

Crissmas in Korwahn



By Kristen Ashley



Lahn left his queen in their bed after their morning session.

The climaxes she gave him never failed to energize him, but the ones he gave her had the opposite effect.

Thus, he was smiling as he tied the laces on his hides, his gaze on her languishing in silk, her golden hair tumbled across the pillows, her eyes lazy.

He enjoyed this vision before him so much, his preference would be to reverse his actions, unlace his hides, divest himself of them, and return to their bed.

But he was Dax of Korwahk. He had responsibilities.

With a sigh, he moved toward the bed to bid her farewell with a kiss.

As he moved, however, she rolled to her back and sat up, holding the silk to her breasts, a modesty that was entirely unnecessary after all their time together, and the experiences they'd shared, some of which produced four children.

It was also entirely endearing.

“Can we talk?”

Her question ceased his movement.

She spoke in her own language, the language of The Vale, or as she knew it, English.

This was Lahn's edict, that they would speak thus in their *cham* at all times, not only because he wanted to converse with her using something familiar and beloved to her, but also because, by doing it, they taught it to their children, and Lahn felt they should have that part of their mother and the world she left behind to create their family.

But he saw from the look in her eyes that the climax he bestowed on her, unusually, had worn off quickly.

He knew why, and his understanding of it tightened his chest.

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“*Kah fauna*,” he murmured in an effort to escape the melancholy in the spirit that always danced and shone so fiercely in her eyes, “I have already dallied too long with my queen.”

He felt his lips quirk when she rolled her eyes and muttered, “Like you don’t *dally* too long every morning.”

“Like you don’t enjoy it,” he retorted.

She didn’t attempt to deny it, a futile endeavor.

She looked deep into his eyes and said what she’d been saying since the day after they celebrated Hades enjoying his first full year of life. That being four months ago.

“Lahn, I want another baby.”

Something else got tight in Lahn’s body as he heard his queen make this demand. It ran along his shoulders, down his spine, up his neck, causing pain.

“I forbid it.”

He said these words in a whisper for two reasons.

The first, if he said them quietly, perhaps his temper would not ignite at being forced to utter them, for she knew full well his thoughts on this matter.

The second, they were words his wife very much did not like passing his lips.

He was king, he could forbid whatever he wanted.

Except with his wife.

“Lahn—”

“I gave you Ashur,” he stated.

“I know. But—”

“And then I gave you Hades,” he carried on.

“Yes, you did. But—”

“I did not wish to do so. I love my sons. They are wonders. They are a miracles. We are blessed they walk our sands. But you will remember, I did not wish to plant those seeds. But I did.” He paused accordingly before he finished, “*Twice*.”

“Hades coming into this world was night and day from Tunahn and Isis,” she returned, and he fought back a flinch at the memory of his Golden Queen birthing their firstborn twins.

He’d almost lost her.

After actually losing her for what felt an eternity, he did not wish to abide that again for an actual eternity.

He noted she did not mention Ashur's birth, which was nowhere near as traumatizing as the twins, but it was not easy (or, to Lahn, it did not seem to be with all of the sweating and grunting and cursing and blood).

Thus, allowing her Hades—even if his son was the fifth piece to his joy, making it whole—had been a time of unease and eventually agony he refused to go through again.

“He was easy. Labor lasted only a few hours and he slipped out with just the tiniest amount of pain,” she continued.

“As you pushed him through, you cursed me to perdition. And I do not know what perdition is, my Circe, and you refuse to enlighten me, but I could sense from how you said it that it is not a place I wish to visit.”

She rolled her lips between her teeth.

Ah, yes.

Perdition was not a good place.

“And the tiniest amount of pain?” he inquired. “As well as cursing me, you were screaming.”

“I would never wish you ill, but I’m *this close*,”—she held up her hand, finger and thumb not far apart, and she squinted through the space that separated them, making him need to fight back a laugh, not to mention the warmth the reminder of her doing that same thing some time ago caused, both happening no matter how annoyed he was with her at that moment, before she dropped her hand—“to wishing you’d have to pass a kidney stone so you’d get it. What I mean to say is, it hurts like hell, then it’s over, and the world is made more perfect.”

He could not have this discussion with her...*again*.

He had to end this...*now*.

“I freed all men and women...for you,” he reminded her.

“You did that for them, not to mention, to be the great Dax prophesied of the Golden Dynasty,” she mumbled.

He ignored her, even if what she said was partially true.

“There were uprisings all through Korwahn that the Horde had to quell.”

Circe lifted her chin. “They were prepared for them, and the Horde is the mightiest army on the planet, in this instance, with both might and right on their sides. Not a warrior was lost or even critically wounded. And there were two merchant uprisings that the people quelled themselves.”

This was true.

Lahn had thought, and they’d prepared, for this to be a much more hard-fought battle. But the majority of the people supported it, therefore it wasn’t as difficult as he’d planned for it to be.

“We no longer scout foreign lands for beauties for our warriors,” he went on.

“What you mean is, you don’t abduct women and bring them to Korwahk to—”

He interrupted her again.

“And we acquire verbal consent from all potential brides in the Wife Hunt.”

She shut her mouth at that, for they did. And to be certain a family member did not apply coercive tactics to any potential bride to join the Wife Parade, and thus be claimed by a warrior, there were many, as his queen would put it, hoops to jump through.

It was a bureaucratic morass, and as such, a pain in his ass.

Though, he had to admit, now, after the Hunt, things were much more peaceful when all the women involved wished to be so.

Regardless, he didn’t let up. “And we have the tribunal.”

The tribunal—comprised of his top lieutenants, Zahnin, Bain and Bohtan, as well as his chief advisor, Karrim, and at Circe’s insistence to have women in the body, her dearest confidante, Diandra, and another woman of years and experience, Claudine—sat and heard petitions if a warrior of *Suh Tunak* was accused of maltreating his wife or children. Evidence and testimony were sought. And if the tribunal was split down the middle, Lahn cast the deciding vote.

Enforcing this rule on a Horde that had lived millennia without any had been taken with mixed feelings.

It was welcome by the majority of the warriors, all of whom were loyal to their wives and families and felt the make of a true warrior of *Suh Tunak* meant all of them should be.

The public behavior of Dortak, whose treatment of his bride was unconscionable, many warriors believed, sullied them all. They didn’t want a repeat of this and were pleased to have in place something that would put a stop to it, but more, carry the message that it shouldn’t begin in

the first place. And if found guilty, punishment was expulsion from *Suh Tunak*. Stripped of the right to bear the paint, as well as stripped of their *cham* and belongings (these were given to their wives, who they were also stripped of), none of which was something any warrior wishes.

Even so, there were others who did not feel the same.

This set Lahn up for challenge after challenge to his reign.

He had, of course, bested them all. But this had caused his Golden Queen great anxiety.

As such, right then, sitting in their bed, she shut her mouth again, knowing that concession, or as she phrased it, progression was hard won...*by him*.

“The point you seem to be missing is that *we* make up the Golden Dynasty,” he told her. “You are my queen. You rule at my side. These were grave concerns of yours that I listened to, and I then addressed. In so doing, the Horde addressed them, as did my entire realm.”

“Addressed *and* embraced,” she added sharply.

“Indeed,” he agreed. “The changes were uneasy when they began, but yes, they have given our land peace and prosperity.”

“Okay, so I don’t understand why you’re making your point.”

“What would this realm do without you?”

Her body jolted, and Lahn did not like seeing it, but he had to persevere.

“What would your children do without you?”

Her expression softened. “Lahn—”

“My Golden Queen, what would *I* do without you?”

“It might not—”

“But it might.”

“With Ashur and Hades, it didn’t—”

“But with the next, it could.”

She slammed her fists into the silks, and snapped, “Lahn! Let me finish speaking.”

“About this, no,” he retorted. “It’s decided.”

“If I keep taking pennyrium, I could become infertile,” she stated.

“And this is not an issue to me.”

“Well, it is to me,” she gritted.

“Then cease taking it for a while,” he responded.

She blinked. "But...if I do, we can't have sex."

"No. I cannot release my seed inside you. But I can enjoy your *xaxsah* with my mouth and fingers, and you can do the same with my *xac*."

She said nothing to that, because it was true.

She would say nothing, because she enjoyed his mouth and fingers. Perhaps not as much as his cock, but she knew she would not go unpleasured.

"If you wish to retain this aspect of your femininity, even if it will never be used for that purpose, this we will do," he decided.

"So, now you're going to tell me when I can and can't use birth control," she complained.

"Was it not you who just noted your concerns about the powder?"

Again, she clamped her mouth shut, but her eyes blazed.

He'd take it, this show of ire from her spirit, even if he knew it wouldn't last long.

She was spoiling for a fight, and he knew why. He knew her suffering.

And he knew it was all his fault.

Thus, he knew he had to do something about it, and fathering another child on her was not the answer even she sought. She'd told him herself, not simply after the ordeal was over, but weeks later, that she was happy with what she had, and Hades would be their last.

However, now, she was in such a state, she could not logically find her way to that answer.

As such, he would have to do it for her.

"We're done discussing this," he decreed.

"Of course we are," she muttered.

"You have things to do today too," he pointed out.

Again, she locked her gaze with his and he saw something new.

Something he did not understand, but he understood he very much did not like it.

"I do? Really? What?" she asked.

"Our children—"

It was his turn to be interrupted.

"Our children have four aunties I practically have to beat back with a sword to get to them.

And that doesn't include Diandra, which makes five. Or Sheena, which makes six. Then there's Narinda, of course, which puts it up to seven. Also, Sabine, as well as Nahka, which makes it—"

“They are your children, simply order them to leave you to it,” Lahn advised.

She let out an exceptionally harassed breath before she said under it, “You don’t know your country very well.”

He would not rise to this challenge.

He would not.

He did.

“What is there I do not know?” he demanded.

“I am their mother, and you are their father, but every child of Korwahk is raised by their community. It’s one of the coolest things about this realm. Even the younger warriors are looked after by all the older ones.”

He had learned the different meanings of the word “cool” in her world, so he calmed down at Circe declaring something thus of the land that was her land, but it wasn’t—and it would seem it would never be—her true home.

“It’s like telling a new grandmother she can’t babysit because you’re being selfish and intend to keep your child all to yourself,” she continued her explanation. “You were in warrior training since you were four, but you had your version of the same. Still, you didn’t see how everyone looks after one another, how it’s all a big family. Of course, there are some you’re closer to. But it’s still family.”

Lahn opened his mouth to speak, but he was not fast enough.

“And they’re young, Lahn, but they don’t require every waking moment of my day.”

He watched her shrewdly.

“You can’t read my thoughts by staring at me hard,” she quipped.

Oh, but he could.

“I will share luncheon with you and our family,” he declared.

“So noted,” she mumbled.

“And do not cease with the powder today. I will have you three or four times tonight to get my fill of your golden honey before I must do without.”

Another rolling of her eyes and “Oh, for fu—”

“Are you to let me leave without a kiss?” he asked.

Pulling the sheet with her (again, unnecessary, but endearing), his Golden Queen left their bed, came to her king and pressed her lush body with the silk between to his.

He bent his head, she tipped hers back and got up on her toes to press her lips to his.

He slipped his tongue inside her mouth.

His Circe's honey, the most beautiful taste on the planet, however he tasted it.

When he lifted his head, he looked at her spirit.

Happy again.

For now.

"I love you," she whispered.

Ah.

That was why she was happy. He'd reminded her.

"And I you, *kah fauna*," he murmured, touched his mouth to hers, then picked her up, laid his queen in their bed, and walked to the flaps of the *cham*, through them, and out into the sun.



As he came upon her *cham*, Lahn saw Diandra emerge from it, turn her head to take in the *Daxshee* and catch sight of her Dax.

He then saw her eyes grow large, and she immediately ducked back into the *cham*.

This did not annoy him. It didn't happen frequently, but it happened, always around the time something was bothering his wife, and he needed to discuss the issue with her closest friend.

For some reason Lahn couldn't fathom, Diandra did not like doing this. She told him that if he wished to know the concerns of his wife, he should ask his wife.

And he explained, through feats of patience, if he could, he would do so. Since he couldn't, or Circe wouldn't explain, he went to Diandra (and sometimes Narinda if Diandra was being stubborn, or Nahka, when Narinda was stubborn, though, outside Diandra, he usually started with their husbands, however, because of this, the women had learned not to share about their queen, as, Lahn had learned, women on the whole could be stubborn).

As he was approaching their *cham*, Seirim, Diandra's husband came out.

He was wearing a smile.

Yes, Lahn had come to the right place.

“My king,” Seerim greeted.

“Seerim. You’re well?”

“As ever.” Seerim glanced back to the flaps of his *cham*. “Do you wish for me to be in attendance at this discussion?”

This was a change that had come of late, but it wasn’t one of Lahn’s decree.

Customarily, no man would speak to another man’s wife, in some cases, for any reason.

However, through Circe, Lahn developing his own relationships with her friends, and doing so openly, had somehow broken this seal throughout Korwahk.

This was something that was also widely embraced by man and woman—the widening of lives, of families of friends, of communication and community.

As for Seerim’s question to Lahn, it was oft-asked, as sometimes Lahn didn’t even want Diandra to know what he needed to discuss, but the discussion needed to be had.

This time, perhaps Seerim could also have input.

“If you would,” Lahn replied.

Seerim nodded and led the way through the flaps.

“I need to go to the market!” Diandra declared upon seeing him, busily moving about the *cham* and grabbing things, none of which, like the candlestick gripped in her fingers, she would take to the market.

“You do not greet your king?” Seerim asked, but his words were trembling with humor.

“Of course,”—she stopped moving and bent her head—“Dax Lahn.”

“It is friends here, no?” Lahn asked.

“Yes,” Seerim stated proudly.

“I guess,” Diandra muttered.

Lahn shared a smile with Seerim.

Diandra dropped her satchel, put down the candlestick, threw herself in a chair, rolled her hand at Lahn in a most disrespectful manner (if it was anyone other than Diandra, he would be forced to teach a lesson) and suggested, “Let’s get this over with, shall we?”

“I do believe with you trying to avoid me that you, too, have met with my queen’s ill-humor,” Lahn remarked.

Diandra’s head wobbled side to side. Not in a no, in a manner to say she had, she was simply not going to say aloud her friend was irritating her.

“She seems at odds with what to do with herself these days,” Lahn stated.

“Can I ask again why you don’t question her?” Diandra queried.

So she was to be stubborn today.

“If a warrior knows, perhaps through his bride, of another warrior’s wife’s concerns, he would not hesitate to share to keep peace in a *cham*,” with some patience, Lahn told her something he’d not only told her before, but she knew through her own marriage.

“Women don’t work that way,” Diandra also shared something she’d shared before.

“Yes. You’ve said,” Lahn confirmed he’d heard. “You wish us to ask *you*, to listen to *you*. And yet, many times, you do not speak plain.”

Seirim grunted his agreement.

Diandra puffed out an annoyed breath (but she did not refute him).

Lahn kept talking. “You dance around your worries. You hide your anxieties. You prevaricate and dither.”

“Don’t tell Circe she *dithers*,” Diandra mumbled.

He absolutely would not.

“I wish to make my wife happy,” Lahn said in a steely tone, his patience waning.

Diandra, not missing this, sat up in her seat.

“But I cannot do so if she invents fights about things that have nothing to do with why she’s not happy,” Lahn informed her. “I can only do so if she tells me what’s making her unhappy and then”—he crossed his arms on his chest and planted his feet wide—“I will fix it and make her happy.”

Diandra’s eyes had warmed as he said this.

However, she replied, “There are, perhaps, some things you can’t fix, my king.”

His chest tightened again.

“Though, I will say that Circe very much wishes you will consider her proposal about introducing formal schooling, at the very least to the children of the *Daxshee*...at first.”

“I didn’t *not* consider it,” Lahn returned. “She mentioned it once, and I shared I felt the idea held great merit. However, she hasn’t spoken of it again. I thought she went off the notion as we have four children, and this would be a venture that would require a great deal of time, planning and implementation.”

Diandra drew in a large breath before she divulged, “She went off the idea of making any kind of changes to the way of Korwahkian life after she had to sit through the seventh challenge to your rule that you bested. But during that challenge, make no mistake, she most certainly learned her lesson of pressing you to progress in a more meaningful manner for the good of the realm. And I do believe the eighth, ninth and tenth challenges completely done her in. Though, she was already rethinking it every time the Horde had to ride at news of an uprising when you freed all people. She waited on tenterhooks for the squads to return healthy and safe. The wait was much more torturous if you rode with them.”

Lahn’s brows rose. “She gave no indication of worry about the uprisings.”

Diandra shook her head. “That is not the way of a warrior’s wife, my king. And it is certainly not the way of the True Golden Queen when her king rides for the righteous.”

He knew this to be true, as frustrating as it was. A warrior did not need to worry about his wife’s worry, or at least that was what the wives thought.

Personally, when Lahn saw that concern reflected in his queen’s eyes, it only gave him more incentive to swiftly do what needed to be done and get home to her.

“She did not think I would best the challenges?” he inquired.

Diandra shrugged. “People cheat. Dortak taught her that.”

“And Dortak was not only headless, he was legless and armless when we finished our challenge.”

“It is not a question of your strength, my king,” Diandra replied. “It is the question of watching someone you love have to fight for his life, no matter how good he is at it.”

And there lay the crux of the issue.

“Fuck,” Lahn murmured, using English (they’d been speaking in Korwahkian).

“Indeed,” Diandra agreed, also in English, for she was born speaking the language of The Vale.

Lahn nodded once. “I will speak to her of this at luncheon.”

Diandra's shoulders slumped with relief. "I believe that will help."

Feeling better about this, for it was a problem he could fix, he dipped his chin, said his farewells and was nearly out of the tent, when Seerim said, "*Bahsah, bentoo. Ey kay lalay.*"

Wife, speak. Or I will.

Lahn stopped and turned back to his friends.

Diandra didn't look as if she felt relief anymore.

"He must know, my wife," Seerim said quietly, and it was not only Lahn's chest that was tight, but it felt as if he could not breathe through his throat.

As such, his words were rough when he noted, "I will command it as your king if you do not say it. Is my wife ill?"

Diandra shook her head quickly. "No."

He considered his conversation with Circe that morning.

"She is not with child, is she?"

Diandra seemed confused by that. "No. Of course not. She'd never, not without discussing it with you. Not after what you both went through with Tunahn and Isis."

"Then what is it?" he demanded.

"He may be able to fix it," Seerim said quietly.

"This cannot be fi—" Diandra's eyes lit up as she ceased speaking abruptly.

"What?" Lahn nearly barked.

"It is summer here, but it is winter now, in her world," Diandra said softly.

Her world.

Just as he thought.

The pressure on his chest was nearly unbearable.

"They have something she's told me of," Diandra shared. "It's called Crissmas."

"Crissmas?" Lahn asked.

Diandra shook her head, but said, "Yes. Crissmas. I don't quite understand it. A child is born to a virgin, and everyone celebrates his birthday every year."

Lahn and Seerim exchanged a look at the virgin mention, but Diandra kept talking.

"It's meaningful in her world, or at least her part of the world. Like here, there are many beliefs. And gods and goddesses. And rituals, traditions and celebrations. This Crissmas is an

important one to Circe. Again, I could never quite take it all in when she explained it. But there are lights. And decorations. And trees. Trees get decorated...with lights and other, um...decorations, for some reason. And there are presents given. And some man with a white beard and a red suit brings gifts for the children in the middle of the night. They have special food and a big dinner. It's about family and friends and laughter and making memories and giving of yourself, your time, your love, your thoughts, your treasures. It sounds quite beautiful, really."

Though some of this seemed ludicrous, much of what his wife told him of her world seemed thus. So he didn't question even the idea of a decent father allowing a stranger in a red suit to enter his home in the middle of the night, whether he left gifts or not.

The rest of it, Diandra was correct, sounded nice.

"And she misses this," Lahn deduced, feeling a loosening of his muscles at finally knowing what pained his wife every summer.

"Yes, my king."

"Why didn't she tell me?" Lahn asked.

At that, the warmth in her eyes and the softening of her features reminded him of why Seerim was so very dedicated to his wife.

"She gave it up for you, my king," Diandra whispered.

He didn't look away. He stared at her, the relief short-lived, his insides now gripped with pain.

"No. I have bound her here," he amended. "Without her decree."

"She would have stayed regardless."

"But she gave up much," he said.

"She just misses Crissmas." Diandra stood, sweeping a hand up to indicate Lahn. "This. This is why she says nothing. She knows it will cause you hurt. She knows you blame yourself that she cannot go home to visit her father, her friends. She doesn't want to distress you. She doesn't want you to feel this blame you place on yourself. She wouldn't have it any other way, my king. Please know that. And she is our Golden Queen, she is a warrior, she is strong, she loves you, and your children, and her life here. But she is still a woman who sometimes feels nostalgic for home, even if she wouldn't want to be anywhere but here."

"This is why, every summer, she grows despondent," Lahn shared his earlier thoughts.

Diandra nodded.

Lahn, as he often did, made an instant decision.

“Do you know of these traditions?”

Her head ticked. “Why, yes. Of a sort.”

Of a sort would not do.

“Ask her for details, but do not cause harm or let on I know,” Lahn ordered. “You have two days to learn as much as you can, then report it to me.”

She glanced at her husband before she nodded to Lahn.

“I appreciate your honesty, and your love of my queen,” Lahn stated.

“And my love for you and your family,” Diandra added.

Lahn jutted his chin to her, to Seerim, feeling the warmth of her words in his heart.

He then left their *cham* and made his way directly to Zahnin.

There, he told him to find their witch.

After that, he found Karrim, and they went to Karrim’s *cham*.

And there, they planned.



At luncheon, Lahn walked through the flaps of his *cham*, and to his left, his five-year-old son, Tunahn, was laying waste to everything he could stick with his wooden sword.

On the bed, Tunahn’s twin sister, and the light of Lahn’s life, Isis was plaiting the hair of a doll.

And to his right, his bottom to the rugs over the stone, Lahn’s nearly one-and-a-half-year-old Hades was making a racket banging pots with a spoon.

Circe was sitting at the table, writing a letter, seemingly immune to the noise. Though she did look up at his arrival and smile. With her was three-year-old Ashur, sitting atop a mound of pillows. He had the tip of his tongue lodged in the side of his mouth as he drew some squiggles on parchment with a stick of charcoal.

And last, Ghost, their white tiger, was lounged by her (current) favorite, Hades, somehow managing to snooze through the din.

At sight of him, Isis tossed aside her doll unheeded, took her feet, ran across the bed and threw herself in the air, only to be caught in her father's arms as he moved fast to make sure she did not fall.

She had every faith.

He would rearrange mountains to make sure she never lost it.

“Daddy!” she screamed as if she hadn’t seen him in epochs.

“Has it been that long since I’ve held you to my heart?” he inquired. “I do believe we had dinner together just last night, *kah rahna hahza*.”

She giggled and said, “But not breakfast.”

“Indeed,” he murmured and smiled at her.

He was then poked in the buttock by a wooden sword.

“Take that!” Tunahn cried.

As Lahn turned, his son brought the sword back for another strike, his aim something that Lahn did not wish to use to create more children, but he very much wished to continue using it for a good long time, so he moved to avoid the strike. And at that point, he and Isis danced away from Tunahn’s thrusts, doing this all through the *cham*.

This caused Isis to giggle uncontrollably.

It also had the desired effect of taking Hades’s attention from making noise so he could toddle after them, also giggling.

In the end, they all four wound up on the bed, and that was when Ashur joined them, landing on their tangle with an impressive war cry that made Lahn proud. Four against one, but Lahn didn’t let them win. If he did, he could not tickle them or blow what Circe called “raspberries” on Hades’s round belly.

“Can we eat?” Circe asked, making them all stop and look at her standing beside the bed, her hands on her hips, but a smile was on her lips.

“Mummy, come play!” Isis cried.

"It's luncheon and then it's studies, my darling. You've played all morning," Circe replied to her daughter. Her gaze moved to their eldest son. "And you must join the others for the afternoon."

"Yes!" Tunahn yelled, then jumped off the bed, found his sword and started slashing it around.

For millennia, the warriors of *Suh Tunak* were chosen and taken from their homes, and their families, to start their training at the age of four or five.

It was Lahn's inability to consider even the possibility of Tunahn being away from him and his mother for training that decided it.

As such, Tunahn lived at home.

It was a royal privilege. None of the other training warriors were afforded the same.

However, Tunahn would one day be Dax.

Therefore, along with his sister, and when the time was right, his brothers, Tunahn was learning his numbers and letters from his mother.

In a few years, Lahn and Karrim would teach him different languages. Lahn, Karrim, Zahnin and Bain would instruct him on diplomatic and tactical strategies.

And Lahn would show him how to be king.

Though, being Lahn's son, he liked his afternoons training with the other warriors his age the best.

Furthermore, neither Ashur nor Hades would be king, but they would also not leave their mother and father. Lahn decided this because they would one day be advisors to their brother (of course), so they, too, would need special instruction from their father and his men for which they would need to stay home.

This gave Lahn pause to think about the fact his daughter did not have the same structured learning with other children her age.

Which brought something else important to mind.

He sat on the edge of the bed as Isis decided to find her own wooden sword, and she and Tunahn began clacking at each other with them on the other side of the *cham*.

Ashur wandered to Ghost, who immediately changed her allegiance and tussled with him gently and playfully.

Hades, however, decided to use his father's big body as a playground, doing so grunting in a manner it made it difficult for Lahn to focus on what he had to say, and not laugh at his boy's antics.

Even so, Lahn kept a mind to his youngest, making sure he didn't tumble or fall, as he looked to his queen.

"Before we eat, I must share it's time for you to start making plans," he announced.

She tipped her head to the side. "What plans?"

"For these schools you wish to introduce."

Her torso swayed back, and her eyes grew large in delighted shock.

Seeing her reaction, it took effort, but Lahn didn't smile.

Instead, he warned, "You've procrastinated long enough."

She recovered from her shock quickly and her eyebrows shot up. "I've procrastinated?"

"Yes, you spoke of it some time ago. I agreed it was a good idea. Then you lounged abed, went to the market with Diandra, babbled amongst your women in their *chams* and—"

When he knew she was about to blow, he stood, planting Hades on his hip, getting close in order to cup her jaw and bending his head so his face was near hers.

"If you need more in your life, my Golden Queen, than me and your children, then I'll remind you...*you are queen*. Find those challenges, and best them, as I know you will."

Tears filled her eyes.

"I want you happy," he whispered.

"It's not that I don't love you all very much," she whispered in return.

"I know," he replied. "I love you all very much as well. But I take pride in my station and performing the duties it requires. *Lahnasahna*, you must seek the same." He got even closer and dipped his voice lower. "And you mustn't worry about how our people will react. You, my Golden Queen, are the heart of our realm, I am its sword. It is our destiny to bring beauty to our people, even if we have to fight for it."

A tear trailed down her cheek.

Lahn kissed her nose.

"Mumma!" Hades screamed, not fond of his mother's tears as he didn't know what brought them, and therefore, he threw himself at her.

She caught him and cuddled him close, but she didn't take her gaze from her husband.

Lahn gave her a smile then he turned to his hellions to see Isis almost had Tunahn blockaded by her blade and some trunks.

His princess was a warrior just like her mother.

“Luncheon,” he ordered.

At the tone they both knew well, the swords were dropped, and they raced to the table.

Lahn sat at the head, Circe to his right, Ashur to her right, Isis to his left, Tunahn at the foot, and Hades in a special tall chair with an attached table in front of it that, at Circe's bidding, Lahn had designed and crafted (they had two of them, the twins and Ashur had used them at Hades's age) so he sat between Circe and Lahn.

And the king and queen with their family ate luncheon.



Circe rode his cock at Lahn's behest, the pads of his fingers digging into the flesh of her ass dictating the rhythm.

“I talked to Diandra,” she gasped. “I only have to be off pennyrium for three weeks.”

“Good,” he grunted.

“Though, she said I should do that every nine to ten months.”

Lahn let her ass go with one hand in order to fist it in her hair, the other he used to keep her seated and filled.

“We’re done talking about Diandra,” he growled. “And pennyrium,” he concluded.

She grinned.

Fuck, he loved her.

He also loved fucking her.

So much, he pulled her off his cock, positioned her genuflected before him, and drove in again.

This was his favorite position, outside of Circe on her back, him covering her, so he could see what he gave her move over her beautiful face.

It was hers as well, and this would be proved yet again with how quickly she climaxed.

Not long later, she gave him the same.

When it had moved through them both, he lay on his back and arranged her atop him.

He then told her, "We break camp in the morning. We're going to Korwahn."

Circe lifted her head from where she'd tucked it in the side of his neck to look down at him.

"We are?"

"Yes."

"Why? It's not winter."

Not in this world.

"I have business there."

Her eyes narrowed. "What business?"

"Important business with the King of Keenhak," he lied.

"Oh," she mumbled.

"Our alliance has held for some time. I need to keep it that way," he continued lying.

"Are there issues?" she asked, concern beginning to cloud her gaze.

He must lie, but he didn't want her worried.

Thus, he shook his head. "No, but I don't wish for any to grow by not continuing to communicate."

"Smart." She nodded. "Like a summit."

He had no idea what a summit was.

"Yes," he agreed.

She snuggled. "You're the greatest king *ever*."

"No king can truly be great without a great queen."

Lahn thought that was both complimentary and romantic, and as such, was unprepared when she smacked his chest hard.

"Don't make me cry again," she snapped.

Ah.

He chuckled and squeezed his arm to pull her closer.

"Are you excited about your new project, my Circe?" he asked quietly when she regained control of her emotion.

“It’s going to be huge, building something like that from the ground up,” she replied.

“It won’t be anything if you don’t begin.”

“Oh, I’m going to begin.”

That was his Golden Queen.

Lahn smiled at the roof of the *cham*. “Good.”

He felt the bed depress under the large paw of a tiger.

“Ghost, the children,” Circe ordered, as she did on the occasion Ghost tried to sleep with them, and not in the next *cham*, with their children and servants.

The bed depressed more as Ghost disobeyed.

“She misses her *Loolah*,” Lahn murmured. “Let her stay.”

“You’re such a softie.”

The beast had helped to save his queen’s life, he was no softie.

He rewarded loyalty.

These two things were very different.

After Ghost settled down Lahn’s side, they heard her purring, which might have to do with Circe petting her.

“Who is soft now?” Lahn teased.

“Shut up,” Circe mumbled.

“*Trahyoo, kah rahna pahnsahnalla.*”

His wife kissed his jaw.

She then fell asleep atop his body.

Lahn had fixed one problem.

In a few weeks, he hoped to fix the other.



Three weeks later...

In our world, Christmas Eve.

Night had fallen.

And his and Karrim's timing was impeccable, for Diandra had shared that the evening before this Crissmas was also important in Circe's old world.

His Circe, with a sleeping Hades strapped to her chest, rode her steed Zephyr up the Avenue of the Gods at Lahn's side.

Lahn had Isis seated before him on his mount, Lahkan.

Bohtan was close, with Tunahn seated behind him. Seerim also close, with Ashur seated in front of him.

Ghost, as Ghost always did, prowled close to her *Loolah*.

He wanted his family near to watch their reactions when they entered Korwahn.

Especially Circe.

She noticed something before they were even halfway through the Avenue, as he had, for it was impossible to miss. He saw her brows draw together when she did, and since she was looking at it, not him, he allowed himself to smile.

But then they hit the outskirts of Korwahn, and at what he saw, he almost forgot to watch his wife.

There were candles lit everywhere, in windows, on steps, down alleys, on rooftops. Boughs of greenery hung over windows and arched around doorways. Some of them were adorned with red ribbon, others silver or gold.

It didn't seem like much, but if this was like her Crissmas, he could understand why she pined for what she'd lost.

It was beautiful.

As they rode over the cobbles, the people came out as they usually did to watch the Horde of the *Daxshee* return home. They called, and waved, and little children ran alongside the horses.

Wonder in her face, Circe nudged Zephyr close to him.

"Is this decoration for the King of Keenhak?" she asked, her gaze still moving around, taking it all in.

“No, *kah Lahnasahna*,” he answered. “It’s because it’s my understanding it’s Crissmas Eve.”

Her head whipped his way, and she blinked at him.

Then she stared.

“It’s so pretty!” Isis cried.

“How did you...? *Diandra*,” Circe whispered.

“Do not be cross with her. I made her tell me,” Lahn returned.

“Lahn, you didn’t have to do this. It’s...”—she glanced around, the wonder having not left her expression—“a lot.”

“Mummy, look! It’s a miracle!” Isis yelled.

She was also pointing.

Circe looked to the Majestic Rim at the top of Korwahn, and her mouth dropped open.

Lahn didn’t take his eyes from her.

It was then, she began weeping.

And when she did, her emotions so strong, they overwhelmed her—and her magic—even if the weather was the summer chill of nighttime in the desert, it was not chilly enough for what fell from the sky.

A soft drifting of snow.

His people were murmuring in marvel and lifting their hands to catch the quickly melting flakes, but they were not experiencing surprise or awe.

They were used to their Golden Queen’s magic.

Lahn made a noise, and within seconds Zahnin had Isis, Bain had pulled Hades from his swaddles, and Lahn tugged his queen off her mount to sit with him on his.

She wrapped her arms around him, but she kept her gaze to the Rim.

“Wh-where did you f-find a Christmas tree. *With lights?*” she asked.

“Valentine,” he answered.

She tore her gaze from the mammoth lit tree, the kind one would find in Lunwyn, but nowhere in the Southlands, that sat at the edge of the Rim, and she looked up at him.

“We will celebrate this as a people every year,” he proclaimed. “I do not know of virgins and babies or men in red suits sneaking into homes. But our people will rest from their toils. They

will eat and drink and be generous to each other. They will deck their homes in joy. And we will come to Korwahn every year to be home for this holiday.”

Circe shoved her face in his chest and began sobbing.

As such, the snow became heavier.

He hated her tears, even ones like these, so he bent his head and whispered in her ear, “You must cease, or you will miss it, my queen.”

She pulled her head back, her spirit dancing with love and delight right at the surface, even hazy with tears, and that was a sight Lahn loved to see.

Lahn allowed himself a moment to enjoy it before he barked, “*Voyoo!*”

The procession stopped.

“*Pahlems! Boh!*” he thundered.

And above the twinkling tree on the Rim, great bursts of light flashed and glittered in the sky.

“Fireworks,” Circe breathed.

He heard gasps and shouts then cheers, and ringing over them, his eldest son and daughter yelling, “Daddy! Mummy! Look! Lights in the sky!” (along with Hades’s baby giggles, so it would seem the excitement woke his youngest).

Lahn started Lahkan moving again as the sky lit up with color and brightness, but he didn’t watch the lights. He watched them play over his queen’s stunning face.

And then they were at the golden doors to their home.

“Dazzled by a little light show and one-upping me with snow,” Valentine drawled, and Circe’s head jerked around and down to the woman wearing the green dress standing in the opened door.

“Valentine!” Circe cried, then, with a quick kiss for her husband, she slid off the horse and ran to her friend.

“If I must endure a hug, it’s only the Christmas spirit that’s allowing it,” Valentine groused within Circe’s embrace. “Christmas *is* actually a pagan holiday, you know. Or at least it started that way.”

Circe sprung back as Lahn took control of their children.

“God, it’s so good to see you,” Circe said, her face wreathed in smiles.

“Excellent set up,” Valentine returned, stepping to the pavement. “For I’m fairly certain it’ll be better to see him.”

At that point, Harold Quinn, Circe's father, came out the door.

"Pop!" Circe shrieked, before she rushed her father and flung herself into his arms.

"Circe girl," he murmured into her hair.

Lahn could tell his queen was crying again, and not simply because the snow continued to fall.

And these tears, he would allow.

"Best get that all out," Harold advised. "Because there are some folks here who want to see you, and they don't want to see you blubbering."

She pulled her head back but didn't let go of her father. "Who?"

"You aren't the only one who misses Christmas," Valentine said as she slipped inside.

Circe's face shone as she asked her father, "Finnie, Cora and Maddie?"

Harold nodded. "And Frey, Tor, and Apollo. Plus, all their broods. Franka and Noc send their love, but they're a little busy now with their own Christmas stuff. They couldn't make it."

Circe stepped out of her father's arms but pressed on his chest, his shoulders, cupped his face in her hands and whispered, "Are you real?"

"I am, and dying to get my hands on my grandkids, so if you're done with your inspection," Harold teased.

Circe let out a trill of musical laughter before she stepped aside and said, "C'mon, kids. Say hi to Grandpops."

Circe backed up and ran into Lahn as Tunahn, with Hades's hand in his toddling forward, Ashur with his hand clenched in Isis's, Lahn and Circe's children threw themselves at their grandfather (Lahn could say, so his children could have this, and Circe could too, that he often got in touch with the green witch).

Lahn circled his wife with his arms at her belly and dipped to her ear. "Happy?"

She twisted her neck, looked into his eyes, and she didn't have to answer.

But she did.

"Yes, *kah* Lahn. *Enna fahnahsan.*" She lifted a hand and rested on his cheek. "Enna, baby."

He smiled at his queen.

She smiled in return.



The next night...

Circe moved from what she called their bathroom, even if the bath was a pool in another room, into their bed chamber.

She was rubbing something into her hands, but when she caught sight of Lahn stretched on their bed, she skipped—yes, his queen *skipped*—to the bed, then jumped on it, landing astride his lap.

He would take this, and all of her behavior that day, and the evening before, as her approval of his decision to introduce Crissmas to Korwahn.

“This will not make it easy for me not to find my way inside you,” he warned as he settled his hands on her hips, but his lips were fighting a smile.

“I started on the powder again last night.”

At that news, he whipped her to her back and covered her.

“Lahn!” she cried. “We need to talk.”

He was tugging at her shift. “After.”

She caught his face in her hands, and when this didn’t work, she tugged on his beard, so he was forced to focus on her.

“How much did it cost to do all you did?” she asked softly.

“A chest of rubies.”

She raised her brows, knowing Valentine far better than that.

“And one of sapphires,” he finished.

She shook her head on the pillows, but her lips did not fight her smile.

He studied it very closely. “I like this holiday. You smile often during it.” His gaze rose to her eyes. “And laugh.”

“It’s a happy holiday. Around this time, that’s what people say in greeting where I come from. Happy Holidays.”

“I like this,” he stated before he pulled the shift over her head. He allowed himself a moment to watch her golden hair fly before he set to work on her panties. “We will adopt this saying here too.”

“Lahn.”

He was focused on her panties and how to get them off without losing too much contact with her skin.

Fuck it, he’d just tear them. Jacanda was very good at mending, they’d learned that well over the years.

“Lahn!” Circe snapped.

His attention shifted to her.

“You didn’t have to do this,” she said.

“Yes, I did.”

“You didn’t, baby,” she whispered.

He was perplexed and his brow furrowed with it.

“You didn’t hide how pleased you were that I did.”

“Because I *was* pleased. *Am* pleased. *Very* pleased. It was beautiful. Amazing. I loved every second. The kids loved every second. Pop did. Valentine can pretend she’s above it all, but she did as well. And you did too. This house is full to the brim with people I love, and I don’t think we’ve ever had that much family around our table for dinner. It’s a memory I’ll never forget. You still didn’t have to do it.”

“I do not understand you continuing to assert this.”

“Lahn,”—she pulled his head to hers so they were nose to nose—“I’m where I want to be. Not where I need to be, where I *want* to be.”

“I know this.”

“No, honey, you don’t.”

He drew in a sharp breath as understanding dawned.

His wife spoke.

“I’m happy to give the people of Korwahk Christmas. I’m happy for you to give Valentine chests of treasure so Pop can be with us. So our friends can be with us. But what I need to give you is the knowledge you feel right here”—she removed a hand from his face to press it to his

heart—"that I have all my heart's desires in the life I live with you, even if I never again had all of what you gave me today."

With that, her panties tore.

Or, more aptly, Lahn tore her panties.

She gasped.

He kissed her.

And not long later, he gave her his last present of the day, and she gave him hers.

But the one she gave him just before was the seventh best present he'd ever received, after claiming her, earning her love and making four precious babies with her.

Crissmas.

A day of sharing treasures.



And Lahn was king, thus he made it so this day would be celebrated for all his people.

Though, this one wasn't difficult. The proclamation was embraced throughout the land.

As such, every year, the people of Korwahk celebrated Crissmas.

And their queen never explained that, when it was put in letters, it was spelled wrong.

Because she thought it was spelled right.

And since it was their version of it...

She was correct.



It would take another couple of years.

Then Korwahk learned all about Thanksgiving.

And throughout the land, in whispers and in shouts, they continued to rejoice in the Golden Dynasty.

The End

**Happy Holidays to all from
Lahn, Circe, all of Korwahk...
And me.**

Korwahk to English Translations:

Bahsah - wife.

Bentoo – The imperative (command) of to speak

Boh – Now

Cham – Tent

Dax - King

Daxshee - The traveling encampment of the Dax [king] of the Korwahk Nation

Enna fahnahsan – Very happy

Ey kay lalay – Or I will

Kah fauna – My doe

Kah rahna hahza – My golden bunny

Kah rahna pahnsahnalla – My golden goddess

Lahnasahna - Tigress [female tiger]

Loolah - [familiar] Mama

Pahlems – Lights

Suh Tunak – The (Korwahk) Horde (military)

Trahyoo – The imperative (command) of to sleep

Voyoo – The imperative (command) of to stop

Xac – [slang] Cock (penis)

Xaxsah – [slang] Cunt, pussy (vagina)