

A Bottle Of Dreams

by **Tal Greywolf**

Wednesday evening

The small wooden sign over the door said it all. Spells R Us, Magical Supply Shoppe. Swinging gently as a breeze drifted down St. Phillip's street, it caught the attention of Andrew Davis on his way home in the French Quarter. Small stores like this one were not uncommon in the Quarter. Several of his favorite places were hidden away like this one, on side streets or down alleys into the courtyards that were part of the heritage of the area. Along with its occult appearance, it was a perfect fit with the atmosphere that was strictly New Orleans.

His curiosity was piqued. The store didn't look that recent, but considering how often he walked this way, he was surprised to find it at all. Deciding to take a look, he opened the door and walked into the shop.

A silver bell jingled as he entered, a curtain parting as an old gentleman walked out from the back.

"Welcome to my shop," he said simply. "If you see anything you like, let me know."

"Thank you, I will." Andrew proceeded to gaze about the shop, peering at the various pieces of jewelry in cases and at the books on shelves while the proprietor watched quietly.

Andrew picked up an old bound book, a touch dusty and read the Latin inscription on the binding. Chuckling to himself, he placed it back on the shelf while the proprietor raised an eyebrow in surprise. Few would have recognized the text, fewer still to be able to resist the spell associated with them. He cleared his throat, catching Andrew's attention.

"I take it you found something to your liking?"

Andrew chuckled gently. "A few items are interesting, but nothing's really standing up and saying, 'take me home', no. Then again, it's been a while since I've been in a really interesting store like this one."

That caught the old man's attention. "Oh? You've visited other places like this before?"

"Well, I used to live in Milwaukee and visited Sanctum Regnum regularly," Andrew admitted. "And there was this little place in Santa Cruz I used to know while I was living in Monterey. And there's the places here in town like Mystic Curio over on Royal St."

The old man's eyebrows rose slightly. "So you know about magic, then?"

"In a sense," Andrew picked up another book, this one a non-spelled one by Starhawk. "I do believe in magic, if that's what you're referring to."

Nodding, the old man gazed closely at his customer. "I suppose then selling you a love potion or spell to be wealthy wouldn't work, would it?"

Andrew laughed and shook his head. "No, it wouldn't. I'm quite happy with the work I do and the money I make and while I'm sure my love life could do with some improvements, I wouldn't want to make any radical changes there, either. Even if it's been a little lacking lately."

Again, the old man's eyebrows rose. "Why, if you don't mind me asking? I would have guessed you would have females following you all around."

Shaking his head, Andrew sighed. "No, I wouldn't want that, either. Fact is, being the way I am tends to make most females treat me more as a brother than as anything else. Not that I'm complaining," he said quickly, holding up a hand to forestall any comments. "It's just that what I'd prefer would be someone more willing to share the interests I have."

A glint came into the old man's eyes. "Interests such as what?"

Andrew grinned. "Magic, for one. Shapeshifting for another. I've always had a fascination for shapeshifters and transformations, collect stories and artwork in that vein. Adventurous as well, enjoying being out in the wilderness and exploring." He smiled at the old man, giving a wink. "I doubt you'd know of someone like that."

The old man remained silent for a minute, staring intently at Andrew. "You're serious," he said finally. "You are truly serious about this."

Andrew nodded, the mood in the store feeling quite different to him. Something felt odd, something that jangled his senses. As if he had just crossed a line and was about to get himself in trouble.

The shopkeeper shook his head. "Relax, I'm not going to do anything," he said as if reading Andrew's thoughts. "It's just rare for someone like you to come here. This wasn't chance at all." The last he muttered to himself, making Andrew blink.

"What wasn't chance?"

"Wait here," the shopkeeper said. He went back behind the counter and into the back room, disappearing from sight. There was sounds of rattling, then he came back into the room holding a bottle.

"This is for you. I received it two days ago, and wasn't certain why at the time. But I think it was meant for you to have."

He handed Andrew the bottle. It was heavier than he would have guessed, the shape that of a middle-eastern vase with a broad base, tapered neck and glass stopper. Dark blue in color, there was silver and gold tracery all around the bottle making it look quite decorative.

Andrew looked up at the old man. "What is this?"

"Yours." He said it simply. "Take it. This is what you wished for. Just remove the stopper and pour out the contents, and you'll discover the rest." The old man smiled warmly at Andrew. "Go ahead, take it."

Andrew looked uncertain. "I don't know..." he said haltingly. "I mean it's lovely, but..."

"Andrew," the old man said, surprising him with his name. "You're a special young man with a special gift. You are the most qualified for what's inside the bottle. If it doesn't work out, just turn here in a week."

Still uncertain, Andrew nodded. "Ok, a week." With that, he opened the door and walked back out onto St. Phillips St. The old man watched him leave, then shook his head slowly.

"I hope this does work out," he said to himself.

Andrew walked down Chartres St, heading toward his home. The sounds of a Dixieland jazz band drifted on the winds, and tourists walked past him heading towards the Quarter. His place was on the edge of the Quarter, just a few blocks away from the French Market. Unlocking the door, he walked into his apartment and closed the door behind him. Placing the bottle on the living room table, he checked messages on the answering machine. Two wrong numbers, AT&T asking for his business, and one customer wanting to design a new web page for his business. Sighing, Andrew made a note of the latter call and headed into the back rooms to fix dinner.

An hour later after some manicotti and cheese and a small glass of wine he went back into the living room to examine the bottle. There was no writings or inscriptions anywhere, even underneath. The glass was too dark to see what was inside, yet when he moved it he could feel something sloshing about within. Finally, he shrugged and unstopped the bottle. Remembering what the old man said, he started pouring out whatever was inside.

A thick golden liquid started to flow out from the bottle. It pooled onto the floor, then slowly it started to shimmer and ripple. Andrew blinked in surprise, a tingling felt on his skin as the liquid rose up into the air, much like the character from the movie Terminator 2. The liquid took shape, becoming that of a young woman with a middle-eastern appearance. Lined black hair cascaded across her shoulders and down her back, while deep green eyes opened to the light. Her body was sleek and shapely... and completely unclothed.

Andrew stared at her in shock. She didn't notice it at first, her arms raising up as she stretched and took a deep breath. Then her gaze met his and she smiled warmly, falling to her knees as she bowed down before him.

"Kind master, I thank you for your generosity in allowing me my freedom. What is it that you wish or desire of me, your humble slave?"

Andrew shook off his shock, blinking at her, then at the bottle. "I think," he said softly, "I think that we need to do is talk."

Her name was Aluria. She was in her own words a djinna. Andrew listened to her explaining who and what she was with a mixture of disbelief and rapt fascination.

"So you see, I am yours now." She said it as a matter of fact. "You are my master, and I shall obey whatever commands you give me, within my ability."

Andrew leaned back against his seat and hummed softly. He had already put aside the fact that she was still naked, and was instead paying attention to her words.

"What do you mean 'within your ability'?"

"Some things I cannot do. Such as kill another person, bring back a person from death, affect others directly. My powers are limited only to myself and my master. Making his or her life easier, more convenient, giving him whatever he would desire."

Andrew hummed softly again. "Like asking for wealth or riches."

Aluria nodded. "I can't provide unlimited wealth, no. But if that is what you wished for, I could grant it. At least enough wealth to live comfortably for the rest of your life."

"No, no," Andrew quickly interjected, waving his hands. "I'm quite satisfied with what I have."

Aluria nodded again, bowing her head. "I have other abilities. You could shape me into whatever you desire me to be."

"Shape? As in shapeshift your form?"

"It is what my master can do with me, yes. If you find me unpleasing, you can turn me into whatever form you wished me to be."

A slight cough came from Andrew. "You mean I have control of your body?" The conversation had taken a turn into the Twilight Zone, he thought to himself.

"Oh, yes. My previous masters would turn me into whatever they desired for me to be." Aluria was serious as she spoke, causing Andrew to shake his head in amazement.

"If I hadn't seen you form out of that liquid," he said slowly, "I would swear someone's pulling a hoax on me. But I did see you form, and you're here." He shook his head again and sat back in his chair, relaxing. "Let's get a few things straight right now, though."

Aluria smiled. Andrew cleared his throat, then looked at her.

"First off, don't call me Master." That caught her off guard, and the look on her face showed it. He continued on talking, however.

"It's not that I don't understand what you're offering me here. It's just that, well, I'm not the sort who'll order a person around. I'll ask you what you would like, but I will not force you to do anything against your will."

Aluria was profoundly puzzled. "But... I was meant to serve others. It's part of who and what I am."

Andrew reached out and patted one of her hands. "I understand that. I can't deny you're here, and can't just simply take you back. The old man said for me to wait a week. But I can ask you to understand where I'm coming from here.

"Secondly, for I'm being living as a loner for a while now. I'm going to still be that way while you're here, although I know I do have to give you attention. So I will try to take time for you. You're likely not used to the way this world is now, so for the time being I want you to learn about the way things are for now."

Aluria nodded. "I've already learned much just from when you opened my bottle. It's part of my magick to learn about my ma... you when you first take control."

Andrew nodded slowly. "Ok. Then you probably know some things about me already. I'll answer any questions you have, and expect you to do the same when I ask you about yourself. Or about your abilities."

Aluria smiled slightly at that. "I'd think you'd rather see me simply demonstrate what I'm able to do," she said simply.

Andrew hummed softly, then nodded. "Yeah," he replied. "I would probably want that. Finally, a simple thing. The middle room is my office. During the day when I'm there, try not to bother me too much. Any other time is fair enough. And the books are always there for you to read. That might help make the time go by easier when I am working."

She nodded in understanding, then smiled again. "May I ask a question then?"

Andrew nodded. "Ask away."

"Do you wish me to look different now?"

Andrew peered at her, humming softly once more. "You want to show me this is real, don't you?"

"Yes. Perhaps you'll believe that I'm speaking the truth when I say you can change my form with just a thought."

Andrew nodded, then looked at her closely. She really wasn't all that unattractive at all, rather fetching in appearance. Perhaps with longer hair, and black instead of brown...

There was an odd rustle, then Aluria's hair lengthened rapidly down her back, reaching just above her ass. As it grew the coloration darkened, until it was as black as night by the time it stopped growing. Aluria smiled, turning slowly to show off what had happened.

He let out a very low whistle. "Dear goddess," he said softly, admiring her again with a critical eye. "Just remind me not to go crazy around you with this."

Aluria looked a little disappointed. "I would think you'd turn me into your dream lover," she said bluntly. "Or someone very sexy looking."

Andrew laughed, then quickly stifled it at her expression. "My dear, I'm not quite that sort of male," he explained. "I mean, sure. I could make you into a Pam Anderson, or a Playboy bunny if I wanted to. But I don't want to. Not right now, at least. Perhaps later on. For now, we, and I mean WE need to get used to each other. It's not that I don't want to shift you about right now." He smiled warmly, trying to reassure her. "I just need to get used to this."

Aluria looked a little more hopeful. "But you will indulge yourself with me?"

A soft chuckle came from Andrew. "We'll see what happens."

Thursday

Andrew woke to the smell of pancakes and bacon. He blinked his eyes to clear the sleep out of them, then winced slightly, remembering where he had been sleeping.

Aluria had said something about not needing sleep, but he had insisted she sleep in his bed. He had slept on the futon in the living room, keeping his office between himself and her. More for her own protection than anything else. Grumbling softly to himself, he looked at the clock, and was amazed to see it was 8:10 am.

Managing to get himself upright, he walked down the hall into the kitchen. There he saw Aluria cooking away, dressed in what could only be called harem domestic.

She smiled when she saw him leaning in the doorway. "Good morning," she said, making him wince slightly. "Breakfast will be ready in about 10 minutes."

"Good," he rumbled softly, turning to head into the bathroom. "Maybe I'll be awake by then." Staggering his way in, he managed to get himself looking and feeling more alive, wandering back into the kitchen once he had finished his morning ritual.

At the table sat Aluria, along with a short stack of pancakes, several bacon strips and a glass of milk. "I took the liberty," she said as he sat down, "of reading your thoughts last night. Since we're bound together now, I should know much more about you and what you enjoy."

Andrew paused for a moment, then sat down in his chair. "You're one up on me," he managed to say. "I'm still not sure about all of this."

"I know," she replied. "But you said to give it time."

He grunted, then chuckled softly. "Touche", mon pussy cat," he said back. "I deserve that one."

"You deserve more than that," she cryptically replied. "Eat up, it's getting cold." "Yes, mother," Any further comments were stifled by his eating, which was quite good this morning. The pancakes were just shy of perfect, and the bacon crisp. Looking up, he saw her watching him intently eating. "What are you looking at?" he asked. "Just watching," she replied. "I guess I'm just fascinated at how you can enjoy something so simple." "Simple tastes for simple minds," she shot back at her. She grinned and threw a grape at him, hitting him on the nose. "You are hardly simple," she said. "I haven't had a master with such a vivid imagination before." He looked up at her again. "What did I say last night?" he commented. "I'm not calling you master, I'm making a statement. You have a very vivid imagination. No one else will be with you'd even think of some of the things you've thought up in your mind."

"Mmmhmm." Andrew licked off a bit of syrup, then looked at her, resting his chin on his hands. "You mean the thoughts I've had about various forms?" Aluria nodded. "None of my other owners were as creative in their thoughts. Most kept me in human form, although a few did have me take animal shape from time to time." Andrew nodded, looking thoughtful. "How so?" "One was a rajah. He would have me turn into a tigress to explore the grounds at night, shifting back into human form in the morning. Another wished to have a horse that would win races, so he shifted me into a swift mare and she had me mate with a stallion. I became pregnant, and months later had a colt that was what he wished for." Andrew hummed softly, listening to her. "I wouldn't wish that on anyone," he said mostly to himself. "Oh, it wasn't so bad." It was a little something, remembering that way. "Mostly I was cared for, fed and groomed. I didn't have to do anything other than carry the foal, so I let myself be a mare. No real conscious thoughts at all, other than being what I was then." Andrew looked at Aluria and asked slowly, "Would you want to be a horse again?" She smiled warmly. "If it was what you wished, and it was enjoyable, then I would. I'll admit there were some very interesting images you had that caught my attention." Andrew would have responded to that, but a phone ringing made him stand up from his chair. "Work calls collect," he said. "Remember what I said, try not to bother me too much while I'm working. We'll talk more about this later on." Work, it turned out, was actually something that Andrew explained as web page design work. Between talking with clients online and on the phone, he had managed to secure three new contracts as well as work out two new scripts for maintaining other pages. By the time 3pm rolled around, he was tired of staring at the screen, and turned it off. Walking into the living room, Andrew found Aluria on the floor, a number of his books and fanzines surrounding her. She looked up from what she was reading, her eyes filled with amazement. "So many ideas," she simply said. Andrew chuckled widely and offered her a hand up. "I think you've had a bit of information overload, like me. Come on, let's go out and get something in the way of a late lunch." "I'll need something more for outdoors," Aluria turned around, still dressed in her formly outfit. Andrew sighed and nodded, and instead of the sheer gauze, she found herself wearing a very colorful blouse and dress.

Andrew chuckled softly, shaking his head at her. "Got to admit one thing, shapeshifting does save on the clothes. Are they a part of you?" "As much as anything else would be. I can take it off if I wanted to, but usually it just becomes a part of me if it's not needed." Andrew nodded softly. "Ok. Let's go eat, and we can talk some more." Port Of Call was an Esplanade, just a few blocks from Andrew's home. As they walked, he took the time to give Aluria a little history of the area, at least what he remembered about the Quarter. The restaurant was busy, but not as busy as it might have been earlier. They managed to get a quiet spot to settle down in, Andrew ordering the house specialty for them both. Once the waiter left, Andrew looked at her and smiled a bit. "So what's on your mind now?" Aluria smiled back, shaking her head. "Just so many ideas. I can't believe some of the things I saw or read in those books you had."

"Well," he said as an explanation, "seems folks have learned to let their imagination run wild sometimes. Thinking about fantasy and what if's, they decided to actually write or draw those ideas and share them with others." "It's just so... strange. So many ideas and concepts. Not many djinni would even consider half of them." Andrew chuckled gently and sipped on a glass of tea. "Different strokes for different folks, dear. Me, I've always had an love for transformations and such, just never thought I'd get to find someone who could do it. Not sure if he's able to make her do them at whim." Aluria smiled at that. "I hope you'll do more than that with me. I've always been interested in seeing what someone would want to be, but some of those ideas are truly odd. I'm not sure if I'd enjoy them." "Oh, I don't know," Andrew replied. "You might find it to be quite enjoyable. Whoops, here's our food." The waiter arrived with a large tray, placing the Port of Call's famous burgers and baked potatoes. Conversation ceased while both they enjoyed the meal. Andrew glanced at how much there was. He grinned and the other, and Andrew told her that this was one of five places he enjoyed having a meal in the Quarter. "The other four are Napoleon House, Cafe Maspero's, Molly's at the Market and a place called Hooters." He was grinning at the last. "An excuse to let scantily clad females serve good food and make males drool." Leaving a tip, he offered his hand to her and they headed back out into the street. For a little while, they wandered about the Quarter, stopping in the little A&P for some groceries, then headed back to Andrew's place. Both settled back down in the living room once Aluria cleaned up her mess on the floor. Andrew watched as all the books literally flew back in place, chuckling softly as he shook his head in amazement. "Feel like I'm Major Nelson dealing with Barbara Eden again." Aluria giggled at his words. "That's not far from the truth," she said, surprising him. "Only you can do more with me than he could with her." "So, you've already learned about television and bad shows?" He grinned merrily, unable to keep from snickering. For her part, she winked and suddenly her outfit changed into an identical dress of Jeanie. Andrew laughed, and the colors changed into a deep blue instead of the pink and off-red. "There, that's better. If you have to look like her." Aluria giggled and bluffed about it, then sat down near Andrew. "So what else did you want to do with me?" Andrew laughed and ruffled her hair. "Ok, ok. You want to show off for me." "I settled back in his chair, looking at Aluria. "One thing I do want to see is you go back into that liquid state again." Aluria smiled warmly. "All you have to do is wish it." Andrew nodded, then suddenly Aluria's form seemed to ripple. She let out a soft moan as her body turned golden, flowing down to the floor. The puddle rippled a bit, then moved on its own towards Andrew, pooling around his feet. He giggled at the sight, then shook his head. "Strange. Really strange. Wonder what you're thinking or feeling." There was a soft tingle, and her voice whispered in his thoughts... it's very odd. Being formless...: He carefully touched her. "Are you ok this way?": "Oh, this is my natural state...: "Oh, this is my natural state...: She flowed into the center of the room. "...I was being a different..." Andrew nodded again, then let an idle thought cross his mind. The gold liquid rippled, flowing up into the air and taking the shape of a tall, dark skinned female with short black hair. Aluria shifted and stretched a moment, then caught her image in a mirror. "Ooh, my," she said softly. "This looks very nice." "Just a thought," Andrew said in response. He got out of his chair and walked over to her, admiring her form. "I'm beginning to see what makes you so alluring now. Being able to take anyone's fantasy form." "It is what I am," she said, turning to look at him. "Isn't that what you wished to have?" "Partially," was his reply. "But what about you? What do you want?" She giggled softly again, then went over to one of the fanzines. "I want to try this," she said, pointing to a picture of a centaur female. "Or maybe this," indicating a feline morph. "You've always wanted to see something like this to be real, so make me real." Chuckling, Andrew took the fanzine. "You really want me to do this?" Seeing her nodding in agreement, he went back to his chair. "Well, not the centaur, not in here at least. But let's see..." His voice trailed a bit, then grinned as he remembered a picture he had seen on diskette. Aluria shifted again, moaning gently as she felt herself changing back. The clothing vanished, leaving her standing naked in front of Andrew. There was a soft smile on his lips as he visualized what he had to see. Her body grew larger, more muscular yet retaining a soft, feminine appearance. Across her body fur began to appear, initially white but quickly turning orange and black. Her face stretched out slightly, taking on a feline cast, muzzle and whiskers taking shape. She growned low as a long tail appeared from behind her, quickly flicking in the air. Andrew watched in rapt fascination. If anything was making him believe this was real, it was this. He stared as her breasts became fur covered as well, growing in size until they were quite impressive. Long golden hair fell down behind her shoulders, then with a sudden shudder Aluria staggered a bit, leaning against the wall. Andrew bolted out of his chair, quickly reaching out to help her. He wasn't surprised when he touched her, finding that it was really fur on her body. She growned softly, then turned to look at him with cat eyes. "Oh my gods," she purred, looking down at her hands... paws. She looked back up at Andrew, who was staring intently at her as well. "Is this... what you intended?" Andrew shook his head, clearing it as best he could. "I didn't expect this, but my gods, it's real." He ran his hands across her arms, feeling the soft fur. Both were startled as she started purring from the caresses. "Don't stop," she pleaded. "It feels so... different." She stretched her arms, flexing about then giggling as her tail tickled his legs by accident. He watched her stretching, trying not to start at her too much, then chuckled and shook his head. "Gods, a sexy tigress. I know folks who'd be going insane right now from the sight." "Good," she purred. "Because I love you're wanting to go insane from me." She stepped closer, and before he could move away, planted a very warm kiss on his lips. Despite the fact that he wasn't really meant for kissing, he responded in kind after a few seconds. She wrapped her arms around him, pressing close against his chest and rumbled in pleasure from the closeness. He felt himself responding in kind, somewhat shocked and surprised yet wanting this to happen. He stared into her eyes, then whispered. "So giggled softly. "Now we both find out what we've done." Andrew laughed and kissed her nose, making her whiskers twitch. "Does this mean I'm going to have a tiger in bed for once?" "Tigress," she corrected him. Despite the surreal feel, he couldn't help but grin. "Hope I'm up for this." Aluria laughed and hugged him tightly. "Feels like it to me," she said, nibbling on his ear. Andrew laughed loudly, then grinned. Without saying a word he led her into the bedroom, and closed the door.

Friday

The ringing of a phone woke Andrew out of a sound sleep. He grumbled low, and started reaching out to the handset on a nearby nightstand.

"Hello."

"Andrew? It's Ed."

Andrew looked at the clock. 7:53am. "Ed, it's almost 8am. Couldn't you have waited?"

"Sorry, did I wake you up?"

Andrew turned over in bed, looking at the sleeping form of Aluria. The night's activities came back in a rush as he saw that she was still very much the tigress, purring softly.

"To be honest, Ed, I have company here."

There was a giggle on the other end. "Who whoo, our lone wolf actually is getting some tail for tonight?"

Ed's statement made Andrew chuckle. "In more ways than one, and you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Save it for another night. Anyways, CNG's server crashed last night. Major crash. They're trying to recover, but they think they lost all the rest... I need to know if you've got copies of them."

Andrew sat up in bed, making Aluria stir slightly. "Yah, I've got them on a Zip disk here. They want a copy I take it?"

"You got it. Go down to their office and reinstall it on a local machine there. Their MIS director can do the reinstall without any problems. He just wants to make sure the files get where HELL have a backup this time."

"As long as they're paying for this."

Ed chuckled. "Oh, they're paying. Believe me. Nothing in the contract covering restoring lost files, and it's clear they are responsible for it."

"Ok, ok. I'll get dressed and head over to their offices. Tell them I'll be there at 10am."

"Gotcha. Give the lucky lady a hug and kiss from me, and when I see you later on." The line went dead, and Andrew hung up the phone.

Sighing, he was just about to slip out of bed when two furry arms wrapped about his waist and pulled him back. "Leaving already?" Aluria purred, snuggling against him.

For a few minutes they lay there, snuggling. Then Andrew finally responded, sighing.

"Yah, I need to go here. Work related problem that I have to take care of."

Aluria looked disappointed, then smiled. "But you'll be back, won't you?"

"Oh, I'll be back, dear. And when I do come back, we'll see what else we can do together. Sounds good?"

Aluria grinned. "Oh, it sounds very good."

"Glad you agree." Andrew winced slightly and looked at his chest, where several thin claw marks were left. Aluria looked a bit chagrined at that, eyes downcast.

"Sorry, but I couldn't help myself."

Andrew instead smiled and kissed her lightly. "It's ok. And right now, you should be something other than a walking furry wet dream." Aluria shivered slightly, and slowly reverted back into her human form, only keeping the golden hair. She sighed softly, rubbing her arms and looking behind her.

"I'm already missing the fur and tail," she commented. Lying down off of the bed herself, she arched her back and shook herself.

"Don't worry," Andrew commented as he rummaged in the closet. "You'll have it back soon enough. Right now, I do need to get ready for this job."

Whistling idly, Andrew headed into the bathroom, taking a good hot shower. When he exited, he smelled breakfast being fixed and smiled. He sauntered back to the kitchen, where Aluria was already eating breakfast.

Two eggs and toast later, Andrew gave Aluria a warm kiss at the door. "Go ahead and look through the books and magazines again, dear. I want to hear what ideas you'd want to try and see if they mesh with the ideas I've had as well."

"I'll do that, Andrew," Aluria smiled, then closed the door. Andrew made sure it was locked, then headed down the street to the bus stop.

Several hours later, Andrew walked up the steps to his home. It had been much, much worse than expected, having to rebuild the entire web site from backups. But at least the job was done, and the paycheck to come would be well worth it.

He opened up the door, and leaned against it. "Gah, I hate my work sometimes." He shook his head, and headed inside to see Aluria again with all sorts of magazines and books around her. Grinning, he stepped carefully and kissed her in greeting. "So what have you been thinking about?"

"A lot." She stood up and hugged him tightly, then brought him down to the floor. "How can so many people have the same sort of interest in forms and shapeshifting?"

That managed to get a chuckle out of Andrew. "It's a long story. Why don't we discuss it over dinner? Did you get something to eat earlier?"

"I come on, fruit and vegetable, and some of the crackers." She pointed to the open house. "Andrew, causing Andrew again."

"So come on, let's get you looking presentable and head down to Napoleon House. I feel like getting something special for dinner."

Aluria smiled and winked. The books and magazines went back in place, and she wore a long, green dress that hugged her in all the right spots. Andrew grinned and nodded, giving her another warm kiss, then together they headed out of the house.

Napoleon House stood at the corner of Chartres and Conti, just across from the old State Courthouse. The place got its name from the fact that back in the early 1800's several citizens of New Orleans including Jean Lafitte fought the place while planning to spring Napoleon out of exile. Although it didn't happen, the house remained a landmark, and more recently a restaurant.

Requesting a quiet table, they were seated in a corner, near where the fishtank stood. Andrew looked at the fish for a moment, smiling to see a few new ones. Then gave his attention back to Aluria and the menu. "So why do so many people want to be different?" Aluria asked while looking at the menu. "I'd think that most would be satisfied with what they are." "To be a few more," he replied. "But there's some who always want to be something else for reasons. Personal reasons. A dream. To see what being someone or something else would be like. Escapism. A lot of the magic has left this world, and some wish it would come back." He sighed softly, laying down his menu. "I'm like that myself, sometimes. Wishing I could be something different, even if just for a while. A wolf, a lion, a fox, a tree, whatever might be interesting and unusual." Aluria nodded and was about to make a comment when the waitress came over. Andrew ordered a steak dinner, and she ordered the chicken salad. Drinks were quickly brought, and they were left alone once more. She slipped her wine, then looked at Andrew again. "What would you do if you could change forms?" Andrew sighed softly. "I don't know," he admitted. "Likely I'd want to try quite a few changes, but exactly what." Andrew smiled, then looked up at Aluria. "I've been to the kid in a candy shop with \$5 and everything's a penny." Aluria smiled at the analogy, nodding in understanding. "But if you could, would you do it?" "Probably would," he said. "I mean, I'd like to try. But I know it's not possible." "Don't say that," she chided. "If it's possible for me, it's certainly possible for you." "Yes, but you're a djinna, dear. I'm not." "Doesn't matter. Remember, I can affect you with my magic." Andrew mullied it over. He remembered her mentioning it, but didn't take it seriously then. "I'd have to think about it," he said slowly. "It's not something I'd want to rush into..." Aluria surprised him by agreeing. "Don't rush into it. Take your time and think about it. I'd like you to, but I have my own selfish reasons there." Andrew laughed and leaned over the table, giving her a light kiss. "And some very good reasons, no?" "Oh, a few." Andrew smiled, giving him a shy wink. "Last night being a very good one to begin with." "It was expansion for you, wasn't it?" Andrew smiled softly, remembering the sight of her over him, and some body good reasons, no?" "Oh, a few." Andrew smiled, giving him a shy wink. "Last night being a very good one to begin with." "It was good for you, wasn't it?"

"Go on, don't apologize, you're enjoying it just as much as I was." Andrew grinned as a response, then kissed her lightly again. "Well, this is very nice. A lot better than any other owner I've had." Andrew winked at her, then took up with their tray, the small making both of their mouths water. "Enjoy your dinner, and if you need anything else, just ask." The waitress smiled and left, leaving them alone once more. Andrew dug into his meal, occasionally watching Aluria enjoying hers. They took their time, chatting idly as they finished their meals. Aluria asked about Andrew's upbringing and hobbies, while Andrew questioned her about her past owners and experiences she's had. Late afternoon turned into evening, and finally they departed Napoleon House, feeling a touch hollow. They wandered down the streets, pausing in Jackson Square to look at the buildings bathed in lights, then down to the French Market to pick up some fresh fruits. Finally, they ended up back home, setting down in the living room once more. Andrew walked back into the kitchen, then reappeared with two glasses of wine. Aluria smiled and took a sip, then found a place for her to sit