

"I'm sure you did. And that's not necessarily one of your charms." Mel excused herself and retreated from the table.

Jan sat back and rolled her eyes. Sighing, she glanced down at her rough hands, "No social graces." And Melinda was all grace. Soft and warm and...luscious. She'd have no chance in hell of getting close to a woman like that. How could she even entertain the fantasy?

"So, kid, how's it hangin'?"

"Go to hell, Jack." The bastard must not have seen the willowy beauty exit the room or, surely, he'd be in hot pursuit. He sprawled into the vacated chair. Hard to believe she'd prefer this...simian. Just because he had that...little something extra. "And I might ask you the same question."

"Can't complain." He grinned like a braying jackass and rocked back in his seat. Jan took the opportunity, which she couldn't very well resist, to topple him with one slight tip of her boot. When the gods provide these little justices one should always be ready to take the advantage. She scooped her hat from the table and took off, hoping to catch up with Mel.

As she left the small hotel cafe she could hear him scrambling to extricate his lanky frame from the tangle of both chair and table. It made her laugh, and so she decided she was in a good mood after all. Now where was that sultry bitch... "Mel," she raced on her shorter legs to catch up. "Wait," Jan was on her beautiful tail and breathless, "how can you move so fast in those things?" Mel was certainly statuesque as it was, but in high heels...imposing almost. Of Olympian proportions. A goddess. "Alright! I'm sorry, okay?" The tall woman slowed her gait. "I shall attempt," a deep gasping breath, "to control my..." ah, oxygen... "heathenish... behavior...okay....forgive me? Will milady be amenable to that?"

"Darlin', you really don't have to change to please little old me. I...hate to admit it, but I kinda like you...the way you are."

Jan brightened at the sound of herself referred to as 'darlin'.' That was tasty. She'd be on her best behavior for more delicious little tidbits like that.

"You were right. But, you should know I don't take you for granted. I'm just a tactless bull-headed philistine. Maybe you'll have a civilizing influence on me yet, huh?" They stood there smiling at each other and Jan felt it again. It was as if the earth tilted on its axis, akimbo, spinning more slowly than before and it almost made her dizzy. Deja vu. That was the feeling. She didn't dare ask Mel if she felt it too. She'd be disappointed if her friend said no.

The Istari Museum was across the street from the embassy and the two women whiled the time before their appointment by echoing down the long high halls, deserted by all but one or two lone tourists, probably on lay-over. It was a small, but choice collection.

Mel's lapis eyes glowed when Jan pointed out an ancient inscription on an alabaster vase. "As they were in life, so too in death, their ashes commingle."

"I guess we have a natural affinity for antiquities. Have you...ever felt that...connection again...to her...to the past...to Xena?" she said the name in a hushed tone as if someone either in this world or the next would overhear her.

Mel stood erect and took off her glasses, a stunning effect to anyone who thought they lent a secretarial air. "I don't know. Sometimes...I think...something will remind me...of something else and I'll feel it prickle along my arms, but I can't quite place it...a feeling, or scent or taste...or just the way you look at me...when you think I'm not looking, the tone in your voice when you're at ease and unguarded..."

Jan swallowed, mesmerized. Then Mel HAD felt it, the same sort of momentary whirl- a-tilt had spun her about, which she associated with the french term. Were they merely descendents of these women, or something more? That still wouldn't negate the possibility of actual...incarnation. The scrolls hinted at just such a deeper connection...to the infinite...between their souls...if they shared in this...journey...she and Mel...