

Chapter 15: Tana

I didn't know the kestrel and I barely trusted Ishir, but I didn't have a choice. I can't fly to my cave of treasures, so I need Ish to carry me if we're going to get there in this century.

We pick up the kestrel first. She's still healing from her injuries, but she looks pretty good. "Are you able to shift?" Ish asks her.

"I think so. It's good to see you again, Tana." She says to me quietly.

"You as well. I never got your name."

"Jena."

"Well, Jena. Ish here thinks it's a good idea for all of us to move to the city. What do you think?" 1

"Umm, well, I don't have any money."

"Good thing for you, Tana has money and I have jobs for both of you."

"What kind of a job?" She asks. Jena is young. If I had to guess, I'd say she's barely an adult. 1

"Apparently, I'm going to need a babysitter in a few months." Jena's eyes go wide.

"Oh." Is all she says looking at my stomach, before turning to Ish.

"What about my sister? I need to find her."

"I'll search for your sister once we're settled. It may take some time to find her, but I won't stop until I do. That's a promise."

"Okay, what's next?" She asks.

"First, we need to get to my cave. I can't stress enough how much my



dragon will kill you if you ever breath a word of its whereabouts to anyone. A dragon takes their treasure and possessions very seriously." I say to them, making sure they understand how serious I am about it. I like both of them, but if they ever try to steal from me, or tell anyone about my cave, I won't hesitate to kill them. 2

Ishir looks at Jena. "Are you good with that little kestrel?"

"I won't say anything. I swear."

Ishir looks at me. "I don't have many friends, Tana. Those that I do have, I treasure with my life. I would never betray you."

"Okay then. Let's get going. It's going to take a while to get there, even in your tiger form."

I may not know where we are, but I always feel a pull to my treasure cave. It's like a beacon to my dragon. It's been in my family for centuries, Now that I'm the only fire dragon left, all the of the treasure belongs to me. 2

Over the next couple of days, I direct Ishir to where we are going. Jena flies as much as she can, but she's still healing, and our days are long. When she can't fly any more, she joins me on Ish's back. Carrying me is slowing Ish down and when we stop at night, he eats like a starved man. I do as well since I'm eating for two. Jena doesn't eat as much as we do, but she is also able to grab small birds while she's flying to help with her stamina and healing. 2

As we sit around the campfire on our second night, I tell them that we should reach the cave tomorrow. The terrain has become rockier, and we've been steadily climbing over the last day. Tomorrow will be grueling for Ishir. Tigers can climb but not usually with a heavy person on their back. I warn him that the last part of the climb will be very steep, nearly vertical. 1

"We'll manage, Tana. And once we have what we need to start our life, we'll find a way to get it and you back down the mountain."



The next day is as grueling as I warned Ishir that it would be. I have to practically lay on his back to help him keep his balance. Jena flies to the top of the mountain and waits for us, watching from her perch. The cave was meant to be reached by a flying dragon, not a four-legged animal.

When we get to the top, Ishir collapses on the ground. Jena has been flying and collecting wood for a fire. I light the fire and wait while Ishir catches his breath. Jena brings him some birds and as the sun sets, she picks up some night critters and a couple of owls. Ish stays in his tiger form, so he eats everything she gives him whole, usually in one or two bites.

"Let's wait until morning to open the cave. The sun rises early here on the mountain top. We can get an early start and figure out how much we need to get settled. Once I have the baby, I can fly back here and get more if needed."

We all sleep well, knowing that nothing can attack us here on the mountain. As the sun rises, I wake and look at my cave. It's covered with a rock formation, so it's not easily seen by other flying creatures, not that many animals fly as high as dragons.

I walk to large boulder that I placed in front of my cave and push it out of the way. As soon as I do, the sun hits the gems that I have stored away, and I hear a gasp behind me.

I turn and see Jena, her eyes as wide as saucers. "Wow!"

She looks at me. "May I?" She asks, awe in her voice.

"Just remember what I said. I'm very protective of my treasures."

"I can see why." She says, taking a tentative step toward my cave.

"Damn Tana. When you said you had money, I didn't think it meant that you had millions of dollars in jewels sitting in a cave rotting away." Ishir says, coming awake and seeing my cave twinkling in the sunlight in



various shades of red, green, blue and of course, the diamonds split the sunlight into a rainbow of colors.

"They're not rotting." I say, walking in and running my fingers over my jewels, my possessions. They sing to me, and I feel their energy through my touch.

"How did you get all of these?" Jena asks, walking in and doing a full circle as she looks at everything that I have stashed away here.

"The jewels are the easiest. I can feel their energy. I find them in mountains, rock formations, the ground." I shrug. For me, it's not hard. Humans search their entire life to find one or two of the stones that I have here. I feel them as I fly over them. Singing is the only way I know how to describe it. It's like their essence sings to me. Then I collect them and bring them here.

"Are these Picasso's?" Ishir asks, looking at my collection of paintings.

"Some Picassos, some Rembrandts, a few Caravaggios and some others."

He whistles low. "You know each of these are worth hundreds of millions of dollars?"

I shrug. "That's why they are here in my cave. They are treasures."

Ishir continues looking around. "Is this....is this that sculpture that was found in Iraq? The one thought to be over 5000 years old?"

I look at Ishir more thoughtfully. I wouldn't have expected a tiger to be so interested and knowledgeable about art.

"Guennol Lioness, yes."

He looks at me with awe and something in me shifts. I feel my emerald-green eyes turn red. "Remember what I said Ishir. I like you, but I won't hesitate to kill you."



He raises his hands in front of his body. "I can appreciate the value and rarity of the items in your cave without wanting to steal from you, Tana. Stand down."

I look at him for another moment before feeling the dragon relax. "How many of these gems do you think we need?" I ask, moving to the side of my cave where most of my gemstones are. There is an area where I've collected stones that I'm not particularly attached to, and then there are those that I would never part with, no matter how desperate I was. 1

Ishir comes over. "Let's see, what do we have here? This diamond is huge. That, by itself would be enough, but it would most likely raise suspicion unless you're willing to have it cut first."

I look at the stone. While humans think that diamonds are rare, I can find them very easily.

"I have several smaller ones." I show him the smaller ones as Jena stands by, quietly observing.

"These would be easier to sell. And because they're already cut, we can sell them to different vendors and not raise too much suspicion."

Ishir begins handing the diamonds to Jena, who cups her hands and looks like she might have heart palpitations at having some many jewels in her hands at one time.

"Okay, now that we've got what we need, how do we get it down the mountain?" I ask as we walk back out of my cave.

"I wasn't sure what you'd have, but I brought a burlap sack, just in case." He goes to the small bag he's had me carry the last couple of days.

"We can put them in here and have Jena fly them down to the bottom of the mountain." He turns to Jena. "Then you can wait for us to meet up with you and we'll head to the city."



Her eyes go wide, and she begins shaking her head. "I don't want to be alone with these. What if someone attacks me. I may be a bird of prey, but I'm still only a bird. I don't have the strength of a tiger or a dragon." She protests.

Ishir looks at me, then turns back to Jena. "Would you be more comfortable staying up here while I get Tana down the mountain, and we can call you when we've reached the bottom?"

She nods her head emphatically. Ish turns to me. "Are you good with that?"

"I am. Just be careful with those, they will be heavy in your bird form. As soon as we are down the mountain, I can hold them."

I move the boulder back into place. It's mid-morning before Ishir has me climb onto his back. It's slow going getting back down. If it was hard climbing up, climbing down is even harder. One wrong move and we'll both go careening head-first down the mountain. 1

It's late afternoon when we finally get to the bottom. I immediately climb off Ishir's back and he chuffs for Jena to join us. I look up and see her take flight immediately, carrying the bag in her talons.

I can see her struggling to carry the weight of the bag as she makes her way to us. Once she's landed, we decide to make camp for the night. Ishir goes off to find food and Jena and I make a fire and find water.

The next day, we take off for the city. It takes us nearly a week to get there. By the time we arrive, my stomach has begun to show signs of the baby growing inside me.

