

# **Dragon's Heir**

## **Sierra Dafoe**

All rights reserved.  
Copyright ©2006 Sierra Dafoe

**No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared by any electronic or mechanical means, including but not limited to printing, file copying or sharing, and email, without prior written permission from Changeling Press LLC. Willful violation of this policy will result in suspension of account privileges and will lead to prosecution.**

**WARNING: Illegal files may contain viruses.**

ISBN (10) 1-59596-510-6  
ISBN (13) 978-1-59596-510-3  
Formats Available:  
HTML, Adobe PDF,  
MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:  
Changeling Press LLC  
PO Box 1046  
Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046  
[www.ChangelingPress.com](http://www.ChangelingPress.com)

Editor: Chrissie Henderson  
Cover Artist: Bryan Keller



This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

## Prologue

Lara had always loved the wind, the sense of it caressing her skin as it swept past her, setting her blood to tingling in a way she'd never quite been able to explain. Now, of course, she knew why it had always delighted her so.

She wasn't, as she'd always thought, simply Lara Sutherland, the struggling young artist who'd eked a living from painting pictures of the dragons she'd always fantasized about. In fact, she was Elara Southerlin, daughter of the Dragon Queen Melgara who sat on the high marble throne of Wind Castle, and the reason why she'd always fantasized about dragons was the same as the reason she'd instinctively loved the wind -- she was a dragon herself.

At times, Lara could hardly resist the urge to pinch herself. How good could life possibly get?

Flexing her shoulder muscles, she swept downward, intensely conscious of the keen mountain air beneath her wings bearing her up as tangibly as water rushing under the hull of a ship. Behind her, Rand flew steadily, his massive red wings sweeping the air in powerful strokes. On her left and a dragon length above, Darrek knifed, as black and deadly as a hawk, through the cerulean sky.

Just for fun, Lara darted ahead, grinning at the scowl in Darrek's onyx eyes as, with the merest flick of her wings, she shot past him.

Until Darrek and Rand had shown up at the door of her modest rented cottage on Cape Cod, Lara had had no idea who -- or what -- she was. In a ploy to end the decades-long feud between their two clans, Melgara had hidden her infant daughter on Earth and then, twenty years later, had sent the dark, tempestuous Hausther heir and the massive, redheaded Rand to find her and compete for her affections. The one who won her would become her husband, while the other would be banished forever.

That had been the plan, anyway.

Lara chuckled to herself as Darrek, unwilling to be outdone in anything, arrowed after her. Dancing on the wind, she glided before him, banking on a thermal to cut directly across his path. She laughed as he fumbled midair, swerving awkwardly to avoid her. The blade-like barbs running the length of his spine bristled in irritation.

Below them, Rand continued steadily on, watching their antics with a fond, amused eye.

Spreading her wings, Lara soared higher into the glistening sky. Behind her, steep, forested mountainsides rose northward toward the harsh, craggy ranges of the Hausther domain, where she and Rand had just spent the past fourteen days with Darrek's clan. And before her, the river Andida sparkled, snaking its way through the verdant central hills of Djarera, with here and there a lake gleaming in the distance.

There was a wildness in flying, a heady exhilaration that stirred her to her very core. Feeling the wind stroke along her body, she wondered, and not for the first time, what it would be like to mate as a dragon -- to couple midair, feeling her lover thrust into her with every mighty beat of his wings.

The idea was intoxicating, almost hypnotic. She could *feel* him, the phantom dragon who mounted her, his wing strokes matching hers as together they glided, soaring on the winds of a passion so intense it left her breathless with desire...

It wasn't Darrek with her in that vision. Or Rand. Oh, she loved them, both of them. Absolutely. And she loved making love with them -- Darrek with his fierce, haughty temper; gentle, massive Rand, always so eager to please. She loved feeling their arms around her, their hands rousing her -- and each other -- to peaks of delight she'd never experienced with a human male, their lips gliding over her hot, naked flesh...

But she wasn't *in* love with either of them.

Who was he, the shadowy lover of her dreams? Was he only a fantasy? As heir to the throne, she'd been presented to the four clans, meeting -- or so it felt -- every dragon

in Djarera in the process. But whoever he was, the mighty lover she sensed hovering behind her like a storm over the horizon, he wasn't among them.

If he even existed.

Once again, Lara felt the daydream teasing along her thoughts. She gave herself to it, losing herself in the fiery eroticism of that soaring, yearning flight. Desire flooded through her, breathtaking in its suddenness, encasing her in a world of wind, heat and wildness where she saw nothing, felt nothing but his breath upon her neck, his fierce, demanding thrusts...

*Damn!*

Darrek shot past, twisting his neck as he flew to flash her a sly, triumphant smile. Lara scowled. *Darrek! No fair -- I was thinking!*

*Oh? And what were you thinking about so intently, Elara? My kisses, perhaps?*

*No, she mind-spoke back with a sharp, teasing edge to her tone, I was thinking how well you suck Rand's cock at my command.*

Without replying, Darrek whipped his head forward and slashed the air with furious strokes of his wings. Lara grinned in triumph -- although it was hardly fair to needle him, she supposed. He was probably never going to be comfortable with that side of himself, or the obvious delight he took in Rand's huge, muscular body.

Oh, she *did* love them. Just as she loved Djarera -- the world the dragons inhabited -- and flying, and, well, *everything*.

The erotic daydream slid away, and she felt the cool mountain air rushing past. Throwing herself into it, she arced like a falcon against the sky, following the curving range southeastward toward the towering central peak upon which Wind Castle stood.

In delight, she swooped in the air, painting her exhilaration upon the wind. Her life was perfect. Absolutely perfect. She couldn't imagine anything that could spoil her joy at being here, at being alive, at being exactly who and what she was.

\* \* \*

From a perch on a cliff that was not, strictly speaking, really *there*, a cold, determined consciousness watched the young princess in flight. Her hide gleamed like

warm honey in the sunlight, and she darted through the air as easily as a swallow, so playful, so carefree.

So very young.

Iron-hard talons scraped furrows in the stone -- stone which existed in a plane separated from Djarera by a tissue-thin membrane, as tenuous and permeable as a cloud. He could *see* the sunlight pouring down, streaking the hills and little lakes with its life-giving warmth.

But it could not touch him.

Here, everything was cold, so cold that the very touch of the ground seared like fire, and the stones upon which he crouched held not one scrap of life -- not a twist of grass, not even moss. There was not so much as a trickle of water or whisper of wind to mar the dead, leaden stillness. There was nothing.

How he hated this prison, this half-life! This shadow world to which the bitch-queen had consigned him, locking him away in this timeless void! Rage beat along his icy veins, tensing his corded muscles, his huge, virile strength.

For he *was* strong, strong as the bones of these barren, twisted mountains. Strong enough to tear a passage back to Djarera -- he was certain of that. He could do it.

Only to be shut away again, as he had been before.

In twenty years, his fury at that defeat had diminished no more than his strength.

He was tired of this world. Tired of these shadows. He was cold, cold to the icy marrow of his being. But he would not risk escape prematurely. Not when Melgara could still lock him away as she'd done the first time. Not till he was *sure*.

His gaze returned to that graceful, golden form.

So this was Elara, the long-hidden princess. He smiled -- a motion of his lips that failed to lighten his inflexible, heartless gaze. Enormous fangs, designed to rend and devour, gleamed hungrily in his massive jaw.

She was his key, he knew it. Knew it in the frigid marrow of his bones. That shining, carefree creature flitting on the wind...

Yes.

He would have her. And he would have Djarera. And it -- and everything in it -- would be his. Including a certain young princess who shone like the very sun itself. She was warmth, and flame, and fire -- but he had learned one thing, in the frozen confines of his prison.

He had learned that only ice endures forever.

## Chapter One

"What?" Elara stared up at Melgara in shock. "No way! I'm not marrying Darrek!"

"Rand, then."

"No! I don't want to marry either one of them!" Folding her arms, Lara glared up at her mother, her chin jutting rebelliously. "Mother, we've been *through* this!"

"No, we haven't." Melgara sighed, and smoothed the long white fabric of her skirt. Having this meeting in the throne room had been a mistake, she realized. It made everything she said sound like a royal order.

"Yes, we did! When I first came, I told you --"

"You told me you'd go back to Earth and never return if I exiled either of them."

"No, I told you I refused to choose."

Melgara nodded. "I can appreciate that, Lara. And I am proud of you for managing to end that pointless feud. But it is your *job* to safeguard your subjects, your land, and that means, among other things, providing an heir to the throne. Surely you must see --"

"I *do* see. That doesn't mean I have to like it." In an abrupt change of mood, Lara sank to a chair, propped her chin on one hand, and stared glumly at the ground.

She looked so young at that moment, both furious and miserable, her lower lip pooched out like a sulky child's, that Melgara couldn't help feeling a pang of regret for all the years they'd lost. Rising, she descended from the dais and drew up a chair alongside her daughter. "None of this has been fair to you. First I send you to be raised on a foreign world, ignorant of everything that you are, and then yank you back without so much as a by your leave --"



"It's not that. I love being here." Lara shrugged, dismissing her apology. "It's just..."

"It's just that you're not in love with either of them." Lara looked up at her, surprised. Reaching out, Melgara stroked the soft chestnut mass of her daughter's hair. "Oh, Elara. If you want, I'll bid every male dragon in Djarera to Wind Castle for you to choose from. But if neither Rand nor Darrek can capture your heart, I can't imagine who will."

The defiant glint was back in Lara's eyes. "But why do I have to marry *now*?"

Melgara dropped her hand to her side. "Because whoever you mate with will become heir to this kingdom until your children are grown. And," she continued, holding up her hand to forestall Lara's interruption, "you don't have forever to choose."

Something in her tone caught Lara's attention. "Why not?"

Melgara bit her lip, lightly. This wasn't easy to talk about. "Because unlike humans, dragons go into season. Into heat. Do you understand?"

Lara's eyes widened. Then she shrugged. "So put me in a kennel for two weeks."

"It's not that easy." Standing, Melgara turned away. Her voice was low, tense. "*Khef*, we call it, the mating frenzy. And it does not pass. It grows stronger, and stronger, until you would shatter the walls of any prison I could devise. With us, sex in human form is a pleasure, a diversion. The drive to procreate is something else altogether."

She turned back, fixing her daughter with a piercing look. "You are grown, Elara. And soon you will begin to feel the urge to mate as a dragon -- if you haven't already." She peered closely at her daughter, and Lara blushed. "I see."

Shadows were creeping slowly through the long hall. Moving to a wall-sconce, Melgara blew gently on the unlit torch. Flames sprang up, casting flickering light over her face. As she spoke, her thoughts turned inward, back toward a memory of such incandescent passion that not even the passage of a quarter of a century could pale it.

"It will get worse. Eventually the need will become irresistible, until you would rut in the mud with any toothless, drunken, wing-broken imbecile, if that's what was

available." Turning to face her daughter squarely, she let the crudity of her words sink home.

When Lara blanched, Melgara felt tears prickle at the corners of her eyes. When had she gotten so... so *heartless*? But as much as she sympathized with Lara's plight, she wasn't about to let her daughter put the entire kingdom in jeopardy. Melgara kept her voice cold and steady. "Nor is that all."

"What else?" Lara asked faintly.

"When you enter *khef*, every unattached male within a hundred miles will fight tooth and claw to have you if you're still unclaimed. Is it your wish to watch Rand and Darrek rip each other to shreds?"

Her daughter knotted her fists in her lap. "All right! I get it."

But by the clenched, stubborn line of her jaw Melgara could tell she hadn't. Not really.

She would, though. Let the real pressure of full-fledged *khef* hit her, and she'd understand all too well.

If only she didn't understand too late...

Surely Elara wouldn't let it come to that. Her daughter, who had already proven herself to be both brave and resourceful, would realize her responsibilities and do what was proper. Studying her, Melgara couldn't resist trying to reinforce that message, although her daughter's sulky demeanor was discouraging to say the least. "Elara, one day I will not be here."

"I know."

The words were sullen, muttered. Melgara ignored them and nodded at the high, carved seat at the top of the dais. "On that day, you will have to ascend to that --"

"I *know*."

-- and it will be your duty to make sure that the one who follows *you* to the throne --"

"I know!"

-- will prove as capable and responsible as I'm sure you will be."

With a last, meaningful glare, Melgara spun on her heel and strode from the room.

\* \* \*

Quivering with fury, Lara stomped down the hall. To her right, graceful arches carved with birds, vines and flowers opened onto the clean, silent evening, looking westward to where the last blaze of sunset was fading rapidly into night.

How could her mother deliver such a scathing reprimand with what appeared to be a compliment? The contrast between her words and the meaning behind them had flayed Lara to the core, making her nerves sing with adrenaline that, since her mother had then stalked out, was left with no outlet.

God damn it anyway! She hadn't even *disagreed*. She understood well enough what Melgara was saying. But --

But something inside her could feel itself dying. A dream, a vision... And it was breaking her heart.

*But what if that's all it is, Lara? A dream? A fantasy?*

She scowled at the traitorous thought. Surely -- *surely* the yearning inside her was more than just wishful thinking. The vision of passion and fire that haunted her more and more frequently...

No. She *wouldn't* let go of it. Not yet. Not now. There *had* to be another answer.

She was in a fine, foul mood by the time she reached her own room -- an enormous, Byzantine chamber that was larger than some art galleries she'd been in. A shallow declivity some two feet deep took up over half the floor space, lined with cushions and thick, soft rugs -- a sort of sleeping pit, large enough to accommodate a full-grown dragon. Or two.

*Or three*, she thought wryly. Though they hadn't tried *that* particular experiment yet. Her species was only fertile in dragon form, and, having had no wish to find herself pregnant, Lara had been quite happy to restrict her lovemaking to human shape -- so far.

Rand and Darrek were sprawled companionably, both completely naked -- Darrek in the pit, his lean, sculpted form draped across a pillow almost as large as he was, and Rand lying on his stomach on the edge with his chin resting on his folded arms. The rolling muscles of his shoulders and powerful swell of his ass caught gleams of light from the torches around the walls, and his thick, wavy hair fell like a tumble of fire down his back.

At the sight of them, Lara completely forgot her intention to slam the door in her pique. They were so handsome! Each of them in his own way an ideal of male beauty -- Darrek all alabaster skin and arrogant cheekbones and midnight-black eyes, as chiseled and graceful as a statue come to life; Rand as huge and rugged as a mountain, all rolling muscle and heavy, masculine features, but with an easy smile that lit his turquoise eyes like sunlight, softening the line of his strong, broad chin. Every time she saw them they took her breath away.

Why couldn't she be in love with one of them? It would make life so much simpler.

They looked up as she entered, and Darrek's black brows shot up at the tension in her face. Rand immediately drew himself into a sitting position on the rim.

"Elara, what's wrong?"

She'd stormed through the door, fully intending to tell them -- and now she couldn't. She just couldn't. What would it do to them, to the friendship they'd built up over the past seven weeks, to know that once again they were rivals, both in competition for the dubious prize of her hand?

Muttering "I don't want to talk about it," she slumped to a seat on the floor of the pit, leaning back between Rand's massive thighs. Darrek regarded her warily, but Rand dropped his hands to her shoulders and began massaging them.

Lara dropped her head back, sighing, feeling the knot in her stomach begin to unclench as his strong, heavy fingers worked over her muscles with a gentleness one would never expect by looking at his size.

Darrek tilted his head, and his hair, as smooth and straight as corn silk, slid like a veil across his sharp, hawk-like features. Lara loved his hair -- it fell almost to his waist, so glossy black it looked wet even in sunlight. He peered at her intently from behind it. "So I take it the happy homecoming wasn't so happy."

"I said I don't want to talk about it." She didn't even want to think about it. Not now. Not tonight.

Later.

He studied her a moment longer, then shrugged. "Suit yourself." Grasping her ankle, he tugged off her boot and stroked one long, aristocratic finger along the curve of her arch, making her foot twitch.

"Darrek!" She tried to yank her foot away. All she wanted was to relax into Rand's soothing touch, but Darrek held her foot tighter, and did it again. "Damn it, Darrek!"

She kicked out viciously, shoving him back off the pillow. Rand chuckled, behind her. "It isn't funny, Rand!"

The two of them glanced at each other. Darrek smiled, his thin lips curving like the edge of a saber. Rand's turquoise-blue eyes sparkled with merriment.

"She's in a temper, Rand."

Rand's chuckle rumbled in his throat. "Can't have that, can we, Darrek?"

"Guys, if you even *think* you're going to --"

Too late. With a deceptively quick motion, Rand slid down into the pit and grabbed her wrists. Pinioning them behind her, he tugged her back against him while Darrek -- Darrek the traitor -- seized her thighs, straddled them quickly, and dug his long, agile fingers into her ribs.

Flailing futilely, Lara shrieked, twisting against Rand's unbreakable grip as Darrek tickled her relentlessly. Her nerves, already strung tight by the argument with her mother, blazed with outraged sensation, and the laughter torn from her throat made her gut ache. "No!" she gasped. "Stop it! Dar --"

Instead, he tickled her harder. Lara's blood pounded in her ears, and tears slipped down her cheeks as she writhed and shrieked, her body racked by torment. She thrashed, tugged, rolled, until she was choking with fury and exertion. Finally she snapped her head back and screamed, "*Stop!*"

Mercifully, he did. Lara kicked at him once, feebly, then collapsed back against Rand, her chest heaving, her cheeks flushed. The warm, sturdy feel of Rand's broad chest behind her was soothing -- not that she was forgiving him for *his* part in this any time soon!

Almost apologetically, Darrek gently tugged off her other boot, and she closed her eyes as he began massaging her feet. She could feel Rand's breath, warm on her neck, and his hands slid beneath her shirt to stroke her soft belly. Her nerves jangled and twitched, still preternaturally alert from the torture they'd subjected her to, but slowly her heartbeat eased, leaving her with a strong desire to cry.

It wasn't fair. It totally wasn't fair. She loved them both so much... and yet not enough. Not the way she should have if she was going to marry one of them.

She was hardly aware of Rand's hand sliding upward until it grazed her breast. The soft touch sent a jolt along her oversensitive skin, and she gasped, opening her eyes to the velvety darkness of Darrek's midnight gaze.

Darrek's focus slid past her to Rand, and a smile curved the thin, finely shaped line of his lips. "What do you think, Aureora?" he asked. "Does she still need cheering up?"

Immediately Rand's burly arms slid around her again -- but this time she had no energy to fight him. And no wish to, either. She was suddenly aware of the heat of his erection pressed firmly against the small of her back, and didn't struggle when he pulled her upward, half onto his lap, so that her ass was a few inches off the floor.

Lara watched, feeling a sudden anticipation unfold in her belly as Darrek undid the belt of her trousers (she doubted she'd ever become comfortable with the long, flowing skirts her mother wore) and slid them off. The heavy silk of his hair trailed over her thighs as he bent, lowering his mouth to the vee of her crotch.

His tongue darted out, brushing the soft, chestnut curls covering her mons. An electrifying quiver shook her, like the first salvo of a fireworks display, and she arched her back. Rand took advantage of the motion and quickly tugged her shirt off, then clamped his hands on her hips and pulled her more tightly against him.

Lara stared downward, her eyelids heavy with arousal, as Darrek caressed her thighs lightly, spreading them open, then lifted her legs and draped them across Rand's outstretched ones. She felt like she was sitting in a warm, living, muscular chair -- a chair with hands, she thought dizzily as Rand slid his palms upward, along the sides of her ribcage, then curled his fingers inward to caress her breasts.

Propping himself up on his elbows, Darrek lowered his mouth again to her cunt even as Rand closed his fingers on her aching nipples. She moaned, and felt Darrek's lips spread in a smile. Then, hungrily, he jabbed his tongue at her clit, making her buck.

Rand followed his lead, squeezing her nipples fiercely, then playing his fingers across their erect surface in a feathery, teasing touch. Already she was gasping, her strung nerves painfully sensitive to each shift of pressure, each stab of arousal. The heat from Rand's cock, snuggled against the curve of her ass, seemed to penetrate her skin, sinking inward to some hot, aching point behind her tailbone, and she was acutely aware of the empty space under her ass, a void that seemed to thrum with unspoken possibilities.

Somewhere within her was a strange, yearning emptiness she didn't know how to fill. A low, aroused growl thrummed in her throat, and she leaned harder against the plane of Rand's broad chest, pressing her shoulders back and raising her breasts to his fingers, urging him to squeeze them harder.

Instead, he traced slow, lazy circles around her aching nipples, and licked her earlobe as he watched Darrek taste her cunt.

Darrek licked at her inner folds, stroking playfully over the hot, damp opening between. She wanted him to stab his tongue inward, penetrate that throbbing entrance, but instead he merely traced its perimeter, groaning with satisfaction at the taste of her trickling juices.

Delicately, like a cat, he lapped them, following their path down to the smooth, tender skin between her cunt and her ass. The emptiness inside her throbbed, growing stronger even as the heat from her clit flared like a bonfire. Then Darrek spread her thighs wider and buried his face against her cunt.

Desire flooded her groin, and she hung, boneless and unresisting, in the curve of Rand's arms. His hands savaged her breasts, squeezing their fullness, then gripped her nipples in a vicious pinch that sent a bolt of white hot lust ripping through her. Whimpering, she let her eyelids fall closed, and light exploded behind them as Darrek clamped his lips around her clit, suckling it as intently as a nursing calf. His tongue lashed across it, making her head loll as she moaned, drowning in the waves of sensation beating through her.

It wasn't enough, though. She wanted more. *More what?* She didn't know. Something was unfurling inside her, something tense and feral, like a panther preparing to spring. Something voracious, demanding...

Following its urging, she pulled herself from Rand's arms and rolled onto all fours. Feeling Darrek rise to his knees behind her, she arched her back, mewling like a cat, and the thing inside her smiled in triumph at the sound of his low, agonized groan.

Reaching out, she grabbed at Rand's hip, tugging him to his knees, and guided his shaft to her mouth.



## Chapter Two

She adored Rand's cock. It was, in fact, a marvel, so huge and thick she'd frozen in amazement when she first saw it. Hung like a horse? Hell, Rand was hung like a *dragon*.

He tasted of velvet and salt, sweet and metallic all together. She licked the swollen purple curve of his glans, wanting to devour him, to swallow him whole. Opening her jaw as wide as she could, Lara slid her mouth around his erection, feeling it swell against her lips as she engulfed its tip.

Slowly, rocking back and forth on her hands and knees, she took him deeper, inch by inch, feeling his whole body quiver in his effort to remain still, to resist the urge to plunge himself into her in one hard, choking thrust.

His tip pressed against the back of her mouth and Lara paused, feeling her throat spasm reflexively. Her jaw tightened as she swallowed, and Rand groaned at the pressure. The first, precipitate spurt of his semen flooded her tongue, and she sucked hungrily, voraciously, breathing through her nostrils, loving the taste of it and wanting more, more...

Her whole body ached with unfamiliar desires. It was as if a huge, nebulous void had unfolded inside her, an uncharted land begging to be explored. She was suddenly aware of Darrek's hands massaging her ass cheeks, stroking slowly between the sodden folds of her opening and then trailing lightly up the delicate pathway between her cunt and her ass, over and over. He caressed the small, tight band of muscle between her upthrust cheeks, spreading her body's juices over it, prodding it gently.

She froze, a wave of desire roaring through her so strongly her arms trembled beneath her, and her breasts seemed to swell with arousal, heavy and full.

Yes. Yes, she wanted this. She wanted them to fill her, to fuck her in every way possible. She wanted to bring them, over and over, to the point where they couldn't take any more.

Tilting her hips, she arched her back wantonly, and heard Darrek's breath hiss through his teeth. Closing her eyes, she imagined what he saw, looking down -- her ass tilted up, her cheeks spread wide, beckoning, welcoming...

With a harsh, grating moan, Darrek rocked his hips forward, pressing his throbbing cockhead against her.

Grabbing her ass, he spread her cheeks wider, pushing ever so gently against that tight, yearning opening. Fire washed through her as he eased just the very tip of his cock inside, and she nudged back against him, urging him on.

His cock prodded inward, as hard as steel, as hot as molten lava, and Lara shuddered at the intensity of the sensation. Lubricated with her own juices, his shaft invaded her, sending a tremulous delirium flooding through her as his cock penetrated, inch by inch, filling her in a way his fingers could never do. The pressure was intoxicating, spreading her open, slowly pushing deeper, deeper...

Darrek paused, his body rigid with lust, and she hung suspended between them, feeling herself on the brink of some unknown chasm, some secret valley deep within herself. Moaning, she swirled her tongue over Rand's swollen tip, begging him wordlessly. Gasping, he responded to the plea in her tone with a gentle flex of his hips that forced her jaw wider.

*Yes, she thought wildly, oh yes, that's right, fuck me! Fuck my mouth, split me open, fill my throat with your come...*

She hadn't meant to mind-speak, but he heard her anyway. The ragged, gravelly groan that escaped his lips made her close her eyes in delight. Burying his hands in her hair, he rocked forward, sending his cock deeper than she'd ever imagined possible.

Bracing herself on one arm, she raised a hand to his scrotum, tracing her fingers over the rock-hard swell of his balls. They were huge, distended with come, the pebbly skin stretched tight over their heavy, swollen mass. Egging him on, she closed her hand

around them, squeezing them lightly, and was rewarded by a deep, animal growl as he bucked in reaction.

*That's right, Rand. Fuck me hard. Come on, give me more!*

She squeezed again, harder, and his growl changed to a groan so full of need it sent her own arousal into a conflagration.

They were hers. *Hers*. They were helpless, both of them, trapped utterly by the force of her desire.

Tilting her hips, she drove Darrek just the merest fraction deeper inside her. He trembled, his thighs pressed against hers, his hands spasmodically squeezing her ass as he fought for self-control, and the wild thing inside Lara grinned in triumph. Nothing, nothing in the world, could make him pull away from her now.

He reached down between her thighs, running his fingers between her juice-soaked lips and spreading a fresh trail of moisture around her tight opening. Rocking back slightly, he coated his cock and, slick with renewed lubrication, pushed in again.

She arched to meet him, ramming her hips backward till she took him to the hilt. She heard him gasp aloud -- a sound that was half snarl, half plea. At the same time, she grabbed Rand's balls and dragged him forward, taking him as deep as she could, until her jaw was stretched so wide it burned. She held them there, Rand in her mouth and Darrek in her ass, feeling them arched above her, drawn tight as bowstrings, quivering with agony.

They would have died for her before. Now, they would *kill* for her -- without a second's hesitation.

Something deep inside her -- something savage and vital and greedy -- reveled at the thought.

Rand groaned, barely able to restrain the pulsing in his balls. He panted, trying desperately to resist the urge to plunge into her, fuck her mouth until his juices exploded outward, filling her, feeding her...

Something was wrong here. But the white-hot lust roaring through his mind made it very hard to think.

Tearing his gaze away from the sight of her lips, stretched tight around the turgid thickness of his shaft, Rand raised his head and found himself looking, instead, at Darrek. The Hausther heir's head was bent downward, his long, dark hair falling around his pale features and cascading over his taut, marble-smooth shoulders. His black eyes were half-lidded in erotic abandonment as he slid his cock with excruciating slowness in and out of Lara's tight ass.

*Winds!*

At the sight, Rand felt a rush of saliva inside his gaping mouth. His balls throbbed, growing even heavier. They dragged like lead at his groin as he bit his lip fiercely, trying to contain his involuntary cry.

His gaze fixed on Darrek's long fingers, digging into the sweet curves of Lara's hips as he thrust, grinding his cock deeper and deeper. His lean, chiseled torso flexed and tightened, the muscles in his chest gleaming with sweat. An almost overwhelming urge to lean forward and lick Darrek's tight, erect nipples filled Rand's mouth, and he groaned.

Darrek looked up at him, and Rand was trapped in the midnight blackness of that gaze, like a velvet vortex sucking him down to some dark, fiery plane where he seemed to see himself, propped on his knees as Elara was now, feeling Darrek plunge into him, feeling those lean, cool hands clenching *his* ass.

Rand felt his jaw go loose as a moan escaped him and, unable to stop himself, he rocked his hips forward, thrusting into the hot, damp embrace of Elara's mouth. Darrek's eyes burned into him, seeming to whisper in his mind, *You like that, Rand, don't you? You want that. You want me to fuck you, shove my cock deep inside you, shred the flesh from your bones, split you open till you scream...*

Winds, yes.

And Elara, below him, was urging him on, sucking hungrily at his shaft as she dragged his cock deeper, devouring him, consuming...

But she was... *distant* somehow. So was Darrek. There was a disquieting detachment in their eyes, an aloofness, as if Rand could have been anybody. As if *they* could have been anybody.

Rand's hips pistoned forward, beyond his control, caught in the sheer erotic force pouring off Lara, whirling around him, seizing him, consuming...

*No*, he thought again, somewhere deep in his mind, *this isn't right. This is...*

*Khef*. Elara was entering *khef*.

And Darrek, responding instinctively to the mating violence growing within her, was trapped in its frenzy.

*And you're not?*

Yes. No. Yes...

*No!*

With a jerk, Rand yanked his cock free, thrusting himself back from Lara, and tumbled to the cushions. She hissed, baring her teeth at him, glaring. Then her expression changed, twisting into a sly, mocking grin. Her eyes burned into his as she thrust back against Darrek, impaling herself on his swollen shaft. Once, twice, a third time she pushed backward, slamming her ass against his hips, and Rand saw all consciousness drain from Darrek's eyes as his features went lax, imprisoned utterly by the mindless ecstasy flooding his body.

Then, as if something had taken him over, his hands clamped down on her hips with an urgency that left Rand breathless, unable to move as he watched Darrek fuck Lara with a savagery that made Rand's head swim with desire.

Lara's cries spiraled upward. Her gaze flicked at him again, beckoning him to her; she was irresistible, utterly desirable. It should be *him* inside her, her eyes seemed to say, *him* crying out as her body clenched around him, dragging at his shaft, squeezing his cockhead...

Rand felt a black rage pulse in his brain as Darrek pistoned into her -- who was he? How *dare* he touch her? She was his, *his*! And by the Winds, he would have her!

Roaring, he sprang forward, leaping past Lara to grab at his rival. Burying his hand in that black, silky hair, he hauled backward, trying to snap Darrek's neck. But Darrek rolled with him, snarling, his talons raking Rand's side.

Rand shrieked in pain and fury, his form shredding, swelling into dragon shape. Thrusting himself up, he swiped at the puny two-legged creature before him, but already it was darkening, lengthening...

The other's tail lashed behind him, the iron-hard barb at the end shattering a column as he spun to face Rand, his black eyes narrowed in hate. Rand sneered, regarding his rival. Quick, yes, and barbed along spine and tail -- but *he* was the stronger.

Rand roared in anticipation.

"NO!"

Lara shrieked, the sound so high and shrill it lacerated her throat. She stared up in horror at the two bristling dragons, poised on the verge of throwing themselves at each other.

*Is it your wish to watch Rand and Darrek tear each other to shreds?*

No. God, no.

Lara gasped, fighting back tears.

When Rand had wrenched Darrek out of her, the shock had jolted her first into fury and then into horror as she watched their shapes ripple, expanding. Their eyes were glazed with hatred and arousal, both of them ready to spring at each other...

Panicked, not knowing what else to do, she darted between the two towering dragons. With shame and despair washing through her in sickening waves, she screamed at them like a mouse chattering at two charging bulls...

But it worked. Or *maybe* it worked. She saw Rand hesitate, saw a flicker of doubt in his turquoise eyes. Throwing herself before him, she whirled to face Darrek, glaring into those onyx eyes as if daring him to leap. She almost sobbed with relief as she felt Rand shift behind her, resuming human form. She sagged back against him, grateful for

his huge, steady strength as he supported her. Looming over her, Darrek screamed with rage and tried to swipe at Rand.

Wrapping her arms protectively around the Aureorean, she mind-spoke desperately. *Darrek, no! No! It's Rand! This is Rand!*

Darrek lunged forward, reaching past her -- and Lara did the only thing she could do. Letting go of the shape that was all she'd known for twenty years, she thrust herself upright, feeling her muscles thicken, her bones grow heavier.

Immediately, lust slammed against her mind, a fierce, almost intolerable craving, as pitiless and unstoppable as a tidal wave. The urgency she'd felt in human form was nothing in comparison -- a twig, a spindly branch. *This* was a battering ram, a massive fist that hammered relentlessly at every cell in her body.

*Khef.* The mating frenzy.

Oh God, what was she going to do?

Already it was lashing at her, eroding her resolution. She shrieked, baring her fangs, her wings scraping against the thirty-foot ceiling as she unfurled them, wanting to spring into flight, to provoke, to torment... to mate.

*No!*

She felt Darrek's excitement quicken, and thrust back her own. Raising her forepaw, she slapped at him brutally, rocking his muzzle back with the force of her blow.

*Darrek, listen to me! Don't do this! Change! Change back now!*

Looking at the madness in his eyes, she wasn't sure he could do it. Feeling the frenzy blazing in her own, she wasn't sure *she* could.

But she had to.

Closing her eyes, she concentrated, let go... and found herself standing in front of Rand, facing a black dragon who wavered like smoke... and shifted to the lean, handsome, haughty-looking youth who had once climbed through her window in the middle of the night.

Her knees gave way in sudden relief -- but neither of them noticed. Darrek stared past her at Rand, the blood draining from his face. The pleading in his eyes was as obvious and incontrovertible as the cracked chunks of marble scattered across the room.

"Rand..."

In three steps, Rand crossed the space between them and wrapped his arms around the Hausther heir. They clung to each other, quivering. Then Darrek raised his head, and the redheaded Aureorean bent down to him, gently brushing Darrek's lips with his own.

The flush sprang back to Darrek's high cheeks, or maybe it was simply that the rest of his face grew even paler. Standing there, still as stone within the loose circle of Rand's brawny arms, he looked more like a statue than ever. Cold, cold and still -- but the lifeblood beating in his cheeks told anyone with eyes to see exactly how deep -- how deep and how fiercely controlled -- Darrek Hausther's passions ran.

Rand had always been far easier to read. His broad, handsome features had an almost childlike transparency, even beneath the copper stubble shadowing his heavy jaw. He was one book you *could* judge by its cover -- honest, warm-hearted, and fundamentally decent.

*I guess it's true what they say,* Lara thought with an edge of bitter humor, *opposites do attract.*

Looking nervous as a teenager, Rand lowered his full, soft lips again to Darrek's thin ones. His hand trembled as he reached to brush a black, silken strand of hair back from Darrek's cheek.

Fighting back tears, Lara saw in her mind's eye a dark, windy beach; two angry young men lit by a pale October moon. "And make it count," she whispered to herself, feeling hot, heavy tears slide down her cheeks.

Darrek quivered, his entire frame shaking with what could be easily mistaken as rage. Then the tremors ran out of him, and he opened his mouth just a sliver. Rand moaned as Darrek's sharp, pointed tongue prodded between his lips.



At the sound, Darrek's hands came up, burying themselves in the thick, wavy mass of Rand's fiery hair, pulling him fiercely downward, his tongue plunging deep into Rand's waiting mouth. Mindlessly, overwhelmed, Rand slid his hands over Darrek's hard, muscled back, caressing his arms, his neck, his shoulders.

Oh, it was there. It was all there -- the rapture, the longing, the way their bodies arced together as if starved for each other's touch. Darrek driven, demanding; Rand soft, accepting, yielding, bending all the strength of his brawny frame to Darrek's demands, Darrek's desires... and even as she watched, Darrek raised those long, pale fingers to trace a possessive trail down the length of Rand's throat.

That was passion.

That was love.

That was everything she was never going to have.

"So," she said softly, the naked pain in her voice shearing through their desire more effectively than a shriek. They dropped their hands guiltily, pulling away from each other with a reluctance so tangible it made her throat ache. She smiled bitterly.

"So which one of you do I get to marry?"

Rand bent his head, his shoulders slumping as if a burden had just dropped upon them. Darrek's chin came up, his sharp features deathly pale again. Lara dropped her head to her knees, her shoulders quivering with the sobs she refused to loose.

Rand knelt beside her, patting her back awkwardly, his voice low and soothing. "It's all right, Elara. It's all right. It's just the way it has to be -- it won't change anything between us."

*Us.* He meant himself and Darrek. But it was too late -- everything had already changed.

*Khef,* Lara thought bleakly.

Mating frenzy.

*All right! I get it.*

Remembering her angry, headstrong words, she flushed with shame, seeing again the two of them roaring, ready to tear each other to bits...

No. She hadn't gotten it. She hadn't gotten it at all.

Furiously, she swiped at her tears, tightening her jaw against the agony that tore at her insides. And her body still thrummed like the bottom string of a harp, low and humming in the back of her mind.

*Khef.*

"Maybe you'd better tell me exactly what's going on."

Rand and Darrek glanced at each other, then looked away. Rand blushed fiercely. Darrek studied the ceiling.

*You'd think I just asked them to explain a girl's period.* Lara's lips twisted in a sour grin. Then she realized that, in a very real sense, she had. "Oh for God's sake, you two. Sit down, get over it, and tell me what I'm in for."

They did. As she listened, Lara felt all traces of humor, however bleak, slip away.

Most dragons settled on a spouse long before *khef* began, specifically to avoid what she was now facing. At the first stirrings of the mating frenzy, they coupled in dragon form for as long as it lasted, a period that Lara supposed could be compared to a human honeymoon. As soon as the female became pregnant, *khef* started to ease -- and as she almost invariably became pregnant on the first try, the most violent ravages of *khef* were thus avoided.

Pale and distracted, Darrek told her of couples who had resisted those early urgings, seeking the heightened thrill of the later stages of *khef*, often at a tragic cost. And when a female dragon was entering *khef* -- an occurrence that might happen anywhere from one to four times during her lifespan (although Rand told her one apocryphal tale of a female who had been said to enter *khef* twice a year, much to her exhausted husband's dismay) -- having sex in human form only exacerbated her condition.

"And you can't change into dragon form, either -- it only makes it worse."

"Tell me something I don't already know," Lara muttered, drawing her legs up and wrapping her arms around them. Hot, angry tears stung her tired eyes, and she wiped them away impatiently.

It wasn't fair. It just wasn't fair.

She *knew* she was being immature about this -- hell, plenty of women would happily rip her eyes out to have either Darrek *or* Rand. But...

But it wasn't just her own heart she'd be breaking.

"All right, you two," she said. "I think you'd better find somewhere else to sleep tonight."

They glanced at each other uncertainly, their love and worry for her so palpable she felt her throat close with tears again. Roughly, she added, "I'll be all right. In fact, I'm a lot more likely to be all right if you two aren't here."

Reluctantly, they gathered up their clothes and moved toward the heavy door. Rand glanced back, his soft turquoise eyes so full of concern for her that Lara gritted her teeth against the howl she could feel rising inside her. Somehow, she mustered a smile instead. "Go on. We'll figure it out in the morning."

Ducking his head, Rand followed Darrek out, and closed the door behind him.

Even now, Lara didn't give into the grief that threatened to overwhelm her. Bad enough that her body was forcing her to give up her own dream of a passion strong enough to pale even the lovemaking she'd shared with Rand and Darrek. She wouldn't sacrifice *their* passion, too. Not if she could help it.

Just because she couldn't have love -- or maybe precisely *because* she was never going to have that -- she wouldn't rob them of it, too.

*We'll figure it out in the morning.*

Lara grimaced at her words. They were a lie.

In the morning, she wouldn't be here.

## Chapter Three

Darrek strode with grim determination down the long southern corridor, but Rand kept looking back. There'd been something in Elara's face, something that had made him think of his mother who'd died when he was eight. That same brave smile, that same silent grief in her eyes...

Rand shook his head. Lara shouldn't be left alone, not tonight, not when so much had happened. But she'd been right -- their presence would only exacerbate her discomfort. Reluctantly, he turned to follow Darrek.

They found a disused chamber, its wall-brackets empty of torches. Grimacing, Darrek fetched one from the hall, stuck it into a bracket, and curled up on the meager comfort of a dusty cushion. Silently, awkwardly, Rand settled with his back against the door, watching him.

There was so much he wanted to say.

When Darrek had stared at him after the fight, back in Elara's room, something had thrilled through Rand as clearly and unmistakably as the sound of a gong. The anguish in Darrek's eyes, the mute pleading for forgiveness...

Nothing within him could have resisted such a plea.

Rand closed his eyes, remembering the way Darrek had kissed him, so deeply, so fiercely, as if, for that one moment, nothing in the world existed except their mingled breaths, their intertwined limbs, the touch of their lips...

He wanted that, Rand admitted. He wanted it more than anything in the world.

And now it was impossible.

*When wasn't it, Rand?* he asked himself. But for one shining minute, his body had blazed with hope -- with more than hope -- with certainty.

And if it were true, if what he'd believed so strongly for that one moment was *right*...

"Dar?"

Darrek opened his eyes, and Rand flinched. Darrek's eyes burned with such rage, such contempt, that the words Rand wanted to say died on his lips. Fumbling, he reached for them, but they came out awkward, stilted, limping in their inadequacy. "Darrek, whatever happens... whichever of us marries her..."

"Oh, it'll be you." Darrek's voice was thin with scorn. "Don't worry about that."

"I'm not." Rand struggled, choking on his inability to simply *say* what he meant. "That's not... It's not what I want, Darrek. It's not what --"

"Spare me, Aureora. It's what you wanted since before we even found her. It just took you this long to finally win." Rolling onto his back, Darrek draped an arm over his eyes.

Rand would almost have preferred Darrek to slap him. "No, Dar, it's not. I'm telling you, I don't care! I would rather have *you* marry her than... than..."

*Than have you hate me.*

He couldn't say it. Futilely, he beat his fist against one massive thigh in frustration, breathing heavily through his nostrils -- if he opened his mouth, he knew, he'd moan like a wounded animal.

Darrek didn't move his arm, didn't open his eyes. But after a moment he shook his head. "I don't want to. Besides, she'll be better off with you. We both know it."

Rand couldn't help it -- he *did* moan. Salty, stinging tears slid down his face, catching in the coppery stubble that shadowed his cheeks. His jaw clenched, trying to bite back the grief that wanted to rage out of him.

"Dar... Darrek, please!"

"Please what?" The contempt in Darrek's voice cut like a knife, slashing Rand's shattered heart. Sobbing, he stumbled to his feet, desperate to find some way to convey all the things he couldn't find words for. As he collapsed to his knees beside Darrek, the Hausther heir sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing with fury.

"What do you want, Rand? Do you want my blessing? Do you want me to say I'm *happy* for you?"

Mutely, Rand reached out, tears pouring down his face. Darrek slapped his hand away. "Don't touch me, *bastard!*"

The word lashed at Rand, and he jerked backward, raising his gaze to Darrek's clenched, bloodless face. Darrek's eyes were shining with tears. Rand stared at them mutely. *How strange*, he thought, *how very...*

Then Darrek's face seemed to crack, his jaw suddenly falling open as he gasped, his chest heaving, and dropped to his knees. Great shuddering sobs shook him, and the expression he raised to Rand was filled with the pure, straightforward grief of a child.

Gently, Rand gathered him close, something like exultation flooding his veins even as he bent with tender pity to lay his cheek against Darrek's black, shining hair. Darrek's hands tugged desperately at his shirt, pulling it open and then clenching in Rand's crimson mane, holding him immobile as Darrek sobbed against his chest.

Rocking him softly, Rand murmured, not knowing what he said, not caring, letting his hands, caressing Darrek's shoulders, speak for him.

Darrek nuzzled against him, his lips moving heedlessly across the swell of Rand's pecs, and Rand gasped as Darrek's tongue grazed one dark, tight nipple. Then his mouth dragged lower, kissing and licking a path down to Rand's navel, and Rand closed his eyes, swallowing the saliva that immediately flooded his mouth.

"Dar..." he whispered. "Oh, Dar."

He wanted to move, wanted, obscurely, to stop him -- but Darrek was already tugging at the string of his trousers, sliding them down his hips, revealing the erection that jutted forth from his groin, thick and eager. With a low, wordless cry, Darrek wrapped his lips around it, sucking hungrily at the smooth, engorged swell of Rand's glans.

Rand felt as if his very bones were melting under the searing embrace of Darrek's mouth. His knees were like water. His head swam with desire, so different

from what he had felt earlier with Elara. That had been harsh, almost violent in its intensity. This, while no less intense, was gentler, more intimate.

As tenderly as a mother holding her child, Rand cupped Darrek's head between his strong hands, feeling the Hausther's long, satiny hair slide against his palms as Darrek nursed greedily at his shaft, sucking it deep into his mouth. Darrek's eyes were closed, his face lax with arousal. His jaw worked as he suckled, his tongue jabbing at the delicate underside of Rand's rim, tickling and teasing until Rand's cock pulsed in his mouth.

Groaning, Rand pressed his hips forward, and Darrek reacted eagerly, sucking him harder. Winds, was *this* what Darrek wanted? With great daring, Rand closed his hands, twining the silken mass of Darrek's hair through his fingers.

Darrek responded with a high, hungry whine.

Immediately, the tenderness inside Rand spiraled up into lust. Hesitantly, he thrust once, and Darrek's lips clamped around him, his head straining in Rand's grasp as if egging him on.

*Oh, sweet Winds.* Carefully, he pulled Darrek's head forward, tightening his grip, and Darrek opened his eyes and gazed up at him with a look of such abandon, such bone-deep *hunger*, that Rand could no more resist it than he could Darrek's kisses. Clamping his fists in Darrek's hair, Rand dragged his head to him, thrusting his hips at the same time. Darrek tilted his chin, straightening his throat, and with a rush of white heat Rand felt his shaft slide in deeper, penetrating until Darrek's lips encircled the very base of his cock.

Agony flared deep in his groin, a pulsing, aching fire that was pain and ecstasy combined. "Oh, Dar," he whispered, feeling his cock flex and throb in the searing heat of Darrek's mouth. "Please -- please tell me..."

*Tell me you want this. Tell me you...*

Reaching inward, Rand sought for Darrek's mind-voice. Darrek gazed up at him from under half-closed eyelids, but he didn't answer. Instead, he groaned, deep in his throat.

The sound vibrated against Rand's shaft, caressing it, and the urgency in Darrek's black gaze flared like a beacon. He clamped his lips harder around Rand's huge cock, his tongue lashing eagerly -- and Rand felt his hesitation crumble. His fists closed tighter, pinioning Darrek, clenching the silken mass of his hair. With a roar that reverberated through the empty room, Rand slammed his hips forward, fucking Darrek's mouth with a need he'd never before admitted -- a need to take, to hold, to *claim*.

For this one night, if never again, Darrek Hausther would be his.

Roughly, almost viciously, Rand seized Darrek's head, yanking his hair heedlessly as he forced Darrek to take him deeper. Tears started from the corners of Darrek's eyes -- whether of pain or of pleasure, Rand suddenly, for one glorious moment, didn't care.

Dragging his cock out of the hot velvet wetness of Darrek's mouth, Rand plunged in again, hammering his shaft home.

Darrek whined like an animal, rousing him further. His balls clenched, and he froze, straining against his incipient orgasm -- he wanted this to last, last forever, he wanted to spend the rest of his life right where he was now, with his cock buried deep in Darrek's moist heat.

But Darrek whined again, a high, pleading sound that wrenched away the last vestige of his self-restraint. Ruthlessly, he plunged between Darrek's stretched lips, pounding out his fury and grief and longing with every frantic thrust. Darrek's jaw was strained to its limit, and still Rand drove savagely into his mouth, feeling the fire in his groin grow into an inferno, beyond thought, beyond regret -- far, far beyond control.

Heaving, he towered over the black-haired Hausther heir, his hips pistoning with a ferocity he couldn't stop if he wanted -- but Darrek met his every thrust, sucking him deeper, claiming his shaft even as Rand claimed his mouth. He stared up, tears streaming from his eyes, his expression both exultant and pleading.

*Take me, Rand.* The words whispered in his mind. *Oh, please take me.*



With a last, grating roar, Rand threw back his head, the muscles in his arms bunching as he pinned Darrek with his hands and slammed his massive cock home.

His roar twisted up into a hoarse cry as his orgasm burst through him, shooting wave after wave of his seed deep inside Darrek's mouth. Darrek's throat worked convulsively, milking him dry, swallowing every drop of his juices until Rand's knees buckled and he rolled to his side and lay there, quivering.

"Oh, sweet Winds, Darrek," he gasped, his lungs burning, his chest heaving. He felt Darrek touch his shoulder gently. Rolling, he pulled the slimmer man to him, wrapping him in a fierce hug, feeling his heart thunder in his chest as his shudders slowly eased.

Then gently, tenderly, he lifted Darrek's chin, licking at his hot, pointed tongue and tasting his own come upon it.

His cock twitched at the taste, and Rand stared down wonderingly into the black depths of Darrek's eyes. "Tell me what you want," he whispered. "Tell me, and I'll do it. Anything. Anything at all."

Darrek only looked at him.

Rand couldn't help it -- he dragged Darrek against him and kissed him urgently, sucking Darrek's tongue deep into his mouth, sliding his own tongue between Darrek's teeth. His cock was already hardening again, lengthening against the firm weight of Darrek's thigh.

Darrek rolled onto his back, and Rand followed him, refusing to release Darrek's sweet mouth. Covering his lean body with his own larger one, he felt Darrek's erection throbbing against his belly. Reaching down, he closed his hand around it, reveling in its hardness. Tightening his fingers, he moved his fist upward, and Darrek arched below him, pressing himself tight against the thick swell of Rand's cock.

Rand could feel Darrek's balls, tight and full, dragging heavily against his own. The sensation made him gasp, and the ache in his groin returned, hot and ready. He squeezed Darrek's cock harder, working the skin up and down the long, rigid shaft, and heard Darrek's harsh breathing. Wetting his fingers, Darrek slid his hand downward,

then put his arms around Rand's chest, pulling him close. His thighs wrapped around Rand's hips, and Rand groaned in heedless longing as his cock glided on the slickness of mingled saliva and come.

Flexing his hips lightly, he could feel the throbbing muscle of Darrek's tight entrance against the very tip of his cock. His blood roared in his ears, drowning the world in a crescendo of lust.

Through that pounding haze, he heard Darrek whisper, "Take me, Aureora. Take me deep. Fuck me hard. This one night, make me yours. This once, and never again."

With a cry that sounded in his ears like the last snapping of his heartstrings, Rand pushed himself slowly into the searing embrace of Darrek's ass. Impossibly hot, almost painfully tight, Darrek's passage gripped him as if it would never let him go.

\* \* \*

As soon as the door shut, Lara moved. Tugging on her clothes, she tied her boots together by their laces and slung them around her neck. Then she swung her leg over the sill of an arch and gingerly let herself down.

Wind Castle was perched like an aerie high on the peak of Mount Anduth. There was no courtyard around it, no pathway curving up -- everyone who approached it did so in dragon form.

But the palace itself was only one story tall -- it needed no additional height. You could see all the four corners of the realm from its many arches, from the glittering eastern sea beyond the Aureorean lands, to the vast golden plains of the southlands, the deep, endless forests of Gerdain's dominion...

You could also see, if you craned your neck downward, the broken, tumbled sides of a steep valley, running down Anduth's western face to the lower peaks below.

Lara was less terrified of that precipitous descent than she was of the mating lust beating in her loins. She'd rather risk the climb than feel that madness battering her again, driving her into a frenzy in which she'd willingly watch the two men she cared for most deeply tear each other apart for her sake.

Carefully, she found footholds with her bare toes, digging them into the crevices between the massive blocks of the foundation. Then the sole of her foot touched thin, crusted snow -- she was down. Stopping only to pull on her boots, Lara lay flat on her stomach and lowered herself over the edge of the cliff.

Stones bounced away beneath her seeking feet as she clambered carefully, feeling her way. Then the cliff face seemed to crumble around her, and she was sliding, bruised and battered by the rocks tumbling with her, the dirt and dust they kicked up filling her mouth, her nose, her eyes... Scrabbling, she fought for a handhold, a foothold -- there was nothing.

Then a boulder caught her, knocking the breath from her lungs, and she clung there desperately, gasping, her heart thundering in her chest as the landslide boomed and clattered into the darkness below.

Shuddering, Lara panted, trying to work up the courage to leave her fragile perch. Staring up, she tried to see how far she'd slid -- but the ridge above her was indistinct in the blackness. There was no knowing. And no help, either. There was nothing to do but go on.

Finally, gritting her chattering teeth, she swung her leg past the boulder, feeling for a grip. Her foot brushed a projection -- she stepped down harder -- the rock crumbled away beneath her, ripping her hands from the boulder, and her head slammed against an outcropping, sending white streaks bursting behind her eyes.

She was falling, falling, her screams thin and shrill in the empty mountain air. A wrenching roar filled her ears, as if the night itself was ripping open above her. Wind buffeted her, tossing her on the air, and something plunged out of the darkness, seizing her in sharp, piercing claws.

Invisible wings flapped above her, and she caught a last, hazy glimpse of Wind Castle, its white walls and soaring columns glimmering faintly in the dark, before the world whirled silently away.

## Chapter Four

Slowly, the throbbing in her shoulders pierced her unconsciousness. She tried to ignore it, to reach again for the soothing nothingness that had wrapped her, but soon other sensations came to join it -- an ache in her wrists, the dull, leaden clanging in her skull, a flare of pain along her spine.

Panting, Lara dragged her eyes open -- and shut them immediately as a gray flood of nausea spiraled through her. She swallowed convulsively, and opened them again.

The air around her was brown and thick, searing her throat as she sucked it in. It was hard to see clearly in the murky dimness. Blinking rapidly, Lara made out a rough stone wall across from her, some thirty feet away. Twisting her head (and ignoring the stabbing agony in her neck as she did so), she saw that the air grew marginally brighter to her left, lightening to a sullen ocher where the walls curved away.

A cave, then. She was in a cave. She couldn't see the entrance from where she stood -- for she *was* standing, barely. Her hands were fixed over her head to the rock wall behind her.

A cave -- but where? The rough granite walls might have been in a hundred places in Djarera's northern mountains, but why was the air so acrid? Had there been a fire? Her head throbbed dully. It was hard to think.

After a while, she heard the clear, scraping tread of footfalls approaching. Slitting her eyes, she peered out from beneath her lowered lids at the man who appeared at the edge of her vision.

He was easily as tall as Rand, and as broad through the chest. Heavily muscled, but without the same overwhelming bulk as the Aureorean. *This* man looked fast -- and

dangerous. His wide, brawny shoulders tapered to a whipcord waist, and his hips and thighs were taut and powerful, like a runner's.

At the sight of him, the hunger inside her roared back to life, flaring along her battered nerves like wildfire.

Lara closed her eyes, fighting that instinctive frenzy, willing the pressure of *khef* to retreat. Then she studied him again covertly, keeping her eyes slitted.

He was naked. Gloriously naked. His skin appeared to be darkly tanned, though it was hard to tell in the dimness. Thick shining hair, the color of young wheat, tumbled over his rugged shoulders, falling nearly to his ass in tangled disarray. The curly thatch at his groin was equally golden.

Quickly, Lara averted her gaze, trying to ignore the throb of heat in her cunt.

He squatted in the center of the cave and looked up at her with eyes that were a piercing ice-clear emerald, even in this murky light.

"You're awake. Stop pretending."

As she opened her eyes fully, Lara realized she was cold, cold to her very marrow. She'd seldom in her life felt so much as chilly, something she'd never questioned growing up, although the neighbors had looked at her strangely when she'd run around in a T-shirt when everyone else was bundled in parkas.

Now her teeth chattered, and her fingers, deprived for so long of circulation, stung painfully. Nevertheless, she held her head erect. "Why am I bound?" she demanded. "Release me."

He -- whoever *he* was -- glanced at her again; one quick cut of those icy-green eyes. Lara bit her tongue. *Stupid. If he'd wanted you loose, you'd be loose already, wouldn't you?*

Yes. She supposed she would.

*Think of something useful, damn it!* But the only thing she could think of to say was, "I'm cold."

Rising to his feet, he strode to her. Taller than Rand... oh, most definitely. He *towered* over her, staring down at her body, and Lara flushed as she realized she was naked.

She flinched as he raised his hands, expecting... a blow, maybe. She didn't know what she expected. He was so silent, so inexplicable, his taut, flowing muscles radiating a deep, controlled violence. Who *was* he?

Then he cupped his hands intimately around her breasts, and all Lara's questions faded away. The touch of his fingers was so firm, so familiar... as if he knew every one of her most secret desires. Her nipples, already contracted into points by the chill, hardened still further, sending a spike of arousal through her. His hands were like ice -- but the contrast against her oversensitive skin only heightened the sensation.

Lara gasped, feeling her knees tremble. He stood close, his body almost brushing hers. But where the heat of his body should be, the soft glow of his life force -- there was nothing. He might have been made of stone. Yet his massive chest moved as he breathed, and his skin gleamed. It would, she thought deliriously, be soft as velvet if she touched it, if she trailed her fingers over the broad swell of his pecs...

Studying her impassively, he closed his fingers on her nipples, tweaking them -- hard. Lara arched beneath his touch, raking the harsh, unfamiliar air into her sore throat, feeling the hunger inside her strain against her tenuous control, fighting like a wild animal to be free, to fly, to *fuck*...

*Khef.*

Had she said she was cold? She was on fire. Shudders racked her body like the trembling of a heroin addict deprived of his fix. Having no experience with drugs, she had always thought the junkies portrayed in movies to be ridiculously overblown -- but now, feeling her body cramp with a need she could neither fulfill nor deny, Lara admitted that if drug addiction was at all like this, those portrayals had been, if anything, tame.

The man regarded her a moment with no change of expression, then dropped his hands from her breasts. Lara couldn't help it -- she whimpered with longing. A cold

satisfaction gleamed briefly in his eyes. Then he moved to the far side of the cave where he hunkered, watching her, always watching.

Still he'd said nothing.

Fiercely, Lara bit her lip, forcing down the trembling in her body, ignoring the slickness between her thighs and the way her breasts ached, wanting his touch. This whole situation was starting to piss her off.

"I'm hungry," she demanded. Oh, she was hungry all right -- just not for food. He gazed at her flatly. "I'm tired, my arms hurt, my head hurts, and I think I'm going to throw up. So are you going to untie me?"

No reaction.

"Then at least tell me what the fuck is going on!" Pointlessly, she kicked out. Well out of her range, he curved his lips in a smile -- a motion which made her aware of the fine shape of his cheekbones, his high forehead, his strong, well-shaped jaw. But his eyes remained cool, aloof. Measuring.

"If you like." His voice rumbled, sounding like thunder in the distance -- deep, muted, both exciting and menacing. Lara watched his Adam's apple move as he spoke, and felt her nipples tingle. "It is not I who will release you, but you who will release me."

"What? But..." This whole thing made no sense. Release him from what? "Where am I?"

He shrugged, the muscles in his shoulders rippling with that small, careless motion. "Nowhere."

"No..." That was impossible. "Fine. How did I get here?"

"I brought you."

"That was *you*?" Hazily, she remembered falling, being seized up, borne away... "You're a dragon."

He nodded, one slow up and down motion of his blond head.

Of course he was. Of course. Her body, racked on the dangerous knife-edge of *khéf*, had already known, responding to him like a wire to current.

*It will get worse. Eventually the need will become irresistible, until you would rut in the mud with any toothless, drunken, wing-broken imbecile...*

Lara closed her eyes again, swallowing. How close was she already to that perilous brink? The nameless man before her was neither toothless nor wing-broken; in fact, he radiated an almost overpowering virility.

But what he was instead... that, she didn't know.

"Then take me back. Now."

"No."

"Why not? Who are you? What --"

*What do you want?*

But she didn't say it. Under the frosty regard of those crystalline eyes, she was suddenly afraid of the answer.

He leaned back, tilting his head. "Ah, so many questions, Elara."

She froze at his use of her name -- the implications were terrifying. But the *way* he said it, in that deep, deep voice that reverberated in his throat like a growl, was impossible to ignore.

"How do you know my name?" Hearing the sharp edge of fear in her voice, Lara cursed inwardly -- but for the first time, she saw emotion gleaming in those piercing eyes.

It was the look of a predator, closing in for the kill.

Vaguely, she remembered her frantic, ill-advised flight. The rockslide, then falling... And he, whoever he was, had rescued her -- only to shackle her to the wall of some cave.

What did he want with her?

Gritting her teeth, Lara glared at him, her fury fueled as much by the shudders of lust coursing through her as by fear. Her anger seemed to amuse him, for he smiled again -- that cold, hard curve of his lips which brought no warmth to his eyes.

Something about that cool, superior smile reminded her of Darrek. What, she wondered, did *this* man's icy exterior hide?



Closing her eyes again, she pictured the lean, proud Hausther heir, his black hair falling like a waterfall straight down his back as he'd tilted his head, dragging Rand's mouth down to his with such need, such passion...

The memory sent a flare of lust roaring through her veins as she imagined the two of them together: Rand poised above Darrek, his massive cock ramming downward into Darrek's spread mouth even as Darrek thrust up, shoving his shaft between Rand's soft lips; Darrek mounting Rand from behind, fucking him as furiously as he'd fucked *her* last night...

Enraged jealousy pounded through her, and Lara was suddenly straining at her bonds, her body arched in the effort to free herself. In that moment, had Darrek been there before her, she would have savaged him like a beast for daring to want Rand -- *Rand!* -- instead of her.

Shocked, she froze, hearing her breath rasp in her throat.

The stranger watched her closely, his green eyes glinting.

No. No, she *wanted* Rand to have Darrek, wanted them, at least, to have what she never would -- a binding, a closeness that her heart hungered for, far and beyond the frenzy pulsing inside her. That was why she'd fled, after all.

*Was it?*

Had she been reacting just to Darrek and Rand? Or had it been the need inside her as much as her love for them that had driven her out, sent her into the darkness searching for another answer, a different path...

A different mate.

Warily, she eyed the cold, silent stranger across from her.

*Khef.* Damn bloody *khef.* Even when she'd been fleeing, it had *still* been controlling her actions, her decisions, leading her...

Here. Wherever "here" was. But no way was this man her shadowy dream lover.

It was time for some answers, damn it. "What do you mean, 'it is you who will release me'? How? Who are you? Release you from what?"

He leaned back against the far wall, his long, muscular legs bent casually before him. His tangled hair tumbled around him, a dull, heavy gold in the gray light.

"Elara," he said finally. "Young, headstrong Elara. Has anyone ever told you how very much you resemble your mother?"

No one had had to. The first time she'd seen Melgara, she'd known immediately that this woman was her mother -- they had the same eyes, the same expressions, the same chestnut hair, although in Lara's opinion the features that were, on her, blandly regular, were heightened in her mother to something approaching true beauty. "How do you know my mother?" she demanded.

"In a sense, I don't. But I *will* know *you*."

There was something ominous in his tone, something intimate and insinuating... but at least he was talking. Lara bit her lip, and waited.

"We are a very conservative race, Elara -- have you noticed that yet? In thousands of years, we have barely changed. The clans in their four domains, the queen on her throne... We are bound by custom and tradition as much as nature, endlessly repeating the same patterns, the same small, narrow paths..."

She hadn't thought of it that way. It was all still so new to her. But there were things she'd seen that had puzzled her -- the absence of guards in the palace, for example. She'd asked Darrek and Rand once, and they'd stared at her. *Guards? Against what?*

At the time, she'd found their incomprehension reassuring.

The man chuckled, leaning his head back against the wall as he studied her, his arms draped loosely across his bent knees. Jesus, he was gorgeous. But the sound of his laughter was as hard and brittle as shattering ice.

"Irony, isn't it, that those same traditions that demanded my exile are the very ones that will guarantee me the throne?"

The throne? Lara stared at him in confusion, feeling her fear increase, dulling the lust beating inside her body. This wasn't random. As impossible as it seemed, this had been *planned*.

By him.

"Who are you? Why were you exiled?"

"Because I would not surrender my freedom." His gaze burned into her, inflexible, demanding. "We are children of the Winds, Elara. Wildness is our very nature. We have the power to go wherever the Winds take us. But Melgara --" his tone made the name an epithet, "-- forbids. Unless, of course, it is at her command," he added, sneering. "Should I chain that wildness? Should I submit to a queen that will not allow me to be all I am?"

His entire body seemed to clench with passion, and he sprang to his feet with the sinuous grace of a panther. Feeling faint, Lara had to admit she couldn't imagine him submitting to anyone. He was virility incarnate, dominant, assured. He moved closer, his eyes blazing a virulent emerald, until he towered over her. He hissed, low and deadly. "I will not surrender my freedom, Elara. Not for anyone, or anything."

Lara's eyes widened. Melgara had told her about the Zendarian wars, about the violent rogue who had sought to seize control of the throne. Only the fierceness of the Hausthers and Melgara's own determination had defeated the massive Westron dragon...

"Zendar," she breathed. "You're Zendar."

He leaned back again, his eyes studying her briefly, his powerful body relaxing as he nodded again. "And you shall be the one to free me."

"Why?" she demanded. "What do you need *me* for? You can free yourself, obviously, since you --"

*Rescued me.*

Lara paused, her head spinning. If it wasn't for him, she'd be dead right now. And whether she wanted to admit it or not, the fire in her body was more than just *khef*. Those icy green eyes burning down into hers...

But he had tried to usurp the throne. Tried to seize the kingdom and rewrite its laws as *he* saw fit. And he would use *her*, Lara, to accomplish those ends.

"I can force my way back into that world, yes," he replied. "But for what?" Lara swallowed nervously, feeling his closeness pulling at her, as surely as metal being drawn by a magnet. His eyes, so cold, so forbidding, were as compelling as clear, flawless gemstones. "No, Elara. I will not leave here. Not till I have made myself heir to the throne of Djarera."

Slowly, purposefully, he trailed one finger down the length of her throat, then delicately followed the curve of her collarbone. The craving inside Lara flared like a beacon.

*Whoever you mate with becomes heir to this kingdom...*

And soon, the inescapable frenzy of *khef* would drive her to mate -- whether she willed it or not.

Zendar leaned closer, his eyes filling her vision, blinding her to everything but the cold fire of his gaze. "I'm willing to wait, Elara. As long as it takes. But --" he added, sliding his hand from her collarbone to the swell of her breast, grazing her nipple which ached at his touch, "I am equally willing to hasten the process."

## Chapter Five

Melgara had felt the rending in the night, the implacable rage which had torn through the very planes of existence. It had ripped her out of an uneasy sleep, and she'd sat up, her heart pounding.

Hastily, she'd pulled on a robe and strode to the throne room. Wind Castle was silent around her -- no cries of alarm, no sounds of forced entry. Still, her apprehension hurried her on, and she took the steps of the dais two at a time.

Dragons *were* the Winds, in a very real sense. North, south, east and west, the four clans were the living embodiment of the element that had given birth to them. And, seated on the throne of Wind Castle, the ones who governed and protected them could see wherever the Winds blew -- into every corner of the kingdom; even into the other planes the Winds traveled.

But when Melgara sat on the carved marble seat and turned her gaze inward, she saw nothing. No invader, no panic, no motion anywhere that she could detect. The kingdom of Djarera lay wrapped in peace.

Had she imagined it? Had that awful, sickening sense of rending been no more than the product of her own fears?

Turning her gaze from the wide, night-dark lands, Melgara concentrated instead on the palace, seeking through the long, graceful corridors. Sensing motion in a long-disused room she peered inward, and saw Rand and Darrek wrapped in each other's arms. Well, she'd expected that. It didn't take the sight of a Dragon Queen to perceive the attraction between the two young heirs.

But one of them *had* to marry Elara.

Melgara did not begrudge them their goodbyes. Delicately, she withdrew, and sought instead the mind of her daughter. It was a thing she did not allow herself to do

often -- if she had, she would have spent all the years of Lara's childhood following every moment of her estranged daughter's growth. But tonight, she wanted reassurance, wanted to feel the warmth of her daughter's lively mind...

Only she could not find it.

A moment of panic broke her concentration, and Melgara found she had started from her seat without realizing. Stopping herself, she breathed deeply, containing her apprehension, and sank again to the hard marble seat.

Slowly, now she sought outward, through every room of Wind Castle. Then across the vast, night-shrouded mountains.

Nothing. There was no trace of Elara.

Could she have changed to dragon form, fled to Earth, trying to escape the frenzied grip of *khef*?

No. Melgara shook her head distractedly. She was fully aware how close Lara's crisis was. If her daughter had allowed herself to assume dragon shape, the pressure of *khef* would have driven her, almost immediately, to mate.

Never before had Melgara had to search for her daughter. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she'd always known unerringly exactly where she was, even on Earth. Now, where that comforting half-awareness had been, there was only an emptiness, a blankness, a...

Void.

Melgara's eyes widened in the darkness of the throne room. That hideous ripping sensation, the impression of rage...

There was only one place she knew of that her sight could not follow. Only one place where the Winds did not blow -- because she had barricaded it. She had closed it off, shutting Zendar behind it, sealing it with the force of the Winds.

He had broken through. Somehow, over the decades, he had learned to do that.

And now, Melgara thought with an icy trickle of surety, he had seized Elara and drawn her back with him. Into the void. Into the one place she was unable to see.

\* \* \*

Zendar's touch burned like fire, so cold it seared her skin. Equally fierce, equally remorseless, the frenzy of *khef* pounded at her. She hung in her shackles, writhing under Zendar's implacable caresses, unable to control her body's responses.

*This* was where it had brought her, her dream of a nameless lover who would fulfill her completely, binding her in a passion so intense, so vibrant she could still taste the sour ashes of that fiery vision. She cursed it -- empty fantasy, false vision -- it was a cheat. A *cheat*!

And it had cost her everything.

The man standing before her, touching her, tormenting her senses, was physically perfect -- his broad, powerful chest, his thick, golden hair, his intent emerald eyes that transfixed her and sent the blood rushing through her veins every time he looked at her.

But he was cold. So cold. There was no love in him, no caring... No remorse. How different from Darrek, with his deep, repressed passions, his hunger so great he'd never even been able to name it...

Marrying Darrek would have been a joy compared to this frigid, vengeful man.

But that wasn't even the worst of it, was it? No. The worst was the way her body responded. Each flick of his fingers along her naked skin increased the craving inside her -- a craving that was only intensified by his intoxicating nearness.

*Khef*. It was *khef*, that's all it was!

*Is it?*

*Yes!* Lara insisted silently. Look at what she'd felt with Rand and Darrek, the mindless desire that had seized her, reducing her to a feral, lust-maddened creature...

But this desire was neither blind nor mindless. *This* desire had a purpose, a direction, a goal. Not to mate -- or not *only* to mate -- but to mate with *him*. Zendar.

Never in her life had Lara felt so fundamentally betrayed.

*No!* she shrieked silently, hardening her will -- but Zendar's icy fingers trailed through the curls of her sex, tugging lightly, and she groaned. He leaned close, and she couldn't help admiring the strong, chiseled line of his jaw, the firm, corded muscles of

his long neck... He was perfect. Absolutely perfect. And her body screamed for him in a way she'd never before experienced.

Resolutely, she shut her eyes.

He laughed. "Oh, Elara. So proud. So resistant." His words whispered in her ear like a chill winter breeze. Her skin was on fire wherever he touched it -- his pecs pressing close against the aching points of her nipples; his thighs brushing hers, easing them open; his cock, hard as marble, jabbing against her belly. His ice against her heat, his rigidity against her softness...

The opposing sensations racked her, and she writhed, driven to a level where every touch, every stroke of his fingers, was agony, and every flick of pain was a delight so exquisite she moaned with unendurable longing.

*Khuf.* Brutally, inexorably, he was pushing her, step by step, into the frenzy of *khuf*.

His hands clenched her hips, and he shoved his cock forward, pressing it against the tingling nub of her clit. "I *will* have you, Elara. And with you, the throne. And then you -- and all Djarera -- will bow to *me*." Viciously, he ground his shaft against her, his teeth bared in triumph as she groaned in arousal. "I will have my revenge, Elara. Do not doubt that."

*I don't*, she whispered somewhere in the tortured confines of her mind. Surely she hadn't said it aloud! But he grinned again as he knelt, seizing her breasts and closing his mouth around one erect nipple.

Fire seared through her. His lips, soft as silk and yet cold as granite, tugged at her breast, and she whimpered in longing. The sensation was maddening, excruciating. His tongue teased her tender aching nipple till she shrieked in mingled agony and lust.

"There is no escape, Elara," he murmured, his lips whispering against her tingling skin. He trailed one hand downward, drawing lines of white fire over her belly, her mons, as his mouth closed over her other nipple, suckling it fiercely. Lara moaned, feeling the lips of her cunt swell as moisture slicked her hot, yearning passage.



No! She would *not* simply submit to him, no matter how much he roused her. She was Elara Southerlin, not some mindless plaything! A snarl burst from her, challenging and fierce. Furiously, she struggled against him, fighting the lust that flared in her groin as her gyrations forced her breast deeper into his mouth. Growling low in his throat, he clamped down tighter, pinching one nipple as he suckled the other with a frenzy that bordered on rage.

It hurt -- God it hurt! But the pain was sheer ecstasy. Her breasts felt heavy, aching, and she stifled an urge to thrust them even harder against him. Desperately, she held herself rigid, biting back the moan that throbbed in her throat. "Release me!" she demanded, her voice cracked with desperation.

"Release yourself," he whispered back, the motion of his lips teasing her nipple. "All you need to do is change shape, Elara, and you can rip yourself free with hardly a thought."

She glared down at him, panting. "No!" she spat.

"Then," he replied, "shall we continue?"

Grabbing her thighs with his powerful hands, he pushed them irresistibly apart and thrust his tongue deep into her throbbing cunt.

\* \* \*

It had been Darrek who'd woken first, conscious of a sense of warmth so profound, so all-encompassing it stirred memories he'd never admitted he had -- memories buried deep in his proud, lonely heart of wanting desperately to be held, cherished, *loved*. And every yearning he'd ever had, Rand had fulfilled.

But as the cold light of dawn crept through the dusty room, Darrek pulled away silently from Rand's sleepy embrace. Today, Rand would marry Elara.

And that was the end of it.

But when they'd gone to her room, Elara wasn't there.

They'd found Melgara still seated on the carved marble throne, her face strained and ashen. Darrek wasn't even sure she'd heard them until she raised her head, gazing down at them bleakly. "Yes. She is gone. Zendar took her."

Glancing at Rand, Darrek saw his face go deathly pale. "We have to go after her."

Melgara shook her head. "No. You cannot. Not unless I drop the barrier between the two planes. And if I do that, Zendar will be free."

"But," Rand protested, "if he seized Elara, he can already escape. Lara can't! She can't, and he'll keep her there, until --"

"Yes, I know, Rand! Do you think I can't see?"

Rand stared up at her. Darrek could see the tightness of his shoulders, the way his entire body seemed to strain at his control, as if only his will kept him pinioned in human shape, kept him from flying then and there to Elara's rescue.

*Does he love her so much, then? Will he risk all Djarera to have Lara back?*

Had he ever really thought that Rand could love *him*?

Quietly, so quietly it went unnoticed amid the tension in the room, Darrek's heart cracked. He swallowed twice, breathing shallowly to contain his desolation. It didn't matter. It didn't matter. What was a heart? A small thing, completely unimportant in the face of everything that was at stake.

"Let me go after her," he heard himself say. "Your Highness, your daughter is already deep in *khef*. How long do you think she can hold out? Or, if he mates her, will you consign her forever to the void along with him?"

Melgara looked down at him, her face haunted by indecision. Darrek kept his gaze on her, not daring to glance at Rand. If he did...

If he did, the shattered fragments of his heart might very well kill him. "Drop the barrier, my lady," he whispered urgently. "Drop it, and I will bring her home safe to marry Rand."

## Chapter Six

Lara moaned like a cat in heat. Zendar's tongue lashed at her, and her body, far, far beyond the reach of her will, arched before him, giving him easier access to her throbbing clit. She strained forward, pulling against her shackles, trying to push her cunt harder against his mouth.

She needed... needed...

Zendar drew back, trailing a finger instead through her full, swollen lips, spreading the juices over her already sodden folds. She whined high in her throat and bucked against him, wanting to feel that teasing finger inside her.

Instead he stood, roughly spreading her thighs with his own, forcing her legs wide as he bent his knees. His hands grabbed her ass, dragging her against him. She didn't resist. It was what her body wanted, what it ached for...

She was so wet that his cock slid easily against her, its cold, rock-hard tip bruising her clit. She moved against him, grinding her mons harder against that rigid, stony shaft. Tilting her head back, she gazed up at Zendar, panting through half-open lips, daring him, challenging him, *begging* him to take her.

With one violent thrust, he pushed himself inside her heat. Lara's head snapped back, and she screamed with rapture.

He was so hard, like iron inside her. His cock was nearly as thick as Rand's -- and he wielded it with a vehemence Rand never approached. Each thrust seemed to spear her to the very core of her being, stoking the conflagration inside her, rocking her backward.

She couldn't imagine anyone else ever filling her so completely.

Again and again, he rammed into her, fucking her with a fury that made even Darrek's lovemaking look tame in comparison. *When he's done with me*, Lara thought faintly, *there'll be nothing left*.

He would consume her utterly.

Heat pounded in her gut, searing, demanding, clamoring for a release deeper than orgasm. Limp in her shackles, her mind assaulted by a craving stronger and more consuming than any she'd known, still Lara clung to that one resolve. He would use her, fuck her every way he wanted -- and she wanted that, wanted it with a carnal abandonment that terrified her.

He had kept her quivering on the edge for what felt like centuries, teasing her over and over to the point where her head thrashed and cries poured from her as freely as her juices. She would do anything, *anything*, if he would just *take* her, send her over the edge into white, screaming bliss.

*But she would not change.* She would not allow him to use her for his vengeance.

Every time she quivered right on the verge, he backed off. Each time it would take one more stroke of his fingers, just one more stab of his tongue, he stopped. Twice she had heard herself begging, in language that made her blush furiously when she realized what she was saying.

Each time, Zendar answered with one whispered word: *Change*.

No. No.

And so he had started the torment again.

If it were just him, Lara thought, she could manage. As torturously erotic as his caresses were, she could resist him -- barely. But each time he brought her to the brink, the frenzy inside her stepped up a notch. She could almost *feel* her body swelling, her bones lengthening, thickening; feel herself rip from the puny shackles that held her and vault into the air, thrusting herself higher with each mighty beat of her wings -- wild, exultant, impossibly *free*...

The fierce, feral emotion burning through her reminded her sharply of the passion she'd seen in Zendar's intent eyes. *Is this, then, what he feels? What he's so afraid he'll lose if he submits?*

The thought shocked her. Surely there was nothing -- *nothing* -- they had in common! But for a sudden, terrifying moment she glimpsed what it must have been like, to be imprisoned forever in this empty, timeless void. What it must have meant to him, *him*, who valued his freedom above everything else.

Even life. Even friendship.

Even love.

Nothing else Melgara could have done could have hurt him so cruelly -- not even death.

*No wonder he's so cold.*

Lara's eyes widened as she lifted her head, gazing up at his strong, firm chin, his broad, pronounced cheekbones. Had she thought Darrek was like a statue? If so, Zendar was the entire mountain come to life.

Or, rather, he was the very wildness of life, frozen into impenetrable rock.

"Oh," she cried faintly, feeling him thrust inside her, his rage and fury as palpable as her need. His gaze bored into her, hard and aloof. Of course. Of course -- how could it be otherwise? How could he not despise her?

But what Lara felt, in that one moment, was pity.

He was strong -- so strong it took her breath away. Proud, wild, passionate... Had she thought him emotionless? He had more fire in him than Rand and Darrek combined. Freedom he'd wanted, absolute freedom -- could she blame him for that? For it, he'd been willing to risk everything, even his very life...

And he stirred her to heights of arousal she'd never dreamed possible.

Wanting nothing, expecting nothing, Elara Southerlin looked into the dark emerald eyes of her enemy -- and then reached up and stroked the cold curve of his cheek.

Jerking his head back, Zendar stared at her, his eyes wide and furious. Then, without warning, he drew his arm back and struck her.

Lara's head slammed backward against the rock. Stars exploded inside her skull. Rage -- blind, unreasoning rage -- flared through her, compounded of pain and arousal and the hurt of rejection, and she roared as her fingers hardened into claws. Her arms thickened, snapping the restraints. Lunging forward, she tossed him back like a rag doll, her muzzle twisting into a grin as he hit the far wall and slid to the ground.

Then the volcanic heat of *khef* struck her like a tidal wave. She shrieked in mingled agony and lust, her head snapping back, her wings trying to unfold in the cramped space of the cave.

She was trapped, trapped. She *had* to get out! Clawing at the rocks, she battered at the cave walls, thrashing her tail and lashing with her head till the roof collapsed in with a grinding roar of stone and debris.

Screaming her defiance, Lara leaped into the acrid air, barely aware of the massive green dragon that shrugged his way from beneath the rubble behind her and launched himself in pursuit.

She glided before him, glowing and golden, a blazing beacon calling him higher. Sweeping the air, Zendar climbed after her, feeling the mating frenzy emanating from her, a siren song that enflamed his senses, maddening him with the need to possess her.

His unreleased orgasm throbbed in his groin.

It had been pleasure of the keenest kind to torment her, to bring her over and over to the edge of release, watching coolly as she writhed and begged under his touch, feeling his own desire grow as he sensed her will crumbling -- yet it had never fully broken.

Not till he struck her.

A strange sense of discomfort stirred in him at the memory. Shaking his head, he chased it away.

Dancing on the air, Elara flitted before him, aware of him now. He could see it in the arch of her back, the flash of her wings -- she was luring him on. As if he needed luring!

Yes. He would have her. And then -- *then* he would be free.

Baring his teeth, he dove after Elara.

Fire pounded along Lara's veins, and she reveled in the feel of her wings, sweeping downward, shooting her through the air like a falcon. *He* was behind her, closer now, but he would not catch her yet. Not yet. Not till he was burning for her. Not till he needed it so bad he'd do anything -- *anything* -- to have her.

Like an echo in her mind, the ghost of her vision soared with her. Her body pulsed, almost shimmering with arousal. Soon, his need would spiral upward, flaring to match hers, until with a last, frantic dive he would cover her, their wings beating as one as he lowered himself into her, his claws gripping her neck, his haunches thrusting beneath her upcurled tail...

Shrieking in anticipation, Lara plunged through the air, arrowing downward in a blaze of speed before swooping up again, feeling him follow doggedly behind her. Oh, he was hers, *hers*. He would follow forever, pursuing her tirelessly until she deigned to fuck him.

She led him across the sky, glorying in her power, intoxicated by the dance they performed upon the air. She could feel his lust like a wind at her back -- he *had* to have her, whatever the cost. She was irresistible, utterly desirable -- what dragon could see her and not long to mount her?

None.

Arching her neck, she cried out her triumph, felt his impatience increase as he swooped after her.

Now, *now* he was starting to feel the grip of her passion, her power. Soon he would be able to feel nothing, think nothing, *see* nothing but her body before him, driving him mad, rousing him to a desire he would kill to fulfill.

Yes.

Yes.

When she saw the other dragon appear as if out of nowhere, Lara smiled in savage anticipation.

So long attuned to that invisible wall, shutting him away in this gray, empty plane, Zendar felt it the moment the barrier failed. His head snapped up, and he saw Djarera before him, its towering peaks and endless green forests stretching beneath the sun.

*What...* Confused, he fumbled, and Lara darted ahead, opening a gap between him and herself. In the space of a wingbeat she glided from gray, formless clouds to gleaming blue sky without ever noticing the change, she was so deep in *khef*.

How many years, how many decades, had he waited for this? Immured in that frozen no-place, it could have been eons, or the blink of an eye. And now he was in Djarera, and his triumph was close, so close! As close as that golden shape streaking before him. Zendar felt his eagerness strain like a dog at a leash.

Lust roared in his belly -- he *wanted* that fleeing golden form, wanted it with an intensity that burned in his loins.

But what stuck in his mind, playing over and over, was the light, hesitant brush of a hand on his cheek.

Zendar's eyes narrowed.

Her touch had enraged him. Innocent fool! Did she not know how he would use her, impregnate her and then cast her aside? She was a tool, nothing more!

Then why did he think of wide gray eyes gazing up at him, luminous with...

With what? He couldn't identify that fleeting emotion -- but when she'd touched him, his cheek had felt warm.

No! Impossible. Even with his cock buried deep in her cunt, he had felt nothing but lust, and ice. He was cold, cold. Nothing would ever warm him again.



Thrusting his head forward, Zendar strained through the air, closing the distance between them, so intent on his pursuit he didn't see the dragon that stooped like a hawk, whistling out of the sky, until claws raked his back and he roared in surprise.

Knifing around, he slashed at the intruder -- and then grinned slowly, baring his fangs. Black dragon. Hausther. It would be a pleasure to kill him.

But he had to do it quickly. He glanced after Elara and saw her hovering, circling back around to watch the battle. He could *feel* her avid interest, the bloodlust increasing her craving to mate.

Eyeing his enemy, he snarled in contempt. The black one was lithe and quick, but no match for him. Screaming, he threw himself forward, closing on his smaller, snakelike opponent.

Bracing himself, Darrek watched the green dragon come. Zendar. Rogue dragon. He was the stuff of legends -- and the legends, for once, didn't exaggerate. His scales were like crystals, catching the light, and he was barbed at both spine and tail as Darrek himself was -- but the spikes at the tip of Zendar's tail were two feet long and sharp as rapiers. And he was large, larger even than Rand -- although leaner, faster, quicker in the air.

Darrek stared levelly at Zendar, expecting to die.

He didn't care about that, though. It was probably better that way. But he'd made a promise to Melgara -- and to himself. All he had to do was survive long enough to fulfill it.

He could feel the beat of *khef* in his veins, like liquid fire -- but his mind was unclouded, his will unswayed. Heartbreak was proving a very effective anti-aphrodisiac... for which he was grateful, considering the circumstances.

Looking at Zendar's lust-maddened eyes, Darrek counted it an advantage -- a slim one, he realized as he swerved in the air, narrowly avoiding the vicious swipe Zendar leveled at him as he flashed past.

And it was all for nothing if he couldn't reach Elara.

He shouted again, in mind-speak, trying to pierce the haze of *khef*.

*Lara! Lara, hear me! It's Darrek! Lara, answer!*

He heard nothing in return but a fierce, exultant cry. Spinning rapidly, he saw Zendar diving at him again, his talons outstretched.

Darrek darted under him, gliding beneath his belly -- and realized his mistake when Zendar's tail lashed down, scoring him across his shoulders. He dropped rapidly, then thrust himself upward, trying to get above the larger dragon -- he didn't dare let Zendar control the upper sky.

*Elara! Damn you, listen to me!*

Nothing.

Zendar circled, coming back around to face him. Darrek saw amusement glinting in those cold emerald eyes. Winds take him! Zendar might win -- probably *would* win -- but he would *not* have Elara. Elara was for Rand.

And Darrek would die to make that happen.

Shrieking, he threw himself at the larger dragon who, either in surprise or overconfidence, failed to block his attack. Darrek snarled as he closed his jaws in Zendar's throat, feeling the Westron's talons rake across his chest. Locked together, they tumbled, their wings beating madly. Tasting the hot, coppery tang of blood, Darrek felt the pressure of *khef* increase, and thrust it down impatiently.

*Elara Southerlin! My lady! You bitch! Answer me!*

For the first time, he heard -- not even heard, but *felt* a hesitation. Digging his teeth deeper, seeking for the buried pulse of Zendar's life, he howled in his mind, *Elara! Go! Get yourself out of here! Please, if you can hear me, fight it!*

A whisper in return, like a breath on the wind. *Darrek?*

*Yes! Now go! Rand's waiting for you.*

The voice in his mind was querulous, impatient. *Rand? Who is Rand? I don't want him -- he's not here. You are here. I want you.*

A tendril of lust inserted itself into his mind, and suddenly he saw her as she'd been -- was it really only a night ago? -- on her knees before him, her ass tilted up in invitation...

*Yes... he heard her whisper through the blood roaring in his ears. Yesss...*

*No!* Darrek roared, tearing himself away from Zendar. His opponent raked him viciously across the muzzle and darted away. Agony exploded in Darrek's skull and he shrieked, trying to clear the blood from his eyes as he labored upward, feeling a hitch in his flight -- Zendar's tail-barbs had torn a muscle in his shoulder. His left wing was dragging.

And he was flying blind.

He felt Elara's arousal redouble. Winds take it! What would it take to get through to her?

*Elara! It's khef! What you're feeling is khef! You fought it before, remember? You fought it to save Rand.*

*Rand?* Her tone now was troubled.

*Yes, Rand! He taught you to fly, remember? He rescued you from me, when we --* No, don't remind her.

Or maybe it was himself he didn't want to remind. Not now. Not with the lure of *khef* beating so strongly in his own loins, despite the pain that flared and pulsed along the left side of his face. His right eye was clearing, although the world around him was coated with a haze of red. And where, by the Winds, was Zendar?

He found out when Zendar crashed into him, ramming him halfway down his body, just below his ribs. The blow knocked the breath from his lungs, and Darrek tumbled, fighting to break his fall, to bring his wings up -- the torn muscle in his shoulder screamed in protest as he wrenched against the wind, righting himself. Zendar hung above him like a buzzard, waiting for the kill.

*Lara! Go back to Rand! He needs you. He --* Darrek's mind-voice was bitter, even to himself. *He loves you, Elara.*

*No.* Her voice was faint, distant, distracted. Was she even hearing him? *No*, she said again.

No, what? No, Rand didn't love her? No, she wouldn't go back? Or possibly -- just possibly -- was she saying no to the frenzy of *khef*?

As Zendar dropped like a stone, his talons sparkling emerald fire as he cleaved the air, Darrek realized he would probably never know.

*NO!*

The shock of their collision knocked her mind clear of the lust seething through it, and in horror Lara saw Darrek fall, Zendar locked above him, his claws ripping as he rode Darrek's body down. At the last moment, the huge green dragon loosed his hold and hovered as Darrek slammed to the ground and lay there, absolutely still.

*NO!*

Stooping like a falcon, Lara plunged for the ground, swerving to avoid Zendar's reaching grab. Her arousal shriveled and twisted into nausea as she landed, stumbled, and dropped out of dragon form. Racing to Darrek's side, she clasped the great muzzle, turning his head toward her, recoiling at the gore coating half his face. Was that a spark she saw in his remaining eye or just the sunlight, reflecting from his obsidian gaze? Sobbing, she laid her head against his chest, feeling his scales like velvet iron below her cheek. She tried to stifle her sobs, to listen for a breath -- she couldn't.

"Darrek! Darrek! Oh, Darrek, please! It isn't me Rand loves. It's not me he needs. Please, please Darrek..."

Throwing her head back, she howled. Wind rushed above her, and she looked up to see Zendar hovering, his emerald eyes watching her intently.

"Go away!" she screamed. "Don't you touch me! I hate you, do you hear me? *I hate you!*"

Snatching up a stone, she threw it futilely, then threw another. And another. Zendar hovered, just out of range, until finally she dropped to the ground, crying bitterly.

A shadow drifted over her. Looking up, Lara saw him gliding low toward her, his talons extended -- to land, or to snatch her up? Either way, she didn't wait to find out. Shrieking in fury, she sprang into the air, her wings unfurling even as she leaped. Claws extended, she dived at his naked back, ripping eight jagged lines across it before she thrust herself upward and dashed into the sky.

Even the searing torment of *khef* couldn't pierce her grief. In an odd way, she welcomed it, opening herself to its fierce, tearing hunger, lashing herself with it as she sped for Wind Castle.

It wasn't until she saw Mount Anduth below her and folded her wings to drop to its peak that she realized Zendar hadn't even tried to pursue her.

## Chapter Seven

Why had he let her go?

Zendar stared after Elara until she faded into a speck in the distance. Then, feeling impossibly weary, he dropped to the ground and let his dragon form go. The black dragon, his enemy, lay crumpled before him. But Zendar couldn't even summon the energy to care whether he was alive or dead.

*Why had he let her go?*

It defied belief.

He *hated* Melgara for what she had done to him. She had taken his freedom, had locked him in a frozen, timeless void, and left him there until the ice sank into his very bones.

She would, he was certain, have left him there forever. So why should he show any more mercy than she had?

What a vengeance it would have been to claim and destroy her only child! He could still practically taste that bitter victory. And yet...

And yet, where Elara had touched him, he had felt warm.

*I hate you!*

He had thought his freedom was the most precious thing in the world. He had thought that only ice endured forever.

Disbelievingly, he raised his hand to his face and touched his cheek. It was damp with tears.

Even ice, it seemed, could melt.

\* \* \*

Sitting on the edge of the sleeping pit in her chamber, Lara smoothed the full, soft skirt her mother had given her. Tiny white snowflowers, *asthuraia*, were woven into her chestnut hair. In the throne room, she knew, the guests awaited.

Woodenly she stood, and left her room. Not even the ever-present pressure of *khef* could shatter her numbness.

Turning right, she walked south, away from the throne room. But she wasn't running away -- not this time. There was just something she needed to do first.

Outside the room where Darrek and Rand had slept, she paused, brushing her hand lightly over the smooth, rich-grained wood. Then she opened the door and went in.

Swathed in bandages, Darrek lay as still as death. Only the shallow rise and fall of his chest gave proof he had survived that terrible fight. When they'd borne him back to the castle, Lara had been sure he was dead. Once again she wondered why Zendar hadn't taken the chance to finish him off -- but the thought was distant, dull. It really didn't matter.

Kneeling beside Darrek, she stroked his hair gently. Bending, she kissed his right cheek, carefully avoiding the bandages that covered the left side of his face. He didn't rouse.

She stretched out beside him, studying the one visible cheekbone, the black, arching brow, the contrast between his alabaster skin and the rich ebony gleam of his hair. "Thank you," she whispered. "I don't think I said that. And Darrek? You were wrong. It is *you* Rand loves."

She felt a tear slide down the curve of her cheek, and splash onto her outstretched arm. No, she would not have chosen this, but it was her duty. And she would not dishonor what Darrek had sacrificed.

She would not keep Rand. He belonged *here*, not waiting for her in front of the throne of Wind Castle.

But that was where he was, and it was time, now, to join him. Stroking Darrek's cheek one last time, she murmured, "Wait for him, Darrek. Get well for him. He needs you."

Her mouth twisted with bitterness. No one would ever need *her* like that.

Except that wasn't true. Not entirely. She *was* needed -- by Rand, by Darrek, by *all* the dragons. Someday she would be their queen. And it was time for her to start acting like one.

Holding her head high, Lara rose and left the room, closing the door softly behind her.

\* \* \*

Rand stood, dressed in the formal crimson and gold that were his clan's colors. His gaze rose to meet hers, warm and reassuring. He smiled lightly, and Lara's heart clenched painfully in her breast. Oh, she *did* love him -- how could she not, when even now he was trying to comfort her?

He was too good for her. He was more than she deserved.

But it was still so much less than she had once wanted.

The great doors at the end of the hall were flung open, and the peaks below Anduth were bare, their snow melted. The air crackled with vibrancy, crisp and alive. The hall itself fairly blazed with color; the black and silver of the Hausthers, the yellow and green of the Westron clan led now by Gerdain, and the clear, unsullied white that was her own clan's color, the Southerlins.

From the throne, Melgara smiled down at her, but Lara saw the compassion in her gray eyes and bowed her head. Her mother, too, she knew, truly wished things had been different.

But they weren't.

Firmly, Elara stepped forward, the clans bowing to her as she moved toward Rand. She *would* be happy about this -- she would mate with a dragon she cared for, and have a child, a child she could love with no reservations, no regrets, no stifled dreams.



Surely that was reason enough for joy?

But try as she might, she couldn't bite back the tears glimmering in her eyes, and as resolutely as she walked, somehow the journey from the door to the dais seemed to stretch out forever. She was acutely conscious of every footfall, each shuffle in the crowd, every light brush of wind against her pale cheeks. Time slowed to a crawl, giving her ample opportunity to hear the yearning cry in her breast -- *for what? For a fantasy? A daydream? Grow up, Elara! There's no shining knight, no ideal mate... no mighty lover to whisk you away. Let it go.*

She had. She *had*.

Then why did her heart stutter in her chest as she caught the emerald flash of Gerdain Westron's gaze? Why did it sink immediately after when she recognized who he was -- or rather, who he *wasn't*?

And why, at the rush of wind through the hall, did she turn so eagerly to the great, wide-flung doors, hearing nothing but the thunder of her leaping pulse?

She didn't know. She couldn't think. Without realizing it she raised her hands to her cheeks, pressing her suddenly cold fingers to the flush rising through them as the emerald-green dragon flew into the hall, his wings cupping the air as he landed and changed.

Zendar.

He stood, so tall, so erect, his golden mane falling in gleaming waves around him, his green eyes flashing dangerously at the hostile shouts from the crowd. Ignoring them, he strode forward, not even glancing at her as he grabbed her hand and tugged her with him to the foot of the dais. Rand, his eyes wide, stepped to one side.

At the touch of his hand, Lara's blood roared in her ears, as wild and triumphant as a dragon in flight. Her body arched, shocked back to life by the blazing heat of *khef*, surging through her with an urgency she could barely contain.

Somehow, she held herself silent as Zendar gazed up at her stern, silent mother, his head held high, unrepentant, asking no forgiveness and offering no apology.

Oh, he was brave! Surely her mother could see it. He had risked everything -- even being thrust back into the void -- to be here.

She would have cast herself at her mother's feet, would have pleaded, would have threatened as she had for Darrek and Rand -- only Zendar, she knew, would despise her protection.

She could see the crowd murmuring in anger and shock, could see Zendar's mouth moving -- but all she could hear was the rushing of wind. Or was that her heart? Lara couldn't tell.

Her mother's eyes darkened. Zendar smiled stiffly. Holding Melgara's gaze, he sank to one knee.

Lara gasped.

Still Melgara said nothing.

Then Zendar dropped his emerald gaze, and bent his head before her.

Lara knew she would see that picture forever -- his gleaming hair falling around his stern profile; the play of muscles in the back of his neck; his powerful shoulders bent in submission -- for her. For *her*! She drew in a deep, shuddering breath, struggling to contain the exultation surging through her.

Melgara's gaze flicked to her, noting the tremors in her arms, the way her chest heaved, the way her whole body quivered with barely restrained tension. Lara stared up at her, feeling the plea in her own eyes. Melgara's jaw gritted.

"Oh, get out of here," she snapped, "and take my daughter with you. She'll never forgive me if you don't, that's plain enough. Now go!"

Rising, Zendar bowed to Melgara, his manner only slightly mocking, and then turned to her. "Elara," he said, in that deep, deep voice that reverberated in his throat like a growl.

Then she was in his arms, heedless of the staring crowd as his mouth closed over hers. She kissed him back fervently, feeling her need sear along her limbs -- she couldn't hold him tight enough, couldn't kiss him hard enough. But he was pushing her away --

why? Lara looked up at him, confused, as he clasped her hand again and placed it gently against his chest.

His skin was warm, warm under her fingers, smooth and soft as velvet. Underneath the swell of his pecs his heart thundered steadily, pulsing beneath her palm like some great, powerful beast.

The beast in her answered, changing before him, her body molding itself to the wind that whirled around her, urging her toward the doors and the bright sky outside.

With a cry that echoed between the high marble columns, Lara sprang into the air, feeling Zendar just behind her. Five times, eight, her wings swept down -- and then he was above her, his wing strokes matching hers, his long, rippled torso caressing her back. Volcanic heat poured through her at that warm, smooth touch. She needed him now, *now!* Twining her tail back, she looped it around him, and with a roar he thrust forward, spearing her on his huge, engorged shaft.

His cock pulsed inside her, stoking her need. She shrieked her delight as he swept his wings downward, plunging himself deeper with every wingstroke.

There was something almost desperate in his resolute fierceness, in the strength with which he gripped her, his haunches straining against her as he invaded her tightness with each frantic lunge. She felt an answering frenzy deep inside her, and arched her back as he drove in toward it, reaching closer, closer...

Like a tidal wave, his desire poured through her, and sensations and images bloomed in her mind -- her own face, unfurled like a flower in the full bloom of passion, turned up to his gaze, her gray eyes glowing with pity and understanding. The touch of a hand, soft and gentle, warming a cheek like carved marble, and a heart like cold stone. The feel of a nipple, hot and hard, being suckled by a ravenous mouth.

And her face again, contorted by anguish, screaming *I hate you! I hate you!*

Zendar writhed above her, pounding into her with a fury of love, fear and longing, asking nothing, giving everything, giving it with a single-minded violence that left her shuddering with desire.

Arching below him, she tilted her hips back, and felt him rear above her, his wings beating at the air as he slid even deeper, his huge cock swelling inside her, filling her so tightly they were locked together, the motions of their wings tugging him back and forth inside her.

*Forgive me, Elara,* he whispered.

*Not until you finish what you started,* she replied and, opening her mind, she sent images washing back -- his fingers, tugging deftly at the curls of her mons, teasing her clit to a hard, searing point. His mouth on her breast, tugging at her nipple until her body screamed with pleasure. His cock hammering inside her, pushing her closer and closer to mating madness, till she wanted to tear the flesh from his bones if he didn't fuck her, fuck her *now*, fuck her with a savagery that would consume her...

*You wanted that?*

*I want it. Now, Zendar!*

Throwing his head back, he roared in triumph. Then he tipped them forward in a steep, dizzying dive.

Wind rushed around her, caressing her skin, thrumming through her blood with a wildness she couldn't resist. With all the weight of his body, he rammed down into her, his cock penetrating so deeply she thought she'd faint from the sensation.

*Yes, Zendar, harder!* she cried.

He complied, drilling himself into her as his teeth grazed her neck. Shrieking in exultation, she spread herself open, feeling him take her, possess her. Screaming in lust, he ground his hipbones against her, and his huge balls, trapped between their bodies, throbbed and contracted as his semen poured into her, wave after hot searing wave.

His cock flexed inside her, pulsing with ecstasy, and she felt every shudder, every thrust as he slammed himself home again and again, until she went rigid beneath him, all her concentration suddenly fixed on that tight, aching point clenched deep inside her. Her passage gripped him, milking every twitch, every last drop from his still-thrusting shaft. And then the heat inside her exploded, spreading outward in waves of pleasure so fierce they were almost indistinguishable from pain.

Limp, half-insensate, they tumbled through the air, until at last Zendar hugged her close and spread his mighty wings, pulling them into a long, low glide that set them finally down on the banks of the Andida River.

Letting go her dragon shape, Lara collapsed to the ground, gasping with laughter as she felt Zendar shift with her, sprawled across her back, his cock still firmly nestled in her sodden folds.

She protested as he moved, withdrawing, but he rolled her over onto the grass, instantly sliding his erection back inside her. His eyes darkened with emotion, and he breathed, looking down at her, "Elara..."

She brought her hand to his lips, tracing their firm, smoothly curved line. He kissed her fingers, then lowered his head to her breast, sucking lightly. Raising her hips, she thrust up to meet him even as he pressed down, the hard ridge of his pubic bone teasing her clit.

Twice, three times, four, he stroked into her, and then she was coming again, her arms clasped around his neck, her hands buried in his hair. She clung to him, shuddering, as her cunt spasmed around him, sending him over the edge with a deep, rasping groan.

His come flooded her cunt, mingling with her juices, and he rocked his hips forward, teasing her till she gasped, "Oh, Zendar, fuck me. Fuck me again."

The sky was already glowing orange in the west before Zendar lifted his head again and gazed into the sunset. Gently, Lara ran one finger along the line of his jaw, enjoying the golden stubble that tickled under her touch. His eyes were shadowed with a mix of emotions that fascinated her. It was like watching the play of light through a cut gemstone, sparkling off certain facets while leaving others dark.

How many years, she wondered, would it take before she could read them all?

Maybe a lifetime.

Maybe forever.

"That is the first time in over twenty years," he breathed, "that I have seen a sunset."

There was one certain shadow, though, that she was coming to recognize. He looked down at her. "Elara, is the Hausther... the black one..."

"Darrek," she breathed. Tears pricked her eyes, but she nodded. "He's alive."

Zendar let out a sigh that was almost a sob, and in relief dropped his head to her shoulder. Gently, she stroked his hair, feeling it tumble across her like honey, like silk as she gave him what he sought for -- comfort and understanding.

And then she nipped his chin. "Let me up, you damn dragon." Surprised, he drew back, and then, clamping her ass in his hands, he rolled over, pulling her with him until she sat astride his hips. He grinned up at her and folded his arms behind his head. "Nay, Elara. I told you once, it is you who must release me."

"You also told me you would never submit," she shot back, fighting the urge to bend down and lick one of his tight brown nipples.

She lost the chance when he cupped his hands over her cheeks and drew her down to kiss her, slow and deep. His eyes gleamed as he gazed up at her, a clear, bewitching green, and his lips curved in a mischievous smile. "I will kneel before you whenever you desire, my queen."

The memory of the last time he'd knelt before her was more than enough to make Lara's clit throb again. Zendar pulled her against him, clasping her hips, sliding her up and down his shaft as it hardened again inside her. Lara felt her nipples dragging back and forth across his warm, well-muscled chest. Turning his head, he whispered in her ear, "But in turn you must promise to let me be as wild as I want."

*Now that, Lara thought deliriously, is a promise I can live with.*

## **Sierra Dafoe**

Sierra Dafoe imprinted early on the one, the real, the only Robin Hood (and we all know who that is!) and has been in love with the heroic adventure story ever since. She branched out from there into fantasy and science fiction and even a few forays into horror, but still has a deep-seated weakness for those cocky, handsome rebels.

Rather unsurprisingly, Sierra lives in northern New Hampshire's White Mountains -- which is good, because nothing short of their beauty would likely ever drag her away from her keyboard! After years of publishing short stories, she's thrilled to be with Changeling Press, and would love to hear your feedback. Visit her at her website, [www.darkerdesires.com](http://www.darkerdesires.com), for excerpts, contests, freebies, and more!