

A breeze lifted the dark curtain covering the open window, bringing with it the scent of sweet mint. Squinting against the sudden flare of bright sunlight, Erin took a step closer to the bed. Arick still slept. He'd nudged the thin woolen blanket down to his waist at some point in the night, baring the wide strips of bandages they'd used to strap his arm tightly across his chest. Complexion pale, his chest rose and fell steadily.

As though dreaming troubled dreams, Arick scowled. Moving his legs beneath the thin blanket, his unbound hand plucked fretfully at the bandages crossing his chest. He sighed, turned his face into the sweet breeze, and his eyes opened.

Escaping like a wraith beneath the curtain through the open window, the strum of a guitar flitted through the room, followed by the persistent jangle of a tambourine. Erin shivered. Her heart beat loudly in her ears, matching the rhythm of the music. Shouts of laughter. The stamping of feet. Twirling around a yellow-gold campfire. Dust filtering down onto her uplifted face and naked arms.

Arick's scowl deepened. He gasped and half-rolled toward her. Hope filled the hollow ache in Erin's heart, driving away the phantoms. He recognized her! She could see it in his eyes! He would say her name!

"I remember you," Arick whispered. He swallowed heavily, trying to clear his throat, but started to cough, and the coughing chased away the hint of recognition. His frown of confusion twisted into a grimace of pain.

Erin straightened slowly. She'd been afraid to speak, to break the bond between them, and now she felt barren and alone, encircled by mocking shadows and unfulfilled promises. Why didn't he recognize her as she recognized him?

