

**Excerpt from young adult novel *There on the Sand*.**

Sweat soaked Bea's bandana as she polished the midnight-black shell of her herdsorpion, Karo. It was noon, or sometime close to it, the slice of day when the narrow Trak a thousand feet above called its shadows back to their shortest and the only shade to be found in the Sand was under the trestles themselves. Karo slapped her wide claws on the dirt in frustration and tugged against her tail-hitch. The knot held without tightening, just the way Papa taught her it would.

"Easy, girl. Easy," Bea cooed, shifting over to Karo's front side to offer her a hand to sniff.

"Chik-chik-chik," chittered Karo in reply, in a tone Bea knew meant *Why are we baking in the sun? It's naptime*. All scorpions seek the dark in daytime desert, and Karo's instincts were calling her to the cool shade nearby, beneath the ancient tangle of lumber and sandcrete that made up the base of the Trak. Bea could relate. She wanted nothing more than to throw off Karo's hitch and scurry over with her, to nap in the Trak-shade with her head laid against Karo's sunwarmed backplates.

But Karo's shell needed scouring, and doing the job right meant doing it at noon, or sometime close to it. The merciless blaze made every scrap of perl on Karo's shell twinkle. *Twinkle like diamonds in a mine*, Bea thought, smiling. The tedium of shell-scouring went down smoother with a little poetic flair. Karo, satisfied with having registered her displeasure, settled three hundred pounds of arthropod down into the warm sand.

After a moment of working the ball of her thumb against a particularly thick lump of perl, Bea's smile faded. *Diamonds* felt like a lie. It reminded her that she'd never so much as seen a diamond, let alone a whole mine's worth. The only gemstones in Bea's memory were the big ruby earrings Miss Jezzle wore sometimes when she came around the ranch, especially when she meant to invite Papa to dinner. Karo's perl wasn't red, though, so that wouldn't do. Bea stared at Karo's shell, considering.

*Twinkling like stars at the solstice.*

There. That felt true.