



The Seven Deadly Sins
and Virtues

ENSLAVED



BRENNNA
LYONS

GLUTTONY

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Enslaved

Seven Sins and Virtues Series

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ENSLAVED

A CLOSER LOOK AT GLUTTONY

SEVEN SINS AND VIRTUES SERIES

BY BRENNA LYONS

Gluttony: (glʊt'n-ɪ)

n. pl. glut ton ies

Excess in eating or drinking; the quality of being intemperate; an excessive desire; never satiated; never satisfied; wanting more pleasure from something than it was made for.

The misconception about gluttony is thinking that it only pertains to overeating. It is about an excess of any given thing: food and drink, sex, or possessions.

There are several types of gluttons in this book. Jedean is a glutton for power and position. Even as he prevails and ensures no one will wrest him loose, there is no denying his thirst for more. In fact, it is his gluttony for power alone that causes this story to unfold. Senna is driven by what she is, and what she lacks, to a more classic gluttony, insatiable hunger. Then there is Jaysen...

Senna didn't consider refusing the gift...or even asking who had sent it before she accepted it. She'd be a fool to do it. She raised the goblet to her lips and drank deeply, feeling her magic as she hadn't in nearly a decade, since just before Jedean locked her away completely from the world.

It was night. Mother Night called to Senna, welcomed Her daughter home.

Her body reacted fiercely to the stimulus, her sex dampening and begging for a lover's touch. She licked her lips, plumped as if already well-kissed.

The steward took the goblet from her hand. "The gift is to your liking, Lady Senna?"

"It is," she whispered, lost in pleasure, drunk in the need for more.

FOREWORD: THE HISTORY OF SEMITERR

Welcome, dear reader, to Semiterr, a world inhabited by humans and two types of mages: Radiants and Blood Mages. Radiants are children of the day, feeding their magic on the radiant energy, the auras, that surround every living thing. Blood Mages are children of the night, unable to withstand the intense radiance of sunlight, feeding their magic on blood taken from willing hosts, a largely peaceful race.

Mistrust, as usually will, has always run rampant between the two. Only one solid truth has kept the Radiants from eradicating the Blood Mages completely; on a rare occasion, a Radiant and a Blood Mage are destined as mates. In such a union, their magic merged, there is none on the planet more powerful than the blood mated pair.

For the last century, a war has waged, not between Radiant and Blood Mage but Radiant against Radiant for the seat of power. A Blood Mage mate would ensure victory and strengthen the bloodline of the possessor.

Thus, Blood Mages fell prey to the Radiants, forced to test and killed if not mate to the Radiant in question to avoid an enemy finding a match. Always, a few were left alive to continue their kind.

Blood Mage and Radiant have each been forced to their keeps, hidden behind shields and wards, trusting no one.

A new game is afoot. Jedean might have taken the seat of power by magic alone, but he would have had to hold it by force. How much better and more expedient to keep his place by trades for loyalty oaths, sealed in magic, for something only he possesses...

Dedicated to...

Lisa, who's always ready to be a sounding board when I'm stuck and always ready to test new stories to see if they punch the reader solidly and for all its worth.

CHAPTER ONE

"Watch, Jaysen," his father instructed, pointing to the corridor furthest below their balcony perch. Jedean whispered, though the pulse of magic around them made it painfully clear to Jaysen that the shields between them and the floors below would protect them not only from attack but also from being observed or overheard.

He stared at Jedean a moment longer, taking in his ice-blue eyes and the light-brown curls cropped only a finger-width down his neck. His father's tanned chest was uncovered in his typical form of dress for inside the keep, nude save his white trousers.

Jaysen's resemblance to his father ended with the tanned skin and dress; he was undeniably his dead mother's son, possessing her midnight blue eyes and black curls that he kept longer than was fashionable for a man under his father's protest.

Even his sensibilities ran more to his mother's tastes, something Jedean assured him would change as he became a man and learned more of the cares a man had. Jaysen hoped he was wrong, though he dared not speak that thought aloud.

Jaysen's mind worked at the powerful mage's great glee. It was unbecoming, something Jaysen himself

had been counseled about by his teachers many times.

"This is how a man grows powerful. Watch now."

Jaysen sighed. He was ten and six winters, a moon from his manhood ceremony, and his father still treated him like a child. Still, he looked where his father directed. There was a lesson to be learned here, a lesson that might make him a mage as powerful in radiant light as his father was.

He gasped in surprise at the sight of their greatest rival, stripped to his ceremony wrap and standing in the lowest corridor of the keep, tanned skin in stark contrast to the rosetone walls, feet uncovered on the bare floors. Jaysen would have thought him a prisoner had he been restrained in any way, but he was clearly a penitent, fresh from some rite or about to engage in one. *Within our keep?* Such a thing defied reason.

"What is Delek Tro doing here?" he asked in amazement.

Jedean chuckled darkly, urging Jaysen along the upper corridor ahead of him. For a moment, the only sound was that of their feet against the thick carpets of the family core, brick red to offset the rosetone and golden accent pieces along the walls.

"I possess something Delek desires...something many strong in the radiant light desire, something they will pay in loyalty oaths and riches to obtain."

Jaysen looked back, watching the house steward leading Delek the same direction they traveled. "It must be a precious possession," he mused.

"The most precious," Jedean agreed.

"What could be —"

"She." His father stopped at another balcony and motioned to the room below.

"A woman?" Jaysen questioned in disbelief. No woman was worth the risk of entering an enemy's keep unshielded, even one as lush as the one stretched out nude on the bed below.

Though, she is a striking woman. He took a moment to consider her before stating his disbelief more firmly, certain that he was missing something that would encompass the whole of his father's intended 'lesson.'

She was young, no more than a year or two his senior, an adult but barely so. She was unadorned by jewels, her beauty speaking for itself. Her skin was unnaturally pale, a sign that she spent much of her time inside the keep...or inside some keep. It only added to her allure, setting her apart from the dark tans of the nobility. And yet, something about her spoke of a noble background, the cut of her face perhaps. Her hair was long and straight, as black as his own, well-kept and untangled, an invitation to touch her unspoken. Yes, she was stunning.

Still, entering an enemy's keep in such a fashion was madness. Tempting flesh could only tempt a man so far. "What could—"

She opened her eyes, and the breath caught in Jaysen's lungs. *Green-gold eyes.* They fairly glowed in the candlelight.

"A Blood Mage," his father confirmed. "One of the last and of bastard lineage, but powerful and eligible stock."

But, Jaysen heard him through the haze of sexual

longing. A spike of jealousy sliced through him as her gaze locked on Jedean. Jaysen wanted her to look at him, to invite him in.

"She always knows when I am near, despite the wards and shields, even if I am out of her line of sight," Jedean mused. "This is our greatest treasure, Jaysen. Every mage with aspirations of the seat of power desires her."

I desire her. I need her. But, he was incapable of forming the words to state it.

"But, I have her, Jaysen. I own her."

He shuddered at the thought of the woman below being a slave of the house. *A slave to anyone.*

"Those who wish to test her passion become indebted to me."

"You let them use her?" Jaysen could hardly force the words past his dry mouth. He needed to drink of her body. It was as essential as breathing to him.

"She has no hope of better," Jedean dismissed his concern. "Her magic led her here in search of her mate."

What desperation would force her to abandon her keep and go to those who slaughtered her kind? Even if her mate was a Radiant, even if she trusted that he wouldn't turn on her as so many would...

His father kept speaking, oblivious to his contemplation. "She was young, barely ten and six winters gone, naïve, quick to test."

Jaysen stiffened. His father had used her inexperience against her. He didn't question it. In his pursuit for the seat of power, no foul trick was beyond Jedean.

"Binding her was a simple matter, once I had her trust and her arousal proved a detriment to her attention. I wasn't the mate she sought, of course, but I played the part well, I think...until I had her snared. I knew I wouldn't be." His voice showed his contempt at the thought of such a match, as advantageous as it would be. "She'd undoubtedly been one with my brother, Tason, and our close blood confused her."

"He is dead," Jaysen offered numbly. He wasn't certain whether he should feel anger at Jedean's deception or pity for the poor girl thus ensnared. She was barely a woman and a slave to the mage she'd hoped would save her from some dire predicament.

"Yes, and so there is nothing better in her future than feeding on a line of men she can never accept fully." Jedean leaned on the balcony rail, staring at her. "Though eventually, she will choose to birth a bastard. Most without mates do, as her mother did after Gavin tested her and let her live to produce a new generation."

The image of the woman below, tied down while old Gavin tested her lust and hunger, had his fury burning. Her mother would have been much like her, much like all Blood Mages were.

"She took a human, I hear," Jedean spat. "It would have been better if she'd chosen a Blood Mage to sire her bastard, but I imagine finding one was difficult. Still, this one is a strong one, considering she is a half-blood."

Jaysen's retort was cut off as the door opened. Delek stepped into the room below, and Jaysen's

blood ran cold. Delek was here to force her to test.

Her eyes turned gold, and she moved them from Jedean to Delek. Her hunger assaulted Jaysen, making him lightheaded. She spread her legs in invitation, and his cock rose.

Delek went to her bed, kneeling between her parted ankles, his oiled skin reflecting points of candlelight. "I come to test you, Blood Mage."

Jaysen wanted to throw the older mage out, to go to her himself, to allow her to test *him* in the manner she should be allowed. And yet, he longed to watch her feed and be fed upon.

Her voice was like silk. "You and many others, Radiant. Continue, if it pleases you."

Delek darkened, his jaw tightening in fury that spoke of violence to come. "It will please you," he challenged.

Her golden eyes flicked to Jedean, then away, a wry smile curving her lips. "No doubt, it will. You know my price."

Jedean laughed harshly. "Her idea, her addition to what I require of her...and require of them. They are bound to give their lifeblood to her willingly in payment for the right to test her. They leave here exhausted from their efforts to drive her to test and a little weaker in fluids, but they leave indebted."

Delek nodded and spoke in a low voice that was lost in the rushing in Jaysen's ears. She smiled indulgently, saying something that made Delek go shades darker.

Jaysen didn't hear it; he didn't want to hear it. He fisted his hand. Though she affected amusement well,

her sadness and pain ate at him.

Jedean chuckled. "She thinks she punishes me with the knowledge that she enjoys their attention."

The force of an energy blast to the chest left Jaysen gasping for breath. It tortured *him* to know it.

"Jaysen?"

Delek lowered himself, tasting her, growing more avid as she bowed up. Her eyes closed, and her lips parted, her fangs lengthening as her cries became louder and more frantic. Her hips cycled, guiding Delek's ministrations.

Jaysen's muscles tightened in preparation for battle, and his cock ached. His breathing regressed to gasps. He stepped toward her, intent on killing the one who dared touch her, who dared make her feel such dark emotions in what should be a beautiful sharing.

"Jaysen!"

Hands dragged him away. Jaysen fought them, grumbling curses, searching frantically in a mind that fought clear thinking for the battle spells he'd had driven into him since toddlerhood.

Two hands became four then six. A heavy door closed, then a second. He roared in protest as her emotions disappeared from his mind. He had no sense of direction, no idea where she was, but he had to reach her. The voices around him made no more sense than the hum of night insects.

A sharp incantation brought his head around. His father's face was abruptly clear before him. Then all went black.

* * * *

Jaysen groaned, his head tender in a post-spell reaction. It took a moment for the scattered memories to knit into a sketch that he understood. It was no enemy who had done this to him; his own father had struck him down.

"Jaysen?" Jedean grumbled in a voice that sounded of near exhaustion.

He forced his eyes open, identifying the light beige linens, whitewood and silver accents that indicated they were in his rooms at their summer keep in confusion. The rooms were decorated, as everything in the summer keep was, to his mother's specifications. There were no rooms like this in his father's bastion.

How long had he been incapacitated? *At least, half a day to have reached the summer keep. Most probably, a full day, when one considered the time to arrange such a move on short notice.*

"Jaysen? Do you remember what happened?"

"You cast against me," he stated. How could Jedean do such a thing?

"You were crazed, a danger to yourself and others."

Was I? Jaysen vaguely recalled fighting. His knuckles ached, a living testament to the fact that he'd struck physical blows instead of magical ones. "To others," he admitted.

"To yourself, boy! You nearly threw yourself off the balcony and —"

"The Blood Mage!" Jaysen launched to his feet, intent on reaching her, then crumpled into his father's

arms. He groaned weakly, his breathing labored. Visions of her green-gold eyes danced behind his closed lids.

Jedean settled him into bed again, tucking the quilts as if he were a babe.

"I must see her," Jaysen murmured. *I must touch her. I must taste her. I must protect her.*

There was silence, an unsettling stillness, a chasm that hadn't existed between them moments before.

"I want her, Father. My manhood ceremony approaches—"

"No. You will not be permitted to see Senna again."

"Senna..." A smile pulled up at his lips. The name fit her.

"You are forbidden, Jaysen." His father's voice was cold and hard in decision. "The wards and shields have already been set."

His head throbbed, and a sick swirl settled in his stomach. "But, a man is permitted any boon when he reaches—"

"This is not a boon. It is suicide. You will never see Senna Ravensky again. Not while I live to prevent it."

Jaysen's protest was drowned out by his father's casting. He sank into a magic-induced sleep, welcomed by dreams of Senna, eaten up by his hunger for her.

CHAPTER TWO

TEN YEARS LATER

Senna lay on the bed, staring into nothingness as she did most days.

It wasn't that there was nothing to look at or nothing to do. In truth, her room was comfortable. Deep red carpet offset the rosestone walls that were hung with paintings of night scenes that soothed her and silver candle sconces that Jedean's magic kept bright and clean. There were cushioned chairs and a reading desk stocked with books, a small fire nook that was cold at the moment, and even a smaller version of his mineral pool that had been added some eight years prior.

And yet, she would give nearly anything to leave the place, but that was impossible for many reasons.

She had no concept of day or night; that most basic magic had deserted her long ago, lingering only weeks longer than the rest. Even if Senna left the lower corridors and found her way to the upper reaches once more, she could be walking into agony unknowing.

But, what did it matter? She'd been bound by her stupidity and Jedean Magal's magic for the last twelve years. The locked iron doors between her and the outside world hardly mattered. It was something of an insult that Jedean bothered with them.

He hadn't always kept her behind locked doors. For the first two years Senna had been enslaved, she'd been free to wander the lower reaches of his keep. In those days, she'd had use of the main library, the steam room, mineral pool and even the smaller fire den. She'd simply been denied use of the family core of the house. Senna hadn't used her privileges often, so angry at her enslavement that she'd sulked most of the night hours away like the child she'd been at the time.

And, you have grown so much, she chided herself. *You act like the eight and twenty you profess to be?* No. This wasn't sulking. This was despondency, boredom, apathy.

Now, even that shadow of true freedom was lost to her. In truth, she could request books from the library, and they would be brought to her room, but her frequent depression made that an empty joy, at best.

It wasn't just her movement that Jedean had restricted. He'd not allowed her to feed on lifeblood from the day he'd locked the doors until today. Though the mundane food she was provided with was copious and well-presented, it wasn't what she craved most.

Gone were the days when she'd been free to feed from willing servants, when Jedean might deign to

share her bed himself for the pleasure her nectar gave him. Gone were the days when she might trade the right to “test” her for a powerful mouthful or two of lifeblood from the Radiants’ most high. Gone were her powers with it. No longer truly a Blood Mage, she simply...existed.

Jedean hadn’t passed through the doors in those ten years. He had rarely peered at her from the high balcony. There had been no reason given for the change in her imprisonment, not that a slave expected one.

Thus, a decade had passed. Senna was alone save the few servants granted access to her, most notably the slight, serious house steward. She typically saw the man four times a day: bringing each of her meals and picking up the final tray, always asking if she required anything more of him. Since he could not give her the one thing she wished for, the answer was typically in the negative, and she would see him no more.

Senna had often wondered if his aim was to keep her weak, to steal her magic in retribution for some offense against him. His reasons for such a thing were impossible to guess, though. She was bound, incapable of doing Jedean harm in any way: physically, politically or emotionally. That a given, it made little sense to keep her weakened and trapped behind iron doors.

The door opened, and the house steward entered, a pewter goblet in his hands instead of a tray of food. The scent of blood assaulted her first, the essence of a powerful man, one of the higher Radiants, dizzying in

its potency. Her fangs lengthened, and her mouth watered to taste it.

The question of whose blood the cup contained was dismissed almost as quickly as it appeared in her mind. It wasn't Jedean's blood. As hungry as she was, she might have refused his blood, offered in such a manner.

But, it isn't Jedean's. For that reason alone, it was a welcome gift.

"Lady Senna," the steward greeted her. It had been years since he'd addressed her so formally, but she didn't question it. *Not while he holds the goblet of liquid life in his hands.*

At times, she'd wished she could address the man by name to ease her loneliness, but a mage's servants were never addressed by name. If the steward had a name, and she assumed that he did, Senna doubted that Jedean even knew it. He had servants to keep abreast of such things for him.

She nodded, rising slowly, her eyes locked on the offered treat. Senna didn't typically like to drink in so mundane a manner, but the magic surrounding the goblet spoke of a freshening spell. The contents would be as warm and vital as if taken direct from the Radiant himself.

In confirmation of her belief, the goblet was heated; it seemed to pulse beneath her fingertips. Surely, it was a trick of the magic, but she was strangely touched by the effort. Jedean had never gone to such lengths to please her, yet more proof that the gift had not been commissioned by her 'owner.'

Senna didn't consider refusing the gift...or even

asking who had sent it before she accepted it. She'd be a fool to do it. She raised the goblet to her lips and drank deeply, feeling her magic as she hadn't in nearly a decade, since just before Jedean locked her away completely from the world.

It was night. Mother Night called to Senna, welcomed Her daughter home.

Her body reacted fiercely to the stimulus, her sex dampening and begging for a lover's touch. She licked her lips, plumped as if already well-kissed.

The steward took the goblet from her hand. "The gift is to your liking, Lady Senna?"

"It is," she whispered, lost in pleasure, drunk in the need for more.

"If it pleases you..." He hesitated, seemingly disconcerted.

"Yes?"

"My master requests an audience of you."

Senna stared at him in confusion. To her knowledge, Jedean had never *requested* anything, of her or of anyone in his employ. And, when did the steward start referring to Jedean as "my master?"

"Jedean has never asked permission to enter here before," she noted cautiously.

"Alas, Lady Senna," he began with a weak smile. "Lord Jedean is no longer master here. He has passed to the Sun's far side."

Her heart pounded in a mixture of hope and terror. "Who is master of the keep?" *Who holds my chains now that Jedean is no more?*

"With Lord Jedean's death, all he owned passed to his son and heir, Lord Jaysen."

All he owned. A spark of anger ignited in her. He owned me. And now, Jaysen owns me.

"Will you come to him, Lady Senna?"

"Come? Come where?"

"To his fire den."

She considered that. Why would the young Radiant return her magic to her and treat her as an equal? The cost was certain to be a high one.

A length of black silk appeared on the bed before her, and Senna touched it, hardly daring to believe her eyes. It was the traditional dress of a Blood Mage, possibly the same one Jedean had taken from her after he bound her.

No. This one is new, without the taste of old magic mine would carry, even after a dozen years, without the protective spells my mother wove in before her death.

"A gift from Lord Jaysen," the steward informed her with a slight bow of his head.

"As was the goblet of living life?" she asked.

"Indeed, it was."

"Tell him..." She lifted the sleeve of the dress and stroked her cheek with it, sighing. "Tell him I will come to him."

* * * *

Jaysen reclined on the mattress and cushions laid before the fire nook, his skin still tingling from the mineral bath, unclothed in her honor. He'd chosen the room purposefully. It was one of the few he'd been able to redecorate so far, changing the dark carpets to light much as the summer keep was decorated. It was

Jedean who had favored the deep red furnishings; as in most matters, Jaysen was more like his mother had been.

He trailed his gaze over the painted day-scapes on the wall, hoping Senna would like them as much as he did. The room was light, warm, nothing like the darkness of her cell. Of course, there was no way to learn if she liked it but to watch her reactions to it.

It was time. He'd restrained himself only three days after Jedean's death, preparing for her in what he hoped was the appropriate manner. Senna would arrive soon, and with her agreement, a decade of waiting would come to an end.

Those years had been long and frustrating. Many a sleepless night had found Jaysen wandering the keep, stopped again and again by the many shields and wards that separated him from her.

He'd known the truth within days of his father's decree, but no amount of reasoning, pleading or threats had swayed Jedean in the slightest. Jedean had been wrong about Senna's intended mate, though he'd been right about the fact that his blood had confused her. Tason's blood hadn't been that which she sought; it was Jaysen's. His father had dismissed that idea, since Jaysen had not yet been a man when Senna appeared at the door.

Had she come to the keep two years later, how much different their lives might have been. But, Senna had no doubt assumed that her mate would be an adult, as she was at the time.

There was no question that Jedean knew what Senna was to Jaysen after his reaction to Delek's 'test.'

Nor was there any question that it scared the old mage to death to know it. Hence, he would not relent while he lived, just as he'd vowed.

Perhaps, he feared Senna had gone mad in her enslavement and would harm Jaysen rather than accept him.

Perhaps, Jedean feared losing position. Though Jaysen cared little for the tales of the shared magic, it was undeniable that, with Senna as his mate, there would be no higher Radiant than Jaysen. He would win and hold the seat of power without effort, and Jedean had never backed down from a contender to his place, even if it were his own son.

Or perhaps, Jedean simply feared Senna's wrath, were she free to vent it.

Jaysen never learned which it was. His father had died without comment on the matter.

He straightened as the doors opened and the steward announced her. His heart pounded, and his mouth watered in anticipation of her taste. Her power washed over him before she appeared, a glorious blaze of her full strength unleashed.

Then she was there, in the doorway, making her way to him. Her smooth, black hair fell to her hips, shimmering in the firelight, looking like a short cape against her equally-black gown. Her skin was pale and unblemished, her lips red as blood and eyes wide and bright.

The door closed behind her, granting them privacy.

Senna walked across the room, her head held high, a proud woman who owned the very air around her.

He smiled. Of course, she owned it. As her mate,

all that was his was hers, though she didn't know it yet.

She stopped at the edge of the mattress, panning her eyes down the length of his body, regarding his rising cock in the same boredom she'd shown Delek years earlier. "You called for me?" she asked, the bite of ice in her voice. She kept her mind shielded, a sure sign that she didn't trust him.

"I *invited* you to join me. Would you rather I come to that foul cell?" He'd determined not to go to her there long ago. In addition to the fact that she'd been imprisoned there for so long, which was sure to make her uncomfortable, the memories of Delek drinking of her would drive Jaysen mad if he attempted it.

"A slave is a slave, wherever she lies."

Jaysen ground his teeth in impotent rage. "I cannot deny it," he admitted.

"I suppose you wish to test me, Radiant?"

"One does not test a Blood Mage," he countered. "The Blood Mage tests him...if she wishes."

She hesitated, her eyes narrowing, seemingly wary. "You do not require that I submit to you?"

Finally, she was asking the right questions. "I do not demand that you submit to anything."

She stared at him, her mouth working as if to question him further. Senna looked into the fire.

"That confuses you." He'd expected that it would. He knew he'd probably have to lead her into the concept that she controlled her own destiny this way.

"I cannot deny it," she taunted him.

"What do you want, Senna?"

She didn't seem to know how to answer that. After

so long as a slave, he'd expected as much from her.

"Sit down," he invited.

Senna sank to the mattress beside him, seemingly lost in thought. She looked down then winced, no doubt in the realization that she'd obeyed him. She refused to meet his eyes. That was unacceptable.

Jaysen slid the tiny sacrament blade out of the sheath beside the mattress and sliced a shallow track in his index finger, letting the blood well up. He tossed the knife away.

She looked up, her eyes golden, her fangs lengthening, intent on the sluggish flow. "You tease me," she whispered.

"Is this not the way a hopeful entices a Blood Mage, Senna?"

He *was* teasing her. There was no denying it. Jaysen was playing on her hunger after his father's cruelty. He'd considered this moment long and hard, nights of planning how best to approach her. This was how she should have been approached, the traditional way a hopeful mate appeased a Blood Mage. Senna deserved no less from him.

She shifted toward him, her breath heating his fingertips, the sharp movements of air making his head spin in response.

"Do you want this, Senna? Do you...need it?" *I need it. What will I do if she refuses me?*

He'd let her go, even if it killed him to do it. Jaysen just prayed she'd choose to stay.

Her eyes closed, and she leaned toward him, stopping just short of his offered gift.

Jaysen knew the dance well. He'd studied ancient

texts tirelessly, researching the proper ceremony, a ceremony that reportedly hadn't been used in nearly a century.

He caressed his fingertip across her lower lip, painting his blood on her, the first sign that she was his.

* * * *

Senna sucked his fingertip into her mouth, smiling at his groan of pleasure, at the plea she'd seen in his midnight blue eyes even before she'd accepted his gift. His heartbeat quickened, and his arousal flavored his blood.

His magic was strong, nectar even more potent than his father's had been. She wondered at that, the mad realization that Jaysen might be lord by virtue of murder; his potency proved him more than a match for any other Radiant she'd met. Then again, if it was Jedean Magal he'd murdered, she wasn't certain she'd consider it much of a crime against society at large.

She pushed that thought out of her mind with a silent plea for forbearance from Mother Night. It wasn't a Blood Mage's way to be... Well, that was the worst pun she'd considered in a decade.

Senna released his finger and licked her lips, unwilling to waste a drop of him. The dance of enticement was something she'd lost hope of experiencing long ago. Perhaps, if she hadn't been so young and awed at the concept that a Radiant as strong as Jedean was bound for her, she might have

insisted that he...

He wasn't mine. He'd never been destined for me. I should have known it was wrong when he treated me like a human lover, when he wouldn't...

Jaysen's fingertip glided along her upper lip, seducing her with the promise of sating her hungers properly for the first time in her life. She sucked it in again, drinking of him, feeling her powers swell.

Mother Night, I never realized how powerful I'd become in my full maturity.

That cleared her mind. Of course, she hadn't! Jedean had kept her leashed and on the edges of starvation, even before he stole her magic entirely. Senna had never been permitted to taste her full strength.

She sucked him more urgently, greedily using him to strengthen herself.

"Moon and stars, yes," he whispered.

Senna released his fingertip and surged toward him, sealing her mouth to his. His lips parted further, and their tongues danced. Jaysen buried his hands in her hair, fisting them as she cupped him.

He was more than adequate in size, already hard. With a few delicate flicks of her tongue, he'd pour out his seed for her as Jedean had, in the early days, before he'd locked her away. Jaysen pressed his hips up, begging for more.

Use his hunger.

The thought appeared in her mind from nowhere. Senna tried to argue her way out of it, but it proved impossible.

Jedean had used her passion and her hunger to

trap her. What better irony than using his son's to free herself?

I would be no better than Jedean!

But, did not a prisoner wrongly held deserve freedom at any cost? She conceded that it was so.

Jaysen sank to his back, drawing her over him.

Memories of the long line of lusting Radiants turned her stomach. A single certainty rose in her. This was the last one who would touch her. When she was free, she'd kill Jaysen and take her leave from this place for all time.

Their lips parted, and Jaysen rolled her beneath him. She opened her eyes, gauging his involvement in the affair and finding him fully immersed. It was time to make her move.

"Is this what you want, Jaysen?" She forced herself not to show her distaste at speaking his name aloud.

She hadn't addressed a Radiant directly by name since Jedean betrayed her. It had been her defiance. They'd stripped her of her name, called her 'Blood Mage' as if they were addressing the cook or house steward. She'd done the same to them to show her contempt for them. They were less than human to her.

His voice was graveled in arousal. "You know it is."

"Sex with the slave," she sighed. Senna thanked Mother Night that he was so different in appearance than Jedean had been. Though she'd like to claim the resemblance wouldn't have unnerved her and caused her to tip her hand, it might well have.

He winced. "Never."

"Unless you free me, that is all there can ever be

between us." Her heart pounded in near-terror that she masked carefully.

Jaysen opened his startling blue eyes, seemingly assessing her.

If he saw through her ploy, what would he do? Take what he wanted, despite her wishes, master and slave? Lock her in that damned cell and starve her into compliance? Whatever he chose, she would be bound to all but verbal agreement to his course.

But, he will never make it past the first trial. She'd been too quick with Jedean...and confused. No Radiant save him had mounted her since; none had earned the right to. Since her mate was dead, none ever would. Even if Jaysen tried her, he'd leave as unsatisfied as the others had, drunk on her nectar and loss of blood, aching for her, for that one thing she would never grant them.

Jaysen owns me. Like Jedean, he could demand more of her. His protestations that he would not aside, he was his father's son. When her nectar enflamed him, and his body cried out for her, he would take what he wished. His father certainly had, in the early days.

Time slipped away in silence, setting her nerves on edge.

"You are right," he stated. "You will not come to me a slave."

I will not come to you, at all. I will not come for you and your male ego, either. She held her tongue, unwilling to risk her promised freedom in so foolhardy a manner.

She shivered as the words of binding rolled off his

tongue, an ancient verse that she'd heard last in the midst of sensual bliss, Jedean's cock buried inside her and her fangs in him. By the time her muddled mind had identified the spell, it had been too late to stop it. This time, she welcomed the words, the spell spoken then unspoken to break the chain.

Memories of Jedean's smug smile fueled her rage. He'd laughed at her scream of outrage and horror, taunted her as he spilled his seed inside her, seed that thankfully had found no purchase. It was, perhaps, a blessing that he'd never thought to order her to forsake the spells that kept his seed from planting, that he hadn't forced a bastard of his loins upon her. Then again, Jedean probably found the thought of engendering such a child more distasteful than she did.

He would pay for her pain a thousand-fold. *His son will, when I am free.*

The final syllable died away, and Jaysen smiled his father's smile.

Senna grasped his head between her hands, intent on snapping his neck. She trembled, and her arms seemed to bleed strength away. She stared into his questioning eyes, the urge to harm him lessening, confusion setting in.

A sob escaped her lips in realization. "You lied to me." To the end, he would be Jedean's son.

* * * *

Jaysen stared at her, confusion cutting through his arousal. "Never," he assured her. "I would never lie

to you." Why would she think he had?

"You...must have," she hitched out. Tears rolled down her cheeks, pinking her fair skin. "I am still bound."

"You are not. I assure you, the words were spoken." *Is she mad that she believes the ties still bind her?*

She looked to her shaking hands in apparent misery, and her meaning became clear to him.

"You mean to harm me but cannot." Jaysen didn't question it.

Senna drew her hands back to her chest, swallowing unevenly, grimacing.

He laid his forehead to hers. "Why do you seek to harm me, Senna?"

"You are... You..."

"I am not my father. I would have freed you ten years ago, when he...admitted to me that you were a slave to him. Do you not know yet that I speak the truth to you? That I never wanted this for you?" She had to know it, or Jaysen would be tossed aside.

Her body quaked against his. "If... If you speak the truth, why can I not harm you?"

His heart ached at her blindness. Did she truly not feel the attraction between them? Or did she not trust her feelings after judging Jedean so poorly?

"Why?" she insisted.

"Do you feel anything for me?" he asked bluntly.

Senna hesitated.

"Tell me truthfully. There will be no punishment. You have my vow."

"What should I feel for a warring Radiant lord?"

Jaysen bit back a scream of frustration. His father had done it; he'd stolen Senna from Jaysen as he'd always vowed he would, only he'd done a more effective job of it than he'd ever anticipated.

He moved off her, not daring to meet her eyes. "Leave me."

She lay there, stunned, seemingly terrified. "Where—"

"You are free now. Go where you wish. To your home, if that pleases you. To your kin, if you have any left. The steward will...pay you for your service as you leave."

Her eyes narrowed, and she pushed to her feet. "I want nothing from you."

Hence, the problem. "As you wish, Lady Senna."

Senna stared at him, shifting from foot to foot nervously. She nodded. "Good evening, Radiant."

Jaysen didn't answer. He wasn't certain his voice would issue forth if he attempted it, and he had no clue what he'd say if he managed it.

She turned and strode from the room, her back straight and head high. He closed his eyes, abruptly cold. Surely, he would never be warm again, even in the full radiance of the midday sun.

* * * *

Senna forced her breathing to even, reasoning that she feared some trick but that the only hope of besting the trap when it came was a cool disposition and a plan of action. She was powerful and she was determined. She would leave Jaysen's keep.

No trap came.

At the door, the steward offered her a heavy cloak. She started to refuse it then reminded herself that she'd need it. Jedean had taken all she'd carried into his keep from her, including her mother's cloak. It was the least he owed her.

The planetary elements wouldn't affect her as long as she had her strength, but the skyborne ones were another matter. Blood Mages were children of the night, sisters to the stars. Their skin was pale and without natural protection from the sun. Without shelter or their cloaks, they burned and peeled within moments.

She pulled the heavy material around her shoulders — the finest quality, she noted — fastened it at the neck, and turned to the doors, shuddering at the realities of her existence outside the protection of these walls.

Protection? she berated herself. *Iron doors and binding spells are no favor.*

The steward opened the great doors, and she took a calming breath. It was there in her grasp...freedom in the form of the packed-clay path, lined with flowering fruit trees.. And yet she tarried with no possible excuse to. Any sane Blood Mage would be halfway down the path by now.

Move, coward!

Senna took two shaky steps forward, held her breath and stepped through the shield that protected Jaysen's keep from attack. For one horrifying moment, she swore the damned thing held to her, restraining her.

Then her feet touched the path outside, and the night wind welcomed her. *The caress of Mother Night's hand.* The half-moon, peeked through a break in the clouds, lighting her way, revealing the rolling hills and the river between. Without conscious thought, she picked out the hill that hid her keep from view, a four-hour walk distant.

She sobbed in what she would like to proclaim joy, but she'd have been lying to do so. Sadness tore at her. Loss. Confusion. The urge to flee to Jaysen in his fire den was strong. *Too strong.* It had to be a trick of some sort, the trap she'd believed would come.

There is no magic here, no taint of bending a will.

But, it was a feeling that fought shaking off, despite the solid facts. Returning to Jaysen made no sense, and still she ached to, with no idea why she would.

"Do you need anything, Lady Senna?" the steward offered.

Jaysen. She shook her head, forcing one foot in front of the other. The sooner she left, the sooner she would reach her own keep.

The door closed behind her with a finality that chilled her. Senna swallowed hard, blinking back tears.

She was free. That was all that mattered.

CHAPTER THREE

Senna pushed the servant away, annoyed with herself more than him. True, he was frustrated with her, considering the possibility of leaving her service. She couldn't blame him for it. Had she ever been so demanding?

In her youth, she'd indulged her hungers often. There was no denying it, but she'd known limits then. She'd been fulfilled once she'd fed, sated in all ways for a week or more.

In the six days since she'd left Jaysen's keep, she'd known no peace. She fed constantly and without relief from it. Even when her magic wore on her in its intensity, she felt the need for more. The hunger assaulted her, even as she took in the nectar of life, until she used her servants sorely, taking more than was prudent from them, more than they were comfortable giving, which was a grievous offense for beings that only took what was willingly offered.

Senna would have liked to claim it was a reaction to the years of starvation, of want and longing, but it wasn't so. She'd lived lean times before; a few solid feedings had always set her straight again.

She'd have liked to argue that she simply craved

the lifeblood of a Radiant, but she didn't. Though she'd determined not to indulge a Radiant sexually again, she had coin enough to buy her fill from one of lesser family without the promise of testing. The thought killed her appetite as nothing else did, but not for long.

She was insatiable, glutting herself on blood that brought no solace from her maddening needs.

"Lady Senna?" her servant questioned, reminding her that he still waited her pleasure.

Pleasure? There is no pleasure for me. The bitter truth stung her. Whether she fed or not would make no difference. "Leave me."

He did, and she winced at the memory of another dismissal, just as cold and callous as hers had been. The memory of it still pained her, though she couldn't state why it did. He'd freed her. Why could she find no solace in it?

Senna had felt no pleasure from that day to this. Finding her wards in place and her keep unmolested hadn't moved her one way or the other. Rebuilding her world had brought her no joy.

The fact that she was rebuilding it as she last saw Jaysen's keep was more than a little disconcerting. Thankfully, she wasn't recreating the dark room where she'd been imprisoned. Senna would have considered her sanity more closely if she were. She was recreating based on Jaysen's fire den. Several times, she'd consoled herself that the light feel of the room was what she sought, that it was coincidence that she chose paintings by the same artists and of similar scenes to the ones in that room.

The change was intended to comfort her, to bring her peace. It failed.

I feel nothing but unrequited hunger.

Even as she thought it, Senna admitted that it was a lie. She felt much more in her dreams, dreams of Jaysen in his fire den, feeding her on his blood, his midnight eyes reflecting the flames, arousing her, claiming her as not even his father had been able to.

She shook away the image, noting her slick channel, lengthened fangs and beaded nipples in misery. If she went to the mirror, her eyes would stare back gold at her.

Senna grumbled curses in the ancient language. Jaysen was a Radiant, just another greedy day-walking mage who'd wanted her power, no better than his father was. She'd been his slave.

But, he freed me. He returned what was mine to me...or as closely as he could with Jedean involved. He even offered compensation for my time in service to his father.

Why had he? That was the burning question that seemed to have no answer. Why would Jaysen give up the many advantages of having her as his slave?

For the faint hope that she'd agree to let him test her? That she might be mate to him? It hardly seemed likely that Jaysen would pin his hopes on that, when no Radiant had made it past her pleasure in a dozen years.

Perhaps, he'd been sincere in his seeming disgust at the thought of her life as a slave. Such men existed...or so she'd heard. True, she'd never met one, and as such, she'd assumed it was a children's fable of sorts....or tales of a long-ago past, before the

Radiant wars had set the world on edge. It was an unusual trait to find in a Radiant, but she supposed it wasn't impossible that Jaysen held to such leanings.

No. If that were the case, why would he press himself on her before he released her from her enslavement?

He didn't press himself. Jaysen had enticed her, attempted to seduce her, had undeniably treated her as a Blood Mage should have been treated.

"But, why?" she whispered.

CHAPTER FOUR

Senna stood at the threshold, Jaysen's wards an arm's-length away. She edged a foot forward then hesitated.

It was madness to come here, to walk back into the hands of a slave master.

He isn't! Jedean was, but Jaysen treated me with respect.

Mother Night, but she'd chased this bit of logic round for days. She'd lost sleep over it, suffered in inattention, felt she'd go stark raving mad in the cyclic argument. Of course, the hunger had nearly driven her that far, in and of itself.

She was here, acknowledging the insanity of her actions, and still she ached to go to him.

I am a Blood Mage. My mother was Lady Settaya. I have been raised a leader. I have been trained to be decisive, to maintain control.

Senna groaned. Lack of that precious control had made her a slave.

I am in control this time. Slavery has taught me well.

But, she wasn't in control. The hunger was. Even here, outside Jaysen's domain, her body responded as if he offered his lifeblood to her. Her fangs would not retract more than halfway.

I must end this. I must know. That was the only point she'd never truly argued.

There seemed only one plausible reason for her reaction, if it were an honest response to stimuli. Perhaps, Jedean had been wrong, and Tason had never been her destined mate. Jaysen had been an adolescent when she'd been tricked and enslaved. His father wouldn't have considered the possibility that he was the mate she sought.

Or...perhaps, I have simply gone insane over the years within these walls.

Senna cursed herself as a fool and stepped through the net of his shields and wards.. The gusting wind ceased to buffet her; the air moved gently within the shield, the fruit trees beside her ceasing their rustling from one footstep to the next. She marveled that the shields still allowed her to pass inward when they stopped even a bitter wind, when they were designed to stop anyone who might be a threat to Jaysen.

She raised her hand to knock on the war-wood doors then pulled it back on a gasp.

A ceremonial foot-washing trough appeared before her, sending swirls of steam into the cool night air. Senna raised her dress, stepping into it. It was the perfect temperature, a touching gesture of respect.

She laughed, tears stinging her eyes. "Thank you, Jaysen."

Senna didn't question that he could hear her. His power wrapped around her like a second cloak.

* * * *

Jaysen felt the presence lurking at the edges of his domain. It was a dim spot in his vision, possibly friend, possibly foe. It was more likely an enemy than a friend; an ally wouldn't hesitate at the edges of his wards.

He considered leaving his mineral bath, but there was no need to unless attack came or this teasing of his shields continued. Even if that happened, he could cast from here as well as anywhere else in the keep.

The room had been redecorated much as his fire den had been, much as all the rooms he'd changed had been. It was one of the few comforts in his life since Senna had left him, and he wasn't going to leave it for the dark shadow of his father's tastes unless it was necessary to do so. Jedean had cost him more than he cared to consider; it was one of the reasons he was so adamant about eradicating that influence in the keep.

The shock of her passing through the shields sent a bolt of pleasure through him. Jaysen checked his senses again, certain he was hallucinating.

"Senna." It was a prayer, a giving of thanks, a wish breathed into the steam rising from the mineral pool.

His mind worked fast. A Blood Mage guest was at his door...and most heartily welcomed. He gathered his power, rushed through the incantation and sent a trough of his own water to her to ease and bathe her road-worn feet.

Her laughter warmed him, light and pleasant. "Thank you, Jaysen." She was silent for a moment. "Your gift is most welcome and appreciated."

He smiled in spite of his nervousness, as giddy as a

boy at his manhood ceremony, acting the part of a man, though all knew him to be inept.

He sobered abruptly. *No. I cannot make assumptions about why she's come here.* Senna might have come to finalize their monetary settlement for her service. She might have come to bargain her magic for his.

Jaysen climbed from the pool, willing himself dry with a spell, pulling his white trousers on with a heavy heart. The minimum of dress was required for such a meeting. He could not presume to meet her as he had the last time, a man intent on enticing her to test him. He went to the table, settling in a cushioned chair. It was the right way to greet her, the only way not to offend her, considering her refusal of him.

He shifted, trying to get comfortable in a chair he'd never had such a difficulty with before.

Comfortable? That was the most ridiculous thought he'd indulged in for quite some time. How could he be comfortable when he already ached to see her, when his nerves were on edge in the need to claim her as his mate?

The door opened, and the steward announced her, as if Jaysen needed an announcement to note her presence. Senna's magic was a near-blinding aura around her. Even he hadn't realized the depth of her power, a magic that was his to share in...if she accepted him fully.

"Lord Jaysen?" The steward shot Jaysen a look that labeled him perplexed. He'd never had to wait orders before.

"Refreshments, steward."

Jaysen didn't take his eyes off of Senna. She shed

her cloak, handing it off to the steward, seemingly oblivious to Jaysen's presence in the room with her. Then she looked around, her eyes flickering between green-gold and pure gold.

She feels it. At least subconsciously, she feels the attraction between us.

"Already prepared," the steward interrupted his musing.

The tray slid onto the table between them, unheeded by both. Several heartbeats passed in silence.

"Leave us, steward," Jaysen ordered.

The doors closed behind him. Still, Senna didn't move.

"Would you like to sit, Lady Senna?" he offered, conscious that every choice must be her own.

"I would." She slid into the chair beside him, most of the length of her left leg uncovered in the split of her skirt. They were the two halves of a whole being: she dressed in black in deference to Mother Night and he in white in deference to the radiant light of auras. It was what made the mating of a Blood Mage to a Radiant so wonderful, the acceptance of the duality of existence, the melding of their beings until neither was what they once were.

Jaysen reached for the sacrament knife on the tray, the same one he'd used at her last visit with him, preparing to offer the traditional taste of his blood. Her hand closed over his, urging his fingers away from the hilt. She switched her grip from one hand to the other, raising the fingers of his dominant hand to her mouth.

His breathing hitched, as her fangs lengthened. She played the tip of one over the pad of his index finger, taunting him.

"You are most welcome to it," he rasped. It was typically an invitation she would issue and not one he would, but the ceremonies he'd researched had never mentioned this possibility. He had to improvise.

The razor edge followed closely the line his knife had left at their last meeting, a sublime mix of pleasure and pain. Her tongue circled him, stroked him in mimic of orally pleasing him in other ways, encouraging his blood to flow.

Jaysen closed his eyes, cursing the trousers he'd donned. They were crafted to mold to his body...his body when he wasn't erect. It was no wonder the other Radiants had gone to her in ceremony wraps. This was, without a doubt, one of the most uncomfortable moments of his life. In fact, his convalescence after his father attacked him was probably the only thing that bested it.

And yet, he wouldn't have traded it for anything. As long as Senna was touching him, any discomfort was a minor annoyance.

"By the gods," he pleaded. He'd thank the God of Light and Mother Night equally for more of this.

She shifted, settling into his lap, and a prism effect of energy washed over him, making the throbbing in his cock all the more pronounced. Was it happening already? Was the merging of their aspects that advanced?

"By the lights of the night," he grumbled. It was an old prayer, one that most Radiants had forgotten in

the long years since they'd started abusing the Blood Mages' trust.

Her mouth left his hand and settled lips to lips with him. The next few moments were a blur to Jaysen. Her hair cascaded over his hands and chest. Her mouth meshed with his, a hard, hot kiss.

He had to get closer. The need was elemental; following the commands of his body was essential to his survival.

The crash of stoneware brought him back to his senses. Senna was laid out over the table, her arms wrapped over his shoulders, the contents of the tray shoved out of their way.

For a moment, they stared at each other, their breaths coming fast and heavy. Senna drew his hand to the slit of her skirt, arching up as he slid his fingers beneath.

Her center was weeping and ready, and Senna responded to his touch with wild abandon, her hips cycling to his stroking fingers, moaning in delight, her fangs lengthening fully, her golden eyes pleading for more.

Jaysen thrust two fingers inside her, and her entire body tightened and drew up. The contractions of her sheath around him let him know that he'd done what few had before. He'd driven her to release. No one, not even his father, had driven her to more than two.

He slid his hand out of her, and she whimpered at the loss, shivering. It was time. He would go no further without her verbal agreement to test her passion.

"Jaysen," she pleaded, reaching for him.

He raised his fingers to his mouth, licking them clean. Gods, but she tasted better than he'd dreamed she would.

Senna moved toward the edge of the table in a sensual slide, baring more of her body to him. He stared at her, licking his lips, his mouth watering for more, but he would not go further until she invited him to. She had to want him to test her, and she had to invite him properly. She was the Blood Mage; he was the Radiant. It was the proper way.

"You are most welcome to it," she breathed the traditional words.

"Am I?"

"You know you are. Surely, you feel it."

He nodded, sinking to his knees. She was hot against his tongue, as pungent as sweet wine. Jaysen forced himself to attend to her and not lose himself in the dizzying effects of her nectar.

He spread her wide, sucking in at her engorged nub. Senna cried out harshly, her hands fisting in his hair. He paid unwavering attention to it, suckling gently, nipping, stroking his lips and tongue over it.

She screamed in a second release, whispering pleas for him to claim her.

"You are not sated," he whispered. Jaysen moved lower, nibbling at her outer lips, stealing the nectar she'd poured out for him.

She thrust against him, murmuring his name, reaching for another climax already. Senna was coming to them faster now. Soon, she would be ready for more.

She gifted him with a full-throated scream and a

fresh wave of her elixir. His vision blurred, drugged, and yet he craved more. With every climax, she became more potent, and the final gift she'd give him was reportedly better than the rest combined, the proof that he was her mate, the tie that would make them one.

He drank her down then buried his tongue in her, driving her over again. Senna screamed his name, her hands fisting in his hair, tugging, urging him up in words and action.

Jaysen refused her, returning his attention to her pleasure. At the moment, her womanly urges were speaking for her, the same ones that had allowed his father to trap her in the first place. *Quick to test*, but only because Jedean's blood had confused her.

Her womanly needs were not enough. It was the Blood Mage who had to demand more, who had to test *his* worth. Jaysen wasn't Jedean. He wouldn't take her at the words that it was time; it would be a proper test or none at all.

He forced her to still another climax in a few strokes of his tongue then sucked gently at her nub again.

The growl from above was his only warning that the tables had turned. In a heartbeat, Jaysen was on his back on the thick rug, Senna astride him, both nude thanks to her magic.

She was beautiful, her golden eyes glittering in the candlelight, her black hair a curtain around them, her magic a fog, clinging to her skin and teasing his. Her fangs dimpled her lower lip.

"You think yourself worthy of me?" she

challenged.

It was not a question that was typically asked. Jaysen considered how best to reply to something so unusual. What did she need of him? "Only the gods know for certain. Only you may decide to test it, but I believe..."

She waited for his answer.

"I believe no man is worthy of you who has not your love."

She stared at him, seemingly disconcerted.

* * * *

Senna's mind reeled. No man had said such wonderful things to her in her lifetime. Not even Jedean, who had flattered her out of her common sense.

Jedean hadn't pushed her to test as Jaysen had. He hadn't forced her to an instinctual response. At her first pleas for more, the old Radiant had mounted her. *Mounted me!* She'd always known that had been wrong, but she'd wanted a mate's touch too much. His seeming madness for her had warmed her, and she'd ignored her niggling of unease.

"Have I offended you?" Jaysen asked, his voice slow, drugged in her aphrodisiac nectar.

"If I left you?" she whispered. She had no doubts that he'd *allow* her to leave without interference, even now, but would he pay with more than his uncomfortable cock?

Pain twisted his features, what seemed to be a crushing blow to him. "Do you intend to?"

His reaction told Senna all she needed to know. He hungered, and not just for her nectar. She lowered herself onto him, forcing her eyes open when she wanted to close them in delight, lost in the wonder that came over him.

Jaysen grasped her hips, thrusting into her, a groan rumbling from deep in his chest. His eyes pleaded with her.

Senna nodded, and he turned his head, offering his throat. She stared at the pulsing artery beneath his skin, the blood rushing in her own matching it.

The hunger ate at her, a maddening need to know if Jaysen was her true mate. Fear stayed her; if he was not, Jedean had been right that her mate was dead, and she would be alone forever.

Jaysen's voice cut through her indecision. "We must know, Senna. We both must."

She leaned over him and sank her teeth deep in the join of his neck and shoulder, moaning in a combination of his flavor and his reflexive thrust into her. Jaysen went wild beneath her, his hands fisting in her hair.

Senna pulled back, barely breathing. It was the moment of truth. She prayed to Mother Night as she hadn't prayed since she'd been a hopeful young Blood Mage of ten and six at Jedean's door.

Jaysen ground his teeth, teeth that lengthened into fangs before her eyes. Senna fought for breath, her climax nearing in the knowledge that her mate lived.

"Not yet," Jaysen ordered, his speech garbled unaccustomed to the dentia he now possessed. One fang cut into his lower lip, and the blood welled up.

He didn't give her a chance to take advantage of it. Jaysen grasped the back of her neck and pulled Senna's throat to his mouth. His newly-developed fangs broke skin, and she screamed in pleasure, the first whispers of climax stealing what remained of her sanity.

Jaysen flipped her beneath him, rearing back, her lifeblood mixing with his on his lips. He surged into her, sealing his mouth to hers, their blood mingling, the power binding them. She closed her eyes to the soft brush of his aura against hers.

The moment was sweet agony, her body contracting, his heat flooding her, their hearts beating in unison. Jaysen held her as the waves of pleasure receded, as they explored each other, mouths meshing, fingers tangling...and finally, darkness descending.

CHAPTER FIVE

Senna came to consciousness slowly, disoriented. Her senses told her it was day. The sun was low but still aloft. Why would she wake now?

As if in answer, a hard cock slid between her thighs and fangs scraped at the back of her shoulder. The marks at her throat warmed, just as the ones on Jaysen's shoulder would be warming.

She smiled, brushing her bottom against him. "Hungry?" she purred. She knew he was. She could feel it from him, enflaming her own hunger.

"After a decade of wanting you and being forbidden a single touch? A single..." His teeth fired her nerves again. "Taste," he breathed.

Senna turned abruptly, her mind working fast. Jaysen had wanted her all that time. That would indicate he'd not only known about her but had been close enough to experience the call. "A decade?"

Jaysen didn't seem to notice her upset. He nipped at her chin. Her body responded despite her better judgment.

"Jaysen!"

"Anything," he vowed.

Senna pushed him away, meeting his startled gaze

steadily. She took his confusion to heart. Jaysen wasn't his father; he wasn't trying to deceive her. She was certain of it. And yet, she had to know when he'd come into the radius of her power. She had to know how she could miss so momentous an occasion. "A decade," she repeated.

He nodded, sobering somewhat, his fangs retracting.

"You were forbidden to... Jedean knew." *Dear Mother, this was why Jedean locked me away, why he starved my magic out of me. He was afraid of our union.* Knowing Jedean, he'd probably been appalled by it...perhaps threatened with the loss of his precious seat of power.

Which still left her the question of when and how Jaysen experienced her, in the first place. "You... If you ached for me..."

Jaysen's face darkened, and his muscles tightened in apparent fury. "He wanted to gloat. He hadn't considered the possibility that I was the one, until... When Delek came to you, he meant me to watch it."

She gasped at the idea of him learning what he was that way.

"I went mad. I tried to reach you, and when they stopped me, I fought them. Jedean cast against me to still my fight. I asked for you when I woke from my father's attack, the right to approach you at my manhood—"

"And you never came for me?" Her heart ached. Had he tried to reach her at all once he'd been refused?

"The wards and shields were set before I woke. It

took a fortnight for me to heal, a fortnight during which Jedean made them impenetrable. I tested them constantly, until he set painful spells on them...and then still until he threatened to send me away from you entirely. Until he died and —”

“All that was his passed to you,” she finished for him.

“Yes. With it came the power to undo the walls between us, and I did.”

“And now that you are no threat to Jedean...” Her mind locked on another fact, one that might have influenced him. “You will hold the seat of power now that —”

Jaysen pulled her to his body. “And that frightens you. Do you wish me to hide our union? I can —”

“You wouldn’t,” she gasped. It was too close to the deception of her own birth. There was one thing Senna was adamant about; no one would call her children ‘bastard’ and live.

“I want to love you openly, Senna, but the choice is yours.” He wound his fingers through hers. “Just as the choice to test me was yours. I can wear a Radiant’s white, hide the signs with a glamour —”

Senna kissed him, silencing her laugh in the process. He was sweet to offer it, but it wasn’t what she wanted. “You will do nothing of the sort, Jaysen.”

He smiled, lifting her from the bed and striding into the corridor.

“Jaysen, we are unclothed,” she protested. Though several of the servants had seen her unclothed in her years within the walls, and likely seen Jaysen as well, it didn’t seem proper to walk the corridors thus.

His fangs peeked past his upper lip. "You wish to celebrate our union in the traditional manner. Do you not?"

Her heart skipped at that. "Oh, yes." How long had she dreamed of it? Probably since she'd dared peek at the sun as a child, flirting with the gods' wrath in the vain hope that her human father's lineage would protect her.

"Have you ever seen the sun?" he asked.

"Once. It was very painful." And her mother had refused to heal it with her magic, a punishment for risking herself.

The doors before them swung wide in the push of Jaysen's magic, and a glorious sky filled her vision, a rainbow of color from the yellow-white crescent of the sun over the hillside, orange and pink, lavender, blue darkening to the color of Jaysen's eyes far above her head.

He set her at the rail, facing outward to the glory he brought to her world. The view took her breath away. While she would never be able to walk the midday sun, the ability to tolerate the muted radiance of the dawn and dusk, like the ability for her to sense auras and the melding of her magic with Jaysen's, were gifts of the mating.

Jaysen's breath warmed her shoulder, and she spread her legs, fisting the rail, knowing intimately what he intended. He covered her hands with his own, pulling her earlobe into his mouth and nipping at it. Nectar overflowed her sheath, teasing her as it caught tendrils of the cooling air.

"I hunger," he grumbled.

"As do I." It was said a blood mated pair hungered for each other endlessly. "Feed."

His cock slid home, laying claim to her in the dying rays of daylight. "I will feed from you. Then I will feed you." He thrust slowly, drawing out her pleasure painfully. "Is it true that my essence will now be the elixir to you that yours is to me?"

Her head spun at the thought of it. "So they say. I would like to know."

"And so we shall." His teeth sank into her, forcing her to a blinding climax that he followed with a groan.

He held to her in the aftermath, his lips pressed to her throat, panting hard.

"Jaysen?" she questioned him.

"I hunger."

Aftershocks wracked her. "Take me to the mineral pool and feed me your nectar. Hunger should never be wasted."

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, nine of them in VA Beach, where she wrote her first novel.

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>