

breathing of the woman who lay beside her in the dark. What was it? This thing she was feeling. It couldn't be what foolish Romanticists called falling in love. That didn't exist. Not really. Of that she was quite sure. She'd never felt it before. Therefore it wasn't real. Something people made up to make themselves feel better and more secure about the merely animal side of their nature. Whenever she'd seen someone in the past and she'd been attracted she went after it. If rebuffed she shrugged and, *c'est la vie*, went elsewhere. Pleasure was fine, but you couldn't let it rule your life. Occasionally she'd visit a certain *houri* at a little brothel in Cairo who catered to varied tastes and who knew just what she liked.

She thought of that now as she met Mel's sky blue eyes. The frank method and approach were best. That's what she'd always thought anyway. Why should she change now? "I'm assuming you're no virgin. But I doubt you've done this before. Am I right?" Jan's hand trailed lazy fingers up her back.

Mel's throat constricted as she tried to swallow, "You mean...I mean...the Greek fashion of...women...of two women. Like... Sappho..."

"Ah, you've read her I'm sure. At least what fragments the misogynist patriarchal bastards didn't destroy. The Bard of Mitylene, of... Lesbos. A place you've never thought to travel?"

"I..." Mel treaded water nervously.

"Honey child," Jan cooed in gentle imitation, "I'm not going to be able to travel with you, sleep by your side every night without desiring to--"

"But...I don't know what to do...I mean--are you sure?! You want me?" the woman blurted.

"I'd have thought you'd want someone more...experienced."

Well, that had always been true. And when she couldn't find it--those brittle English women archeologists and camp-followers, the American girls, slim and willowy, looking for a summer adventure on leave from the Seven Sisters--she'd paid for it.

Jan had never taken the time to break someone in, to teach them the ropes. She smiled wickedly at the analogies, but silently chided herself for a frivolous attitude in this. She didn't want to be frivolous with this woman. Not this woman. There was something about her, something too... profound to be treated lightly, or as a mere conquest. Something which had been hinted at in the Xena Scrolls. That glimpse into a distant past which seemed to connect their spirits. Perhaps she was finally gaining some insight and maturity as her father had always promised she would.

"Look, Mel, I won't pressure you. I won't even bring it up again. OK? I'd rather keep you as a friend...than lose you as a lover. That's more important to me." She couldn't believe she was saying it. Not with this exquisite creature naked beside her in the warm caress of water. She wanted to bite her lying tongue. But was it? Oh, look at her. She's so... SO. Her fingers twitched, she ached to touch her. NO, she really could control herself. This was important to her. This dark woman was important to her. What must be going on in her mind and psyche? 'What inner turmoil and conflict have I created with my foolish, ham-fisted, inelegant, tactless...'

Mel moved closer and thrillingly, throatily murmured, "Show me."

Both were trembling at the first kiss. Jan was astounded by the emotionalism she was experiencing. Oh, this wouldn't do at all. She'd be forced to revise all her long-held theories of women and need and lust and...the thing called love. What was it? Was it this? Could it really exist afterall? Quite a discovery, Professor. Possibly the greatest you'll ever make.

Their breasts floated like lotus blossoms and the pebble-hard nipples tickled and excited, provoking that wonderful rush of the senses, taking over. The feeling of falling as the womb flutters and contracts, the heated wetness between the thighs. Jan touched her there and Mel shivered. Not from any chill. But she drew away.

"I can't. I can't. It's too much." The tall woman struggled from the lotus pond and went to sit