



The Oasis

by Juliet Robinson

A flickering sign had drawn me down the narrow alley. Some wizards work, many years ago, the spell now fading, but still effective, a naked woman grinding her behind against the capital O of the word Oasis.

Florin nudged me, a smutty look on his face. 'A place to experience the culture of Nylryi.'

There was nothing about this dump that promised culture, we were in the heart of the slum district, but we needed a place to lay low.

We pushed our way through the beaded curtain which jingled and swayed. A dwarf bouncer sat on a bench beyond the curtain, their beard slick with beer froth, their axe propped against the smoke-stained wall, they nodded at us as we passed, confident, not worried about a halfling and skinny human. Inside the air hung heavy, a mixed scent, something sweet, body must and a metallic tang - perhaps blood.

A stage, sat at the center of the room. An unnatural purple haze radiated from it, illuminating the crowd, though the further you got from the stage the less you could see of the patrons. The customers were a mixed bunch, humans, trolls, dwarfs, a couple of goblins, a hunched over creature with scaled skin, we wouldn't be noticed here. They sat nursing drinks, talking quietly amongst themselves, or playing cards, not one of them showed the slightest interest in our arrival. This was a good sign, perhaps word hadn't gotten out that Ironbeard had put a price on our heads.

We found a table, greasy and wobbly in the midst of the crowd and Florin flicked his wrist, summoning a serving girl. We ordered drinks, which I suspected would be poor, but when they arrived, I was surprised by the quality of the wine.

Suddenly the air crackled with anticipation. A spotlight sliced the haze, illuminating a figure who was descending from a hidden platform above, an elfin woman. My pulse quickened. She was a vision. Her skin was polished alabaster, it shimmered with flecks of gold. Long sun-bleached hair framed her heart shaped face, a face that many would readily bleed for.

Her costume ... well, there wasn't much to it, clung to her curves like the possessive hands of a lover, but for the most part we were treated to an expansive view of her toned body. She alighted on the stage and bestowed a playful smile upon the crowd, all of whom had fallen silent and then in a honeyed voice she teased, 'Admire as much as you can. Most people don't admire enough.'

Well, that was a lie, there wasn't a soul here who wasn't admiring. Next to me Florin sat frozen with his drink forgotten halfway to his mouth, his eyes riveted on the near nude goddess.

And then she started to dance, and I, like everyone else, was captivated. It was the way she moved, every step, every turn, every twist was a symphony of grace. The music pulsed, not leading her steps, but responding to her flow. She shaped the music, it was enthralled to her, as was I.

This wasn't just dancing; it was a story. A story of a faraway land, she taught us ancient rituals with a twist and spin. She wove desire and hunger into the tale, and I leaned forward, eager. The crowds' bored stupor had vanished and had been replaced by a primal fascination. We were all drunk on her.

When the music finally ended, the room shook with thunderous applause, and bestial calls. I joined the chorus, I needed more.

The woman basked in our desperate pleas with a smile on her face. It was cruel, she had given me a taste of the sweetest nectar, she had let me sip, but she had snatched it away before I could quench my thirst. She raised her arms, stretching out her long slender body, the light dancing over her form, and then she ascended back to the heavens from whence she came.

Silence, the crowd's voice had deserted it. I shook my head, I felt drunk, yet I had barely touched my wine. I wasn't alone in this trance, a glance around the room showed me that my fellows in the crowd were as numb as I.

The Oasis had promised nothing, well nothing other than smut, but it had delivered. No, she had delivered a sensual transcending.

'I didn't expect that,' Florian said his voice raw and rasping.

'Nor did I,' I breathed. Surprised I had been able to draw breath enough to speak.

A hand fell upon my shoulder, its grip like an iron vice, a gravelly voice growled in my ear, 'and I didn't expect to find you two so easily, it is a day for surprises it seems.'