



I'm writing the sequel to book one in the Bringer of Chaos series. The first was Origin of Pietas, the second is Forged in Fire. In it, we get a lovely flashback of his first love. When Joss and Pietas meet for the first time, he is young, isolated, and alone. This is from the work in progress. May have final edits before being released. Currently, it's on track for Sept 2017.

### ***Joss and Pietas Meet (Excerpt)***

Pietas didn't sleep with Joss until he was twenty, but he fell in love with her at first sight.

He was sixteen. She was ageless.

The older woman had plucked him off the streets, fed and clothed him, given him a job and dignity. That wasn't why he'd slept with her. It had taken several years to become her lover because he didn't know how to ask and she hadn't made the first move. She told him later he'd been too young to know what he wanted.

This time, he knew how it was done, he had no intention of waiting, and he knew exactly what he wanted. *Her.*

As he hiked beside her, he recalled that first meeting. He'd been starving, standing in lines to join work crews. For *days*. No one would hire him. He had no identification. No money. His father had thrown him out with nothing. He was too proud to steal and far too proud to beg. He refused to buy falsified documents. He'd either earn his keep the right way or he'd starve. His honor had no price.

The day had grown late and it had started raining. He ducked into a covered alley and huddled against the wall for protection from the wind. The greasy food cooking at the diner across the street had started smelling good two days ago. Two skinny Ultras stopped by the diner's back door every night and accepted a handful of scraps. He would bear stomach cramps forever before he'd do that.

A female soldier passing by slowed, looked him up and down, and then stopped. She wore an officer's uniform: simple black jacket, white blouse, black skirt, shiny shoes. "Hello."

He stood taller. Finger-combing his hair, he smiled at her. "Hello."

"Are you looking for work?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She entered the alley, gesturing for him to accompany her.

He turned to follow, staggering with dizziness. No matter what kind of work she needed done, he would find a way to do it, hungry or not. Once they reached the alley's deepest end, she pulled up her skirt and held out paper money.

It took a moment for it to register what she expected him to do. He'd never been around any women other than his mother and sister. Did people do...that in an alley? Surely not. He must be mistaken. Surely she needed something else and he had misunderstood.

When he just stood there, she gestured with the money. "I don't have all day, do you want this or not?"

He turned and fled and didn't slow down until he reached the Ultra's union hall. There, he dropped onto a bench in the drizzling rain and hung his head in his hands, sopping wet, cold and miserable.

"Hello?" called a gentle voice.

He balled his fists and stood. "I am not for sale!"

"That's good to know." The woman facing him was not the one who'd offered to buy him earlier. Unlike his platinum blond, her hair held tones of gold. Kind blue eyes seemed to look right through him. The rain had ceased and a beam of sunlight illuminated her. Seeing her, a man could believe in angels.

He pushed his hair out of his face. "Sorry."

"Don't be. Are you Pietas?"

"I am." Was this someone who could hire him? It wouldn't do to look sloppy in front of her. He drew back his sodden hair into a tail and tossed it over his shoulder. Wiping wet hands on wetter clothes, he held himself in militarily correct posture. "How do you know me?"

"From your mother's description."

A wave of homesickness arose in him so strong he lost his breath. He might be new to the greater Ultra world, but he hadn't been raised a fool. He kept his distance.

"How do you know my mother?"

"Helia and I were created at the same time. She was scientist class and I was warrior, but we became friends. I introduced her to Mahikos. Thankfully, she doesn't hold that against me." A wry smile tilted her mouth. "She called me, told me she had a son named Pietas and a daughter named Dessy. She said you and your father had a fight and asked me to look for you. She sends her love."

"You're Joss! Growing up, she told me all about you. She said you were the sister she never had."

"Did she?" Her amusement came through the aether, as warm and embracing as his mother's had ever been. "I'm glad to know that. I wish she'd told me about you."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. That isn't your fault."

"Is Mother here? Have you seen her?"

"No. But she was worried so I said I'd try to find you. Looks like I did. She said to try the work halls. This should have been the first place I looked." Smiling, she spread her hands. "But I finally found you."

Surely it wasn't wrong to fall in love so fast. Mother had said not to trust strange women, and from his experience with the one earlier, she'd been right. But this was Joss. Her friend and sister. Pietas took two steps toward her, stopped himself and stuck his hands in his pockets.

Joss offered her hand. When he shook it, she clasped both of hers around his.

The moment she touched him he knew he would survive. He could do anything. His life was not over before it began. He'd had no idea then she was using her gift of Clarity to help him see his path. All he knew was this amazing woman cared about him.

"Thank you for looking for me. Finding me."

"My pleasure." She slid her fingertips down his jaw, out to the dimple in his chin and released him. "Now, let's get you off these streets, into some dry clothes, and find you a meal. If you want to, you can call your mother."

That memory brought the same sense of stomach-butterflies and walking-on-air as it had then. Nineteen hundred years later.

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