

Peace

Grains of sand slip through my fingers to float away on a hot wind. I will miss this wind. Cold nights spent pining for the heat now fill a bittersweet ache in my chest. The rising dry warmth of the desert is a living thing that digs under your bones and into your heart.

I should know. I've spent my life sailing these ever-changing sands. My people, the nomadic Kalani tribe, have inhabited these lands for millennia. When the Dreb-Kabar invaded from across the sea one thousand years ago, they brought their machines of war and of industry. The tribes were outnumbered and outmatched, but the invaders had never contended with the harsh realities of the desert. After the Hundred Years' War, my people signed the Treaty.

It was a stay of execution, nothing more. Not as the day soon arrived when the Dreb-Kabar were finally free to pillage our lands – looking for the liquid fire churning in the rock, deep beneath the shifting sands.

I watch from the top of my dune, facing the great blue sea. Dreb-Kabar machines infest the sky and waters. They wait offshore, just beyond our borders, lurking there. Once the sun is set on this day, the Treaty will be ended, and they will descend upon the desert like sand flies upon a rotting carcass. Then they will begin to drill. The old songs speak of the first drilling, during the war. The sand will dance, and the creatures will flee. The desert will change, and my people will lose our home. And so my tribe is leaving. But I am not.

I take out my knife and watch the setting sun glint off the hard steel. I was chosen for this. The Blood Curse.

Carefully, I kneel in the scared way and place my palm against the fine grains of that warm sand. I close my eyes. The desert speaks to me, and I drift down, down, down to the liquid fire roiling through the channels in the rock. My heart races.

The desert brushes her cool hands over my brow. *Peace*, she whispers.

I plunge the knife into my chest. Red spurts onto the sand. My life blood. In my mind's eye, the curse takes form. I see my blood and the liquid fire become one, swirling and mixing. As my blood drains, the liquid fire runs away from the surface, deeper into the bedrock. So deep that the Dreb-Kabar will never find it.

They have waited one thousand years to harvest the desert's sacred liquid fire. Now they will never have it. They will drill and drill and find nothing. Then they will leave. And the desert will be safe. My home will be safe.

I lift my head and catch the last rays of this final day as they dip below the horizon.

Peace, she whispers again.

I am fading now.

I will join with the desert. My life for my home.