

Disney
Aladdin

Far from
Agrabah

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Prologue

From *LEGENDARY LEADERS
ACROSS THE AGES—*
“Sultan Waleed of Sulamandra”

ONCE UPON a moonlit night in the sprawling kingdom of Sulamandra, two men squared off in a dimly lit palace room. But for their hair—the sultan’s was a warm honey brown and the other’s a shining silver—the two could have been mistaken for brothers. And indeed, Sultan Waleed had believed the man standing before him wearing a long green robe was a brother to him. Until now.

“Tell me it’s not true,” said the sultan. He held up a

cream-colored scroll. "If you tell me it's not true, I will believe you."

"I don't have the slightest idea what you're going on about," the man replied.

"Abbas, this is no time for jokes. I went against my advisor's recommendation by meeting you in private. I've even kept the guards outside to keep them from gossiping. I want to protect you, but I need your honesty. Did you send this missive to our ally? Did you ask the prince of Doran for his help in overthrowing me?"

Abbas crossed his arms and looked away. His gaze settled upon a gold-framed painting of the vast and sprawling mountains on the eastern border of Sulamandra. It hung on the wall next to an oak table, where a glass-encased lantern burned low.

"How long ago was that landscape painted?" Abbas scratched his chin. "I'd say Hasan bin Yasin was commissioned for it, based on the swirls and the color pattern. That puts it at four centuries old, doesn't it?"

"We aren't here to discuss paintings, Abbas."

"Four centuries old, that painting is," Abbas continued. "And those mountains look the same now as they ever did."

“I’m warning you . . .” the sultan said in a low voice.

“Why so flustered?” Abbas smiled. “I’m only making an observation. All that gold and silver buried and untouchable. It’s a shame. A tragedy, really. And then of course there is the matter of my maps.” Abbas’s eyes narrowed. He glared at the oak table. “They’re in that drawer, aren’t they? The ones I drew up all those years ago with the precise location of every precious mineral and gem within our mountain ranges. I entrusted you with my only copy, and you’ve let it gather dust for over a decade.”

“As I’ve told you before, we don’t need the map, and we don’t need to destroy our mountains.”

“We don’t require it to survive as a kingdom, but were we to extract even a tiny fraction, we would have the gold to buy enough fleets and weapons and train enough soldiers to become the most powerful kingdom on earth.”

“We are powerful and respected among all kingdoms as it is—we do not need to destroy the most fragile parts of our land for the sake of greed.”

“And that is why you are a fool.”

“What did you say?” The sultan’s eyes widened.

“Oh, did you not hear me?” Abbas said with mock surprise. “I said that is what makes you a fool.”

“Careful how you speak to me,” the sultan warned. “We have played together since we were children. I accept your familiarity with me. But do not forget who I am.”

“How can I forget?” Abbas scoffed. “You have that ridiculous emerald crown on your head, don’t you?”

“Abbas.” The sultan exhaled. “Our families have known each other for generations.”

“They have.”

“I know we have never seen eye to eye on how to develop and grow this kingdom.”

“We have not.”

“But despite all this, you have always been my dearest friend.”

“We are not friends.”

“Fine. It’s true. You are more than a friend. You are like a brother to me.”

“Had I been your brother, I would have been king. I’m smarter than you. I am certainly cleverer. Sulamandra could rule the entire world if you weren’t so soft that you wouldn’t dare harm a flower. It’s time for the Akbar family name to get its full due. I deserve to be king.”

“So then.” The sultan’s eyes brimmed with tears. “You did send the missive to Doran.”

“Oh, yes. Not just to him, though. I sent one to every kingdom near and far. I offered a cut of Sulamandra’s wealth for assistance in overthrowing you. Then I’ll finally be able to use my map to make Sulamandra the wealthiest and most powerful kingdom on earth. It is a shame the prince of Doran betrayed my trust, but I’m not worried—there will be others who will send their armies to assist me. Surely some are on their way this minute.”

“Abbas . . . why?”

“Because gold has a power you cannot begin to grasp.”

The king stared at Abbas silently for a few moments.

“I suppose you were right, then. I was a fool, wasn’t I?” the sultan finally said. “I was willing to make a million excuses for you because I loved you. I loved you so much I didn’t take the veil off my eyes until now. To hear you talk this way about money and power . . . You have been given every privilege in life. Your estate rivals my own palace in size. You want for absolutely nothing and yet you are still not satisfied. I see now that your soul is hardened beyond repair; whatever good was once inside—it is long gone.”

“Better a hardened soul than a weak one such as yours,” Abbas scoffed.

The sultan studied Abbas for a moment and then sighed.

“You leave me no choice, then,” he finally said.

The sultan turned toward the palace door.

“Oh, no.” Abbas’s eyes narrowed. “This is not how this story ends.”

Before the sultan could take another step, Abbas lunged. The sultan stumbled. His back hit the oak table. The lantern trembled.

“What kind of sultan leaves those who would protect him outside?” Abbas laughed. He pulled out a silver knife he’d had strapped against his body and raised it in the air. “This works out far better than I’d planned, actually. Who needs an army when I can finish you off myself? Now I can say I overthrew the sultan with my own two hands. Imagine that! They’ll write legends about me one day.”

But as he went to attack, the sultan ducked. The knife stabbed the desk instead. Abbas grunted and yanked the weapon out, but not before the sultan’s closed fist struck Abbas’s jaw. Abbas crumpled against the desk. His head hit the lantern, which tumbled to the ground. The glass shattered. In an instant, the flickering flame came to life

with a roar. It licked at the carpet and crawled up the ceiling, devouring centuries-old murals and paintings, turning them into ash.

And so, too, burned the oak table and the maps that lay within.

Jasmine

Chapter One

JASMINE STOOD in the palace hall holding a basket of sweet candies. She handed them out to the children standing before her now, their hands outstretched awaiting their treats. The little girls wore dresses, some with flowers, others with birds stitched upon them. The boys wore cream, brown, and sage-green tunics. One by one she plucked out candies from her basket and placed them into each child's palm—cherry, lemon, and strawberry-flavored—and the children thanked her before hurrying off happily. She watched

them leave, nostalgic for her own childhood, for she had also grown up attending these festivals and had many a warm memory of eating sweets and swaying to the music without a care in the world. Those days felt many moons ago now.

The hall was aglow with lights strung against lattices; glass lanterns of pink and amber lined the walkways leading to the festivities. Jasmine smiled, pleased at the results. The Harvest Festival was one of the few things in Agrabah that fell within her domain, and she enjoyed designing the theme and look it would take on each year. The musicians, whom she had hand-selected after listening to many a questionable audition, played a lively song from their place by the dance floor. Festival attendees twirled to the music just across from where she stood. She inhaled the smell of buttery baklava and creamy pistachio pudding wafting over to her from the food stations, where renowned chefs and cooks prepared delicacies for the revelers. With the lights twinkling overhead and the music floating into the night air, as disillusioned as she'd felt lately about Agrabah—and the way her father constantly brushed her thoughts and opinions about the kingdom aside—she had to admit that when

it came to the Harvest Festival, everything had worked out absolutely perfectly. If only she could push away the sadness that still lingered in her chest.

Jasmine looked around the hall yet again, scanning the room for any sign of the kind black-haired boy with the warm brown eyes. She knew it was unlikely Aladdin would have come to the festival, but still, she'd hoped. She had met him just a few days earlier when she'd traded clothes with her handmaiden and snuck out of the palace to explore the streets of Agrabah. She didn't know how he'd managed to charm her so completely, but he undeniably had. It was Aladdin who'd helped her navigate the city and truly *see* the kingdom of Agrabah as she'd always longed to. And despite the differences in their social circumstances, she and Aladdin had connected in a way she hadn't with anyone before. Jasmine remembered how, when she'd found herself lost in the city, Aladdin had held out his hand, asked her if she trusted him. Even though she'd barely known him, she had let her guard down; she *had* trusted him. But perhaps, she thought now, she'd trusted him much too easily. Because he had promised to meet her the previous night, and she'd waited well until the moon had slipped from the

sky—and the boy never came. It was just as well, she supposed. What future could two people from such different worlds have? Still, the disappointment stung.

“May I have one more candy?” a little girl asked, interrupting her thoughts.

“Of course you can.” Jasmine looked down at the child. She had curled pigtails tied in ribbons and grinned as Jasmine handed her a maple-flavored sweet. The girl thanked the princess before hurrying off. Jasmine watched as she looped around one of the hall’s bronze pillars, passed a group of boys in starched tunics tossing a ball back and forth, and finally joined her mother, who stood in line for grilled kebabs and a cheese pastry the chef was preparing warm and fresh. The mother looked down and smiled at her daughter. Jasmine remembered her own mother smiling at her the same way. The Queen had been a great leader and had infused in Jasmine her love for learning and her passion for leadership. Had her mother still been alive, Jasmine’s life would have turned out quite differently. Even when Jasmine was a child, her mother had taken her desire to be sultana seriously—indeed, she had been preparing Jasmine for that very role until her untimely and tragic death changed everything.

From the corner of her eye, Jasmine noticed Prince Anders. It was hard to miss him, what with his fuchsia and green royal costume and the ridiculous fur-lined hat he never took off, even in the balmy heat of Agrabah. Right now, he positively glowed from the praise and adulation of the people surrounding him. Which was just as well—their attention kept him from regaling *her* with tales of his lands and his brilliance. In contrast to Prince Anders, the other visiting royal, Prince Ali of Ababwa (a kingdom so obscure even *she* hadn't heard of it) seemed to be keeping to himself. He stood awkwardly against the wall opposite her. While Prince Anders's outfit was completely over the top, Prince Ali wore a gold-fringed cream outfit that was simple enough, even if the costume involved so many layers it looked as though his clothing intended to swallow him whole. Still, he was dressed far more plainly than she'd have expected of someone who'd barreled into town with the most obnoxious entourage she'd ever seen, replete with marching drummers, dancers, peacocks, and golden camels. He had arrived standing on a flower-covered *camel float*, of all things. And yet now he stood on the other side of the room, staring at his surroundings as though he'd never been inside a palace before.

“He seems different.” It was Dalia, Jasmine’s handmaiden and best friend, who spoke, nodding toward Prince Ali. “And his friend is incredibly attractive, so please make it work?”

Jasmine glanced at the jovial-looking advisor standing next to the prince; he was broad-shouldered, wore blue, and stood a bit taller than Ali.

“What about the prince?” Jasmine raised an eyebrow.

“Seems cute in a nervous, low-self-esteem kind of way.” Dalia shrugged. “He’s trying too hard.”

“That’s the problem,” Jasmine said. “I need someone with more heart.” She glanced at Ali and suddenly felt bad for her harsh words. It wasn’t *his* fault he’d come courting—her father was obsessed with marriage and constantly encouraged princely suitors when all Jasmine wanted was a seat at the table to help lead Agrabah in the right direction for the sake of its people. Ali didn’t know marriage was the last thing on her mind. As far as princes went, though, she had to admit he didn’t seem quite as bad as the others who’d come to try to win her hand. Sure, what with his poor attempts at smooth talking, he’d put his foot in his mouth more times than she could count in the brief exchanges they’d had since

he'd arrived at the palace. But even if his execution was awkward, his intentions were good—she could tell that much.

“Here he comes! He’s coming!” Dalia’s eyes widened. “Act natural.”

Jasmine suppressed a smile as Prince Ali approached.

“Sorry for earlier,” he told her. “I didn’t mean to . . . I’m not used to partying. I mean, I am, but . . .”

Dalia was right, Jasmine thought. Despite herself, she smiled at him. He *was* kind of adorable—in a nervous sort of way.

“Dance?” Jasmine interrupted him. She needed to put him out of his misery. “I’d love to.”

Prince Ali’s eyes widened, but before he could say anything else, she led him to the dance floor. Music swelled around them as the musicians began their next song. Jasmine began to move to the beat, but Ali’s feet looked permanently glued to the ground. *Now what’s the matter?* she wondered. She was about to ask him if he was all right when suddenly he began dancing—if one could call it that. His hands and legs flailed about him as though he were a puppet. *What on earth . . . ?* thought

Jasmine. But she smiled in spite of herself. He was trying. She'd give him that much.

Seeing the shift in her expression, Ali grinned. It was the first genuine smile she'd seen from him since they'd met, and as she noticed the way his dimple deepened, something inside her softened. When the next song began, Ali swept Jasmine into his arms. Once his nerves had settled, it turned out he was actually a good dancer. A *very* good dancer. And there was something about those eyes—they looked familiar somehow. Comforting. With his arms around her waist, they moved across the dance floor. Looking into his deep brown eyes, she felt as though the crowd had melted away and it was just the two of them in all the world.

She gazed at Prince Ali. Who *was* this mysterious prince? What was his story?

The music shifted then, pulling both of them out of their reveries. The next song was a popular one and more up-tempo. Prince Ali's eyes lit up. Pulling her back, he spun her out across the dance floor. And then—he danced. Without her. Jasmine watched from the sidelines. He danced like his feet were on fire. He pivoted and

spun, and soon a crowd of attendees surrounded him on the dance floor, clapping and cheering him on as they swayed to the music.

Jasmine's heart sank. Just like that, the moment was over.

When the music stopped, Prince Ali looked through the crowd until his eyes landed on hers. There it was. That self-satisfied, smug grin. Just like Prince Anders's. He had managed to charm her with one dance, and she'd let her loneliness get the best of her, believing there was more to him than there was. But there wasn't more to him. There was no mystery. He was a wealthy, attention-seeking prince, just like all the others before him.

Suddenly, Jasmine felt weary. She was tired of compromising and making the best of her stifling situation. She was tired of men appearing at her doorstep day after day, looking at her as an object of conquest. Why had she even bothered to come to this at all? She'd have been better off staying in her quarters finishing up with rereading *Legendary Leaders Across the Ages*. There was nothing at this festival—or in Agrabah—for her.

Without another word, Jasmine swallowed her disappointment, turned on her heel, and walked away.