

**ADRIANNA  
DANE**

**ELURIA'S  
ENFORCER**

## ELURIA'S ENFORCER

Eluria felt every inch of Devon's naked flesh against her body as he pinned her beneath him. She should have expected nothing less. He was no longer the youth she'd fallen in love with in the Before. He was a dangerous predator, and she was his prey.

Her heart pounded in her chest, but she refused to struggle against him—or fight for her life. “You have the upper hand, Enforcer, do what you will. It was my choice to grant you freedom. I live—and will die—by my own choices—wrong or right.”

His flinty gaze bore into her, piercing her, igniting her flame. He leaned closer, chest to breast, hip to pelvis, with one hand carrying the majority of his weight, yet pinning her effectively beneath him. His fierce heat wafted over her, through her, his male hardness pressed into her feminine core.

Control shattering, Eluria's radiant aura burst free, the fiery, flickering evidence of her sexual arousal overly bright in the darkened recesses of the cavern...

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# ELURIA'S ENFORCER

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ELURIA'S ENFORCER  
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*To my CPs: Karen, Car, Silma, and Trista.  
Thanks for all you do.*

*And to my publisher for allowing my imagination to soar.*



# CHAPTER 1

*Danger, Will Robinson, Danger!*

Those were the first words that entered Devon Andromeda's mind as he swerved the hovercade to avoid another fireball. The fragment of memory caught him unaware. Come and gone that fast. Lately, there'd been a number of uncomfortable, yet similar flashes. None joined, none threaded to emotion. Confusing.

Another fireball exploded on the uneven earthen track ahead of him. Again he swerved. He'd need to stop until the firestorm subsided or take the chance of disabling the hovercade in a nest of craters left in a fireball's wake.

*Haydon!* He wished he could engage the hovering capabilities of the vehicle; he would get to his destination much faster. But there was too much instability in the atmosphere of the planet even without the storm. Why anyone would use Serdion for a hiding place, he couldn't fathom. In his opinion, it was on the verge of splintering and was as unstable as they came. Intermittent firestorms bombarded the planet's surface

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leaving deep gouges in their wake.

He was too close to his target to take chances, had come too far. He pulled over to the side of the track he followed and powered down the vehicle. Leaning back, he closed his eyes, emptying his mind, knowing patience would net him the prize.

Having achieved the rank of First Level Enforcer, there were none who possessed his level of skill. Enhanced through Nanus, all emotion and memory forever barred from consciousness, he'd been reborn to serve the Argadian Tribunal, the highest power on Argadia. Enforcers were molded from adolescent Argadian youth, each chosen carefully by the members of the Elite Tribunal.

Devon was selected in his seventeenth year. So they informed him. He retained no personal memory of the event. There were only three emotion levels allotted to an Enforcer. Stasis. Aggression. Killing Frenzy. Memory was viewed as an impediment to an Enforcer's usefulness. Enforcers were controlled and monitored by the Tribunal. And terminated efficiently if dysfunctional.

Devon rose to First Level Enforcer status because of the number and intricacy of missions he'd completed successfully. And lived through.

These breaks in memory disturbed him. Once this mission was complete, he would present himself for assessment and reprogramming. As required, he'd reported the memory breaks to his commander. The only reason he wasn't at the Nanus refusion facility now was because of the apparent importance of this mission. He'd been specifically requested by a Tribunal member.

The target had eluded or disposed of all previous Enforcer attempts at capture. From the chip they'd implanted in his neck, Devon possessed all the pertinent data he required to identify, locate the target, and...disable...it. The photosimiles transmitted to him gave him pause and caused some confusion.

Over the years a lone image had approached him somehow through

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stasis visions. Female. Tall. Seductive. She'd floated within his stasis mind, beckoned him. Fleeting bits, quickly vanishing, soon forgotten. Until recently.

He'd often wondered who she was. There'd been nothing to connect her to him as far as he knew. For some unknown reason, he'd never mentioned her image to anyone. It was solely with the implantation of the chip he was now able to name her.

If he'd been susceptible to the passion emotion, he would experience desire for her. He knew of its effect, understood its purpose, but had never personally experienced it. Not that he hadn't been trained in seduction techniques. In fact, he had a reputation for being quite skillful in that area. It didn't require feeling the emotion to use it against an opponent.

Nanus programming allowed his khout to stiffen on his thought command when seduction mode was required. His ability to pleasure and fully satisfy had served him well to elicit necessary information from informants.

His thoughts returned to the target. He'd wondered if the stasis visions stemmed from yet another fracture in memory. It disturbed him the way they continued to occur. It represented an imperfection. He was no longer an imperfect being as existed before conditioning.

The fact he still lived and had risen to a rank no other had been able to achieve in the last twelve years was evidence of that level of performance. No, imperfection could not be tolerated.

When they'd implanted the chip with her image, aggression consumed him. Foolish female. Now knowing her identity, he reasoned she'd sought to disable him through his stasis visions. She'd obviously thought she could elicit a softness in him and deter him from his mission.

Her name was Eluria Zydon. One of the rebel leaders to a group of young, idealistic Argadians who had recently led a new, futile insurrection attempt against the Elite Forces. As expected, it ended in

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swift and bloody defeat. The Tribunal had hoped to wipe out the whole cell. But it was discovered shortly thereafter that Eluria Zydon survived, and had disappeared.

Fortunately, the Tribunal was able to plant an informant within the Freelson rebel organization, and information had finally been received as to her whereabouts. She'd been adept at eluding him so far. Unusual for a rebel. But then again, Eluria Zydon had slipped by more than one skilled hunter. Devon had tracked her movements for months, and it ultimately led him to this desolate, ravaged planet.

The information chip he received also informed him she was the eldest daughter of an Elite Tribunal Member. She was dishonored, her Purity compromised, and for a number of years supported herself as a twilight companion, one who provided skilled sexual release to those who would pay a twilighter's high price.

It was not uncommon for those in power to contract for a twilighter's services to provide long-term companionship when transferred for duty to one of the lesser planets. Devon surmised her skill as a twilighter was what allowed her to breach his stasis. In some instances twilighters were known for their unique enhancements beyond simply physical pleasuring and companionship.

It was her father, High Commander Zydon himself, who sanctioned the mission and requested Devon specifically to carry it out. Eluria Zydon had been an embarrassment to him for years, but now she'd become a danger as well—apparently more than just a worrisome thorn in the High Commander's side. One that would not be allowed to continue.

Upon arriving on Serdion, Devon drove past field after field of flat desolation. There was no longer life on Serdion. Elite Forces conquered this planet long ago. All inhabitants had been moved to Argadia to serve the Tribunal. Hence, even with its obvious instability and dangerous environment, it often served as a perfect hiding place for those seeking refuge from Argadia's brand of justice. Although there

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were several smaller planets more conducive to life, Serdion was positioned an equal distance between Ednos, the rebel stronghold, and Argadia, the home planet.

His informants indicated this was where Eluria's transport unit had landed. Each time he thought he had her location pinpointed, she'd changed transports, requiring him to wait until new information filtered out to him. Hopping from one planet to another, to this point she'd successfully evaded him.

Not this time. Finally, he'd tracked her present unit here. There'd been no indication of life force nearby when he'd discovered her ship. He'd searched it for anything useful, then destroyed the unit, making certain she had no way to leave the planet, or to change transports before he located her. He'd followed the trail left by her land conveyance.

Traveling these lifeless tracks for days, he followed her zigzagged pattern. Until today she'd invariably eluded him, but now he understood her pattern of evasion. She was clever, but not clever enough. Or she was tiring. One less skilled would not have discovered the seemingly random movements she followed, never resting long enough in one place to target her. But he would have her soon. Having discovered the pattern she used, he could anticipate her next move and would have her soon.

Yet now another delay. This time a firestorm hindered the completion of his assignment. And this was a mission he wanted over. Chasing some scrap of a rebellious female was not what he'd been trained for. It offered too much down time as he awaited news from his informants, time in which to receive more fragmented memory best left submerged until it could be rectified. A First Level Enforcer should only concentrate on the task at hand. Memory and confusion were not acceptable.

He squinted and looked up at the cobalt sky. The storm appeared to be easing. He turned and stared down the length of the dark, deserted

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track. He narrowed his gaze as he targeted the brief glow of a soft yellow light in the distance. It was not the reddish-orange of the tiny, heated embers falling from the sky. It was a steady cream-yellow glow in the night, indicating life force. Possibly a dwelling or an encampment of some kind.

Devon sensed the elusive quarry would soon be his. He inhaled deeply, centered and narrowed his dark inner power, felt its surge within him. He focused on the mission, capture...defeat of the enemy...a quick termination. Hot, sizzling energy flooded and encompassed him. The window of the hovercade reflected back to him the familiar fierce red glow of his eyes as he simmered with the inner molten frenzy he called upon, the signature of a true Enforcer. It was a look that made more than one enemy quake before him.

The familiar power of rage coursed through him, heating him until it was a fire enveloping him with an intensity that blistered away all unnecessary thought. He started the hovercade and slowly directed it toward the beacon of light. Eluria Zydor was about to confront her fate.

\* \* \*

Eluria sat huddled beneath the overhanging rock formation, a fire lamp her only source of warmth and light. She didn't dare sleep, knowing an Enforcer was on her trail and closing in quickly. With only snatches of sleep over the last few days, her strength was almost at an end, and her alertness was not what it should be.

She'd come to Serdion thinking to avoid detection. Apparently, it hadn't worked the way she planned. This Enforcer was better than the others, more persistent, determined. His thought processes more refined. He'd kept close, forcing her to constantly keep moving, and she'd only just managed to stay one step ahead of him.

This firestorm had halted what little progress she'd made. She could only pray that it stopped him as well. All around her the fireballs fell, flashing showers of orange and smoldering to gray ash, leaving huge gouges in the planet surface.

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She'd wound up here because the research team had discovered the antidote. After all these years of testing in the Freelon labs, finally it had been perfected enough to try out on a living, breathing Enforcer. She carried the first precious vials with her. The attack on Argadia had been a diversion to allow her enough time to flee.

It pained her to think of so many lives lost, just so she could escape. But this antidote could mean the difference between their future success and a continued long, drawn out battle against the Elite Tribunal. The struggle had already cost too many lives.

When she'd discovered what her father had done, it had started out as a personal crusade to right a wrong. But when she'd witnessed up close the brand of justice the Tribunal meted out to innocent citizens, the enforced slavery it termed "service to the Tribunal" her involvement had turned into much more than that.

It was her task to get the vials off the planet without detection. Another arm of the plan was in place to capture an Enforcer, incapacitate and transport him to Ednos. They would meet at the home base of the rebel faction. It was secure, a sanctuary for them, and offered a place to detain a trained Enforcer while the antidote attempted to unweave the nightmare Nanus enforced.

If they were successful, they would use it to turn enough Enforcers against the Tribunal. They could re-educate them and gain entry to Nanus, destroying the facility before more Enforcers could be molded. Once infiltrated, they would be able to overthrow the Tribunal and end the terror of their domination over Argadia.

It sounded good in the planning. But an informant, a traitor, had breached their security. It was something they hadn't counted on. Their plans were revealed to the Tribunal and everything unraveled. The last communication she'd received said the entire cell on Argadia had been destroyed. They'd also informed her an Enforcer beamer had been attached to her current transport unit and she was alone with a hunter on her tail.

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She'd placed a rebel beamer inside the container of antidote. If she didn't return to Ednos, others would at least be able to find the precious cache and complete the mission. It was imperative the vials be kept out of the Tribunal's grasp, whatever the cost.

When the firestorm first started, she'd taken cover, and hidden the antidote. The metal container now rested beneath a pile of rocks near where she sat, hidden in case she was discovered. Once the storm abated and she was certain the Enforcer was not close by, she would recover them and make her way to safety.

For days she'd eluded him, trying to get to the secure cave she'd prepared without being discovered. There was no way she could capture him by herself. Kill him maybe—if she caught him unaware. Yet, she was so weary of the deaths. Each time she killed it was another mark on her soul. And there were so many already.

She sought only to evade him. The point of the antidote was to save lives, not sacrifice more. Once she reached her sanctuary, he would be unable to detect her location as it was veined in plordium, a natural yet effective mask to any tracking devices the Tribunal might use.

Eluria stepped out from beneath the overhang and squinted up at the sky. The firestorm had abated. She scanned the desolate, rocky area around her, hand poised in readiness above the weapon strapped at her hip.

Serdion had once been the home of a benevolent, thriving community. It had been destroyed because word spread that Serdion insurgents planned to overthrow Argadia. But it had been a ruse.

Once it was a beautiful planet, rich, lush, teeming with life. Until it was discovered it contained several rich deposits of Talagite. The indigo colored, glowing nuggets were considered priceless by the greedy and powerful on Argadia. A very lucrative deal had been struck with certain members of the Tribunal, and the Enforcers were sent out to secure the planet and subdue its supposed insurgents. It was such a surprise when exploring the planet, a team accidentally discovered the



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Talagite.

Once the Talagite had been mined, the planet was stripped, and all life destroyed on Serdion. All done in the name of the Tribunal for some pretty baubles and more power. Such tragedy, pain, and suffering from what had once been a welcoming, indulgent society. All based on lies. The Tribunal must be stopped, whatever the price.

Eluria began to gather her things quickly and moved toward her velocitor. She had to get to the cave.

A shadow moved between her and her destination, halting her abruptly, heart thudding in her chest. She dropped what she was carrying and reached for her weapon.

“Rebel Leader Eluria Zydon, dishonored daughter of High Commander Clorial Zydon of Argadia, your end has arrived. Prepare.”

She stayed her hand as she eyed the weapon aimed at her. Her gaze slowly rose and her eyes widened in disbelief. “Devon Andromeda,” she rasped out. Shock pulsed through her. Standing before her was her nemesis. The man she’d sacrificed everything to save. *Merciful Symbion*, was this how it would end? Would Guardian truly be so cruel?

She saw a brief, halting flicker of what looked like surprise in his merciless blood red gaze when she’d uttered his name. Then the fire banked and surged. She knew by the look of him, there was no hope, there would be no salvation.

He didn’t recognize her. How could he, when he had no memory of the Before? She carried no weapon powerful enough to stop him, nor was she fast enough. He was in Killing Frenzy. She knew his reputation. Impotently, she watched as his finger tightened on the deadly weapon.

She knew defeat. Even if she had a worthy weapon, this was the one Enforcer she could never destroy. If her death meant he would live, so it must be.

“It is good you recognize the means of your end, Female. May your journey to Haydon be less painful, knowing the means by which you

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pass. You have been a worthy opponent.”

Closing her eyes, she raised both hands, curled them into fists and placed them over her heart. Delivering herself freely to death, she whispered the chant of acceptance. *“Guardian, into your hands I release my light. I embrace my destiny. Your justice will endure.”*

The sound of exploding zyflamite missiles filled her ears, and the next thing Eluria knew she was flying through the air, hurled by their force and slammed to the ground some distance away. At the hard impact as she met the solid rock and tasted dirt, her breath was knocked from her body and blackness engulfed her.

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Guardian, or at the very least, Symion, had apparently heard her chant. Inhaling deeply, Eluria opened her eyes, a sense of imminent danger flooding her. In one fluid motion, she was on her feet and turned to assess the situation. The sickening smell of spent zyflamite shells permeated the air around her. It turned her stomach.

She didn't know how long she'd been unconsciousness, but knew she couldn't take the time to gauge its passing. Breath halted in her chest as she located the inert form of Devon Andromeda lying on his stomach some distance from where she stood. *Oh, please, don't let him be dead*, she prayed. Not after all this time.

Alert to any movement, she unsheathed her weapon and tentatively, in quick, running steps, made her way to his side. Scanning the area as she went, she knew that whoever had launched the zyflamite would not be long in locating them and discover they were still alive. It didn't make sense. Now knowing it was Andromeda who tracked her, she also knew from his file, he worked alone. Always. So, who fired on them?

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Why attack if they knew an Enforcer already had her in his sight? Unless, they were after him as well? Betrayal was more the rule than the exception when it came to dealing with the Tribunal. Anything was possible.

Sinking down, she knelt next to Devon's unconscious body, alert for any movement on his part. With both hands, she pushed against his side to roll him to his back. Her gaze arrowed over him, seeking signs of injury. It was impossible for her not to reach out to touch his face. He was here, with her. How many times had she imagined this? She inhaled sharply when she spotted a long narrow gash in his right side where blood was steadily oozing onto the ground.

In his gloved hand, he still clutched the laser weapon that would have ended her life. She pulled it free, carefully disengaged the power source, and tossed it away. Checking the pulse in his neck, she was thankful to find it strong and steady.

She quickly surveyed him for other signs of injury. There wasn't much time, so she could only make a cursory examination. It looked like the worst of it was the gash to his side. There was no way for her to detect if there was internal damage. Not here. She had emergency supplies at the cave; she would tend to him when they were in safer surroundings.

The most urgent need was to get them both away. First, she needed to make sure he stayed in stasis. She ran to her velocitor and grabbed a container from beneath the driver's seat. It held a small amount of a stasis-inducing drug, which should be just enough to immobilize him until she was able to get him to the cave.

She ran back, knelt next to him, and injected him with it. Hurriedly she gathered what remained of her supplies, dug up the antidote from beneath the rocks, and returned to her vehicle.

There was little chance, even with the pump of adrenalin, she'd be able to drag him any distance. She jumped into the velocitor, planning to maneuver it as close to him as possible, hoping somehow she would

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be able to lever him into the passenger seat. The rocky surface and crater indentations made it difficult to get as close as she would have liked. Once positioned, she jumped out and hurried back to his inert form.

Gazing down at all that solid muscle, she seriously had her doubts. *I can do this—I have to do this.* Hooking her hands beneath his arms, she heaved and slowly began to drag him the short distance to the velocitor. *Haydon, he was solid, dead weight.* Reaching the side, she released her grip and sank back onto the seat, needing a moment to catch her breath. She still needed to shift him the short distance onto the seat. The fact the vehicle was very low to the ground and with a hefty helping of adrenalin, hopefully she would just be able to manage it by dragging him across the seat and settling him into it.

Standing up, she leaned down and pulled him to a sitting position against the frame. Stepping up and to the other side of the seat, she leaned down, again anchoring her arms beneath his armpits, and she locked her hands together at the middle of his chest. Using as much leverage as she could manage and with a fervent prayer to Symion, she pulled upwards and managed to get his upper torso splayed across the seat. She unclasped her hands and leaned away to gasp for air.

*We don't have time for this,* she thought to herself in panic. *But I can't leave him here.* With firm resolve she leaned forward, locked her arms into position, and heaved once more with every last bit of strength left, at last succeeding in levering him into the vehicle.

Choking back a sob of thankfulness, she jumped across the driver's side. Racing around the front, she lifted his legs into the vehicle, shifted him so he was more securely in the seat, and strapped him in. *Thank Guardian. It better not be this difficult getting him out.*

Luckily the velocitor was small enough she'd be able to drive it inside the cave, so it wouldn't entail dragging him far once they reached their destination. And at least she wouldn't have to try to lift him upwards again as the bedroll would be on the ground.

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She raced back around the side, jumped in, and sped away. They weren't far from safety; she just needed a few more minutes to maneuver around the outcropping of rocks.

Surveying the sky first, she then studied the surrounding area. She could detect no movement. Yet. She turned on the scanner in the vehicle. Thank Symion the firestorm had eased as it had a tendency to play havoc with the tracking program. The system allowed for short range scanning capability that could give her some indication of whether there was any lifeforce close enough to cause concern. None of this made any sense. Where had the attack stemmed from?

Eluria breathed a sigh of relief as she wound around the last obstacle to safety. She wended her way through low-lying boulders and stopped before what looked like a solid wall of rock. She pulled out a remote device and pressed the button. Slowly, the rock wall dissipated and she drove forward. Once inside, she turned in her seat, pointed the device and the illusion reappeared. Collapsing back in her seat, a sigh of relief escaped her.

Swiveling sideways, she surveyed the unconscious man strapped to the passenger seat. What was she going to do with him? She couldn't have left him there. Killing him was out of the question. Slowly, she stepped out of the velocitor and walked through the low-lying passage to the next chamber.

In was an area she used for sleeping as well as storage. There was a set of large metal trunks to one side and she stepped toward one of them. Inside were extra small weapons, ammunition, and the items she was searching for—restraints. She didn't have a choice. Either she confined him or he killed her. Her options were few.

After she secured him, she'd need to come to another decision. One she wasn't sure she was ready to make. One that scared her.

She pulled out a bedroll from the other trunk and spread it out to one side of the enclosure. Then she set the restraints. The electronic control allowing her to adjust the grip was set to maximum level.

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Securing him would require no less.

Once everything was in readiness, she turned back to the opening and took a deep breath. Now to get him from the vehicle to the bedding.

Whoever said determination couldn't get the job done was wrong. It took the remainder of her strength and one heck of a lot of focus, but finally she had him settled on the bedroll. Before she engaged the restraints, she would need to remove his black skinsuit to assess his wounds. She didn't look forward to it; knew the effect it would have on her. Taking a deep breath, she tried to steel her emotions against the sight of him.

As each centimeter of his supple, golden skin was uncovered, she found it harder and harder to concentrate on her task. But at last his body was revealed. And what a beautiful body it was. She would have enjoyed just sitting there and gazing at him for hours, like a fine sculpture displayed at one of the old museums on Argadia. She wanted to curl up next to him, hold him, feel his solid strength. She wanted Before.

*Stop it!* She turned away from the focus of her desires. His wounds required attention. She needed water to cleanse them. Rising from her kneeling position, she walked into a third chamber. This one contained an underground spring, the water warm enough for bathing. A cascade of it fell from the face of the stone constantly providing a fresh supply of soothing wet heat. It was one of the things that made this cavern a good resting place. All the comforts of home, so to speak.

She pulled a small wooden bowl, a soft drying cloth, and a mediseal from another trunk located in the chamber. Filling the bowl from the pool, she returned to Devon, and proceeded to thoroughly cleanse the wound in his side. She winced as she surveyed the long, jagged tear. It was a good thing she had a mediseal with her, and proceeded to carefully close the wound. It would heal, but because it was deep, there would be a scar. Much similar to the one she carried on her own body.

She'd hesitated long enough. It was time to engage the restraints.

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Again, she leaned back on her heels. With his eyes closed, his face was in repose, softened, reminding her of the youth she'd once known. They were strong features, but not hard, a square jaw, and high, defined cheekbones.

Unable to resist, she reached up, and touched his hair. It was thick and silky beneath her fingertips. The texture much as she remembered. But the color had changed. It was now white. Recognizable as an Enforcer. When she'd known him, it had been black as a night sky without moon.

His body was firm, muscled, sculpted. She was unable to resist and ran her hand along his shoulder, down the contours of his smooth, hard chest. Life, warm and pulsing, thrummed beneath her fingertips. So beautiful. She closed her eyes in painful remembrance as the Before washed over her.

*"Come watch this old Earth film I bought on the black market today," Devon urged her, a grin on his lips. There was an eager light in his beautiful turquoise eyes. He reached for her hand and pulled her into the viewing room, urging her down onto the long comfortable lounging chair. She'd curled up beneath his arm as they watched the science fiction movie from long ago.*

*He'd looked down and smiled at her. "I'm glad you came over, Eluria. I've missed you. You'll be at the Celebration tomorrow, won't you?"*

*"Yes, I'll be there. You know I wouldn't miss it," she'd responded, tucking her head against his shoulder, inhaling his warm, musky scent. She loved spending time with him. Wanted the moment to go on forever.*

How could she have known that within the space of a sun's rising he would be torn from her life? The spirits of Before haunted her often. When he'd been taken away, her heart had broken knowing she'd never see him again. Even if she did, he wouldn't remember her. But when she'd found out the truth, her whole life had shattered. That's when it had become imperative to find the antidote and set him free.



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*The antidote!* She raced out to the velocitor and retrieved the small box containing the vials, handling it reverently. She carried it back inside.

He was the reason she was here now. She looked at him and then down at the small box. She had a decision to make. Was this why Guardian had brought them together on this planet? Did she dare attempt to use it on him now? Did she really have any other choice?

No. It would either work or it wouldn't. It was apparent someone wanted them both dead. If he killed her and went back, they would probably find a way to kill him anyway. If she left him the way he was, he would try to destroy her, complete his mission. And he would succeed because she couldn't kill him. Either way they were both dead.

She wanted him whole. She needed to give him back his life. Guilty knowledge from Before washed over her. And if it did work, there was a chance it would work on others and the rebellion could be successful.

Placing the box on the lid of a trunk, she opened it, removed a syringe and one of the clear vials marked Nanus-X. She remembered the instructions. First, she must inject him with Nanus-X. If all went well, twenty-four hours later, she must inject him with the neutralizer, Nanus-Z.

After filling the syringe, she walked back to his side. Her hands shook at the enormity of what she was about to do. She chanted to the protection goddess.

"Symion, if ever I needed your guiding hand, I need it now. Don't let me make a mistake. Please let it work." Slowly, she lowered her hand with the filled syringe to Devon's hip.

## CHAPTER 3

Again, her form filled his vision. But this time it was different. Coils of pain threaded about his body, his mind hazed with lust. He roared with rage and impotence as consciousness returned, and he realized he was shackled and his movement severely restricted.

“Release me!” he raged as he fought against the cuffs binding him securely. Pulsating raw emotion consumed him, his vision blurred by its intensity. *What in Haydon was happening to him?* Thoughts, feelings, emotions he shouldn’t be experiencing swamped him, like being caught in a tidal wave and flung helpless within its wake. Desires he shouldn’t have rippled through his body, tightening it, his khout throbbed with a driving need he was unprepared to assuage. His words vibrated back to him as he thrashed uselessly against the bonds that held fast.

The blanket covering him was lifted away and a soft hand touched his hip, followed by the sting of a needle. He flinched and tried to draw away, but was limited in his ability to move any distance.

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He looked in the general direction of the movement, but his eyes were blurry, his head throbbed. He attempted to focus, but all he could make out was a vision with reddish-brown hair, and a slender frame.

He arched and fought against the restraints. He attempted to move past the surges of pain and lust destroying him. Had he gone mad? Should he have gone for refusion sooner? It was like a dam had burst inside his head, his body. Wave after wave of converging emotion struck him, desire, hate, pain, rage, without surcease.

He felt the stroke of a hand against the blanket over his chest. The touch was meant to soothe. He didn't want to be soothed; he wanted to be free.

"Relax," a soft voice of smooth cream floated over him. "You've been hurt and you'll tear your wound open again."

"Female, release me," he bit back at her, determined to ignore her siren's call. Surging against the bonds, against the emotion, he struggled impotently.

"Release you and you'll kill me. I think not."

"Either kill me or release me," he raged back as he fought to tear free. Completion of his mission was foremost in his mind. He'd never failed before. Never.

Animal desires continued to pound through him. Again his body tightened, breathing constricted in his chest and he arched against the pain and lust swamping him. He tried to focus on the mission, to control the passions. But the only thing he experienced was a primal, driving demand to fuck the Female. To sink deep and hard, driving fast, until a release he'd never known nor desired, and didn't understand, took over. His khout pulsed and tightened with the urgency to fill her, to claim her.

Again, he stiffened as the savage desire and pain rode him. He just needed to gain control of these feelings, something he hadn't been required to do in twelve years.

"I can ease you, somewhat," the soft voice murmured. "You need to

lie still.”

“What have you done to me?” He was hot and cold at the same time, everything swirling inside him, ripping him apart. Emotions crashed against each other. First rage overtook him, then fear. *Mylonna!* Fear was not an emotion he wished acquaintance with. Yet, wash over him it did.

He was unable to clarify and isolate one emotion in order to control it. They wavered, shimmering one through another. He couldn't grasp a way to stop them. The lust and desire was worst, the most primal of needs ebbed through him.

“Let me ease you.” Her voice held a note of pleading he didn't understand nor want.

“I would not have tortured you, Female. Your death would have been quick.” Another agonizing wave of pain sliced through him, and he convulsed in response, fighting its control.

His body raged with a fire that sought to be quenched, and there was nothing he could do. He felt cool air as the blanket was removed from his sweat-soaked body.

“I'm trying to help you, not kill you, Enforcer. You'll hate me for this later, but right now it's what you need. To help you find your way through the maze of emotions overwhelming you.”

He felt a soft hand encircle his khout and a new emotion emerged to overtake the others. A moist tongue circled the tip and her mouth enclosed him in a warm, satiny, heat. Wanting to fight the craving his body demanded, but unable to do so, he groaned with the pleasurable texture of her mouth.

“Mylonna! Deeper, take me deeper.”

He thrust his hips upwards, trying to force his command, fighting for release. Haydon! The pleasure that consumed him. It was too much.

She laid a hand to his hip, staying his movement, as she continued to drive him to a place he'd never been, to the fringes of Lydion. Pleasure flooded through him, the sensations of her mouth, her tongue,

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swirling, sucking, drove him upwards. The need to bury his khout in her channel overwhelmed him. Her fragrant scent of rozanna petals drifted around him.

He'd never desired a female. The raw feeling now encompassing him to see if her skin tasted as sweet, if her lips were as soft as they felt on his hard shaft, had him dizzy with painful wanting. Not just any female, but this one who was driving him mad with her mouth.

He tightened, and then release erupted inside him like exploding zyflamite, sending him into a swirl of colors and fulfillment he'd never felt before, a shattering. Pleasure rode him hard, as he tried to bury himself farther into her depths, and she continued to stroke him with her tongue, swallowing his seed as he released a groan of satisfaction.

Tension left his body as he dropped back onto the blankets beneath him, his body drenched in sweat. He closed his eyes, thankful that for the moment pain was manageable and the lust had abated.

He slitted his eyes as he felt a warm, wet cloth stroke his chest. He watched her from beneath lowered lids, confusion now overriding his thoughts. "Why?" he rasped.

She stopped what she was doing and glanced at him. He could determine nothing from her expression, none of her thoughts filtered through. The protective lenses she wore over her eyes hid her emotions; her soul and mind were closed off from detection.

"You have a fever. I'm simply trying to make you more comfortable while you heal."

"Why didn't you kill me when you had a chance?" He couldn't understand why she'd let him live and he needed to reason her purpose. "What do you hope to gain by keeping me alive?" He'd accessed her file, knew she'd terminated others who tracked her. Why not him?

She glanced away and continued bathing his sweat-drenched body. "I have my reasons," was her cryptic response. "You must rest now. The emotion may surge again and you'll need your strength."

He narrowed his gaze, studying her. "What do you know about

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what's going on inside me?" He remembered the prick at his hip. "What have you done to me, Female?"

She replaced the blanket over him and leaned back, looking at him. "You know my name. It's Eluria. Stop calling me Female. I find it distasteful."

He returned her stare, seeking her motives. "You think I seek to please you, *Female*? I care not what you find distasteful."

He saw her lips firm into a thin line. "You are at my mercy, *Enforcer*. I suggest you have a care with your tongue."

"You think I fear death? Unlikely." He fell back and stared at the ceiling. "Do as you will." When his mind was clearer, he would find a way to be free. Right now his thoughts were too jumbled to make sense, and his eyes couldn't seem to maintain focus.

He heard her deep intake of breath. "You're a fool, *Enforcer*. Eventually, you'll see that. But I can wait."

From the corner of his vision, he saw her rise and turn away. He turned his head to follow her movements as she walked through an entryway; liked the sway of her hips, appreciated the roundness of her bottom so well displayed in the dark blue skinsuit she wore. Wanted to know what lay beneath it. A primal rumble again started to rise deep in his chest. He now recognized the need building in his body.

He turned away from her, feeling the lust again attempt to overtake him, trying to control it. If he didn't look at her, maybe the feeling would subside. Long, painful moments later, he discovered it wasn't going to be that easy. He didn't need to be looking at her to desire her. He could scent her presence and it fueled his passion.

He felt the molten heat rage through him, like his body was on fire. He fought for control, refusing to give in as the pain surged. Again, sweat broke out on his body as he strove to restrain the feelings erupting and swirling inside him. Unbidden visions of the female in naked beauty entered his mind.

*No!* He screamed inside his head. She'd done something to him. But

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he would fight it and he would succeed. Failure had never been a choice for him and it would not be so now. If he was to die, he would do it as an Enforcer, not cringing in fear.

Was that what she hoped to gain? To bring out a cowardice in him? How did she know about the problems he'd been experiencing with the Nanus block? The only one he'd spoken with was his immediate commander. No one else was aware of the breach.

For what seemed like hours, he lay there fighting against the emotions. She always hovered, asking him how he felt. Was he in pain? Did he want something to eat? To drink? He refused to answer her. When he'd fought against the restraints, his body tightening against the fierce waves of pain and desire, she came to him again, and provided him with the release his body craved.

He'd fought her, not wanting to succumb to the ripples of pleasure devouring him as her skilled mouth worked its magic on his hard, pulsing shaft. The female drew from him all manner of thought and feeling he'd never experienced before. He tried to tell himself it was because she was an experienced twilighter, knew how to provide pleasure. But some part of him seemed to recognize her touch, her scent. And it was this part of himself he didn't understand.

The Killing Frenzy was no longer foremost in his mind as it should be now. What he needed above all else was to claim her in the most elemental way, to fuck her until they both lay unconscious at the borders of Lydion. He groaned again as her skilled lips brought him release and he collapsed, allowing the cradle of unconsciousness to enclose him in its arms.

## CHAPTER 4

Eluria studied him as he lay in stasis. Watching the emotion rage through him tore her apart. There was little she could do, except try to ease the sexual frenzy somewhat. She wanted to take the pain into her own body, rather than see him suffer so. But she knew it was a stage he must pass through to be healed.

When his memories returned, would he hate her for what she'd done? Absently, she fingered the pendant of the fragile silver necklace she wore. It had served as a talisman to her over the years, offering a symbol of strength to carry her forward.

Even with Devon's memory returned, there were things he wouldn't be aware of. Painful in her own memory, knowledge would eventually need to be offered to him, to complete his understanding. Would he welcome their return?

She knelt next to him and set down the bowl she carried. She wore the weight of her duties heavy on her shoulders and right now she felt their full impact. She turned back and was startled to find his intense



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gaze studying her.

"Eluria the Pure." He said it without emotion, a statement, not a question.

She nodded her head and looked away. "Yes. Does this come from memory or the files you accessed?"

"I knew you."

"You knew Eluria the Pure." She reached for the bowl. "You need nourishment. Will you accept this from my hand?"

"Release me. I'll feed myself."

"Not yet."

"Where are we?"

"We are on Serdion. In a place we will remain undetected."

"I had you in my sights." She watched him as he tried to remember.

"Yes, you were about to terminate me when we were attacked." She tried to remain unemotional at the memory of her final words to Guardian.

"We were attacked? Why do you say we?"

"Use your brain, Enforcer. Why would they put you on my tail and then send in a second force? I know for a fact you always work alone. That doesn't make sense. Their target wasn't just me—it was both of us. What have you done, Enforcer, that they want you dead as well?"

His navy blue scrutiny pierced her. The fact his eyes were blue and not black, she took as an encouraging sign. He was changing. She'd waited the requisite time and injected him with the Nanus-Z neutralizer and now it would simply be a question of waiting.

"Why didn't you kill me instead of bringing me here?"

"Unlike Enforcers, it is not our way to kill needlessly." She didn't want to tell him the real reason. She was certain he wasn't ready for the truth.

She saw his gaze narrow. "Nor do we kill without reason. You're a rebel. You've killed before. What is your reason for not terminating me? You've injected me with something, I felt the needle. What was

it?"

She shouldn't be surprised. He'd always been sharp, even in the Before. She looked away and then back. "What was your life like, Enforcer? What memories did you have? What did you feel?"

"You know the answer. What more do you want?"

"I've injected you with an antidote to the Nanus process."

"There is no such drug. It is impossible to reverse the process. The Tribunal would know if one existed."

She pinned him with a hard look. "Oh, they know. Why do you think they sent you after me? Want me terminated? Do you really think the Tribunal would share such crucial information with you? They make you and they use you for their own greedy purposes. After your usefulness is over, they discard you in their own way without thought. They're not going to offer you a way to be free of their enforced slavery. Do you remember anything from Before?"

The look in his eyes changed to one of heavy lust. "What I remember is the feel of your warm mouth on my khout. You are skilled Twilighter, I will give you that. You seek to seduce me, have come to me in stasis. To what end? The Tribunal cannot be defeated."

She rose and turned away. She could never let him see how much she yearned for him. Her body heated at the thought of joining with him in the truest sense. Not simply a fucking, but the spiritual and passionate sealing of souls in true union and balance. She also knew because of her path, she would never again be considered a proper complement in Union to any male. Never before had the thought tasted so bitter.

She turned back to him. "The Tribunal will be defeated. We now have the knowledge. You are the first to test the antidote. Tell me, Enforcer, what do you feel? Or maybe the better question is, do you feel?"

He struggled against the restraints. She could smell the impotent rage consuming him. She'd tasted his lust, knew his desire. Yes, the

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antidote was working. But how quickly would it be before the Turning was complete?

He turned a hate-filled gaze on her. "Yes, I feel emotion. Desire that I should not have. If I am unable to serve as an Enforcer, you might as well terminate me now."

"Be thankful you are no longer able to serve a brutal ruler," she bit back, then turned away from him. Taking a deep breath, she tried to calm herself. "No, Enforcer," she continued quietly, "it isn't our way to kill." How much should she tell him?

Turning around, she walked toward him and knelt. She could smell his desire building. She also sensed he was learning to control his need. She leaned closer. "I knew you Before, Devon Andromeda," she whispered. "I would save you now."

He yanked back and pinned her beneath a hard cobalt stare. "Save me? From what? I had purpose. You would take that from me. You seek to hobble me with emotion and desire I do not need. Memories that serve no purpose other than to impede my duty."

Eluria sighed and picked up the bowl. "Your duty? Duty to rulers who kill on a whim for power and greed? Who destroy your past to make you the perfect killing machine? This conversation serves no purpose. You must eat."

"I will take no food from your hand, Twilighter. Release me or terminate me. Now."

Eluria rose. "Be obstinate, Enforcer. Eventually you'll eat, even from my tainted hand." She watched as he closed his eyes and his jaw tightened as he twisted away from her. He reminded her of a small male unable to have his way. She sighed and turned away.

"Why did you approach me in stasis? What did you hope to gain?" His words halted her.

She whirled back to him. "I don't have that power. I never entered your stasis. Explain what you saw."

"You. Beckoning me. Calling to me." He studied her for long

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moments. "Different than you are now. Yet the same."

He'd had memories after becoming an Enforcer? Was that possible? She'd never heard of that anomaly before. Was the Nanus process deteriorating in some way? Or was it Devon who was the exception?

"I never came to you in stasis. As unbelievable as it may be, it appears you retained a memory from Before. Or one resurfaced. How long have you been having the visions?"

"Over the last several years your form has appeared to me. I felt no emotion attached to it, only the vision. I didn't know who it was until I accessed your file." His gaze arrowed past her, as though focused elsewhere.

"Your hair and form were the same, but you were Maigin." His eyes refocused on her, seemed to assess the lines of her body. She felt uncomfortable beneath the fierce look. "Your face was softer, your eyes held purity."

A knife pierced her heart and she turned away. His vision was of her as she had been before he was taken. Maigin. A pure young woman eagerly sought by many young Argadian males for Union. Once loved by Devon. Before he'd been taken. Before she'd discovered the betrayal by her father. Before she'd made the choice to become a Twilight Companion.

"It appears it was the shadow of a memory of me which haunted you in stasis." Her voice was husky with suppressed emotion. She would not let the bittersweet memories of Before hurt her. She'd convinced herself to move beyond them long ago. It was impossible to go back, and destructive to yearn for what might have been and would never be.

"What happened, Eluria the Pure? Your father is a powerful Tribunal member. Why would you throw away your position and purity to become a Twilight Companion? You had no need, you already had power and wealth." His eyes darkened, dilated. "Your signature radiance glows scarlet with sexual fire. Was it fucking you craved? Did

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you thirst for more Argadian khout than your father's position could buy through Union?"

She pulled inward, attempting to dim her radiance, knowing it glowed for him and no other. It never had. By Symion, his words cut deep. Pain washed through her. He would never know what it cost her to become a Companion. The enhancements she needed to ingest faithfully just to be able to perform without illness. He would never see the deep scars seared in her soul.

\* \* \*

He saw her flinch at his words. He'd hurt her. Remorse filled him. It tasted odd. He'd never felt it before and was uncomfortable with its weight. He'd seen the pain before, knew its definition, but it had never touched him. Not like this.

"I find I hunger. I will eat the food you've prepared," he said gruffly.

Slowly she made her way back to his side and knelt. He found it pleasant to watch her. Her movements were graceful, like a moondancer, sensual and fluid. Though his memory was still vague, he knew she spoke true. She was part of his Before.

As she fed him, he studied the memory, weighed the emotions he felt. Ones rusted with disuse. He recalled her presence and it felt pleasant, warm. The feelings of happiness, affection, love mingled inside threading through the shrouded memories. They washed through him like a tidal wave against the land. He sought to control their intensity, separate and harness his response to their demands.

Devon wanted to know more about her, wanted more of his memory. Something inside him ached to touch her. His shaft rose hard, tenting the blanket covering him. Desire seared him, yet he found he was now able to control the emotion, to fetter their strength and command.

He saw her glance at the tented blanket knowing its cause, a tinge of pink spread across her cheeks. She looked away, appearing enthralled

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by the bowl in her lap.

“You need not fear. I am in control of the emotions now.”

She glanced up at him. The smoky lenses covering her eyes, hiding the path to her soul and heart, frustrated his efforts to read her emotions and find her true purpose. He wanted to know her and her eyes could tell him much about her true thoughts. She'd also cloaked her radiance, effectively sealing herself from any further discovery.

“I don't fear you. Nor do I fear your needs if pain exists or you are in discomfort.” Her voice was even-toned, low, emotionless.

“So you would be willing to ease my pain?” He didn't like the lack of expression in her face.

She nodded without looking at him.

“How would you do it? Like before with your mouth? I'll admit your soft, wet lips gave me a great deal of pleasure.”

The hand holding the spoon trembled, and he watched as she set it down. She licked her lips. “Is that what you need?”

He sensed her vulnerability. Why did he continue to bait her? Forcing her to relieve his lust was not his way. “Tell me of Before.”

“It's best if you wait for memory to return. I don't want you to question whether I force your thoughts.”

With a frustrated sigh he leaned back against the bedroll, watching her. The restraints confining him were tedious. He tried to remember his mission, the fact her termination was inevitable, demanded by the Tribunal, wanting to remember his duty. But all his mind would return to him was the vision and feel of her curled next to him in Before. The aroma of rozanna petals swirled about him. He shifted restlessly.

“Where is my uniform?”

Eluria turned and nodded toward a chest. “It has been repaired and awaits you.”

“If you don't plan to terminate me, release me so I may clothe myself.”

He saw the look of uncertainty that flickered through her

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expression, but she didn't move to do as he demanded. Sighing in exasperation he said, "Haydon, Female, I am no longer in Killing Frenzy, you can see for yourself. You are safe for the time being. This fragment of memory I seem to have... I won't harm you until I know more. And it appears only you have the information I want."

Through a long moment of silence she studied him. What she hoped to find there he had no idea.

"I would have trusted Devon Andromeda with my life in Before," she murmured. "Without question. My need to trust you now stems from those memories. From the youth I once knew and..." Her words trailed away, her gaze focused past him, then returned. "Your oath first, you will not try to leave the caves."

"You don't ask for my oath not to terminate you?" It puzzled him. It would seem to him preservation of her life would be uppermost in her thoughts.

She shrugged, yet did not respond.

He couldn't understand. Her manner was incongruous. She should terminate him, but she didn't. She should want his oath not to terminate her, yet she did not. "Very well. You have my oath I will not leave your caves. How long do you intend we stay buried here?"

"Until your memories of Before return."

"And what if they don't?"

She bit her lip, a look of uncertainty on her face. After a long moment, she straightened her shoulders. "Memory will return," she answered him decisively. "Emotions have done so, memory will soon follow. We stay until that time. Do I have your oath?"

By Mylona, he admired her determination. Even knowing she was a rebel, he found himself drawn to her strength, if not her proud beauty. He'd wanted her Before, that much of his Before was uncovered. To learn more of his blinded memories, he would give her the oath she demanded.

"Very well. You have my oath not to leave these caves until

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memory is restored. Now release me.”

Slowly, she leaned forward from her kneeling position, raised the end of the blanket covering him and released the restraints binding his legs. He remained still. Waiting. Watching.

Pulling back a moment, she studied him. As if satisfied with what she saw, she stretched over his body, and released the first restraint. He slowly brought his arm down, his muscles protesting at the movement. As the second bond was released, faster than a striking viper, he was up and had her pinned to the ground, stretched fully beneath his naked body. He captured her wrists and pulled them above her head, anchoring them with one hand.

She didn't fight him, simply lay quietly beneath him, her breathing shallow as she gazed up at him. Devon leaned in closer. A wave of consuming lust flooded through him, hardening his body.

“So, Female, what will it take, I wonder, to woo the answers I seek from your tainted soul? Was your trust misplaced do you think?”



## CHAPTER 5

Eluria felt every inch of Devon's naked flesh against her body as he pinned her beneath him. She should have expected nothing less. He was no longer the youth she'd fallen in love with in the Before. He was a dangerous predator, and she was his prey.

Her heart pounded in her chest, but she refused to struggle against him—or fight for her life. “You have the upper hand, Enforcer, do what you will. It was my choice to grant you freedom. I live—and will die—by my own choices—wrong or right.”

His flinty gaze bore into her, piercing her, igniting her flame. He leaned closer, chest to breast, hip to pelvis, with one hand carrying the majority of his weight, yet pinning her effectively beneath him. His fierce heat wafted over her, through her, his male hardness pressed into her feminine core.

Control shattering, Eluria's radiant aura burst free, the fiery, flickering evidence of her sexual arousal overly bright in the darkened recesses of the cavern.

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The look in Devon's eyes was one of triumph. "So, Female, what would you offer me to assuage your need? Twilighter, how long has it been since your last encounter? I need answers and you can provide them. In return—"

Eluria turned her head away, unwilling to meet his gaze. She refused to rise to his taunt. His grasp tightened on her wrists and she winced. "How long have you been without completion?" he repeated through gritted teeth.

"What do you care, Enforcer? Why do you care? I'm nothing to you. If it's you who want release, say so," she challenged him in a low deep-throated tone meant to entice. "There's no need to tackle me. I'm trained, after all, to service those very needs. But it will not give you the answers you seek."

His hard gaze roved insolently over her taut body beneath him. Finally, he released her and stood. Towering over her, he studied her as she lay still, appearing to wait for his next attack. When it became obvious he planned no further assault, Eluria jumped to her feet and retreated across the room. The distance she created helped to reassert control and her radiant red glow flickered and disappeared.

She walked to the chest containing his uniform. Reaching inside, she pulled out the folded garment and threw it at him. "Your skinsuit, Enforcer. I suggest you clothe yourself. Unless, of course"—she allowed her heavy-lidded gaze to glide brazenly over his body—"you have other needs to assuage first?"

When he'd been prone, lying on the bed unconscious, his inert form enticed her. But standing, in full, firm glory before her, Eluria wasn't sure how she would succeed in keeping her distance, or her control, for much longer. The enforced closeness was already eating through her self-control.

Devon uttered a sound of disgust, and reaching down, picked up the uniform which had landed in a dark puddle at his feet. "I don't suppose there's a water supply nearby?" he asked when he straightened,

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ignoring her suggestive question.

She pointed to the passage leading to the next chamber. "Through there is a pool. You'll find the water is naturally heated. It should serve your needs adequately."

She watched as he strode through the entrance, admiring the golden, molten lines of rippling muscle. Once he was out of sight, she released a long-held breath and collapsed against the side of the trunk.

A sob broke free as she speculated on how little it would take to lose her control and surrender to her passion. Even now, she was damp with arousal at the thought of him taking her, of the hard need riding her, and how much she wanted to feel him pushing deep inside her. By the look of him, he'd fill her so completely there'd be no room for the empty longing now filling her heart.

What would he think, she wondered, if she informed him she'd never achieved completion as a companion? She'd never spiraled to the place of total, spiritual balance she knew was possible, with any of the companions she'd accepted.

Instinct told her with Devon it would be different. No, she corrected herself, with Devon it *could* have been different. He could never want what she'd become. She heard the contempt in his voice when he branded her with what she was—*twilighter*. Little did he know all the hated name truly encompassed.

What would happen when his memory was fully restored? They would return to Ednos, and then what? He would take his rightful place and she would disappear. It's what she'd planned. From that point in her youth when she discovered the betrayal, she'd centered on the need to right the wrongs done by her father to him and his family. Every choice she'd made, every breath she'd taken had been fueled by the guilt lying heavily on her soul.

But once he returned, what was left for her? Her purpose would be served. Panic rose within her breast. The pain of loneliness and a deep, dark abyss of emptiness loomed before her. She'd never thought that

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far ahead. To the success of the task she'd set for herself. She shook her head in denial.

Once she'd held a young Maigin's innocent visions. Union with a *taman* she loved. No more—those dreams had been shattered long ago. So what was she left with? More importantly, how would Devon react when he discovered what her father had engineered—and the guilt resting on her shoulders? How would he respond when he knew she was the one ultimately responsible for his father's termination?

\* \* \*

Devon leaned back against the rocky ledge of the heated pool, allowing the moist warmth to ease the aches still remaining from the clash with zyflamite. His gaze rose to the ceiling dripping with stalactites, seeking the source of the latticed patterns of light filtering across the surface of the clear pool he relaxed in.

His thoughts were filled with the Female—Eluria, the remembrance of her soft body beneath him. Her scent, like her radiance, had wrapped about him, seducing his intent to have answers. If he'd held her longer, he'd have taken her, filled her savagely with the completion he knew they both wanted. The arousal he felt in her presence was new to him, causing an aching need his body demanded be relieved.

He felt her inner war of need and denial. It flared inside him, halting his intent to take her. He would not force himself upon an unwilling Female—no matter the circumstance.

His mind wandered back to her certainty they were protected here.

How?

He rose in one fluid, economical movement, and stepped from the recesses of the crystalline spring. Water slid from his body and pooled at his feet as he surveyed the rocky, uneven walls of the cavern. There was something within them that masked their presence. He was certain of it. He walked to the rocky face to peer closer, splayed a hand to the surface and smoothed it along the uneven contours.

He bent closer, inhaled deeply, noticing a scent not of earth or

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heated rock, but slightly metallic. Again, he raised his gaze to peer more closely at the rocky interior and noticed a shimmer caste of violet interspersed throughout the rock.

Of course! It had to be traces of plordium. It was the only ore which could possibly cloak their presence inside the walls of the cave. Again, Devon found himself admiring the Female for identifying and putting to good use this naturally secure hiding place.

He still was not convinced the zyflamite was meant for him or that he should remain within the recesses of the cave for protection. But these new emotions he felt gave him pause to consider what would be his best course of action. There could be no doubt his role as Enforcer would be severely hampered by the feelings churning inside him. Until he was able to control them adequately, he would stay.

Devon winced as a knife of pain stabbed through his head. He staggered as another arc of pain drove him to his knees. Reaching up, he cradled his head, as another surge shattered, crashing through him. Lights burst behind his closed lids, images of people and events flashing, mingling, colliding.

It was as though a steel gate had been opened, and he was tossed out within the midst of reclaimed memories. For remembrance is what it had to be. He tried to grasp an image, any image, hold fast to it, understand it, but they moved too quickly, one after the other, drilling into his brain.

"No!" he yelled, trying to control the swarm of images and the emotions they elicited in response.

Suddenly he felt gentle yet firm hands on his shoulders; the scent of rozanna caressed him. "Devon, what is it?" A concerned voice hovered above him. Blinded by the images, he sought to push her away. Another deadly dagger drove through his mind.

"Images," he gasped, pressing hard with his hands against his temples. "Too fast," he groaned, "too fast, too many." The blanking numbness of unconsciousness sucked him away from the whirling

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colors as he collapsed back into the arms seeking to shield him.

\* \* \*

*Symion! What do I do?* Eluria panicked when Devon lost consciousness. As he began to fall forward, Eluria tightened her arms and twisted, cradling him close as she sank to the ground in a sitting position. She calmed a bit after locating his pulse and finding it strong and steady. Wrapping her arms around him, she waited, praying to Guardian for guidance, to return Devon to her.

An eternity seemed to linger as she sat there, recalling a time when he'd held her in his arms. Bittersweet memories of his hard arms and the security they represented in the Before. His laughter, like warm honeyberry nectar flowing over her, infusing her with happiness. When was the last time she'd felt real happiness?

There was some sense of joy in the reality of touching his warm supple skin, after so many years of fantasizing of doing just that. She leaned forward and inhaled his scent. It was different from Before, yet the same, seasoned by time and experience, like the most rare Dalanian Ale.

Knowing she shouldn't, but unable to stop herself, she traced the line of his finely-sculpted lips with her fingertips and a yearning inside took shape. A spark of pleasure charged through her.

One kiss. Just one. To last her a lifetime. To remind her of what happiness tasted like. He would never know she was but a hungry thief who stole a small sample of paradise.

She lowered her head. His breath whispered across her senses. Like the ray of first sunlight to a new day she touched her lips to his, felt their firm yet yielding hardness, wanted more. She'd known one touch would not be enough. Yet it must suffice. Long ago she'd learned to live in aching want.

She began to pull back. Hard hands rose to cup her face, with gentle firmness. Eluria held her breath and waited.

He opened his eyes. His turquoise gaze locked with hers. She

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inhaled in shock. "You're back," her words were a triumphant gasp of breath. "Thank Guardian, it worked."

"Eluria. *Na-nivia*," his hoarse utterance stilled her. *My love*. If only it were still possible.

"I remember you. I remember all of it." He released a shuddering breath.

She nodded in thankfulness, her eyes filled with tears. "I know."

Slowly, he sat up without releasing her. His gaze swept over her as a thirsty man eyed a well of water in the middle of a desert. He lowered his head, his lips capturing hers, drawing from her very core, the desire she'd fought so hard to control. Her radiance shimmered attempting to burst free, to encompass them both in hot, blazing light. As much as she wanted to, she couldn't let it happen.

"No," she breathed, attempting to pull from his arms, from his power. "There's much you don't know. We can't do this."

Finally, she broke free and frantically put distance between them. She watched as he struggled for control. Passion simmered between them, ready to blaze again. Electricity crackled in the air around them. Her radiance fought savagely for freedom, which she couldn't allow. Eluria strove for the peace of inner balance.

He stepped away from her. Staggered, and righted himself.

"Devon," she gasped, instinctively taking a step towards him, ready to help him if need be.

He winced, but motioned her back. "I'm fine," he growled. "Let it be. The memories are settling—finding their place. The pain isn't as bad."

"You need to rest, Devon. We don't know how this will affect you."

Like jeweled daggers, his gaze pinned her. "You think I'm not aware of that? Everything is turned around. With these memories, these emotions—everything is changed."

He leaned down and picked up the uniform. Donning it quickly, he turned back to her and straightened, his gaze the look of a hunter sizing

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up its victim. "I want answers."

She'd known he would. Once the memories of Before returned, he would want the truth.

Though no longer the eyes of a dreaded Enforcer, still they pierced her. "Where is my family?"

Eluria bit her lip, turned her gaze from his, unable to meet his searching look. "Your mother is alive, as is your sister. I don't know about your brother. Alekos has disappeared. There's been no real word of him for many years. Just rumors. We think he may have been terminated, but have been unable to confirm it."

She paused, taking a deep breath to steady her. "Your mother is in seclusion on Ednos. Gavrielle sought peace after...after..." She stopped speaking, trying to find the words to continue. "Kierra...Kierra is near your mother."

"And my father?" The question she feared most dropped between them.

"Taeryl. Taeryl was terminated, Devon."

Painful silence echoed all around them. Finality. Eluria saw his jaw harden, and his eyes fill with pain.

They were silent for long moments as she waited for Devon to absorb the knowledge of his shattered family.

"All these years I had no memory of them. If I'd actually met any of them during that time, I wouldn't have known them."

She nodded. There was a time when he'd passed her several years ago. There'd been no hint of recognition in his eyes. She'd wanted to touch him, to force him to remember her. Instead, she'd hurried away before desire won over common sense. The blank, unemotional look in his ebony eyes haunted her for months afterwards.

Now she watched a myriad of emotions flitter across his face. He looked at her, his blue eyes blazed through her. "When? How?"

She squared her shoulders, prepared to accept the full brunt of his anger. "Because of me, Devon. All of it, because of me. You. Alekos.



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Kierra. Taeryl. The evil that has touched your lives is my fault. I have brought your family to this fragmented and horrible conclusion.”

## CHAPTER 6

Devon tried to absorb what she told him. Feelings of love and hate threaded through him. It wasn't the same as the Killing Frenzy—that was a different kind of single-minded aggression manufactured by Nanus modification. These two emotions were real and were melded together with a sense of impotence—a feeling he'd never experienced before.

His hands balled into fists as he tried to grasp the knowledge his father was terminated, his mother and sister exiled, and his brother—Alekos, the younger, could very well be terminated as well. Only the Tribunal had the power to force exile and command termination.

Memories of a happy, secure Before in the heart of his family flared and was reduced to cold ash in an instant. Duty. All the years that had passed with no memory, no feeling, no purpose other than duty to the Tribunal flashed through him.

And somehow Eluria was involved? In his memories of her, he

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found it hard to believe she could have done anything to harm his family. But she'd become a twilighter. It didn't mesh with his memory of her. Why had she done it?

He lifted his gaze and studied her as she faced him, poised like a young, wild kyrle awaiting termination, with no way of escape. Twelve years had passed since he'd sought to court her. She had changed.

Eluria had been a good friend to Kierra, his sister. That was how he'd first met her. She'd accompanied Kierra home after a dance celebration and Kierra introduced them. He'd recognized in the brief innocent glow of her radiance, the bonding that would come to their future. Her soul blazed out at him through her beautiful violet looking-glass eyes. The plans he'd made for the future from that moment had been with the view of union and balance with Eluria Zydon. But somehow their lines to the future had been altered.

He'd lived and breathed his responsibility to the Tribunal for twelve years. How did he reconcile what she was telling him now with his duty to contain...and destroy? Always in allegiance to a government made up of people who didn't merit loyalty. He knew his family wouldn't have deserved persecution by the Tribunal. Devon remembered his father as a good man of wisdom, unlikely to become affiliated with a rebellion without sufficient cause. Pain shot through him at the knowledge of his loss.

With his memories no longer splintered, he knew she spoke true. Like pieces of broken mirror restored, full knowledge brought him not hate for Eluria, but self-loathing for what he'd become.

Eluria was no longer the young Maigin who honored him with her devotion. But nor was he the same naïve youth who'd envisioned a future with her as his balance. Twelve years of bloodshed covered his hands. A manufactured being created for the sole purpose of termination. Pure and decisive destruction. And he'd been very good at it. The best. How to come to terms with that knowledge? With the understanding he'd served a government that nurtured a force of killers,

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a tool used to subjugate and maintain control?

So new to him, his hidden memories were now at the forefront in his mind. All he'd felt and wanted Before were as though it had all happened yesterday—fresh and urgent. His desire for Eluria a living thing, winding around and through his body.

Maybe it was because of those memories he couldn't see the hard, calculating nature of a true twilighter about Eluria. He sensed innocence and removal in her manner, though she tried to mask it. All wasn't as she'd have him believe, and he was determined to know truth. The Maigin he'd known wouldn't have betrayed people she loved.

"Remove the lenses."

He saw her eyes widen at the request, and she shifted and tensed. "Seeing the color of my eyes will tell you nothing new. I'm deserving of your hatred. I accept it."

Was it her knowledge of an Enforcer's duty that made her appear to accept the inevitability of termination for her betrayal without argument, without attempting to justify her actions? Her manner was not one of a guilty, vengeful Female. Nor of a seductress out for self-gain.

Even as an Enforcer, unlike the others, he always weighed the evidence presented fairly before acting. It had been easier without the weight of emotion to blur his judgment. But even with the impediment of emotions, he couldn't believe his instinct would be led far astray.

"Remove the lenses willingly, or I'll do it for you. I will see the colors of my professed enemy."

She flinched at his words, yet still she hesitated.

"Now!" he commanded and took a threatening step toward her. She was hiding something, and he was going to find out what it was, one way or the other.

Finally, she removed the lenses, but refused to meet his gaze. He strode towards her, and with a firm, yet gentle grip, cupped her chin and forced her head up.

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She lifted her gaze unwillingly to his. Her lids lowered.

"Open them," he commanded her in a low tone.

He heard her long, shuddering sigh. Felt it. Finally, her gaze rose to meet his. He studied her closely, seeking the soul he'd once known as well as his own. Devon inhaled sharply at what met his intense examination.

Pain and desperation pulled at him. There was no dark betrayal evidenced in the reflection of her heart and soul. What shone back to him through the ruby-shadowed eyes of a twilighter, an unpure female, was a tinge of silver gray with traces of pink, the color of a soul scarred, damaged, but not evil. He saw guilt, determination, and strength. Fear, and a painful need so deep he winced in response to its wail.

The desire to soothe what he saw, to somehow make it right throbbed within his own body. Emotions and memories threaded through him—visions of Eluria and him as they'd been. Innocence lost long ago, for both of them. What he knew now, looking at her, was his desire for her hadn't changed. He lifted his other hand and stroked the side of her face, wanting to find some way to assuage her suffering. Where did he start?

She broke away from him and fell back against the unyielding barrier of the stone wall. "No more." Her cry was drenched with pain. "Isn't it enough that I've told you of my guilt? Must you tear all my shame from what's left of my soul?"

He refrained from following her, although strong instinct pulled him to comfort her. He needed answers to why she felt such guilt and had destroyed her own life in her attempts to right the wrongs done to his family.

Opening her hand, she made a frantic move towards replacing the lenses.

"Stop. The lenses are unnecessary. The only purpose they ever served was to hide you from yourself. From what you didn't want to

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see. They had nothing to do with what you wanted or didn't want me to know."

The lenses dropped to the ground as she collapsed against the walls of the cave, defeated. "What do you want from me?" she whispered. "You are healed. It is as it should be. We'll return to Ednos and you'll be reunited with Gavrielle and Kierra. You'll find your place, and be restored."

"And what of you, Eluria? Where is your place?" He moved a step closer to her. "What part have you played in all of this? You'll give me your truth. All of it. You owe it."

Her gaze fell away. "Yes. I'll tell you my part in this madness. It's because of me you were made an Enforcer. It's because you were made an Enforcer that Taeryl eventually joined the Freelion rebels and led them to many victories. Taeryl was betrayed from within. I was too late with my warning. He had no time to escape."

She paused. She didn't say it, but he knew it would have been an Enforcer responsible for eliminating his father. Anger flowed freely through his veins at the fresh, unwelcome knowledge.

Devon sensed she found it difficult to continue. Wanted to give her time, but after twelve blinded years, he couldn't wait. Besides, dragging it out would only prolong her pain in the telling.

"Go on," he coaxed her in a low tone meant to encourage her story without judgment.

Eluria looked up at him uncertainly. "Your mother and brother escaped. Kierra was caught in the streets on her way to returning home. She was forced into service." He saw a look of horror pass over her face at the memory. "Three years she spent in service," Eluria whispered, "before I was able to locate her and get her to Ednos. The life of a twilighter is not an easy one, but for Kierra..." Again, she looked away. "Her spirit has been wounded forever by her forced service. I doubt she'll ever be able to achieve balance. Sometimes she goes far away in her mind. It's gotten worse since Alekos disappeared.

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But she's always returned with the help of Gavrielle close by to anchor her. Your return may help to steady her even more."

"What of Alekos?"

She took a deep breath as though trying to gain strength to continue. "Alekos was filled with anger and frustration at the termination of your father. He became harder to control as he grew older. When he knew what had happened to Keirra, saw the state she was in, his rage became uncontrollable. He went away, became a Soul-Ravager, one of the worst. A rebel without heart—almost as bad as an Enforcer. He's remained elusive. Rumors of his termination come to us often, but there's been no solid information to support it. We've not actually seen him for five years, only heard word of his deeds."

Devon knew of the Soul-Ravager, had heard of his bloody exploits, never realizing it was Alekos. Memories of his little brother filled his mind. Alekos had hero-worshipped Devon, followed him everywhere, hung on to his every story. But it had all happened in Before. All that had been was now gone forever.

He felt an urgency to see his mother. His sister. Needed to connect with them after all this time. He had a feeling connection with his brother would be difficult to achieve. "None of this explains your involvement. Or why any of this should have happened because I was selected to become an Enforcer. You haven't given full truth yet. I want the rest." He would know the whole of it.

\* \* \*

Eluria pulled away from the wall and moved to stride past Devon. "What more do you need?" she cried in frustration. Wasn't it enough? "Now that you're recovered we need to leave."

She couldn't take any more of the memory...the pain it released. Her impotence at the knowledge she was too late to save Kierra from degradation.

Kind, gentle Kierra...only a shadow remained. And she never spoke of her time in service. A twilighter companioned to the elite was treated

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well. But a female in service was used and traded over and over again. She shuddered at the memory of the condition Kierra was in when she finally tracked her down.

Eluria was desperate to be released from the memories, but Devon's hand on her arm as she tried to move past him was like an iron claw. "What is your part in all this?"

She tried to wrest her arm from him, but after finding it useless, sagged in defeat, and remained still. "All right. I'll tell you the rest." She took a deep breath before continuing. How did she tell her part in the destruction of his visions?

"My father discovered our hopes for union."

"And?"

She laughed humorlessly. "Commander Clorial Zydon likes his power. He was apparently in negotiations with Tribunal Leader Odon for my union with his son. When he overheard me talking with Kierra..." She trailed off, deep in memory of the conversation she'd overheard her father having with Leader Odon. "...he apparently felt his plans were threatened." Although it had occurred twelve years ago, the moment she'd discovered his treachery was branded into her memory.

*"Odon, it's all been taken care of." Clorial handed Leader Odon a glass of sparkling Dalanian Ale.*

*"Your daughter does not suspect?"*

*Eluria held her breath, waiting to hear her father's response. Something inside her cringed.*

*Clorial laughed. "Why should she? The youth was of the age all Enforcers are inducted. None of the families ever have prior knowledge. All was accomplished in proper order." He raised his glass. "To the union of our children. A long and fruitful contract."*

*To Eluria the laughter and clinking of glasses was a death knell.*

"When my father left, I snuck into his office and accessed his terminal. I found the list of youths who were seized the day you were



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taken. Your name was not in proper sequence according to your Ceremony of Becoming. It was at the bottom. The list was revised the day before your Ceremony. You were never supposed to be seized," she finished raggedly.

She remembered what had come next. She'd been so distraught, realizing what had happened. How different things might have been if she'd thought more carefully about how to proceed before acting upon her emotions.

"What happened next?" Devon's words pulled her from the Before.

"I went to your father. I shouldn't have done that. He wouldn't have turned to the rebel cause if I hadn't gone to him. He'd be alive today. Kierra wouldn't be scarred—"

Eluria felt Devon's arms wrap around her. If only she felt she deserved his sympathy. She knew she should pull away, but couldn't find the strength to do so.

"What happened is not your guilt, *na-nivia*."

"Ah, Lydion, don't call me that!" She looked up at him, searching for the condemnation she knew should be there. Found it hard to grasp what she found was sympathy, and—something else she refused to name. "Don't, Devon, I'm no longer the Maignin you knew."

His steady blue gaze held hers. "Nor am I the same youth who made an oath to you."

Eluria shook her head in denial. "But it was not by your choice. None of it. What I've become is because of choices I made."

"Why did you become a twilighter? What sent you to them?" He forced her to look at him. "It makes no difference what has gone before, but I want to know all of your truth. Tell me."

Her reasons at the time were muddled. It had been an innocent's anger and futility that prompted her decisions. There'd been nothing noble about it.

"My father wouldn't listen to me about the union he'd contracted. I begged him to return you to your family. He laughed and ridiculed my

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apparent naivete. Taunted me by telling me you'd shown yourself already to be prime Enforcer stock. Informed me you'd already made your first clean kill. He took pleasure in torturing me with details of your training." She took a shuddering breath, tried to repress the horror of that meeting. "He sold my purity and took away your past in exchange for more power and wealth," she finished bitterly.

Devon's arms tightened around her. The security of his arms felt too good. He shouldn't want to soothe her, not after everything she was telling him.

"I'd thought he loved me," she continued in a low voice, "wanted my happiness, but found that to be untrue. I knew there would never be balance in a relationship such as he'd devised. A union made in Haydon. I knew in my soul it would never be honored by Guardian, nor given the balance of Mylonna and Symion." She looked up at him, knowing he would see the essence of her heart and soul. "There was only one with whom I'd experience the true balance of Lydion and that vision of union was destroyed forever."

Devon brushed a hand along the curve of her face and she leaned into it. She'd never realized before how truly cold her soul had become. His touch was like a warming beacon on a frigid night.

"The night before the union celebration I went to the House of Twilight and sold my purity. I decided if anyone would profit from my innocence, it would not be my father. The next day he confronted me and I was officially declared impure and no longer of any use to him. I haven't spoken to him since that day."

Devon pulled her close. "It was an act of desperation. I wish I'd been there, I should have been. There was no one to protect you."

She leaned back and looked at him. "Who protected you and your family from my father's greed, Devon?" she asked softly. "I vowed the day I found out what he'd done, I would find a way to free you."

Devon stroked her hair. "You've done that, Eluria. That and more."

"But too late. It was by accident I heard of the plan to seize your

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father. I'd been able to pass him bits of information from my...assignments." She tried to pull away, but his arms anchored her. "As soon as I heard he'd been discovered, I went to him."

She reached up to remove the silver necklace hanging around her neck. "He gave me this. We talked many times about you." She looked down at the talisman she'd worn next to her skin for so many years. "He wanted you to have it. He had faith I'd find you."

She offered it to him. He released her and took the chain from her hand. A wrenching tugged at her heart. It was the last link binding her to him and his family. She watched as he studied the talisman, then looked at her. His gaze held memory—and sadness.

"Do you know what it is?"

She shook her head. It had been enough to know it was something she was to hold in safekeeping for his return. It kept her focused on her purpose. "I only know he meant for me to place it in your hand and to offer you one word. Remember."

Devon's vision turned inward, past her, into the Before. "It belonged to my grandfather, and his father before him. It is a symbol of our freedom from the brutality of the Moygars—a piece of the shackle our descendant wore. My great-grandfather had it encased in crystallite to preserve it. It has been handed down to each eldest son since that time." She watched as his gaze returned to the talisman cupped in his hand. His fingers curled into a tight fist around the memory.

"I'm so sorry, Devon."

"It's all that's left. And you have protected it. Don't be sorry." His determined blue gaze caught and trapped her.

"Devon." The word was but a sob of answering need.

Without warning, he lowered his head and his lips claimed hers. She felt his heat blaze through her. Instinctively, she opened her mouth, and his tongue drove deep into her moist warmth, demanding what should have been his long ago.

Eluria tried to pull away. She couldn't do this. To seal with him

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now would be her utter destruction. She broke free of his consuming kiss. "Devon, no—"

His expression brooked no discussion. "Yes, Eluria. Together we will heal the past and bind the future. Guardian would not have brought us together on this planet without purpose."

"It wasn't Guardian," she cried in denial. Guardian wouldn't have been so cruel as to have brought them together this way. Not with the knowledge that she could no longer offer the balance that Devon should have in union. "It was my father who did that. I know the level you've risen to as Enforcer. He doesn't like to share power. Nor does he like to be thwarted. This was his way of closing our circle in the most vicious way possible."

"Trust me, Eluria. You've been in my visions always, even after the Nanus process. The block should have destroyed everything Before. Your memory—our connection—is that strong." Again, he captured her lips, commanding her acceptance of him. He slid his hands along the length of her back to rest at her hip, molding her to him. She felt his hard arousal and her passionate radiance broke free.

The fire he lit surged, and denial of need could no longer be accepted. She yearned for his touch and bent to him, needing to recapture the past that should have been theirs.

He raised his head to pierce her with the glow of his fiery passion. "You're mine, Eluria Zydon," he growled. "And I'm determined to make sure you never forget it."

## CHAPTER 7

He picked her up and carried her into the other chamber. Laying her on the bedroll, he opened her skinsuit and quickly peeled it from her body.

When she was fully revealed, every inch of skin open to his touch, he sat back, gazing at her. As she watched, he lifted a hand. With his index finger he traced a line from her shoulder down, across the full mound of her breast. He lingered at the blushing areola, circled and teased her nipple, until it beaded tightly. As though satisfied with the response of her body, he moved his finger down the curve to the sensitive underside, tracing its fullness. He stopped, a look of wonder on his face.

"I like touching you. My body responds to the sight of your form. Your skin is soft as the rozanna petals. Like silk. I've never felt pleasure in touching before." His tone seemed to be one of surprise.

"I've dreamed of you too, Devon. Are you shocked to find you enjoy touching me?"

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He resumed the sensual exploration with his finger. Did he plan to trace every inch of her skin? Every spot his finger came in contact with seemed to draw a path of electrical energy, arousing her more than she thought possible by such light contact.

Devon's gaze followed the trail of his digit as he drew a path over each new contour. His finger ignited her as he traced her curves, watching as it rose and dipped through each arc of new discovery, stopping only to investigate the most sensitive peaks and valleys, noting her response. It was as though he sought to memorize and inflame every inch of her body.

"It's always been a duty," he murmured. "Enforcers don't feel passion or arousal. What I feel now, when I touch you, is new. It was aggression through which I achieved erection for sensual persuasion. Used only as a means to complete the mission." His gaze rose to meet hers as his fingers trailed over her stomach to linger at her mound. "Not the pleasure I experience at touching your skin, seeing your response."

The bliss she felt at the caress of his hands had her arching to know more. This teasing touch was driving her to the edge of madness.

"Devon, please—" Her radiance fluttered and pulsed in shades of shimmering gold and creamy yellow around her, a very blatant indication of the intensity of her female desire. Restlessly, she moved beneath him. Through slitted lids, she looked at him. "What do you feel? Do you desire me, Devon?" Symion, his fingers were driving her crazy.

He continued to stroke her body, but never touching her feminine center. "I've always desired you, Eluria." He bent closer to her. His long, ice-white hair drifted over her sensitized breasts, flirtatious, caressing.

Tangling her fingers in its thick, silky layers, she pulled him down to within an inch of touching. "I've hungered for you always, Devon. This deep ache inside me has never been assuaged by anyone else."

All five of his long fingers splayed across her mons, branding her

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with his heat, crawling downwards. Her channel throbbed and released her juices of welcome and acceptance. She trembled with anticipation. It had never been like this before. As a twilighter, she'd always needed enhancements in order to respond. But not with Devon.

Touching her lips with a gentle, teasing brush, his tongue traced their fullness. She opened her mouth, wanted to taste him. Yanking him downwards, she drank with a ravenous thirst from his sensuous, firm lips. His piercing invasion captured her soft moan of desire.

With one hand, he cupped her face and the other, the one that tantalized her, separated her shax lips and at last two fingers entered her heated core. *Oh Symion, so much pleasure in his touch.* She whimpered and pushed her hips towards the source. Shafts of radiance flared outwards, encompassing them both within its warm center.

He raised his head and looked at her, his fingers anchored inside her. "Your hot silk beckons me, *na-nivia*. Can you sense my desire for you?"

Untangling her fingers from his hair, she reached around and yanked his skinsuit open, with an imperative need to taste of him, she nibbled at his neck, felt his pulse throb beneath her tongue. Her fingers encountered a scar at the back of his neck. She pulled back and looked up at him questioningly.

"The chip with your information embedded with a beamer to track my movements. It will need to be removed. Later." He bent to her, his long fingers thrust inside her, his thumb teased at her bud. "Much later," he growled.

She pulled him close and wrapped her arms around him. A wave of panic overwhelmed her at the realization of what awaited them outside this sanctuary. She trembled in the knowledge that this time with Devon must last her an eternity. With a fierceness born of desperate need, she clung to him.

"Devon, love me, please," she whispered frantically. "Now. I need to have your khout filling me. I need to forget what awaits us."

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She felt his fingers recede from her and he stood. "Don't think beyond this moment. Think of the union we planned. This was always our path. Envision only Devon and Eluria cloaked in your female light." He shed his skinsuit as she watched, admiring his lean, hard form. It felt unreal, having him here, a vision materialized.

It seemed an impossibility he could still want her after what had happened—after what her father had done. To have him desire her, to see it in his eyes, feel it in his body, had only ever been a taboo vision allowed her in stasis.

"Open for me, *na-nivia*. Show me your shax-ra—the petals of your desire, glistening only for me."

Eluria heard the passion in his tone. She eyed him hungrily, his khout was thick and hard, ready to impale her. She knew once he entered her channel completely and held steady, her liquid essence would cause the shaft to grow longer, thicker. Desire built, her radiance was now a steady golden fire surrounding her. It was more than lust—it was the color of bonding—a sensual, yet spiritual melding of bodies and minds.

She moved to sit up, wanting to caress the satin hard length of him. There'd never been a desire to appreciate a man's body before. But now, she thought she understood his pleasure in touching her—she wanted to do the same—to savor every inch of him.

"No," he stopped her. His blue eyes glowed with an inner flare of want. "Open for me."

She lay back and spread her legs for him. He knelt between them and watched her as she reached down, spreading the engorged lips of her shax, and displayed her pulsating, wet shax-ra. Her desire for him blazed.

Molten fire singed along her skin as he reached a hand out to caress the engorged, sensitive opening. He touched her hard bud and she felt more of her liquid essence release. "Yes, *na-nivia*, flow for me. You are beautiful. It seems I've waited a long time as well for this moment."



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She felt his fingers enter her, his thumb teased her bud of sensation, driving her passion to a higher sphere. Her body clenched with need. He withdrew his fingers and lubricated his shaft with the golden liquid heat of her body.

"Seal with me Devon, please," she begged. "I must have you inside me before I shatter. I must know completion. Only with you."

Devon knelt up and pulled her hands to her sides. He separated and lifted her legs to his shoulders. She felt the tip of his hard length at her entrance.

"Yes," she sighed, "oh, yes." She felt him circle the tip, before he pushed forward. She felt her lips separate, allowing his khout to tunnel deep inside. She arched upwards offering herself, opening for complete penetration.

He entered her, filling her, until stopping, fully sheathed inside her. For moments he remained still and she felt his shaft lengthen and become thicker, adjusting to her, until it touched the entrance to her tender cervix.

Only then did he pull almost fully free, every nerve ending in her channel sensitized to each movement. She felt herself pulsing around him, each wave sending her higher and higher. He thrust forward again, and again in long, slow strokes. She screamed as wave after wave of intense sensation threaded through her. It had never been like this. Never.

One last thrust and he stopped. His khout throbbed, and she felt what she'd never felt before. The vibris beneath the hood of his khout were released and began to massage the entrance to her womb, encouraging her to open fully to receive his seed. Like feathers whispering, coaxing her responses. Her breath faltered as she was consumed by pleasure as the spasms of her release gripped her. Her shax-ra pulsed, releasing the threads from her shax lips to wrap around the base of his khout, sealing them together.

Again she screamed, a deep-throated primal sound of triumph as she

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felt her anstillia cord release for the first time and extend from the base of her shax to enter Devon's anal channel. It widened and held fast, each tiny nerve-ending in the length of her cord nestled inside him transmitting his vibrations of pleasure to her.

She heard his growl of release—of claiming. This was completion. They were bonded, sealed together as pulse after pulse of rapture flowed and rippled through them, binding them.

The strokes of the vibris of his khout continued to cause endless sensual vibrations to consume her, as the sensitive anstillia cord pulsated inside his anus enhancing and prolonging his release.

She felt all of it. Every ripple of completion throbbed inside her—their combined release, intensifying, merging their responses inside her as they climbed ever upward.

As they reached the pinnacle, a stillness filled her, like a shadowed, soft whisper of death, sending her into a void, a moment of complete and utter soundlessness, then a burst of shattering colors surrounded her as she felt her soul freed from her body.

Opening her eyes, she looked around and was shocked at what she saw. Devon stood next to her, holding her hand in a strong secure grip. Both of them were naked, surrounded by her vibrant radiance. Before them was a golden throne set on a raised dais. In her heart she knew they were in Lydion. It was Guardian who sat upon the throne, and to either side was Symion and Mylonna—the trinity of perfect balance.

All three stood as one, and Eluria and Devon knelt as one before them. Guardian nodded and smiled. "The union is complete."

The scene dissolved and Eluria again felt herself falling through the black void. Sighing with a pleasurable sense of completion and balance such as she'd never known before, she fell back into the welcoming embrace of unconsciousness.

\* \* \*

Devon watched Eluria as she slept. He wanted her to wake, needed to know if she'd experienced the same vision he had. He was still

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overcome by the seal and completion they'd achieved. Whenever he'd engaged in sensual persuasion for duty, he'd always encased his khout in a protective covering, not willing to unintentionally create a seal with any other female.

With Eluria, there'd been no question of not sealing. He wanted all of her and to claim and be claimed in the most intimate and spiritual way possible. What would she feel when she discovered what he'd found upon waking? The seal they'd experienced went far beyond anything they could have imagined. That Guardian had acknowledged the seal and bound them forever in a true balance union.

He again looked at his wrist, and at the threaded colors of the markings running down the center of his chest. There'd been stories of true-balance unions, but to his knowledge none really existed. He'd thought of them as figment tales only for the ears and entertainment of youths. Now he knew he was wrong.

Again, he looked at Eluria as she lay sleeping. A smile curved her full, pink lips. He lowered the blanket, noted the new markings on her body, which mirrored his own.

It was too much temptation. He lowered his head and captured her lips. They parted for him, and he thrust his tongue deep. She arched and he heard her soft sigh. So responsive to his touch. He inhaled, allowing her scent to tease him. Her golden radiance flickered faintly around her.

He thanked Guardian for this gift. She was his tafai, his soul-flame, and he would care for her in all ways.

Slowly her lids lifted. A feeling of possession and satisfaction overwhelmed him when he saw the color had altered. Instead of the ruby shadow of a twilighter, they were now the rich dark magenta of a tafai. His tafai. He ran a thumb across her full, lower lip.

She turned away and moved to stand. "I need to get dressed. We have much to plan. It's time we left."

Devon grabbed her shoulders and turned her to face him. Her expression had become guarded. "What is it?"

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She shifted her gaze away. "Nothing. Why should there be? We need to find a way to reach Ednos. I assume you disabled my transport. What about your ship?" She tried to pull away.

"Look at me," he demanded. She was trying to shield herself from him. Didn't she realize things were different? "Do you understand what took place between us? That we are changed?"

"Nothing has changed. You have a path to follow. I must find a way to get you to Ednos." She went silent. Finally she looked up at him and he saw, and felt, pain emanating from her. "There can be nothing more between us. We shouldn't have sealed. The-the depth of what took place was like nothing I've ever experienced before, but it can't happen again."

He yanked her wrist up and held it before her eyes. "Do you see this?" He saw her eyes widen in shock. "Look at the markings on my chest, look at your own markings." He held his own left wrist before her. "My markings are the exact mirror of yours."

"It's not possible," Eluria whispered desperately. "It's a figment tale, nothing more." She pulled away from him, stood and raced across the chamber.

"You are my tafai, the union is honored by Guardian. You know this. Your vision was mine. We would not hold the markings of higher union if it weren't true. Your eyes are the magenta of union. Union to me."

"You don't understand," she said with frantic despair. "I can't be your tafai. I'm unpure." She took a deep breath. "I'm a twilighter..."

"You *were* a twilighter," he corrected her.

"No...no. When I contracted my purity..." He saw the pain and fear of a cornered animal in her eyes. "When I contracted my purity...I was modified." She raised a tortured gaze to his. "I'm barren, Devon. My body will never carry your children. Never, do you understand?"

She pounded her closed fists against the rock wall. "Oh, Guardian," she cried, "why would you do this to him? Bind him to an unpure

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female who could offer no hope for Beyond. This isn't what was supposed to happen."

## CHAPTER 8

After dressing, Eluria paced the chamber, arms folded across her chest. *Haydon, what a mess. There had to be a way out.* She straightened her left arm and studied her wrist. It displayed a beautiful, intricate pattern of colors, similar in design to a delicate tri-colored, braided wrist adornment. True Union, the markings of Guardian's acceptance. It was disaster.

"Stop obsessing, it won't give you any answers. You can't separate what Guardian has joined."

She whirled around at the sound of Devon's deep voice.

"Then what will?" she demanded. "How do we repair what shouldn't have happened? We never should have sealed. Never." She shook her head in denial and began pacing again. "There must be a way to free you."

"What? Again?" There was a hint of amusement in his tone.

She spun back and stared at him. "You find humor in this situation?" Of all times for his sense of humor to surface, she wouldn't

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have expected it to be now.

He walked toward her and cupped her chin. "You've given that to me, Eluria. The ability to feel again. To experience joy and pleasure." She saw his eyes darken and a blaze began to glow inside her. "Guardian has brought us back to each other. Why do you continue to question?"

She bit her lip, tried to look away, but his firm grip held her steady. "Maybe because I want it too badly. It's always been at the back of my mind, the vision of what could have been if not for my father's intervention."

"You aren't to blame for what he did," he protested.

"Maybe not directly, but it never would have happened if using me hadn't been part of his plan."

Devon brought his other hand up and cupped her face. "You have suffered enough. You've sacrificed too much already. Don't try to sacrifice what we've found."

He tilted her head and leaned forward to possess her lips with a kiss claiming her acceptance and allowing no argument. She wanted to fight him, to battle the needs of her body, the visions planned long ago, which never faltered over the years.

Licking at her lips, forcing her to yield, she opened her mouth, allowing him entry, unable to resist. When his tongue drove home, a shudder passed through her. She wanted him so much.

Pulling back, he yanked at the front closing of her skinsuit, then pulled open the front of his own. He clasped each of her hands, placed one on his chest and held the other to her own breast.

"Feel the rhythms, Eluria," he commanded her in a guttural, husky tone. "I detected the change when we first awoke. What do you feel?"

She felt the steady life-beats. Her eyes widened with uncertainty as she looked into his face. "There is no difference in the patterns. How can that be?"

He nodded. "We are in perfect concordance—balance, if you will.

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A change to your rhythm will cause a change in mine. If you feel fear, I will know it. If you feel pleasure, I will experience it. If your life-beats stop, so will mine.”

“No, oh no.” The full understanding of the import of what he implied caused her to panic. “If something happened to me, if I were terminated—”

“I don’t fear termination, Eluria. If your life-beats were to end, I wouldn’t want mine to continue. It is an assurance that in the future you will have a care.”

“But to tie you to a twilighter—” She didn’t want that for him. She could give him no Beyond.

“An ex-twilighter. As I am an ex-Enforcer. Our paths were ordained to part and to come together with knowledge to combat the Tribunal. Together we will succeed. We are stronger.” He cupped her face, his gaze locking with hers. “If children are in our Beyond, we’ll find the path. Know this. I’d rather be joined with you in True Union without surety of Beyond, than any other female and a planet full of children offering continuity. That will never change. There is no other vision for me.”

Eluria wanted to believe him. Too badly. “I want this too much,” she murmured, trying to convince herself she would have her visions. That she would not be destroyed because of it.

“Seal with me, Eluria.” Slowly he pushed her skinsuit from her shoulders, releasing her arms from the material. He shifted to his knees and pushed the cloth down her legs. As he lifted one of her feet to remove the garment, he leaned forward and placed a kiss at the center of her smooth, golden stomach.

“I want to feel your silk surround me again,” he whispered against her skin. She felt the vibrations of his words through her whole body.

“It arouses me when we move closer to completion, to know that when your anstillia cord penetrates my anal entrance you feel the extent of my pleasure as I fill you. That you bind us completely—that you



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dwell inside me and possess me as completely as I do you.”

Her golden radiance glimmered, bathing them in its light. Her breathing hitched as he shed his own clothing. The prominent display of his desire rose thick and long. His body was that of a warrior, hard and tightly muscled. His passion only for her. A shudder of fiery desire raced through her, and her arousal ran warm and rich down her inner thighs.

Again he knelt and with his tongue, he traced the scar running from her first rib to the top of her hip bone. “Where did this scar come from? How close did I come to losing you without even being aware of it? I could have ended this life without ever experiencing the sweet taste of you.”

Swallowing hard, she found it difficult to concentrate. “It-it was an altercation with an Enforcer. Oh, Symion, Devon, I’m burning up from your touch.”

Her radiance extended. “I can see your passion, *na-nivia*. How bright will it burn before we reach balance, I wonder?” He forced her to part her legs, and she moaned when his lips moved to her mound, sending an electrical path of pleasure spiraling through her.

“Who tried to terminate you? Does he still live?”

She felt his moist breath at her shax lips. Arching her hips, she needed to feel his mouth, his tongue.

He slid his hands along her calves, up her thighs. With his fingers, he parted her secret lips and she felt the warm seduction of his tongue lapping at her slick juices. “No—ah—no, he’s dead. I killed him,” she rasped, as her knees buckled.

Devon eased her to the ground, his tongue buried deep inside her. He pulled her legs wider, buried himself deeper. She felt his hands at her lips, his thumb circling her hard bud. He removed his tongue and inserted two fingers, rubbing, sliding, driving her ever beyond. So many sensations swirled inside her.

“Your passion glows bright enough to keep us warm in the fiercest

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of ice storms. *Na-nivia*, release for me. You throb with need, your body calls to me. Release for me and I'll take us both to completion. Dance for me, beautiful one."

She could do no other as he drove her onwards, his words inciting her passion to radiate, vibrating around them. Release overcame her in a sweet, magical cadence, her glow pulsing in rhythm with her release. Not the mind-numbing, heat-filled release achieved with completion, but the gentle, rhythmic billowing of engulfing pleasure.

"Oh, Devon, please," she gasped, "I need your khout inside me, filling me. I want to feel you grow, feel your vibris stroking me. Please."

He moved up her body, stopping at her breasts. She felt the moist warmth of his tongue as he sucked and nibbled, drawing sensations, arrowing to her shax-ra, building her need. He licked and pulled until both of her nipples glistened and beaded with desire. She arched farther, driven wild with the need to have him buried inside her.

Finally, moving up her body, she felt the tip of his khout at her entrance. "Yes," she breathed, tangling her fingers in his hair, and pulling him down. "Seal with me, please."

He drove his hips forward, tunneling deep, retreating and driving inwards again, his twin sacs slapping hard against her each time. Finally, he halted, buried inside, and she felt his steely shaft lengthen, filling her completely. When at last the thick tip pushed against her cervix, again he began to move in long, slow thrusts, driving them both to the summit. He brought a hand down to tease her hard bud.

Anchoring her hips, he powered faster and faster. She screamed her pleasure as he buried himself, and she felt the vibris release and seduce her opening for full acceptance of his seed. Her shax threads reached out, twining at the base of his khout, sealing them, halting all movement.

Breathing stopped as her anstillia cord extended, found his anal channel, massaging the entrance. It slid in and out, lubricating, until

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finally pushing home, sealing them as they entered completion. His guttural groan was one of pleasure as it filled him.

She felt Devon's life-beat, knew it was his, yet felt the essence of his pleasure inside herself, intensifying her own. Her soul released to join his in balance. Her scream mingled with Devon's groans of fulfillment as together they entered the void of soundless balance, seconds later the wash of colors and completion, and her golden radiance, bathed them in ecstasy.

"If this be Lydion," she whispered, wrapping her arms around Devon and inhaling his scent, "let me not awake." Eluria felt tears of joy bathe her face. Happiness as she'd never known filled her as the blanket of unconsciousness wrapped around her.

\* \* \*

Eluria woke to find herself cocooned in warmth. She lifted her head and looked around. Devon had apparently moved them to the bedroll, one muscled leg was anchored across her lower body, and a hard arm was curled possessively around her waist. She studied him as he lay sleeping. She felt the strong beat of his heart inside her. It's steady rhythm soothed her. She remembered the erratic beat changes when they sealed, how it enhanced her own arousal, knowing its source.

He was right. The ties Guardian joined could not be severed. The intensity of their completion and balance confirmed it. She admitted to herself she hadn't wanted to be free of them. They were bound into the Beyond. As it should be.

She laid her head on his shoulder. There would never be a time she would grow tired of feeling his body next to her, inside her, of knowing his life-beat was her own.

This time of bonding had been necessary in order to rediscover their love. Being with him began the healing process of her soul. The wounds had been open and gaping, bleeding endlessly through the years. Devon's love acted as a magical mediseal, healing her as nothing else could.

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"I love you, Devon Andromeda. You are my heart," she whispered, snuggling against his hard chest.

"As you are mine, Eluria Zydon." She stiffened at the deep rumble of his voice, assuming he'd been in stasis. "My heart and my soul."

Leaning back, she tilted her head to look into his intense turquoise eyes. She raised a hand and stroked the side of his face. "I've always loved the color of your eyes. When you look at me, it's as though I can feel your hands stroking my body, feel you inside me."

Easing her close, he nuzzled at her neck. "There will never be a time I'm not inside you. Never again. Always, you'll feel my presence, know I'm with you."

They stayed entwined for long moments, before Devon released a heavy sigh. "I suppose it's time to prepare."

Eluria pulled away. "Yes. We must return to Ednos. With the antidote and the fact we now know it works, we need to move quickly. And your mother and sister await you, Devon. They need to know you've been restored."

Sitting up, Devon threw back the blanket. "I know. I am eager to see them after all this time."

"They are much changed," she cautioned.

Sadness reflected in his eyes as he reached up, fingering his white hair. "As am I, Eluria."

She leaned forward brushing her hand along the whitened locks. "Your essence has been restored. I loved your raven hair, but this white makes you look quite dashing, I think." Her lips curved in a smile.

"It is the signature of an Enforcer," he responded heavily.

Rising to her knees, she cupped his face, and drew him towards her. "But no longer a Tribunal Enforcer. Now you're my Enforcer." She felt his breath against her lips. "Eluria's Enforcer," she whispered. "And that makes a whole world of difference." The heat of his kiss captured her. Another few moments of tasting ecstasy in his arms would be well worth the delay of their departure.

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## CHAPTER 9

“We’ll need to move out on foot. Taking your velocitor will make us too easy to track.”

Eluria nodded as she continued to stuff necessary items into her shoulder pack. “I know. Although I think I found the beamer they were using to track me, I can’t be totally certain there wasn’t a second one I didn’t locate. It would be like them to have placed two beamers, hoping I wouldn’t locate the second.”

She looked across the chamber, her focus pulled to the freshly healed scar on his neck. The chip was destroyed—the Enforcers wouldn’t be able to track them through the beamer embedded in the information chip. She trembled at the memory of the procedure to remove it from his neck.

Devon wouldn’t accept the numbing drink she’d prepared. He’d said he wanted to remain alert; and he could handle the slight pain it would bring. She’d tried to be as quick as possible. She’d stayed attuned to his life-beat, searching for any irregularity to hint at his pain.

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Surprisingly, it had remained steady. It was only now, once her nerves were steadied and the procedure was complete, she realized what he'd done.

"You deliberately controlled your life-beats and masked your pain from me," she accused him.

His steady blue gaze met hers, but he said nothing. She threw the pack aside and strode across the room.

"And now you're masking your feelings." She balled her hand into a fist and struck his chest. "You will not do that. We're tied, and you will not hide your feelings in this way. I won't tolerate it." She moved to strike him again, but he caught her fist in his grip.

"Eluria, it would have served no purpose for you to know the pain I felt. It would have caused your concentration to waver."

She struggled to remove her hand from his strong grip. "You had no right. Do you consider me so weak? I've handled much worse procedures in my time."

Devon yanked her close. "On someone you love, Female?"

"Female? You call me Female?" She wanted to strike out at him again, but he held her arms too firmly—but not her legs.

"Don't even think about it," he warned her, his firm gaze locked with hers. "We'll have an understanding here and now."

Slowly, she lowered the leg she'd lifted, readying for attack. "What kind of understanding?" she asked mutinously.

"I know well those who hunt us. I lived as one of them. I know how they think. You must agree to follow my instructions. I'll do whatever is required to protect you."

"As I'll do for you." She raised her chin. "I've worked alone all these years, Devon. I've destroyed my share of Enforcers who have sought to terminate me. I'm not as weak as you seem to think me."

He reached a hand up to cup her face. "I don't think you're weak. I admire your courage, your devotion." Stroking the side of her face, he continued. "If you were hurt, it would compromise my sanity. Do you

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understand? To deal with the return of emotions is hard enough without concern that you won't heed my commands. My concentration must be unwavering."

He was right. He did know the Enforcers better than she did. He could anticipate what they would do.

"I'll do as you ask, Devon. I know you want only to get us safely away. But you will not mask your emotions from me again. Promise me."

He released a deep sigh. "Like you, I've always worked alone." After a long moment he nodded. "I'll hide nothing from you in future. But I will see to your safety. No matter what emotions transmit to you, you'll follow my commands."

"We're going to clash like this a lot, aren't we?"

"If you continue to prove obstinate, I expect we will. Your oath."

"Obstinate? You should talk. Very well, I'll follow your commands, you have my oath. Only because you obviously have a better knowledge of Enforcer mentality. And that's not a compliment by the way. Now, I'll have your oath you'll never again mask your emotions from me."

He released her and nodded. "You have my oath. Unless your safety is compromised," he qualified.

"Males. Stubborn and pigheaded. I've always found them so. For now, I accept your oath, as limited as it is." She reached up and pulled him down for a hard kiss. "I love you, Devon. Don't ever forget it. If your safety is compromised, I'll do what I must."

Stepping away from him, she turned and stalked back to her pack. She heard him chuckle behind her. "We make quite a pair, tafai, don't we?"

Her lips curved into a smile she refused to show him. "Yes, we do...taman."

Eluria lifted the pack onto her shoulder and turned back to him. "You're sure your ship isn't compromised?"



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"It's veiled. They won't be able to detect its exact location."

"Why not? Didn't they use a beamer to track you? Wouldn't it secure the location of your ship?"

The smile he gave her was feral. "I'm not as trusting of the Tribunal as they expect. I've altered the beamer, providing a mirror location. It's not enough of an adjustment to cause suspicion, but sufficient so they won't be able to detect the exact location of my ship." He lifted a pack onto his back. "My guess is they'll monitor the mirror site and circumference the beamer indicates. They'll wait for us there. It's strategically sound for them to watch the position indicated by the beamer than to search the whole planet. They'd know it's my only way off."

Eluria nodded. "What's your plan once we reach the ship?"

He was silent for a moment before responding. "We'll circle around and attempt to eliminate the trackers on the surface. Once we take off, I'll deactivate the beamer and engage the veil. I'll alter the veil signal so they won't be able to pinpoint it. They'll be unable to locate or find us at that point."

"Well, it all sounds very good. Let's hope it works." She turned to leave the chamber.

"Eluria, wait."

She turned back to him questioningly. "What is it?"

His gaze was serious as he studied her. "You will do as I say? Our lives depend on it. You won't jeopardize your safety."

"I'll do as you say," she confirmed. "And you won't jeopardize your safety."

He walked towards her, halted and reached out to caress the side of her face. "You have my thanks for restoring my memories. And my emotions."

She smiled. "I couldn't have done otherwise."

"If we don't survive, you should know I love you. I wouldn't go back to the shadowland of the last twelve years. Having found you

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again, these hours with you..."

Smiling, she lifted her hand, hushing his words. "I know. And I feel the same, Devon. I wouldn't change a moment. But as you pointed out, Guardian wouldn't have guided us this far if we were meant to fail. We will succeed."

\* \* \*

They'd been on the move for about an hour when Devon raised his hand and called a halt. They were hidden behind a large boulder sheltered from the blazing rays of a fierce sun. They'd been lucky so far in that they'd encountered no firestorms. Yet, Devon pulled out a container of fluid and tilted it to his mouth. The cool liquid refreshed his parched throat. The suit he wore regulated his body temperature so he didn't become dehydrated from loss of bodily fluids, but he still needed to remember to replenish.

He turned and looked at Eluria who was also refreshing with fluid. He monitored her life-beat, noting it was strong. It seemed odd that in so short a time it felt normal to feel the echo of both life-beats inside his own body. Without the steady dual rhythms, it would seem a part of him was cut away.

They were drawing closer to where the attack had taken place with the zyflamite. It would require greater caution from this point onward.

Devon leaned back and slid to the ground. Eluria was already seated in the shade of an adjacent boulder. He felt her tense alertness; watched as her intent, narrowed gaze scanned the area where they rested.

"When we get to my hovercade, I want you to remain hidden."

"Devon, I won't—"

He held up a hand. "No. You agreed to do as I asked. You'll be able to observe the surrounding area. I know what I need, and there's no point in us both becoming visible targets."

He heard her uttered sigh of frustration, but she nodded. "All right. Unfortunately, it makes sense."

"If you monitor with the port-scan, you should be able to detect any

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movement before it becomes too dangerous. Did you put the vo-comms in your pack or mine?"

She pulled her pack around. "They're in mine."

"I think it's time to put them on."

Eluria reached inside the pack and pulled out a small black container. She opened it, pulled out two tiny devices, handed him one, and placed the other in her ear.

Devon secured the vo-comm. Once in place, and sensing his body heat, he felt the small wires, like the fragile legs of a fire spider, snake out to wind around the outer curve of his ear to hold the unit firmly in place. He stood and moved a distance from Eluria to test the units.

"Do you hear me clearly?"

"Yes. I hear you," her musical tone came back through the nucleus of the unit. He turned, looked across at her and grinned.

She returned the look in acknowledgment and stood. "Let's get this done. The sooner we're out of here the better."

He strode back to her. Reaching out a hand, he ran his thumb along the curve of her lower lip. He felt her life-beat increase and he grinned, knowingly. Adrenalin and hot desire pumped through his veins. It was a heady feeling, enhanced by the danger.

Twelve years as an Enforcer and he'd never felt this alive before. They'd turned him into a robot, curbed all sensations of humanity. He might as well have been dead. But now he was reborn, and he'd get them out alive.

He felt Eluria place a hand on his arm and he looked down at her.

"What is it, Devon? Your rhythm has changed."

He pulled her hand to his lips and kissed the palm. "It's nothing. It's simply preparation for confrontation. Nothing more."

"I understand. The heat of battle rises in your blood."

He tilted his head to consider her, how attuned she already was to his emotions. Yes, it was the heat of battle, but not the Killing Frenzy he was used to. The Frenzy would consume him, make him a killing

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machine bent only on one thing...aware of only one thing—focused destruction.

This adrenalin of battle cloaked him differently. And he knew he had yet to discover the full meaning of the difference. That worried him.

“Let’s go. I need the veil control to unlock the ship to get us off this planet.”

Again at a slow jog, they moved toward the location of the hovercade.

As they neared the area, Eluria used the port-scan before venturing closer. “I’m not picking up any movement or discernible body heat. Make it quick, Devon.”

With one last glance about the area, Devon sprinted to the hovercade. It lay on its roof, nicely mangled from the force of a zyflamite bomb. It was a wonder they weren’t both dead. One more look around to be certain nothing lurked nearby and he dropped to the ground, inched beneath the hood and through a shattered window. Opening a hidden compartment beneath the seat, he breathed a sigh of relief as his hand encountered the smooth, hard surface of the control.

Slowly, he pulled himself out from beneath the useless conveyance. Wasting no time, he moved quickly to return to Eluria.

“Did you find it?”

He grinned and nodded. “I have it.” Leaning toward her, he cupped the back of her head and gave her a swift, hard kiss, and released her. “Let’s move out.”

An hour later, they were hunched low beneath an overhang. Eluria scanned the area. She stilled.

“There are three heat sources indicating life force.” She glanced up at him. “It’s unusual for the Tribunal to use more than two Enforcers on a hunt. They must consider you very dangerous.”

Devon met her steady stare. “Or you, *na-nivia*. My guess is they want no mistakes this time.”

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He saw pain flash into her eyes just before she looked away, felt the jagged ache enter her heart. "My father is very determined to see me terminated," she whispered.

Reaching out, he pulled her stiff form into his arms and stroked her hair. "He never appreciated the jewel he possessed. I'll not make the same mistake."

He felt her shuddering breath as she fought for control. Her rhythm steadied and she pulled away. "I'm fine, Devon. He obviously wants us both. How do we proceed?"

"One at a time. They're positioned far enough apart, it will be too late by the time they realize what's happened."

"You could take the one to the far left, and I could—"

"Don't even finish that thought. You will not confront an Enforcer in battle." The blue fire of his eyes blazed with determination.

"It's not like I haven't done it before."

"You're not alone now, tafai. There's no need for you to put your life in jeopardy."

She huffed. "We aren't primitives, you know. I can protect myself."

"You may protect yourself, but you will not seek battle. Do you understand?"

"All right, all right."

"Let's go. Stay to my rear and watch for signs of other movement."

The first Enforcer went down efficiently, never knowing where the attack stemmed from. Devon surmised he was young, newly indoctrinated; hence, his skills weren't fully developed yet. He felt some sense of regret in knowing they'd never be given the chance of maturing now. A hand touched his shoulder.

"Devon, you had no choice."

He nodded. "I know. It's contending with the emotions after all this time."

"I'm sorry."

"We need to hurry before the others realize what's happened."

### *ELURIA'S ENFORCER*

As Devon came upon the second, the man whirled towards Devon reaching for his weapon. But again, Devon was quicker and had his molecular diffuser aimed and discharged before the Enforcer could free his own weapon. He disintegrated quickly until nothing was left but burned ash. Devon had never had a use for torture and always had his weapons set to max. There were some he knew who enjoyed the slow decomposition of their targets. He'd always found the act of toying with slow termination distasteful. One more to dispose of.

As he turned to head back to Eluria, her voice came to him in a tight whisper through the vo-comm. "Devon, behind you—"

He pressed the nucleus of the vo-comm. "Eluria!" There was no response. He felt her change in rhythm as it sped up, thundering in his chest. A cold finger of trepidation raced up his spine. She'd been discovered and she was in danger. As he moved closer, he heard her scream.

He cornered the outcropping of rocks and his blood chilled to ice. Eluria and the Enforcer struggled on the ground fighting for control of a diffuser. She was pinned beneath him. It was impossible for Devon to use his own diffuser because the disruption of molecules could cause damage to Eluria as close as she was in the struggle.

A red haze of rage filled his vision. Devon sprinted forward and grabbed the man from behind, tearing him away from Eluria.

"Distance yourself, Eluria," he shouted to her, as he whirled and faced the Enforcer. The Enforcer confronted Devon, his eyes glowing red with Killing Frenzy, a look and feeling Devon remembered well. Too close for diffusers, he jumped at Devon and they landed in the dirt, rolled and struggled for control. Devon freed an arm, pulled back and putting all his weight behind it, threw a right punch. His head snapped back. Devon landed another driving fist, sending the Enforcer flying backwards to land sprawled in the dirt. Recovering quickly, the Enforcer rose and pointed his diffuser at Devon.

Devon fainted and the blast missed him by inches, disintegrating the

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rock behind him instead. Devon dived toward his discarded diffuser, rolled, came to his knees, and fired. His aim was true and the Enforcer disintegrated quickly, leaving only ash to mark his presence.

Drawing in a deep breath, he lowered his diffuser and rose to his feet. Eluria was at his side in seconds, wrapping her arms around him.

“Devon, oh Symion, Devon, I thought he was going to terminate you,” she cried, pressing herself close. He felt the erratic rhythm of her life-beat and wrapped his arms around her, knowing his own life-beat wasn’t much better. He’d almost lost her.

“We have to get out of here now. They would’ve been in regular contact with a security ship. When they don’t check in, they’ll send someone to investigate.

Quickly, he pulled her along, heading toward the location of his ship. He pointed the veil control. There was a shimmering aura and the ship appeared.

He turned and grinned at her. “What is it the Earth show captain says? Beam me up, Scotty?” He grabbed her hand and pulled her with him to safety.

## CHAPTER 10

“Is there any indication we’re being tracked?” Eluria asked as she entered the navigation deck of the small ship. Devon had encouraged her to rest once they’d safely entered space and were again veiled from detection. Grudgingly, she’d finally agreed, but found she was unable to sleep, still wound tightly from the confrontation on the planet surface.

Instead she took a quick shower and returned to the upper deck and to Devon. Rest was the farthest thing from her mind. What she needed was Devon filling her, loving her, erasing those last moments when she thought he would be terminated.

She now gazed out at the limitless void of space. It was reminiscent of the void of balance. And she was reminded of the ecstasy discovered in Devon’s arms. Liquid desire pooled between her legs and she turned away from the dark vista.

Earlier she’d given Devon the coordinates to Ednos and they were on course. It would be several days before they arrived.



### ELURIA'S ENFORCER

A fire had been slowly building inside her, a result of the combination of adrenalin and Devon's nearness. When she entered the control deck, she'd felt the change in his rhythm.

"Come here."

She looked up at his command. There was a blue light in his fierce turquoise eyes. She had a feeling she knew what it meant, that the same swirling, primal emotions were reflected in her own eyes.

"Come here," he repeated in a low voice, humming with lust. Heat swirled inside her as she walked to him.

When she stopped in front of him, he reached up, tangled his fingers in her hair, and drew her to him. "I want to fuck you, *na-nivia*. Hard and fast. Right here. Right now." She was close enough to feel the blaze reflected in his eyes.

She pulled at his skinsuit and it released. She knelt in front of him. He needed a primitive fuck, lust as old as time. A claiming of life, not a seal of love. Affirmation of continuance. She needed the same. The adrenalin rush of combat needed release. Red radiance glowed around her.

A wildness rushed through her. For this man. Her taman, the only man she'd ever want. In every way possible. She leaned forward, licking at his exposed nipples, nipping and tugging. He inhaled and arched into her mouth, pulling her closer.

She sucked deeper, her tongue swirling around the hard nub as she urgently pushed his suit from his body, down across his hips as he lifted from the seat, and she tossed it aside quickly. She ran her hands along the length of his hard thighs, reached for his stiff shaft, reveled in its steely, firm length, rising between his legs.

His heart thundered and she leaned back and looked at him through eyes reflecting her need. "I want you to fuck me," she returned in a voice thick with urgency. "Fast and deep. I want to feel you throbbing inside me."

With a growl, he ripped her suit open, surged to his feet, lifting her

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with him, and bent her over the control panel. She felt his hard, solid heat as he pulled her tightly against him. Consumed by the flames of desire, she pushed her suit the rest of the way off, needing to feel his hot skin against hers. His fingers drove into her shax-ra, testing her readiness.

His lips blazed a path down her neck, across her breasts. "You're mine, tafai, mine."

She tangled her fingers in his hair, holding him close, reveling in his savage possession. "Yes, taman, yours. Always yours."

He moved back up her body, grasped her arms, spun her away from him, and bent her forward over the panel. In one swift thrust his thick khout separated her lips and entered her shax-ra. He sank deep and she screamed with pleasure. Taking her from behind, with fast, deep penetration, it was unlikely they would seal, but she could still feel every hard inch of him tunneling inside her, spreading her, building their combined heat.

He leaned over her and began to thrust in short, fast movements. He ran his hands along her spine, up to her shoulders and back down to her buttocks, cupping and molding. He forced her legs wider, curved her deeper. She could feel her juices gush thickly around him, as he surged forward, then retreated, and surged again. She moved against him, balancing his driving intensity, meeting his demands, needing the wild, savage release she felt close to achieving.

"Make me release, Devon. Ah, Symion, please," she cried. She thrust her buttocks back, ground against him. He yanked her back to him, cupped and molded her full breasts with his hands, pulled at her erect nipples, sending painful shafts of pleasure driving through to her core.

He raised one hand to her neck, pulled her closer, thrust deeper. Bringing one hand downwards, he teased her hard nub, circled and sank more fully inside her, pulled back and pushed deep. Again and again. She spiraled and pulsed around his hard shaft, flying free and she felt

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his release, her screams threading through his cries of primal possession.

As the waves receded, slowly he pulled from her body. Cradling her in his arms, he turned to collapse in the chair, pulling her onto his lap. She curled close, her body still thrumming with aftershocks.

"It's a good thing we're veiled," she murmured against his neck.

He stroked her back, sending shivers along her spine. "It wouldn't have mattered. My need for you surpasses all common sense. I'd have taken you anyway."

She brought a hand down and stroked his semi-rigid khout. He quivered beneath her touch. "Keep that up and I'll have you backed over that panel again before you can catch another breath, *na-nivia*."

She looked up into his eyes, a hint of amusement on her lips. "And do you think the thought scares me?" Raising a hand, she pressed it against his chest. "I feel your rhythm, taman, I know its beat as I know my own. What you desire, I give freely."

He looked down at her and she sensed his worry. Stroking her hair, he leaned back in the chair, looking out across the vast space. "We have a difficult path ahead."

She nodded against his chest. "We do. But we know now it will succeed. Your father would be proud, Devon. He had faith you'd be restored and would continue the fight as he couldn't."

She felt the sadness of his soul and a determination of his spirit.

His arms tightened around her. "I love you, *na-nivia*. We will fight for our people's freedom together."

"Always, taman." She leaned up to capture his lips in the age-old bond of all time—Before and Beyond. The rhythm of their lives and strength of their love, restored and intertwined for all eternity.

*ELURIA'S ENFORCER*

## ADRIANNA DANE

Theresa Gallup uses the pen names of Tess Maynard and Adrianna Dane. Theresa has been writing since the age of 10. A legal secretary for 30 years, she is currently working on another erotic romance, as well as a full-length romantic mystery/suspense. She has been married for 30 years and has three grown children (a daughter and twin sons), and is a new grandmother.

Writing as Tess Maynard, her first published short story appeared in the ezine, *The Whispering Forest*, in January of 2004. Writing as Adrianna Dane, where adding sensual heat to romance is her motto, *Esmerelda's Secret* was her first foray into the erotic romance genre.

Having traveled and lived from the East Coast to the West Coast, Theresa receives inspiration for her stories from a variety of sources, including music and poetry, and her tastes are eclectic.

For more information about current projects, visit Theresa's websites at [www.tessmaynard.com](http://www.tessmaynard.com) or [www.adriannadane.com](http://www.adriannadane.com).

\* \* \*

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