

wouldn't get so chilly. As if guessing what her friend and partner was thinking, Jan strode over and stood behind her enfolding the woman in her arms.

"See it. Up there. Just rising above the horizon. What's that?"

"An astronomy lesson?" Mel sighed.

"Humor me," Jan squeezed her tightly and the taller woman sat on their camp stool and rested her head back against her lover.

"I've never been very good at this. Leo? Sagittarius...Scorpio? I give."

"I don't know either," Jan admitted.

"You don't--!" Mel blustered and started to rise but Jan pressed her back into the collapsible canvas seat.

"What does it look like?"

Mel bit her lip and kept her temper, barely, through gritted teeth, "You mean--like a lion...or a centaur...or a scorpion?"

"Maybe...but use your imagination."

And then the glimmering of her partner's sudden seeming madness shook loose the cobwebs in her mind and reminded her of something...

"It could be...a...horse...or a..." she tried to see the pattern of stars as someone long ago, noticing them for the first time may have done, "a...winged horse..."

"Mm. I can see that. Or maybe a griffin... the sphinx? Now," she lightly touched Mel's arms, urging her to stand, "turn around." The smaller woman pointed.

Mel smiled. "That one I know. The Dipper."

"Is it? Someone once thought it looked like a great bear...in ancient Briton it was the Plough...we all read different images there. Don't we?"

Jan's fingers trailed across the buttery soft sleeves of her own jacket. Mel's fingers caught and entwined with hers and she turned to Jan smiling and tugged at her hands, "Come here."

Shrugging out of the jacket, she tossed it on the sandy soil and lay back on the ground pulling Jan down and into her arms. "Same sky," she breathed into the smaller woman's ear.

"More or less," Jan answered. "The Zodiac moves in a millennium or two. And the great thing about celestial clockworks is that you can extrapolate back through time to find your way around an ancient sky."

"And the terrain beneath the sky?"

"Clever girl," Jan said fondly and rolled over to nibble on a particularly sensitive ear lobe.

"Think of all the nights they spent together under those stars..." Mel mused as her breathing quickened.

"Mm," Jan agreed, "and doing this...and this," her tongue insinuated itself into Mel's sweet mouth.

"I suppose you'll want a compilation of all such references..."

"Ooo, you're so sexy when you talk like that."

"If you like that," Mel ran her hands up and down the expanse of Jan's back, "how about this," she rolled on top of the smaller woman pinning her to the ground and whispered a perfectly scandalous suggestion in her ear.

"Now? Here?" Jan asked, raising her eyebrows in mock surprise. "Tell me more," she invited in a husky voice.

They lay entwined, bathed in a deep reddish glow provided courtesy of Mel's silk scarf fastened over their flashlight to maintain their vision, dark-adapted, to the night.

The scrolls were laid out end to end more or less neatly all over the floor. Mel sprawled among them. Jan lay on the bed, several books opened around her, a few calibrating tools, charts and maps.

"You know," Mel opined, "I think she was covering the bases. Repetition. Counting on