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A Slave's Life

Brenna
Lyons

Wands



A Slave's Life:

By

Brenna Lyons

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***D*edicated to...**

The cosmos at large, for the idea that sometimes it's
the person standing next to you that you've always
wanted to find.

A bit about the card...

Tarot: The Four Of Wands

This card is perfect for a lovers' deck. It is a card of rejoicing and good tidings. Voria and Juleron are the perfect couple to represent this lucky draw.

This card is about happy events, observing milestones or anniversaries, ceremonies and rituals, opening the door to new possibilities, escaping unhappy circumstances, escaping an oppressive situation, getting caught up in the moment. Sit back and relax, and join Voria and Juleron, as they explore a future few would envision possible for a Slave raised with Fion's Children and her Master, a Lengar General.

NOTE: There is a glossary of Keen terms used in the book at the end of this story.

Abrin 27th, 7i 10-461

Sow did I end up here? Voria pleaded silently. She prayed to a goddess who seemed as dead as her race, hoping against reason that someone would save her. *Perhaps I am unworthy of the Mother's intercession. The Mother loves her warriors.* Voria was anything but! She'd been taken from Gidlore before she'd had even a day of her training as a Priestess. She knew nearly nothing about battle and less about herbs, only what she learned watching her mother work healings.

Tovin's hands pulled up at her woven dress, his sour breath heavy in the iri brandy he loved so much. "You want it," he growled. "Lie though you might, you witches are women. You love it when a man—"

The rest was lost on a groan as he prodded at her unready body with his rigid cock.

Voria stiffened, wishing she was even half the warrior her mother had been. She swallowed a sob at that – at the failure she was to her race, unable even to stop this rutting beast.

There is nothing I can do, her mind argued. *If I move against Tovin, it will go badly for me – and he will still have me.* Voria had seen it before. None of the female

servants in General Juleron's home were safe from the house head. It was simply a blessing that he'd not dragged her off to some dark alcove to take her maiden's blood years earlier.

And, Voria wasn't a servant. She was a slave – spoils of war taken by the victor. She had no rights. *It is a blessing that I have escaped this long*, she reminded herself yet again.

"Open for me," Tovin demanded in a slurring voice.

Her legs shook, her instinctive drive to keep them clenched shut warring with her conscious acknowledgement that she had to accept his advances or face the brutality she knew him to be capable of.

He forced her thighs wide, and she swallowed a scream of frustration. It was one more thing she would have to endure. She knew when she was taken that there would be no challenge night for her; she would never shed her maiden's blood on the sacred green stone. What did it matter where she shed it now that her legacy was lost to her?

Voria closed her eyes as he positioned himself, bracing herself for that first brutal thrust. She gasped in surprise as Tovin's body left her without penetrating. A rush of cool air surrounded her, blessedly clearing away some of his stench.

She opened her eyes, blinking in the light streaming into the pantry. Tovin's face was nearly purple, his breath coming in strangled gasps. A mad certainty that Mother Fion had struck him down lodged in her mind, and she bit back a laugh of relief.

Then he landed in a heap before her, and she gazed

at the harsh lines of Juleron's face, terror taking the place of her relief. Why would the Master do such a thing? Was she next?

His eyes bored into her, taking in her situation. She dropped her eyes as she'd been taught, reminding herself that she was a slave. Unless the Master wished to speak to her, she had no right to meet his eyes. The Master never spoke to slaves directly, except to issue orders that were to be carried out immediately on pain of whippings for failure in your assigned task.

He stepped over the house head's body, the fabric of his cape rasping against the narrow shelves on both sides of the cramped space as he moved. He was a big man, a strong man who was capable of snapping most of the men in the village in two without a sweat breaking over his brow.

She stiffened, expecting punishment. Voria learned quickly that guilt or innocence mattered little when you were a slave. Her parentage was reason enough for a beating. Any misdeed committed in the household was simply an excuse.

She felt the phantom burn of the single lash she'd been given acutely, though she'd assured herself in a mirror that it was little more than a red crease above her waist. They dared not whip her again; the house head who had dared paid with twenty lashes at the Master's own hand – Tovin's predecessor. The Master had made it clear that she was too valuable a piece of property to maim; her unblemished looks were important to him. Still, it wasn't uncommon for Juvia to see to her duties with a bruised cheek or sore ribs.

Juleron's hand skated up between her legs,

cupping her woman's curls and tracing her seam with one warm finger. Voria swallowed a sob. If that was what the Master demanded, she was his to use.

He grunted, and his hand left her body. "Return to your duties," he growled. "I expect a tray brought to my room within the hour."

"I will summon Lur —"

"You," he interrupted her. Juleron turned away. "You will bring my tray today."

"As you wish, Master," she whispered, peeking at his shoulders.

He turned back, his eyes hard and his jaw tight. She pressed back into the shelves, unable to look away from his gaze. He'd caught her watching him twice. Was she a fool to court a beating this way?

"Cover yourself," he growled.

Voria dragged the dress down her thighs, her hands shaking in fear but also in relief that he hadn't laid a hand on her for her gall in meeting his eyes.

Juleron stared at her. "You have nothing to say to me?" he asked.

Her head spun, the possible answers he sought making her dizzy. What did one say to the Master but a simple acknowledgement of his commands? He hadn't spoken to her about anything but her duties since he turned her over to his house head to train as a slave all those years ago.

"Thank you, Master." Surely that was what he sought.

He raised an eyebrow as if waiting for more.

She bit her lip, uncertain. Had she angered him somehow?

Juleron sighed. "For dealing with Tovin?" he hinted.

"Yes," she agreed eagerly. "Thank you for dealing with Tovin – Master."

"You are my property, Voria. No one takes of my property without my leave." He didn't give her time to fumble for an answer to that. Juleron strode away, stepping over Tovin's still form.

She took a calming breath and hurried to the kitchen to collect Juleron's tray, wondering but for a moment if Tovin were dead or alive.

* * * *

She knocked at Juleron's door, wincing that she was late. It was most likely intentional. Luri was trying to keep Voria in poor favor, as always. Perhaps she hoped that the Master would be so angry, he would punish her personally for her laziness.

"Come in," Juleron called absently.

Voria breathed a sigh of relief. Perhaps he hadn't noticed her tardy arrival. She entered and fell to the task of unloading the heavy tray onto his work table.

"You are late," he noted.

She stilled, her heart pounding. "My apologies, Master."

"For being late?" he prodded.

Voria nodded, focusing on her task once more.

"Why were you late?"

"There is no excuse," she deferred to him. That was a lesson she had learned quickly in the Master's house.

"Then, it was your own fault that you came here late?"

"I should not —"

"It was your choice to be late?" he snapped.

"No. Of course not," she answered frantically.

Juleron was silent for a moment. "Then why do you apologize?"

Voria shook her head, abruptly uncertain. He asked questions that confused her.

"Bring the plate of fruit and meat," he ordered.

She turned, moving to the bed in a haze, noting at the last moment that Juleron was stretched out on the quilt, nude and aroused. A stab of fear warred with her rising interest. Was this how Juleron met Luri when she brought his daily tray? Did he intend to educate her to serve him the same way his usual servant did?

Voria moved her eyes away from his erect length and the dark curls surrounding it to the equally dark eyes watching her. She felt her color rise at that. What had she been thinking? Staring at him that way was surely frowned upon, though Voria had never been trained to serve in this capacity and so had no idea what a personal servant would do in the same situation.

"How long have you lived in my home, Voria?"

"Nine years, Master."

"Do you remember the day I found you?"

Her eyes flicked to the scar that marred his wrist, the scar that was one of the few he earned in years of battle. She looked away again, willing her hands not to shake. "A bit," she lied. How could she forget that

day if she lived to be as old as the Mother Herself?

"I remember every moment," he countered.

Voria offered him a slice of meat with shaking hands. Juleron could have killed her for injuring him, but he didn't. He could change his mind about that at any time. In all these years, he hadn't. Was his comment meant as a warning that any further trouble involving her in his household would result in such an end? She dared not ask.

He took the meat, his lips brushing over her fingertips. Juleron took his time, chewing the offered food slowly and examining her expression all the while. At last, he swallowed. "How old were you when I found you?"

"Nine years," she answered.

"A year before you would have started your training as a Priestess," he mused. "And so, it was my choice whether to spare you or not."

Voria didn't answer. The image of the Lengar commander reaching for her was seared in her memory. She'd been terrified. Her mother and older brother had been slain, and Voria stood alone amidst the dead and dying, the cries of other children echoing from the far corners of Gidlore, tears rolling down her dirty face.

Why she chose to grasp her mother's abinatine was still unclear to her. Perhaps it was a mad urge to prove herself worthy of her race. Perhaps she was simply a frightened child taking up the only thing she felt certain would protect her. Either way, she had done the unthinkable and struck the commander who came for her.

Juloron had been furious. His battle cry had shaken her nerves as he struck her down with his armored hand, the abinatine clattering off of her mother's armor. Voria had looked up at him, waiting for the bite of his sword, a blow that never fell. Instead, he had bound her hands and tossed her over his buck, her stomach pressed to his thighs as he rode from the bloody battle.

"Voria?"

She startled, embarrassed by her inattention, and offered him another slice of meat. "Yes, Master?"

"You have reached your eighteenth year now?"

"Yes. More than a moon ago."

"Is it true that Fion's Daughters are considered adult at eighteen years?" he asked.

"It is."

He nodded, his eyes taking measure of her. "Put down the plate, Voria."

She hesitated, meeting his eyes.

"Now." His voice was almost soothing.

As it had been on the road from Gidlore. Voria placed the plate on the bedside table.

Juloron panned his eyes down her body, tracing circles on her inner thigh above her knee. "You didn't like what Tovin was doing," he stated.

She shook her head slowly.

* * * *

Juloron knew as much from her unready state in the pantry. He moved his hand higher, caressing more of her body. "Has Tovin taken you?" He bit back fury at

the thought that the beast might have. His house head had been warned that Voria was not to be molested. The drunken sot should not have tried. If he had taken her – ever, even once in the years he’d served – Tovin would die for it before the sun fell from the sky.

“No, Master. Never.”

We shall see very soon. “Has anyone?”

Voria gasped as his hand moved higher, her core dampening, heating to his touch.

It is proof of nothing, he reminded himself. *She may have dreamed of my touch. I have certainly anticipated hers.* “Has anyone taken you?” he demanded.

She shook her head. “No,” she stammered.

A smile pulled at his lips. “Never?” He brushed his fingers over her core, now ready for him as it hadn’t been for Tovin.

“No,” she gasped, her body jerking slightly.

“You say no to me?” he asked calmly.

Voria shook her head again, fear clouding her green eyes.

“You like what I’m doing,” he said, his eyes moving to the hem of her tattered dress. “Do you want more?”

“If you wish,” she managed.

His smile melted away as fury coursed through him again. “Did I say what I wanted?” he asked.

“No, Master. I—” Her breath caught as his fingers stroked at the hood of her pleasure.

“More?” he prodded.

She nodded frantically.

“Take off your dress.”

Voria pulled the garment over her head and dropped it to the floor.

"Unbind your hair."

Her fingers fumbled at the thick braid.

Juleron watched her progress, his body burning to taste her depths. He couldn't remember anymore when he stopped seeing Voria as the pitiful, lost child he dragged from under her dead mother only to taste her blade – when he started dreaming of her white gold hair fisted in his hands or fanned over his pillows as he plowed into her fertile, young body.

It seemed he'd ridden the edges of madness since she'd been fifteen, waiting for her to reach adulthood according to the culture that spawned her, unwilling to force her to his hand as many of his Lengar brethren would have – as many of them had with their own Fion's slaves.

Juleron ground his teeth at the thought of those arrogant bastards. How had he let them make him doubt? Had he ever doubted Voria before?

She met his eyes briefly, then lowered them, her hair half-hiding her beautiful face. She sighed as he pulled his hand back to his chest.

"Lay next to me," he ordered. Guilty or innocent, Juleron would have his fill of her – at least this once.

She followed his command as she did in all things. Voria ran her eyes over his body, and he took heart in the flush of color that raced down her body.

"Touch me," he invited, praying she would prove the innocent he believed her to be.

Her hands pressed to his chest, tracing the muscles that bunched in pleasure at her touch, playing in the

line of dark curls that led like a spear to where he wanted her hands most. She didn't follow them that far. She investigated his chest and arms breathlessly, her eyes locked on her hands, wide in seeming disbelief. He bit back a groan as she played at the well of musk above his nipple.

"Touch me everywhere."

Voria looked to the aching length of him that hungered for her body. She didn't move. Juleron drew her hand down, pressing it to him, groaning aloud as she circled him. She played at him, tentative strokes that grew bolder as his breathing became more ragged.

He drank in her rising scent and dilated eyes. He soothed himself that his own rising scent was acting as an aphrodisiac on her. It was certainly working on him. He needed her; he needed to be in her – *now*. Her eyes widened as he grasped her head in his hands.

He gentled, reading her fear. Juleron drew her to his body slowly, reining in his frustration. Mayhap, Voria was as innocent as he'd always believed. He would treat her as if she were, easing her into the experience. In case she was, he wouldn't let Releger and his kind force him into ruining his one chance at claiming her properly as his own.

Juleron tasted her lips, noting her trembling, cursing himself for taking pride in it. It was his relief that Voria seemed out of her element that caused this cursed happiness at her trembling. He moved his hands, tangling his fingers in the silin strands of her hair, and brought her mouth back to his again.

Her trembling subsided as her responses became

more ardent, as she eased into the kiss and learned his tastes. Juleron pressed her to his body, thrusting his hips forward to nestle his cock to her woman's curls. A whimper escaped her lips, and her nipples came to tight points against his chest.

He met her eyes, pinning her in his sights as he lowered his head to her breast. He licked her nipple, his eyes moving between his sweet torture of her and the expression of bliss on her face. He sucked at her, nipped at her, and soothed away the slight pain. There seemed no attention he could pay her that Voria balked at, even unconsciously.

Her scent was maddening, female musk at its purest and most potent call for a mate. He pushed her to her back, smiling at her look of stunned rapture.

"Voria," he whispered, waiting for her to meet his eyes before he continued. "I will take from you now."

She nodded, biting her lip lightly.

"Do you know what I mean?"

Voria looked at his ready length, her breath hitching.

"Not yet, but soon," Juleron soothed her.

She didn't answer that. Voria averted her eyes, her pale skin staining to a deep crimson.

"Do you know what I mean?" he asked again.

"If not that..." She faltered. "No, Master. I do not know what the term means."

We shall see. Juleron nudged her legs apart.

She complied timidly, her breathing uneven and her eyes darting to his face and away as if she might flee the bed. She closed her eyes; her breathing calmed and body relaxed.

"Voria," he demanded gruffly, waiting for her to meet his gaze again, pushing away the thought that she had some knowledge that meeting a man with muscles taut was not a comfortable thing. He calmed himself. Perhaps she had merely overheard that much.

He didn't explain himself. Her honest reaction was what he sought. Juleron captured her hood without warning, sucking hard at the nub.

Her reaction was immediate and intense. She jerked away, her small hands pressing at his shoulders and her eyes full of something resembling terror.

"Voria." He forced his voice to remain neutral, detached. Secretly, he reveled in her shock.

She looked to her hands, pulling them back with an expression of horror. "My apologies, Master," she gasped, most likely envisioning some dire punishment for raising a hand to him.

Juleron knew the Lengar servants in his household had taken the back of a hand to her person on more than a few occasions. One had even dared whip her. He wondered if she noticed that she was safe from that when he was in residence.

"You disliked what I did?" he asked evenly.

She faltered, her brow furrowed.

"You disliked —"

"I do not know." Voria seemed torn in confusion.

"The sensation startled you then? The pleasure - or pain was so intense that you forgot yourself?"

Relief flooded her face. "Yes, Master. I did not mean —"

"Juleron," he urged her.

Her eyes widened.

"And, do not apologize." He looked to her seam, ravenous for her. "Lay with me. I will be more slow."

"Yes, Master."

"Juleron," he breathed.

She sank to the bed, spreading her thighs wider and raising her knees at his indications that she should do so. He traced her seam with the tip of his tongue, and she cried out softly. He explored her body, a thorough introduction to the pleasures of his tongue on her outer sex. He sucked at her hood again, tenderly this time. Voria thrashed her head back and forth, licking her lips in apparent sexual hunger.

"The loveplay is to your liking?" he asked.

"Yes." Her voice was little more than a whisper.

Juleron smiled at that. She hadn't called him by name, but she hadn't called him Master. "I will continue, Voria. The sensations will be intense. You may feel the need to grasp at my hair or shoulders."

She fisted her hands as if to remind herself not to move against him again.

"You may do so," he assured her. *I want you to.* "You may also feel the need to force me away. This, I will not allow. At the height of your pleasure, I will claim what is mine."

"As you wish, Ma—"

He shot her a look of warning.

"Ju—Juleron," she stammered.

"You will learn to say my name for moments such as this," he instructed her.

"Yes— Yes, Juleron."

"Better." He returned to her body, to his external play.

Voria moaned in delight as he let the tip of his tongue wander inside her seam. He ventured deeper, drunk on the aphrodisiac properties of her woman's musk.

"Juleron." She said it so softly that he almost missed the gift.

He rewarded her with a concerted effort at her internal pleasure spot. Her fingers touched his hair, retreating abruptly then returning, making an uncertain path through his locks. Juleron became more urgent in his pursuit, urging her on.

"Juleron," she panted. "I cannot. Please."

Her hand fisted in his hair and tugged lightly, the second joining it. She shifted her hips, desperately seeking escape. He held her in place and braced her thighs wide with his shoulders, burying his face in her body, knowing she was close to release and he to the end of his uncertainties.

She bucked her hips, her grip on his hair near painful. He used the movement to his advantage, driving her to climax with ruthless efficiency. Voria screamed, her hands tightening, then falling away.

Juleron didn't hesitate. He rose up over her, praying to whichever gods protected her that Voria would remain his. He pierced her body in a single stroke, closing his eyes with a shiver of longing as her barrier shattered. He pulled back, leaving her warmth and grasping at the square of silin beneath the pillows.

One more thing, he reminded himself. One more test,

and she is truly mine.

* * * *

Voria stiffened in surprise at the new invasion of her body. Juleron made a soothing sound, his shoulder pressed to hers, pinning her to the bed. His fingers explored inside her, massaging her tender tissues. She moaned at the silin teasing her hood, her body throbbing, aching for him to complete the mating.

His hand retreated. She watched in confusion as he used the already-soiled silin to clean the blood from his length.

He tossed the silin to the bedside table next to the plate of meat. His expression was unreadable – hungry, intense, and something else she couldn't define. Without a word, he filled her again.

She cried out in pleasure then darkened – half in embarrassment and half in uncertainty. The embarrassment was easily dismissed. Fion's Priestesses faced their challenge of silence after three years of intense training. There was no shame in her inability to control her responses. Any untrained priestess would do the same.

The uncertainty was harder to dismiss. She'd never lain with a man before, and Juleron was Lengar. What did he seek? Did he wish her to play the part of an unaffected priestess as so many had at Gidlore, taking his body in silence despite her lack of training? Or did her lack of training and inexperience excite him as she'd heard it excited men? Did Juleron wish to hear the passion of one of Fion's Daughters, as pitiful an

example of one as she was? If he did want her silence, was Voria capable of giving him that?

Her answer came as he moved again, sensuous slides of his hips against hers. She grasped at his shoulders, a whimper forced from her lips. Juleron came at her faster, panting out instructions that, when followed, heightened her pleasure.

And then he went still, the head of his member lodged hard against the gates of her womb. The heat of his seed came fast and hard, making her gasp in surprise. Her body exploded in sensation as his body locked into hers; heat rushing through her limbs, explosions of energy making her dizzy. She screamed, a full-throated scream of ecstasy. How could any woman deny this feeling?

For a handful of heartbeats, Juleron was silent, seemingly deep in thought. "The last of your kind," he whispered.

Voria forced her mind to function. She hadn't been the only girl taken from Gidlore. Were the other three dead, then? Her mouth refused to form the words to ask the question. What would she do if they were?

As if he possessed the ability to hear her thoughts, Juleron nodded. "They ran from their masters over the years and were killed in the attempt."

She swallowed a sob at that, nodding her understanding. He would kill her if she ever tried to escape him. She'd always known that. *But Tereya* – Tereya had been her cuvia – her sire cousin and only a season younger than she. Their mothers had been sisters of the heart, and they'd been raised together at the hearth.

"You know the boy in Releger's household?" His voice was calm, but the tension in his muscles warned Voria of some threat in that question.

"Gulin," she breathed. Tereya's younger brother had been a comfort to her in Berenal. After he had sired Voria, Tereya's father had become her mother's true mate, and so both of them were her sire cousins. Since she could not see Tereya – indeed knew not even where the other woman was, Gulin gave her hope.

His jaw tensed. "He was killed last night while entering my lands to come to you."

She shook her head in denial, a tear spilling down her cheek. Gulin was dead, and she was alone in the city of Berenal – alone in all the world.

Juleron's face hardened, rivaling the cock still buried in her. "How often did he come to you? Did he promise to take you to the Magden?"

"Never. I swear it." She trembled in fear. If Juleron truly believed she'd betrayed him, what would her punishment be? Whipping? Death? Or had he taken her maidenhead with the thought of making her a vessel for his soldiers to fill with Lengar slaves? She shuddered at that.

"You weep for him," Juleron accused. "What is he to you if not your lover?"

"My cuvie –" Her grasp of the intricacies of Lengar families escaped her. What did one call sire cousins in their culture? Was there anything comparable?

"Your intended mate?" he growled, no doubt forgetting that Fion's Children did not promise their daughters away to men as the Lengar nobility

sometimes did.

"No," she gasped in horror. Juleron didn't know the ancient word. "We—shared a sire. We could never have been mates."

He went still. "He was your brother?"

Voria shook her head, frustrated by the cultures that separated them. "We had different mothers," she managed weakly. Though Burnia had been like a second mother to her, that did not make her children her siblings by law.

"A half-brother, then?" His patience was strained, and he looked prepared to throttle her for her inability to simply agree with him, but Mother Fion did not approve of lies, even when they would benefit you.

She sighed, realizing fully that she was courting his ire, but unwilling to lie to him to avoid it. He'd asked her a direct question; an honest answer was all she could offer. "He was not my brother," she repeated slowly. "We had different mothers." Voria shivered as his cock released her band.

His eyes burned in seeming fury. "Did you or did you not share a sire?" he demanded.

She nodded, her head aching at trying to follow his logic.

He sighed in relief, his muscles unclenching. "By *Lengar* law, he was your brother. Explain your priestesses' law to me."

"We were – cousins. Close cousins, too close to mate but not siblings."

"Swear this to me on your goddess. Swear it on your right to your soul's reward."

Voria nodded. "I vow that I speak the truth."

"He never came to you? He never offered to sneak you away from here? Perhaps in town, while you did your assigned work?"

"Never. I swear it, and... I was never left alone in town. I have never been trusted not to..." She felt her cheeks flush. The servants always believed she would run at her first opportunity.

He searched her expression as if weighing her words then left the bed.

"Master?" she asked nervously.

Juleron shot her a venomous look, pulling a silin lounging robe around himself and grasping the blood-stained silin from the table. "You will wait for me here," he instructed as he made his way to the door, belting the robe as he walked.

Voria bit her lip as the lock snapped shut behind him and she heard the slide of the lock bar leaving it. She pressed a hand to her forehead, still shaking. Did he believe her, or had he gone to collect his guards?

She startled at that, scrambling from his wide bed and pulling her dress on over her head, unwilling to have the guards come for her while she was naked in bed. Her hands trembled, fisting in her rough dress then smoothing it over her thighs.

I am a slave, she reminded herself. Even if Juleron wants me to come to his bed every day, he is still my master, and I am still a slave.

* * * *

Juleron glared at the men in his lounge, men he'd

once fought with against Ro Ti. Now the Lengar were in a state of civil war, animals, mere shadows of the greatness they once possessed. There were days when Juleron would welcome a force from Ro just to end this feuding. Were it not for the fact that he would surely face the Magden king's blade for the many battles he'd won against their troops, Juleron would invite his enemy in – some days.

He nodded to the brothers, though he wanted to slit their throats for their lies. "Releger. Muvian."

Releger panned his eyes down Juleron's robe with a sneer. "I trust you used the bitch well," he commented coolly.

He pulled the scrap of silin from his pocket, throwing it onto the table before his foes. "I and no one else."

Muvian blanched. "Then you caught her before –"

"The boy was her brother," he interrupted them, his patience wearing thin. "Her half-brother, in actuality."

"And you intend to take her word on this?" Releger asked in disbelief.

"And whose vow did you take?"

Releger darkened. "I... Why should I –"

"No matter. I can guess." Juleron strode to the door that led to the kitchen corridor and yanked it open, snatching Luri up by her arms as she overbalanced into the room.

She gasped, finding her feet in a rush. "Master Juleron, I came to," she began.

"Silence," he warned.

Luri dropped her gaze, presenting the appearance

of a subservient wench. His grip tightened. He'd seen too much of her games to believe her.

"You went to the Fion boy, Gulin," he stated without question. "What did you tell him to make him come for her?"

"I did not—"

Juleron shook her. "You dare lie to me?" he growled.

Luri flicked a glance at Releger and Muvian, as if the brothers would come to her aid against her master.

"The truth," he demanded.

She shied from him, fear in her dark eyes – the same fear she'd made Voria feel. He ground his teeth at that, at her attempts on Voria's life and safety.

"Let me lay out your plan, then," Juleron offered. "You knew I planned to take Voria to my bed and feared – rightly, I might add – that your time in that position was through. You would lose the added comforts of being my bed companion."

Luri blanched. "I meant—"

"I know what you meant. I also know your measure, woman. Did you never wonder why I stopped taking you to my bed?"

"No, Master. I—"

"Did you think I wouldn't know your plans to win a child of me? Your lax attention to the Walla teas? And the rest?"

She gasped, her face draining of color.

"Yes. I know you took other men, believing I would be fooled into thinking the child my own. Is that how you convinced Tovin to agree? How you

made him ignore my orders not to lay a hand on Voria? Or did you simply ply him with drink and fill his head with ideas?"

Her stark terror made it clear that he had followed her tactical trail perfectly.

"Your servant has cost us a valuable Fion slave, Juleron," Releger snapped. "What satisfaction comes to our house?"

Juleron smiled his coldest, his course clear. "I give you two slaves in return."

Releger's face lit. "Then we will take the women—"

"No. Voria was innocent in this treachery. She will not serve your house in repayment for it."

"What do you offer?" Muvian asked, mirroring his brother's scowl.

"Tovin as a house slave and Luri in the manner she sought. Fill her belly with as many babies as you wish – a whole generation of slaves. I assure you, the woman will serve whatever man plows her well – if she wants to live."

Luri shook her head, trembling in his hands. She was Lengar, but she was a woman without family. Now that she had been caught plotting against him – and had no one to buy her out of her actions, it was his right to exact any punishment he wished, including her death.

Muvian took Luri from his grasp, testing her breasts with his big hands. He grunted his approval. "Acceptable offer, Juleron. She is young and ample. We can get half a dozen good young from her."

Releger motioned for Juleron's attention. "I would

like to purchase your Fion slave girl for my own. As the last, the remuneration would, of course, be considerable."

Juleron chuckled. So, that was the true game. No doubt Releger had convinced Luri that she would be well rewarded and have her prize of Juleron's attentions both. He met her eyes, daring the slave to turn her new masters over to his judgment.

Luri shot a nervous glance at Muvian's hand, then at Juleron. It was almost lamentable that he'd already given her to the brothers. Though he would have sold Luri as a breeding slave in punishment regardless, she now had to consider whether a magetra would take her word over Releger's. She remained silent, taking the perceived safe route from the battle; Releger and his brother having knowledge that she had done them this service was infinitely preferable to an unknown punishment by either Juleron or the brothers after the magetra made his determination.

"Juleron?" Releger reminded him of the offer still standing for Voria.

"No. I think not. By my right at Jurel's side, I believe I will use her to give me heirs."

"You'd wed," he began hotly.

"They planned to give the last of the Mothers' child to the young prince. Though Voria holds no abinatine, she is undeniably the only living heir to the seat - a worthy vessel for my sons."

"You have aspirations of the throne," he accused.

"Not at all." *As if I would want to throw in with the wariken fighting for scraps of what was once a great dynasty!* "The only reason for Jurel's heir to be intent

on the Fion's Mother's child was the fact that she was heir to Ro Ti as well. Jurel wanted the Mother to warm his bed for his own pursuits." Juleron smiled. "No. Voria is not Magden royalty. There is no political gain to planting heirs in her. What would they inherit but what is my own?"

"Then why her?" Muvian asked.

"Because she is unique, and by virtue of my right at Jurel's side and the right of the blade, she is mine. I will have strong sons from her."

Releger grunted his agreement, scanning Luri with the promise of claiming her at his first opportunity. "Very well, Juleron. I leave you to your vessel."

He waved them out with an order to have Turin delivered to the brothers from the whipping post he now graced. He returned to his rooms with due haste, planting the lock bar in the door with a smile of success. His smile faded at the sight of Voria.

She stood in the center of the room, clothed again in the rags she came in earlier, her hair hastily braided and looking as if she faced execution. She trembled, peeking at him but keeping her eyes lowered, her hands clutched in the folds of her skirt.

He closed the door, crossing to her without a word. Voria didn't fight him as Juleron removed her dress and tossed it away. He pulled the strip of fabric from the end of her braid and loosed her hair, combing it smooth again with his fingers.

"I ordered you to remove these things," he chided her.

"I am—"

"Do not apologize to me," he growled. He fisted

his hands in her hair, drinking in their mixed musk on her body. "Those things are no longer yours, Voria. You will never put them on again. Do you understand me?"

She managed a jerking nod, her eyes wide and wild.

"You enjoy my touch?" he asked, gentling his voice.

"Yes," she admitted, glancing to his eyes as if making certain she hadn't angered him somehow.

"Good." Juleron captured her mouth, groaning at her heated response. He guided her back to the bed, intent on his course.

Her fingers stroked the silin robe, tracing the line of trim down his chest to the knot at his waist. She paused as if waiting for his permission to proceed.

"It is your place."

Her brow furrowed in confusion at that, but she nodded and untied the knot, letting the belt slide away. Juleron shrugged the robe off, letting it fall to the floor. Voria looked at his body in a mixture of longing and fascination. Her fingers played in the line of curls again, and her lips pressed to his shoulder.

"Do you wish to be here, Voria?" His voice sounded rougher than he wished it to. He caressed her cheek, the longing for her nearly maddening.

She murmured her assent. She turned her head, pressing her lips to the scar she gave him at their first meeting.

"You are mine," he informed her. "No one will ever take you from me."

Voria shook her head. "I never intended," she

gasped. "You have my vow that—"

He didn't answer but stilled her words with a finger across her lips. He urged Voria to her knees on the bed then left her side to collect the veltian from his cabinet. She looked to the green satil cushion in confusion.

He eased it around her body slowly. "This is a veltian," he instructed her. "It will support and position you for my claiming."

She nodded, stroking a hand over the satil brushing her upper thighs. Juleron guided her legs apart, pushing them to the long, padded bars of the veltian that surrounded her. Voria looked back at him in surprise as the gold band closed around her right ankle.

Juleron stroked her leg and moved to the left. She turned her head, watching the band snap on, her body rigid as if in military review. He guided her over the front of the veltian so that her body lay along the wedge and her head on the pillowed lower edge. As if giving her blessing, Voria positioned her wrists for the fore-bands.

When all four were firmly in place, Juleron placed the lock bar on its fine gold chain around his neck. He took in her position breathlessly, spread for him with her deep red folds pushed high and wide for his pleasure.

He'd dreamed of this day, praying that Voria would welcome his touch. The veltian was ceremonial, but it was also functional. Had she fought him, it would have held her fast as he planted his heirs as many Lengar nobles had won heirs; but she

lay placid, her sex glistening with her woman's musk, ready for his claiming as he'd hoped it would be.

There was one thing left, the most enjoyable part of the claiming. He played the head of his cock in her waiting heat, watching intently as Voria pulled at the bands, biting her lip lightly. She likely believed he meant to take her in some brutal fashion.

His cock parted her, sliding into her a fingerwidth at a time, teasing at her inner pleasure spot. A small amount of his seed released, mixing with her musk, warning him that his control was tenuous at best. Her breathing went ragged. She strained toward him, stretching her arms to the length the bands would allow.

"More?" he offered.

Voria nodded with a guttural sound of pleasure. "More," she gasped.

"More..." he prompted her.

"Juleron, please."

He pushed himself to the hilt in her, crying out in unison with Voria as the liquid silin of her body gripped him tight. The call to claiming was too strong to ignore. Juleron pistoned in and out of her, his hands wrapped tight around her lush hips.

His eyes strayed to the pink line of the whip that marred her cream-colored skin, and he thrust deeper. No one would dare touch her now. There would be no more bruised cheeks, no more whips, no more long days of laboring at chores no one else would touch. She was his.

His name was a plea on her lips, over and over, as she fought the restraints that held her down. Juleron

growled at that, knowing she was leaving the marks that proved his claim.

Voria screamed his name, her body suckling at his length like a babe at the nipple. He followed her over with a shout of triumph, his seed finding a home in her – he hoped. Juleron wrapped his body around hers in the age-old promise of protection. *No one will touch her now but me – not sexually or in anger. She is my bride.*

She sighed in contentment, a smile curving her lips.

“So beautiful,” he breathed; her smile was rarely won. Perhaps she would have reason to smile now. “Do you understand why I’ve used the veltian, Voria?”

Her eyes opened. She glanced up at him then away. “I have heard –”

“What have you heard?”

“Such a position encourages a babe from the union.” Voria pressed her forehead to the pillowed edge. “You wish a child from my body.” She didn’t question it.

“I wish many children from you.”

She nodded. “As you wish, Master.”

Juleron sighed as his cock released her. She didn’t understand what he was saying. He reached down and released the fore-bands from the veltian.

Voria played at the bands, looking for a catch to release them and finding the jeweled lock – emi bead to match her eyes. She turned her pale face to him, questioning him silently.

He nodded. “You are banded as my mate, Voria. I

have claimed you. Will you give me the children I crave? Will you give me yourself?"

She looked at the bands again, gasping out something unintelligible.

"Voria?"

"Yes." Her voice was a strangled whisper.

"Yes?" he asked, needing to be certain.

"I will be your mate, Juleron. I will bear your children."

"Vow it on your goddess." He sat back on his heels, shivering as his cock left her body. He released the bands that would ring her ankles from the veltian.

"I vow to be yours."

Juleron turned her into his arms, meeting her mouth urgently. He smiled.

"What is it?" she asked.

"We will have midday meal and appease our carnal hungers again." He ranged his eyes down her body. "Then—"

"Then?" she asked breathlessly.

"You are banded, Voria. It is my duty to dress you in silin and fur and carry you across my lap on my buck in announcement." *With your bruised limbs displayed for all to see.*

Her eyes widened. "But I am—"

"Sworn my bride." *Len alone help the fool that interferes with that.*

Voria scanned his body, her scent as hungry as her gaze. "Will you use the veltian again?" she asked.

Juleron chuckled. "There are many ways to use the bands," he promised.

Glossary Of Keen Terms Used In The Book

NOTE: Keen is a lyrical language, and minor changes in pitch and inflection denote a slightly different word in the language. See next page for the Keen calendar.

- Abinatine--- the sacred dagger of one of Fion's Priestesses: used in her healing, to take the life of a worthy opponent, and when she takes a mate
- Choc----- a soft, brown color
- Cuvia----- a female sire-cousin, one of Fion's children born of the same sire and different mothers
- Cuvie----- a male sire-cousin
- Emi bead---- a soft (consistency of amber) clear emerald green stone usually shaped into beads and used for decoration
- Fion----- Keen queen of the gods; Goddess of love, balance, and mercy
- Fion's Children/Daughters
----- The matriarchal priestess race wiped out by the Lengar in Ti 10-452
- Hottel----- a horse-like creature (mare pony-size and war-buck Clydesdale size)
- Len----- God of the underworld, vows broken, trickery, and havoc
- Lengar----- the people to the North who sought to rule the world before unification
- Mag----- Keen king of the gods; God of justice,

- law, and vows unbroken
- Magden----- the race ruled by Ro Ti in the days
before unification
- Satil----- -a stiff, thick material used to make
farthingale-type skirts for presentation
of heirs, also used for paintings due to
its long life
- Silin----- a silk-like fabric that most women's
clothing and royal bedding are made from
- Stride----- a measure of distance; the distance the
average war-buck can travel at a loping
stride (half-speed) in the space of five
minutes
- Ti----- conqueror, king who takes his land by
force
- Veltian----- a Lengar device used at the taking of a
mate and in sex games. It consists of a
wedge-shaped center cushion with
cushioned metal arms extending out
from it. There are a series of clips to
hold the mating bands in place for
various sexual positions.
- Wariken----- a large gray or deep choc furred beast
which runs wild in packs in mountain
areas; can be trained as a hunting beast
or companion though always a bit wild

Keen Calendar

A year on Kegin is roughly equivalent to an Earth year. Days are twenty Earth hours long, but the year is separated into twelve months consisting of thirty-seven days each. A week on Kegin consists of eight of their days. I formatted the calendar as if the Keen year started in January like an Earth year. In reality, the Keen year begins in Endl. The end of winter and beginning of spring is a time of rebirth, and so it is the start of the Keen New Year.

Pri-----	January
Ite-----	February
Endl-----	March
Wos-----	April
Zor-----	May
Fim-----	June
Jad-----	July
Caj-----	August
Wend----	September
Abrin ----	October
Veril-----	November
Iric-----	December

About The Author

Brenna Lyons lives in Haverhill, MA with her husband, three children, and a zoo of pets. She was born and raised in the Hazelwood/Glenwood area of Pittsburgh, PA and toured the east coast as a Navy wife for thirteen years.

She enjoys the Society for Creative Anachronism and is a member of such groups as Broad Universe, EPIC, WRW and ERA.

Brenna holds a BS in Accounting and a Certificate of Computer Programming. Why? An auditing teacher commented that she would either “make the perfect auditor or the perfect thief,” and she had been writing for eleven years with little professional training – in effect, a thief of attention by misdirection.

Never one to pass up a challenge, Brenna has worked as an auditor, tracking down fraud suspects, finding the backdoors into exchange computer systems, creating accounting programs for government and small businesses, and as a writer. Overall, it's the best of both worlds.

Brenna enjoys talking to readers and can be reached via her site at <http://www.brennalyons.com>