



FIREBREATHER

...Ferin nudged her to his brothers. "Take pleasure in this gift. And never question what you feel, Lea. You've bonded with the Dracon now. You're one of us. Lead with your heart."

She nodded absently, her arousal growing as she noticed the heat in his brothers' eyes, flaming with deep, red hunger.

"Come here," Adrian growled, pulling her to him when she neared. Matthias stood at her back, taking her clothing off while Adrian kissed her, hard.

With him there was no finesse, just raw, hungry need. And the intensity of his desire fueled her own. His tongue brushed hers, licking at the cavern of her mouth with bold strokes. And when his cock pressed against the skin of her belly, she knew this was right.

Matthias' hands reached around her to cup her breasts, flicking her nipples until she gasped.

"Matthias, please." Please what, she didn't know. But she needed more, needed to fill the emptiness in her womb.

Spreading her thighs, he dipped one hand between her legs and thrust into her moist heat. But Adrian would not wait.

"Move, Matthias. She's ready now."

Matthias removed his hand and returned to her breasts, kneading the taut flesh while he pressed his cock between her buttocks, rocking lightly.

"Take her then, and hurry. I need to feel her, to feel you, Lea. I need to fuck that tight pussy," he rasped, holding her up as Adrian wrapped her legs around his waist. And when Adrian shoved himself inside her, she leaned back against Matthias, reveling in the belonging and desire she felt from the males loving her so generously...

BOOKS BY MARIE HARTE

Darkson's Forfeit
Firebreather

FIREBREATHER

BY

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FIREBREATHER
AN AMBER HEAT BOOK

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CHAPTER 1

“My, my, don’t you look good enough to eat,” a husky voice echoed through the sophisticated crowd perusing Venlay House’s exhibits. Several people stopped to stare, and Lea Venlay balled her hands to keep from slapping the smug grin off the face that had been tormenting her for months.

Glaring up at the sexy irritant smirking down at her, she smiled through her teeth. “If I didn’t think you meant that literally, I might take it as a compliment. You know, Mr. Dekker, a less practical person would attribute the odd coincidences of our meetings to something more sinister. Like stalking, maybe.”

The first few months Ferin Dekker had shown up at the same places she had, she’d written off the chance meetings. After all, the reputed shapeshifter was a savvy investor, and Venlay House’s artistic pieces were consistently topnotch, growing in value daily. They both lived near Asheville, and in the autumn months, everyone frequented the

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coffeehouses, like moths to flame. So he and she both liked Café Blue and hazelnut lattes. So what? But lately, Dekker had been frequenting the gallery more and more, with an uncanny knack for visiting only during *her* working hours. Even her mother had commented on the fact.

“Really, Lea. Stalking? That’s a bit harsh, isn’t it?” He smiled, his white, even teeth a reminder that under other circumstances, those teeth would be several inches longer, and caught between scaled, green lips.

A flash of movement distracted her, and to her consternation, she noted her brothers walking her way. As if she needed their intolerable interference with a Dracon. She knew more about the Dracon than any other human in history, well, except perhaps for her a few of her deceased, and *unpublished*, relatives.

Turning back to Dekker, she noted the ease with which his gaze moved slowly, sensually, over her body. And she wondered just what it was about him that simultaneously annoyed and aroused her.

He had money, but then so did she. He had looks, a killer body, and charm in spades. But he was Dracon, an enemy she’d been warned about since before she could walk. Yet staring at Dekker, she could see nothing beyond a man too captivating to be ignored, and too dangerous to be anything but tempting. *Damn it.*

“Besides, Lea,” Dekker murmured and took a step closer. “There’s more than one way to eat a delectable morsel like yourself.” He licked his lips, and instead of repulsing her, the aggravating Dracon aroused her, as he did every time they crossed paths.

“Lea, this guy bothering you?” David, her oldest brother, suddenly arrived by her right shoulder.

“Just say the word,” Blane, her other brother, said from her left, scowling.

Great. Now more people were beginning to take notice. It was common knowledge the Venlays had little use for the Dracon clan in general. But business was business, and the liberal art world tolerated a

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lot, especially for Ferin Dekker, one of the most intriguing shapeshifters in Western North Carolina, not to mention one of the richest.

Dekker stared at her brothers curiously, a spark of something wicked darting in his eyes. Colors flashed before he blinked, and dark black irises reappeared. “Gentlemen.” He nodded, but made no move to leave Lea’s side.

She could almost see the cloud of testosterone threatening to rain havoc all over her sister’s first art show. Time for clearer heads to prevail. “Guys, I’m fine. I’m just chatting with Mr. Dekker, one of our *finest clients*, for a few. Why don’t you two see if Cora needs any help?”

They frowned, but took the hint and left. Despite Dekker’s background, he was an influential man among the many patrons who regularly attended the gallery. And Venlay House made it a policy to welcome everyone, no matter race, gender...or species.

Of course, that policy existed because of her mother. Had her father still been alive, he’d no doubt have suffered a bout of apoplexy just hearing Dekker’s name.

Lea sighed. “Is there something I can do for you, or did you talk to me just to bait my brothers?”

The satisfied grin he wore watching her brothers leave made her suspect the latter. But when he glanced back at her, she revised her opinion. Such hunger swirling in a fathomless black gaze.

“You know, Lea, that color is exquisite on you. And I’d imagine it’s just as enticing pooled at your feet, a swath of temptation around a veritable goddess.”

His smooth words and rhythmic cadence were mesmerizing, so much so that he’d run a finger down her cheek and over her lips before she could catch her breath, and her wits. The resounding put-down that should have come from her mouth didn’t, because she couldn’t stop

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envisioning what they would look like together, naked, in bed.

His eyes danced, breaking the spell, and she fumed that he might have an inkling that she—like the rest of the women in the room—might feel such an intense attraction. *He's Dracon, Lea. Remember your little side job?*

Shaking free of her lust and disgusted with her rampant hormones, Lea prayed her nipples didn't look as hard as they felt and smoothed down the line of her green, silk dress. "I'm sorry, Mr. Dekker, but I have to see to another client. If you'll excuse me?" She didn't wait for a response but turned away. Discretion was certainly the better part of valor tonight, especially since she'd actually considered doing the horizontal mambo with a Dracon.

Threading through several potential clients, she soon found her sister—the guest of honor at the gallery's most auspicious event to date.

Cora Venlay fairly glowed as she watched the crowd looking at her oils. Lea felt a moment of envy, wishing she had even a smidgen of Cora's incredible talent. Then she saw who Cora was staring at and shook her head. Her sister might have received the family's share of artistic skill, but when it came to judgment, she'd clearly been shortchanged.

"Is it hot in here or is it just me?" Cora asked in a breathy voice, her gaze caught on Mr. Irritating—Dekker.

"It's just you." Lea refrained from scowling and smiled at Mrs. Newcomb, a regular at the gallery.

"I don't understand how you can be so unaffected," Cora said, again in that breathy little voice, grating on Lea's nerves. "He's tall, built, and has the face of an angel with sex on the brain."

"You mean a devil with murder on the mind," Lea muttered, not surprised when Ferin Dekker quickly glanced her way and grinned, showing too many teeth. The Dracon had better ears than a bat.

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“Murder, right. Don’t tell me you really believe in those stories?” Cora shook her head. “I thought you and I were beyond that.” She nodded to their brothers, both standing near their mother as they cast the occasional glower at Dekker. “At least Mother has an ounce of sense. Honestly, Lea, what happened eight hundred years ago doesn’t matter any more. It’s today that matters, and tomorrow.”

Surprising insight from the youngest of the family. “Actually, it was five hundred years ago. And I agree, to an extent, that what’s past should stay past. So long as we don’t repeat our mistakes.”

“Whatever.” Cora sighed. “But how can you think a man that fine would ever give a woman anything but pleasure? God, just look at his build. He’s got such a great set of pecs.”

“How would you know?”

“Sherry mentioned she’d seen him running the other day in shorts and a T-shirt, in this weather no less.” Cora nodded toward her best friend. “And you should have heard what she said about his ass.”

Lea’s temples began to throb.

“I just don’t understand why David and Blane are so prejudiced. It’s unfortunate our great-grandmother died. But it was an accident. When will they let it go?”

A little devil inside Lea prompted her to say, “Accident? One of those prehistoric barbarians *murdered* our *great-great-great* Grandmother Meredith. Hell, David still likes to remind me of the time I was ten and stole a stamp. Of course he’s not going to forget the ‘Venlay Family Feud.’ Dad weaned us on it from the womb.”

Cora shook her head. “But it’s so tragic. A woman on the verge of marrying into the Dracon line, destined to be a queen, but fated to die.”

“Can the drama, Cora. You’re almost as bad as dragonbreath over there.”

“Shh, Lea. They have really sensitive hearing,” Cora whispered with a glare. “And I happen to like Ferin Dekker. He’s been nothing but

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pleasant ever since I met him.”

“Whatever.” *Probably wanted to see your dress pooling at your feet, too. A great line, if you can believe it.* Lea didn’t plan to continue the argument. She had better things to do at home. She glanced at her watch and made a decision, confirming it when the Dracon in question made a beeline in her direction.

After a quick good-night to her family, ignoring the scowls on her brothers’ faces, Lea grabbed her coat from the front coat check and fled out into the blustery night. She waited briefly while a valet fetched her car before driving home as safely as possible. October had brought black nights and gusts of wind to Weaverville, North Carolina, and she had no intention of crashing in the short half hour it took her to return home.

Driving onto the Venlay estate, twenty acres of prime, mostly-level property in the mountains that had been in her family’s hands for generations, Lea finally relaxed for the first time that night. She had the next three days to herself, not having to return to work until Tuesday. And the relief that afforded made her truly smile for the first time in days. Winding through the driveway, past the main house to the groundskeeper’s cottage deeper onto the property, she grinned with contentment as she parked and exited the car.

It was a small house, but it was hers. A quaint cottage with enough room for two to live comfortably, and one person to live like a queen. Shedding her heavy woolen coat, she made her way through the comfortable living room to her personal paradise, the study.

Wooden floors, floor to ceiling bookcases and a to-die-for leather chair she’d spent a fortune on, the study—the study?

“What the hell?”

Long claw marks scarred her prized leather desk chair. The papers she’d worked so hard to publish lay in shreds on the floor, mingling with the scattered remains of her text references and priceless Dracon

journals.

She quickly reached for the cell phone stuffed into her jacket pocket now laying on the floor and dialed the main house. “Barbara? Hi, it’s Lea. I’m back for the night. Just wanted to see how you’re doing.” The housekeeper chatted easily and soon hung up, easing Lea’s mind. At least nothing in the main house had been disturbed.

Determined to keep control, she leaned down to salvage an ancient book she’d only recently acquired. It had taken six months to locate *Reem’s Lost Arts*, of which only a handful had ever been printed to begin with. Unfortunately, her “burglar” must have understood its significance, for only the binding remained, the interior pages ripped free.

Straightening, she surveyed the rest of the damage, praying it looked worse than it actually was. A few broken book bindings, strewn papers over the floor, and a busted desk lamp seemed the extent of the damage—except for Reem’s book. And the chair. And that destruction she took personally.

Burglar my ass, she seethed as she began the painstaking business of setting her study to rights. No point in calling the police, since Dekker owned half the force. Rich *and* irritatingly sexy, a lethal combination. If the damned man weren’t Dracon, she might be inclined to cut him some slack. But she found it hard to pity his flaws when his strengths shone so brightly. And informing the police of the break-in might enlighten them to her little side-gig, the source of her true happiness and, hopefully, eventual career.

With two overbearing brothers who considered dragons worse than demons, Lea had never felt the desire to share her alter ego. No one but she and her editor knew that she had written several professionally credited articles, *and* a best-seller, under a pseudonym on the shapeshifting Dracon clan. Years of family research combined with a fierce fascination for the half-man/half-dragon creatures had instilled in

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Lea a need to understand, and to help others understand.

Despite what she'd said to her sister, Lea didn't hold any prejudice against the Dracon. Against one in particular, yes, but against them as a whole, no. The stories she'd heard as a child had been just that, stories. She'd been young when her father died, and seeing the beauty of the creatures as they flew through the air had been more than enough to paint them in a surreal, almost mystical light. Even today, she'd give anything to fly among the clouds.

And much as she hated to admit it, Ferin Dekker turned her on as no one ever had, no one real, anyway. Her dreams, however, were another thing altogether. Lusty and provocative, and decidedly carnal, unlike her boring, all-too-real existence. Shaking herself from the heat beginning to overtake her sense, she frowned down at several cracked CDs and collected more scattered paper.

Yes, the Dracon were a people to be studied, to be treasured for their differences. However, rifling through her study and ruining her favorite chair were not the actions of an estimable race. She could only pray her burglar had attacked randomly, and hadn't realized just how much she knew about the mysterious clan.

Glancing again at the careless destruction, Lea's anger flared, but she dropped the rest of the papers she'd been gathering as a sudden thought hit.

"Oh, no. Not my hard drive."

The computer looked untouched, but when she turned it on, nothing happened. The monitor flickered to life, but the screen remained blank. And that's when she noticed the small holes on the side of the tower case. The back of the computer showed a large gaping wound, where someone had *ripped out* the hard drive.

Curses streamed from her mouth like a river, and while she raged, she raced through the hallway, praying the asshole hadn't also located her hidden safe, where she kept a handy backup drive.

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Once in her bedroom, she stopped. What if whoever had begun the job of screwing up her research hid in her house even now, waiting for an encore? Glancing furtively around, she waited for the smallest sound to alert her to an intruder. After several quiet minutes, she opened the faux-panel of her nightstand and entered the digital combination to her small safe. When it clicked open, she breathed a sigh of relief. The backup lay on top of her first-edition published articles and her great-great-great grandmother's illegible journal.

"At least I've still got you," she murmured, relief making her lightheaded.

"And I've got you," a familiar voice said with satisfaction, scaring the hell out of her.

CHAPTER 2

Lea slammed the safe door shut and spun around, her heart racing as she looked up at none other than Ferin Dekker.

His nostrils flared as he stared at her, his eyes glowing as they trailed from the top of her head, down her body to her heel-clad feet, and slowly back up again. It didn't escape her notice that he lingered a bit too long on her breasts.

"You left before I could say goodnight," he murmured and took a step closer. His eyes seemed to flash, a kaleidoscope of color that shouted "Dracon."

"Back off, Dekker." She thought of her chair and narrowed her gaze, her heart racing like a rabbit. "Better yet, tell me why one of your clan slaughtered my favorite chair downstairs. And why the hell they trashed my computer."

He said nothing, cocking his head as if to study her from another perspective. His calm demeanor stirred her fear into fury, and she took

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a threatening step forward, her hand balled into a fist.

“Look, you shifting bastard, I want to know why and how you snuck into my house. Insults and leers are one thing, but this is taking it too far.”

At that he frowned. “I didn’t do this. I was at the gallery well before you arrived, meeting with VanShone for one of his works. And for the record, I’ve never insulted you.”

She noted he didn’t deny the leering accusation. “Well if you didn’t ransack my place, why are you here?”

“I told you.” He closed the distance between them and answered in a throaty voice. “You didn’t let me say goodnight.”

She opened her mouth to argue and found herself in his arms and under a kiss before she could blink. She wanted to resist, Lord did she, but the minute his mouth touched hers, she felt adrift in sensation. As if under a spell, her body suddenly melted into his. Warm, hard lips coaxed hers into opening, and he slid his tongue inside her mouth as if he owned the right.

Like liquid sex, his mouth loved hers into complete submission. He stroked her tongue, licked at the roof of her mouth and teased her into near-orgasm. His hard chest pressed against her breasts, causing heat to race from the pinpricks of her nipples through her belly into her sex. His erection strained against her stomach, and she could no more stop riding against him than she could stop the kiss.

“Lea,” he murmured as he kissed his way toward her ear. “I want to eat you up and lick you all over.” His voice lowered into an animalistic growl, but she was too caught up in his touch to care. When his hands slid from her waist to her hips, he pulled her into him, lifting her to fit over his steely shaft.

She moaned and blinked at him, nearly mesmerized by the sudden swirling colors in his eyes. And then self-preservation kicked in, surprising her. A need for distance, for a last attempt at independence,

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welled within her.

“Not yet,” she mumbled feebly, and cleared her throat to try again. “Wait a minute.”

He immediately stilled, his breathing harsh and erratic.

Well, at least she wasn’t the only one affected. The thought gave her a sense of control, and she drew on her reserves to resist the sexual temptation throbbing against her. *Throbbing and willing...*

She coughed into a hand and pushed at his chest for space. He slowly lowered her to the floor, making her very conscious of the sodden panties between her legs. As if he sensed her thoughts, he gave her a tight smile, his eyes fairly glowing.

“Your minute’s nearly up.”

“I meant slow down,” she breathed. “Just an hour ago you were jumping all over my last nerve. I come home to find my study torn apart, and you show up ready and willing to seduce me.”

“It worked.”

“Not quite.” She didn’t understand how she could feel so attracted to the man and so annoyed at the same time. *It worked.* She wanted to kiss—no—*punch* that smugness right off his face. “I want you out of here, right now. I have some thinking to do.”

The look she gave him should have hustled him right out the door. Instead he drew her closer, much to her outrage...and delight.

“I have some *thinking* to do too. About what to do with S. M. Ryans, a woman with way too much knowledge about the Dracon clan, and too many opinions for her own good.”

She blanched. How the hell had he found out? “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He gave her a look that said little for her intelligence.

“Ryans? The Dracon researcher? I heard he lived in Scotland and was about ninety years old.”

“You don’t lie well at all.”

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She swallowed loudly, more than unnerved by his piercing study. With the information she had on the secretive clan, she could do some serious damage. The Dracon guarded their secrets and didn't suffer publicity without retaliation. She'd been lucky thus far to remain fairly anonymous.

"Don't worry, Lea. I'm going to take good care of you. After all, I wouldn't want the Venlays angry with me. Your family has quite a reputation among my kind." He drew her close, his body putting off some major heat. Unfortunately, the desire in his eyes had been replaced by an iron reserve.

My family lives to hunt, she wanted to say but didn't think it wise. Instead she tried to shrug, and his embrace grew tighter.

"Outside."

She moved with him, not by choice, but because each time she tried to resist he squeezed her until she felt as if she'd pass out. Though she hated to admit it, she much preferred his kisses to the steely-eyed Dracon leading her all too easily. Once out the back door, he released her.

"We're leaving for a while, Lea. Ever flown under the moonlight on a windy night?" he asked, his voice raspy.

She stared, wide-eyed, as he shimmered into another form altogether. One minute he stood as a man, the next his body misted into a golden light, which suddenly coalesced into a twenty-foot long, shiny green dragon with color-changing eyes. Wings unfurled from his back, huge gray-green appendages spanning his entire body.

Staring at what she'd only ever seen in books and on the television, she gaped at his massive form. He snarled and stared at her, and she imagined climbing onto his back and gripping his neck before they took to the sky.

She shook her head. *Took to the sky?* Sure, until he rolled and she fell to her death, one less S. M. Ryans in the world. "No way."

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Again the image appeared, persisting though she had no intention of riding a dragon. She'd fantasized about it more times than she could count, but a fear of heights, and being skewered into little pieces by the hungry giants, had killed the dream.

When she shook her head a third time, he snapped his teeth and a small flame darted from his breath.

She stilled. *A fire-breather.* Here. At her house. One of the rarest of the Dracon species. A high born, perhaps of noble blood. A shapeshifter that could actually emit flame. What she could learn from Dekker would be invaluable to her work. A work any Dracon would be more than happy to bury rather than see it read by the public.

She eyed him again, knowing his patience had nearly run dry. Then she had a sudden image of herself sprawled out on a large bed, naked and moaning as he fitted his very human head between her thighs.

"You've been sending me those pictures, I take it?" she said wryly, her face hot. He stared and cocked his head in that familiar manner. "I'm not normally so slow, but I've never been face to face with a live dragon before. So sue me."

A flash of her bent over his lap as he spanked her hard appeared, followed by her climbing onto his dragon back and riding with him into the night.

"Oh, hell. Fine. I'll climb on." Much as she would have liked to turn her back on the whole mess, her intellect, and libido, were screaming at her to jump on his back before he decided to leave without her.

Riding a dragon. The opportunity of a lifetime .

"But you let me fall to my death and I'll haunt you for the rest of your life."

He huffed in what sounded like satisfaction.

"Wait here while I get my coat. I promise I'll be right out." She left before he could argue, throwing on her coat as she hurriedly rejoined

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him outside. The bitter chill of the night had deepened, and a full moon pushed between two large clouds, illuminating western North Carolina's mountains. A few dragons flew in the distance, and she wondered if she'd soon be joining them. Preferably not as the main course.

* * *

Ferin soared through the air, the heady delight of wind through his wings and over his body a mental aphrodisiac addicting him more than any drug. *Almost better than sex.* "Almost" being the key word. The woman on top of him reminded him just how long he'd been without female companionship, and that only added to the myriad complications surrounding Lea Venlay. He knew he'd best curb his desire for the woman into more mundane matters, like finding out just what she really knew about the Dracon royal line. And why the hell she stirred him like no other.

The damned woman was human, not a drop of Dracon in her that he and his brothers could sense. He felt her shiver above him and gradually dropped several feet. They'd nearly reached his home deep in the Blue Ridge Mountains, the heart of Dracon Mount, as his people called it.

For hundreds of years the Dracon and human population had lived as one. Initially, his kind had lived in secret, word of their alternate, dragon form existing in old tales and lore, until humankind had pegged dragons as no more than fanciful myth. Then Daryn Venlay had found and befriended one of Ferin's forefathers, and the Dracon were introduced to the world.

The Dracon—men and women who appeared like any other, save they could transform into magical, legendary beasts. Rumors still abounded about Ferin's people, and he liked the mystery surrounding them. What the humans didn't know would keep his kind safe.

Because not all of the humans had embraced the merging of

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cultures. Dracon-haters lived everywhere, and a high price had been attached to anything with dragon origin, which, unfortunately, drew all kinds of “hunters.” Unlike those vultures, however, the Venlays had a more personal gripe with the Dracon.

A few hundred years ago, one of their women had been rumored to be the king’s destined mate. Not pleased that the king of all Dracon might marry a mere human, one of Ferin’s kind had, with the help of a human conspirator, killed the woman. Needless to say, the Venlays had taken it personally and vowed vengeance upon the clan. Ever since, Lea’s family had been steadfastly policing any stray Dracon they might find.

In their defense, the Venlays didn’t persecute the innocent, but they had no problem playing judge and jury for the guilty, a feat that should only belong to the Dracon royal family, namely, Ferin and his brothers.

“Are we getting close?” Lea shouted to be heard over the wind, and Ferin immediately dropped, scaring a small shriek out of her.

Sending her an image of his apology, he gently made his way deeper into the treeline until he skated just above the generous hickories, black birches and oaks still clinging to red and yellow leaves.

Despite what Lea thought she knew, had in fact published, the Dracon had left the underground caves two hundred years ago. Out of necessity more than practicality, they’d moved to avoid being caught vulnerable in their nests. Instead, the Dracon had taken to shallower dwellings, hidden castles and stone dwellings fortified against fire, and always accessible to the sky.

He felt her tense as his home came into view, and he felt a note of pride that she should see his castle in all its glory. Out of loyalty to the royal line, all the Dracon had gathered to build this fortress some five hundred years ago. With the exception of modern conveniences, such as plumbing and electricity, the keep stood as it had those five centuries past. A jewel hidden among the trees.

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He landed atop the keep, lowering his neck so Lea could slide to the ground. The minute her feet touched stone, he changed back. Being home always engendered a feeling of calm satisfaction. And having captured S. M. Ryans, the biggest threat to the Dracon at present, should have compounded that satisfaction. But for some reason Ferin felt only a restless ache, a gnawing hunger that grew as he stared at the picture of feminine challenge before him.

The wind blew her coat and dress, exposing more of her long, shapely legs. Her dark red hair danced in the moonlight, and he thought it the color of flames, of the fire burning inside him. Her dark brown eyes flashed with uncertainty and the promise of disobedience, a heady combination, which only fanned her attraction.

Ferin had never been one to shy from a challenge, and Lea Venlay screamed difficulty. He grinned, pleased when she focused on his mouth before blushing and staring into his eyes.

“Are we going to stand here all night in the cold while you stare at my legs? Or can we find some heat?”

He planned on giving her more heat than she probably wanted, but what the hell. She was finally here, in his home. And he was the king.

“Forgive my bad manners.” He bowed and fitted his arm around her waist. “Come with me, Lea.”

She shivered, and he knew it was from more than the cold. Taking her down the hidden stairwell, he soon had them inside the royal quarters. Along the way he mentally shot several of his retainers orders not to interfere or make their presence known.

“Where is everyone? It’s late, but not that late.”

He smiled. Trust Lea to notice the details. “Though you may think you know everything about the Dracon, in fact you know very little.”

Her delicate brows arched. “Really? Funny, then, that someone from your camp decided to trash my house and my work. If it’s all so much of nothing, why bother with me?”

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Then entered a large chamber. A fireplace sat in one corner, in front of which his brothers sat playing chess. Lucas, his security advisor and best friend, lingered in the corner, sharpening a wicked-looking saber. All three men stopped what they were doing to stare fixedly at Lea. Ferin could feel their curiosity, as well as their desire, and the knowledge flamed his attraction.

“Why bother with you? For obvious reasons, I’d imagine,” he murmured, stroking her waist. “I’m not sure who tore apart your study, but I’ll fix the damage. I regret such action was taken. But like humans, we Dracon are all individuals. Some good, some bad.”

“And which are you?”

He steered her past his startled family into his quarters and shut the door behind him. “Me? I’m very, very good.”

He removed her coat and threw it over a chair. But the view of her body in that skin-hugging silk did him in. The hunger that had been building, suddenly burst. His vision flared. Colors rocketed throughout the room, flowing in and around her, until she stood in a glittering, golden view. His treasure, his prize. And he understood what he’d been questioning since the day they’d first met.

“Ferin?” She took a step back. “Are you alright? You look a bit...strange.”

He felt strange. Fitting he should look as such. Never before had he needed so much, to the point of pain. And all for a human with the blood of his enemy.

“Ferin?”

Again she used his name, and the sound of it on her sweet lips sent him over the edge. He cared little for his brothers’ questioning voices inside his head. He only knew he had to have Lea, now and without fail.

He didn’t answer her with words. Instead he stalked her, as he’d been subtly doing for months. That odd, annoying attraction to Lea

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Venlay, daughter and sister to one of the larger threats to his kind, finally made sense. He didn't question the knowledge, but accepted it as his forefather should have done so many years ago.

Pulling her into his arms, he gave her no chance to deny him. Plundering her mouth, he felt like a barbarian of old. A warrior claiming what he'd rightfully waited for with patience and purpose.

CHAPTER 3

As before, the minute their lips met, Lea's body flowed into his. Helpless to stop his sigh of satisfaction, Ferin was equally pleased to hear her sigh of surrender.

"Ah, Lea," he murmured as he kissed his way down her throat. "The things I've dreamed of doing to you." Fascinated by the racing pulse of her heart, he nipped at the throbbing vein at her neck and sucked hard, marking her.

She moaned and pushed against him, her full breasts straining through the silken fabric of her dress. Not wanting to wait a moment more, he nuzzled the valley between her breasts and inhaled her womanly scent. Sweet yet spicy, a wildness buried beneath the placid scholar teased him to do more.

Fondling the swollen globes, he pinched her nipples and rolled them through his fingers. She arched into him like a cat, her wet panties calling to the dragon within him. Latching onto her nipple through the

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fabric, he suckled and bit, stinging her with the assurance of future demands.

“Ferin,” she breathed, and threaded her fingers through his hair, holding him close. “More.”

He smiled around her flesh, right in his suspicions that Lea hid a well of fiery passion, a naughty streak that contrasted sharply with the orderly woman she presented to the world.

Like the Dracon, his mate possessed hidden depths, a jewel to be treasured and admired often.

He laved her other breast, plumping her as he went. And as he suckled and licked, he surged against her belly, unable to keep from touching her. The feel of her nipple caused his cock to swell even harder, and he felt himself tightening with the need to thrust inside her.

“I need to feel you,” he panted, and ripped her dress to her waist. Showcased in snowy lace, her flushed skin taunted him for more. He changed one finger into a claw and sliced easily through the fabric. The treasure that met him made him groan. And without pause, he closed his lips around her nipple.

The feel of her skin on his tongue made colors burst inside his mind, and he felt a similar response from his brothers. *More, Ferin*, they urged. *Bring us to bliss*.

Not needing further prodding, he ran his hands along Lea’s waist and down her thighs. Edging under her dress, he quickly sought the panties blocking him from the woman beneath. Slicing through the delicate undergarment, he felt it fall from her body and stilled.

“Ferin?”

“Lea.” He waited until she looked him in the eye, thrilled at the sleepy sexuality clouding her gaze. Fanning her belly, he moved his palm lower, fingering through her curls. And as he traced the moist cleft keeping him from his prize, he watched her eyes flare with excitement, felt the breath she huffed as pleasure raced through her

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blood.

“You’re mine,” he growled before plunging a finger inside her.

She gasped and groaned, and began riding his hand. “Please. I can’t wait any longer.”

He added another finger, then another, his cock weeping with the need for relief.

Lea decided to take matters into her own hands and reached for his waistband. With shaking fingers, she unsnapped and pushed past his trousers. When her fingers reached his shaft, however, it was he who trembled.

“Lea,” he groaned, needing to be inside her more than his next breath. “Let me love you. Deep inside. Be mine.”

Though he knew she was as lost as he, he needed to hear her acceptance. And if some dim part of him questioned the need for her unquavering, verbal approval, his hormones suggested he search for the answer later.

“Yes, now. Right now.” She squirmed in his hold and wrapped her hands around him.

He bucked, unable to help himself, and speared her pussy with his fingers. She clenched tight, and he knew he couldn’t wait another minute. Leaving the delightful warmth of her body, he gripped her hips. When she wrapped her legs around him, he turned for the nearest wall and shoved her against it, still careful not to harm her. Excitement ate at him as he pushed his trousers farther down his hips.

The tip of his cock brushed her moist slit and he groaned, unable to stop.

“Now, Lea.” Thrusting hard, he pulled her over him as he pushed deep. *Nothing had ever felt so right.*

Her breasts bounced as he fucked her, and he ground against her, wishing he could feel her strawberry nipples against his chest instead of against his shirt.

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Next time, he promised himself, and met the demands of his body. He could feel her channel closing around him, could sense her clitoris was near to bursting by the cries and jerks of her body.

Her eyes were closed, her face and breasts flushed as he took her. Possession, hot and heavy, claimed him as he thrust deeper.

“Take my seed,” he growled and shifted his pelvis ever so slightly.

She gasped and cried out, “Ferin, oh, God, Ferin.” Her body felt like a vise, her orgasm shattering her and soon him.

The feel of her muscles sucking him deeper into her womb pushed him over the edge. Sensations bombarded him, colors, shocks of light and heat coiled and sprung. He shot hard, coming into Lea with a force more than himself. With this sharing of seed, of life, he began the bonding in a single breath.

As she cried out his name, he shouted hers. And within his voice, the rejoicing of several others was heard throughout the clan.

* * *

Lea could barely catch her breath as she leaned against Ferin. He had joined with her so deeply, she still couldn’t tell where he ended and she began. The feel of his massive penis made her shiver, and when he flexed and groaned, she hugged him tightly. Feelings of possession and tenderness flooded her, startling her with the urge to have him again, and so soon.

Images of sex at its basest, both carnal and pure, swamped her. And she blushed to see Ferin staring straight into her eyes, his a wondrous rainbow glittering within black. Dracon eyes full of repletion.

“Draka,” he murmured, thrusting gently. *My queen.*

His pubic hair brushed her thighs, cradling her core as he remained buried within her. She felt moisture trickle down her legs and blinked at the carelessness of her encounter. But then she recalled the Dracon’s inability to conceive disease, as well as the infertility between species. And though relieved, a small part of her bereaved the fact she would

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never have children with Ferin.

Which made no sense at all. None whatsoever. *What the hell is wrong with me? Since when do I equate great sex with babies and happily-ever-after?*

“You’re thinking too hard.”

She glanced at his smiling face, his eyes once again fathomlessly dark. All thought faded but the animalistic need to have him again.

“I feel your pussy squeezing me for more.” His voice had deepened, like a sorcerer weaving a spell. “And I’m going to give you more. Much, much more. I see you, Lea. I’ve always seen you, known you.”

He confused her, but his body encouraged her to believe. Oddly, it wasn’t so difficult to nod her head, to agree. A part of her recognized him as well. Each encounter they’d had before this must have been building to tonight. All the sly innuendoes, the stares and questions about her family that she’d before taken as a personal affront, made sense. Ferin hadn’t been antagonistic, he’d been interested.

His shaft flexed and the base brushed against her stimulated clit. Hell yes, he was interested. *But not more than I am.*

“There’s much you don’t know about the Dracon, Lea.” He seduced with words as much as his body, promising answers. “I would show you more, Lea. More than you’ve ever seen, or felt.” His fingers moved from her hips to her ass, and one digit wormed between her cheeks to rest at her anus.

Ferin grinned, a sinful smile that should have made her pause. She’d never before been experimental in the bedroom. The dreams and urges she’d had over the years she’d squelched behind academic pursuits, and to fit in with her family. Good old reliable Lea. The steady one. The smart one. The good girl.

Yet here she stood, with Ferin Dekker *inside of* her, a Dracon who knew her secrets, and who could kill so very, very easily. The sense of danger that surrounded him only made him that much more desirable,

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and even as she felt her attraction deepen, she wondered if she had made a huge mistake.

Sex with the Dracon could be addictive, or so she'd read. But as she remained tied to the captivating man, she could easily deem it true. She still couldn't quite believe that she, mousy Lea Venlay, was having sex—no, *fucking*—Ferin Dekker. Hell, she couldn't even think the word “fucking” without blushing.

“Lea? What'll it be?” His finger pushed deeper into her anus, discomfort straining against the pleasure filtering through. So wicked, so naughty. And she wanted it, wanted him, all over again. Reality bedamned.

Staring into Ferin's hungry gaze as he slowly rotated his finger, she breathed, “Show me,” and prayed she'd made the right decision.

A door suddenly opened, and in walked two tall Dracon, both with a striking resemblance to Ferin. Lea could only stare, shocked, at the flushed features of the other men. Okay, she'd decided to enjoy Ferin. But he'd never mentioned other men! Embarrassment flushed her from head to toe, but with that embarrassment, something more, something dark and primal filled her.

“Brother, we welcome your prize.”

“And submit to your treasure.” Both brothers bowed, their black eyes shining as they took in her embrace with Ferin.

Yet as the men stared at her, her mortification faded, and her arousal increased. Hadn't she secretly dreamed of this? Of sex with more than one man? Just being seen by them, two extremely hot men, turned her on, though she'd never in her life considered herself an exhibitionist. With Ferin, however, she wanted to do anything. And apparently he knew it, for he smiled and pulled out his finger, then his thick shaft, only to thrust inside her again. The others, she noted, watched with keen intensity.

“My brothers, Matthias and Adrian,” he murmured, nodding to the

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pair. “They’re here to witness our coming together. Along with one other.” He waited, gauging her response.

The “I’d never,” that she should have said failed to appear. She’d already taken the first step, why not jump off the damned cliff? Lea felt as if she’d been reborn, the passionate, wondrous woman once trapped inside the dutiful, mundane Venlay daughter finally freed to fly.

“Let us help you,” Matthias, the taller of the two, said with a naughty grin. He pulled her up and off of Ferin and took her in his arms.

“And let us make you more comfortable,” Adrian murmured, running his hands up her back.

Streaks of lust shot through her, making her question her sudden overwhelming sexuality. She tensed, reluctantly realizing the embarrassment that should have reared its ugly head sooner. How could she feel so attracted to another man—men—with her lover standing not three feet away? And not just any men, but his brothers?

“Relax, Lea. This is meant to be shared, explored. I said I’d show you more of the Dracon than you’d known. And you agreed.”

She stared at Ferin over Matthias’ shoulder, his persuasive smile urging her to agree. Only in her wildest dreams had she envisioned herself with more than one man. But three? And her lover not only accepted the fantasy, but encouraged it? The new, adventurous Lea settled into Adrian and Matthias’ caresses. Bemused, she let herself feel the hunger, the sensual need, and wondered how she could have suppressed such lusts for so long, when with every new breath she wanted so much more.

Ferin pulled off his shirt while his brothers laid her gently down on his huge bed. They stripped her tattered dress and shoes from her, the sensual slide of silk leaving her skin making her tremble, needing more touch. Just as Matthias covered her breast with his warm palm, Ferin opened a side door to admit a fourth man, this one looming over the

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others.

Unlike Ferin's siblings, this male had a harsher face, his features savage, his height and brawn clearly that of a warrior. He murmured something to Ferin upon entering, and gave him what looked suspiciously like a small bow.

Lea wanted to ask what that meant, but Adrian made all the blood rush from her head when he lowered his face to the juncture of her thighs.

"Ah, brother, you marked her well. Lucas, come and see."

Lucas, the giant, neared, his eyes glinting with lust. He made no effort to hide the erection straining his trousers, and startled her when he covered her mound with his hand, shoving one thick finger inside her.

"So fine," he said in a gravelly voice. Staring at her, he met her eyes and slowly smiled. "Worthy, I think."

Worthy? Of what exactly? A foursome? Of him?

Matthias continued fondling her breasts as Ferin left the room, only to return with a damp washcloth. Adrian disrobed, curiously studying Lucas while he did so. And to her surprise, Lucas stared back, approval and warmth written all over his face.

As Ferin washed her, he began murmuring to the others in Drac, a frustrating language that had always eluded her.

The language barrier didn't bother her though. The hunger in all four males spoke volumes, and Lea felt more feminine, and more powerful, than she ever had. Though they each clearly outweighed and outmuscled her, she held the reins on their desire.

Ferin washed her with the cloth while Matthias and Adrian trailed her skin with their hands, Lucas behind them, studying her like a hungry dog wanting a bone. "You like this attention?" Ferin asked softly.

"Mmm." She arched into Adrian's teasing fingers.

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“And do you also like to watch?”

“Watch what?” She flushed, silly considering she lay naked before four men.

“Come, Lea,” Ferin said. “You know what. Others engaged in sex. In pleasure.” He nodded to Lucas. To her surprise, the large Dracon reached for the snap of Ferin’s trousers.

Intrigued and surprisingly aroused by the sensual glide of Lucas’ hands over Ferin, she watched as he stroked the growing erection now clearly visible from Ferin’s pants.

Ferin’s eyes narrowed with pleasure while Lucas masturbated him. But her lover didn’t stop his gentle ministrations with the cloth. For every stroke of Lucas’ palm, Ferin pushed higher into her vagina with the terrycloth.

Adrian and Matthias stilled their movements, caught by the cloth’s motion. In and out, deeper and deeper inside her slick walls.

“You see, Lea, watching can be every bit as pleasurable as participating,” Ferin rasped. “Now them,” he said to Lucas over his shoulder. Lucas replied in Drac, something that made Adrian smile wide and had Matthias frowning. Then the large Dracon left Ferin to divest Adrian of his clothes while Matthias undressed himself.

Ferin had stripped to nothing, and she couldn’t help noticing his massive hard-on. He kept his eyes glued to hers while she vacillated from Ferin to the others openly engaged in erotic play. From what she knew of the Dracon, they were a very sensual race, not opposed to sexuality in any form. Of course, she’d never heard tales of orgies, and from what she’d heard about Ferin, had never imagined he might seek pleasure from a man. Nor had she realized how wet she’d become watching a man touch him.

“Lucas likes to touch, to give as much as receive,” Ferin said and lay beside her. Completely naked, the man looked good enough to eat. Ropy muscle bunched as he leaned up on his side. His large hands had

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surprising grace for their size, and gave indescribable pleasure as they plucked at her nipples.

Bombarded with sensation, she could only feel as she watched Lucas and Adrian engage in heavy foreplay. Matthias lay by her other side, stroking her belly and clit in alternating feather-light caresses that made it hard to breathe. Adrian, on the other hand, seemed to prefer a harder touch.

He faced her with Lucas at his back. The look on his face was one of pure rapture. Lucas hugged Adrian, and with a hand wrapped around Adrian's penis, began pumping while he stared at her. And from the way he'd positioned Adrian's thighs wide, she imagined he'd soon be fucking the Dracon.

"Adrian likes it in every way," Matthias murmured, flicking his tongue in her ear just as Ferin sucked at her breast. "And you'll take it every way soon enough. You're so hot, Lea. So perfect, so ripe. Have you ever been with a Dracon before?"

She couldn't speak, her temperature rising as Ferin teased her unmercifully. The touching, the watching...she felt terribly close to orgasm and wanted it to last. The events of tonight were so amazing she wanted to savor every moment. It almost had to be a dream.

"Have you, Lea?" Ferin repeated.

She shook her head, unable to stop the moan that left her.

"The pleasure we feel is extremely intense. Just look at Adrian and Lucas."

Lucas was steadily priming Adrian to come, his large fingers wrapped around the rosy shaft, thick and seeping with arousal. Noting Lea's eyes on them, Lucas gave her a secretive smile and reached around Adrian with his free hand.

Lucas leaned closer to Lea, and stunned her by putting two fingers inside her vagina. At that moment, both Ferin and Matthias latched onto her breasts, sucking hard. She felt so wet and so stimulated she

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nearly came.

Watching what Lucas did next both shocked and thrilled her.

“Don’t come yet, Lea. Wait and watch,” Ferin ordered in a raspy voice.

Lucas took his fingers, wet with her juices, behind Adrian’s ass. He must have pushed them inside, for the look on Adrian’s face changed to one of desperate need.

“Damn it, Lucas, quit playing,” he growled, his eyes suddenly a fiery red.

Lucas chuckled and nudged Adrian’s feet wider. He dropped Adrian’s shaft, now shiny with precum, and thrust slowly inside the Dracon.

“Fuck, yes,” Lucas rumbled and glanced at her. “It feels so good, Draka. Just the way it’ll feel when we do it to you.”

Lea sighed and arched up as Matthias spread her labia, brushing her clit ever so lightly. But instead of following with his fingers, or heaven help her, his mouth, Ferin took his place.

A hot mouth closed over her clit, and a strong tongue jolted over her flesh. Harsh grunts and moans poured from both Lucas and Adrian, who had his penis wrapped in his fist as the giant pounded into him.

Matthias rubbed against her hip while his brother brought her closer and closer to climax. “Watch as he comes. Wait and see.” It was then she felt the brush of his knuckles against her hip, and realized he was jerking off against her as well.

“Ferin, I’m going to come if you don’t slow down,” she gasped, needing beyond breath a hot cock inside her. She felt so empty, so needy while she witnessed the others taking their pleasure. Yet she couldn’t deny the magic of Ferin’s mouth, of Matthias’ touch, in a dream of carnality too vivid to be fantasy.

“Ferin, now,” Adrian rasped.

Ferin rose between her legs to his knees, as did Matthias beside her.

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“Fuck,” Lucas snarled before withdrawing from Adrian.

Then, amazingly, all four men groaned as Ferin, Adrian and then the others began to come over her. Hot seed hit her belly and her chest, a flood of Dracon nectar that covered her torso with warm bursts of power.

And as they came, they chanted in Drac. Frustrated though captivated by the sexuality of the moment, she watched the scene with awe, tied closer to Ferin and his Dracon than she would ever have imagined.

CHAPTER 4

When the men finally ceased, they stared down at her as if making a claim.

“Mine,” Ferin said in a tone that brooked no refusal.

“Aye,” the others said as one. “Yours, and ours.”

The tension seemed to increase as incredibly, they hardened again, as if a waterfall of cum hadn’t just washed over her. To her bewilderment, the thick stuff simply disappeared, and she felt tingly all along her skin. But the sight of four hungry, hot Dracon distracted her, increasing her frustrated need. Slick and hungry, she waited with baited breath as Ferin lowered himself once more. But this time he pulled her to the edge of the bed and stood between her legs.

“Now we’re going to fuck you, long and hard, Draka,” he promised.

Matthias maneuvered over her, turning his back to his brother as he straddled her neck, leveraging his jutting penis toward her mouth. Before she could blink, Ferin thrust hard into her, and began fucking her

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without mercy. Right next to the bed, Lucas fell to his knees and was deep-throating Adrian, loving the Dracon the way she intended to love Matthias.

She closed her eyes and opened her mouth, the scent and feel of Matthias' hard cock making her wetter than ever as he pressed forward. Ferin continued to ride her, his pummeling thrusts jolting her mouth around Matthias.

"Ah, Lea," Matthias groaned and pushed deeper, his balls slapping her chin. She gagged a bit but gradually accepted every inch he gave her.

"Draka, Lea, you belong to me now. Witnessed and sealed," Ferin panted, thrusting harder and harder until unable to take any more, she came.

Her orgasm reverberated through her body. She clenched around Ferin and felt him still and shoot inside her. Matthias cried out and jetted, salty male cream pouring down her throat. She heard Adrian shout as well, and saw him rock into Lucas' mouth before sliding to his knees, only to return the favor.

Throbbing, lost in the sensual haze of incredible sex, Lea noted a subtle blurring of color around her. Matthias left her mouth and his skin seemed shiny, a green tint growing steadily darker. Between her legs, Ferin stood buried, but his eyes had changed, the pupils elongating and swirling with color.

"You belong to the Dracon now," he said, his words lost in dragon cry.

A roar of harmonies sounded outside the walls, and the Dracon within joined the noise. Ferin gently withdrew and kissed her hard on the lips. "Sleep now, and when you wake, I'll explain this gift you've given us."

She wanted to protest, wanted to feel his arms around her again, to feel his brothers' touch, but then ecstasy overtook her will, and she fell

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into a deep, dreamless slumber.

* * *

High in the air the dragons soared. Not in thirty years had the clan felt such joy, such belonging to the world as they did this night. The king and his line remained unbroken. A true mate had finally been found for the royal line. All rejoiced as King Ferin and his brothers, Prince Adrian and Prince Matthias, protected by Lucas, the royal guard, joined in the celebratory dance.

It was noted that the king's mate did not join in the dance, and though many wondered at her absence, the sheer delight in the continuation of the species allowed for the unexplained. But not all felt such peace

One particular Dracon knew why the female had not joined the others. Another human, an inferior being not fit enough to look upon the king, let alone bed him, had arrived to dilute the clan. Once before steps had been taken to rid the Dracon of such a disease. And it seemed steps would need to be taken once more, lest the Dracon line fall prey to the disease of humanity.

* * *

"By the stars, brother. I've not felt that before in a joining. And I've a mind to feel it again," Matthias roared to his brother in the language of dragons.

"As have I," Adrian added, breathing a playful ball of fire at Lucas. "Our guard fucked so hard I still feel his cock up my ass. And I'm not complaining."

Ferin grinned, more than pleased with his mate. Though he would not have thought to choose a human, fate had decided for him. For too long he'd been fixated on the stubborn woman, never dreaming she could his Draka, the queen of his heart and of his power.

Lea Venlay knew the Dracon, and despite her family's history with

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his, he had a feeling she would be more amenable than most to ending their long-standing feud. She had an intelligence and grit about her that spoke to his heart. And remembrances of what they'd just shared more than told him she spoke to his cock.

Mother of Treasure, but the quiet little art house bookkeeper was way more than she appeared. He'd lain with many a female Dragon, but none had taken him and his brothers the way Lea had. And though he knew she'd never before participated in such a carnal encounter, she'd met them every step of the way. He only hoped she had no regrets upon awakening.

He shook away the ugly thought. He would not allow the perfection of this night to spoil. Lea was his. She was meant for him, just as one of her female relations had been meant for one of his. The coincidence could not be overlooked. Ferin believed in fate, and he learned from the past. Though many in his clan would welcome her for the priceless gift of life she brought, others would not be so pleased. He would have to be ready.

His thoughts on his mate, he swooped low once more before returning to Lea. Once inside his chambers, he studied the woman, seeing in her the future. A lifetime of love and anger, of quenching her hungers, soothing her piques and encouraging her studies. Her studies.... He frowned. Under his supervision, she could certainly resume her work, but not at the expense of the clan. Some truths simply could not be shared, not if the Dragon were to survive.

He sighed and caressed her flushed cheeks. Lea was intelligent. She would understand the risks and merit of such stricture. And, hopefully, she would take to their joining with as much pleasure as she'd just shown him.

A woman, human or Dragon, could not share so much of her body and soul without sharing her heart as well.

He hoped.

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* * *

When Lea next awoke, it was to a cup of steaming coffee just the way she liked. A breakfast tray lay on a table next to the bed, and Ferin sat quietly beside her.

“Wow, breakfast in bed. I guess last night wasn’t a dream after all.”

Several chuckles followed, waking her quickly. She glanced up to see not only Ferin, but Adrian and Matthias too, all dressed casually, all staring at her. She felt a sudden draft over her breasts and blushed.

“You might have mentioned I was half-naked.”

“Actually, we were hoping you’d lose the sheet,” Adrian murmured, coming closer to run a finger over her shoulder.

Immediately, heat rushed to the area, and her womb tightened with desire.

“Really? I thought Lucas did most of *your* work,” she said with some cheek, earning a grin from his brothers.

Adrian laughed. “He did last night, sure enough. But he received as much pleasure as he gave, and all because of one very special, very sensual woman.”

She slowly sobered at the seductive look in his eyes. Hello, but she’d come here with Ferin. In the light of day, she now questioned what she’d done last night. This was going to be a problem. Or so she thought. She glanced at Ferin and saw his approving nod.

“I thought Dracon were possessive.” Something about their escapade last night seemed off. Pleasurable, yes, but so very not normal for the possessive Dracon.

“We are,” Matthias answered. “And as S. M. Ryans, you’d know all about us. But you’ve never written about our mating practices.” He gave her a sexy grin, and she wanted to sweep the fall of black hair from his forehead so she could better see his eyes. “I bet you could write a book now.”

“With that little demonstration last night?” Adrian scoffed. “Be

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serious. Wait until I'm inside her, riding her to oblivion."

"You?" Matthias shook his head. "Try me. Though her mouth is heaven, that pussy had Ferin hard even after our last course."

"Fellas," Lea said, not surprised to feel her face flaming. She'd never had men talk about her in such a way, at least not that she knew of. And why were their words making her wet? She might have thrown caution to the wind last night, but she'd had a shocking evening. A gallery exhibit she'd tirelessly prepared for. A break-in at her home. Her first dragon ride, *ever*. Was it any wonder she'd been off-kilter enough to accept sex with not one, but four men, more than fulfilling her deepest sexual fantasies? Just the thought of it turned her bright red. What Ferin must think of her...hell, she didn't quite know what to think of herself. At the rate she was going, she might want to start looking for a career in adult entertainment. *Four men?*

"Adrian, Matthias, you can see she's alright. Why don't you let me take it from here?" Ferin waited until his brothers left, grumbling and poking at one another. "They demanded to see that you weren't suffering any ill effects from last night."

"I'm not." She sat up clutching the sheet beneath her arms and sipped at the coffee he held for her, trying to think of what to say and blundering. "Okay, I'm a bit embarrassed at what I did. You caught me off guard," she said defensively, and saw his mouth quirk. Damn, even that had her heart racing. "I just, I don't have sex...like that."

"Like what? With Dracon?"

Oh hell, he looked offended.

"With *four men*, you jackass."

His mood cleared and he laughed. "I love when that prim voice of yours denigrates into sexy, frank talk. You have no idea how hard you make me. Constantly," he murmured and placed one of her hands over his growing erection.

Damn. Her embarrassment was swiftly turning into desire.

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Impossible, yet there it was.

"I want to fuck you right now, long and slow," he rasped, and her womb clenched. "But we've much to discuss. I need you to know what last night really meant."

She slowly lowered the coffee to the tray, uneasy because she knew, on a deeper level, that last night had been unusual for him as well. Though she'd never written anything about the Dracon mating practices, she knew more than Ferin and his brothers gave her credit for. The Dracon were an extremely possessive, and protective, race. They held fiercely to their own, their loyalty unquestioning. Very few Dracon ever betrayed their own kind, making what had happened to Lea's relative such an extraordinarily tragic loss.

But Ferin didn't strike her as an atypical Dracon. Quite the opposite, actually. In him, she saw the legendary creatures as she'd always imagined. Dangerous and beautiful in dragon form, sexy and charming, enthralling when walking as a man. And as she stared at him, her heart took that funny dip, the same one it had taken last night when he'd proclaimed her his.

"Ferin..."

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, as if seeking answers beyond him. When he opened them, they glowed, a bright rainbow of color and light, his inner dragon blazing at her. She didn't know why, but she found it almost as sexy as the feel of him inside her.

"Lea," he began tentatively, his tone making her sit up straight, her hands clenching the sheet around her. "Last night we bonded. You know that Dracon have sex just like humans do. We like men, we like women. Sexuality, as long as it's mutually enjoyed, is never taboo. But bonding goes much, much deeper."

The knowledge in his eyes triggered her to be cautious. "You'd be surprised at what I know about the Dracon."

"Ah, yes. *Reem's Lost Arts*." He reached into his nightstand and

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pulled up a copy. “Before you fly off the handle, it’s not yours. There are only ten copies in existence, and the Dracon had nine of them. Presumably, now ten, if the thief we sent to your home did his job right.”

Indignation filled her at memories of her study. “I knew it! Why the hell did you steal my copy? And why trash my office?”

“That was a mistake, and one I intend to rectify.” His eyes flared, and she realized he hadn’t planned such destruction. “His orders were to steal the book. And you know why, don’t you S. M. Ryans? What I want to know is why you haven’t told your family.”

“Who says I haven’t?” self-preservation urged her to say.

“Because we’re all still alive,” Ferin said dryly. “Come, love, tell me why you didn’t tell them. Tell me why you came to me last night, and accepted me and my brothers.”

He’d called her “love.” Her brain turned to mush, and she had to clear her throat before she could speak again.

“Look. All I know is that I’ve made a decent living working at my family’s art gallery. But it’s not what I’m passionate about. The Dracon have always fascinated me. Maybe it’s because of my family, maybe it’s just because no matter how you look at it, dragons are wonderful. Magic in a world needing more of it.

“I don’t hold with a centuries-old grudge. I never have. A Dracon and a human conspired to kill one of my relatives. Sad, yes. But it’s history. If only my brothers would see that,” she muttered.

“So that’s why you didn’t tell them what you learned?”

“Yes.”

When he waited, she sighed. “You want to hear me say it, right? The great secret the Dracon would willingly kill for?”

He frowned.

“Okay, steal for?”

He nodded.

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“Fine. But remember, one of you Dracon owes me a chair. So, okay. Between the few legible parts of Meredith’s journal, in connection with Reem’s book, I learned the key to destroying the Dracon.” She took a deep breath and kept her eyes on his, not wanting to dwell on the sadness that dragged her at thoughts of the Dracon annihilated. “All the Dracon are tied to the royal line. It’s a psychic, or maybe mystic, link that I don’t quite understand. The point is, Reem knew, as did Great-Gran Meredith, that love is a bond stronger than any blood.”

He nodded. “True.”

“And, apparently, and correct me if I’m wrong, but to continue the Dracons’ existence, the king has to find a mate, not only to procreate, but to make sure the rest of the Dracon don’t suddenly become infertile, dying out one by one. Kill the king or his mate, you kill the Dracon. End of story. The fact that Meredith died and the Dracon continued may mean one of two things. Either she wasn’t his mate, or a Dracon king may have more than one possible love.”

“*Or* a king may follow his chosen mate into death’s kiss, in which case a new king, one of royal blood, would be appointed. In Meredith’s case, once she died, her lover, King Stowen, launched himself off a cliff and deliberately fell to his death. His younger brother, Rafael, assumed the throne and took a mate. So the royal line stayed true.”

She nodded. “I *knew* Meredith was Stowen’s true mate. A lot of the garbled stuff she wrote I still can’t understand. I think she wrote in code to protect the Dracon. It looks like a phonetic rendition of Drac, which I’ve never understood. If I had the journal, I could show you.”

At his bright look, her eyes narrowed. “Why do I get the feeling you have it here?”

“I had a few Dracon clean up your study after we left.”

“Nice.”

He had the grace to wince. “It wasn’t about stealing your things. I

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brought them here to keep them safe. And for you.” He walked over to an ornate armoire covered in detailed dragon carvings and opened a door. Several items of her clothing appeared. “This, too, is for your comfort.”

She stared from her clothing to him, stunned. “You brought my things to your home? Your fortified castle?” A thought struck. “Are you kidnapping me?”

“Of course not.” He rolled his eyes. “You’re overly dramatic, Draka. I simply wanted you to be happy while we spent some time getting to know one another. While I love your body, it’s also your mind that intrigues me.”

“Don’t you mean S. M. Ryans who intrigues you?” *Her mind?* So that’s what he wanted. To know what she knew about the Dracon. Disappointment welled within her, along with an absurd need to cry.

“Stop what you’re thinking right now.” Ferin growled, looking uneasy. “Don’t you dare cry. Whatever you’re thinking is wrong. I want to know *you*, Lea Venlay. I’ve read as much as I need to know about S. M. Ryans. I want to know Lea’s favorite color. What makes her laugh. Why she was always so annoyed whenever I showed up at the gallery. Wooing you has never been so hard.”

She immediately brightened. “You were wooing me? I thought you were pestering me for info on my family.”

“Like you, I’m tired of the animosity between the Venlays and the Dracon. A tragic happenstance several hundred years ago should be buried. I didn’t kill anyone, and I know you didn’t. I’d rather make love than war.”

The look on his face promised delights her body was more than ready to handle.

“Love, hmm? Just you and me?”

He smiled, male satisfaction blazoning. “If that’s what you’d prefer.”

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“Last night was incredible, but I’m a little worn out from so much attention.”

He laughed and leaned in to kiss her. Like before, she melted into him and met his tongue with her own. Her heart did that funny little dip again, and she accepted the growing affection easily, her mind on other things.

CHAPTER 5

Ferin groaned and lowered her into the bed.

“I can’t help projecting my pleasure to my brothers. It’s a sibling bond we share, a sharing of emotions.”

“Fine. As long as I get to be on top.” Lea shimmied out from under him and trapped him under her body.

He returned her kiss wholeheartedly, his hands cradling her breasts with callused palms, the contact making her wet and needy. She squirmed over the bulge in his jeans and sucked on his neck, much as he had the day before. She couldn’t explain it, but being with Ferin quelled her inhibitions, and she felt like a woman without restriction. Anything and everything with him was right.

“Why aren’t I the least bit messy this morning? You guys did a number on me last night.” She leaned down to nibble his racing pulse.

He groaned and reached down to unbutton his fly, freeing himself. “Dracon seed saturates the skin. We leave no mess behind.”

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“Only a marker, a possessive sign to other Dracon,” she realized.

“Hmm. Yes,” he rasped, surging up inside her in one smooth pull on her hips. “Fuck me, Lea. Take me home.”

She fused her mouth to his, battling his tongue while feeling his cock grow harder and harder within her. Leaning up, she stared down at him, completely enthralled by the Dracon watching her with open lust and affection. Slowly sliding up and down over his steely cock, she savored his every expression. The color-changing glitter of his eyes, the harsh breaths, the pulse she could see pounding under the open collar of his shirt.

“So beautiful,” she murmured. “Almost better than dragon flight.”

He laughed harshly and caught her hips, urging her to increase her pace. “That’s just what I was thinking last night. But sex with you is better than anything in this world.” His skin rippled and she stared, captivated. “Ah, Lea. You’re so perfect. Your pussy is so hot.”

He bucked up, almost unseating her, driving harder into her. The feel of him inside her was making her crazy. And then he began throwing images at her. Of how she’d looked last night when they’d come all over her. Of his cock in her mouth, in her ass. Of her on her knees as he and his brothers filled her every orifice at once.

The pressure against her clit, in addition to his pictures, sent her careening into climax. As she tensed around him, he jerked and shot, filling her with his essence.

The little death seemed to last forever, yet he managed to sit up and hug her while still joined.

“You undo me,” he murmured. “Each time is better than the last.”

“I know.” But something about his lovemaking niggled at the back of her mind. To feel so incredibly linked with him, yet he didn’t act at all jealous about his brothers and Lucas, made her wonder. He rotated his shaft inside her, rubbing against her clit and her womb clenched again. And all was right with the world.

FIREBREATHER

* * *

“So you still haven’t told her you’re king.” Speaking in Drac, Lucas grinned around a turkey leg and took a large bite.

“Scared of your new queen, eh, brother?” Adrian teased.

“Not scared. I just don’t want to ruin the mood.” Ferin frowned. Little did they know of women and relationships. And with his Draka, his queen, now found, his brothers had little to worry about mating. They could mate, or they could not, but the pressure to continue the line had lifted from the family with Lea’s presence.

“You just had her not a half hour ago. She feels good in here.” Matthias tapped his head. “As well as in here,” he said, pointing to his groin. “You got lucky with this one.”

“Hell, all of the Dracon did.” Lucas grunted. “She knows as much about the Dracon as most of us. She’s sexy, intelligent, and real easy on the eyes. But if you don’t soon tell her who you are before she finds out, shit is going to seriously hit the fan. Females hate when you keep things from them.”

Adrian rolled his eyes. “This coming from the Dracon with three girlfriends. I swear, Lucas. If Moira and Sherel find out you’re also bedding Emmaline, you’re a dead man.”

Lucas shrugged. “I never promised any of them exclusivity. And my appetites are more than any one woman can handle.”

“But not one man?” Matthias gave him a speculative glance.

“Well, since Adrian’s never seen fit to give me decent head...”

“Shut up, asshole. Just last night you were crying my name.”

“Yeah, crying.” Lucas snickered and the others laughed.

“Seems to me you ought to give Matthias a try,” Ferin offered, needling Adrian’s jealousy.

Predictably, Adrian frowned. “Don’t you have enough to worry about having bonded to S. M. Ryans?”

“Keep it down, Adrian.” Matthias scowled. “We’re the only ones

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who know about Lea's other identity. It'll be hard enough making the others accept a human, especially since she's a Venlay."

"Not once she's carrying," Lucas added. "Then all will be right as rain. And you did say you wanted to try right away."

"Not until she's ready." Ferin pushed away a half-eaten apple. "I just wish I knew how to tell her. I think she knows our joining last night wasn't the norm. Any other red-blooded Dracon would have torn the three of you apart for even looking on her the wrong way."

"Good thing we're not any other Dracon." Matthias swiped his fruit. "I want her, Ferin. More than I thought I would."

Ferin shook his head, bemused. "I know this bothers me, but damned if I can drum up any jealousy. And that's just not normal."

"Your Draka, our Draka," Matthias said quietly. "Until the bonding is completed, we must cement her ties. She belongs to us, until she belongs solely to you, brother. But have no fear. We'll all respect your rights to The Treasure."

"A true mate." Adrian nodded, satisfied. "She'll bear strong young. And she'll stay true to you, to us. Already I feel the emotional connection strongly, something I wouldn't have expected from a human."

"She's more than human where it counts." Matthias smiled. "She has the heart of a Dracon. The mind of a wizard. And the body of a goddess." He glanced behind him and his grin widened. "Good morning, Lea," he switched back to English. "Join us, please."

Ferin watched hungrily as Lea walked with her usual grace to his side. Wearing simple jeans and a soft sweater, she appeared as sexy as she had in green silk. She sat with them, his brothers and royal guard, and looked as if she belonged.

"How was your bath, Lea?"

"Oh, great." She sounded distracted, and Ferin had a moment's unease that she might suspect more than what he'd told her.

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“Is something amiss?” Lucas asked, amusement in his tone.

Ferin glared, and Lucas glanced down, chastised if not repentant.

“Actually,” she paused, blushing, before staring each brother in the eye. “I just can’t figure it out, and I’ve got to know. I’ve studied the Dracon extensively, and last night doesn’t figure into anything I know about you guys. What really happened last night, aside from the, uh, sex that is? You mentioned bonding. But what does that really mean? And all that ‘belonging’ stuff.” Her face was a fiery rose, a becoming blush that had Ferin harder than stone. Hell, he wanted to take her back into that room and mark her again. And by the look on his brothers’ and Lucas’ faces, they wanted the same.

She swallowed loudly. “It almost sounded like a passage out of the mating chapter I’d read in *Reem’s Lost Arts*.”

Ferin choked on the water he’d been sipping, glaring at Lucas when he slapped him on the back.

“I’d say this is the opening you’ve been waiting for.” Lucas raised a brow, Adrian smiled smugly, and Matthias shrugged.

“Hell.” Ferin stared Lea in the eyes, feeling again that contact that told him he’d found his queen. Such purity, such strength, and in such a winsome package. Except for her family name, the woman had no drawbacks as far as he could tell. Although...she was a bit stubborn. Would she take the news well, or try to run for it? S. M. Ryans would stay, more out of curiosity and to further academic pursuit. But would Lea Venlay, the passionate woman he was growing to love, give him a chance when it would mean going against everything she’d ever been taught?

* * *

Lea stared. “Well?”

“How much do you know about the royal line?” Lucas asked.

“The royal line?” She was baffled at the change of subject, but she easily followed. “Only that the Dracon are a secretive clan. No one

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knows who actually rules the Dracon, no one human, that is.”

“And what would the Venlays do with such information?” Matthias asked.

Lea frowned. “I suppose my brothers would exploit the situation, keeping the Dracon in line with threats to the royal family.”

Adrian and Lucas exchanged glances. “I thought she’d at least try to lie on that one.”

“Why should I? My brothers are hotheads. I love them, but I’m not blind when it comes to them. They have issues with the Dracon, for no other reason than a tradition of hostility. My uncles want to roast you all over the coals, and my sister wants....”

“Wants what?” Ferin wanted to know.

“Never mind.” She flushed, disturbed that she felt so possessive of Ferin. Glancing at the men around her, she forced herself to admit her growing affection. And how the hell did a normal human go from a staid, predictable life to having feelings for four Dracon? “Ferin, can I talk to you, in private?”

His brows drew close but he nodded. The others left without being asked, and Ferin watched her without blinking.

Lea didn’t want to say it, but felt she had to. She believed in honesty and made it a practice to start with herself. “Ferin, I don’t know how to say this without sounding, ah, kind of weird.”

“Go on.” He caressed the back of her hand, soothing her nerves while his dark eyes swam with compassion. Why had she never before seen how caring he could be?

“It’s just that last night was so out of character for me. I’ve never had sex with more than one person at a time.” Her face felt on fire. “And I can’t explain it, but I have these odd feelings stirring inside me. Feelings for you...and the others,” she ended on a whisper.

“The Dracon?”

“Not all the Dracon. Just you, your brothers and Lucas. It’s as if last

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night cast a spell over me. It sounds stupid, I know. But I can't—"

"Relax, Lea. It's not stupid at all. And you're the most honest, open woman I've ever known. That's what I lo—" He coughed. "Like about you." He smiled and she smiled with him, relieved he wouldn't be judgmental.

"Lea, when we talked before, you told me you knew about the Dracons' greatest vulnerability, its monarchy."

She nodded.

"We hide our king and his family from humanity for that reason. Didn't it strike you as odd that our history is so muted, so obviously lacking concerning our leadership?"

"I did think it strange. But it was just one more mystery on top of so many. Like the fact that very few of the clan are firebreathers. And then I saw you do it at my house. You breathed fire, and you took me for a ride in the sky." A memory she would never in her life forget.

"Lea." Ferin sounded tentative, and his lack of assurance alerted her to pay attention. "The Dracons are a fiercely possessive and, at times, territorial race. We enjoy life's pleasures, sex being a major part of our enjoyment. But a Dracon doesn't share his female the way I shared you last night."

"I know I'm different. I'm human." She couldn't help the stiffness of her reply. Damn it, did he have to rub in their differences?

"No, no. What I'm trying to say is that you're special. You, Lea..." He paused, seeming troubled.

Did he regret last night? Much as she should have, she couldn't.

"You bonded with us, in a relationship that will know an emotion deeper and greater than any human or common Dracon will ever know."

"But how is that possible? I'm human. And the bond you're talking about sounds awfully like a mating bond." Shaking her head, she tried to make sense of it all. "With you and your brothers? Does that include

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Lucas too?” This was unreal. What the hell was Ferin saying?

“No, it doesn’t include Lucas, or my brothers.” His mouth flattened in irritation. “It does now, but not...Never mind, Lea. We can talk about specifics later. I’m just trying to tell you that you’re special, and it has nothing to do with your being human. It’s about who you are inside.”

Lea stared, her heart bursting, her mind filled with confusion and an absurd hope. For months Ferin Dekker had been following her, trying to know more about her. And while she’d passed off his interest as something more devious, the dreamer inside her had spun visions of happily ever after with a Dracon “prince,” a world of love and affection and magic all rolled into one.

And now Ferin was telling her exactly what she wanted to hear. *And won’t your family be thrilled for you? That same family who only a week ago jailed a Dracon without due process, and all for stealing a treasure rightfully belonging to his family.* She paled, remembering all that she’d left behind. *And what about S. M. Ryans? Don’t forget, they want “him” silenced.*

She stared at Ferin, trying to figure the truth.

He sighed, as if sensing her bewilderment. “Lea, just try to keep an open mind, hmm? No one here wants to harm you, far from it. You’re my guest, under my protection, and I’d like to spend some time just getting to know you. Like I said before. Will you allow me that?”

“Okay,” she said slowly, wondering just what he wasn’t telling her. This enigmatic Dracon, the one who owned several corporations and who lived in a freaking castle, had a reputation as a ladies’ man and as a ruthless opponent who never shied from, or lost, a challenge. But this *man* staring at her so earnestly seemed a far cry from the cold-blooded dragon of rumor and speculation.

His warm smile lit up the room, and he lifted her to her feet for a crushing hug.

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“Ferin, I can’t breathe,” she gasped, chuckling.

“Sorry.” He quickly unhandled her and piled a plate with food. “Eat, Draka, and we’ll have that tour I know you’ll want to see. Imagine having such access to the Dracon, twenty-four seven.”

She smiled wryly. “My inner Ryans is all abuzz. I admit I’m more than curious, but how long do you think you can keep me here?”

His eyes glittered, and she felt a strange rush of emotion both foreign and oddly, masculine. A dragon cried in the distance, and then all was quiet. “Eat, Draka, and I’ll think on your question. After all, how powerful is the dragon who cannot hold onto his treasure?”

Lea sipped some orange juice and stared at him. “Draka? Why do you keep calling me that? It means ‘my queen,’ doesn’t it?”

“I thought you didn’t speak Drac.”

“I don’t. But I’ve caught a few phrases, here and there, from translations.”

“Oh, yes, from your relative’s journals. I’m sure she mentioned we’re an affectionate people. And we love pet names as much as humans do.” He pursed his lips, thoughtful, but as she stared at him, she could too easily recall the feel of such velvety steel on her body, her mouth, her neck. She rubbed absently at the small bruise marking her flesh, and noted his satisfied nod.

“Thanks,” she muttered.

“My pleasure. And anytime you’d like to return the favor, *Draka*, feel free,” he said thickly, his eyes lowering to her breasts.

She cleared her throat and stood, aware that if she didn’t soon get out of here, she’d likely jump him across the table. But apparently, the decision had been taken out of her hands, for his brothers and Lucas suddenly strode through the door, the look in their eyes all she needed to know.

CHAPTER 6

In seconds they'd returned to Ferin's bedroom.

"Lea," Ferin said with a hungry grin. "I know I just had you, but you do something to me. To us. We need to be inside you again. Now."

Lea couldn't help feeling flattered. The Dekker brothers would have made any woman, or man for that matter, drool. All tall and broad shouldered, with shoulder length black hair and obsidian eyes. Their faces had character—high cheekbones and strong noses, a sculpted jaw and chin, and smiles that could melt a girl's heart. To think of keeping Ferin, or hell, all of them...it made her want to shout with sheer joy.

"Are you sure Lucas won't get jealous if Adrian spends too much time with me?" she teased, completely at ease with her newfound sexuality as she'd never before been.

Ferin grinned. "Lucas and Adrian love one another, deeply. That commitment from one male to another cannot be troubled by another's attention. For that reason, Adrian cares not for Lucas' girlfriends. And

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Lucas wants only to please us, to please you, Draka.”

“He has the right of it.” Lucas nodded.

“Yes, he does,” Adrian agreed, sharing a kiss with Lucas before turning to face her again.

Before she could say anything more, Ferin stopped her next comment with a soul-shattering kiss. His hands stole beneath her shirt, molding her breasts to his palms.

“You feel so good against me. Like a brushfire lighting my every breath.”

“Ferin,” she gasped, wanting more. Her body craved his, more than she could say. And the feel of the others’ eyes on her only stoked her desire higher, and hotter.

Glancing over his shoulder, she noted Matthias suddenly naked and aroused.

“Share, Brother. You two are killing us.”

Lea saw Adrian also naked, his cock thick and erect, his biceps bulging as he clenched his fists.

“Go on.” Ferin nudged her to his brothers. “Take pleasure in this gift. And never question what you feel, Lea. You’ve bonded with the Dracon now. You’re one of us. Lead with your heart.”

She nodded absently, her arousal growing as she noticed the heat in his brothers’ eyes, flaming with deep, red hunger.

“Come here,” Adrian growled, pulling her to him when she neared. Matthias stood at her back, taking her clothing off while Adrian kissed her, hard.

With him there was no finesse, just raw, hungry need. And the intensity of his desire fueled her own. His tongue brushed hers, licking at the cavern of her mouth with bold strokes. And when his cock pressed against the skin of her belly, she knew this was right.

Matthias’ hands reached around her to cup her breasts, flicking her nipples until she gasped.

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“Matthias, please.” Please what, she didn’t know. But she needed more, needed to fill the emptiness in her womb.

Spreading her thighs, he dipped one hand between her legs and thrust into her moist heat. But Adrian would not wait.

“Move, Matthias. She’s ready now.”

Matthias removed his hand and returned to her breasts, kneading the taut flesh while he pressed his cock between her buttocks, rocking lightly.

“Take her then, and hurry. I need to feel her, to feel you, Lea. I need to fuck that tight pussy,” he rasped, holding her up as Adrian wrapped her legs around his waist. And when Adrian shoved himself inside her, she leaned back against Matthias, reveling in the belonging and desire she felt from the males loving her so generously.

* * *

“She’s good, isn’t she?” Lucas murmured in Ferin’s ear, startling him that he hadn’t heard Lucas move.

“Very.” He hungrily watched as his brothers loved his mate, taking her to places where she, too, could fly. “I take it all is well in the castle?”

“I surveyed the grounds this morning. The Dracon are pleased with your mate. She feels too right to take exception to her humanity. Emmaline, however, is going to be a problem.”

“Emmaline?” Ferin kept his voice low, not wanting to interfere with Lea’s pleasure. “What has your girlfriend to do with this?” He briefly recalled an unsatisfying bout of sex with her months ago, one in which she demanded he beat her to increase her pleasure. Fortunately, his brothers had taken her off his hands and then Lucas had begun fucking her on a steady basis.

“She still pines for the throne.” Lucas’ palm settled on Ferin’s waist as the big man subtly put himself at Ferin’s back. “The only reason I took her was to keep an eye on her.”

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Ferin drew in a breath when Lucas began rubbing himself against his ass. "Not to mention the sex."

"She's not bad. But not as good as any of us in here."

Catching him by surprise, Lucas quickly reached into Ferin's trousers and wrapped a hand around his cock. Just as Adrian climaxed, Lucas squeezed hard, making Ferin want inside Lea with deep longing.

"Soon, my king. Let me ready you, hmm?" Lucas breathed, and easily undressed himself and Ferin. Then he stood as before, behind Ferin with his hand around Ferin's turgid cock. Wiping his fingers through Ferin's slit, Lucas hissed his pleasure and pressed his cock between Ferin's cheeks.

"Damn it, Adrian was right. You're a tease," Ferin whispered harshly, pressing back into Lucas' crotch while he watched Matthias push Lea to her hands and knees as he mounted her from behind.

The position enabled Lea to watch Ferin, and he shot Matthias a grim smile of thanks, thoroughly frustrated by Lucas.

"Watch Ferin, Lea, but think of me," Matthias groaned as he penetrated her pussy.

The slapping sounds of flesh against flesh stirred Ferin anew, and with no small relief he felt Lucas nudge his thighs wider.

"Grip the table in front of you and bend over," Lucas ordered harshly, caught up in the spell. "I'm going to fuck you, Ferin, while your pretty little mate gets her pussy fucked as well. And you're going to love it, aren't you?"

Lucas got off on dominance, and Ferin was more than happy to let him while he watched Lea and Matthias screw.

"Just do it, you bastard."

Lucas chuckled and paused, greasing his shaft with lube from a small vial. When he pushed, the pain of intrusion was more than pleasurable. His massive girth stretched Ferin wide, particularly so as Ferin had been a while without a man's hard cock. But he welcomed

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every thrust and grip on his shaft as he watched his brother ride Lea to another orgasm.

Matthias cried out and stilled, and Ferin knew his brother had reached his peak.

“Don’t come,” Lucas rasped as he rammed particularly hard. He loosened his hand and gripped Ferin’s hips. “Save it for her pretty little ass.”

With another push, Lucas climaxed, his fingers clenching hard enough to leave bruises. “Fuck, you’re good, Ferin.”

Ferin grunted, feeling painfully hard. “Later you’re going to pay for teasing me.” He pulled away from Lucas with his eyes fixed to Lea’s panting, flushed face.

“My turn,” he murmured when she licked her lips. “No, love. Not your mouth. Not yet. I’ve something waiting for me.”

She stopped him by reaching for his thigh. Instead of moving for his cock, however, she ran a hand around and between his legs, swiping the cum dripping down his leg. She slid it between her ass cheeks, as he’d imagined doing to her, and waited, watching him for a reaction.

Fire raced through his body, and she smiled, a siren knowing her power. Without another word, he knelt behind her and positioned his cock at the welcoming pink rosette of her anus. He rubbed the moisture dripping between her thighs onto his fingers and pushed in, slowly, gently, until he was past her sphincter.

“Shit, Lea, you’re so tight,” he groaned, the pleasure of her surrounding warmth making him lightheaded. Out of the corner of his eye he noted Adrian and Matthias taking Lucas on, using him on his hands and knees while one fucked his mouth, the other his ass. “See how good an ass fuck can be.”

She glanced up and shuddered, and he felt her desire as she wiggled against his fingers.

He added another, pushing in and out, until she was slick and

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stretched.

“This will sting a bit. Get used to me,” he growled, his control nearly shattered at the overwhelming sexuality flooding the room. He sent her several images of how she looked and felt to him, completely beyond words.

Then he was penetrating, seating himself within her tight, slick sheath. She mewed her resistance before groaning her welcome. And as his brothers fucked Lucas, he fucked his mate, taking her virgin ass as he’d taken her pussy. With long, deep stokes he buried himself within her time and time again.

The others growled. The Dracon shrieked within his mind as he pushed her into climax and surged with one final stoke into heaven.

Shuddering, he spewed, great heaping jets of cum that splashed into her ass and down her legs. And still he came, his love, his desire so great it flowed in every Dracon’s mind. Visions of color, of the future, stole through his mind’s eye.

When finally he caught his breath, he found his brothers and Lucas staring at him wide-eyed. Lea lay limply beneath him, her breathing scattered, her pulse racing.

“Holy shit, Ferin. You touched every Dracon across the country!” Adrian said in Drac, sitting in Lucas’ strong arms and looking dazed.

“I wonder that you didn’t sire a dragon this day,” Lucas murmured in kind.

“I came in her ass,” Ferin said stupidly.

“But you’re continuing the bonding, Ferin, The seed goes as it’s meant.” Matthias gave him a sly grin. “Ass, pussy, mouth. You can impregnate your Draka in any way, as long as your seed speeds true.”

Ferin couldn’t catch his breath. He knew, deep down, what Matthias said had merit. And because he’d just seen stars and much, much more during his orgasm, he realized fatherhood was pending, either this day or the next time he made love with his queen. Whether he and Lea were

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ready for it or not.

* * *

When Lea could again catch her breath, she realized the others had quickly left her and Ferin alone. Good lord, but those Dracon knew how to fuck. She flushed at the internal use of such language, and laughed at herself. Ferin hugged her to him tightly, murmuring softly in Drac. He stroked her hair tenderly, his hands warming her cooling body to an unbelievably sexual heat...*again*.

Hell, was this what he'd meant about bonding? That she'd become insatiable for sex, with four men or one? She needed to think about all he'd told her before losing her mind, and her body, in his again. Good lord, had he turned her into a nympho or what?

"How about that tour, Ferin? *Now*."

He grunted his assent, and after a short shower and another set of clean clothing, she and he walked together, hand in hand, through his home.

For the most part, the first few hours were pleasant.

The castle, Lea noted, must have housed at least a hundred people. Much more than Ferin's home, this place seemed a bustling center of activity. They'd walked over the parapets and through the keep—his fortified, structured "inner castle," as she liked to think of it. They now stood in a central greenhouse, a large garden surrounded by a waterfall and small creek bed, all glassed in by thick, unbreakable, Dracon-fire enforced glass. Staring around her, Lea couldn't help feeling like she'd landed in Neverland. Funny, but she wouldn't have attributed the Dracon to an aboveground existence.

Oh, she knew the clan needed flight like they needed breath, but from what she'd gathered in her notes, the Dracon preferred underground dwellings, like the "lair" of old. From truth myths sprouted. Hundreds of years ago, the Dracon had lived in large caves and underground cities. There they could guard their treasures,

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anything from gold to jewels...to food? She'd never found an exact translation for "treasure" in Drac, and had sensed the treasure had more to do with a Dracon's individual tastes than an overall object, *per se*.

Glancing at Ferin out of the corner of his eye as he spoke with some rough-looking males, she wondered what he would safeguard most.

Thus far in their tour, she'd seen several professional offices tucked inside the castle's walls. For all that this monstrosity looked like something out of the Middle Ages, it had all the amenities of home. Running water, electricity, cable, satellite, any and all modern conveniences, and then some. Obviously Ferin's purported wealth was more than true and, just as obviously, he poured most of it into his home and the people within it.

Though she'd not seen another human around, she thought there might have been one or two. It wasn't unusual for a few Dracon here and there to take a human to bed. She blushed, focusing on the rose garden sitting in front of her. She knew other passing Dracon stared at her with interest, but not one of them had approached her. And she knew she had Ferin to thank for that.

The one small bit of unpleasantness during her tour had come in the form of an incredibly sensual, exotic female Dracon. Dark-haired and, of course, dark-eyed, she'd stared after Ferin as if she owned him. She'd been touch-feely with Lea's lover, and completely dismissive of Lea in a way that made Lea want to stomp the woman into the ground and kick her until she bled.

Lea blinked, the violent images both foreign and disturbingly...welcome? Quickly dousing the odd burst of jealousy, she looked to Ferin, and her heart did that funny dip that made her shiver with desire. *Good lord, I must be in heat.* He winked at her and turned back to his rapt audience.

The males he talked with nodded their heads in deference before walking away. And once again, Lea had the feeling she was missing

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something. Everyone treated Ferin with respect, admiration, and a hint of...deference? Almost like a king, she thought absently, sharpening as the idea struck. Was that it? Could Ferin indeed be the king of all Dracon?

Three more people approached him, two women in business suits looking serious, and a third man, an older gentleman, wearing a wide, welcoming smile. All three looked like your average, everyday citizens...if everyday citizens were uncommonly attractive, and possessed black irises around black, luminescent pupils. The older man laughed aloud and slapped Ferin on the back, glancing at Lea as he did so. Then he smiled warmly.

Ferin, king? She shook her head, feeling silly. The Dracon kings she'd read about were older, more serious, and decidedly stodgier than Ferin appeared. Despite last night being their first true encounter, she'd kept her ears and eyes open whenever his name was mentioned. And she'd never heard of him as anything other than a successful businessman and playboy. Yet here, he seemed nothing farther from the truth.

He'd not flirted or met any women today with anything but polite familiarity. And though he had enough money to own this place, he didn't act like the lord of the manor. Instead, he seemed like everyone else. Just another Dracon living with his peers, working his way through life, *who just happened to have a human lover*.

She flushed, and leaned close to smell a blood-red rose.

"Hello, my dear. You must be Lea." The older man to whom Ferin had been speaking sat next to her on the stone bench and held out a hand. His face was lined with character, still tanned from a lifetime of flying close to the sun, with thin, curling lips, a patrician nose, and blunt chin. Cropped silver hair hugged his scalp, thick and lustrous even in age, and he remained impressively tall, like the others of his kind. Long, graceful fingers that might have belonged to a much

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younger Dracon grasped her hand in a firm, but gentle hold.

“Yes, hello.”

“My name is Shino Tailstak. And I’ve been a good friend of Ferin and his family for ages.”

Lea smiled. He looked close to seventy, and though Dracon aged at a similar rate to humans, there were a few here and there that lived to almost two hundred years. Perhaps Shino was one. “It’s nice to meet you. I’ve been touring the castle. It’s a fascinating place.”

Shino chuckled. “I hope the boy’s been keeping you warm enough. Though most of the buildings are interconnected, a few can only be reached by venturing outside.”

“He’s been more than considerate.”

For a moment she thought she saw calculation darken his eyes, but he blinked and grinned, and she chalked it up to an overactive imagination.

“The Ferin I know has always been a responsible, hardworking individual. A wonderful Dracon and leader.” Shino started when a hand settled over his shoulder. “Ferin.” He smiled, glancing up. “We were just talking about you.”

“Yes. Shino was listing all of your positive attributes.”

A sudden image of Ferin making love to her rose in her mind, and she blinked, realizing he’d put it there.

“Ah, Shino. A good man.” Ferin grinned. “Well, we’ve been walking for several hours, Lea. Why don’t we break for lunch. Shino, I’ll see you later this afternoon. We’ll hit those merger reports then.”

Shino nodded and stood. Leaning down, he reached for Lea’s hand again. “It was a pleasure, Lea. Hopefully, I’ll see you again.”

She stood as well. “Thank you, Shino. And you, too.”

Shino walked away, leaving Ferin and Lea alone in the middle of the garden.

“So, trying to find out more about me?” Ferin teased.

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She rolled her eyes. "Please. I sat down and Shino arrived, singing your praises. I will agree, though, that you're a great host. I've learned more about the Dracon in this one short morning than I did all of last year perusing volumes upon volumes."

"For example?" he asked lazily.

"For example, I didn't know it was possible to still live like a feudal lord, but with computers and the Internet."

He grinned. "We have no serfs, and no knights or lords. Remember, Draka, knights and dragons didn't often get along. And the castle, well, it won't burn, and as firebreathers, several of us have need of fortified housing."

"Right." She'd almost forgotten that fact. "But a castle? And so many people here. I'd always thought of the Dracon as solitary. But you seem so communal. What does everyone here do?"

"A little of everything. We like to be self-sustaining. So we have an agricultural branch, a financial branch, of which I'm the head. Several of our members excel in crafts, and our trade sect does wonderfully downtown. In fact, we have a very profitable shop on Battery Park."

"Not Lost Arts?"

"That's us."

"Wow. I like that place. I've actually bought some things there. So all of the pottery, clothes and crafts are made by the Dracon?"

He nodded. "We pretty much do everything here. Like I said, I'm in charge of the financial, but there's so much more to running this place than money."

"No kidding." She stared at the blooming roses, awash in the sensation of community. "It seems almost too good to be true. Like you're all just one big happy family."

He snorted. "Every family has their struggles. And not all of my 'brothers and sisters' here are happy."

"Oh?"

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“Nothing to worry about. Just the same old he-said-she-said things. I have a few items to take care of later, but nothing worth bothering over.” His eyes heated. “In fact, there’s a particular craving I can’t get enough of lately.”

She flushed and, that easily, her libido raced with want. Just as she rose to meet him, Matthias rounded a bend in the garden, his eyes glowing.

“Could I have a word with you two?”

Lea glanced from him to Ferin, wondering at the odd undercurrent. Matthias seemed to be asking for something more.

Ferin nodded, and they walked quickly, following Matthias. They entered one of the nearest doors and Matthias shocked her, ripping her from Ferin’s arms. Lea caught a glimpse of Ferin shutting the door behind them, of a queen-sized bed and nightstand, a small, violet room with a decidedly feminine feel, and then Matthias was kissing the breath from her.

CHAPTER 7

I'm sorry, Ferin. But you were projecting too loudly. Don't worry, I'll be quick about it.

Ferin huffed, amused. *Be very glad we've not fully bonded yet, brother. Because I'm feeling decidedly mellow in sharing my mate.. But for all that, I'm as stiff as a pike, and not wanting to wait overly long.*

I'm willing to share if you are. By the fire, this morsel can kiss like a true Draka. Matthias moaned and deepened the kiss, his hands claspings Lea's buttocks, pulling her into his arousal. *Fuck. I want her now.*

Ferin watched, greedily, as Matthias exposed more and more of Lea's pale, smooth skin. Lea writhed and moaned, caught in the sensual web of a royal Dracon bond. He grinned to himself, glad he had only two brothers. He was, in fact, surprised not to see Adrian as well, but figured Lucas had his brother in hand. Just as his little Draka had Matthias in her hands.

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And speaking of hands...Lea had hers pressed between her and Matthias, and Ferin angled for a better look. Everything Lea did had a sensual edge, as if her burgeoning passion simmered too close to the surface to be buried beneath the secret and scholarly S. M. Ryans.

"Oh, Lea," Matthias gasped, groaning. "More, stroke it harder."

Her fists pumped his brother's shaft, his arousal gleaming like a wet kiss over her hands. Matthias kissed her again, his hands cupping and rubbing over her breasts, those full breasts that pouted with desire.

Ferin grew harder and shed his clothing, noting that Matthias, in his haste, had not. His jeans were parted, Lea's clever hands taunting his brother to distraction. And then Matthias had her on the bed, her legs spread wide as he thrust into her. Ferin thought it a most erotic scene. Lea's head back, her lips parted in sensual surrender while his beloved brother, Matthias, parted her flesh with his body, the physical essence of his soul.

The Dracon around them listened in wonder as joy lit the room, his future Draka projecting her pleasure clearly, surprising Ferin that she could reach them at all, let alone via a dragon's link. The knowledge of her mental acuity only made him desire her that much more, and he reached for his cock, ready and needy.

Matthias continued to plunge, his grunts and straining sounding in Lea, as the two raced for a heady climax. Matthias shouted and tensed, his frame shuddering as he spilled within Lea's vessel, and then she too cried out, clenching his brother fast.

On the verge of pain, Ferin's arousal needed an outlet. Matthias glanced up, wiping a sweaty brow, and grinned with satisfaction. "She's ready for you now, brother."

Ferin grunted and moved painfully into position, showing Lea what he wanted while Matthias helped her to rise.

On her hands and knees on the bed, she met Ferin as he knelt before her, placing his turgid cock at her lips.

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“Open for me, Draka. Suckle me. Give me the release I crave,” he growled, his eyes glinting as dragon sight took over. He could feel the need to change, to fly and scorch the earth with his fire. The primal desire to mate consumed him and, as Lea took him inside and began laving him with her tongue, he couldn’t help the flowing Drac that poured from him.

“Love me, little flame, drink of my nectar, and take me into your womb. With my seed, grow new life, and perpetuate the line. And feel the hungers, the needs, of your new people, your kind, the Dracon.”

Her mouth grew hotter, his shaft thicker, as he began to pump in earnest, no longer able to keep his thrusts gentle and short. But Lea accommodated him easily, and soon had him gasping as she massaged his balls, her fingers gliding over the velvety sack before she eased her fingers between his cheeks toward his anus. When one finger and then another probed the puckered hole, he saw stars, his breath coming in fits and rasps.

And when she sucked hard and penetrated him without warning, he shot deeply, his soul merging with hers in an unending cacophony of ecstasy. On and on he pulsed, and as his hungers were abated, so, too, were they stoked.

He could hear the Dracon swelling with him, within his mind. And he rejoiced in the completeness of their joining. He could feel Matthias’ love mingling with his, could still sense Adrian and Lucas’ seed within her, swimming in her blood through her skin. And the magical transformation of the Draka had begun.

His eyes swam as he realized the truth in what had just happened, in what he had not meant to happen just yet. He had found and begun the next step of the bonding with the other half of his heart. And she still didn’t know what she meant to him. Nor did he know how she really felt.

“I think you ought to tell her soon,” Matthias drawled in Drac,

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sounding almost sleepy. “Before she begins breathing fire, that is.”

* * *

Lucas closed his eyes in bliss, no doubt basking in the pleasure streaking through him and every other Dracon around the planet. Emmaline Tailstak did her best to ignore it, though, too annoyed to revel in the sensual feelings coursing through her blood.

“So you don’t want me any longer.” Emmaline stared at Lucas with narrowed eyes. The bastard. Who was he to sever ties with her, the Dracon destined to be queen?

“Honey, it’s not that I don’t want you. But I have responsibilities to the kingdom.”

“You mean to those bitches Sherel and Moira?” At his wince, she sneered. “By the treasure, you didn’t think I knew? Hell, Lucas, you fuck like a Dracon put out to stud. I knew you were seeing other women. But be honest. It’s that stupid human that’s distracting you. That rotting piece of meat.”

Lucas’ stare grew decidedly cooler. “That ‘stupid human’ is the king’s future Draka, so take care not to offend. And she, like Ferin, is under my protection. Should anything happen to her, I would be most displeased.”

The red fire in his eyes simultaneously enraged and aroused her. The strongest and largest Dracon in the land, Lucas could crush her with one hand. But for all his strength, the brute had never once put a bruise on her. And she’d done her level best to entice him.

She stilled, suddenly realizing what else Lucas had said. “Future Draka?”

He smiled through his teeth. “Yes. She’s already queen. She just doesn’t know it yet. Surely you felt the mountain shake under the joining last night?”

She had been too busy fucking Moira to notice, but she said nothing.

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“If that’s all then...”

“But Lucas, we can still be friends, can’t we?” She ran her fingernails down his chest, peeved when he only stared at her. She had to maintain this link to Ferin. Without Lucas, she’d be out of some vital information, making it that much harder to gain her rightful seat beside the king. And she hated to go to her other source. He was so damned *moral*, so righteous.

“Emmaline, I have to go.”

“I’ll be quick, Lucas. I promise.”

His eyes narrowed in irritation, and when his hands found her shoulders to put her from him, she quickly knelt. She had him out of his trousers and in her hands in a heartbeat. And his thickening shaft told her he wouldn’t resist.

“Come on, Lucas. We can still be friends, can’t we?”

He stared down at her, his fist in her hair, and paused. She blew a hot breath over him, waiting. With a muttered curse, he drew her head to his erection.

She watched him as she took his cock in her mouth and began sucking. He stared at her, assessing her while taking what pleasure she gave. The bastard. So distrustful when he had a willing woman on her knees sucking him deep. Though irritated, the supreme arrogance of the hardened warrior turned her on, and soon she was moaning with her own pleasure as she licked and stroked his thick shaft.

“That’s it, baby. Rub the head. Ah, yeah. Your tongue...”

She wanted badly to touch herself, but kept her hands on his balls and the base of his cock, not wanting to let him go. She controlled the pace. She decided how much pressure to give or not give. And when she nipped at the sensitive spot under his crown, she reveled in his shiver.

Unfortunately, Lucas remained careful with his power, thrusting lightly into her mouth. Displeased, she sucked him deep and fondled

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his balls, squeezing harder. He growled a warning and pushed deeper, touching the back of her throat. Pleased, she raked her teeth lightly around his cock and triumphed when he cursed and tensed, jets of cum sliding down her throat.

Once he finished, he withdrew from her lips and tucked himself back in his trousers. Then he jerked her to her feet and hauled her to her floor length mirror.

“Okay, baby. You want it, too, don’t you? Watch yourself while I fingerfuck you.”

She made as if to protest, secretly pleased when he shoved his hand under her dress and sought her wet pussy.

“So wet. You just love my cum, don’t you Emmaline?” He thrust a finger deep inside her, making her arch into him. “No, don’t close your eyes. Watch the mirror.”

She moaned and stared at them, at her petite frame being invaded by a much larger, stronger Dracon. The sight stirred her like no other. Being dominated aroused her, and the one time she and Ferin had played such games, she’d fallen in instant love. Of course, then the king had pawned her off on his brothers and Lucas, like no more than a plaything. And she’d known she had her work cut out for her.

“Pay attention, Emma.”

She hated when he called her that, and the cruel twist to his lips knew it. He thrust another finger into her pussy while his thumb rode her clit.

“Do you love my cum, Emma? Do you like sucking my cock?”

His fingers rode her hard, the calluses and thickness of his digits almost as satisfying as his shaft.

“I love your cock,” she whimpered as he held her on the verge of climax.

“Yes, you do. And just so you know, you can’t lead me around by it, baby. I fucked you because I wanted to. Not out of any desperation.”

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He laughed and rubbed her clit harder, almost bruising, and she came.

He watched her with calculation and leaned closer to whisper in her ear. "I watched the king fuck his Draka. And trust me, that woman has no competition when it comes to Ferin. She's his, Emma. His only."

He withdrew his fingers while she panted with repletion, and wiped his hand on her dress. "Remember, anything happens to Lea or the royal family, and the offender deals with me." He blew a cold breath in her face, a warning reminder that icebreathers could wreak as much havoc as their firebreathing brethren.

"Oh, Lucas, I was just teasing earlier."

He shook his head and left, not even a good-bye, or heaven forbid, a thank you. She rubbed her thighs together, taking cold comfort that she'd at least managed to rile the large Dracon, and started to make new plans.

Obviously Lucas was taken with the human bitch, and that most likely meant Ferin was as well. No matter. Once she was gone, Emmaline would regain favor with Ferin and his brothers. It would require some careful maneuvering, but she had the right connections to resume her rightful place. And ridding the clan of an interfering human would be an enticing bonus. Of that she had no doubt.

* * *

In three days spent at the castle, Lea had never before seen so many dragons up close and in one place. High above the castle they flew, bursts of green, red and gold soaring through the air. And on the ground many Dracon remained in dragon form, no doubt basking in the safety of this place, where dragons and Dracon mingled freely, without fear of capture.

Though several laws remained in place about the illegality of dragon poaching, too many humans cared little for the law, only for the incredible money to be made selling dragon bone and hide. Watching the dragons dance through the air, Lea couldn't believe anyone would

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want to destroy such magnificence.

“They’re showing off for you.” Ferin took her hand and led her into the main hall, where many of his people gathered daily to eat and spend time with one another. The fare had a delicate, though sharp, bite, dishes of meat laced with tangy spices and a lot of green vegetables. Surprisingly, she also noted the mounds of fruit on nearby tables.

“Ferin, I didn’t realize the Dracon liked fruit so much.”

He blinked at her in surprise, then looked away, as if uncomfortable.

“Ferin?”

“It’s another clan secret, Lea. Another one you’re worming out of me as I show you the castle and the Dracon within. Dare I trust you with it?” he asked jokingly, but the hard stare behind his words made her think twice before answering.

In the time she’d been here, she’d been wined and dined, and loved nearly to death. Aside from Ferin’s constant loving, Matthias had again taken her by complete surprise again yesterday, not to mention the forays with Adrian last night. Lucas remained to be seen, but Ferin had told her he was busy with security issues. Yet for all that the five of them hadn’t repeated their earlier coming together, Lea didn’t mind. She’d loved every minute with the Dracon and their free sexuality. But her alone times with Ferin meant more to her than anything.

Despite their short span together, Lea couldn’t help feeling so close to Ferin. He constantly watched her, paid her every courtesy, and treated her like a true treasure. And she loved seeing him around his kind. The hard man she’d grown accustomed to in town gave way to a more relaxed, tolerant man. And he was a man, of that she was sure. Despite his ability to change into a dragon, Ferin had the foibles and needs that she and everyone she knew shared.

The time she spent with him seemed to be eroding his mental safeguards. When he looked at her, she felt overwhelming need and

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affection, mixed with a sorrowful loneliness, which made no sense. Here he was, richer than Midas, surrounded by friends and family who loved him. And she'd seen plenty of instances in the past few days to verify that love. She sniffed. To her disdain, Emmaline had intruded on them *again* today, all smiles as she batted her thick, sooty eyelashes. Ferin, to his credit, had been friendly, but not overly so, and introduced the witch to Lea.

Shocked to find the vampy Emmaline daughter to Shino, Lea had done her best to be pleasant, inwardly wanting to punch the woman's lights out. Too bad the Dracon had superior strength and endurance when compared with humans... Which made Lea's marathon sexual acrobatics all the more puzzling.

"Lea?" Ferin frowned at her, and she realized he'd been waiting for an answer to his question. "I can trust you, can't I?"

She wanted to say, "Of course you can," but from a Venlay, "of course" might not be enough. Lea took a deep breath, searching inside herself for the right words.

"Ferin, though I wasn't exactly keen on leaving my house, and my *ruined* study," she reminded him, still determined to find out who had destroyed her chair. "And although you kidnapped me and stole not only my clothes, but my research material, I'm not mad at you...anymore." She grinned at his pique, thinking how boyishly cute he looked when annoyed, as compared to devastatingly handsome when in a charming mood.

"Glad to know."

"I can't tell you how much these past days have meant to me. Not as a researcher, but for me, personally. I've dreamt of dragons for so long, it's as if they've always been a part of me." His stare sharpened, and she hoped he believed her. She'd never been more honest in her life. "I've never agreed with my family, or should I say, my brothers and my father's side of the family. My mother and sister just love you,"

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she muttered, still not pleased with Cora's "Ferin infatuation."

"Oh?" He lit up, and she scowled. "*Oh.*"

"I was saying how much these past few days have meant to me," she gritted, not amused at the mirth glowing in his eyes. "You've shown me a world of magic, of dragons and the Dracon, and such incredible, almost unreal loving."

She blushed, not sure she should have described it as "loving" considering they'd had raw sex. Yet at times Ferin had felt so tender, so caring, and in her eyes, they'd made love every time. As carnal, as erotic and wild as it had been, their interactions had been full of emotion, at least on her end.

"Yes, loving," he murmured, as if reading her mind.

"So bottom line," she said quickly, aware she'd probably said too much. "Is that yes, you can trust me. I could never write about what I've learned here, about the royal line or anything potentially damaging to the Dracon." She swallowed around a tight throat. "If anything ever happened to harm the Dracon because of something I said or wrote, I don't think I could handle it."

Ferin took her face in his hands, his look so intense she couldn't breathe. "Lea, you, I..." He stared hard, then blinked and exhaled heavily. "We're addicted to sweets. Apples in particular are a weakness. And they've been used in the past to lure many a dragon from his treasure, especially if they're drizzled in honey."

Lea stared into his eyes, conscious he hadn't finished what he'd started to say. She could feel his hesitation, could sense he wanted to tell her something, but didn't know how. But she felt it wrong to intrude, so remained mute, hoping he would trust her as she now trusted him.

"Lea, there's something I should have told you." He paused, looking around him, and seeing the nearly empty room continued. "There are lines drawn to protect the Dracon, boundaries we don't

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cross. But with you, nothing seems off-limits. I've wanted to tell you for a while, but things kept interfering. The time has come, however, for you to know. You see, I'm—"

"Lea, how nice to see you again." Shino approached with a smile, then stopped. "Oh, my lor—Ferin, I'm sorry. Am I interrupting?"

Ferin sighed. "No, Shino. Please, stay. I've got to meet with Lucas about a security matter anyway and I'm already late. Would you mind keeping Lea company for a while?"

Shino nodded, his eyes sparkling. "It would be my pleasure. Please, Ferin, don't let me keep you."

Lea waved goodbye to her lover, wishing Shino hadn't spotted them. What had Ferin been about to say?

"So what do you think of the compound thus far in your stay here?" Shino asked pleasantly.

"It's incredible. Like a well-oiled machine, a corporation of family and friends rather than business associates." Lea puzzled over the matter. "Yet they all live here, with Ferin. I'd heard about Ferin's stature among the business community, but never could have imagined how he lived."

Shino chuckled. "Yes. The Dracon have changed much over the years, but our sense of community, of oneness, hasn't dimmed."

She caught the speculative look he gave her and asked a bold question. "So does it bother you then that I'm here? A human with such an important man like Ferin?"

"Not at all." He smiled, his grin sincere, yet Lea sensed something else in his eyes. A not altogether welcoming feeling. "Many years ago I might have felt differently. I'm sorry to say, I didn't get along well with your father."

"You knew my dad?"

"We ran into each other now and then. A stubborn man, your father."

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She shook her head and smiled. “‘Stubborn.’ You’re being nice.” Her father had hated the Dracon, and she could only imagine he’d been less than pleasant in his encounters with Shino. At least her brothers tempered their dislike with a sense of fairness. Though they stepped outside their bounds and involved themselves in Dracon law, they’d never actually condemned an innocent Dracon...that she knew of. Frowning, she tried to change the subject.

“I think I met your daughter yesterday.” A she-devil with eyes on Ferin. “A very beautiful woman.”

Shino smiled. “Emmaline works in logistics for Dekker Enterprises. Looks just like her mother did at that age. Ah, my Rowena was a veritable beauty with brains to match. I was heartbroken when she passed, but I still see her in Emmaline every day.”

Why the hell had she brought up his daughter? Jealousy seethed through her. “That’s nice, being able to work with your family. I’ve worked for Venlay House for the last few years. I like knowing my mom is so near.”

“Yes. Though my family and the Dekkers aren’t related by blood, we’ve been friends for generations.” He paused, regret shining in his dark eyes. “It was a shame what happened all those years ago. Meredith Venlay was reportedly a wonderful woman who loved the king very much.”

She stared surprised. “Oh? What do you know about that?”

“What everyone knows, I suppose. It’s part of our history. It’s rumored that in the king’s chambers a portrait of Meredith still hangs to this day. You should have Ferin show you.”

“Ferin? He has access to the king’s chambers?”

“Of course he does.” Shino looked confused, then uncomfortable. He coughed. “Well, he is an important man around here. But talk of our king isn’t exactly public, especially not with outsiders—no offense, Lea. We consider our monarchy sacred, a topic of conversation only to

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those with Dracon blood. Honestly though, the power wielded among our clan is an internal thing, nothing to concern humanity in the slightest.”

“Less political and more ceremonial?” she offered, knowing the truth—that the Dracon couldn’t exist without the royal line intact.

“Exactly.” Shino seemed relieved. “But I’ve monopolized this discussion with dour topics. What say I show you a special place I’m sure Ferin’s avoided?”

She stood with him and moved to a large door leading to the outside. “Why would he avoid it, whatever ‘it’ is?”

“Because no man can resist showering a beautiful woman with jewels.” Shino’s eyes twinkled. “Come, and let’s view what we like to call The Hoard.”

Ten very cold minutes later, they entered a warm, overlarge stone chamber set apart from the main keep. Several worktables lined the area, and each was covered in gemstone. Rubies, emeralds and sapphires gleamed under halogen lights recessed in the ceiling, while a raging fire blazed in the hearth at the far end of the room. Two men sat working, both inordinately tall yet slender for their species, each possessing large, graceful hands.

“Amazing,” Lea breathed, causing the men to smile as they worked on the stones with nimble fingers.

“We procure our stones from several Dracon mines, particularly those in South Africa, Australia and Burma,” the one closest to her said. “But we’ve also begun digging deeper into our mines here in North Carolina.”

He held out a ruby he’d been polishing. “This one in particular came from deposits found in Franklin, North Carolina. The stone is actually called corundum.”

“Corundum?”

He nodded. “Sapphires and rubies are both varieties of corundum,

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and all the colors of corundum are called Sapphire but one—the red corundum we call rubies.” He handed the stone to her.

Surprisingly, it heated in her palm, and she felt a burst of fire spread though her body. She handed the gem back quickly and murmured her thanks, bemused at the quiet satisfaction in the jeweler’s eyes.

Shino too had become somewhat subdued. “We appreciate the small lesson,” he said with a forced smile.

“It was my pleasure, Shino. Draka.” The man nodded his head and returned to his work.

Embarrassed to be referred to as “my queen,” Lea quickly exited the room. Someone must have overheard Ferin calling her that, and now everyone seemed in on the joke but her...and Shino. He seemed upset, and she took him by the arm as they walked back toward the main dining hall.

“I’m sorry,” she said quietly, not sure why she felt the need to apologize.

Shino shook his head. “No, Lea. Forgive me. My people have a wry sense of humor not everyone understands. I’m sure Darin meant no harm by the little nickname.” He paused. “Does Ferin call you that?”

She blushed. “He does.” She laughed. “Much nicer than what I’ve called him in the past, I can tell you that.”

Joking with Shino as they returned to the hall, she answered his interested questions about Venlay House and her sister’s newest exhibits. Before she realized it, an hour had passed.

“I love the work your family showcases. I’m an avid collector myself and have been meaning to stop by.”

“Oh, do. I usually work evenings during the week. You’re more than welcome.”

Shino smiled and patted her hand before standing. “Now, my dear, I’d best return to my job before Ferin starts swinging that big stick of his.”

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“Thanks for keeping me company.”

“It was my pleasure.” He turned to see Lucas bearing down on them. “Oh good, Lucas is here. Perfect timing. Until we meet again.” He bowed and left her, ignoring the curious look on Lucas’ face.

CHAPTER 8

When Shino found Emmaline, he had to force himself not to walk away in disgust. Through the open doorway of her office, he spied the ignorant girl bent over her desk being pleased by her secretary. He quickly turned his back and closed the door, cringing at the cries and moans ringing in the other room.

Waiting impatiently in the empty outer office, he wondered how it was he'd been saddled with such a lascivious little witch. Her mother had been ten times the woman his daughter had turned out to be. With sad remembrance, he envisioned Rowena's loveliness, her worth as a woman befitting a queen's destiny. That he, Shino Tailstak, had won her heart had never failed to amaze him. And he'd never taken her for granted. But to have spawned such a lacking child.... It hurt him to think Emmaline was all he had left of Rowena.

The secretary entered the outer office and gave him a smug smile. She licked her lips and creased back her long, blond hair. Common

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bitch, he thought with a snarl. He strode past her and slammed the door behind him.

“Damn it, Emmaline. Can’t you at least keep your door shut for these impromptu fucks?”

“Really, Father. Such language from an elder. Most unbecoming.” Emmaline looked sexually sated, her eyes slumberous, her lips moist. And for a moment, Shino questioned his motives concerning Ferin’s choice of mate. He stared hard at his daughter. Could this woman ever truly be queen? Then he saw a spark of uncanny intelligence, a flash of Rowena in his only child, and remained firm.

“It’s serious, Emmaline. Lea Venlay held a star ruby in her palm, and it blazed.”

Emmaline straightened. “Well, well, the little slut’s turning, is she? Becoming a real Dracon after all. I wouldn’t have thought the human capable of containing dragon fire. I guess what Lucas told me is true then. Ferin actually thinks to mate with a human.”

“Perhaps he does, but he still doesn’t trust her enough to tell her who he really is.”

“What? That he’s king?” Emmaline’s eyes glittered with malice. “That’s interesting, Father. And something we can indeed use to our advantage. If she hasn’t fully turned yet and *somehow* learns how much her lover distrusts her, we might be rid of her before the bonding cements. Humans have such fragile emotions, after all. An easy and hands-free disposal if she leaves of her own free will.”

Shino stared. “Very clever, daughter. And blameless.” Much as he felt distaste about moving against his king’s wishes, his motives were pure, he told himself. The continuation of a true, *pure* Dracon bloodline. And though his daughter spoke with such disdain toward Lea, she had at least suggested a bloodless form of retribution. A savvy idea, and one worthy of a future politician and leader. Perhaps there was more to Emmaline than the pursuit of the next great orgasm. He

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could only hope. "I left Lea in the main commons. With Lucas."

Emmaline stood. "Don't worry, Father. After I'm through with her, she'll want Ferin's balls for lunch. And not in a good way."

* * *

"What did Shino have to say?"

Lea stared at Lucas, conscious she hadn't seen him much at all since their night together several days ago. Tall and broad, with muscles that bulged beneath his black mock turtleneck and loose black slacks, he looked every inch an enforcer. He stared after Shino's retreating form, his gaze cold. But when he glanced back at her, those same eyes warmed with appreciation.

"Shino kept me company while you and Ferin had your security powwow. He showed me where several of your jewelers are fast creating some wonderful, and *expensive*, pieces."

Lucas grinned, though the sight of his smile did nothing to lessen the aura of danger surrounding him. "Gotta love those sapphires."

"I'm partial to rubies, actually."

He cocked his head, studying her. "Not a great surprise there. A ruby is a stone of flame. And you're just full of fire, aren't you, Draka? From that dark red hair to the flames burning within you." He leaned down to whisper, "And I long to feel those flames licking at my body. It's not fair Ferin should have all the fun."

She flushed but couldn't contain a smile at his teasing. His eyes sparkled and he opened his mouth to say more, when suddenly he froze.

"Fuck me," he muttered.

Lea glanced over her shoulder to see two Dracon women standing together, their arms crossed, glaring at Lucas. Both were blond and rather busty, and both looked at Lucas like a piece of meat they wanted to slow roast before devouring whole.

"Seems you're a popular man today, Lucas."

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He sighed. "Women. You people are enough to drive a man to drink. Heavily." The blondes approached, their hips swaying to the beat of angered female. "It would be too much to ask that they'd take this conversation somewhere private."

"You have a lot of nerve, Lucas," one of the women said, tears in her eyes.

"What Sherel said goes for me too. I couldn't believe it when we found out about Emmaline."

Lucas frowned. "Sherel, Moira, I'd think you'd know better than to listen to anything Emmaline has to say."

Sherel glared and wiped at her eyes. "I'd think you'd have better taste than to lie with that slut." She glanced down at Lea, as if seeing her for the first time. "Is this your next conquest?" she sneered. "She's prettier than Emmaline, but so human."

Moira clapped a hand over her friend's mouth. "Lucas, perhaps we could take this conversation somewhere else? I doubt *Ferin's friend* wants to hear about our dirty little secrets." She stared hard at Sherel, who glanced from Moira to Lea and back again. Paling, she nodded furiously.

"Yes, yes. I'm sorry, uh, Draka. I hadn't realized who you were. My mistake." She nodded respectfully, nearly bowing, and confused the hell out of Lea.

"Ah, sure. Feel free to tear a strip off of Lucas in private. I mean really, Lucas, Emmaline?" Even Lea found it hard to stomach the idea of Lucas with that nasty woman, Shino's daughter, who'd only yesterday tried to steal Ferin away.

Lucas glared at Lea and muttered for her to stay put. He grabbed Sherel and Moira by the arm and dragged them a good distance away, to the far, empty corner of the common room.

Several minutes passed where Lea could hear nothing but hushed whispers and muffled crying. Much as she liked Lucas, she had to

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shake her head. “Never lie to a woman you’re sleeping with, Lucas.”

“Good advice. Too bad you’re too naïve to understand it yourself.”

“Excuse me?” Lea turned to see Emmaline standing behind her.

Joining her at the small table without being asked, Emmaline sat and crossed her long legs. Leaning forward, her breasts strained at the thin material of her scooped blouse. For all that the woman had mounds of sex appeal and an unearthly beauty, the frosted hostility in her inky gaze warned one to tread carefully in her presence.

“Your precious Ferin, who fucks like a *king*, has a well of secrets he’s yet to share with you.” Emmaline’s eyes danced. “Did he hold you down when he shoved that cock deep? Did he twist and burn you, marking you with his fire?”

Lea tried to ignore the sudden images searing her brain, of this bitchy woman having sex with *her* Ferin. Jealous possession slowly consumed her, even as she fought the strange and scary sensation.

“He’s really very good, even without his brothers as an encore. But when you add Lucas to the mix, it’s heavenly, isn’t it, Lea?” Emmaline snorted and leaned back, her eyes wandering over Lea with speculation. “You’re pretty enough. That red hair is so dark, and those lighter highlights work for you. They real, or dyed? Then again, who the hell really cares?” she asked in mock cheer.

“While you’re basking under so much attention, you’re oblivious to the fact that Ferin lies to you all the time he’s spreading those legs.” Emmaline licked her lips. “Not that I fault him. I’ll bet you taste as sweet as you look.”

Great. Not only was Emmaline a bitch, she was a bitch in heat. The thought of this woman having her hands anywhere on Lea’s body made her want to gag. But she kept her emotions buried and stared at the Dracon.

“Cut the crap, Emmaline. I know you’re jealous, and you have every right to be.” Righteous anger poured through Lea, and she

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eagerly let it out. “He’s mine,” she growled, her throaty voice alarming. But the rage building within her felt too good to suppress. “You’re weak, vain and selfish. And I bet it must really eat at you that Ferin chose a human over you.”

Emmaline’s eyes glinted, a rainbow of color that sparkled like onyx. “You little bitch. I’m telling you the truth. You don’t deserve Ferin, and you’ll never have him to yourself. He’ll never trust you, never really love you. He fucks like a king, dear girl, because he *is* a king.” She waited, watching for a reaction.

Though stunned, Lea knew the notion Ferin might be king made sense. All the respect, the discreet nods that were in actuality bows, and the sheer confidence Ferin carried with him all added up to an idea she’d been resisting. Because if Ferin were king, and he kept calling her Draka... Both excitement and nerves tangled inside her. But aware Emmaline watched her like a hawk, Lea did her level best to push this revelation to the back of her mind and lied for all she was worth.

“*That’s* your big secret? Ferin told me the day we arrived, but asked me to keep quiet about it. Apparently, I satisfy him much better than you ever did. Must be my superior human genetics.” And boy, did that burn her to even think of Emmaline with Ferin. He had a hell of a lot to answer for—Emmaline, being king, and calling Lea *his queen* without letting her know what the bonding between them had really meant.

Despite Lea’s inner confusion, the stupefied look on Emmaline’s face was worth it. “Think what you want, Lea Venlay. But Ferin is meant for more than a human. And your family is as much an enemy to the Dracon as you are. Enjoy him while you can. Because you’ll never see your day as his queen. Not in this lifetime.”

“Do tell. Oh, but wait, Emmaline. Here comes Lucas. Maybe we should share this conversation with him, see what he thinks?”

Emmaline flushed, glaring from her to Lucas and calculating her odds. “I’ll talk to you later. If you’re still around, that is.”

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“You do that.” Oddly enough, Lea felt no threat from the Dracon. A powerful fury roiled in her belly, a hunger for satisfaction that blazed with fiery need. And when she gazed on Emmaline, she could easily envision surrounding the witch with queenly fire, decimating her enemy.

Emmaline swore and raced for the door behind her.

“Lea,” Lucas said, holding her by the shoulder as she stared at Emmaline’s retreat. “What did she—” He swore when he looked at her and took a step back, his eyes wide. “You’re a little annoyed, I take it?”

Lea shook her head, trying to make sense of the anger consuming her. Ferin was hers, by right and by bond. And if that bitch thought she could come between them, she had another thing coming. Lea felt hot, hotter yet stronger than she’d ever felt in her life.

“Lea? Lea?” Lucas’ calm slowly penetrated the fog of rage clouding her thoughts, and she blinked into his concerned gaze. “There you are.” He exhaled heavily. “Why don’t we see Ferin now. I think it’s time you and he had a good talk.”

“Yes, why don’t we?” she said pleasantly, trying to figure out how best to deal with this situation.

Lucas said little as they walked through the keep, while Lea’s mind raced. *Think, remember what you know about the Dracon, and what Reem’s text said.* The king needed a queen to continue the Dracon line. And once they bonded—no, mated—and she was impregnated, the species would flourish until the next Dracon king ascended the throne and found his mate.

But the mating...she had no idea what that actually entailed. For a Dracon to mate with his own made sense, since he’d need to sire young. But humans and Dracon weren’t fertile together from what she’d read. So how the hell could she be the next queen? Moreover, how did everyone seem to know about it? Lucas’ girlfriends, the jeweler, and several other Dracon she’d bypassed while staying here

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had called her Draka.

Why hadn't Ferin told her? She remembered how he'd looked at her, tenderly, affectionately. And the way he touched her. With reverence, with love.... He'd been trying to tell her something important before Shino had interrupted them. Had that been it?

The more she thought about it, the more she leaned toward that explanation. Which meant he accepted her, truly wanted her, as his mate. From all that she'd read, a king chose his future wife not out of necessity or duty, but for nothing less than love.

She stopped suddenly, understanding making her lightheaded. *Holy crap.* Ferin meant for them to wed, which meant she, Lea Venlay, aka S. M. Ryans, would be living with the royal family. In an ancient Dracon keep. In the arms of her family's "enemy."

Shit.

"Lea? Everything okay?"

"Fine, Lucas. Fine. Let's find Ferin."

She ignored his curiosity and followed him toward Ferin's room at the top of the keep. Lucas knocked once and opened the door upon Ferin's "Enter."

"Lea." Ferin stood and crossed the room, giving her a soft kiss. He must have read the turmoil within her for he frowned. "Lucas, would you give us a moment?"

"Good luck," he muttered to Ferin and left in a blur of speed.

Ferin stared down at Lea, his hair mussed as if he'd been running his fingers through it. She noted a mountain of paperwork on a nearby desk, and wondered how stressed he might be feeling about everything. Financial advisor, ha. Ferin Dekker ruled the Dracon, and on his shoulders sat the responsibility for their future. And now, apparently, their future also sat on her shoulders.

"What's wrong, honey?"

She stared at him, seeing the worry, the compassion, the love. *The*

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evasion. Dammit, why was it so hard for him to simply tell her what she wanted to know?

“Why does everyone keep calling me Draka?” There. She’d blurted it out.

“This bothers you?”

Again he avoided her answer, and she grew more irritated. If he meant for them to live together, to actually coexist as king and queen—her heart raced at the chance of a lifetime with the man she couldn’t help loving—he would need to understand how to communicate better.

Staring up at him, she reached out and traced his lips with a finger, and that quickly, his eyes flared with desire.

It was there she found her answer. In the bedroom, Ferin was never anything but honest. Perhaps she could teach him a lesson he wouldn’t soon forget. And in the process, cement the bond growing between them.

“I’m feeling neglected, Ferin,” she said softly, running her hands over his chest. His heart raced and she smiled, reveling in her sensual power. This would be easier than she’d thought. “I think you owe me an apology, don’t you?”

“At once, Draka.” He leaned forward to kiss her, but she stilled him.

“I was thinking we could do it my way. Send for Lucas.”

His brows rose, but within seconds Lucas knocked and entered the room.

“You communicate mentally with one another, don’t you?” she asked, stroking his chest.

“Yes, we do,” he rasped, and she could feel his erection burning against the intentional brush of her hands.

“Good. Then he probably told you I’m a little irritated about Emmaline.”

“Emmaline?” He frowned.

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“Lucas failed to mention her? Shame on you, Lucas.” Lucas shrugged uncomfortably, caught in both Lea’s and Ferin’s displeasure. “And not only for failing to tell Ferin about her, but for sleeping with her at all. That’s one nasty woman.”

Ferin swallowed audibly when she palmed his erection, pushing against him. “Which is to say nothing about how I’m feeling toward you, *my king*,” she whispered darkly.

“Ah, Lea, you don’t understand—”

“Oh, but I do. You like to keep secrets. And Lucas likes to help you. So now Lucas can help you explain something for me.”

“Oh?” Lucas shifted, crossing his arms over his chest.

“From all that I’ve read, a Draka and the king rule jointly over the Dracon. Punishments are swift but fair.”

“True.”

“Then if the queen ordered you to do something, you would have to obey her?”

Lucas’ eyes glinted as they met with Ferin’s. “As long as it caused no harm to the king or his brothers, yes.”

“Undress his highness.”

Ferin blinked. “Lea?”

Lucas hid a grin that Lea saw and she smiled, pleased at his acceptance. “Yes, Draka.”

Ferin stood docilely, growling under his breath at Lucas, who appeared to ignore him.

“But don’t rush on my account,” Lea said, deliberately projecting an image to Lucas that made the man’s eyes widen. He literally shivered, and Lea realized that between her arrival here and today, she had definitely changed, in more than her mindset.

She could feel an internal fire that felt alien, yet familiar. As if Ferin had breathed new Dracon life into her, perhaps with their mating, she could now sense other Dracons around her and project her thoughts

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through images if she tried hard enough.

Ferin stared hard at her, his arousal evident, and groaned when Lucas took his time over his shirt, brushing against his nipples. “Just take it off, Lucas. Quit playing.”

But Lucas took his direction seriously, sucking and nipping at Ferin’s nipples as Lea envisioned it in her mind. Then his hands slid down Ferin’s abdomen to unsnap his trousers, and slowly, ever so slowly, slid them down.

Bending to removed his king’s shoes, socks and trousers, Lucas came close to Ferin’s impressive cock. His lips whispered over the head before avoiding the area altogether.

“Come here, Draka,” Ferin rasped, nodding arrogantly at her. “I’ve got something for you.”

“Oh, no, my king. I have something for you.” She slowly removed her clothing piece by piece while Lucas did the same. And when they all stood naked together, she nodded to Lucas. “Come here, protector. No, Ferin. You stay there. And watch.”

Ferin growled but did as she bade, and watched as Lucas towered over her. Lea reached up and pulled Lucas’ head down, kissing him slowly and with a zeal that lit her inner desires. Lucas’s cock was large and hot, and pressed against her belly it made her want to grind herself against him. But as she glanced over at Ferin and saw the frustrated desire in his eyes, she forced herself to remain in control.

“Watch, Ferin, while I show Lucas how I want him to pleasure you.”

She dropped to her knees and cupped Lucas with gentle hands. The man hissed and began thundering in Drac when she took him in her mouth. He was so large she couldn’t take him too deep, but then her mouth began to tingle and her jaws widened, taking him all the way in. His balls smacked her chin as she pushed and pulled him in and out, her hands on his hips.

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“By the fire,” Ferin breathed. “I want inside you right now.”

She paused and slowly let Lucas fall from her mouth, his cock moist with her saliva and his own desire. Standing, she reached for Lucas’ hand and pressed it between her thighs. “Use this,” she whispered to him, unable to resist riding his fingers as he began plunging them inside her.

“Such a wet little pussy,” Lucas murmured, his voice thick with need. “So empty.”

“Not for long.” She smiled, and mentally showed him again what she wanted.

He groaned and left her, unwillingly, and grabbed Ferin’s arms, twisting them behind his back.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Ferin roared and his eyes flashed.

“He’s merely following my orders,” Lea purred, completely caught up in the sensual game they played. She felt on fire, her body urging her to take what Ferin offered. His shaft looked so hard, so flushed and full he might burst. And the hungry anger burning through his gaze told her he’d been pushed. But not hard enough.

“I think we have some communication issues to clear up, Ferin. And since this is the only place you’ve been completely honest with me, we’ll start here. Now.” She walked up to him and kissed his chest, rubbing herself against him. “You taste so good. So, rich.”

“Lea, I meant to tell you before—”

“Before the entire castle told me who you are? Or before Emmaline described how good you are in bed?”

He had the grace to wince, and Lucas tightened his grip. At her internal demand, he nudged Ferin’s thighs wider and settled his hard cock between his ass cheeks.

“Lucas,” Ferin growled.

“No, Ferin,” Lea interrupted. “I want you to focus on me. Lucas is just helping me to better understand you, right Lucas?”

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“Yes, Draka,” Lucas said with a humbleness not in keeping with his hard-ass reputation.

Ferin tried to turn to see Lucas’ expression, but Lea wouldn’t let him.

“No, Ferin. I think you need to learn a lesson or two about communication. Lucas, tie him up tight, using that creative contraption there in the corner. Hmm, Ferin. You’re kinkier than I’d thought. How...interesting.”

CHAPTER 9

Ferin groaned with pleasure watching his Draka touch herself. Tied as he was to the standing cross beams, his wrists manacled above his head, his ankles bound fast and spread wide, he was exposed and vulnerable—a position in which he'd normally put Lucas or one of his past paramours.

But Lea now used it to bind him, keeping him both helpless and frustrated as he watched her rubbing her nipples into stiff points, watched as Lucas bent in front of her to lick that delectable pussy.

Ferin was so hard he wanted to cry out, his need to come growing more and more acute. His cock wept, his balls tightened under his shaft and his asshole flexed, needing to be filled. Damn, but he'd never seen anything sexier than Lea being pleased. The closet hedonist was writhing against Lucas' lips as his friend held her steady, eating her until she came and gushed over his mouth.

And all the while Lea watched him, her slumberous brown eyes

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glowing with an internal fire only his Draka would wear.

Pleasure and pride filled his heart, and when she nodded at Lucas and approached, it was all he could do not to rip free from his bonds and shift into dragon form, taking her in his most primitive, animalistic state.

“Lucas showed me how much you like to taste me.” She put her fingers between her legs and withdrew them, running her wetness over his cock. Then she put her fingers to his lips and he sucked them dry, his desire fierce.

“I need to be inside you, Lea. Open those legs for me. Your mouth, your ass, your pussy. I need you, Draka.”

“Yes, you do. But more than that, you need to realize how good we can be together, working as one.”

“Baby, I—”

He tensed to feel rough hands prying his cheeks apart. In his haste to convince Lea to love him, he’d lost sight of Lucas.

“You’re tight, my king,” Lucas rumbled, his finger large as it penetrated his hole.

Ferin panted, his body accepting the intrusion all too eagerly.

“Tell me how you feel when he does that,” Lea whispered in his ear, her tongue darting into the cavern, making what little blood he had left in his head rush to his balls.

Lucas added another finger, and Ferin clenched the steel holding his wrists. “Shit, Lucas. Just do it already.”

“Ferin,” Lea prodded, and encircled his shaft. She began to pump him, and in his excitement he told her everything she wanted to know.

“It feels good, so incredibly pleasurable when Lucas touches inside me. Almost as good as when I’m fucking you, my queen.” He gasped and groaned, pushing against Lea’s grip when Lucas shoved those fingers deeper. “You make me so hard, so fucking crazy to pour inside you. I want to come in you deep, showering you with my seed.”

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He rocked against Lucas' hands, and wanted to shout with frustration when Lucas suddenly vanished.

"I need some lube," Lucas said as he circled around. Lifting Lea forward, he positioned himself behind her and eased inside her body. The bliss on his face as he fucked Ferin's mate began to burn. For the first time since Ferin had shared her, he began to feel the telltale possessiveness of his kind.

"Good, Ferin. You're cementing the bond," Lucas growled, pistoning his hips. He stared into his friend's eyes, the rainbow shine of pleasure glittering like gems in his gaze. "She's so fucking good for you." He reached around to rub her clit, and as Lea's pleasure increased, she tightened her hold on Ferin's cock.

He drew higher and higher, coming closer to the orgasm threatening to break free. And then Lucas let Lea go, and she dropped Ferin from her hands.

"Lucas, I'm going to flay you into little pieces if you don't—"

His words were cut off as Lucas thrust hard and deep inside his ass. The feeling of penetration suddenly increased tenfold as wet warmth engulfed his cock. Ferin glanced down to see Lea sucking him, fondling and stimulating him anew while Lucas grunted and pounded into him from behind.

The pressure on the pleasure spot deep in his ass magnified, and when Lucas thrust again and shouted, coming hard, Lea sucked him deeper and tightened her hold on his balls.

Visions of Lea, of small children with her face and his eyes, of a future filled with flying dragons and love and laughter, whipped through Ferin like a jolt of electricity, and he came so hard he saw stars. His sphincter contracted around Lucas' cock, making the man groan as he came again. Lea swallowed thick, ropy cream as Ferin continued to come, his love, his essence, pouring out of him into the woman of his affections.

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"I love you so much," he said on a sigh, thrusting into her mouth again. "My dragon queen."

Lucas gripped him when his knees threatened to buckle, and without being aware of it, he felt himself carried gently to his bed. He dimly watched as Lea kissed Lucas before he left with his clothes in hand.

Lea joined him on the bed and leaned over him with a sober expression. "You do realize you've committed yourself to a human, from a family who doesn't like you very much, and who will most likely not be able to have children."

He smiled sleepily and stroked a hand over her breast, bemused when her nipple hardened like a little pebble. Pulling her down, he latched onto her breast and sucked the nub until she squirmed.

"Should I leave you in frustration, love? Like you did me earlier?"

"Ferin," she gasped, "that's not fair. You—"

"Shh, and sit over my face. I've got to taste you."

She quickly straddled his mouth, and rocked over him as he tongued and teased her into a quick orgasm. Still stated from his incredible climax, Ferin felt his cock harden, but hadn't the energy to make good on his body's demands.

"I don't know how you keep doing this to me," she breathed and collapsed against him. "I feel like I'm in heat around you."

"You are." He kissed her gaping mouth closed. "And in case I failed to explain things properly, you're my queen, we're now thoroughly mated, and I love you beyond words."

Her eyes filled. "I love you, too. But I have some doubts as to how this is going to work. I'm already late getting home, and my family is no doubt going crazy trying to find me."

Hearing her say she loved him made him happier than he'd ever been in his life. "Lea, that you love me is enough. And since I've been accused of not properly communicating with my beloved, let me also

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say, you're much less human than you used to be."

She stared, confused. "What are you talking about? Humans and Dracon are separate species. You can't transform one into the other."

"Oh, yes, you can. If you're the king, that is, and the woman you love is human."

She gaped.

"And not to totally shock you, but even now my seed swims in your belly. We've just made a baby." The satisfaction saying that afforded knew no bounds. He'd found his mate, and he'd gotten her pregnant with his child. The Dracon rejoiced, and his heart found heaven.

"But, you didn't come inside me."

"I did."

"In my mouth." She blushed, and he found it charming that after seducing him to mindless need, she could still feel embarrassed by talk of sex.

"For a Dracon, the seed goes as it's meant. Mouth, ass, pussy, wherever and whenever." He cupped her mound, sliding his fingers inside her. "But for the record, this is what I love most about your body."

"And my mind?" she said breathlessly.

"I love your strength and your ability to accept."

Lea curled into him, and though his body wanted more of her wet and willing channel, he felt as much comfort as arousal in holding her.

"Then let's pray my family will be as forgiving. I love you, Ferin. But I love them too. Be patient with them, okay?"

He groaned. "I suppose I'll have to be. They'll be here tomorrow for the wedding. Your mother and sister, and your brothers. Oh, and your Uncle Rick. The other Venlays refused to attend. So your family's presence here will be small."

"Wedding? Here? Tomorrow? I don't remember even being asked."

He laughed at her pique and quickly soothed her anger with a soul-

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stealing kiss. “Will you marry me and bear my sons, oh love of my life?”

She punched him in the arm, a twinkle in her eyes. “Well, I suppose so. Yes,” she said on a laugh as he tickled her. “How could I resist my very own fairytale come to life?” She paused. “Did you say sons?”

“There are three of them growing even now within you. But don’t worry. You’ll have the hang of transformation and breathing fire before then. And I’m sorry to say you’ll need it. Dracon young are a handful.”

She didn’t speak, merely stared at him in shock. And he held her tight, promising a future his people had been waiting for the past three decades.

* * *

“You’ve made a mistake, Lucas.”

Emmaline alternately whimpered and snapped at Lucas as she fought the guards throwing her from the castle. She’d been banished to the Greenland site not only for her traitorous attempt to sever the royal bond, but for her plans to poison Lea at the wedding banquet the following day.

Shino was beyond furious. “I’m so sorry, Lucas. She certainly is not the daughter I once knew.”

“You bastard!” she shrieked. “You don’t like her any more than I do. You want her out. She’s dirt, scum. She’s *human*.”

Shino shook his head sadly, aware Lucas watched his every move. “Emmaline, my every concern has always and ever been about our people. I’m an old Dracon, but even I can see that the time for change is now. Our king loves a human, a woman who has brought the Dracon new life. She betters us, my dear. I’m only sorry you couldn’t let Ferin go. You’d never have made a proper queen anyway. Too hungry all the time.”

“You can say that again,” Lucas murmured. He nodded and the others hauled her away. “I’m sorry, Shino. I know that had to be hard.

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But our new Draka must remain as calm as possible for the next twenty-four months.”

“What do you mean?” Had Lea somehow stalled the transformation? And if so, did he have the heart to finish what Emmaline had started? A true Dracon might eventually sit on the throne, and hopefully give birth to new young. As it was, no new Dracon had been born in over twenty years. The future queen *had* to lead the way.

“Lea’s carrying, Shino. Surely you heard the joyous news last eve?”

“Carrying?” Shino swayed, shocked and suddenly exhausted. All of his schemes, his plans to rebuild the clan came to a halt. As much as he disliked the humans, he would never, ever, harm the royal bloodline. And if Lea was indeed carrying Ferin’s young, she was no doubt his true mate. Hell, they’d barely had time to bond and already she was pregnant?

Just like his time with Rowena, he thought, and jolted to realize the truth. Love, no matter in what class, form or gender, existed as meant. Rowena would never have wanted her daughter to behave as she had. Nor would she have wanted him to encourage such behavior. He reddened with shame. Lea wasn’t a bad human—far from it. She’d seemed to like all she saw while here. And her intelligence, not to mention obvious attraction, would only serve the Dracon better.

“Shino, are you feeling unwell?” Lucas practically carried him to a nearby bench.

“Lucas, I think I’m feeling better than I have in ages.” He wiped away a surprising tear. “So she’s carrying, eh? Already?”

“Yes.” Lucas spoke with pride, and Shino could see she’d already won his trust. “According to Ferin, she carries three sons. Future firebreathers.”

“By the fire.” Three more to carry the Dracon into tomorrow. “Do you think she’d be averse to a visit from a humble old man?”

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“She’d probably welcome it.” Lucas snorted. “Her family’s here, currently battling with Adrian and Matthias while Ferin tries to play peacemaker.”

Shino frowned. “She shouldn’t be around that at all. Her seedlings need time to root inside her womb. Has her family no care for her then?”

“She won’t let Ferin tell them she’s carrying yet. ‘One shock at a time,’ she said.”

Shino stood, new life surging through his blood. He could almost hear Rowena’s triumphant cry as the Dekkers’ oldest protector reclaimed his purpose. “Enough time has passed with all this feuding nonsense between the Dracon and the Venlays. Take me to them, Lucas. And let *me* smooth the way.”

Lucas grinned and led him into the visitor’s wing.

* * *

Lea stared, unhappy. Her mother and sister were overjoyed by the match. Though if Cora touched Ferin’s arm one more time she might snap her sister’s hand off. She breathed hard and felt a burst of steam leave her nose.

The bane of her existence, David and Blane and Uncle Rick, stared at her in shock.

“Holy shit, Lea. Your eyes are red!”

“And you’re blowing smoke,” David rasped. “What the hell did they do to you?”

Shino entered at that moment, followed by a smugly grinning Lucas. Ferin sighed, muttering under his breath.

“*Enough*. You three, come with me. The time’s come to set the record straight. A little shared history between the Venlays and Dracon is long overdue.”

Lea blinked in surprise as mild-mannered Shino took control with a snap of his fingers. Her brothers and uncle followed slowly, but with

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determined strides as they left the room.

“Don’t worry, Draka. Shino’s going to tell them what they should have known long before now,” Lucas offered.

“That both the Dracon and a *Venlay* poisoned Gran Meredith,” Lea’s mother said quietly, shocking them all.

“You knew?” Ferin asked.

Her mother nodded. “So did Lea’s father. But that stubborn fool refused to see reason, or to ever tell the rest of the family the truth. My sons only cling to the hatred for the Dracon because Rick and his brothers continually pressure them to ‘show respect’ for their father’s last wishes.” Gina Venlay paused. “Complete bullshit.”

Cora and Lea gasped. “*Mom.*”

“Well, it is. Meredith never wanted anything but to love Stowan. But her family and his had issues with it. We’re no Romeo and Juliet waiting to happen.” Her mother shook her head with the stubbornness Lea often associated with her brothers. “I’m sorry, Ferin, Matthias, and Adrian, for having let this bigotry continue for so long. Don’t worry, Lea. Between me and your friend Shino, everything will be perfect for your wedding.”

“Which is today,” Cora murmured under her breath. “Neat trick. Where did you find a dress in so short a time? You’ve been holding out about Ferin haven’t you?” Cora flushed. “Oh, and I told you all about his hot body. Lea, you should have said something.”

Ferin had a devilish glint in his eyes. “Hot body?”

Cora blushed again, and her mother laughed.

“Have I mentioned how fondly I’ve always held the *Venlay* women?” Ferin smiled, his grin positively lethal. “Such beauty and wisdom, and such incredible artistic talent.”

Cora smiled prettily, stealing Matthias’ attention. Lea blinked in surprise. Now that she and Ferin were expecting, his brothers had no need to take a mate. They could if they desired, and the way Lucas and

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Adrian constantly looked at one another, she assumed the two would declare themselves in the near future. But now Matthias was making eyes at her baby sister...hmm.

"You just make sure you treat my girl right," Gina Venlay demanded. "And I want to be here when the babies are born."

"How do you know?" Lea stared at her mother in awe.

"Adrian whispered it the moment we arrived. I have to say, two years is a long time to be pregnant. And with triplets. But don't worry, honey. I'll be here for you."

"And so will I," Cora said, her cheeks rosy as she tried hard not to stare at Matthias.

He grinned. "We'll ready a few rooms for you, for whenever you'd like to visit."

Lea's heart felt full, near to bursting. And later, when her mulish brothers and uncle returned with a beaming Shino in tow, she laughed with sheer joy. A flutter of gladness settled in her belly, and she knew her sons felt her happiness as well.

"How did I get so lucky?" she asked Ferin, who hugged her tight, kissing her mouth leisurely.

"She gets Ferin, this castle, and a ruby the size of a mountain," Cora shrieked. "Look at that, Mom! It's huge."

Ferin took an aster ruby from Lucas and placed it in Lea's hands. "You hold in your hands my heart, my love, and our future. Accept this symbol of my affection, and wear it forever close to your heart. I love you, my treasure."

Lea sniffed and pulled the golden chain holding the ruby over her head. "I love you too, Ferin. You've made my dreams come true."

"Even if it means foregoing your side business?" he asked, his voice low but serious.

Sighing, Lea snuggled into him. "Oh, I'm sure that part of me's not done yet. But I'm thinking more along the lines of some Dracon

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romance. The nonfiction side of me has had it's due. Now it's time for some all-out fantasy."

He grinned and mentally shared several more interesting positions they'd try as soon as their mating ceremony, their formal joining in front of her family and the Dracon, finished.

"I'll definitely have to make it an erotic romance," she whispered, struggling not to show her family how aroused Ferin was making her. "Cut it out."

Lucas and her future brothers-in-law stifled laughter.

"What?" she asked, a bit peeved.

"The stone around your neck is on fire, my treasure," Ferin explained with a grin. "The moment I met you, I knew you'd be a real firebreather."

Her mother laughed. "Funny, Ferin. But that's what we used to call her as a young girl. She had such a temper with all that red hair. Our little firebreather."

Lea pictured her first transformation, wondering what her family would think of it. She glanced at her brothers, who had begun to settle down. Blane winked at her, then returned to looking fierce as he studied Ferin.

David, however, gave Adrian a second, confused look. Adrian's glance, by contrast, showed interest and more than a little attraction—causing Lucas to glare and Matthias to laugh. And she couldn't help her own glee.

"Firebreather, hmm? Then do I have something to show you, Mom..."

MARIE HARTE

Marie Harte is an avid reader who loves all things paranormal and futuristic. Reading romances since she was twelve, she fell in love with the warmth of first passion and knew writing was her calling. Twenty-two years later, the Marine Corps, a foray through Information Technology, a husband and four kids, and her dream has finally come true. Marie lives in Georgia with her family and loves hearing from readers.

For more information about Marie, you can visit her website:

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* * *

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