

## The Goddess' Request

By Tiona Yates

Lisor and his twin Reyel had just turned fifteen; he found that it left him rather discomfited that Reyel spent most of her time on magical studies now, though he'd never admit it. It left him far too alone, and with too much time on his hands. While he was easily as intelligent as his sister, he had little desire to study dusty tomes or try his hand at manipulating magical energies. He wanted action, adventure. He chafed greatly at the rules and structure of his household, even though he was two years now from full adulthood.

He was sitting alone in his room contemplating his future, or perhaps, lack thereof. Nothing had gone right today, though most of that was his own fault. Why couldn't he stop himself from playing pranks that would do nothing but frustrate and annoy his father? He'd just received not only a scolding, but a warning. What he had spent the past several years doing would not be tolerated much longer. He needed to change, to become something more, find a niche that he could fill in the world.

His father was Lord Tainen Calasti, ruler of the city of Akhshar. His mother was a capable priestess of the Risen One as well as a mage. With not only his father, but grandfather bearing soulwords for Railah, Lisor found that there was little he could do to gain the excitement he craved without harsh rebuke. When Arandel tested for his soulword, it would only get worse, for Lisor's brother was even more strongly of the opinion that rules and structure were what was needed.

Today he'd managed to sneak out early, and found a way in to a market stall where the owner was distracted and, without stealing any of the product, rearranged it. Akhshar was generally safe; thefts and the like were punished fairly but heavily, and Lisor knew not to actually steal anything. Not that it would have been of any benefit to him to do so. His family had all the wealth he could ever need, and he didn't act out of greed, but out of a need for excitement. Arandel had managed to locate him as he was replacing the last of the product, which completely ruined the prank, in Lisor's eyes.

While he could prove that he hadn't actually taken anything, merely moved it around, the disapproval that was evident in his father's eyes worried Lisor. He'd been warned, time and again, that his rebellious ways would cost him much, perhaps, eventually his own freedom. But he couldn't find anything else that could capture his attention for more than a few minutes. Following the rules set out for him was simply too boring. There was nothing challenging about his life. But, at the same time, he knew that he couldn't keep this up indefinitely. At some point, his pranks would go too far, and his father would have to do more than merely reprimand him.

"What is it that I'm to do?" he wondered out loud. "I can't continue on like this; I know that. But I don't know what I should focus on, what would give me purpose."

~I can give thee the purpose thou need,~ a voice spoke softly in his head. It was a woman's voice, deeper than he'd expected, and yet gentle. He had never heard that voice before, and wondered at its source. He'd never tested as having mind-magics before, though he'd been on the receiving end of his grandfather's power in the past. Yet this felt different.

Carefully he formed his own reply in his mind, wondering who could be contacting him. ~Who are you, and what purpose are you offering me?~

There was a sense of a deep rolling chuckle, and he felt almost as if someone were studying him, though he was certain there was no one else in the room. ~I am one who has watched thee long, and has seen why it is that thou act. Perhaps, with the skills I can give thee, thou and I might work together, to aid many, including thy family.~

He shivered. Was this the sound of someone attempting to corrupt him, or was it truly someone who wished to help him? Her mind did not feel like a mind-speaker's, but rather something beyond normal contact. It easily passed through the mental defenses he'd learned from his grandfather, defenses that usually worked even without him having mind-magical ability himself. ~Lady, please let me know who you are, so that I may know if I may trust you.~

He caught a brief flash of an image, a mirror, across his mind. ~I am Nocta, who is known to most as Lady Night. I have come because I have seen thy passion, and thy skills. I would have thee as one of my Chosen, and would teach thee the skills that thou will need to serve me well. Thou will learn magics different from thy sister's, and they would compliment thy sense for adventure, thy need to act within the world. I would have thee learn to act from the shadows, manipulating people and situations to serve the tapestry of fate.~

He knew something of the Goddess who spoke to him, and realized that only a deity could have breached his defenses so easily. Though she kept but a very small church, a handful of priests and even fewer Chosen, she was known, if only because she was the one who would act when no others could. It felt strange to him, to sense her regard. But he also could tell, instinctively, that what she was telling him was true. ~You want me? I never considered that a Goddess would want my service. Why would you approach me? My family doesn't even approve of me, not really.~

~The reasons thou act as thou do are known to me, perhaps better than to any other. Thou need a challenge, a purpose, something to drive thy mind and spirit. I would give thee that purpose. There are things within the world that are beyond even my knowledge, and I would have thee learn of these things, correct the tears in the pattern. I choose carefully for my followers, picking those who are quick-witted and capable. Thou has never acted from harm in thy spirit, but rather from boredom. Thou need something to fill thy mind, new skills to learn, and new duties to perform. I would have thee do what I cannot, and with complete freedom of action.~

He shivered. She knew exactly why he played his pranks. He craved not only excitement, but challenges, things that only he could do. And with her last statement, he couldn't help but wonder if this could possibly be what he'd been waiting for all his life. ~Freedom of action, Lady?~

~Lisor, thou who I would have as my Chosen, know that I do not command as does my sister, or as any of the other gods do. I will make suggestions, perhaps ask things of thee, but the decision of whether to act, and, more importantly, how to act, will always be within thy purview. Thou must decide thy place in the world, though I would give thee more knowledge and ability to make those decisions count. To do what I need thee to do, thou must have complete freedom, even from my will. It will be different from the rules that thou see thy father and grandfather and brother following. Thy path must be thy own to determine, and, as I would have of thee later, I must offer thee now. Thou must choose thy path.~

Lisor blinked in astonishment. This Goddess was truly different from the other gods; she was asking for his service, rather than demanding it, and would let him choose how he was to serve. She would grant him power and skills that she wanted him to choose how to use. It gave him a complete sense of unreality. And yet, it was a reality that he wanted, badly. ~Lady, if I serve you, what would my duties be? Your church is all but unknown, though I have knowledge at least of you. Would you want me to acknowledge this bond openly, serve you directly? Or must it all be kept concealed, so that my skills are more effective?~

~I have no fear that thou will be effective, and would welcome thee to my service openly, should thou choose to do so. Thy powers I would train, and I would not be averse to thee making clear thy devotion. It would be easier on thee, I think, should thou do so. For thy family would learn to accept it, and perhaps even support thy skills. If thou accept my offer, I will give thee what thou needs.~

He'd be allowed to tell his family who he served, and, perhaps use that influence, the name of his devotion, to convince others to act, when his own reputation would not be enough. Because Lady

Night's servants were so few, there was no real hierarchy. He would be able to make demands in her name, should he have the need to do so, on his own recognizance. It gave him an impression of power and responsibility that he'd never had before. He knew better than to misuse it, but it was a power that would be his to command.

~Lady, I believe we can come to an agreement on this. You have offered me an opportunity to be more than I would otherwise be. I would be a fool to turn that down. You would not have approached a fool. Teach me these skills that you would have me learn, the magics that will aid me in your purpose, and I will follow, willingly. ~

There was that sense of laughter again, a rumble of pleasure, ~Look to the table beside thee, Chosen, and take up that which thou find. They are for thy use, in service to me. I will come to thee often, teaching thee the skills thou will need, and training thy mind to act quickly and effectively. Know that though the path before thee may be difficult indeed, thou have the strength to overcome nearly any challenge, should thou think things through. Know ever that thy greatest value lies in thy ability to reason, to consider possible options.~

He could see the dim light of his glow lamp sparkle off of something on the table. There lay a mirror, silver backed and about a hand's breadth across, lying atop a weapons belt. In the belt were a pair of daggers, fighting daggers from the looks of them. He couldn't help but grin, as dagger work had always been his strong point. ~Lady, I will take these and serve you. I know how powerful this offer is, and can only give my loyalty in return. But that loyalty you will have, all my life.~

As Lisor contemplated what he would do on the next day, no pranks or devious plots came to his mind. Instead, there was the intent to go to the Ollahmic library to find what information he could locate about his Lady. For, he realized now, she was indeed his Lady, in the only way that counted at this point. He picked up the mirror and gazed into it, suddenly feeling in his mind the beginnings of the art of scrying. He'd never cared much for magic before, but that might be in part because magic had never been useful to him. What Lady Night would teach him would be infinitely useful; he had no reason to doubt that.

That night changed him, deeply. From that point on, Lisor felt no need to play pranks on the merchants in the market, nor, indeed on anyone. He dedicated himself wholly to what he could learn, the skills of reasoning and manipulation. Where possible, he would use those skills without letting on what he could do, for his gifts would be useless if they became common knowledge. And, he found that there was a peace within him, a wholeness that he'd never had before. If this was what devotion felt like, then he wondered that he'd never considered such before.