



*Moon
Dreaming*

L.G. Dalton

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MOON DREAMING

*Legend says only the Chosen One, born of sky, land and water, can harness the power of the *Sandakada pahana*.*

Kendall wandered the market place, her thumbs tucked under the straps of her backpack. She had hours to fill and the awnings offered shade from the twin suns. The raucous haggling of customers and vendors gave her a headache, and the greasy smell of cooking oil made her queasy. However, the vibrant colours of the many stalls compensated the noise and smells. Nothing made up for the leering looks she got from several men.

The blue skinned Mariner race was well known and consequently dismissed as uninteresting. It was her raven dark hair and green eyes that incited the interest. She was the only Mariner to possess that particular combination, courtesy of her mother's ancestry.

Kendall halted by a stall gaily strewn with rich fabrics, luxurious threads and jewellery. She watched the skilled gnarled fingers of an elderly craftsman assemble a neckpiece of glowing stones.

Acknowledging her presence, the artisan paused. "Do you wish for a custom piece, lady?" he asked.

"A medallion," Kendall decided.

"Would the lady care to choose the stone?" He extended a dish of multi coloured stones for her to study and select from.

"Do you carve the stone?" she asked.

"My daughter can. If the design is not difficult it should be complete within an hour."

Kendall took up the proffered pen and paper and closed her eyes. It was a trick one of her uncles taught her. She drew three deep breaths, cleared her mind of the sounds and scents of the market. An image formed on the black velvet panel

behind her eyelids. With economical strokes, she sketched a simple winged beast and wrote instructions for the setting.

“Is there some meaning to the design, ma’am?” the artisan asked. He studied the sketch and his young customer. To his knowledge, Mariners had no fanciful creatures in their mythologies.

Kendall glanced at the sketch. Her green eyes widened with surprise. A hippogriff in flight. Why had she drawn this fabled beast, the symbol of impossible love, from her mother’s folklore? She shrugged, dismissing the matter from her mind.

“Not really” she replied. “I am uncertain to set the medallion in a ring or neck chain.”

She turned her attention to the loose stones, pushing her protective glasses onto the top of her raven head to see them better. Selecting, pondering and discarding, she finally settled upon a dark blood red stone with hints of green.

“The stone you chose for carving will hold its form and is free from inclusions. What do you know about the stone?” The old eyes of the artisan studied her carefully. He saw his young customer had knowledge beyond her age and race. Mariners were the logicians and politicians of the galaxy. This young woman standing before him had depth and heart counteracting the coldness and shallowness of logic and politics. He searched his memories for what he knew of Mariners. There was some speculation about the High Family being hybrids.

“I believe it is called bloodstone,” Kendall said. “It is reputed to protect against poison.” She shrugged. Although she may dismiss the vast majority of her mother’s Terran folklore, she admitted there was rich life in the imaginative tales.

Kendall turned to another dish of loose stones. She pored through them, letting them slide through her fingers, taking note of their texture and feel. One in particular held her interest: a cloudy stone with a pulsating light hidden deep within. Colours within the stone moved through a continuum: from soft white, through cream to pale champagne gold, linden green, dawn pink and peach blushes, to a white blue. A faint frown marred her

smooth forehead. It was as if the stone's heart reached out to her. Her gaze locked on the heart of the stone.

The sounds of the market whirled away. Darkness swirled about her. Diamond pinpoints danced and pirouetted around her. A zephyr breeze lifted then guided her on a path only it could see. In the far distance she heard the soft tinkle of joyous laughter. Her ears popped as she gained height and speed. Her breath lodged somewhere between lung and throat. She struggled to drag a puff of air into burning lungs. The disorientating ride ended as abruptly as it began.

Kendall drew a deep breath of cooler air. She was deposited gently on a stony rise. Her eyes shut against the blinding glare of a single sun. A slender finger sent the glasses from their resting place to land on the bridge of her finely carved nose. She blinked rapidly, adjusting to the brightness. The harsh light filtered out, and the rise became a ridge and dominated the landscape as the highest point. The side of the ridge was steep, strewn with boulders. Not easily navigable, but it could be done. Beyond the foot of the rise, the land stretched endlessly. A few hardy shrubby trees broke the horizon. No lush savannah, hardy clumps of a needle-leaf grass grew close to the ground. Carpets of dry grasses anchored distant dunes. She could see a small, tented encampment settling down for the coming night.

The tents were low slung to the ground. They were small and could be easily carried by a person when struck. This was no semi-permanent camp with tents large enough for a person to stretch and stand comfortably within. It was a mere overnight bivouac. Why had they stopped in that particular place when a sheltered waterhole was nearby? She cocked her head in an attempt to decipher the faint sounds wafting towards her. She matched activity to the lean of a vehicle. Ah...Engine malfunction would be why.

Kendall looked around her. She was not on the same planet as the marketplace. The topography was stony and red, not brown and tamped earth. How she got from there to here

was something she would fathom later. She turned on the spot, studying the terrain of the backside of the ridge. The slope was not as steep, and more of the low round bushes covered it. Sunlight sparkled on water about two hundred metres away. A waterhole, shaded by densely packed stunted trees. A swift glance to the horizon showed a setting yellow sun. It would soon be glowing red and then darkness would follow swiftly.

Her backpack was still in place and she had food and water. She gripped the milk white stone, feeling its warmth and smooth hardness. She stowed it in the front pocket of her trousers. From a side pocket of her pack, she withdrew a soft silken square, and flipped it over her head and face. She saw no sense in suffering sunburn, heat stroke or dry hair.

She turned and started walking down the slope to the water hole. Her booted foot snagged on a concealed rock and she twisted to the side. She landed on all fours. Carefully, she stretched her leg, checking for damage. No pain or bruising aches, but her left arm had taken a jolt.

The setting sun's rays struck at an angle, illuminating her leg and foot, and the stumbling block that had brought her low. This was no rock. It was six feet of thrilling raw male. Oh my. Her green eyes noted the flowing garb, the tell tale head swathing, enveloping gear, and skin colour. Oh stars. What was an Adjutant doing here? Where was his ship and companions? A nomadic race, they travelled in small groups of two to four when planetside.

She checked his pulse and his limbs for breaks. He moaned as she lifted his foot. A wrench and sprain probably. Her fingers carefully probed the swathed head. Judging by the size of the lump on his head, he had knocked himself in his fall. The sunburnt blue of his hands and forearms exposed by the bunched up sleeves showed he had been here for some time. Did he belong to the disabled party? None of them seemed concerned about his non-appearance. Nor were they dressed in the flowing Adjutant garb. No matter how either of them got to

this place, the sun was setting rapidly and the air was starting to cool. The trees beckoned in the distance.

A tiny *tsk*-ing sound averted her gaze to her wrist. She laughed softly. Her symbiotic pet was curling himself around it in a firm bandage. The pink amoeba-like pet never left her, though few people ever saw him. He preferred to hide under her clothes. “Fuzzball, I jolted it, but it is not broken.” Fuzzball merely stretched lengthwise and sideways until he enveloped her forearm.

“Well, tell me how I am supposed to get him from here to there” Kendall remarked.

She shrugged off her backpack and removed her groundsheet and guy ropes from the tent. With efficiency she rolled it out, folded it and attached the ropes. Humming as she worked, she tied the ropes into a rough web beneath the ground sheet. She rolled the two long edges up to form a gutter the width of the unconscious man. That was the easy bit; getting his dead weight on to it would be more difficult. With a little effort and mild cursing in the twenty languages she knew, Kendall managed to roll her patient onto the groundsheet. She unrolled the sides and wrapped it around him, tying it firmly in place with the rope. Kneeling at her patient’s head, she donned her backpack with the carefully tied and positioned ropes. She settled it comfortably on her back before locking it in place with the waist cinch. She crouched, positioned her feet and legs for maximum effect, and thrust upwards. She stumbled under the pull of the dead weight, but regained her balance. With a grimace she settled in to her task of hauling her inert patient towards the haven of the trees.

Kendall sank down in the shady nook, secreted by thick bush and padded with dense mosses and groundcover. “Okay, Fuzz,” she muttered, “that was the longest hundred metres I’ve walked in my life.” She took a long pull of water from her bottle. “Let’s see what the damage is before the light is completely gone,” she sighed.

She unclipped the waist cinch and let her backpack slide off her shoulders. She pulled it around and dug into a side pocket for a torch, first aid kit, plus her skin care pouch. “The basics first, and then the more serious stuff,” she muttered.

Kendall untied the ropes securing her patient and gently unwrapped him. Delicately, she loosened his head swathing. Adjutants were a little known race. They valued their privacy and were known to resist removing their head veils. “Sorry about this,” she muttered. “However, it needs to be done, so deal with the issue.” As an apology to the unconscious man it may have left a lot to be desired, but common sense needed to prevail.

The swathing unravelled, revealing the light blue features. Kendall stilled in recognition. She cursed under her breath. Her prince had done it again: knocked himself out. “Later, Kendall” she muttered. “First things first.” She flicked the torch on and flashed it in each eye. Pupil reaction was good. His pulse was steady and his breathing easy and regular. She needed to get a compress on his head, another on his sprained ankle, and moisturiser on his sunburn.

“Gabriel?” she queried softly. How, by the stars, did Gabriel, her prince, end up on this little backwater planet? By default or design, the Adjutant tended to stay within the Sigma Quadrant and the Delta Theta sector in particular. Although their territory backed onto the hind side of Mariner space they rarely entered it and then it was more often to seek aid than diplomatic reasons. There were no Adjutant craft within several light years. Stars! She did not know if *Phoenix*, her own craft, was nearby.

She sighed and pitched her little tent, manoeuvring it over Gabriel. Within minutes she was seated inside it and beside him. She settled down to a pre-packed meal and cool water. She had enough supplies for him to have a meal when he woke. She picked up her moisturiser and his hand. With a little luck it should ease the sunburn.

Warmth burgeoned against her thigh. “Fuzz?” Kendall quizzed. Fuzzball made no comment. He wriggled and extended a protrusion to the pocket where she had secreted the gem. She withdrew it and caught her breath. The stone was glowing even stronger and brighter than it had when she held it at the market stall. Kendall studied it curiously.

In the marketplace, she felt as if the stone was possessed of a life of its own. Of the many cultures a life among the stars exposed one to, only a handful considered gemstones to possess powers. Her mother’s people had once thought certain stones possessed mystic powers. They had discarded those beliefs centuries ago. Her parents encouraged her to keep an open mind about such beliefs and the Mariner race possessed a high level of psychic talents. The glowing heart of the stone trapped her gaze. A soft urgent hum filled the little tent. She gasped...

Tranced by the gem, Kendall laid it upon Gabriel’s forehead, gently moving it to one side and then the other. The hum increased a fraction and changed its tune. With measured slowness, she moved it down to his chest. It slewed to one side and hovered over his lower ribs. Heat emanated from it for almost a minute before it slid back to the centre of his chest and moved on. As it drew level with his hand it paused, then dove to his wrist, moving up and down along the sunburnt skin, healing it. It slid across to his other hand, healing it before moving back to the centre of his torso and continuing on its journey downwards to his ankle.

Gabriel surfaced from the darkness to gentle warmth on his face and chest. His head still ached, though the throbbing had eased. Several times he had come close to regaining consciousness only to have a spear jab his brain. His lower ribs were pain free as was his ankle. At least the burning sun had disappeared. The cool shade was a blessed relief. He peeped through barely opened eyes to gaze at the figure kneeling beside him. Blue skin, black shoulder length hair, and green jewel eyes belonged to only one person.

“Princess?” A husky query echoed in her ear.

Kendall smiled in relief. “You’re awake. I’ve been so worried.” She grimaced faintly as Fuzzball scurried beneath her clothing. He was quite cool but warming rapidly. He would be content to stay tucked between her breasts until they were safe aboard *Phoenix*.

“How long have I been unconscious?”

Kendall shrugged. “Definitely two hours. How long before that I cannot tell you.” She helped him to sit up and held the bottle of water to his lips. “What was your last location?”

“Sigma Delta Theta 162,” Gabriel replied. “We were investigating possibilities for settlement.”

“From the ship?”

“A small scout party went down to a suitable planet. We lost contact some six hours ago.” He looked at the thick metal bracelet encircling his wrist. “This was their last position.”

“There is a party on the other side of the rise,” Kendall replied. The stone in her hand changed its harmonics slightly. She closed her eyes, breathed deeply, and sank into a trance. She sent her thoughts winging across the ridge to their neighbours. With delicate tendrils she accessed memories and eavesdropped on conversations. It was not the Adjutant party. She frowned as she listened to the liquid speech, recognising a mere handful of words. Those few words struck deep chords inside her. Her thoughts winged further afield, in a desperate attempt to deny what she dreaded. “Think Kendall” she murmured. She sought one individual and found several: her mother’s family.

By all the Dark Stars! How did they get here? Of all the planets in the galaxy, why this one? She may know what planet they were on, but she had little idea of where exactly they were. Getting off the planet without being detected was paramount. The natives were known to be paranoid and dangerous if they perceived a threat. When she met up with her mother she was going to ask questions.

Gabriel grimaced. This was the second time his princess had appeared and rescued him. Since the moment they had met, ironically in similar circumstances, his princess was a constant

presence at the back of his mind. Were her parents as pragmatic and aware of mysterious powers at work as his were? Probably, he mused. The nets were constantly full of gossip about this Mariner family. The gossipers were right about one thing though: his princess was a stunning beauty in mind and form.

“Your parents must be frantic,” Gabriel commented.

Kendall shrugged nonchalantly. She had just spent three days alone in wild terrain, more as a personal quest than a rite of passage. Her parents would not hit the panic buttons until she was an hour overdue. She had been taught by the best of many races and in many fields. Neither parent was prone to panicking. The minute she missed the rendezvous, a search would be instigated. Methodical and meticulous, *Phoenix's* crew would tear the galaxy apart at the sub-atomic level until they found her.

Gabriel studied his princess shrewdly. He knew her on so many levels, and she still surprised him. His logical brain told him it was physically impossible for her to be beside him. Instinct told him she had abilities she did not betray to her parents. He had visited enough planets, and met more than enough diplomats and envoys to know the unbelievable was more than believable. “How did you get here?” he asked curiously.

“The stone brought me,” Kendall replied. She extended her palm and opened her fist to reveal the luminescent stone. “Maman has a necklace with similar stones she calls moonstones, though they don't glow like this. Her folklore credits the stone with many qualities and powers.”

“The men will contact your people when we meet up with them in the morning.”

“Gabriel, your ship is more than thirty light years distant. This is not Sigma Delta Theta.”

Gabriel closed his eyes. Why did she have to say that? Strange things happened when his princess appeared. “How do we get back?”

Kendall sighed. There was always a way out of a situation. The problem being it was not easy to explain and frequently left

her drained. “The same way we got here, I guess. It is possible you stumbled through a portal of some type.” It was the best answer she could give. Why the two of them were here, together, was something she preferred not to dwell upon. Her mother would lay the blame squarely at the feet of the Powers-that-be. She would accept it without too many questions. Maman had some simple beliefs and could be accepting of many events.

She peered out through the narrow opening of the tent. The pale orange moon was now a bright rich cream. She could see patches of grey on the surface. It was so large and bright creating a beautiful skyscape. The constellations were strange and yet familiar. The mythologies of her mother’s culture were bedtime stories for her and her siblings. She grew up with the tales of Orion the Hunter. Starscapes were what made planetfalls bearable, worthwhile. She held her hand open with the stone sitting in the centre of her palm. A ray of moonlight shone through the small trees and onto the water. She could swear the stone sighed with contentment and satisfaction.

“Princess.” Gabriel drew her back inside the tent. He tucked her into his side and settled her head on his shoulder. “Sleep. We cannot stumble in the dark looking for a way home.”

Kendall blinked. He was right. However, they also needed to get off this world before dawn and before Maman had a conniption. The one thing Maman guarded with ferocity was her planet of origin. She lifted the stone, angling it into the moonbeam. Firmly she anchored the images of the market place, and the landing site she had gleaned from Gabriel’s memories, in her mind. It was time to go home. She gazed into the depths of the gem, willing it to reverse their journey. It had what it sought.

Once more the gem glowed with a brilliance that was blinding, swirling about them, gathering them into a maelstrom of flashing light, gusting wind, and screeching. Somewhere along the way, Kendall felt thistledown caress her lips and cheek as Gabriel was torn from her arms and gently deposited on the

outskirts of his party's camp. The rollercoaster picked up speed, intensified in luminosity, and grew in decibels, only to stop abruptly and spit her out.

"Lady." The elderly artisan gently guided Kendall to a seat at the rear of his stall.

Kendall swayed and sat down. A beaker of cool water was pressed into her hand. She sipped, hoping the water would settle her churning stomach. Fuzzball was purring against her shoulder. The faint vibrations were soothing. A second beaker was pressed into her hand. She blinked at the artisan.

"The sun," the artisan remarked, "made you dizzy. It can be quite draining for those not used to the heat." He handed her a wet cloth and encouraged her to wipe her hot skin. He had taken several liberties in guiding her to the chair. Mariners disliked being touched.

Kendall nodded in thanks for the wet cloth and moved it delicately over her face and throat. It was soothing and welcomed, easing her discomfort. She gazed into wise eyes and saw the wonder of ages past.

He had just seen a marvel he would witness only once in his long life. It was the moment he would remember long after his body had blended with the sands and his soul danced on the winds. He pressed lightly on her wrist and felt the hardness of a bracelet beneath her sleeve. Gently drawing it off, he took the moonstone from her hand and carefully inserted it into the faint depression in the bracelet's centre. The metal softened fractionally before hardening around the gem, holding it in place. The stone glowed softly. Deep in its heart an image was trapped. It was a counterpoint to the one carved into the bloodstone. He slid the bracelet back onto her wrist and folded her fingers around her completed medallion.

Kendall blinked. "How much do I owe for the medallion and the stone?"

The artisan smiled softly. "You have already paid for the medallion and the *Sandakada pahana* is not mine to sell. It has

found its home with you, its Chosen One: The one born of sky, land and water.”

Kendall nodded slightly accepting his gift. His description was apt. Her father was Mariner, her mother Terran, and she was born in the midst of the Domdaniel. It was the nicest compliment she had been given. She closed her eyes and breathed deep.

Against the black velvet screen she saw Gabriel greeting his men. He was safe in the heart of Sigma Delta Theta. The medallion in her hand warmed and vanished, reappearing in Gabriel's. He opened his palm and studied the stone. Reverently, he outlined the carving with his finger. If she had looked closer she would have discerned a new determination in his eyes. He smiled, knowingly. He'd been given a task: make the impossible, possible. Their future together was still some years away, and they each had much to learn, but it was already entwined.

The End

Author's Note

Moon Dreaming is an incarnation of *Moonstone Dreaming*, my entry in the Romance Writers of Australia's 2014 Little Gems Competition.

Moon Dreaming is part of Kendall's and Gabriel's backstory. Their early story is told over several episodes until they can finally be together. They have several obstacles to overcome before they can be together. The tyranny of distance, clashing cultures, career paths to name a few. Kendall's story is told over three arcs, as she finds her path in life, career, and love, with her prince as her lodestone.

I hope you enjoy this episode of Kendall's and Gabriel's journey.

Please keep visiting my website www.lgdaltonnovelist.com for news of Kendall and Gabriel. You can contact me by email on contact@lgdaltonnovelist.com