NISHA J. TULI

PUE OF HE HURORA KING

NISHĄ J. TULI



FOREVER

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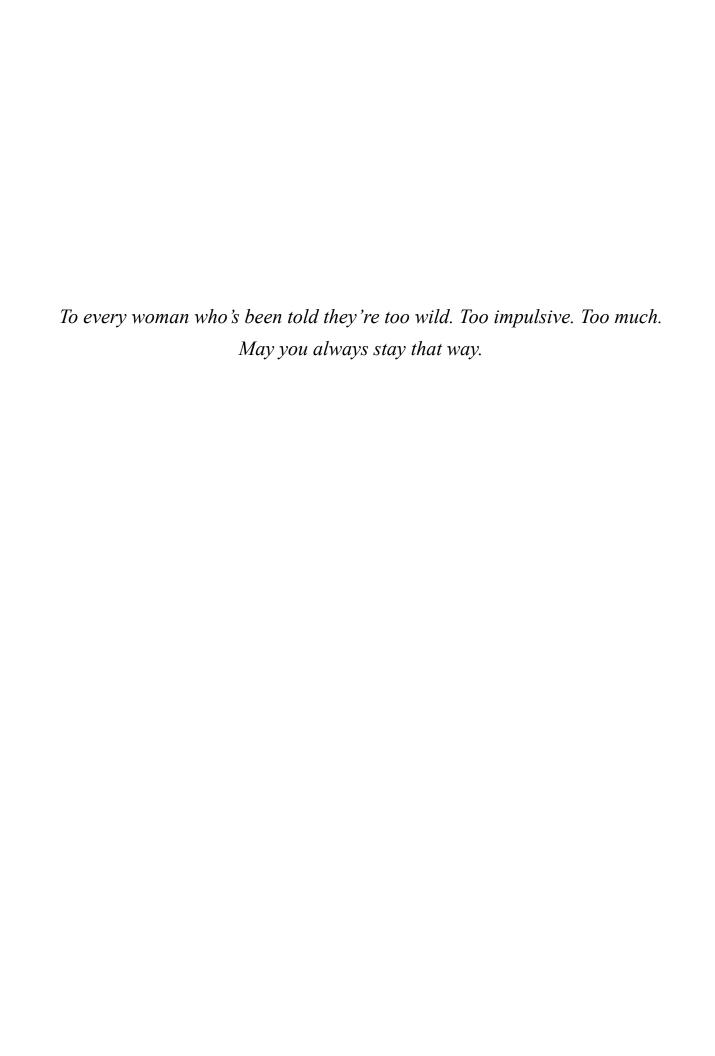
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Acknowledgments

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AUTHOR'S NOTE



Welcome back to the world of Ouranos! I hope you're eager to dive back into Lor's story and find out what happens next.

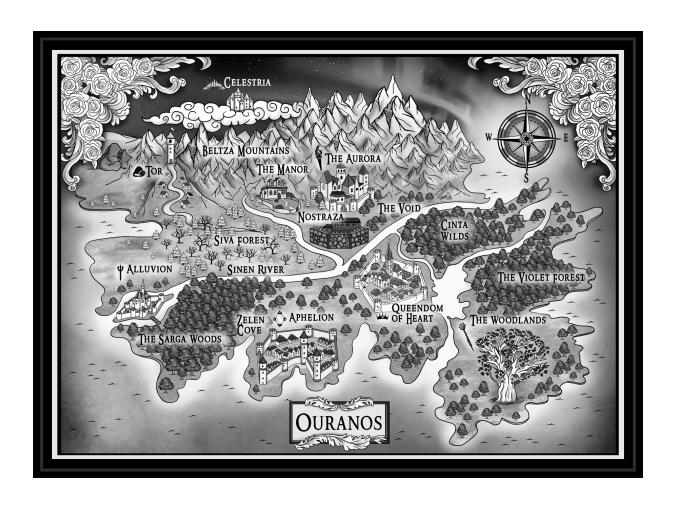
Expect a lot of angst and pining in this one, and maybe a moment or two when you want to throw the book across the room? I'm sorry, but don't worry, I promise it's all going to be worth it.

Content warnings are pretty much the same as for book 1, but you can find them on my website if you'd like to review them at nishajtuli.com.

Thank you again!

Love,

Nisha



CHAPTER ONE



LOR

PRESENT DAY: THE AURORA

I hurl the vase with all my strength, missing the Aurora Prince's head by just a hair. He lifts his arms to deflect the blow, and it explodes against the wall, peppering him with shards of broken porcelain. I lunge for a nearby table, attempting to snatch up a small crystal dish when he's on me, one large hand snagging my wrist and the other circling my throat. He shoves me flat against the wall with enough force that I grunt at the impact.

"Stop that," he hisses, his face so perilously close to mine I feel the warmth of his breath on my lips. We stand inside my bedroom—no, my *prison*—in a house somewhere in the middle of the Void in the furthest reaches of The Aurora. Outside, there are mountains and an endless stretch of midnight sky littered with rivers of stars and rainbow ribbons of color.

Amya and Mael broke me out of Aphelion almost five weeks ago, and they've kept me here, refusing to let me go. At first, I was convinced they were returning me to Nostraza, but my fate continues to be more complicated than that. Instead, they've stuck me in this opulent room and won't stop asking me questions. I've contemplated the logistics of my escape countless times, but I don't know where I'd go. We're surrounded by nothing but a deadly forest and even deadlier mountains.

"I'm not telling you anything until you bring me Willow and Tristan," I say for the thousandth time, or maybe it's the millionth by now. I lost count weeks ago.

"Not until you answer my questions. I have ways of making you talk, Inmate," Nadir says, baring his teeth, those dark and disconcerting aurora-infused eyes flashing with fury. The colors swirl in his irises, the effect nearly hypnotic. He leans closer, nothing left but a constant wall of ire between us. My skin twitches in response to his closeness, like ribbons are sliding through my blood.

"Then do it," I bite back. He's been threatening me for weeks, and I'm not sure what's keeping him from making good on his promises. So I keep pushing him, trying to make him snap. Wondering how far I can go.

I meant what I said. He *thinks* he knows something and maybe his suspicions are right, but I will confirm nothing until I know my brother and sister are alive.

Even then, this prince is dreaming if he thinks he's getting anything from me.

His jaw clenches, but there's a flicker of hesitation in his eyes, so quick I'm not sure if I imagine it.

"Do it," I taunt as his grip tightens around my throat, the pressure bordering on dangerous.

I stare him down, determined to never let him see my fear.

He will never break me.

"Show me how you're going to make me talk, oh mighty prince. I promise there's nothing you can do I haven't already survived."

"Nadir, stop it," Amya says, entering the room, her disapproving glare taking in the way he has me pinned to the wall. "You can't do that to her."

Nadir turns his furious gaze on his sister, but she doesn't even blink. I'm learning she's mostly immune to her brother's moods and make a mental note to ask her for some pointers.

She's wearing a long black skirt split to reveal legs clad in tight black leather, along with a sleeveless corset, tied with violet laces running up the front. Fingerless lace gloves adorn her hands, and her black hair, streaked with colors, is anchored into two messy buns on either side of her head.

She sits down on a black velvet chair, crossing her legs, completely at ease despite the circumstances of the scene she's just interrupted. Nadir and I glare at each other, the atmosphere sparking as both our chests expand with tight, angry breaths.

"I sent word to Nostraza," she says, drawing both our attentions towards her.

"Amya," he growls, and that strange sensation like cords moving under my skin ripples again.

She holds up a delicate hand. "Don't worry. I was discreet."

"If Father knows she's here—"

"He won't," she says, her own aurora-flecked eyes flashing as her cool composure slips. "I know what's at stake. Don't treat me like a child."

"Are you planning to let me go, or am I to continue standing here with your hand around my throat while you converse in my presence?" I ask.

Nadir looks back at me, indecision warring in his gaze. He wants to do something drastic. He's losing patience, and it's so obvious he's perched on the edge, ready to tip over.

Well, he can keep on waiting. In fact, I'll give him a shove.

When his jaw ticks, our gazes melt into each other and that same feeling, like I'm being touched from under my skin, resurfaces. Though I'd never say it out loud, I can't help but notice it only happens in his presence. I don't want to think about what it might mean. I don't *know* what it means, but I'm sure all it can signal is trouble. He hesitates for another second before he finally lets go of my throat.

"Stop fucking throwing things," he says, his voice low and deadly enough to send a shiver down my spine. "Or I'll chain you up in the basement with my *pets*." The vicious glint in his eyes suggests these *pets* are more monster than friendly companion.

He steps back, watching me like a ravenous predator ready to tear out my throat at the slightest provocation. With my gaze deliberately pinned on him, I step out from his towering shadow and before he can stop me, I reach for the same crystal dish and hurl it against the wall.

It smashes apart with a resounding shatter, and I turn to him with a triumphant smile, flipping a lock of my hair over my shoulder.

I flutter my eyelashes innocently. "You were saying?"

His eyes go so dark they turn completely black, those swirling lights dimming down to nothing but inky pools deep enough to drown in. That pull surges again, like a rabid demon trying to rip straight out of my skin. Why does his anger affect me this way?

Amya covers her mouth, trying to suppress a smile, while I look down my nose at the prince. He growls and stalks over, grabbing my wrist again. "I warned you," he says, pulling me forward so I nearly trip, my hand slamming into the center of his solid chest to catch myself.

"Wait! I want to hear what she learned from Nostraza. Are Tristan and Willow alive?"

Nadir jerks me around, my back pressing against his chest and his arm banding around my waist before his hand clamps over my mouth.

"Don't tell her anything," Nadir says to his sister, who's clearly about to reply to my question. "I swear to Zerra, Amya. *Don't*."

Her mouth snaps shut, her lips rolling inwards to the muffled sounds of my protest.

"Let me tell her," she pleads, and the princess climbs a tiny notch in my esteem.

"No," he snarls. "I warned her."

He picks me up by the waist as I flail against the iron band of his arm. After spinning around, he walks me to the door while I attempt to wrestle from his hold, kicking my legs, trying to aim for his shins. Or maybe a far more precious body part.

Of course, he's High Fae and incredibly strong, so I might as well be fighting an iron tree with the personality of a cactus.

We enter the hall to find Mael walking towards my room. At the sight of us, he presses his back and palms against the wall, letting us pass. "Things are going well, I see."

"Shut up," Nadir says as we struggle down the hall and then he stops. I'm still bucking and flailing as he turns around and then around, as if he can't decide where to go.

"Problem?" Mael asks, coming up and folding his arms over his broad chest. He's wearing his usual light leather armor, his black hair cut close and his deep brown skin gleaming under a row of tiny chandeliers suspended the length of the hallway. Amya is behind him with a grin she's obviously trying to contain.

"We don't have a dungeon in this house," Nadir says, as though this is everyone's fault and this salient fact has just occurred to him. So much for the threat of locking me up with his *pets*.

"It's not really that sort of house," Amya says. "That was kind of the point when we built it."

"That was before I realized we'd be harboring a prisoner who behaves like a rabid *child*," he snarls, and I bark out a gleeful laugh that definitely makes him angrier.

The prince practically roars in frustration and then kicks open the door at the end of the hall, carrying me into an enormous bedroom with a huge bed sitting under a long bank of windows, where the northern lights paint the sky in ribbons of color.

As much as Aphelion may have been a court masquerading as a haven of gilded beauty, I miss its bright blue skies like flowers miss the sun. This depressing canvas of grey and more grey is dredging up the painful memories of the twelve years I barely lived under this bleak sky.

Everything in the room is black save for the occasional streaks of color accenting the rugs and furniture—crimson and violet and emerald.

Oh, and the two enormous fluffy white dogs who lie in front of the fireplace, only their heads lifting as we enter, their dark eyes watching us with shrewd curiosity. I think they're dogs—they're big enough to be wolves who feast on small children for supper. Are these the pets he meant? They don't look *that* dangerous. In fact, they're kind of cute if you ignore the fact they could probably take off my head with a single bite.

That's when one of them curls a lip, a low growl rumbling from its throat with its far too intelligent gaze fixed on me.

Okay, never mind. Definitely very dangerous.

Nadir hauls me across the floor as Amya and Mael exchange a careful glance.

"Nadir," Amya says softly.

"Not now," Nadir replies, sharp as a knifepoint. A moment later, ribbons of colorful light peel away from his hands and secure themselves around my wrists. They feel like nothing against my skin, but I can't separate my hands like I've been shackled by tendrils of air.

Mael's dark eyebrow raises, and it's obvious he wants to comment, but he bites his tongue while Nadir binds my wrists to the bedpost with more ribbons of colorful magic. If my primary goal wasn't to rip out his heart and feed it to those dogs, I might admit his power was rather beautiful.

When he's satisfied, he steps back, folding his muscular arms across his chest with a smug smile. He wears his usual uniform of a fitted black shirt and pants, everything tailored to his body with irritating perfection.

"You asshole," I hiss, tugging on my restraints. "Let me out of here."

Nadir crowds me against the bedpost, leaving only a breath of tension separating us. "I told you if you threw anything else, there would be consequences."

I jerk on my restraints with an angry huff, resisting the urge to spit at him. Kick him. Headbutt him. Anything. I'm so frustrated and angry and sick of this shit.

No one will ever let me be free.

"And I told you I won't cooperate with you until you bring my friends here," I snap.

I'm still protecting the secret of our family tie in the hopes I can shield them from what I suspect the prince wants.

"You think you can scare me? I survived twelve years in that fucking prison of yours while you slept in your fancy silk sheets and pranced around in your fancy clothes. Those dogs were probably treated better than I was."

This time I do spit, but somehow he avoids it, my saliva landing on the ground in an unsatisfying drop of nothing.

"You were in that prison because you committed a crime," he says.

"I was a child!" I scream so loud my voice cracks. "I did nothing, you fucking monster!"

"You'll refer to me as 'Your Highness," he hisses, swirls of crimson rolling in his eyes.

"You *aren't* my prince." I spit the words, trying to infuse them with the bottomless depth of my hatred.

I will never, ever bow to this pompous Fae asshole.

"You are a citizen of The Aurora."

"Go to hell. I am not, and I'll die before I call you that."

His nostrils flare, but he doesn't respond, turning on his heel and gesturing to Amya and Mael to follow. At the door, he stops and looks over his shoulder.

"If you keep this shit up, Morana and Khione won't hesitate to put you back in line."

The two furry monsters in front of the fire perk up at the sound of their names, looking innocent enough with their fluffy coats that look as thick and white as fresh snow. But then they bare their mouthfuls of sharp teeth in a tumble of low growls, reminding me not to be fooled by appearances.

Amya throws me a sympathetic look that I don't return. She slept in silk sheets and wore pretty clothes while we rotted away inside Nostraza, too. She might be the nicer one, whatever that's worth, but she isn't innocent of anything that happened to me and my siblings.

The door closes, and I look around the room. My gaze skates over the dogs whose heads are again resting on their paws, but I'm sure they're acutely aware of my every move. Nadir's black jacket hangs off the back of the chair at a desk in the corner, and the far wall is lined with shelves stuffed full of books.

From the other side of the door, I hear the muffled voices of Mael, Amya, and Nadir arguing about something. Presumably me.

Nadir has been questioning me about who I am and what Atlas wanted from the day I arrived, but I've refused to answer anything. I don't know what he believes, or how close to the truth he is, but I'm not making it that easy for him. Atlas wanted to use me for the power I might hold, and I have to assume this dark prince's ambitions lie in a similar direction.

Tired of standing, I sink to the floor, my magical handcuffs adjusting just enough for me to get somewhat comfortable.

I need to get out of here. Not just this room, but this house. The trouble is I have no idea where I'd go. I have no home and not a penny to my name. And I can't just waltz into Nostraza and claim Willow and Tristan. I don't even know if they're still alive.

The Sun Mirror told me to find the Heart Crown, and I have even less clue about where to start with that. Find it where?

Finally, the door opens and Nadir strides in, tossing me a dark frown before he slams it behind him. Amya and Mael are no longer in tow, and a tiny wisp of fear licks its way up the back of my neck. Suddenly, I'm very aware that I have no idea what this wild Fae prince is capable of. How afraid do I need to be? Will he force me to do the same things as the guards in Nostraza? My heart rate kicks up, my palms growing damp. I'll die before I suffer anything like that again.

No one here has harmed me physically, but I know I'm walking a razorthin line with my constant impertinence. But what would be the point in cooperating? I have almost nothing to lose. If he plans to use me like Atlas, then I'm fucked either way. The only power I hold are the secrets locked in my head and the capacity to wield them for Tristan's and Willow's freedom.

Despite the fact he hasn't technically hurt me, it's obvious the prince is lethal and could kill anyone without a thought. He's like a coiled spring ready to strike. He radiates power and menace and an unmistakable aura of darkness. That peculiar feeling under my skin buzzes again, and I inhale a deep breath, trying to suppress it.

Nadir walks over to the fireplace and crouches down in front of his dogs, ruffling their fur while they roll over to bask in his attention. It's clear they hold a special place in his heart, and the scene is so oddly incongruent with his usual behavior that I find myself relaxing a bit. When he's done, he stands, refusing to acknowledge my presence, before he disappears into the bathroom. Then I hear the water running, and I let out a huff, blowing an errant lock of hair out of my eyes.

There's a chill in the air that's the perpetual chill of The Aurora I remember so well. Everything is cold. The air and the sky and their fucking *prince*. I'm wearing a pair of soft leggings and thick socks with a thick black sweater. Thankfully, they're warm and comfortable enough.

The door opens again, and I suck in a sharp breath at Nadir's change of clothing. His top half is bare, and it's virtually impossible not to be taken in

by the perfection of his lean, hard physique. The curves and dips of gleaming brown muscle shift and bunch as he walks to his desk, still not looking at me, and shuffles through a stack of papers.

An array of colorful, swirling markings cover his skin, spreading across his chest and the arches of his shoulders. He's wearing a pair of soft black pants that hang off his hips so low it's nearly scandalous. What the fuck. Is this some kind of game to him?

He looks up, our gazes catching, and I quickly look away, mortified I've been spotted staring. I hear him snort out a derisive laugh as he turns down the light on his desk, throwing the room into near darkness, save the lights of the aurora glowing through the window.

"What are you doing?" I ask, peering at him through the dimness. My earlier nervousness about what exactly he plans to do with me alone and tied up in his bedroom cinches my chest tight.

The colors of the Borealis reflect off his skin, his high cheekbones and his strong jaw. He pads along the thick rugs that cover the black marble floor, and there's something awkwardly intimate about the glimpse of his bared feet.

"Going to sleep, Inmate. It's getting late."

"What about me?" I tug on the magic ropes still anchoring me to the bed.

"What about you?"

"You can't just leave me here like this all night."

"Yes. I can. How are you going to stop me?"

I'm definitely not surprised by this answer. I pissed him off earlier and now it's time for his retribution.

"I hate you," I say, dropping my voice to a menacing whisper.

"So you've said, many, many times. As you can see, I'm perfectly at ease with that fact. I plan to sleep like a baby, knowing just how much you *loathe* me."

He walks to the side of the bed, pulls back the sheets, and looks down to where I'm sitting on the floor, a smirk on his face. He slides under the covers and pulls them up, sighing with a groan of satisfaction I assume is meant to rub in how comfortable he is and how uncomfortable I am. It works. I shift on the hard ground, my ass already numb and my arms sore from their restricted movement. Still, it *does* seem like he's planning to, in fact, sleep, rather than exact some deprayed brand of revenge.

He lets out a short whistle, and his dogs both stand up and stretch in front of the firelight, the fine hairs on their bodies glowing orange. At first, I think they're headed for me. I swallow a nervous knot in my throat, but they pass by and then leap up onto the bed, settling down next to their master with soft grunts.

Right, even the dogs get better treatment. I should have remembered.

Though I can't see Nadir anymore, only the lump of his blanketed form, I toss him my most withering glare, trying to incinerate him where he lies. As if reading my mind, he lets out another exaggerated sigh, and who would have thought an immortal prince could be so fucking petty?

"Sweet dreams, Inmate," he says, a definite thread of amusement in his voice.

I hold back the snarl perched on the roof of my mouth, refusing to give him even a shred of satisfaction as I stare into the dark and vow to kill him.

Slowly and painfully.

The only thing left to decide is if I'll end the prince or his father first.