, sand would gum up the back of my throat, making it even dryer than it already was.

It felt like this was going to be my last day, and there was not a reason left for me to keep fighting. I never wanted to go back to the underworld. Back to that clan, even if they accepted me as one of their own. I felt my legs go weak. I fell to the ground, feeling the heat from the sand soaking into my damp skin. My eyes started to close. I knew that this was the end for me.

I could hear a voice in the distance. I could not tell what they were saying, but it sounded like a woman's voice. I did not call out to her. I do not think that I could with how dry my throat was anyway. I just laid there, waiting for my life to end. It would have been unlikely for her to

find me in this storm, even if I wanted to be saved.

The last thing I felt, before all my senses went numb, was a small, cold hand on my shoulder. And a woman calling for someone to get to her quickly. That a child was in trouble. I was not sure who she was talking about, but somehow I could understand her now. But it did not matter. It was too late for me.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The last thing I thought would happen occurred that day. I could feel my eyes wanting to open. I was not sure if this is what they called the afterlife, or if I was saved. Everything felt cool, but I could still hear the wind, and the sand hitting something hard, it echoing all around me. I got my eyes to open. It was dim, but there was something white above me, and I could hear talking nearby.

I looked over at the voices. There was a young man and a young woman. They were sitting on the ground, not too far from me.

"You need to stop being so nosy. It isn't yours," the woman stated to the man, who was looking through something that looked a lot like the sack that I had. The one with my father in it.

It was then that I realized it was my sack. I jumped to my feet and growled, lunging for the young man.

The woman was fast. I did not even see her grab a weapon, and yet she had a dagger at my throat.

"I told you we shouldn't trust him. He's just another demon. Just like the rest of them," the young man said.

I was not sure if they could understand me, but somehow I could understand them. "It is not yours to be looking through," I growled through my teeth.

I could see the woman flinch. Her grip loosened on her blade. "He isn't a threat, Markata. You just need to be minding your own business," the woman stated, never taking her eyes off of me. "If I promise he won't try to go through your bag again, will you stand down?"

"You are the one with a blade at my throat. Not the other way around," I said.

"True. But you are a demon. I doubt you need a blade or any other weapon to attempt to kill either of us. Now, if you stand down, so will I. I

don't want to fight a child if I don't have to," she explained.

I relaxed my muscles, trying to sit still. I was not trusting that she would keep her word. Then she lowered her blade, sitting back. "Markata, don't touch his bag again, unless he asks you to," the woman spoke. "I would normally let you take your things and let you leave, but this sandstorm is bad, and I wouldn't feel right about sending a child out into weather like that."

"I am not a child. I am on a task that I must complete," I said, not wanting to explain anything more than I had to.

"So are Aziza and I. You don't hear us complaining about it. There's nothing to do, other than to sit and wait. You're just lucky that Aziza found you, before the storm buried you in this sand," the man said.

"Not sure how she could have seen me in that sand. I am sure that it was by accident that you came upon me," I said, my voice was cold. I did not trust them.

"I can see it may sound odd, but I have special abilities. It's why it's so cool in here. Another one of my abilities. I could sense you in that sandstorm. And when I found you, I made this shelter. You're much heavier than I thought. Figured it would take less effort for me to make the shelter over you, then to drag you over to where we were," the woman explained. "Now, where are my manners? I am Aziza, and the man that was trying to look through your things is Markata. What's your name?"

I looked away from her. I had never said my own name. And I only heard my father say it a few times. I was not sure if I was ready to say it out loud.

"If you aren't willing to say anything, this is going to be a very long wait," Markata stated, laying down with his hands above his head.

Aziza scrunched up her face, hitting Markata in the chest. "Don't be so cruel. You don't know his past. He may not speak about it as freely, like we can."

"I have never said my name before," I stated.

Aziza just looked at me saying nothing for a moment. "Where are your parents?"

"Dead."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring up any bad memories. You still seem so young," Aziza stated.

"And yet, I am more than likely older than you are. Demons age much slower. It is why we live for so long. If anything, both of you are more like children than I am. Which begs the question, why are you on a journey? Should you not be with your families?" I asked.

"That can't happen. We are the cursed souls of Laquar. I'm sure you've heard of the story. Everyone in Egypt has," Markata stated.

My eyes widened. I had heard of the city before. It was the one that Neeha mentioned before leaving my mother to die alone. "I have heard of the King of Laquar. But nothing of the cursed souls of Laquar."

"Well, you know part of the story, then. It was the King of Laquar who cursed our souls to be reborn until we could complete a specific journey. And until that day comes, both us, and the Kingdom of Laquar, will never be free," Aziza explained.

"He was my father, originally. It was him who cursed us. All because my original mother, wouldn't give him power. Or at least that's how the story goes. Not like we can prove any of it. Even scrolls that were supposed to have been written by us in a previous life can't be true proof. I mean if it happened, why can't we remember any of it?" Markata asked, still laying on the ground.

"Because, it is only the underworld that can contain the souls of those who have passed. I do not know that it could even be possible that the both of you could be reborn into new bodies. No matter what, all your experiences would change who you are, thus being a new soul," I said. I was not sure why, as I did not know the real answer. But it sounded probable in my head.

"That might be so. But neither of our parents in this lifetime have the same mark as us, and cannot do the things that we can. Though our minds, and personalities may be different, clearly we are somehow connected to those past people. Even if we can't remember it at all. That's the only proof I need. Besides, if it isn't true, then we're doing this for nothing. Us, risking our lives, is for nothing, even if not for ourselves, but Laquar as well," Aziza said.

"But no one knows if Laquar even exists anymore. It's been so long since anyone has been there, that it might as well be a myth," Markata explained.

"It exists," I stated. Both Markata and Aziza stared at me. "It is why both my parents are now dead. It is why nothing is balanced anymore. And it is why I must carry my father's remains."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The sandstorm ended by morning. We did not talk much more after what I told them. Though I did not know what to say to them either for being connected to Laquar as well.

Aziza let everyone out of the shelter, before letting it melt before our eyes, only leaving a wet spot in the sand.

I looked all around us, and nothing looked the same as it did before the storm. I did not even know what direction I was going in before. I picked up my father and tried to guess which way I should go next. In the distance I could see a pack of Jackals. They were coming towards us.

"They're Jackals," Aziza told me, knowing that I was looking at them.

"Demons that must have escaped from the underworld," I said.

"Possible, though I'm not sure that you can say they've escaped," Aziza stated.

"All demons that are not cat demons, have escaped from the underworld," I told her. "Do you plan on killing them?"

"No," she replied. I looked back at her, "they aren't a threat. I have no intention of killing something that isn't planning on hurting me. There's no point. I've killed more than my fair share of living things. Life is life, no matter what their origin is."

I could not believe her logic. It had sounded more peaceful and balancing than anyone from the cat demon clan, and that was their entire purpose for living. How could a mere human, at this age, be wiser than any of them? "How do you know they will not hurt you, though? They are coming towards us."

"Because this isn't the first time we've met. They are of the few demons that will help us get to the secret pyramid, where we can break the curse," Markata stated.

"We only found out when we gave them a chance. They were

following us for a while. They were tired, hungry, and dehydrated. We couldn't help the hunger, but I could quench their thirst, and give them a cool place to stay. After that night, once in a while they would help us catch food or deliver messages for us, in return for water to drink. It took a bit to figure out how to communicate, as they spoke some type of other language that I've never heard before. To be honest, it surprised me that we could communicate right away," Aziza explained.

"I do not think that we were originally speaking in the same language. I remember before everything went black, that I could hear your voice. I did not know what you were saying. I do not think it was until you touched me that I could understand you. You have to remember, the underworld is vast, and covers over many plains. I am sure that with cat demons being so connected with the underworld, that we can learn many languages to help calm the souls that enter the underworld. All that would be needed would be a touch. But that is only a guess. I know little about my kind," I stated.

"The how isn't important, as long as we can understand each other now," Aziza said, with a smile on her face. I heard Aziza laugh. I looked back at her. And she had created a small river, floating in the air. Four Jackals came up to it, lapping at the water. When they were done, they went to Aziza and licked her face. I had never seen such affection since the night my parents met again. I did not understand. They both came from such different worlds, and yet they were at peace.

One of the Jackal's eyes glowed yellow, and pictures appeared in front of us. Even Markata stood beside us, observing. "Still nothing then," Markata said.

"What is it you were looking for?" I asked.

"We asked the Jackals to help us try to find the secret pyramid that we're supposed to find. It is said that this pyramid has a jewel in the center, light beaming down. It is within that light that we can gain our powers. I have already gotten mine in one of the secret pyramids, but we're still unable to find the one for Markata. There were pictures in the pyramid that I got mine, but they're too hard to tell where it is. So, right now, we're walking aimlessly, until we can find some sort of clue," Aziza said.

"Even though we have not known each other for long, do you think there would be a chance that the Jackals could find a special burial place for my father? I have been trying for days, but I do not know where to go," I asked, looking away from Aziza, not sure why I asked her.

Aziza walked closer to me, placing her hand on my shoulder. I

flinched, but she still did not move her hand away. "Are you sure that, if there is such a place that you'd want to bury him? You don't look like you could part with him so easily."

I looked at her, tears welling up in my eyes, "but there is no other choice. I can not carry him for the rest of my life."

"Actually, there might be a way," she said. Her voice was soothing, but I did not know how it would be possible. "Before this life claimed me. My father was a weapon maker. He showed me how to make weapons, too. One day, a demon invaded our village. I think it knew what my fate was and was trying to come after me. Many of the villagers died killing the thing. And once it was dead, my father figured out how to use the bones to make weapons. Armor was always too hard to mold into the shape that was needed, but weapons were usually easier. While he was making the sword, that I carry on my back today, he had me watch him, learn everything that I needed to. There were some failures, but he figured out how to do it. And I know how to as well. I could use the remains of your father to make you a weapon. A weapon that could protect you for the rest of your life. Much like any father would want to do. But that is only if you would be alright with me doing so. I know it would feel like I would be dismembering your father," Aziza said, trying to choose her words wisely.

"He has not been in one piece, since the day that I started to carry him. The clan made sure of that. If you could do something with his remains, that would allow me to carry him forever, then that is what I would want. I would not have to worry about someone else finding his remains, and pillaging his final resting place," I told Aziza. Even though the thought of it made my stomach clench, in my mind, the storm was passing. There seemed to be a light shining when there was not one before.

"Very well. We should head to Cadar. There, I have all my things that I would need to make you a weapon. There are even some designs there of weapons from distant lands. I'm sure I could figure out something perfect for you to use," Aziza said, grinning from ear to ear.

"Thank you," I whispered, tears rolling down my face.

"Well, I guess we're going backwards then," Markata stated, turning away from us, walking into the desert. Aziza let go of my shoulder and followed him.

"Before we go any farther, there is something I need to tell you, both."

"What is it?" Markata asked, turning around, not looking too impressed.

"My name. It is Cucun."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

It took us a couple of days to reach Cadar. There Aziza took my father's remains. "You shouldn't see this while I'm doing it. It could be disturbing if you watch, since it is your father's remains after all. But would you like to say any last prayers or goodbyes before I transform him?"

"I do not know of any prayers. I never have. Not like any of them would ever have been answered. Look at what we are doing? If they had, we all would not be here," I told her.

"I understand. There is a prayer that I know. I will say it before I start. But you and Markata should rest while I work. There won't be too many times that we get to relax for a bit," Aziza said, taking the sack with my father in it.

"Glad to hear," Markata stated, stretching his arms out above his head. "I'll bring Cucun to our usual place. We'll wait for you there till you're done. Follow me."

I just stood there. I felt paralyzed. I was not sure what to do or what to expect. Aziza put her hand on my shoulder. "You can still change your mind. I have started nothing yet. It isn't too late, and we won't get upset if you do. This must be a hard decision to make."

"I may not be ready for this. But it is the best thing to do. I know it is. You may proceed," I told Aziza.

"Alright, then you should go with Markata. Rest a while. You could use it after everything you've been through," Aziza said, taking her hand off my shoulder. I was not sure why, but it always felt so comforting when she placed her hand on my shoulder. I enjoyed it. For once, touch was not a bad thing.

I nodded to Aziza and could finally turn and follow Markata. He brought me to some form of lodging for travelers. It was not a large

building, but it had a few levels, walls separating it into different places. I had never seen a place like this. I was not sure what to think of it. Markata brought me up to what they called a room. Inside there were even more things that I had never seen before. He had told me to lie on the one mat, that it was a form of bedding. I did not understand. I had nothing like it in the underworld, and before that, I always curled into my mother when it was time to sleep. But nothing like this.

I did as he said. It was much better than sleeping on the ground, or on the bottom of a cage. I do not think I even noticed when I fell asleep.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

It took several days before Aziza was done making the weapon for me. We only saw her a few times a day. Just enough time for her to eat something and to sleep. When she was done, she brought the weapon to our room. "Here it is," she told me, handing it gently over, waiting for me to take it from her.

She had it wrapped in the same sack that I was carrying my father in. I doubted that the townspeople would have been alright with seeing her carrying a weapon. "I think you might like it. I have made nothing like it before," she stated, pulling the sack off the weapon. "It's sort of like an ax. Rather than it being double sided, I connected the two, one after the other. That's only one half. You can connect the two parts together. It'll be like having four axes together. You can choose to twist it together as one whole weapon, or split them apart to have one in each hand. Though I think using them separately might be harder to start out with, unless you've used a weapon before."

I inspected the blades. The ax part she mentioned was silver. I could not believe that she made it out of bone. Usually bone was white, and at the center the handles were a dark royal blue, like my father's fur. "Did you use metal to make this?" I asked.

"There's no metal at all. The way that demon bones are, is when they're heated they're easier to manipulate into a shape that you want. But, when it's being heated, it turns into a metallic color, and becomes even stronger than the original bone. And I dried the fur to wrap around the handles. It will help with protecting the handles and make it easier to grip onto. Anything that I didn't use, is still in the library where I was working. No one can get to it without me or Markata letting them in. I figured until you know what you want to do with the rest of your father's remains, that they would be safe there," Aziza explained.

"Thank you. It looks beautiful. Though I do not know how I will carry it. The sack that you have it in now is too large to make Norik accessible," I said.

"Norik?" Markata asked.

"Yes. It was my father's name. And since the blade is, in essence, him, so too will it carry his name," I explained.

Aziza smiled, "it is a wonderful and strong name. I believe I can make a sheath for it. You're still growing, so I'll have to make the strap adjustable so it can grow with you. It shouldn't take me too long to make. And then after we'll have to train. No point in you having a weapon you can't use."

Aziza had a point. I would have to train, to learn how to fight with it, or there would have been no point in transforming my father.

It only took Aziza two days to complete the sheath. The first parts of my training seemed simple enough. Taking my Norik out of its sheath without dropping it, and being able to connect and separate it, using quick and smooth movements. It was easier to hear my task than to do it. But it was something that I could do as we traveled and stopped for breaks. When I could do my training with limited mistakes, Aziza trained me in hand to hand combat. First with blocks, then with attacks. We practiced several times a day as we traveled.

It was hard, but got easier as time went by. "You've improved. I'm impressed with how quickly you've learned. Especially with a weapon that no one has ever used before."

"I have had a wonderful teacher. I do not think that any of this would have been possible without you. And I do not just mean with having Norik be made in the first place. I now really do feel like my father is watching over us, that he would want nothing less," I told Aziza.

"It was my pleasure," Aziza replied, bowing her head.

"Ugh," grunted Markata. We both looked back at him, seeing him looking down at his chest, the tip of an arrow penetrating through it, blood trickling through his clothing as he fell to the ground.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I could not see who shot the arrow. Aziza ran for Markata. I do not think I have ever seen her so angry before. The tips of her hair went ablaze. And then something she had never done in front of me happened. Her form changed to some large white cat. She almost looked like my mother, but in white. It stunned me for a moment. And that was when I saw her. It was Neeha. She was holding her bow, shooting another arrow, but this time at Aziza.

She swatted it with her paw, diverting it to the side. Aziza charged at Neeha, but Neeha was already arming her bow again. I had to do something, or else Neeha was going to take my new family away from me, just like she did with my parents.

I charged at Neeha as well, but Aziza was much faster. Neeha let her arrow fly. Aziza barely moved, and nothing slowed her down. I do not think that she hit her. Neeha was a great shot, and it surprised me that she could not hit Aziza, though I was very pleased about that.

Aziza jumped at Neeha, but Neeha blocked with her bow. Aziza did not care she grabbed onto Neeha's bow with her mouth, pulling the bow away from Neeha. Aziza burst into flames, burning the entire bow.

"Neeha! You are mine!" I yelled. I did not want Aziza to get hurt, not by the hands of my father's sister. It barely took me any time at all to get past Aziza. I lunged, splitting my Norik in two. I tried to keep all of Aziza's training in mind, including to keep my anger in check. Though I believe at this moment, both of us were failing at that part.

"Why am I not surprised? The son of a traitor, betraying his own kind, just like his father," Neeha growled at me, grabbing both of my wrists. She was still much taller than I was. I had grown little since I had last seen her. Though being honest, it had not been that long. She still had the advantage.

"If anything, it is you who has become the traitor!" I snarled, trying to pull my blades back.

"Ha! You are siding with those who do not belong to this world. It is because of things like them that this world is out of balance," she tried to tell me.

I yanked one more time, freeing myself of her grip. Though I was not sure if it was because I got the upper hand or if she let me go, trying to toy with me. I stumbled back, "but it is them that can bring everyone together. They are not against people, nor are they against the demons. It can be them who can balance everything back to the way it was. Maybe even better than what it was!" I tried to tell her.

Neeha grabbed two of her arrows, breaking off the rods, keeping only the tips in her hands. "You are only a child and know nothing. Yet you try to speak like an adult with wisdom. Allow me to teach you a lesson in life!" Neeha charged at me. She tried to slash at me with the arrow tips, clanging them against Norik. I tried to keep the blades covering my forearms. It was the only way to keep her from striking me.

I thrust one of my blades at Neeha. She leaned back, keeping herself up with her tail against the ground. "Aha!" she screamed, lifting her one leg off the ground, kicking me square in the chest. I fell to the ground, dropping half of Norik, it sliding along the sand. Neeha stood back up, standing over me, "one thing that you did not inherit from your father. His ability to fight. Now I will kill you, like I should have done while you were still in that cage!" Neeha was descending on me. I raised the only half of Norik I had, but she had two arrow heads, and there was going to be no way that I was going to be able to block both of them at the same time.

I saw a glimmer against Neeha's face. I raised my Norik over my face, feeling hot embers falling from above me. I looked over, and it was Aziza. She was standing near Markata's body, her hands blazing, as she shot another ball of fire at Neeha. Neeha moved away from me. "I am a demon of the underworld. Your fire does not burn hot enough to kill me!" Neeha turned towards Aziza. I rolled away, grabbing onto the second half of Norik, combining the two of them.

Neeha threw one of her arrow heads, no longer paying any attention to me. I jumped up behind her, stabbing her downward in the back, hoping that it would hit something vital to end all of this. "Let my father's remains be what cast you out of this world. Just like how you cast out my family!" I whispered into her ear.

Neeha fell to her knees. "You think you have saved them. But you

have not. They are dead, and there is still nothing you can do about it. Even in killing me, you have not won a single thing," Neeha choked out, before falling to the ground. I ripped my Norik out of her back, looking over at Aziza and Markata. Markata still did not move since everything began, and Aziza's face was hidden from me, as she looked down at Markata.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"How did you know her?" Aziza asked, choking on her words.

"She was my father's sister. She was also the one who killed both of my parents," I replied, standing behind her. Neeha's blood still dripping off the tip of Norik.

"Was this the real reason why you were in the desert that day we found you? Were you supposed to kill us?" Aziza asked, turning her head toward me. Her face was red, and tears flowed down her cheeks.

"She was part of the reason why I was out in that storm. But it was not to find you, I swear. I knew neither of you even existed until I woke up. I wanted none of this to happen," I told her, hoping that she would believe me.

Aziza looked back down at Markata, lying motionless on the ground. She kissed his forehead. "We need to take him to the pyramid. My pyramid," Aziza told me.

"I can carry him," I told her, moving closer to Markata.

"Don't you dare touch him!" Aziza snapped. I took a step back, watching as she tried to pull Markata closer to her. She gasped. It was then that I could see blood seeping through her clothing.

"Stop. You can not carry him. You are injured, and it will only make it worse. Please, allow me to bring him," I begged.

"It's just a small cut. She caught me with one of her arrows," Aziza replied.

I knelt beside her, putting down my Norik, placing my hand over her's. "But you are still bleeding. You normally do not bleed for this long, so, since you are still bleeding, it must be more serious than what you are saying. I will carry him."

"Fine, if you insist," Aziza stated, placing her hand over her wound, freezing the area. A cool mist drifting away from her body, with the heat

from the beating sun.

I picked Markata up, putting him on my shoulders. I stumbled as I got to my feet, Aziza steadying me. "Thank you," I told her.

"I'll carry Norik. There's no way you can carry both. Not with Markata covering your sheath," Aziza told me, bending over to grab Norik, before I could say anything. I just nodded my head and we started walking. I let her be in front, as I did not know where this pyramid was.

We walked for days, and from time to time we had to stop for Aziza to freeze her wound over again. It was not healing. She did not want to talk about it, so I did not ask, not with her glaring at me the way she did when I would look toward her wound.

As the days went by, we walked slower and slower, and it was much more difficult to wake Aziza up from her sleep. I thought that she would not make it to this pyramid that she was talking about. I was going to have to come to accept that I would be alone yet again. And all because I could not stop Neeha, much like I could not stop her when it came to my parents.

"How much farther till we reach this pyramid of yours?" I asked.

"One or two more days, depending on how many breaks we have to take," Aziza explained, her voice sounding weak.

"I wish I could carry you as well. Are you sure that you are alright to make it that far? Should we not see someone to help you with your wound?" I asked. I could not help but to ask.

"There's no point in seeing someone. I won't be here for much longer. That demon had something on her arrow, that I can't heal from. And maybe it could have been treated if we went to someone right away, but I don't want to live. Not with Markata already being gone. I will not torture myself, by making myself stay alive longer than I have to."

I never heard Aziza talk like that before. I never thought of her as one to give up. I did not think that she would stop fighting just because Markata had passed. Though, I knew how hard it was to lose someone that you cared about very much. But they were never affectionate like my parents were. I did not think that this would be a possible outcome for Aziza.

"Then what is it you plan on doing? What is the reason for going back to your pyramid?" I asked her.

"Because, it will be our final resting place. And then you will have the choice if you want to meet our reincarnated selves. I don't know how long it would take for us to return, but we will. But only you can answer if you will be there for us," Aziza explained.

"It will be my mission-" I started.

"No! I'm not commanding you to do this. I won't condemn you to this curse. Much like the Jackals, I don't control them, I only ask for their willing participation. That if at any time they cannot or don't want to, then they are no longer required to. Just because Markata and I are cursed to live this life, doesn't mean that anyone else should go through the same thing. No one else is cursed, just us. And I know what it's like to be forced to do something that you don't want to, and I will never make someone else feel the same," Aziza explained.

"Very well. I will take great consideration as to what I will do then. But as of right now, I wish for nothing more than to be here for you in any way possible. Especially since I feel partially responsible for what happened to Markata," I told her, looking down at the sand.

"If what you told me before was the truth, then she would have come after us, no matter what. Whether or not you were here, made no difference. Besides, it was me who was tasked at keeping Markata alive, not you. That mission was mine, and mine alone," Aziza told me.

I opened my hand to her, wanting to help her get back up to her feet, "but you are not alone anymore. This burden no longer has to be left on just your shoulders. I will take some of that weight from you," I replied. I never felt like the words I have said in the past were ever so meaningful to me.

Aziza smiled, gripping onto my hand, lifting herself up. The strength in her hands was already becoming weaker. I wanted to do more for her than I already was. She walked ahead of me, not saying anything else. I followed just behind her, making sure that she would not fall.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

It took us till nightfall the following day to reach the pyramid. I was glad to see it. I was getting tired from carrying Markata the entire way. For a moment I thought of nothing else. But Aziza paused where she was. I think she was relieved too. She had been struggling the whole way, forcing herself to keep going. If she was any other person, I do not think that she would have lasted longer than the first day after being wounded by Neeha.

The pyramid was dark and fairly empty. Aziza lit something. It might have been her hand, and led the way deeper inside. "This room here," she pointed. I walked ahead of her, seeing a spot on the ground with no sand on it. I figured that was where she wanted me to put Markata down, and I did. "There isn't much here. You'll have to figure out what to do about food. But your life is yours now. You can do as you please. But there is one thing that I would ask of you to promise to do for me."

"Anything," I responded, watching her as she walked over to Markata's body.

Aziza gave me back Norik, "scatter our ashes after the flames have gone out."

I could feel my eyes widen. I never thought of how she wanted to go into the afterlife. "But you can not burn," I told her, not able to say anything else.

"I think that's only the case as long as I am breathing. But once my soul is gone, so too will that magic. Much like you with your father, there has to be a way to lay our bodies to rest and make sure that they can't be used. If that is at all possible. I don't know. And I have never read how any of my previous selves have passed away and what had happened to their bodies. But you made me think of it, the day that you told me about your father. I know it will be hard to do, but it is what I wish for. Allow

our ashes to be free, even if they are the only things of ours that can be free," Aziza said, a tear rolling down her cheek.

"I can not watch your bodies burn," I told her, my voice choking in my throat.

"You don't have to. When the flames go out, you will know it's done. You can always leave and come back. Like I said, you will need food," she explained.

I got up off the ground, going to the entrance of the room, "I will wait for your return. But this, this I can not stay for. I do promise to scatter your ashes in the wind, but watching you burn, I cannot."

"I understand. Goodbye Cucun, may our time apart be short," Aziza said.

"And may your time away be peaceful," I told her, leaving the room.

CHAPTER TWENTY

I did not return inside of the pyramid that night. I kept looking up at the stars when they came out. I was trying to figure out how to make sure that I always knew how to get back here if I ever needed to. There was always the tearing thought that this may not be the last time I would have to watch Aziza and Markata die.

It was only by the next morning that I went back in. Aziza was right, both her body and Markata's were gone. Only ash remained. I gathered as much as I could, bringing it outside, allowing the wind to take it wherever it was going.

It took twenty years before their souls returned. I could not believe how much they looked like their past selves. I tried to teach them everything that I knew and started our journey again. But just like before, it did not end well. I did not care to count how many times this happened. Each ending differently, but also oh so familiar. And each time they returned, they always reminded me of Aziza and Markata. The only things that ever seemed to change were their color tints. From eye, hair or skin color, but their body structure, facial features, even their voices always stayed the same. Sometimes their personalities would be the exact same as the ones I had first met. I hated learning their new names. To me, they would always be Aziza and Markata.

With each of their reincarnations, the time would always take longer and longer for them to return. And sometimes Aziza's reincarnation would not die soon after Markata's. Instead, sometimes she would return to her homeland, which was unlikely to be within Egypt, and learn of different things that she could bring back, that would hopefully help in their journey next time. I would go with her, and we would both learn as much as we could. Sometimes we would learn different fighting styles from other cultures, to weapons, to just trying to get to the other secret

pyramid, so there would be a more direct route.

Some of the later reincarnations learned other magic that they could use. We even found a random forest in the middle of Egypt that contained stones that have not been seen before. And somehow they seemed to be connected to Aziza's powers. We had taken as much as we could, and when she would pass away, I would continue my research with the stones and anything else that I could think of. It helped pass the time, and I had hoped that if I could do this it would make the next time, the last time.

It took five hundred years for their souls to return, and I was getting old. I did not know how long a lifespan a cat demon had, but I was feeling as if the years would get any farther apart, I could not be there for Aziza and Markata's souls. This time they were much older than before. They had always seemed to be so young, but maybe that was because I was getting older, and when I first started, I was only a child. But this time they seemed more mature. They already knew how to fight, they knew how to defend themselves, and much more. It really felt that if there was going to be a time that this mission would be over, it would be this time.

But as fate would have it, it was not meant to be. We were able to make it to the other secret pyramid, where a demon Fire Cobra, who named himself King of the Demons, awaited us, along with a large smoke demon horse, and hundreds, if not thousands, of shadow snakes. Thinking back on it, we never had a chance. Not with the numbers that were against us. The demon horse crushed Markata's reincarnation, named Prince. We could do nothing to stop it. Aziza's reincarnation, named Sorceress, put a curse on the demons. Imprisoning them, until their own souls could return to defeat them.

"Should we bring his body inside?" I asked, watching her cry over Prince's body.

"No. I don't want to risk him not being able to be reborn. Not now when we were so close," Sorceress replied.

"He would not gain his powers unless he was in the light, if it is the same as your pyramid. We should stay till morning, before leaving. It will give us time to grieve and know what to do with his body," I replied.

"I won't go in there with him. If you wish to go inside, to see what you can find, you are more than welcome to. But we will stay out here. I agree with you that we should wait till morning before making any other rash decisions. That is all I will say about it."

I could not argue with her. They were so close together. Every time they were separated in death, it would always crush me. Knowing that there would be another chance for this all to happen over again. All I was

thankful for was that they would not have to remember this horrible time. I was not so fortunate when it came to that.

Morning came quick enough. Sorceress had already taken care of Prince's body. She did not tell me how, and I was not willing to ask. "We should go back to your pyramid. There is something that I must get you to do there," I told her.

"No. We can't waste time going backwards. We need to find Laquar. You have to know how to get back to here, and how to get to Laquar. There is no point in being this close to only get lost in the desert trying to find the city. Don't give up on me just yet," she replied. I think she almost knew what I wanted her to do, without even having to tell her anything.

"Very well," I replied. I could not argue with her reasoning. She had a point. Though I stayed in the pyramid the night before to give the Sorceress and Prince their time together to say their last goodbyes, I studied the stars. I knew they changed as time passed, but they were still a good map to figure out where to go.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

It took us weeks to find Laquar, though there was no way to get within the walls. I knew we had made it. It had the barrier that Neeha said kept demons out. It kept me several feet away from the walls themselves. We both decided that it was a good enough sign that we found the cursed city.

We stayed there all night long, studying the stars, figuring out which way the secret pyramid was, compared to where we were. And with how many times I had gone back to Aziza's pyramid, I knew what direction we needed to go next. "I still stand with what I said when we were at Prince's pyramid. We have to go back to your pyramid. I must have you do something for me," I told Sorceress, staring at the stars. I always liked nights where it was easy to see the night sky.

"I know. But you know I don't agree with what you want me to do," she replied.

"But I have not told you what it is that I wish for you to do for me. So, how could you possibly say that you do not agree with it?" I asked.

"Because, you keep calling out Aziza's name in your sleep. There have been several times you have accidentally called me, by her name. And you've also called Prince, Markata. I know they were the first that you knew of. I know it's been hard on you. All these years. I can see you are growing tired. I can't blame you. And though I don't know exactly what you want me to do, I can see it in your eyes what the possibility is. You can't even look me in the eye since Prince passed away, like as though you feel guilty, and not just about his death, but the favor that you want to ask me for. I get the sense that you are going to ask me to let us part in some way. That this time, you will leave me before I leave you," Sorceress replied.

"You are not only brilliant in the way of magic. More so than any of your past lives, but you are great at reading people. Yes, I am asking you

to let me go. But not in death," I explained, pausing for a moment. I had never said it to myself out loud before. I found it hard to say those words. She was right. I felt like I was betraying her to ask for this request. "I want you to freeze time for me. I am getting tired, and each of your rebirths is taking longer and longer. I do not know if I will still be in this world the next time that you return if you do not do this for me. I want to keep being there for you, till you can accomplish this journey. But I fear I can not do that without you doing this task for me. Will you help me?"

We sat there in silence. Sorceress did not even look at me as I awaited my answer. "I'll do it," she whispered. "But I have to ask you one thing."

"What might that be?" I looked at her, trying to read her face, but it was emotionless.

"Is there anything else that you would wish to do, before we go back? I don't want to rush into this if I can help it. I don't want to lose you so close to Prince. I'll be alone."

I wrapped my arm around her shoulder, bringing her into me. I could feel her shaking. "Just to teach me every spell that you know that could help in the future. I don't want your soul, or Prince's soul, to ever have to go through this again. I wish that I would not have to leave you alone. I know how painful it is, and I would not wish it on anyone I care for. But, I cannot perform the spell myself, which means that at some point I would still leave you. I do not think that prolonging that goodbye would be best. It will never get easier. But once we say our goodbyes, it will be easier for you to move on. Live your life, and try to be happy. Do not spend your whole life searching for ways that could change the outcome that we faced. Remember, that in the end, you are still alive, and you do not have to punish yourself for that." Sorceress said nothing to me, only her tears rolling onto my chest, leaving small patches of ice where her tears touched, and hearing her sob. I wrapped around her even tighter. There was nothing more that I could do to make her feel better.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

It took us about a month to get back to Sorceress's pyramid. She made us stop at all the villages we had before, saying our goodbyes and helping in any way that we could. She was stalling. I knew she was. She did not want this day to come. Neither did I.

I grabbed onto her hand, "let us get this over with. You will be fine. You are strong and you can survive and thrive, even after I am no longer with you." I pulled her behind me, feeling her resist. I brought her to the center of the pyramid, standing in the light that once gave Sorceress her powers.

"It will be here," I told her, looking into her eyes.

"I don't think I can do this. I don't even know if it'll work. I've never tried to do this spell before. You can't ask me to test it on you!" Sorceress started crying.

I bent down, keeping myself from towering over her, pulling her into my chest. "You may not have faith in yourself, but I do. It will work. And if not, I have lived for so many years. My life has not been wasted, and it would just mean that it would be my time to rest, eternal. I would not hold it against you if it failed. Besides, you must remember, it is my plan. If it goes wrong, it is my fault. Do not blame yourself for anything that happens after this point. I know I will not." I pushed her away to look into her eyes. She tried to look away from me, but I placed my paw under her chin, making her look at me. "It will only become harder, the longer you wait. It must be done now. And I promise you, this will not be the last time we meet. Let that give you hope. And if not, always know that you can come back here to tell me all your troubles and know that I still have faith in you."

Sorceress nodded her head, stepping back from me, pulling out one of her daggers. "I need a bit of your blood, and then get into what ever

position you wish to be in, until the next time we meet," she explained. I put out my paw, letting her draw blood from it. I stood in the light, looking back at the main entrance to the pyramid, leaving my hand out. Hoping that it would be an inviting sight for when her soul was reborn.

"Keyta asunna teasa. Ammana eaenta sunair," Sorceress chanted, repeatedly. I felt the cold trickling up from my toes. I tried to keep myself from looking down, not wanting it to be the last thing I did.

I could hear her voice waiver, "do not worry. It does not hurt. Keep going," I told her. I did not lie, feeling it crawling at my chest and into my arm. It was then that I could see that I was turning into brown colored stone. I had little time left, "goodbye old friend, I will see you again soon," I told Sorceress. She did not stop chanting her spell, but I saw a tear leave her eye before everything went black.

"I don't know why, but I really feel compelled to get closer to it. Besides, what's the worst that could happen that hasn't already happened to us today?" said a familiar woman's voice.

Newsletter

Like what you read? [Join my newsletter](#), and get free access to my Secret Archives! Already signed up to my newsletter to get this free copy, don't worry, you already have access to my Secret Archives! Not only will you have access to my Secret Archives, but you will be the first to know book title and book cover reveals than everyone else!

Magic & Demons: Book I

Prologue

Two thousand years ago, back in a time when magic and demons were known far too well, war raged between the two, and there were those who didn't have power who tried to control it. There weren't too many people left who had magic, because they needed to have the birthmark of their temple. Only two remained, a man who was to be the prince of Egypt, and a woman who was charged with being his protector, until the prince could activate his powers within his temple. They also gained the help of a blue cat demon named Cucun along their journey to the temple.

When they arrived at the temple, hundreds of demons were awaiting their arrival, a large smoke horse, a fiery cobra, and hundreds of shadow snakes.

Cucun charged at the shadow snakes to make a path for the other two to get closer to the other demons. The woman took out her whips and propelled herself over the rest of the shadow snakes and up to the fire cobra.

As for the prince, he ran towards Cucun, with his staff drawn. When he got close enough, Cucun grabbed the end of his staff and threw him as hard as he could to get the prince high enough in the sky to reach the horse's head.

Once Cucun released the prince's staff, he grabbed his own weapon before all the shadow snakes began wrapping themselves around his body so he could barely move. Cucun tried beheading a few of the snakes to keep them from crushing him to death. There were so many it didn't take long before the snakes restricted the rest of his movements. However, they never constricted him hard enough to kill him as though they wanted him to watch the demise of his friends.

As for the woman, she was using a long one-handed sword covered in ice, that was so cold you could see frost coming off of it. She had to make ice panels to stay high enough and move around fast enough to keep up with the cobra's quick reflexes. She could only give it minor wounds, but with every cut she made it would only extinguish a small amount of the flames, which took a bit of time to reignite. With each strike, the snake would let out a loud hiss and move farther away from her, but never leaving the entrance to the temple unguarded.

Meanwhile, the prince stabbed the horse in the side of its neck with his staff. The horse shook his head violently, trying to make the prince fall off. The prince held onto his staff as tightly as he could while trying to lift

himself up to the top of the beast's neck. The horse reared up and made his flesh turn into smoke, dislodging the prince's staff from his neck. There was nothing that the prince could grab that didn't slip through his hands. The prince wasn't able to do anything else but fall the long distance to the ground.

The woman saw the prince falling from the horse's neck. There was nothing she could do but scream, "NO!" The prince lay on the sand motionless, and the horse demon's legs descended towards the prince's body. The woman dropped her sword and knelt on the ice panel she created, and cast her arm in front of her towards the prince's body, creating a dome of ice around him.

The horse's hooves landed on the ice. It cracked. The horse demon reared once again to hit the ice harder to get to the prince.

The woman created more ice around the unconscious prince, all her energy focused on protecting him, not watching out for herself. The fire cobra rose behind her. It coiled around her body, tightening around her, cutting off her air supply until she could no longer stay conscious. As she lost consciousness, the ice she was creating became weaker and weaker. The horse demon hit the ice two more times. The first almost completely breaking it and with the second it broke the ice landing on the prince, crushing his chest.

The cobra let go of the woman and let her fall. As she was falling, just before she hit the ground, she awoke and turned her entire body into water. When she hit the sand, she sunk into it until there was nothing left of her. Both the horse and cobra demon went over to where Cucun was. As they moved away, the woman began shifting towards the prince's body below the sand.

The shadow snakes forced Cucun to watch the entire thing, helpless to do anything about it. The shadow snakes that were not holding Cucun moved out of the way for the other demons to watch his pain. The cobra slithered around him so the flames enveloped him, with the only thing standing between him and the cobra's body being the shadow snakes that were still holding him. The horse demon stood behind the cobra facing Cucun. All Cucun could see were the demons and the prince's motionless body. He could finally see the woman ascend from beneath the sand, kneeling beside the prince's body.

"Thiss isss what you get for betraying your demon brethren. You ssshhall sssuffer for your decception," proclaimed the cobra, as he raised his head and opened his jaws, showing his fangs.

As he was about to strike Cucun, the woman drew her bow and arrow,

the tip of it drenched with the prince's blood. As she released the arrow she said, "Barrar O Sana." The arrow hit the horse in its hind end, and spun the horse into smoke and blew away with the wind until none of its smoke could be seen.

The cobra turned its head away from Cucun and towards the woman. He moved towards her as she stood up. Her eyes ablaze and her hands covered in blood. She took a few steps towards the cobra, with her arms stretched out from her sides, hands clenched into fists, waiting for the cobra to come closer.

When the cobra was only a short distance away, she began running towards the demon and jumped as high as she could. When she was in the air, she turned her back to the snake, casting her arm out in front of her, pointing towards the ground. Lightning shot from her fingertips, hitting the sand, turning it into glass. The cobra contorted its body with its mouth open, raising its head up from under the woman about to grab her in its mouth.

The cobra bit around the woman's waist, leaving the top half of her out of its mouth. The woman gave a bit of a wince. "Be forever imprisoned for what you've done!" she said. She placed her bloody hand on the snake's nose and yelled, "Ou Cenarreena." The glass that she made in the shape of a box rose from the sand, slowly dragging the snake into it.

The cobra let her go, leaving puncture wounds along her stomach and all the way around to her back, she fell to the ground lying on her stomach near the box. Once the snake was in the box, she placed her other bloody hand on top of it, sealing it closed. All the shadow snakes around Cucun disappeared, allowing him to walk over to the woman and help her to her feet and bring her to the prince's body.

She knelt over his body, holding his hand, and crying. Each tear that fell from her eyes landed on his body, turning it to ice. "I'm so sorry, my friend. I couldn't keep you safe."

About Author

K.A. Turnbull is a fantasy writer that writes for the New Adult audience. K.A. grew up in Ontario, Canada out in the countryside, seeing everything mystical and wonderful that nature has to offer.

Though not everything was so easy for K.A. Turnbull. When she was younger, she had many difficulties with school due to an undiagnosed reading disability, that even to this day can cause some hardship when reading. Though with the help of family and volunteer tutors, she has been able to cope with her disability and strives to follow her dreams.