

Broken realms

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BROKEN REALMS

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Beginnings...

Verily, with hardship comes ease.

Firuza wakes up in utter shock from her dream. As she places both her hands in her face, she starts sobbing uncontrollably. It had been 12 years since she had stopped dreaming and now, she had seen a dream again.

“Firuza?” Sabaah asked, as she walked into her daughter’s room. Her mother swiftly made her way towards Firuza and saw something amiss.

“What happened?” Sabaah said worriedly. She tried taking her hands from her face as the sobbing continued.

Firuza started, “Anne, rüya gördüm”. *Mom, I had a dream.*

Sabaah answered back, “What did you see?”.

This revelation had come to her in such an unexpected manner, that Firuza couldn’t even make out the words to her mother.

“I saw myself on fire, screaming at the top of my lungs as the world around me shattered”.

Chapter 1

Firuza

Firuza found herself wondering. As she always did. Whenever someone spoke to her, most of the time she would be listening, but sometimes she would just dream. Her dreams would be so vivid sometimes, that she felt there in the moment. Like her body would leave and travel the world. In that moment, she could feel ethereal.

It was only when she was spoken to again, that the dream would falter.

And indeed, someone spoke to her, and in an aggressive manner at that.

“Get up, sloth. Come help mom” Kardelen said to Firuza as she pulled the blankets from her head.

In an instant, Firuza’s dreams and morning had been ruined by no one other than her own sister. Kardelen laughed as she witnessed the shape of her sister. Kardelen threw the blanket on the ground and ran away towards the kitchen, where their mother was slowly preparing breakfast.

Immediately, Firuza felt the chills on her spine. Her blanket had been warm and comfortable. She had to admit, this indeed was an effective way of getting up. Kardelen yelled again at Firuza to get up.

Little did Kardelen know that Firuza had been staying up the whole night before for her thesis. Firuza was one year away from graduation, and she couldn't risk anything going south for her. She spent most of her time behind her desk or reading books on her thesis.

Every now and then, she would go out with her friends, if they invited her.

Firuza contemplated getting up. She stared at her clock, eight in the morning. She had to be on campus at ten.

"Firuza, hadi ama!" her mother spoke from the kitchen. "*Come on!*"

She got up reluctantly and picked up the blanket from the ground. She made her bed with sheer determination. In the meantime, Kardelen was still laughing at her sister. Firuza noticed and gave her a harsh look.

"Someone is mad this morning" Kardelen said. The grin still so present on her small face.

"Listen up you little," Firuza started, but her mother interrupted before she could have her way.

"Kardelen, stop it. Firuza, go clean your face, breakfast is almost ready" sabaah said.

Firuza made her way towards the bathroom in their small apartment. She was extremely grateful for her own room in this small space. She couldn't bear being in the same room with her sister for too long.

Her legs carried her effortlessly towards the bathroom, which was located next to her bedroom. As she walked inside, she notices the baby blue walls with delicate

white patterns. Her mother always had a knack for painting, so she had decorated every wall in their apartment.

Firuza opened the tap and water started splashing in the sink. Her hands formed a cup and she splashed some of it on her face three times. The cold water felt refreshing against Firuza's skin, and she felt anew. She didn't have much time for her daily routine today since she gave that time up last night.

Firuza dried her face and looked towards the mirror. She had never liked mirrors and until this day, won't. Many stare at themselves for hours in the mirror, yet nothing changes. Once you look long enough, you will find something you do not like.

Therefore, Firuza made her visit to the bathroom fast and slowly made her way to the kitchen.

The smell of egg and toast filled the room. Firuza could feel her stomach growling as she looked at the food her mother has made. The table is filled with all sorts of food. Olives, feta cheese, sausage, tomato, bread, puff pastry, salad. But the most important thing at breakfast would always be tea for Firuza.

Firuza slowly made her way towards her mother and gave her a big kiss on her cheek. Kardelen cringed. Firuza noticed and smiled at her little sister.

"It's not my problem that you can't handle public displays of affection" Firuza said as she walked towards her sister, who was sitting on the right-hand chair. She had found her next victim. Firuza bended over towards her little sister and in the same moment, kardelen

jerked away. She too can play that game of being an annoying sister.

The three of them sat at the table and silently ate their breakfast. The tea was poured into a thick glass and Firuza enjoyed every sip of it. Kardelen finished her food the fastest and left the table to clean for her mother and sister. She also had to get ready for her school and that took her more time than it took Firuza. “Thanks for the food, mom” Firuza said. She started cleaning the table as her mother was still sitting. She looked distraught.

“*Anne*, everything alright?”

“Dear, I do not want to burden you more than you already are. I know you are very busy with your school and job, but I must be honest with you.” her mother started.

Firuza waited in anticipation as to what her mother was going to say.

“I am struggling to pay for the monthly requirements of the house. I know I shouldn’t ask you of this and you have your own expenses too, but could you spare some for the house?” Sabaah said.

Firuza could see the agony on her face as she didn’t even want to ask her daughter the question. Firuza didn’t make much money herself, but she would give it up in a heartbeat if it meant helping her mother.

“Of course, mom. And it is fine, I will go find another job so we can have more for the house and you. I have noticed that you haven’t bought yourself anything in

the last few months” Firuza said, as she felt the guilt creeping up on her.

She was barely making any for her own school expenses, yet she still felt bad for not being able to help her mother.

Firuza wanted to reassure her mother that everything was going to be alright, but she was not so certain herself. Ever since her father had passed, life hadn’t been the same, nor had she looked at it the same way.

She placed a hand on her mother’s shoulder and smiled. Her mother needed this security right now. It was okay, Firuza would work a few shifts more, a few hours more. If it meant that her mother and Kardelen would be better off, she would do anything in her power. They were all she had left.

“Mom, I need to get ready” Firuza started.

Sabaah agreed and told her daughter that she should go get ready. Sabaah gave Firuza a hug and started on the dishes silently.

Firuza got up from her chair and walked towards her room.

Upon entering, she always felt the same way. Her room was filled with bookcases, filled with books from her childhood and books her father had left her to read. If there was one way for Firuza to escape, it was through her books.

She walked towards her closet, taking her make-up with her along the way. It didn’t take long before she was ready. Firuza didn’t like dolling up as much as her classmates. After make-up, Firuza walked back to her

closet to pick out a simple hoodie and some sweatpants she had had for years. Grey sweatpants and a white monet hoodie. She put her dark wavy hair into a bun atop of her head.

She took one more glance at herself in the mirror before readying her bag for school.

The cold afternoon air hit Firuza in her face and she felt a chill run down her spine. How could it be that even in April the weather could be so different. As Firuza made her way towards the nearest train station, she reconsidered what her mother had said.

Her mother had been all alone since Firuza had been 9 years old, and Kardelen had just been born. It was time to repay her mother for all of the kindness she had shown to her.

That is also why Firuza couldn't let anything, or anyone get in her way of getting to that graduation day.

Firuza stepped into the bullet train and the familiar scent of sweat and steel encompassed her every fiber. She had always been used to it, but never did it feel any different.

Her eyes dazed off into the distance as the music in her ears changed every few minutes. Firuza had always loved music, it was her escape from her everyday life.

Seventeen stations had passed, and Firuza arrived at her end station, which was 1,5 hours from her home in the suburbs.

As Firuza got out of the train, she felt something drop in the pit of her stomach. Her heart started heavily

beating out of nowhere and she was starting to panic. Her breathing shallowed and it felt as if her world was going to go black out every minute now.

Around her, the bustle of students was moving fast towards campus. Firuza couldn't move a muscle as she was panicking. And right at that moment, a gust of warm wind with a delicious scent filled her nostrils. Jasmine with rich vanilla.

Her panic eased and she started to calm herself down. Firuza looked around to see if anyone had witnessed what had just happened, but no one had seemed to notice her. She checked her watch, she had ten minutes left to get to class.

Firuza hastily made her way towards campus and still was in shock after what had happened. She had never felt anything like this and had no clue where it had come from.

The walk to campus was five minutes, she would have to run to class if she wanted to be on time.

Luckily, she was. The teacher had already started early, so Firuza quickly took place next to Louise. She made sure she had her laptop and gear ready for the lesson.

The course had felt way too long and tedious, and Firuza hadn't been able to focus on what the teacher had told them. Her mind was still stuck on that scent and where it had come from. The wind it was carried on was one of the most peaceful winds Firuza had felt, unlike any cold wind she had felt that day.

Every now and then, Louise would whisper something towards her, but Firuza would simply pass it on. Firuza

never had trouble focusing, yet she was struggling in this course today. Something was off.

“Hey, Firuza you were right on time today. You would be early normally” Louise starts.

Firuza couldn't focus. All she could focus on was that smell, which had reappeared.

The soft and warm wind engulfed her and she felt as if she could fall asleep any minute right now.

The lesson was over and Firuza packed her bag and started towards the exit of the class. The room led to an old corridor in which many students walked through the day.

Firuza was slowly making her way in the corridor of the south hall as she felt herself being led to a certain set of stairs. Louise had been long gone, noticing that Firuza wasn't in the mood to talk now.

Many students passed her, giving her smiles as they went. The bustle of footsteps grew harder as Firuza made her way towards the bustle of stairs. For some reason, sound resonated even harder in her head, as if her skull was going to split open. The waves in her head were making her lose focus.

All she could do, was focus on the smell of jasmine and rich vanilla. It was such a familiar scent, as if she felt right at home each time, she thought about it.

Before Firuza realized, she stood at the end of the stairs. There were no more footsteps to be heard. All the students had either left for home or for another course. The world felt silent as Firuza walked even

closer towards the scent, burning her nostrils with each step. She had to know what or who it was.

Her legs led her towards a small corridor at the end of the hall which seemed abandoned. She had never noticed it before.

Firuza stepped towards the corridor and her world started shaking even more. Within a few steps she arrives at the source of the familiar feeling and gust of wind.

A door was positioned right in front of it. She could feel the warmth it emanated and could taste the vanilla on her tongue. What was this madness?

The door seemed to be made of old wood and was barely even standing. Firuza slowly touched the delicate varnish of the opening. The wood felt hard to touch and she withdrew her hand. Why would there be such an old door in the middle of this abandoned corridor?

For some reason, Firuza felt inclined to open it. Every fiber in her body was telling her to open the door. She knew she was curious, and that this asset of hers was going to always get her in trouble, yet she didn't care.

Her hands found the doorknob and she turned.

The warm air had her now and she felt better than ever. Like a warm day on the beach, waiting for the sun to set.

Firuza felt ever drawn to the door. In it, she saw a plethora of colors. From purple to blue to red to orange, all the colors on the spectrum. The light

coming from the door was bright and vivid, inviting her in.

Firuza only noticed too late that the wind was also a current.

She couldn't help but reach out.

A mistake.

One so vital it would turn her world around.

A force beckoned on her hand as it sucked her into the void of the door. As each of her limbs passed the door, the warm feeling disappeared, only to be replaced by ice.

Firuza tried to look back, towards where she had just been. The opening of the door shrank in her vision, almost as if she was floating into space.

Shades of red, purple, and blue were dancing on her retinas as she slid into unconsciousness.

The beautiful spectrum disappeared, replacing itself with eternal darkness.

Chapter 2

Destan

Dawn had come and brightened another day. The city of Edina slowly warmed up as the sun glorified its hills and sandy tops.

With the dawn, also came the bustling of people and birds waking up to work.

So did Destan. He woke up to the sound of wind rustling through his satin gold curtains. The air smelled of sand and warmth, the familiar warmth Destan had always been used to. His body felt sore after the fight from the day before. His mentor had completely obliterated him at the training barracks yesterday. If there was a person who could beat him, it was his mentor Fayzal, the best mercenary in the kingdom of Edina.

Destan stood up from his bed and walked towards his curtains to open them. Today was going to be a busy day.

The aches in his body were nothing compared to the hits he took from Fayzal.

Destan heard a knock on his door.

“Who is it?” he says, his voice sounding to him deeper than normal.

“Are you decent, sire” a familiar voice called.

Speak of the devil, Destan thought to himself.

“Just enter, Fayzal”.

Fayzal opened the door to see his prince disheveled and in his morning attire. He couldn't help but laugh at his apprentice. Fayzal wasn't much older as Destan himself.

“*Salaam Sire*, you look absolutely dashing this morning” Fayzal joked.

Destan was not in the mood for this right now. He turned towards Fayzal and glared towards him. His mentor was already in his uniform, waiting for his day of beating apprentices to start.

His eyes conveyed enough emotion and Fayzal knew now to stop. That he was better in combat had meant nothing if it were to cross the crown prince of Mesira.

Destan looked towards his kingdom through the curtains. He noticed many men and women already roaming the streets, making their way to the mosques, preparing their selves for their morning prayers.

He could not help but notice the many children roaming around the streets, begging for food or money. He had to talk to his mother about this.

“Are you awake?” Fayzal interrupted the course of thoughts racing through his head.

Destan turned to his mentor slowly.

“Yes, barely. Thank you for yesterday” he replied as he smiles a bit.

“You are very welcome; I am sure you needed that”
Fayzal began.

“Indeed, I did. You are lucky I couldn’t use my *Hidayah*” Destan said as he made his way towards his bathing room.

Destan got rid of his morning robes in slow manner, assessing the pain in his body. A cold bath would do him good. Fayzal interrupted again before Destan could start his day in his usual fashion.

“Sire, there is a reason as to why I am here.” he began again.

“Did mother send you?” He asked back from the bathing room.

“Yes, and she has a mission for you today. You may not like it, as it is going to be a long way” Fayzal was delaying.

“Just tell me, Fayzal” Destan breathed.

“The queen has offered you to lead a convoy to Hijaz. Along with merchants and their wives and children”.

Destan turned towards his curtains now. He wondered why he was the one being ordered to do this when there are countless generals who could do only that. He really needed to talk to her.

The road to Hijaz wasn’t one for the faint of heart since the journey would be long and slow. The only way to get there would be through the Qayf desert.

“I understand”.

He didn’t understand a thing, but he went with it.

“Tell mother I want to see her within an hour from now. I would like to have an audience with her regarding this matter along others” Destan said.

Fayzal nodded towards his prince. The audience would not be easy to arrange, but Fayzal had his way with the queen as he was one of her most adored generals. Destan could understand why, yet somehow something in him still didn't like it.

“She will see you in an hour, make sure you look representable”.

“*Fayzal*” Destan growled.

Fayzal knew now to really stop. Once his prince changed his tone, he could also change his manner. His prince was not one to cross, and he knew this by heart. He had only seen him once like that and forbid the next person who would have the chance of seeing that.

“What about the situation in Jazeer?” Destan asked.

“No progress, sire. They haven't found anyone with a motive or actions regarding the downfall of the palace. I have only heard as much from my acquaintances. I must travel to Jazeer to see for myself. A danger there could lead to a serious threat to our throne”.

He was right. Peace among cities was essential for the wellbeing of a kingdom. Where that is disrupted, there remains chaos.

Fayzal had told him yesterday that the generals of Jazeer had told him that chaos was ensuing in their neighboring city.

Many groups had tried to overthrow their palace he had heard. Fayzal knew many generals from the west

and east and they always told him everything regarding kingdom matters. Edina was the capital, where the queen resided along with the crown prince. The kingdom of Mesira had many cities with different rulers.

Hijaz was one of the smaller regions of the south, where Jazeer was located in the west.

Rumors of a cult had traveled to the ears of Fayzal. Destan couldn't believe it at first, since cults hadn't been heard of in hundreds of years, yet here it was again. This was a pressing matter, which could lead to war.

Fayzal knew it was time to leave the prince. He must prepare for what today had in store for him. Destan knew today would not be easy.

Fayzal made his way out, before giving his crown prince a bow.

As the door of the chamber closed, Destan walked to his bathing room again. The cold water was rushing into his marble bath and slowly filling it. Destan contemplated why he would be the one to have to lead a convoy when there are more pressing matters at hand.

An hour passed and Destan has made sure he indeed looked the part of his title. His white pants and chemise were loosely fitted for his broad figure. He looked into the mirror as he straightened the collar of his chemise. On his feet, he wore his beige sandals covered in gold, representing his *Hidayah*.

His long jet-black wavy hair had grown quite a bit since his last trimming. It was now shoulder length. He should go to one of his barbers again, he thought.

He stared for a few seconds into his own eyes. The grey looking back at him.

Destan walked towards his left wall, where his weapons were stationed. He picked up his trusted bow and arrow and strapped it along his back. On his hip, he placed his sword. The only thing he had left of his father, king Bilal.

Destan left the room and locked it behind him with his golden key. He had made sure the servants of the palace had made for him a necklace with his key, so he wouldn't lose it. The crown prince took the key from the door and hang it back on its place, just above his heart.

The wide corridors of Edina palace were filled with maids and servants today again. The bustling of footsteps and shuffling were filling his ears. Somehow the sound made Destan feel at peace. Ever since he was a child, the servants had known him, seen him growing up. He greeted a few of them with a smile.

There was nothing left of his mood from the morning. He just needed to wake up and get started.

Many servants bowed as they passed their crown prince. The prince only smiled as he passed them. He pridefully strode towards his mother's chambers, which were located on the other end of the palace.

The black walls of the palace always seemed to him to be a little depressing, making the palace look very dull.

The gold and white chandeliers hanging from the ceilings illuminated the big staircase as Destan passed it. On his left, that staircase led to the main hall, where visitors of the palace would first enter. On his right, he could witness his city, as the staircase led to the terrace. Edina was looking graceful as ever, the many minarets piercing the blue sky. Behind the many buildings and markets, there lay the Qayf desert. The grandest desert of his kingdom. The palace was situated on the south end of Edina, where the markets and buildings roamed. As the north, that is where the oasis was, blooming every day with fruits and trees with endless water.

The oasis was always protected by the palace, and the city was protected by the desert.

Destan realized that he was falling into thought again, trying to escape his daily duties and orders. He couldn't help but admire the many beauties of this world, given to them.

He strode quicker now, realizing that he would be late for his audience. The queen did not like it when her visitors were late for an audience with her.

Destan stopped in front of two grand doors. Their velvet colors bright as ever. His mother always had a thing for this shade. He felt for his sword on his hip, comforting himself. He always did this whenever he felt like something big was going to happen.

Destan knocked on the door hesitantly. He never liked talking to his mother, for she was always aware of everything and always acted upon it. She scared him sometimes.

“You may enter” he heard from the other side.

His hand found the knob and he pushed the door open. As he entered, he saw his mother sitting behind her desk. Paperwork the size of Destan himself was laying on her desk, just next to his mother. Destan couldn’t imagine that being something he wanted to do, but he was destined for it one day. He wasn’t prepared for that day yet, and he knew it.

“*Salaam*, mother” Greetings, mother.

“*Salaam*, my son” she answered.

The queen looked elegant as ever. Red robes covering her every inch. Her face was looking bright, and she wasn’t looking a day over forty. Her elegant hands were sitting on her lap and her smile was ever unwavering. She looked at her son with her hazel eyes and motioned for him to sit in front of her. Destan did.

“Would you like some mint tea?” The queen asked.

“Thank you, I would love that” Destan answered a little too quickly. He hadn’t eaten anything yet, so the thought of tea was making him feel amazing.

The queen waved her hand, and two servants appeared. They were gone within seconds, making sure the queen’s orders were heard and dealt with.

“Mother, I heard some things” Destan started.

“My boy, my tea has yet to arrive” his mother laughed. The kind of contagious laugh.

Destan couldn’t help smiling.

“I love this about you, always eager to work, get into matters. You should take it easy sometimes, you know”.

That was something coming from her.

“I would love to mother, but you know me by now” Destan replies.

“I do of course. Who to know her son better than her mother” the queen smiled.

A slight grin formed on Destan’s lips. He had loved his mother on her kind days. But whenever she turned cold and turned into the queen of Mesira, he had not liked her as much. His queen was relentless when it came to matters of her kingdom and city. That is why the people of Edina respected her wherever she went.

So did Destan, yet it still was hard for him to accept his mother as cold, when he knew she could be kind too.

The tea had arrived on silver plates and Destan acted if it were liquid gold in front of him. He slowly took a sip, and the minty sugary flavor engulfed his every sense. It had been a blessing. He felt much better.

“Now, Destan” the queen started.

Destan focused his attention on his mother, the tea now on the background. He needed to know what his plans for the day were and what the queen wanted from him.

“I am sure you have heard from Fayzal already, but I need you today. You are of utmost importance. You are going to lead a group of civilians out of the city, to Hijaz. I am sure you are aware of the road ahead and the length of the travel. You must think to yourself, mother why me?”

She knew her son too well.

“But I must tell you. You are at this moment, the only one I trust with this task. The journey won’t be long, yet also not short either. Once you arrive in Hijaz, I need you to pick up a parcel for me, I will send a letter with you. I need that parcel, and you are the only one I trust with it, so protect it with your heart.”

Destan wondered why his mother would be so worried about a parcel. The importance of it seemed to do it for him. He couldn’t do anything but nod.

“Everything you need is already waiting for you outside of the palace. I have prepared your horse and the civilians. Food and water are already there. Protect the people with your body and do not forget the parcel”.

Destan had a few questions. Whenever his mother ordered something, he wouldn’t dare refuse. He knows what happens to those who do refuse. It was funny to him to think he could ever refuse. The many men in the barracks knew this too well too. Whenever his mother wanted something, nothing could stop her, not even his father.

“Mother, whom must I receive this package from?”.

The queen smiled.

“You will know when you get there” she simply answered.

The crown prince looked at the floor.

“I will do my best to honor you, my queen” Destan answered.

He stood up and walked towards his mother. He took her hand into his right hand and dropped on one knee. He put his lips to his mother’s hands and pressed her

hand to his head after. This was his way of showing his admiration to her.

“I know, and I am sure you will flourish on this journey” she said, gazing at her son.

“If something happens, send Amir to me”.

“I will, mother” Destan answered.

“May peace be upon you, my dear boy” the queen said as she kissed his cheeks.

“May peace be upon you too” Destan said.

His mother waved a hand again and the servants opened the door of her chambers. This was his signal that he could leave her premise. He hadn't had the chance to ask about the children of the streets, but he had more pressing matters at the moment.

His legs carried him towards the door. Before leaving, he looked at his mother once more. She smiled at him with her white teeth again.

For some reason, Destan didn't feel like smiling. He only bowed.

He was used to being ordered around and doing tasks in the name of his kingdom, yet this order wasn't feeling right to him.

The sun was high in the sky and all preparations were almost finished. The people had gathered in front of the palace gates, waiting for departure.

Destan had overlooked everything, making sure everything was there. The generals had handed him a list of civilians. Destan checked thrice to see if everyone was here with their belongings.

Everything was ready, and so was he. The sun was slowly setting, it would be dark in about three hours.

This was the perfect time to depart, walking in the middle of the day would be hard, since the sun would be at its highest.

Destan found it necessary to address the people in his group. There were about fifty civilians that were going to Hijaz. He still wondered why he was selected. He put the thought away, he had to focus on the job at hand.

Destan put his hands up and the people in the group noticed. He was tall enough to be seen by everyone. The group went silent, curious as to what the crown prince was going to say.

“My dear people of Edina. I speak on behalf of the queen when I say that you will be under my protection during this journey. I am willing to set my life on the line for you all, but I must say I expect the same of you. I will guide you to Hijaz along my generals. Do not falter and stay by my side at all times. Together we will arrive safely in Hijaz. If you have any questions, do not be scared to ask the generals. Let us go peacefully and arrive peacefully in Hijaz”.

There were several nods from the public.

“Now that we have this all clear, let us make our way to Hijaz” the crown prince said.

Destan called for his horse and within minutes his trusted companion arrived. A black stallion arrived with grace. He patted it on the head before mounting. It breathed with life and motion.

All of the civilians were ready and together they started towards the south, making way to Hijaz. Destan had never been to Hijaz, so this would be new for him too.

As the group passed through the city, there were many people waving and sending prayers their way. Destan waved and smiles to his people. They must have heard about the convoy of people and camels making their way to the city beyond the desert.

If all went well, they would arrive there in seven days.

Destan still had this strong feeling in his gut for the rest of day. Something was going to happen, whether good or bad. This was an omen.

Within the span of half an hour, they were out of the city of Edina. Destan looked back once more towards his home. Noticing the huge marble palace in the distance with the many minarets. He would miss his home, he knew.

His mother knew well to send him away, he needed this.

They travelled for two hours in the desert. The wind was still thankfully, not carrying the many sands with it towards them. Destan knew the dangers of the desert and the many storms it could carry with it.

Destan had wanted his trusted mentor to come with him, but he knew that Fayzal had tasks of his own back in Edina. Especially now with the troubles of Jazeer. He would have to ask Fayzal once he returned in about three weeks.

All was going well on their way. The chariots were slow and steady, the people were walking relentlessly, and

the camels had been fed enough to maintain their tempo. The civilians laughed and talked among them as time passed.

Destan looked towards the sun. It was slowly setting in the distance. It would be about ten minutes now.

He looked back once more, to see Edina again.

The city had been almost out of sight, behind the many hills of the Qayf desert. He could only see a little sliver of the palace now, the rest out of sight.

In about two hours, they would take a break for sleep.

The feeling in Destan's gut returned, heavier this time.

He was starting to feel restless yet try not to show it.

The group was moving steadily. Destan enjoyed the vast greatness of the desert. Many hills of sand were visible in the distance. The journey had only just begun, but Destan was already enjoying every bit of it.

The warm winds glided on his neck, where a stream of sweat had formed from the warmth. He could feel the sand in his hair and trickling his skin. It felt calming. The wind rustled through his black hair. He really should have gone to a barber.

The sky was bright the entirety of the day.

Yet, Destan noticed the change in a second.

Within seconds, the sky turned different. The brightness of it faded into grey and Destan knew this was not a good sign. Dark clouds had formed around the hills, and it looked like rain. This was exactly what he wasn't waiting for. He knew the inevitable had only been delayed. He knew this would pass too of course.

The camels grew restless, and so did his people. Worry was starting to creep up on them, since they had never been expecting this. Destan ordered his generals to calm them down and reassure that it would pass soon. Yet it didn't.

The sky turned purple. An unsettling aura covered the desert along with its inhabitants. Destan looked up. The sky had never been this shade in his life. He looked around to notice his generals staring in his direction. They were also starting to feel restless. They were all depending on him.

Had the queen sent them to their demise?

Destan dismounted from his horse and started walking through the crowd.

"Everyone, stay calm, this too will pass" he exclaimed, knowing well this was unnatural.

Destan moved to the front, inching away from his people and generals.

Behind him, the camels were in motion. His companion felt it too, neighing loudly.

The feeling in his stomach was growing stronger by the second. Destan knew not what was happening in this moment, and he was starting to worry about the journey. His mother had been so determined and thought well of the journey, yet here they were, in the middle of a violet storm.

Destan could see the shock in the eyes of his people.

This kind of storm was never heard of.

Destan waited for the rain, yet it never came.

Instead, the ground shook violently. Along with it came a mighty roar the sound of hundreds of clocktowers ringing.

Screams erupted from the crowd and chaos ensued. Children screamed and started jumping around in terror. Many started praying on the spot, thinking that this was their end.

Destan couldn't falter, he wouldn't falter.

He looked at the sky and there he saw it.

In it he saw a crack forming. As if the sky had been torn open. He couldn't take his eyes off of the clouds where it was forming. He heard screams behind him and the start of panic, yet he didn't turn around, couldn't.

The crack in the sky slowly opened, illuminating the hills of sand with shades of white, purple, blue and many other colors of the world.

In it, Destan noticed a single black dot.

No, not a dot.

A person.

His eyes were fixed on the dot, following it around as it edged closer towards the hills of sand. The person edged away from the crack and within seconds, the crack disappeared, taking away the sounds of terror with it.

The clouds remained for a few minutes, yet the dot was still there.

Destan still heard the wailing of his people behind him. He was sure they would not be as happy anymore moving on after this, but they had to.

Destan focused even more on the person in the sky. He couldn't make out its figure.

He didn't have to either, as the person suddenly started falling towards the earth with an unsettling velocity.

Destan wasn't the only one witnessing this. The women screamed as they saw the human fall from that height, towards the hill ahead.

The feeling in his stomach burned him now. Instinct took Destan over as he started running towards the falling dot.

He hadn't realized it before he was already in motion. He looked back once, seeing his generals holding the people back as he made his way. He could feel every fiber in his body, the aches still haunting him from the day before. Destan didn't care. He didn't know how a person had been summoned from a split in the sky, and frankly he couldn't even fathom.

All he could think was that this person from the sky was going to die from the fall.

His muscles were screaming at him from the sudden motion. Every second he came closer to the hills, which had been far from where he stood. Each passing second the person was falling faster. He knew he wasn't going to make it, yet never broke his eyes off.

He heard a loud thud. Sand flew in every direction from where the impact had been. He had almost been there, too.

Destan swore.

He heard screaming and crying coming from his group. The sounds were muffled in his mind. He didn't dare look at the state of the human. He approached the stranger laying on the hill of sand. It was a woman.

Chapter 3

Firuz

Firuz was in a weird dream she felt like. One second, she was at her university, making plans for studying her course, the other she is covered in shades of the universe. She wondered how these two things could be happening in such a short period of time.

Though, Firuz was not enjoying this dream. The warm wind she had felt had disappeared, only to be replaced with the icy one. This dream had felt longer than she actually wanted.

Firuz wanted to wake up from the darkness in which she had found herself.

It was as if her wish had been fulfilled in a second. She could feel herself returning back from her dream, returning back to her consciousness.

Her breathing had been slow and steady, like an everlasting sleep. Firuz had no idea how long she had been out, only that she had never been like this.

The ground beneath her had felt soft and warm to the touch, like a bed of sand. Firuz thought that she might have lost consciousness from the exhaustion. This hadn't been the first time for that to happen.

Firuza opened her eyes. All her senses were on high alert. She could feel the warm wind again, filling her body with signs of peace.

Her body ached as she tried to move. She made a sound, a cry of pain. Firuza let out a breath as she slowly tried getting up from where she lay. She hadn't realized where she had been,

Firuza looked around her, into an immensely new area. She couldn't believe her eyes. She wasn't in her university anymore. Firuza started to panic. She knew she was in the desert somewhere but not how she ended up there.

Her breathing changed quickly. She couldn't breathe as the panic took her over. How had she ended up here all of a sudden?

In the corner of her eye, she saw movement. She could have sworn it was something white coming towards her. Firuza didn't dare look at it, not now. Something in her told her to run. The adrenaline in her body had skyrocketed and she was only just gaining consciousness. She had to go, get out of there.

The white figure slowly started making its way towards her, and that was it. Within seconds, Firuza managed to stand up and started sprinting towards somewhere. She couldn't fathom where she was going in this vast sea of sand, but she had to get away from the figure. She was being kidnapped or something, she was sure of it.

They must have done something to her and that's why she ended up here. Firuza was making all sorts of

assumptions as her mind raced. She couldn't make out anything right that moment. All she could think about was her legs and the aching she felt in them. Her lungs were screaming for air.

Firuza heard footsteps behind her, and her adrenaline spiked even more. The white figure was behind her now, also running. Fear took her over and tears started forming in her eyes. This was not how she was going to go. She couldn't.

Firuza didn't dare look back, she only kept running. Her heart was beating in her ears and all she could hear was the sound of her heavy breathing. She had to keep going.

She looked back and knew she had made a mistake. Her steps faltered for a slip of a second.

Panic filled her mind as she felt a hand on her wrist. Firuza lashed out with closed eyes, hoping she would do something to protect herself from the person behind her. She must have hit something because she heard an intake of a breath.

The person grabbed her other wrist too and now Firuza knew it was over. She couldn't stand still; her energy levels were too high. She kicked and thrashed as she tried freeing herself from this person's grip. She didn't open her eyes, didn't care. This was too much for her. She was sure it was a nightmare she had found herself in. It would all be over soon, she just needed for it to end.

The person said something, but she couldn't hear. All she could hear was the sound of her own breathing.

Her legs felt sore as she collapsed to the sands. She could still feel the hands on her wrists. The person still hadn't let go.

It was as if something happened right at that moment. Her panic started to fade away as the stormy clouds on a sunny day. The pain in her legs faded and her heart found its steady beat again in a matter of seconds. Firuza felt at peace in seconds, where she had been near collapsing. How could that happen?

Firuza opened her eyes as her breathing steadied. The figure in front of her was in fact a man. He was tall and his wavy jet-black hair was the first thing Firuza noticed.

Her eyes found his, and it was as if her breathing stopped for three seconds. The moment felt so long, yet so short at the same time. She had never seen such golden eyes in her life.

She could see the shock in his face, and she could feel it in herself too. Blood trickled down his left cheekbone, just below his eye. The wound looked like quite a deep scratch.

The man was dressed in all white, with a sword on his hip and a bow and arrow on his back. So, her kidnapper liked cosplay? She couldn't understand a thing.

The golden eyed stranger started talking.

"Who are you?" the man asked, his voice like thunder to her ears. His accent was harsh, and it didn't seem like he was from where she lived.

Firuzza didn't react, she was only looking around, searching for an escape.

The man repeated himself.

"Who are you?" he said again. The tone of his voice was calm, yet harsh.

Firuzza reacted.

"Who am I? Who are you?" she almost shouted. The hands on her wrists were starting to irritate her now and she tried pulling away. The man didn't move one inch, and neither did his hands.

"I asked first" the stranger said.

Firuzza didn't answer again.

"How did I get here?" she asked herself. The man noticed and was asking himself the same thing.

"You fell from the sky" he casually said.

With this, Firuzza looked back at his piercing face. He must have been joking. Firuzza laughed at what he had just said. The man was in utter shock at her reaction.

"Stop joking" Firuzza said.

"Joking? What is that?" the man had answered.

Firuzza was in complete shock. She had found herself in the middle of the desert with a random stranger and he told her that she had fallen from the sky. She couldn't believe her eyes and also her ears.

A soft wind came along and brought with it a smell to her. She recognized the smell; it was what had led her to the door she opened in the first place.

"*Sayidati*, I am as shocked as you are right now. Would you tell me your name, perhaps?" the man had said. His tone was calmer now and he spoke more

eloquently. He was also short of breath, Firuza noticed. He was running after her, that was probably why.

“Why were you chasing me just now?” Firuza practically shouted, still not as calm as she had hoped.

“A woman falls from the sky, and you expect me to just let her run off somewhere in the middle of the grandest desert of Mesira?” The man replied with a question.

Firuza scanned her surroundings. She was all alone with a stranger in the middle of the desert indeed. Her eyes found her wrists, which were starting to hurt because of the pressure now. She glanced at the man and back at her wrists. He finally let go. Firuza knew that if she were to run again, he would follow her. It would be no use. She rubbed her hands on her wrists where the pressure had just been.

“Listen, I mean you no harm. You probably think otherwise, and I cannot blame you. Let me introduce myself to you in hopes of you doing the same” he started, his voice sounded low and raspy.

“My name is Destan Azir, I am the crown prince of Mesira”.

Firuza laughed. She was now really convinced that he was into cosplay. The shock on his face could have been visible from miles away. He put a hand through his black hair in desperation.

“Firuza” she simply answered.

She didn’t have a title or anything and didn’t want to play along with his game.