

House of Moons 3: The Slave
Kara Fey

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Chapter One

“You’re naked, and the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. You glare at me as I chain your hands above you and your ankles apart. I wrap black silk around your eyes. Your pussy opens when I force you to your knees. You beg me not to touch you, but I do. I shove my cock into your mouth until I’m deep in your throat. I watch you suck me in the wall mirror until I come. Then I play with your pussy until I’m hard again and you’re sobbing. You’re totally exposed and dripping wet when I kneel behind you. I rub your cunt and ass with warm cinna oil and slide three fingers inside you. I twist your nipple with my free hand. I leave my fingers inside you and pump my cock into your ass. You’re so fucking tight, I think I’m gonna die. I slam into you so hard I lift you off the floor. Over and over. I last a really long time. Your tits are bouncing. Your head’s thrown back in surrender. I watch in the mirror while you scream for more. Beg for more...”

Not fucking likely. Chains and an ass ride were not her idea of a good time. But she was the Slave Empress. Every man’s fantasy come to life -- for an exorbitant price. She wouldn’t disappoint this one, either. Memories of their night together would be more vivid, more real than anything he’d ever truly experience. And it would all be an illusion, a dream born of magic.

A memory implant.

The man at her feet continued to speak, was under compulsion to tell her his darkest desires. Try as she might to pay attention, so the correct memories would be embedded, her mind continually wandered. Time was running out. Her cousin Zira’s murderer was here. She could *feel* his presence. After four moons of setting the trap, of openly enticing him and his insidious sexual appetites, he’d finally arrived on Tantra-9. The Slaver Station. None set foot in this section of space unless they bought, sold, or were for sale themselves. Playing here was a very dangerous game. One wrong move and she wouldn’t be *pretending* to be a slave.

Heavy breathing brought her back to the present. The man before her was sweating and spent, in more ways than one. A soft laugh escaped her when she saw the proof of his exertions had landed on the floor at the tip of her white silk slipper. Sweat ran down his temples and meandered through the smattering of dark hair on his muscular chest. Men. They were surprisingly simple creatures, with an astonishing array of perversions. None of which she ever cared to indulge. Once Zira’s murderer was brought to justice, she intended to enter the Order. A life of peace and solitude appealed to her, or at least the idea of it. Chaos and political intrigues awaited her at home. A royal princess was expected to play their games. But she had a surprise in store for them all. Let someone else have the crown and the nightmares that came with it. Someone ultimately more suited to bringing peace to their war torn planet, peace between the House of Moons and the Antheans.

Calling upon her power, she repeated, nearly verbatim, everything the man had just said to her. His cock rose again at her words, but she just smiled and continued until the memory implant was complete. Then she issued her standard last commands. “Get dressed and return to your rooms. Sleep until tomorrow. You will remember staying here most of the night. You will leave this station upon rising and never return. Any slaves you have at home will be offered freedom and a fair wage in my honor. You will never hurt a woman, or take one against her will. The mere thought of doing so will make you ill. And if you ever meet a man who goes by the name of Specter, you will tell him I’m waiting for him.”

The last slipped out automatically, but she suspected the one she hunted was already here. Specter’s name whispered through the station like a great wave of evil had awakened to welcome him.

When she’d arrived on Tantra-9, full of hate and rage for her sweet cousin’s killer, it had been easy to be strong. More often now, exhaustion dogged her steps, the sensuous nature of her deception lured her, tempted her to indulge herself with some of her customers. Not all of the men who’d knelt naked before her had repulsed her as they ought. And that alarmed her on an elemental level. Even now, an unmistakable wetness coated her thighs as

she watched her latest victim walk from the room.

Something twisted inside of her, warped and shifted each time she exposed herself to their desires, something alien to her nature. In the darkest shadows of her soul, she speculated how it would feel to surrender, even as her heart and mind forbade it. The dichotomy of needs was unexpected, unwelcome, and wearing her ragged. The battle between her body and her spirit raged constantly.

The last few nights, her dreams had been strangely erotic and she wondered if her bodyguard, Lizard, could be slipping Ozera Potent into her food or drink. The powerful aphrodisiac controlled the slaves. Shudders took her body again, punishing her for the use of magic. She ignored it and entered her private chamber. Lying down, she waved a hand and lit her candles. If Lizard drugged her, it would cost him his life. So, why didn't she simply place him under her spell and compel him to answer?

Hands twisting subconsciously in the soft, honey-colored sheets, body still shaking in aftershock, she wondered... was she more afraid he'd poisoned her, or that he hadn't? She'd discovered nothing new during her daily walk of the station. Everything in her tensed, expecting trouble. But what? No one knew she was here. No one but her brothers.

Or so she believed. Perhaps she'd underestimated her enemies...

Sleep was a long time coming.

* * *

Darkness and pulsing lights. Ripened sweat. Semen. Sex. The smells assaulted him, roiled around in his head until it pounded and in his stomach until it churned. He hated this place. Always had. Always would. Yet, here he walked again. But this time, he was not hunting a criminal, he was hunted. This time, he was here for a woman. A princess. A fucking sorceress so powerful the whole planet feared her and her family. Hers was the one life he'd sworn to protect. And failed. That failure haunted him, called him here to save a young woman the world already believed to be dead.

The long dark corridor surrounded him, a cocoon of death. Lights flickered on and off like a drunk who jerked awake then drifted to slumber over and over again. A red doorway beckoned to him in challenge, a test of his loyalties and his oath. The woman behind this door had gotten in his way today, prevented him from rescuing his young charge. He couldn't allow Kamara to get in his way again. However, a lifetime of training wouldn't permit him to abandon her to her fate either, no matter how stupid her actions.

Dressed in black from head to toe, Tobiath, Crown Sentinal Z-4, drifted like a wraith on slaver station Tantra-9. All the detection grids and security measures meshed traditional technology with magic. The defense systems read the magical energy fluctuations of all living things, detected the presence of that brand of power. He walked and no one saw him. He watched and none noticed his presence. He infiltrated spy rings, executed criminals, hunted the truth... and no one remembered his face. Here, he was less than an insect, less than a ghost. An Immune.

Spy and assassin for his government, he was immune to magic. And so he moved, flowed, drifted anywhere and everywhere. Unseen. *Forgotten*.

Enough. Talking to himself was a habit he'd adopted long ago. He had no one else. Left on the steps of Judgment Hall as a baby, abandoned and feared by his parents for his gift, or lack of, there'd been no other option for him but the Crown Sentinals. The elite unit welcomed those like him, rare souls born without names. Or magic. Now the nameless ones hunted him for a murder he didn't commit. Not that it mattered; none of the others had ever been able to catch him.

Soft and sure, his black boots glided over the cold floor to *her* door. Kamara. Princess and royal pain in his ass. She'd nearly blown everything for him today, by revealing herself to the enemy in that ridiculous 5-S mask. Now they would know where to find her. Now he had to protect her and delay his mission.

No one saw him, nothing gave him away. The vid monitors remained dormant, waiting for a surge of magic that would activate them. Illusion wrapped around everyone on board with an unrelenting grip. Its force flowed around him, through him, and he knew what each spell or energy mass was meant to do. He saw the spells as

shadows on the walls, transparent shades of reality that flowed through him, kissed him like butterfly wings, teased him with a lingering touch before abandoning him to the truth. That was the curse of immunity. Magic flowed through him, moved within his soul and flowed out to rejoin the universe, leaving him behind. Bereft Magic touched everything, made it appear more beautiful, more vibrant. Perfect and appealing. He bore witness to facts, ugly and forgotten. He felt the cold metal, instead of illusionary fantasy rugs, beneath his feet. The stench of canned air filled his nostrils despite the freshening spells, and he walked straight to her chamber, in spite of the warding spells meant to lead all others away with false trails and hidden magical traps. Immunity meant he walked in a world of shadows and dreams no one else saw, or even more disturbing, that everyone else believed to be real.

Magic. The word alone made his gut churn and his jaw clench. So easy to get around. To avoid or manipulate those dependent on its power. Magic created a reality he could not live in, a place his entire society dwelled in, used, loved, and schemed within. He was an aberration. A freak. Someone they could not hide their true selves from. Hated and feared by all he knew, he could not regret the freedom immunity gave him to exist in a different world. But he could grieve the loss of a so-called normal life, could still feel the pain that had nearly crippled him as a small boy, pain buried so deeply he'd begun to think he could no longer feel.

Feeling had come raging to life when he'd awakened one morning as a hunted man. Magic had betrayed him yet again. And he could not battle, could not defeat, and could not reverse the sorcerer's spell to prove his innocence. But he could find the person responsible and make him pay.

Illusion and sorcery were the two crutches his people lived on. Both made them complacent. Weak.

Vulnerable. He opened the door to the Slave Empress's chamber and slipped inside the darkened room undetected.

Reality told another story. Scrutinizing the perimeter of the dark room, he grimaced. Air smelling of rot and decay filled his lungs, just as it did everywhere else on the station. Huddled and dying in one corner was the little princess's attempt at growing a small Spirka bush. Each broad yellow leaf was covered with a sheet of needle-sharp projections, but its core, if torn open, lay succulent and sweet. The plant's likeness adorned every courtroom in Judgment Hall, a metaphor for the pain of guilt and the sweetness of truth. The struggling plant seemed oddly out of place on the station, like a tropical bird trying to survive on arctic tundra, or like the princess and heir selling herself as a slave.

Old and barren, the walls and ceiling beams were a dull, metallic gray marred by a red flow of rust growing and spreading like fungus throughout the station. The room was surprisingly empty. Other than the small white chair spelled to look like a throne, Kamara's domain was bare.

Where were her servants? Her guards? Her host of cloying maids that he'd been told followed her around at court giggling and acting like idiots every time they saw an available male? Where was her Sentinel? Why was she here? And why had she wandered the station in a 5-S holographic mask, exposed to his enemies? Surely she knew there were others who would see through her disguise. He'd decided to come back for her later, after he'd completed his mission, but the royal idiot forced his hand. If he didn't take her now, the other would. She'd be no use to him dead. No use at all. And that just wouldn't do.

Continuing on, he saw the door to her private chamber along the opposite wall. An elaborate illusion of climbing white roses protected her. As did the newest surveillance equipment.

Solid and warm, he pressed his palm to the entry grid. The flow of energy passed through him as always, sensing nothing but body heat and the leftover magical imprint of Kamara's own palm. Quiet as the breath flowing into his lungs, the door slid open and he crossed into her private lair.

Chapter Two

Reality tilted. In this small space, there was no magic. The lack stilled his heart and nailed his feet to the floor. Here, three true candles burned, and carried the light scent of wildflowers through the air to his nostrils. The small flickering flames provided the only light in the room.

Kamara lay asleep on her side draped by sheets that wrapped around her like warm liquid honey. A small, ornately carved wooden headboard rested against the far wall. Her bed was shoved into the corner farthest from the door, draped in honey-colored satin sheets that pooled on the thick black rug lying on the floor beside her. In a small dark cylinder at the foot of her bed sat another Spirka bush, this one young and fragile, a new seedling that would fit in the palm of his hand. Her walls were bare. A vid terminal rested atop a six-legged table in the far corner, her connection to the outside world. A three-tiered shelf of glass held several blasters and a semi-circle moon dagger. He paused for a moment to inspect the weapons. They were all outdated so he left everything but the dagger, which he slid beneath the leather strap holding his own knife to his thigh. If he were lucky, he could take it back to his ship and analyze the deadly microbots that usually coated the weapons. The last few times he'd tried to dissect their technology, the little bastards had fallen apart after just a few hours in his presence. If he could harvest the micro-machines and reprogram them, he'd have a sinister and elusive weapon to add to his arsenal. The Moon Warriors claimed not to use magic, but his effect on their weapons suggested otherwise. Examination complete, he turned to the sleeping beauty. The candlelight cast her face in soft shadows. Her thick eyelashes sparkled, as if moisture lingered there. Tears? Perhaps. Something tightened in his chest at the thought, made it harder to get air into his lungs but he ignored it and continued his study. Long, elegant fingers gripped a deadly looking silver blaster in one hand as she slept. Soft and inviting, black curls framed her face and feathered across the smooth pillow. Regal and refined, her cheekbones were high, her lips pouty and perfect. Tobiath knew her face well, knew that if the delicate eyelids opened they'd reveal chocolate-brown eyes and an insatiable passion for life.

Why did it have to be her? Why not any one of the other twenty cousins? The ones he didn't want to tie to a bed and ravish. No matter. He didn't have the time. Every moment here was a precious moment lost.

Tobiath placed the blow tube to his lips. Swift, silent, and free of magic, the drug-filled needle flew across the room and imbedded in her shoulder. Wordlessly counting to ten, he waited, then crossed the room and gently pulled the blaster from her limp grip. She'd sleep like a baby for a couple of hours. Then she would be livid. Tobiath smiled and threw the royal over his shoulder. Soft breasts tortured him where they pressed into his back through her thin satin gown. He stood for a moment to make sure the injection had shut down most of her magic. The drug attached to the receptors in a magic user's mind, breaking their connection to the universal power. Once the old-fashioned medication flooded her system, he held her close and used his gift to absorb the rest of her power and send it back into the great void. Wouldn't do to be seen kidnapping the heir to the throne. Of course, he didn't really need to worry about anyone from home looking for her. She'd taken great pains to disappear without a trace. What else could a gentleman do but ensure her success?

* * *

Knots twisted in her stomach like a mass of angry worms even before she woke. Instincts flared to life and screamed at her to flee. She didn't move. Barely breathed. Something wasn't right. Gone was the soft glide of satin against her cheek, the comforting aroma of her candles, replaced by cool cotton and the tangy sweet odor of chemical air freshener. This was not her room, not her bed.

Lead weights, her limbs refused to move without supreme effort. The unfamiliar lethargy pushed her to waken faster. Swirling deep, anger stirred the magic within her back to life.

Straining to hear, Kamara held her lungs frozen and listened. An odd ticking noise drifted in the room, quiet but

steady, and nothing else. No hum of engines, no whirl of air purifiers, no keening cries from distant sex chambers. Where was she? Without question, she was no longer on Tantra-9.

As if in answer, a door opened behind her, then slid closed with a distinct click. Should she feign sleep or face her fate? Images of all the men she had watched the last few weeks flashed in her mind with alarming clarity. Their faces filled with lust, their bodies jerking before her like half dead fish as their cocks responded to the memories she fed to their minds. Like a criminal line-up in her mind, they haunted her, sneered at her, pawed at her sanity and her flesh. If one of them were her captor...

Clenching her teeth in agony, Kamara didn't fight the small convulsions that overtook her slight frame. The painful episodes had grown more frequent the last two weeks. Every body had a limit to how much magic it could channel in a short period of time. Certainly she was close to reaching hers, and still she pushed. It didn't matter if the sickness killed her. Life was a small price to pay to find her beloved cousin's murderer, Zira's Sentinel.

"Kamara, are you ill?" The voice washed over her in a soothing wave. Masculine. Deep. So sexy her skin tingled in response to the rich timbre.

He knew her true name! "No." An admission would give him another bargaining chip and would be idiocy. Time to discover what fate had in store for her. Fighting to control their jerking movements, Kamara clamped her arms to her sides and rolled onto her back. She opened her eyes just as sex-in-a-uniform sat down next to her on some sort of military style bunk.

"You have the sickness." The accusation stung, contradicted the gentle touch of his hand checking her forehead for fever. Only the most powerful sorcerers knew of the sickness. Who was he? Not only did he know of the illness, but he also dared to kidnap her. Fingers curling like claws, she fought the urge to tear out his eyes. She wasn't sure if the reaction was more fear or annoyance, but the thought ramped up her shivering, erratic movements. Adrenaline was not something she needed right now.

"I'll be fine. Let me go." God help her, he felt good. Strong. Hot, where his hip pressed to her side. His lips lingered inches from her own as he bent over her, and so perfect her nipples beaded beneath her gown in welcome. Heat filled the space between them, pulsed with a life of its own, pulled at her skin until the need to press flesh to flesh nearly overwhelmed her sense of self-preservation.

Damnation.

Determined to escape her rising lust, she looked up from his black uniform into smoke gray eyes and stopped breathing. Her cunt rippled to life, making demands she had no intention of assuaging. What was *wrong* with her? "Hold still. I can help." Strong hands clamped onto her shoulders, pinned her to the bed.

"Leave me alone." The order sounded desperate, not commanding. One more moment next to him, and he'd either be helping her into an asylum... or she'd turn into a sex-starved kitten. Had he slipped her some Ozero Potent? The drug was the only thing she knew capable of affecting someone like this. So he kidnapped her, then drugged her to make her ripe for the taking? "Bastard!"

"You really are an idiot. Where's your guardian, your Sentinel?"

"How dare you!" Dead was the answer. One more friend she'd watched die, weighing heavy on her conscience, demanding justice. But no one knew. No one. Kamara pushed against him with all the strength her trembling body would grant her, to no avail. With no visible effort or strain of muscle, he immobilized her with those hot hands on her shoulders. Thick and heavy, his chest pushed her deeper into the mattress.

Instincts raged to life. She could not be held down without fighting, even if she knew she would lose. Reaching deep into her reserves, she pooled her magic, focused her mind for an attack knowing full well it might be the last thing she did in this life.

"Hold still." The words whispered through her hair. Her neck hummed with awareness, skin tingling and every tiny hair shivering at attention.

All around her, his body relaxed onto hers, covering her like a thick coat of warm syrup. Peace invaded her limbs and they stilled, as if he'd pulled the very essence of the sickness into himself. All reserves of power and anger

went with it. It was as if he flipped a switch and turned everything off. Eyelids drifting closed in temporary defeat and relief, she whispered, “Who are you? What do you want from me?”

“A friend. And I want you out of danger.”

What did he mean by friend? “You know who I am. How did you find me?”

“You’re lucky I found you first. Where is your Sentinel? Where’s Reese?”

This man knew too much. How did he know her Sentinel’s name? The question made blood pound in her ears. Did she dare answer, tell him Reese had gone missing just a couple of spins before Zira’s murder? That he’d stumbled into her arms and bled to death the same day Zira died? No. Not until she knew for sure whom she was dealing with. “Only my brothers are looking for me.”

“Wrong.” Like the soothing balm of a warm herbal bath on oversensitive nerves, the heat intensified, invaded her limbs, relieved the aching, shocking sting caused by overuse of magic.

“How did you do that? Are you a healer?” Well, at least it didn’t appear he would kill her. And, his healing would allow her to draw on her magic sooner. Escape.

“What possessed you to stroll around the station in a 5-S mask? You, of all people, should know better.” His voice hypnotized, deceptive in its gentleness. Rage seethed beneath the surface of his words, gave her goosebumps. He censured her, knowing her true identity. She was heir to the throne! Never had anyone spoken to her in such a manner.

There was only one answer. The knowledge made her heart skip a beat, struggle just to breathe. A man without allegiance. She had studied pictures of all the known outlaws so she could identify them. With his dark hair and sexy mouth, she would have remembered him easily. So he must be a rogue. Or worse, a mercenary. “Who sent you? Who do you work for?”

“Someone loyal to the crown. That’s all I can tell you.”

Relief flooded her. Perhaps she shouldn’t believe him, but she did. “My brother sent you.” Four words explained everything. Padraic. Just two weeks ago, she’d run into her brother on the station and set a Moon Warrior named Charla after him. Messing with the woman’s mind had caused her a small twinge of guilt, but she needed her meddling brother out of her way. From what she could tell, it worked out well for him. The dolt had actually fallen in love with the woman, and the two were out there somewhere blowing up Anthean factories. They’d hit three so far. Knowing Padraic’s wild streak, he would love every minute of it.

She should’ve known he wouldn’t be able to leave her in peace. But Zira’s killer had finally answered her call. She couldn’t allow this level of interference now. She couldn’t explain how, but she was linked to him through Zira’s dying touch. Kamara could *feel* him drawing nearer. If she left the station behind, weeks of agonizing torture, of listening to men and women and their perverted fantasies would be for naught. “You have to take me back.”

“No, I don’t.”

Searing her flesh like a branding iron, he shifted and his arm rested beneath her breasts. Totally relaxed, free of the convulsions that gripped her earlier, she was grateful for the healer’s touch, but a new problem replaced the old. She wanted him buried deep between her legs, riding hard, pumping into her until she screamed for mercy.

“This is insanity.”

“Yes.”

“What’s your name?”

Sudden cold gripped her when the weight of his arm lifted. “You’ll stay here until I determine it’s safe. I have work to do, so I’ll leave you to rest.”

Nearly panicked, Kamara flung her hand out and managed to grab hold of his black shirt before he could stand up. “Wait.”

No one had spoken her name in over three moons. Once surrounded by family and friends, hearing her name fought back the darkness stalking her, renewed her spirit, and was more comforting than she wanted to admit. She’d suffered the loss of her beloved cousin, held both Reese and Zira in her arms as they lay dying. Endless

nights of loneliness and depravity had been her existence since that fateful night, since coming aboard the slaver station. She had to know what he knew. Keeping this vital man with her a little longer suddenly became essential to her sanity.

“Please, tell me your name.” Rising to her knees, Kamara ran one hand atop his broad shoulders, admired the strength beneath the smooth black fabric. Silk-like strands of his dark hair brushed her fingertips. Before coming here she’d been young. Naive. Now she feared her essence would be forever tainted. With every man who’d paid the Slave Empress’s price, every mind she’d touched, she had lost a little piece of her soul. She’d been terrified true desire would never be able to touch her. The throbbing demand between her thighs proved her wrong.

“I don’t have a name.”

“Please.” Whispering her plea against the skin of his neck, she smiled when he shuddered in response. Kamara needed to know, would go to any lengths to discover his identity, and his purpose. A swirling vortex of power rose within her, magic answering her call. He looked away from her, but was not immune to her seduction. Her brother Padraic would never send a man he didn’t respect and trust. Too bad she would have to mess with his mind.

Allowing her tongue a leisurely exploration beneath his ear, she pushed the troublesome doubts aside. He would remember only a beautiful face and a wonderful time in bed. The least she could do, after she found out what he knew, was leave a pleasant memory behind.

Blowing in his ear, Kamara whispered a sorceress’s command none could resist, “Tell me your fantasies. Tell me everything.”

“You don’t know what you’re doing.”

“Let me touch you.” The heat of his skin invaded her palms. She slid her hands around to his chest, gently scraped his nipples to tight beads beneath his shirt with her fingernails, and pressed her own aching breasts into his back. Guilt died a slow death, couldn’t compete with the true pleasure of touching him. Normally, she would keep contact to a minimum when placing memories, but his body begged to be explored. Plus, he deserved a small punishment for kidnapping her. Endless weeks of solitude had warped her, pushed her beyond any normal boundaries. She would play. Touch. Stroke. A harmless flirtation he would never remember.

He turned to look at her, surrender darkened his gray eyes to nearly black. Power was an incredible aphrodisiac. Triumph flared to life an instant before his hungry mouth claimed hers.

Chapter Three

The little fool. Tobiath knew he should confess his identity. But he'd allowed honor and duty to rule his entire life, and what had it gotten him? Not even the shroud of the Sentinals protected him now. No, they hunted him. Every moment of his life, he had lived as a ghost. Alone. Always alone.

So she wanted to hear his darkest desires. Fantasies? Oh, yes. He'd had them as a child. Dreams of belonging, of a family, of a mother who would stroke his cheek and whisper nonsense to him every time he scraped his knee. Of a father whose eyes would shine with pride as he grew in strength and skill. And lately, of a woman, a lover, who would look upon him as a man, and not as a ghost, or worse, a legend.

Hot and seeking, her tongue dueled with his. Made promises he knew she had no intention of keeping. Still, he drank in her passion like a man dying of thirst, thrust into her mouth to tease, to taste... to forget.

Magic rode the words she'd whispered into his ear. Words that beckoned, tempted, and drove straight to his cock like the pounding blood now filling him with need. Magic. Dreams. Life. None had ever been his, nor would there ever be. He'd given it all up... for her, for her family, and been betrayed.

Like ice melting over lava, his control cracked, then melted away. Rage boiled to the surface at her games, her manipulations. Her magic. He'd sacrificed all, and been given nothing. Now she thought to seduce, to control. Tearing his lips away, he grabbed her wrists, shoved her back down on the bed, and pinned them above her head with one hand. "No."

"You have known me your entire life. Loved me. Trusted me. Tell me all your secrets. You want to tell me your fantasies, your dreams. You will tell me why you're here, and how you found me." In soft waves, her magic pulsed through him, ineffective. Anger still seethed within him, fed his desire until lust rode him. Desires he'd never given free rein burned through his bloodstream, singeing his organs, his cock. Kamara wanted to play games. Yes, he would play...

"I want to touch you. Hold your naked breast in my hand and suckle until you writhe and beg beneath me." Her soft gasp turned to a moan as he cupped her small breast in his free hand and lowered his mouth to breathe fire over the erect peak visible through her thin nightgown. "I want to bury myself between your legs and remain motionless until you sob, desperate for release."

In one swift move, he squeezed the soft mound, massaged her firm flesh beneath the golden satin, forced her sensitive nipple to respond, to rise up in silent offering, then sucked her breast, satin and all, into his mouth until he could hold no more.

Kamara bucked beneath him. "Stop."

A command. Interesting. More forceful. More magic behind the word. He would've laughed, but his mouth was full. Instead, he shifted to taste her other breast. Nipped with his teeth, then soothed away the hurt with his tongue. She smelled sweet, like honey. Like life. Gorging on her softness, on her desire, his free hand continued to roll and squeeze the first taut peak.

"Ozera. You drugged me." The words were barely more than a moan, and the feral beast within smirked in satisfaction at her arousal, at the way her back arched up off the bed.

"No." Firm and deliberate, he slid his hand over the curve of her waist, past her hip, lower. Tobiath wondered if her skin would be as flawless as the soft glide of fabric covering her. He slipped his fingers beneath the satin edge of her gown and caressed her toned body from her thigh to her hip. Hellsgate. Every fantasy he'd ever had ran through his mind, a mosaic of hot steamy sex. "I want to hear you scream my name. I want to feel and taste every inch of you, possess your body until you can't get me out of your mind, even when we're apart."

They'd taken everything from him. Now, she would give a little back. Moving to partially cover her with his body, to feel the full length of her softness crushed beneath him, he fought for breath, for control. He wedged his

knee between her bare legs, rubbed his aching cock against the tight muscles of her thigh, and slowly curved his fingers over the soft, satin-covered mound between her legs. He split her folds, imprisoned them beneath her gown and his searching fingers.

In rhythm he suckled her nipple and rubbed her core. Kamara whimpered. Her hips jumped at each stroke of his hand, straining for more. He would have her. Beneath his searching fingers, her gown clung to her, soaked by her arousal, her need.

Without warning she arched under his touch. Her climax shocked him, threatened to drive him past all reason, all thought, until he tore his attention from her body and saw the silent tears streaming down her face.

Tears. They doused his lust like a bucket of ice-cold water.

“Please, stop.” No magic. Just two simple words. True, Kamara had started it, had tried to manipulate him. But he knew the truth, the futile effort she made, and he’d hidden the truth. Touched her. Pain stabbed straight through his heart and sneered at a lifetime of living with honor. Perhaps he *was* a monster.

He leapt away from her. Suddenly the room closed in on him, shrank until her eyes looked too big. His clothing smelled of her, trapped him in her scent like a straightjacket driving him mad. What in hell’s name was he doing? He was a Sentinal, first and always. He had killed. But never had he sought to seduce a woman without her consent. Never had he been pushed beyond his rigid honor and self-control.

“I’m sorry.” Tobiath leaned against the door, closed his eyes, and forced air into his burning lungs. When the Sentinals took him in, they assigned him a number, then trained him to infiltrate, to kill, and then disappear. He’d sworn an oath to protect the royal family. Blood bonded to a royal infant at birth, his ward was Zira. Failure, and their blood bond, haunted him, called him here to save her. *Not* to rape her cousin.

The Sentinals safeguarded the royal lines and meted out justice in the system. Reviled, feared, and nameless, the Sentinals had always served and protected the royal house. And, as to be expected, their existence had become a myth. Only a handful of Sentinals were born to each generation. He knew of only three others who were Immune like himself; the rest were Shifters. All were anonymous but for the names they chose and used amongst themselves.

“What do you want from me?” Kamara’s question pulled him from his miserable thoughts and forced him to meet her questioning gaze. She sat staring at him, the soft blanket that once covered his bed now wrapped around her like armor.

“I told you, I need you safe and out of my way. That is all. When this is over, you can go home.” He needed to use her, to lure Zira’s killer out into the open, but she didn’t need to know everything. In the end, he’d die to keep her safe and rescue Zira, her cousin. The end justified the means. He wasn’t about to waste time arguing with her about how to do his job.

“Who *are* you? What are you doing out here?” Black as midnight in the soft light of the room, her hair tumbled around her, a sensual invitation. His cock pulsed in response to her slightest movements.

“I am Z-4. I’m here to recover your cousin, Zira.”

Fear clouded her eyes momentarily, but anger quickly burned it away. “You’re Zira’s Sentinal!”

“Yes.” What possessed him next was pure madness, but it slipped out before he could stop to question his motives. “And I need your help to save her.”

“She’s dead, you bastard. I held her in my arms as her heart stopped beating, her blood pooled on the tiles beneath us.” Like an avenging angel, she rose to her feet on the bed, shouted at him. “With her dying breath, she said *you* killed her.”

“So you believe.” Tobiath shrugged. What else could he say? It was the truth of her memory, an implant, and the reason a legion of spies, cutthroats, and assassins hunted him. “But she’s not dead.”

* * *

“What?” Four words, and her world turned upside down again.

“Did you not hear me?” The arrogant bastard strolled across the room and sat down in a chair covered with soft animal hide. A large wooden clock stood behind him, pendulum swinging in a calming rhythm, its soft ticking

once again the only sound in the room. Knees spread, he rested his elbows on them like he hadn't a care in the world and just stared at her with those damn penetrating eyes.

"You lie. I saw her die." God, how she wanted to believe him.

One eyebrow raised, he shook his head. "No. You saw her covered in artificial blood, drugged, and weak." Zira's guardian looked straight at her, daring her to call him a liar again. "You saw exactly what the Specter wanted you to see. You remember exactly what he *told* you to remember."

All the blood left her head in a dizzying rush, and her knees buckled beneath her on the bed. Could it be true? Could there be another capable of implanting memories? Someone who kept that skill a secret? Someone close to the family? Very close to the family. "No."

"Yes." The pain in his eyes convinced her as nothing else could... and he'd been completely immune to her magic.

"You will tell me your name." The magical command flowed from her effortlessly, the strongest she'd ever uttered. A test.

He leaned back in the chair as if he were bored. "Not until you ask nicely."

"Please."

"I'm Tobiath."

Kamara wrapped her arms around her legs and rested her cheek on her knees to examine the room and the man more closely. Details suddenly jumped out at her with alarming clarity. The room held no magic. Not a single spell. Everything in sight, the metallic walls, the lights, the very lack of scent, confirmed its absence. The linens felt like hand woven cotton. The lights were oddly yellow and dull, shining from small glass globes along the ceiling. Electric! Every item in the room was present as its true self. No alterations. No embellishments. No spells to make things more appealing.

Other than herself, she'd never known any of her people to live this way, to exist without the illusions, the pampering of the senses magic provided.

"You're immune." Even as she said the words, the initial taste of true fear burst metallic on her tongue. For the very first time in her life, she was with a man she couldn't command or control. Her body flared to life at the thought, remembered the way his mouth had felt on her breast, the way she'd shattered beneath the onslaught of his touch. Tobiath would remember as well. God help her.

"Yes."

"Tell me everything you know." Black as midnight, his eyes snapped to her face at the whisper. She didn't command with magic, but with an elemental need to discover the truth, to seek vengeance. "Where were you? How did this happen?"

He rose from the chair and began pacing. Muscle rippled beneath his uniform. Power and strength clung to him, confidence carried only by someone used to relying on himself. Closing her eyes, she forced herself to stop staring. Stop wanting...

"I was ordered away for three nights. A sentencing."

Kamara nodded. Only the royals knew of this particular job. If someone of high rank or with very powerful magic were pronounced guilty by a Shadow Master, the Sentinals were called upon to either bring them in or kill them. They were the ruling families' personal bounty hunters as well as protectors.

When he didn't continue, she opened her eyes to find him watching her intently. His gaze defied her to judge him, to chastise him for his role in their world.

"You were gone for three nights. Did you bring in your prisoner?"

"No." He resumed pacing, but she would never forget the haunted look in his eyes. "It was a ruse designed to make sure I was gone when they took her."

"Zira?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

“When I returned, I was a wanted man. All claimed she was dead by my hand, but I knew she still lived. Someone set me up and planted memories to implicate me in her murder.”

“Why didn’t they just kill you?” The question stopped him cold.

“I don’t know.” Tobiath resumed pacing, his black boots striking faster, and more forcefully as he crossed the hard metal floor. A deep scowl formed two lines between his dark brows. “Hell.”

Kamara watched him very closely, wanted to measure his reaction to her next words. “Reese is dead.”

“What?” Tobiath’s eyes widened with shock, with rage. “How?”

“He collapsed the same night Zira died. He bled to death. Bleeder’s poison.” Tobiath’s eyes closed and Kamara rushed on. The vision filled her mind and recalled her anger. “I sent his body for examination anonymously. If anyone knew my Sentinal was dead, I would’ve become an easy mark.”

“What makes you think you weren’t already?” Tobiath stalked toward her on the bed, his hands clenching and unclenching at his sides. Kamara tightened her grip on the sheet tucked beneath her arms and tried not to flinch at his words. “What makes you believe that poison wasn’t meant for you? That Zira’s fate wasn’t meant to be yours?” His fingers wrapped around her bare shoulders and squeezed his frustration into her. “They’re *still* looking for you, you little idiot. And you go traipsing around in a 5-S mask, just asking to be found!”

No one in her entire life had ever *dared* call her an idiot. She slapped his hands from her shoulders. The sheet fell from her body, but she didn’t care. The air in her lungs hissed out in a long warning. “Don’t you dare judge me! I came out here to hunt her murderer! You’re the one who lost her in the first place!”

“You’re right.” Tobiath turned away from her and put as much distance between them as the room would allow. His voice was tight; the pain wrapped around each word, giving them more weight. “But I will get her back, and kill the bastard who took her.”

She knew of only one way to be sure he spoke the truth. Rising slowly, Kamara slipped off the bed. Cold metal stung her bare feet as she moved silently across the room. She now wore the sheet draped over her shoulders, a protective cape. Like a cornered, wounded animal, he stood frozen, waiting for her to reach him. To touch him. If what he said were true, he would never hurt her. If he lied, her life could be forfeit. She could not command him with her voice. He was immune to her spells and her memory implants. But could he keep her out of his mind?

Few knew all the skills she possessed. She was the most powerful sorceress born in over a century. Perhaps longer. Like her brother Padraic, she could enter someone’s mind, become a shadow of their consciousness, of their memories. Unlike her brother, the task was difficult for her, required reserves of strength she wasn’t sure she possessed at that moment. But she had no choice. If she believed him, she would be trusting this man with her life, with the life of her cousin. With everything.

Slowly, she curled her fingers around the solid strength of his, let the warmth of his hand meld into her own. Eyelids drifted closed. She swayed on her feet as energy coiled and twisted inside her mind waiting to slide into his consciousness. He caught her, wrapped his free arm behind her waist and pressed her body to the full length of his.

“What are you doing, Mara?” The endearment used by her family and closest friends made her heart skip a beat, and unwanted tears welled in her eyes.

“Hush.” She struggled to maintain control of the magic building within her, struggled just to breathe with his scent filling her nostrils, his strong embrace forcing her closer. “I have to know for sure.”

“You can’t read me, Mara. No one can.” In a sudden move, he buried his face in her hair and inhaled as if his very life depended on drinking her perfume into his lungs. “You can try, but in the end you’re going to have to trust me.”

“No.” Kamara shook her head, then gave in to her body’s demands and laid her cheek flat against his chest. Before she could lose her courage and all good sense, she let go of her consciousness, let it separate from within and move into Tobiath. Behind her, she knew her knees buckled, knew her body had gone limp in his arms.

For a moment her will hovered, lingered to see what he would do, but he just held her and waited. The loud *tick, tick, tick* of his old-fashioned clock drew her awareness with its simple cadence until her entire focus shifted to the sound, nearly hypnotized by it. The steady beat of his heart drew her then, away from the sound, away from her body, away from herself. Loneliness. Sadness. Resignation welled up from nowhere to disorient her.

“So be it, Mara. Do what you will.” With those words she realized the emotions she felt were not her own. Still, she could not stop her search for the truth, for answers. The fate of many depended on what she would discover. She flowed into him then, softness and light. His sharp gasp distracted her, but the colors of his soul lured her until she basked in its glow. A thousand emotions swamped her senses, a million tiny bits of his memory, of his experience danced just out of her reach.

Instead of seeing his thoughts, instead of learning about his life as she would with someone not Immune, she was left with glimpses of his life, his emotions. She felt the stark isolation of his existence, the duty and honor that gave his life meaning, the ache and acceptance of being needed yet never loved. On the fringes, she could actually feel Zira’s life force pulsing somewhere just out of reach, and an answering guilt surged to life inside the Sentinal. Intrigued, she tried to pursue the emotions, to delve more deeply into his heart and mind.

Demanding more magical force from her body, she pushed deeper, ignored the vacuum within absorbing her power faster than she could summon it. A dark yawning pit awaited her; it pulled her in and siphoned her efforts, sent her energy winging out to rejoin the soup of the universe. This was the source of his Immunity, of his power. He was a funnel for energy, connected directly to the source. Untouchable.

Weakened, she felt her essence, her very soul being pulled toward the vortex. She fought against the tidal wave of power she herself had summoned, the flood of magic which threatened to carry her away within it like an undertow sweeping her out to sea.

“Mara!” Tobiath’s voice called her back, the soft echo far away.

Mortality. Madness. Both loomed on the horizon to claim her. Unexpectedly, Tobiath entered the void; the warming light of his soul coiled around hers, anchored her. Called her back from the brink of nonexistence. Somehow, he distanced her from the void, protected her from its paralyzing attack.

She gained control slowly and pulled back into herself. Eyes closed, she didn’t move from his embrace, couldn’t give up the comfort of touching him, of being held, rejoicing in being alive.

“I’m sorry, Tobiath. I should have listened to you.” Kamara nearly collapsed with relief. He had told the truth. His soul was intact and his honor confirmed. Without doubt, if he hadn’t intervened, she’d be dead.

“I don’t know how you did that.”

“Neither do I.”

“Seen enough?” Still arrogant. Still on the offensive.

Before, she wouldn’t have heard the vulnerability behind the question. His voice hadn’t changed, but the link still pulsed with life between them and she knew the question mattered a great deal, felt the sting behind his words. The relentless ache of his existence weighed heavily upon her. Never before had she worried about Reese or any of the Sentinals, of what their lives became when they swore their oaths. Tobiath had saved her, served her family for years with no acknowledgement and no reward. He’d suffered for it, for her, and she’d never once spared a thought for any of the Sentinals. What a truly selfish little bitch she’d been.

Chapter Four

“Yes.” Kamara slid her arms around his waist, rubbed her cheek into the soft, black fabric covering his chest. “And?” He stood still as a statue, a tortured animal shocked by the gentlest of caresses, a man who’d sacrificed his life for her, and asked nothing in return. A man who watched others live, protected them, and all the while hungered for acceptance, for gratitude, for a love he knew he’d never get. And still, he lived with honor, with peace and resignation in his soul. It nearly made her weep and beg his forgiveness, and did convince her she was falling in love.

“*And* I will allow you to help me catch the Specter.” Unable to resist for another moment, she tilted her head up to taste the skin of his neck, first with her lips, then leisurely exploring with her tongue.

“I will hunt him down tomorrow. You will stay here where it’s safe.” Belying his next words, he buried his hands in her hair, held her head in place, a silent demand for her to continue. “What are you doing?”

Satisfaction purred to life within her when she felt his cock harden where it pressed against her stomach. He meant to resist. She sensed his determination through their new, unique bond. But she was equally unwavering in her decision, her *need* to have him. “I’m telling you my fantasies.”

“No, you’re licking my neck.”

Smiling, she visualized him naked and placed her hands on the fabric of his shirt. Her magic pulsed with life between them, ebbing and flowing, always in contact with the abyss. Why, she could not say, but Tobiath’s soul still wrapped around hers, protected her from the dark void and the sickness that came from exposing herself to its power. Satisfaction purred through her body as she concentrated on his clothing and said, “Vanish.”

“Mara!” Her name burst from him, nearly a groan of pain. Beneath her seeking palms, hard, hot male flesh burned with life. Fully clothed, protected by the shroud of his duty, he might have been able to defy their mutual desire. Now, he would be so very easy to seduce.

“I want to touch you, to suckle until you writhe and beg beneath me.” Recognition of his own words snapped through their link, but she ignored it, focused on the winding path her tongue took to his hard nipple. Hands still buried in her hair, Tobiath pulled her to him roughly at the first flick of her tongue over the sensitive peak. A thrill like none she’d ever known rushed through her system, more potent than the newest stims, heated her blood to boil. Her cunt roared to life, throbbing in desperate anticipation of being filled. Never had she held a man in thrall without the use of magic. For the first time, she was with a man who wanted *her*, not her crown. For the first time, everything was *real*.

He tasted of wildness, of pain, and of freedom. Filling her nostrils, her lungs, his musky scent drove all rational thought from her mind until she felt like a wild beast starving for his flesh. A red haze clouded her thoughts. Her heart threatened to explode from her chest. Nothing mattered more than exploring every muscle, lingering over every secret, and discovering his flavor.

Kneading fingers explored the strength of his back, massaging and roaming lower until she held his tight ass. Using just the tip of her tongue she swirled it over his abdomen and lower, until she knelt before him and lightly caressed his cock from base to tip before taking him into her mouth.

Tobiath lost his balance; he swayed before her, a conquered man. Never, not even in his dreams of her, had he imagined Kamara kneeling before him, sexy and sweet in honey-colored satin. Not even in fantasies could he conjure the ecstasy of her mouth, hot and wet on his cock, and her hands driving him to madness. The future queen gifted him as if he were more than a slave. The enormity of the gift, of the genuine desire he sensed within her, pushed him to a place he never thought to be. Unconditional surrender. Madness. Lust.

Her mouth surrounded him, slid up and down his cock and stole his sanity. “Mara.” He whispered her name, his

talisman against the stark emptiness of his life up to this moment. If she didn't stop soon, he would have to wait. Wait to spread her long, smooth legs out before him. Wait to lick the sweet nectar from her core, to taste and explore until she whimpered and begged him to fill her. And wait to pump into her until they both screamed with release.

"Enough." The skin of her shoulders was softer than the satin gown that slid over him when he pulled her up. Protest shone from her eyes, but he silenced her before it could be uttered, claimed her mouth with his own and tore the flimsy gown from her body. Sweetness and flame in his arms, her mouth was hungry and demanding beneath his. The moment her bare skin came into contact with his she jumped off the floor and wrapped her legs around his waist. Welcoming heat teased his cock, hovered at its tip and beckoned.

"Now. Hurry." Kamara tore her lips from his, nibbled at his shoulder, and wiggled her hips lower.

"No."

She bit his shoulder in protest, then yelped when he turned around and placed her in the chair.

"My turn." Slowly, he lifted each leg and laid them over the arms of the chair until she lay open and exposed before him. Chest heaving, her breasts lifted in offering with each rapid breath. He took his time, allowed his gaze to roam and linger on her nipples. They tightened to hard beads beneath his gaze. Goosebumps rose on her skin and the scent of her wet cunt teased his nostrils. Her legs were long, shapely. Curvy and soft, her hips would cradle him. Lush and full, her breasts would cushion his chest. Pink and swollen, her cunt opened before him, ready to be tasted. He savored her position, wanted to keep Kamara here, completely at his mercy.

Like a jungle cat stalking prey, he moved slowly, kept his gaze focused on what he wanted. He grasped both nipples, filled his palms with her soft breasts, and kneaded. Explored. Satisfied his curiosity and male urge to claim every inch of her luscious body. Kneeling, he kept eye contact and lowered his lips to hover over her clit. Drawing her scent into his lungs, he took a deep breath, then slowly exhaled onto her swollen flesh. Kamara's body quivered beneath his hands. She raised her hips, writhed and moaned, buried her fingers in his hair in a futile attempt to pull him closer.

He didn't deny her, sucking and flicking his tongue over her clit until she panted, unable to speak. He plucked and played with her nipples in rhythm with his mouth until she whimpered. Glistening with moisture, the pink folds of her cunt were soft and wet, ready to take his cock deep. Needing a taste, a tease, Tobiath entered her with his tongue, stroked the sensitive spot on the roof of her cunt until she sobbed and strained toward him.

His cock bucked at the sound, seeming to have a mind of its own, and that mind took control. He rose to his knees and pulled her hips to the edge of the chair. Her legs still hung over the sides, leaving her cunt open and vulnerable. He pinned her knees in place with his arms, opening her wider for his possession as he pulled her hips toward him. Her hair fanned out around her head like a dark angel's black halo. Her lips were swollen and red, her eyes nearly black with desire. The vision imprisoned him, held him still as a statue as a sense of the unreal made him wonder if this was a drug induced dream.

Gaze locked with his, she raised her hips off the chair, took the tip of his cock inside her, and introduced him to paradise. Torturously slow, he slid forward until he was buried to the hilt. Her inner muscles convulsed around him, caressed him in heat and wet demand. Then she pulled back, tightening her muscles around him as she did so. The pleasure nearly blinded him, shattering his good intentions. Nothing mattered but filling her. Claiming her.

Mercilessly he pumped into her, watched her breasts rise and fall on her chest in surrender to his driving passion. He found the swollen flesh of her clit with his thumb, rubbed and stroked her with each forward rush of his hips. In and out he rode her, reveling in his power when she threw her head back and screamed in release.

Triumph pulsed through him. Primal. Possessive. The corners of his mouth curved in a wicked smile. He'd conquered her.

Her answering smile should have warned him, but surprise forced a laugh from him as she lifted her legs from the chair and wrapped them around his hips. Locking him in place with her ankles, Kamara sat up enough to reach down and lightly stroke his balls. That fast, he was at her mercy. She held him immobile. He bucked. Her

legs gripped tighter, harder, held him captive buried deep in her cunt as she squeezed him with her inner muscles and stroked him to release with her hand. He pumped his seed into her, then leaned in to taste her mouth once again. Nothing would ever taste as sweet as Kamara. Nothing would ever be home like her hips cradling his, her body soft and pliant beneath him.

All thoughts of conquering her fled before one indisputable fact. He'd never be able to deny her, to resist her, to refuse her anything. The thought was sobering. Frightening.

Tobiath pulled her off the chair and tumbled them both to the rugs on the floor. Seemingly content, she curled up next to him and rested her head on his shoulder.

"Tobiath?"

"Hush." Thought. Movement. Both a waste of energy. He wanted to savor the moment, memorize every detail of her soft body lying against his, the tenderness in her touch, the desire in her eyes. Tomorrow they would find Zira and the two women would go back to Anthea. He would return to his empty life. Alone. Again. He would need the smallest detail to sustain him through the coming years.

"Tobiath?"

He silenced her with a kiss, drank in her taste like a starving man would a feast, and knew he would let her go. Knew she would scar him forever. Knew this night would be worth the price.

Chapter Five

“What are your orders?” Trystan knelt before his master and hid his disgust beneath the long hood of a dark cloak.

“He found the princess for us?”

“Yes. I saw him carry her to his ship. I tracked him to the far side of Tantra. He hides in the shadow of its second moon. Should I pursue?”

“No.” Gnarled fingers wrapped around a crystal staff. A large black stone winked at Trystan from the ring his master wore on his thumb. “Be patient. The Sentinal believes Zira is still on the station. He will come back for her and bring the princess to us.”

“And then?” Trystan knew what his master would say. Hatred for Kamara’s family always caused his master to lose objectivity. Seemed a shame to destroy someone so rare. Someone like him.

“Kill him. Bring the princess to me.”

“Should we not keep him alive to track Zira? We still don’t know where she is.”

“No. Kamara will do just as well. You will make her believe you are Tobiath, be her escort. He is expendable and will only get in the way.”

“Yes, master.” Trystan rose and left the old man behind to plan his schemes, his coup d’etat over the royal family of Anthea. The two women, bartered as slaves, seemed a small price to pay. His master lived by another code. What worth was a soul when he could have power instead?

Shoulder blades on fire, Trystan felt the power of his master’s glare on his retreating back. Good thing the old one couldn’t see his face, or touch his thoughts. He would follow the Sentinal and the precious princess as ordered, but killing Tobiath was not part of the plan. He needed them both alive. But first, there was someone he needed to see.

* * *

Naked. Exposed. Every shifty eye she caught looking her way, every lecherous grin, assured her the scum of this station saw right through her disguise. Tobiath insisted there was another, an enemy on board who could see through the illusionary effects of her 5-S holographic mask. So she wore something he called a wig. False brown hair hung to her shoulders, straight and unremarkable. From head to toe, she looked the part of a Moon Warrior, a Daughter of War, all silver and white. The moon dagger strapped to her thigh was not carrying the dreaded microbots, but no one else would know of the lack. Anyone who looked at her would be less inclined to risk their life by approaching. All knew the daughters of Anthea ran the station. None would cross them, especially after several dead men had been found. The Anthean half moon symbol on her uniform had been carved into their faces.

“Are you sure this will work?”

“Yes.” Tobiath moved silently behind her, his bare flesh covered in standard slave gel. From neck to ankles the translucent black material accentuated every curve and hollow of his powerful frame. The gel was common practice, meant to showcase a slave’s physical attributes when taking one to market. Gelled slaves always garnered a higher price.

Unable to resist, Kamara glanced over her shoulder yet again. Why did he have to be so... so... Her core rippled to life, to instant heat. She wanted him, again, right now. “Toby...”

“Mara, you can’t look at me like that.”

Kamara yanked on the small silver chain corded around his neck and whispered, “Get that arrogant, self-satisfied look out of your eyes, or no one will believe you’re a slave.”

“And if you don’t stop looking at me like you want me to ravish you, no one will believe you’re a Moon Warrior.”

The man had a point. They were moving into the most dangerous section of the station, the small markets. Every few steps beheld another door, and each doorway another flesh dealer. Here, slaves were bartered and sold, traded and stolen. In this section of the station, you held on by will and might alone.

"I don't want to sell you to the bastard. Are you sure she's down here?" Kamara flexed her fingers around the blaster strapped to her hip, for the first time in her life happy to be armed. Before men like Tobiath, there had been no need. And he claimed an Immune like himself walked here, someone with no allegiance to the crown. He said it was a hunch. Instinct. She'd long ago forgotten the small voice.

"Yes. And you'll sell me anyway. It's my fastest ticket behind their doors."

"How do you know they're the ones who have her?"

"Blood bond."

Kamara gasped. How could she have forgotten? All Sentinals were bonded by blood to their assigned royal. Using a specialized genetic linking procedure, a Sentinel's intrinsic psychic abilities were enhanced so they could track their ward anytime and anywhere, without the interference of magic. She'd forgotten; the ceremony took place when the royal was a small child. "So where is she?"

That earned her a frown. "I don't know. This is where her signal was the strongest, but..." Tobiath tensed and grabbed her by the elbow. "Something's wrong. She's not here anymore. It's a trap."

All pretenses gone, Tobiath grabbed her around the waist, lifted her off her feet and turned her around. "Don't run. The bastard's watching us. I can feel it."

A shiver of ice-cold awareness slithered down her spine as she forced her legs to carry her. Hot and hard as steel, Tobiath's hands were clamped around her waist, directing her through and around the steady flow of flesh being brought to market. Strobe lights flashed and sparked overhead. Combined with her next thought, they made her stomach jump and twist until she had to fight not to embarrass herself by vomiting on her beautiful silver boots.

"Is she dead?" Kamara's heart turned to lead in her chest. Just yesterday she'd believed the worst, then been handed a miracle. To lose hope again might kill her.

"No. I would feel it. But he moved her. He knew I was coming."

"Who is it? Point him out and let me question him."

"Look, Princess. You weren't listening. He's like me. You can't touch him. You can't control him. And he won't hesitate to sell you to the highest bidder. I think that was his plan all along."

"What do you mean?" She tossed the words over her shoulder. Tobiath still pushed her through the milling people.

"Why are you out here? Why did you leave Anthea and set yourself up as a slave?"

"Because I..." Fire flared to life in her chest and she clenched her jaw to hold her temper in check. Oh, she knew exactly what he implied. She'd been manipulated. Used. Set up by a Luci, a master at hallucination, at manipulating memories. Another person who had her abilities, but kept it a secret, hadn't registered the gift with her father's court. And she suspected he was right.

Murder would be good. Slow, painful extraction of the bastard's entrails followed by public hanging. She would find someone to Spell him with longevity, send a healer to him every hour so he lasted for several spins.

The burning in her chest expanded to her throat, and behind her eyes. Even her hands felt too hot. Power she didn't know she possessed hummed through her, surged into every cell until she literally felt like she might explode any moment.

"Mara, calm down. Your energy is attracting attention and I can't absorb it fast enough. Moon Warriors don't use magic!"

True. Mind blank, she concentrated on breathing, on the feel of his hands on her hips, and let him guide her through the crowds.

"We go back to my ship. I'll hook up to the brain wave stims and find her."

They passed writhing orgies and screaming slavers. Kamara let her rage die and saw, for the first time, the truth of their world. Tobiath's touch transformed everything. Beautiful rugs were in truth filthy, shaggy mats beneath

her feet. Fine metal carvings became old rusting walls. Eerily beautiful slaves were haggard, starving wretches who reeked of illness and decay. The world that appeared to be beautiful, enchanted, that lured and seduced, was ugly. Sadness filled her at the reality he saw every day. Her whole society was addicted to a drug they didn't even realize they were still ingesting, and that drug was illusion born of magic.

"My God."

"Keep moving. You can ponder reality later."

He could sense her thoughts. Their bond was growing stronger every moment they spent together. "Is he following us?" Even as she asked the question, she tested their new link, reached out to him and felt what he felt. Hair rose on the back of her neck and her stomach twisted into a tight knot. Instinct, he called it.

"Yes." They turned a corner and hit a small market square. Chaos always reigned here, as hundreds of bodies crammed the small space.

Fascinated, she spotted Lizard in the far corner selling her services to the rich and perverse. Apparently, he had yet to discover her missing. He wouldn't knock on her door for another hour at least. The thought of her empty chamber lifted her spirits. The hag who bowed before her with rotting teeth and a bag full of galactic coin offered to buy Tobiath for twenty thousand galactic and pissed her off.

Too many were staring at him. In gel, his sculpted muscles were even more pronounced, more perfect. Just looking at his lips made her cunt clench in memory of their sweet torture. She wanted to taste his lips again, feel him draw her nipple into his mouth and nip at it with his teeth.

"Mara!"

"Sorry. The link." Despite their situation, she laughed and shrugged helplessly as his cock rose proudly to attention, clearly visible in all its glory through the gel. She'd taken less than three steps when she got another offer for him. This time for twenty-five thousand galactic from a fat old man who carried a spiked whip like it was his best friend. She ignored the man and pulled Tobiath after her. "Let's get out of here before I either have to sell you, or kill someone."

They hustled across the area and through the long corridor lined with writhing three-dimensional images of sex and orgies. The station air smelled rotten, vile without its magical enhancements, like a thousand people's sex and sweat had been rubbed into the walls and left to ripen. Kamara struggled to pull it into her lungs. Tobiath moved beside her, silent as a ghost. Deadly. Intense. Sexy as hell.

Her mind shut down as awareness of him whipped like lightning through their link. All control of her body vanished, all logic overcome by the infinite number of tiny threads linking her soul to his. Despite their situation, memories flooded her consciousness like a vid recording gone wild, images of Tobiath kneeling between her thighs, of his tongue licking and tasting, of his body pumping into hers, stretching her cunt. Kamara shook her head, trying to clear it, trying to regain control of her sight, but the violent twist of her neck forced her breasts and nipples to brush the coarse fabric of her uniform. A jolt of raw need released a soft moan from her throat. She wanted him to stop, rip off her clothes, and slam her back against the wall. Gel was said to enhance sex somehow. Suddenly she was obsessed with discovering exactly what that meant, what it would feel like when his hard, gel-coated cock stretched her, slid in and out as his hands massaged her ass.

"Mara! God, woman. Stop."

Heat crept up her neck and into her cheeks, but didn't prevent the horny hellcat her magic created from taunting him. "This uniform unzips in the crotch." Kamara was shaken by the invitation, the low throaty craving in her voice.

"You're going to get us killed."

"Tempted?"

"Yes!" Faster than the word could register, her back was against the wall and his cock shoved hard and hot against her mons. If she'd been naked...

"Are you going to fuck me in the hallway, slave?" She traced the line of his jaw with her tongue, swirled the tip over the metallic tang of the slave chains around his neck. The logical part of her, locked behind a wall of lust

and appalled by what she was doing, counted on Tobiath's control. The maniac she'd unleashed by bonding to him fervently hoped he'd unzip her pants, that his strong fingers would pull her open and his magnificent cock would ram home. Her cunt roared to life at the memory of him. Throbbled. Ached. Needed. In this place they'd just be one more couple who didn't use the bedchambers.

"We're being followed."

"I know." Wicked, wicked thoughts continued to plague her. She'd never been in more danger, and she'd never had more fun in her life.

"Shut up."

She wanted to reply to his rude order, but his mouth crushed hers, punished her for tempting him, for driving him to the brink of control. Tobiath didn't ask for permission to taste her. He forced her mouth open with his tongue and took what he wanted. Wrapping her arms around his back, her hands came into contact with the gel coating his broad shoulders. The gel lay inert, which disappointed her until a tiny jolt of sexual electricity jumped through her fingertips, up her arms, and shot into her nipples, rendering her helpless and weak with wanting more. She moaned into his mouth and everything but Tobiath faded from existence. What would happen if more than her palms were bare?

Before she knew what had happened, she was on her feet once more and Tobiath gripped her hand hard, pulling her down the corridor. "Enough! Move, woman, or I'll smack you across the ass."

Laughter welled up in her chest. She conquered all but a soft chuckle and pulled her blaster free with her other hand. Their feet pounded the station floor grid, every step so forceful their echoes could be heard despite the obnoxiously loud surroundings.

They ran about two minutes, then burst into the trading square and stopped cold. The hair on the back of her neck rose. Their predator had closed in on them. She knew from the way her gut felt heavy and tight and her teeth clenched. No magic involved. Instincts, Tobiath called them. Well, it looked like she had suddenly developed some. Or was she simply feeling his? Regardless, the damn things were screaming at her that they weren't going to make it out of here without a fight. Finally, the knowledge quelled the relentless hunger and she could think. Think!

About fifty people milled around in the large space, some buying, some selling, and the usual rabble picking pockets, others running messages between one shady criminal and another. Not enough bodies to really get lost in. Their clothing varied from complete coverage, including masks to hide their identities, to naked slaves writhing on privately owned stages, masturbating or publicly pleasuring their masters. *This* was her new world. The thought made her nauseous.

Tobiath stood behind her right shoulder and pressed the cold metal links connected to his neck collar into her hand. She didn't remember dropping it. The chain was one of many adorning slaves in the room, and the realization pushed her one step closer to loathing what she'd become. She hated this place, hated these people. Hated it all the more because she'd plugged herself into their system, fed off it, exposed herself to forbidden desires and felt her soul darken in response.

Kamara wrapped the links around her palm once, twice, so tightly the metal cut into her skin. If she ever took the throne, she'd find a way to destroy Tantra-9, even if she had to rip this station apart one bolt at a time. Perhaps then she would feel clean again.

Firm and in control, Tobiath's voice broke her train of thought. "Good. That's the expression you need to have. You must lead. Stay to the shadows along the walls. Head right and we'll avoid most of the party."

Kamara nodded and moved off in the direction he indicated. Arched openings to the docking levels lined the wall on the far side. Most people who made a purchase wanted to leave as quickly as possible with their new merchandise. She was a powerful sorceress but moving unseen in a crowd was his specialty. Sneaking. Spying. Killing. Once upon a time, they had all been beyond her comprehension. And once upon a time, she'd thought being a princess meant frilly clothes, giggling maids, and perfumed bath water.

Tobiath nudged her shoulder and she forced her mind back to more important matters, like getting out

undetected... and alive.

Two more steps and the solution to their problems presented itself. Picking up the pace, she actually yanked on Tobiath's chain and moved swiftly to intercept her men. The Slave Empress's Guard stood stationed outside the secondary corridor leading to her old rooms. Galactic coin lay stacked on a long silver table in front of her green-skinned warrior, Lizard. He must've traveled the back corridor as she and Tobiath had gone the long way around. Lizard bartered her services and protected her with his life, because that's exactly what her memory implant convinced him he needed to do. His loyalty was unquestionable. Five of his men stood ready nearby, dressed in nothing but their leather weapon harnesses and loincloths. They were a small army. *Her small army.*

"Come on."

"No. You can't trust him." Tobiath pulled back on the chain. She yanked him forward in annoyance. He had to follow her, or completely blow their cover. He didn't like it, not one bit. Adrenaline-laced anger exploded into her mind through their link. Her *slave* wasn't happy she'd yanked on his chain. She kept walking toward Lizard and ignored the zing of warning that snapped up and down her spine. Lizard was her man, her personal bodyguard. He'd been with her every time she'd hunted for the Specter. He'd seen her dressed as a Moon Warrior many times in the past. Lizard had guarded her back from day one. On many occasions she'd trusted him with her life. *Her* life, not Tobiath's. Something in Tobiath's outward calm made her shiver and hope the promise of retribution in his eyes was only her imagination.

Chapter Six

Kamara marched ahead of him, determination in the rigid set of her shoulders. If she jerked on the silver chain one more time, he would throw her over his knee and spank her curvy little ass.

“Lizard is mine. I took his mind and he’s been loyal from day one. They can help us.” Kamara pulled him to the side of the room, to the partial privacy offered by black curtains hanging from an orgy stage between them and her men.

“No.” He was ready to strangle her. Absently, her fingers caressed the silver links that bound him and she looked from him to her men and back again. The gesture made acid churn in his stomach and he looked away. She played the part of a Moon Warrior and Anthean slave owner too well. “Walk past him. Do not make eye contact. He won’t even recognize you, Mara. You’ll just put us in more danger.”

“He’s seen me dressed like this before. He knows my voice. Lizard’s hunted with me many times, has protected me for weeks.” Kamara reached up and pulled the wig off her head, grimacing at the limp strands that hung from her hand where the long, brown hair now brushed the floor. Tobiath gritted his teeth and tried not to react. Several of Lizard’s men noticed the change, the dark mat of curls plastered by sweat and pins to Kamara’s head. Too late. The damage was done.

“That was very foolish.” He wanted to hit her as he watched her pull the pins from her hair. Unfortunately, Kamara still believed magic made her somewhat invulnerable. The last few moons out here obviously hadn’t been harsh enough to destroy a lifetime of illusion for her. He’d never had that luxury, that delusion. That innocence. Deep brown eyes implored him to believe. He hoped she was right.

Kamara looked over her shoulder and nodded to one of her men. “I’ve got five men plus Lizard standing around, ready to take my orders. Why should we sneak by when we can use them to stop whoever’s following us?”

What she said made sense. No logical rationale explained the churning in his stomach. The burning certainty that Lizard would disappoint them was a product of life experience. “Let’s do it. But make sure your blaster’s ready.”

Kamara smiled at him over her shoulder and gave his slave chain another sharp tug. Then she headed straight to Lizard. Tobiath gritted his teeth and allowed her to lead him like a stray dog.

The big man showed only mild surprise when Kamara placed her hand on his leather sleeve and began talking to him, but something dark and dangerous fired to light in the eerie greenish yellow eyes. Tobiath hoped the Lizard’s anger stemmed from nothing more sinister than protective instincts. Lizard was a huge man by any standard, a good head taller than Tobiath. Lizard had paid well for green pigment cellular implants, those horrible eyes, and illegal muscle stims. The results of which he proudly displayed by wearing nothing but his weapons and green leather clothing stretched tight over every ounce of his body, from neck to boots. Only his face was bare. Even his massive hands were encased in the material. Any one of the man’s previous sins should warn her off. Instead, the little idiot walked right up to him and placed both their lives in his hands.

Kamara’s voice never reached him, so he had no idea what lies her soft lips whispered to him. Lizard grunted and turned to his men. “No one follows me.”

The loincloth brigade nodded and Lizard took off, heading for the corridor which led to their docking station.

Kamara’s I-told-you-so grin wore on his nerves. Tobiath sincerely hoped she was right. Their only weapon hung strapped to her delicious hip, and Lizard was almost twice his size.

They walked through the arched entrance to the exit corridor and entered another world. Gone were the obscene vid screens, replaced by plain track lighting and bare walls, perhaps a path meant to cleanse your conscience before leaving. Tobiath snorted at the thought. It would take a whole hell of a lot more than that to erase his many sins.

He’d almost started to relax, almost, when he noticed a change in Lizard’s gait. A little slower. As if the oaf were

actually trying to think...

Not good.

The giant's steps faltered and Lizard turned his green tinged face to Kamara with feigned confusion in his eyes. "Which way, Mistress?"

Kamara fell for it. A benevolent smile lifted the corners of her beautiful mouth, his only warning. "Follow me." "No!" Too late. Kamara turned to look at him and instantly Lizard's huge arms wrapped around her neck, a nasty neuro-blaster held poised at her left temple. Lizard boy was a lefty. "Let her go."

"Hands up." After Tobiath complied, he continued, "I have a surprise for you, *slave boy*." The vertical black slits that passed for Lizard's pupils fluttered open and closed in agitation.

"Whatever it is, don't hurt her." Tobiath didn't look at her face. Couldn't. The terror he was sure to see in her eyes would rip out his heart. Here he was, a Sentinal, and the one woman he'd ever given his heart to was about to have her brain neuro-fried, while he stood helpless and unarmed in the corridor, naked except for slave gel. Brilliant. He should've thrown her over his shoulder and carted her ass out of here. But she'd made him weak. Weak was going to get them both killed.

Lizard's laughter made bile rise in his throat. The play of rope-like muscle around Kamara's neck made Tobiath's throat so tight he could barely breathe. Lizard squeezed, just a fraction, and lifted Kamara to her tiptoes. "I know you killed my brother last year. Fucking bounty hunter. Hunted him like a dog and shot him in the back."

"I don't know what you're talking about." And he didn't. Lizard had lost his mind... or had it tampered with. Hell. Their enemy must've implanted new memories in Lizard's mind while Kamara was on his ship. They were fucked.

"You're gonna die real slow for killing him, and this little whore is gonna make me rich."

Kamara struggled in Lizard's arms, laid her bare hands over his gloved ones. "Lizard, I am your friend. You trust me, love me. You are helping us escape an evil slaver." Was that desperation he heard in her voice? Lizard's arms tightened, choking off her air.

"ENOUGH." Lizard's roar of rage echoed off the lifeless walls of the narrow corridor and was amplified by the vid system. The blast of noise made Tobiath's eardrums pop. "Do you think I'm so stupid I would fall for your sweet voice again? No! I'm protected this time, no bare skin! I remember what you did to me, how you used me, sold me. You helped him kill my brother, and now you're both after me." Lizard took a step backward, still holding Kamara off the ground with one arm.

Kamara couldn't speak, but her eyes asked the question, begged him to help her.

Tobiath had the answer, but she wasn't going to like it. "He's been implanted, Kamara."

Kamara stopped moving, became dead weight in the giant's arms. Waiting.

"No. I've discovered the truth! You're coming with me, little whore. I'm going to ride you until you scream, then take you to Tantra prime and sell you to the highest bidder. I already have a buyer." Lizard leaned forward and Kamara's feet touched ground again as Lizard licked the side of her face. The putrid green tongue ran up her cheek and Tobiath saw red.

"Drop me!" Kamara's order flooded the corridor with magic and flowed through their link until his skin tingled. Tobiath smiled, and knew the smile didn't reach his eyes. Flesh to flesh, tongue to cheek. That taste had just cost Lizard his life.

Kamara dropped to the hard floor in a heap and rolled to her side. She came up on her knee, blaster in hand, and fired. Lizard roared in pain and went down. The surge of raw power Kamara had summoned made the air thick with magic; it lingered like the smell of rain and earth after a storm. Not only had Lizard boy touched her, but the slimy tongue had pissed her off.

Kamara looked at him, eyes blazing. One shaking hand wiped the wet stroke of Lizard's tongue off her cheek. Tears gathered on her lashes, but she blinked them away. "I can't believe he got to Lizard, too." Her eyes drifted over Lizard's body and a shudder racked her small frame. Tobiath wanted to gather her in his arms and comfort

her, but there was no time.

“Let’s go, Mara.” Slowly, so as not to get accidentally shot, he walked to her and pried the blaster from her fingers. Kneeling down on one knee, he kissed her fast and hard. She was out of immediate danger, but his blood boiled with the possibilities. If anything happened to her...

Yanking her under the arm, he forced her to her feet and pulled her down the corridor toward his ship. “Move!” The blessed silence lasted about half a minute. Fifty paces. “Tobiath, I’m sorry. I should’ve listened to you.” He wanted to punish her. Kiss her until she begged. He wanted to spank her for being so stupid, and hold her so tightly she’d never be in danger again. Their link fed him her grief, the gnawing ache in her heart at Lizard’s betrayal, at her own vulnerability and helplessness against the sorcerer who’d tampered with her servant’s mind. Tobiath’s mind and heart had been numb for years, conditioned not to feel anything. Now her pain, her loss tore through him, left jagged wounds he had no defense against. Never had he felt this much adrenaline raging through his body, like an explosive wired to blow with a hair-trigger. He had to taste her, comfort her, know she was alive.

Her gasp of alarm had him rock hard and at attention as he backed her into the wall. “Shut up. Don’t talk.”

“I’m so very, very, very sorry.” She grabbed his slave collar and gave a gentle yank. Her eyes were swirling with something, but it sure as hell wasn’t contrition. Despite her pain, wildness flickered in the chocolate colored depths. She was passion and life. Unrepentant. Free.

Dangerous.

God, he wanted to stay angry with her, but the devil dancing behind her eyes denied him. “You’re impossible.” He didn’t give her the opportunity to reply. He needed to feel her pulse in his hands, her heart pounding against his chest. He needed to taste life and hope again. Crushing her soft lips beneath his, he drank her in, and let the pain of loving, of fear, wash over him. For the first time in a long time, he *wanted* to feel.

Soft and inviting, she opened for him. Her tongue darted out to taste and explore his mouth. The thin silver material of her shirt molded and clung. The gel he wore picked up their combined heat, amplified and spread the burning warmth through the rest of the strange suit. Hard and begging for attention, her nipples announced themselves to his chest. Tearing his mouth from the honeyed sweetness of hers, he lifted her higher, pinned her to the wall above him and pulled one taut peak into his mouth through the thin fabric. Every cell in his body smoldered with the knowledge that he’d nearly lost her, that he no longer wanted to live without her.

“Yes.” Kamara wrapped her legs around him, fingers threaded through his hair, demanding he continue, pulling him closer.

The sounds of preliminary movement behind them caught his attention. It sounded like a groan of pain. From Lizard? He tore his lips from hers, turned his head to listen, then looked up into Kamara’s eyes. “Please tell me you don’t have the damn thing set on stun.”

Her delicate shrug made him groan and set her back on the ground.

“Mara!”

“I’ve never killed anyone. I prefer not to commit cold-blooded murder, if you don’t mind.” Her anger flared to life, punched him in the gut through their link.

“Why didn’t you warn me?” He adjusted the blaster setting to ‘kill’ and put his body between her and danger.

“You didn’t give me a chance!”

“Let’s go.” Swarming footsteps and shouts were coming from farther down the corridor now. Lizard must’ve called up the loincloth brigade.

Holding her hand, he pulled her along and ran as fast as her shorter legs allowed. If she didn’t want to kill them, he couldn’t very well waste them right in front of her. In the past, he would have blasted every single one of the bastards and thought he was doing the universe a favor. But now he seemed to be towing a conscience. If their enemy had tampered with their minds, Mara would say he was killing innocent men. Yeah. Right. If they were innocent, he’d shave his head and join the Order. He didn’t doubt they all deserved to die for something. But then, who didn’t?

Pandemonium broke out behind them. Screams chased them all the way to his ship. Neither of them looked back. Neither of them saw Lizard and his men lining the corridor, dead. Nor did they see the shadowed man swiftly and silently attach the tracking device to the hull of Tobiath's ship and slip away like a ghost.

* * *

Kamara bit her lip, sank back into the plush co-pilot's seat, and stared straight ahead at the multitude of stars before them. Such beauty in the universe, and such evil. Somewhere, out in the vast array of stars and spinning worlds, her young, innocent cousin lay at the mercy of a madman.

Tobiath sat to her left, all business now, putting as much distance between them and Tantra-9 as possible. She didn't make a sound, didn't want to distract him. Nothing would make her happier than never seeing the station again. She wasn't sure she would ever be able to wash the stench of the wretched place from her soul. Kamara pulled the remaining pins from her hair and shook the dark strands free in disgust. She needed to feel real. Like herself, and not the disgusting servant of men she had been pretending to be the past weeks, weeks of her life wasted in a trap set by an unknown enemy. She felt like the worst kind of fool.

"You all right?" Brisk and businesslike, Tobiath's question caught her off guard. His gaze skipped along the computer instrument panel as his hands made adjustments to their course, hands she desperately needed to feel touching her flesh, assuring her they were both alive. Whole. Redeemable.

She lied. "I'm fine." He turned to face her, and she quickly averted her gaze to study the long, slender fingers lying calmly in her lap. A princess knew how to fake calm. That vital skill was ingrained from a very early age. "Did you get a feeling about Zira?"

"Yes." The pause lingered, but patience won out and he continued. "She's alive. Very close. I can't get a fix on her location. I think they're moving her."

"Great." A deep sigh slipped out before she could stop it, and suddenly she was tired. Too tired. All this time, all the men and memory implants she'd dealt out to them as the Slave Empress, and still she'd failed Zira, failed her whole fucking world. So easily manipulated by another sorcerer. So sure of herself and the protection of her birth, she'd been such an easy victim. And Tobiath was hunted because *her* memories had proclaimed his guilt. False memories.

Weak. She was too weak to be a queen.

In her lap, her hands danced around each other like lovers afraid to part. Attempting a smile, she rose and stepped around her seat, studied the black paneling and instrument panel behind his chair. "I'm going to write a message to my brothers that will clear your name. I'll send it immediately. You won't be hunted anymore. I'm so sorry, Tobiath. I was too weak, too trusting. I was arrogant and full of my own power. I should've had a Shadow Master test the memories before I put a bounty on your head."

"Mara." His hand caught her right wrist and halted her escape. Electricity jumped from his skin to hers, rushed up her arm and shot straight into her laboring heart. "Don't go."

Mustering her courage, she glanced over her right shoulder, and was caught and held by the torment in his gray eyes, by a pain equal to or greater than her own. When he pulled her back, she could no more resist than she could will her pulse to stop pounding. He swiveled away from the instrument panel and pulled her down onto his lap on the soft gray chair. Strong and comforting, his arms wrapped around her from behind, his lips nudged the back of her neck through the mass of black hair.

"Please." Pulling her firmly back against his chest, his hands wandered over her abdomen, rose to cup her breasts through her shirt. Instantly, her nipples rose to greet him and he gently pinched each in turn. His lips had finally burrowed through her hair to bare skin, and he blew his words across the sensitive skin. "Don't leave me sitting here all alone."

Hot and wet, his mouth lingered. Her toes curled and she dropped her head forward to give him better access. God, she needed him to touch her, to make her feel again.

"Mara?"

"Yes." She twisted in his arms and sought his mouth. He met her halfway, his kiss wet, hot, demanding. His

hands left her nipples and she moaned a protest.

“Hush.” His hands slid up and down her arms, placing hers in the center of the captain’s armrests. “Do you trust me?”

“Yes.”

“Then hold still for me.”

She didn’t move, frozen with anticipation. His left arm snaked around her waist as he nibbled his way along her jaw. To her right, she was vaguely aware of his hand searching for something...

Magnetic locks rose from the chair and locked her wrists in place. She gasped in shock and Tobiath chuckled softly in her ear. “They’re a precaution against mutiny. No one can fly this ship but me. And no one else knows the release code.” Once again free to roam her body, his hands returned to torment her nipples. “Do you plan to disobey any direct orders?” He wedged his feet between her boots on the floor before them and used his legs and feet to drape her legs over his thighs. When he spread his legs, her legs were forced to open even wider on top of his lap.

“What happens if I say ‘yes’?” She laughed and relaxed, let her head fall backward to rest in the hollow of his shoulder, offered up her breasts to his hot hands, brazenly begging for more. His heart pounded against her back, infused her with strength and heated her skin to boiling.

“Then I keep you tied to the chair until you surrender.”

Anticipation sang through her veins. She closed her eyes and focused on the feel of his hand sliding over the curve of her thigh. He pulled the moon dagger from its sheath and ran one hand along her spine, pushing her forward until her back was exposed to him. Using the razor sharp blade to cut her shirt from her back, he slid the fabric forward until it hung from her body in tatters, several inches of space between her flesh and what remained of the silver fabric. Tobiath threw the blade across the small room where it imbedded in the wall, then slid his hands along her sides, wrapped his forearms around her and took the weight of her breasts into his palms.

“Much better.” Tobiath trailed feather light kisses across her back and shoulders as he kneaded her sensitive flesh. Her hair tickled and slid against her skin like a thousand tiny feathers. The sensation paled as Tobiath nipped at the right side of her neck, then swirled his tongue over her skin to assuage the small hurt. Her cunt clenched around emptiness, needing him to fill her to the point of pain. She couldn’t breathe, couldn’t think beyond the desire to have his skin blanketing hers.

“Now, what were you saying earlier about these pants?”

Kamara held her breath. So slowly she thought she would explode, Tobiath slid one hand from her breast to her stomach and grabbed the zipper at the waist of her uniform. He pulled it down toward her core and cold air rushed over the heated skin of her abdomen, then lower until the air hit the wetness soaking her cunt like a blast of ice. She shivered and almost whimpered in relief when the heat of his hand passed over her. Lifting her hips, she pushed against his palm, desperate for a touch, for more.

Touch me. Touch me. Touch me. The words were a desperate litany in her mind, playing over and over like a broken recording. Tobiath traced her entrance with two fingers, spreading her cream in slow, lingering circles. Beneath her buttocks, Tobiath’s other hand worked his cock free, rubbed the hard length of him across her entrance in a slow tease. Grabbing the zipper, Tobiath pulled it toward her back, pulled it all the way to her waist in back so her pants were completely undone in the crotch. Her legs were still encased in leather and slid over his rock solid thighs.

Kamara lifted off the chair as far as the restraints would allow, and stretched her body backward in a long line of offering. She felt decadent, deliciously open and vulnerable. Strength flowed from him everywhere her back touched the hard muscles of his chest, making her feel both wicked and safe.

The slave gel pulled at her flesh like a thousand tiny kisses, a thousand heated mouths sucking and nibbling at her skin, heating and spreading hyper-sensation to her nerves until her mind was temporarily overcome by the sheer overload of sensation. Tobiath’s teeth sank into her shoulder in a love bite. His hand pulled relentlessly at her nipple, beading and tugging until she shook, until her legs quivered even though they didn’t support her weight.

Only then did his other hand lift from her thigh to glide in an agonizing, unhurried caress toward her core. Once there, his fingers hovered over her open cunt. The heat of his hand tormented her without touch until she whimpered, "Please."

Tobiath's ragged breath whispered over the sensitive curve of her neck, teased her ear and her light tendrils of hair so that they tickled the side of her face. He was on the edge of control, and the knowledge spurred her to push her cunt against his fingers. The empty hollow ached with actual pain, so desperate was her need to be filled. Two fingers teased, slid inside a mere inch, then out, spreading her cream up to squeeze her clit before sliding back to enter her. Three fingers spread at the opening of her cunt, forced the flesh to widen, until she whimpered and lifted her hips in an effort to force his touch deeper. One hand still plucked her nipple, the other slid out of her cunt to pluck her clit so the two tender pieces of her flesh were pulled and released in unison.

Kamara sank down, the sensation so overwhelming that she pulled back in an attempt to escape the ruthless knowledge of his touch and pressed into direct contact with Tobiath's hard chest, and the gel coating every inch. A rush of tingling fire raced over her skin, traveled up her nerves and spread hot raging need to her mind. Every electrical current in her body was amplified, as if the gel took her natural senses and turned up the volume. The heat of his flesh was suddenly burning like too hot cinnamon, his ragged breath in her ear suddenly loud and exciting. Kamara could hear his heartbeat, feel his pulse where his cock nestled beneath her thighs, and the clamping emptiness of her cunt went from ache to searing need.

As if he could read her mind, his hand traced the path from clit to core and slipped one finger fully inside her. Kamara shuddered in relief, cried out when she thought he would abandon her. Three fingers stretched and filled her; the palm of his hand pushed and massaged her clit. She let her head fall back to rest against his. Then, his middle finger curled, stroked the ultra-sensitive tissue just above the entrance to her cunt. She screamed his name and let the orgasm take her.

Instead of relief, she wound higher, tighter. The gel at her back pulsed with her heartbeat, throbbed with his. His cock called to her with the same rhythm against her buttocks. When he pulled his fingers from her, she protested, her cunt clenching in vain. She needed more.

"Tobiath. Please!" She squirmed against him, used her legs to rise and adjust until the tip of his gelled cock rested where she wanted him, needed him to go.

Wet and strong, one hand stroked up her thigh. The other slid down over the smooth skin of her stomach, lower, until his fingers stopped on either side of her cunt and pulled the lips apart.

A deep moan of pain erupted from him and his cock bucked. "God, woman. You're going to kill me."

Beyond speech, she simply pushed against his touch as hard as she could, tried to overcome the strength that held her poised and open over his cock. Tobiath shifted beneath her until the soft edges of his cock's head slid inside. Kamara widened her legs, tried to slant over him, take him faster. But Tobiath had control, and he held her open, pulled her down slowly, deliberately, until the pulse of the gel rested against her cervix and pulsed through her womb. Driving her mad with wanting.

Fully seated, they both moaned, and Tobiath's head collapsed to rest between her shoulder blades.

Outside of her cunt, his fingers stretched and stroked her lips, explored her through the soft glide of her welcoming wetness. Unable to restrain herself, Kamara tensed her buttocks to rise up and squeeze him tight, then fall. Her inner muscles closed tightly and then opened wide on his hard shaft. Again her cunt squeezed him, pulled his cock deeper. The gel coating enhanced every nerve ending, amplified every touch, every stroke until she thought she could die from the simple pleasure of seating him.

Tobiath's fingers held her open, but his body was immobile, like a rock at her back. Hot and steady, air rushed out of his lungs with every ragged breath to dance across her skin. Kamara admired his control. Wanted to shatter it. "Hard. Deep." The words were a strangled cry from her lips, a desperate plea to her mate. Her *mate*.

With the thought, magic swirled to her as if she were the center of a tornado, roared to life from nowhere and slammed through them both like a sonic boom. Her cunt spread wide on his fingers, so sweetly full she thought she might split in half. Tobiath surged off the chair beneath her, hips lifting and retreating with such force her

breasts bounced and her feet rose up off the floor.

“Yes!” Kamara’s shout was half encouragement, half demand. The magic and Tobiath’s ruthless pace pushed her over the edge into oblivion. Her cunt rippled. Release screamed through her body, through the gel into his, and came back in hot pulsing waves.

Chapter Seven

“I don’t think this will work. I don’t trust them to help us.” Trystan’s booted feet carried him silently back and forth across the small space in his quarters. Blue eyes in an old woman’s face followed his movements through the vid monitor on the wall, glaring daggers at him.

“This plan has been in place since you were born. I trust them to defeat Bental. That should be good enough for you.” White roses surrounded Jazmyn in her underground prison. Prisms of light shone behind her through the skylights he knew had been cut into the black marbled caves. Long silver hair fell in a straight wall to her hips. The frown marring her face made her look even older than he knew her to be. She looked harmless from this side of the screen, like a loving grandmother out in a garden. But Trystan knew the truth, knew she was one of the most devious and powerful sorceresses alive. And she held Zira’s life in her hands. He played a perilous game with her, trying to defeat his master and win his freedom.

“No, Jazmyn. I had to kill six men just to get them off the station alive. Look at how easy it was to track Tobiath’s ship. He is weak, reckless. I’ve worked too hard. I’m too close. I won’t take the chance that Bental will claim her.”

Jazmyn’s eyes turned glacier cold. “You’ll do what I say. You track him so easily only because he is your blood. Zira was not strong enough. You need the princess’s power to defeat him. She must bond with your brother. Once you’re sure that’s happened, bring them here, as planned.”

There was no mercy in the old woman’s voice, only pain and a will honed by a lifetime in the fires of a personal hell the likes of which he could only imagine. To be his master’s wife was the only thing he could imagine that was worse than being his son.

“Listen to me, Trystan. Kamara is too powerful. I have felt her presence in the fabric of the universe since the day she was born, and so has your father. Either we take the chance, or your father *will* enslave her. I am old. Dying. I have lived almost two hundred years, and my power pales in comparison to hers. He needs her. Kamara’s power could feed him for hundreds of years. Another thousand.”

“I know.” A long, cold snake of dread slithered down Trystan’s spine and settled in the pit of his stomach, ready to strike. If Bental bound Kamara, the very breath of hell would be unleashed on Anthea. His personal hell would become the world’s. “I will see you in a spin, perhaps two, with Tobiath and his princess.”

The vid screen went blessedly blank and Trystan allowed the mask of indifference to slip from his face and his head to fall forward into his hands. Already he’d done something unforgivable, bound the younger princess to him in the hopes that her power would be enough to eliminate Bental. It hadn’t been. He’d known as soon as the threads tied their souls together that her power was no match for Jazmyn’s, that he wouldn’t be able to defeat his master. He’d seduced the beautiful Zira, forced the ritual words from her mouth, and tied her innocent soul to his black one. All for naught. May God forgive him. Zira never would.

Zira was still locked safely away in his mother’s secret dungeon, cared for and hidden from Bental and his thirst for fresh power, fresh blood, a fresh new wife. Trystan would never touch Zira again, and would never forget what it felt like to hold her. Of all the torture he’d endured in his life, this one left the deepest wound.

Trystan stared around his barren cabin. There were no pictures, no decorations, only stark gray walls and bare metal floors. His bed was covered in black sheets and every shelf in the room was home to something designed to hunt, capture, or kill at his master’s whim.

Zira’s soul weighed heavily on his conscience, but the price for killing his father, Bental, had yet to be met. The cost would be much steeper than Zira and his worthless black heart. Time to contact Tobiath directly and set the wheel of death in motion.

Tobiath woke with Kamara in his bed once again -- this time sated, content, and nestled in his arms. Their link hummed with life and he wasn't sure he'd ever get used to feeling what she felt, sensing what she thought. The connection was more intimate than anything he'd ever dreamed existed, and he realized he'd kill to keep it. As for Kamara, she felt safe. Happy. Two things he'd thought never to feel again. He didn't want to move, wanted to savor the moment, the warmth that curled around his heart and made him feel whole. Soft blankets wrapped them in a cocoon. Across the room, his grandfather clock ticked its steady rhythm. The sound was strangely soothing, allowing the mind to drift without thought or direction. Sleep lured him. Eyelids drifting closed, arm wrapped securely around her waist, he never wanted to get out of bed. Then the beeping started. Relentless and unforgiving, the distant sound floated in through his open bedroom door from the control panel, demanded a response.

"Tobiath." She pinched his arm and he groaned in protest.

"What?"

"The beeping."

"Yes. It's the Sentinal's private channel. Whatever those bastards want can wait." Tobiath snuggled back into the covers and pulled her closer to him. He cupped one soft breast in his palm and ran his fingers over her nipple until it hardened. Sleep was good, but he could think of something even better.

"I think it's important."

"Hell, woman." Damn instincts. Somehow, he knew she was right. Perhaps she was picking up the thought from him. A quick kiss and they were both throwing on their clothes. She was forced to borrow one of his black shirts. He watched her pupils darken as she stared at what was left of her silver one lying in a heap on the floor. Thoughts of how he'd cut it from her body rushed blood to places better left undisturbed if he had to work. Ah, fuck it. A wicked smile escaped. Staring at her naked ass was worth every moment of discomfort his rock hard cock would give him.

Tobiath stepped through the doorway and headed for the flight controls. He was strapping himself in when Kamara caught up to him and sat down next to him in the co-pilot's seat. "So, what is it?"

"I don't know yet." A frown marred her perfect brow and he tried, in vain, to hide his confusion from her as he read the coded symbols coming across his monitor in a stream of bright red lights. He muted the alarm and checked every gauge. Auto-pilot was still engaged. They were hovering in the middle of space, far from anything even remotely interesting, but they had company. Whomever it was, they weren't out here to see the sights. He'd been tracked. "Damn."

"What?"

"This is Sentinal's code, but not a call sign I recognize. And it's coming from somewhere very close."

"How close?"

"Right behind us." Tobiath ran his hands through his hair and winked at her. "Well, let's find out what he wants."

Tobiath calculated weapons' cache on board, speed, and maneuvering capabilities of his ship against the smaller one behind him. All this screamed through his mind as he calmly placed his palm over the vid screen control. Instantly the vid screen filled the entire space before them, switching from the black of space to the face of a man. Kamara froze and her shock wove its way into his bones.

Tobiath glared, then leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest.

Glancing nervously from the screen to his face, Kamara whispered, "It's you."

"Just a damn good holograph or a shifter. I've seen this kind of thing before." His words were confident, but energy flared through their link and gave away his rage. Fury twisted his insides into a million tiny pieces ready to explode. The clone better have one hell of an explanation, or Tobiath would kill him for the insult alone. The one who looked exactly like him spoke, "Tobiath, please respond. Priority message." The voice was slightly different from his. Beside him Kamara relaxed and he wished he could do the same. Dread was creeping through his limbs like a cold fog filling his skin.

He activated his speaker system and spoke, "This better be damn good." Leaning over his controls, Tobiath kept

one hand on the weapons systems. One wrong move and he'd fire. For now he waited, planned ways to kill. "Please turn on your visual. I need confirmation that Her Royal Highness, Princess Kamara, is unharmed." "Like hell you do. Who are you and what do you want?" The other ship was smaller, faster, but had less firepower. Both ships were designed for stealth, but Tobiath's had more force. The real question was in shielding. There was no way to know how much power the clone's ship would generate. That would be the deciding factor in the fight. He'd have to hit hard and fast and hope his shielding outlasted his opponent's. "I am Trystan. I know where Zira is being held and would speak with you both." "Zira's not on your ship." The blood bond was cold, distant. Zira was still alive, but nowhere close. What was this man trying to pull? And who was he that he knew Zira was alive when the rest of the universe believed her to be dead? "What do you really want?" "I need your help. If you want to save Zira's life, you'll talk to me." Trystan flashed pictures across the vid screen, images of Zira in some sort of cell. Alive. Apparently. Beside him Kamara's breathing stilled and her heart raced. Hope surged into him from her side of the link. Hell. Tobiath closed his eyes as the oppressive amount of guilt he'd carried over failing his young charge dropped onto his shoulders. Kamara's hope killed any possibility of ignoring the man staring back at him through the monitor, his mirror image. Too bad Kamara would be upset with him if he just shot first and asked questions later. He'd place money on the fact that he'd get more truthful answers from Trystan's ship database and personal belongings than they would from the man himself. He didn't need this unknown factor to track Zira. He still had the blood bond. "Mara." Her attention swung to Trystan's face and she froze in shock. Not many outside of the Royals' inner circle knew her preferred nickname. Hearing the familiarity from Trystan changed the cold fog in his veins to frigid ice. Whatever this man was going to say, he wasn't going to like. "We need to talk." The surreal twin image staring back through the monitor unnerved him, tempting him to refuse. He had a duty to return Zira to Anthea, safe and whole, and to clear his name. To do that, he needed to get his hands on her. Very well. That meant the evil twin got to live a little while longer. "Fine. Docking port alpha, ten minutes." Trystan nodded at him and the screen went blank.

* * *

"Look, I've knelt at the bastard's feet my whole life. He's finally growing weak. His sorceress is dying. We have to strike now." Trystan looked pointedly from Tobiath to her. "I need *your* help to destroy him." "Why me?" Kamara studied Trystan, the familiar lines of his face, the haunting gray eyes so like Tobiath's. Both men held their shoulders rigid, their movements as identical as their faces. She watched them glare at each other, argue and threaten, and doubt crept in. Surely, what Trystan told them couldn't be true. Surely, such a monster as his master didn't exist. But what if he did? "Not just you, Mara. Both of you." Trystan trapped her gaze, willed her to tell him the truth with penetrating eyes. "Have you bound Tobiath to you with magic yet, claimed him as your true mate?" Her answer was a long time coming. Silence fell in the room like a shroud. "No." But was she telling the truth? True, they hadn't spoken the ritual words, but there was no doubt they were linked in some way, their souls already entwined, inseparable. "You must, before you can face Bental Slarin and live." "Why?" Tobiath asked the question she didn't want to. "There are legends about our kind, Tobiath. Legends and myth lost to all but the true scholars about the source of an Immune's power." "And that is?" Kamara's patience was at an end. Two hours of the men talking around each other, arms crossed or caressing the blasters both wore strapped to their muscular thighs. Trystan had a small scar over his left temple. Both men wore black and had haunted eyes. If she'd seen Trystan on Tantra-9, she would've thought it was Tobiath. The resemblance was uncanny. Neither man wanted to give away vital information and so there was

no faith, no truth she could trust in the room.

Trystan rose from his seat in Tobiath's bedchamber and stalked toward her like an avenging angel. Tobiath left her sitting on the bed they'd just made love in and stepped in Trystan's path. Both their ships were small. Tobiath refused to board an unknown enemy's ship. That they were having this discussion in a room where she could still smell his skin, and sex, seemed absurd. Perhaps it was her delicate feminine sensibilities, but the men seemed unfazed by the surroundings and faced off like they were on a battlefield. "Touch her and die."

"Calm down." Trystan held his hands up in surrender.

"Tell me about the Immunes' power." Kamara requested the information, but had a hunch she already knew the answer.

"Unbound, an Immune destroys spells, funnels all magic through the body and passes it back to the universe. It is a rare and highly coveted skill."

Tobiath's hand now rested on his blaster, an obvious threat. Kamara had to peer around his side to see Trystan's face as he continued.

"When an Immune goes through the Binding with their mate, their lover's ability to summon magic becomes a door to the universe. Their strength determines the size of the doorway and how much magic an Immune can summon and direct."

Freed by her connection with Tobiath to summon vast amounts of power without fear of backlash, she decided to let her consciousness loose and sink into Trystan's mind. Time to take a chance and find out if this stranger spoke the truth. Gathering her focus, Kamara called upon her Shadow Master gift and slipped around Tobiath to touch Trystan's arm. She felt Trystan's absolute shock at the mental intrusion.

Lightning fast he pulled his blaster and lifted the weapon toward her chest. Tobiath was faster, holding his blaster to the center of Trystan's forehead. "Move before she's done with you, and you die."

Trystan was more difficult to read; the core of his being pulled her magic away from her almost as fast as she could gather it. Just like his brother. There was no doubt they were related. Their souls, their very cells called to and recognized one another across the void. Like Tobiath, she got impressions from him, emotions. Unlike Tobiath, a magical barrier she couldn't breach surrounded his mind, made a deep probe impossible. When the temptation came to summon more power and challenge the barrier, she resisted and pulled back into herself. Tobiath had pulled her soul back from the brink of destruction. There was no guarantee Trystan could or would do the same.

Swaying on her feet, she was grateful that Tobiath's free hand moved to the small of her back, and pulled her firmly to his side with one arm wrapped tightly around her waist. Her knees buckled, but he caught her so smoothly she wasn't sure Trystan would notice.

Trystan backed away, a small circular imprint left on his forehead from Tobiath's blaster. His smile was cynical, self-mocking. "What did you discover, Your Highness?"

She rested in Tobiath's arms and knew both men were waiting for her answer. "You are brothers, identical twins, born of the same creation."

Neither man acted surprised so she continued, "That's it."

"What do you mean, that's it?" Tobiath's question rumbled from his thick chest where he was still pressed to her side.

"I can't read him. At all. Your cells cry out your relationship, but his mind is blocked by magic. There is a barrier in his mind that I cannot breach."

"How is that possible?" Tobiath's tone left no doubt he expected a damn good explanation.

Kamara looked into Trystan's eyes, studied the weary lines surrounding them, the regret floating like shadows in mist behind them, and she knew the answer. "Zira. He bound Zira to him." All the fire and anger raging through her blood abandoned her with those simple words, and left a burnt out well of ash in her throat. It was done.

Could not be undone. Ever. "Why?"

Trystan closed his eyes, eyelids sinking as if they were weighed down by a hundred pounds of regret. "It was

necessary to keep her hidden. And I'd hoped she'd be strong enough to give me the power to defeat my master without you."

Tobiath tensed beside her. They both knew Zira's strength was phenomenal. Nearly a match for her own. "You have already battled him with Zira's magic, and lost?" Hard as diamonds behind her, Tobiath's muscles hummed with the need to protect her. Kamara felt the determination through their link. If Zira wasn't strong enough, there was no guarantee she would be either.

"No. I knew as soon as we'd bonded that her magic was not strong enough. I have suffered his energies many times, endured many punishments. Mother and I kept Zira hidden for many weeks. But if he finds her, he'll punish them both. Now, we must secure them before we dare risk a confrontation."

"How do we do that?" Kamara asked.

Trystan ignored Tobiath's shaking head and looked directly at her. "My orders are to bring you before him. So that's exactly what I'll do."

"No." Tobiath shoved her behind him and returned his blaster to its position in the center of Trystan's eyes. Kamara slipped around Tobiath's other side to see that Trystan didn't even blink. "Kill me and Zira dies with me."

"Bastard." Tobiath's fury stung Kamara, like a frantic wasp let loose in her mind.

"Toby, stop."

Tobiath shuddered visibly and dropped the weapon. "What's your genius plan, *brother*?" The stinging pain in her mind subsided, but Tobiath still spoke through gritted teeth. "Whatever it is, if either Kamara or Zira is hurt, I'll hunt you down and pull your head from your neck with my bare hands, brother or no."

Trystan nodded. "I'd expect no less from you." His attention shifted back to her. "I take you to his lair, as he expects. Tobiath, you will go underground and set Zira free. I'll draw a map of the tunnels and entrances. Once you've secured Zira, bring her to the main chamber. Together, we should be able to defeat him."

Kamara took a deep steadying breath and asked Trystan her final question. "How old is Bental? Please, don't tell me he's the original enslaver of the House of Moons."

"Then I won't tell you."

Tobiath shook his head. "The House of Moons revolt was over a thousand orbits ago."

Kamara worried her bottom lip with her teeth between words. "Yes... yes it was." A thousand orbits of slavery in the heavens and war between her people and the Daughters of the House of Moons. Bental Slarin was the cruel master the Moon Warriors rebelled against, the reason they'd established independent rule. Tales of his wickedness, his tortures, his callous disregard for life were myth and legend. The history books said he'd been hunted for nearly two hundred orbits, then presumed dead. They'd presumed wrong. As heir to the throne, she couldn't say no. First and foremost she must protect her people. As Zira's blood, she wanted to make him pay. "Show us your maps, Trystan."

Chapter Eight

Huge black doors covered in ornate gargoyle carvings opened before her. The wailing creak of their hinges reverberated through her bare feet, up the chains dragging the floor, and into her body through the metal links binding her wrists in front of her. Magic rushed over her in a tidal wave so intense she nearly lost her footing. The last thing she wanted was to crash face first into the cold marble floor.

“Bring her to me.”

The voice made every hair on her body rise in alarm. Trystan shoved her forward with a swift poke to her back from the blaster he carried. Kamara winced and wondered, not for the first time, if she’d lost her mind. She walked to face an unknown enemy deep in the bowels of his fortress, and her only ally was a man she’d known less than half a spin, a man so bent on vengeance, so twisted with hatred, he would probably sacrifice them all if it meant Slarin’s death.

Head held high, Kamara did her best to ignore the gigantic gargoyle statues lining both walls of the long chamber. There was just enough light to cast their stark, ugly faces in unnatural shadow and for the darkness to extend their menacing claws. Bare marble walls rose to form an arched ceiling that drifted above in a seemingly endless void. The room vibrated with power, with more magic than she’d ever felt or thought to control. All of Trystan’s promises of truth fled from her mind. This man, Bental Slarin, this being who awaited her, defied her imagination. A deep blue cloak kept his physical form hidden, but the evil emanating from him, the power swirling and pushing at her consciousness made her pulse race and her heart pound in fear. Was she strong enough to survive him?

She must destroy him. Doubts crowded her mind so rapidly she couldn’t grasp every thought. She just needed to distract him long enough for Tobiath to complete his mission. But she stood within the demon’s den. What chance did she really have here?

No. Kamara wouldn’t allow her thoughts to tread that path. The odds were of no consequence. What kind of monster would she be if she left him here to torture her people, her family further? She’d rather be dead. Kamara closed her fingers around the key in her hand and waited for her chance to strike.

Cold sweat beaded between her breasts. A single drop ran down to her waist to be silently absorbed by the material pressed to her by a heavy silver chain. The soft slide of white slave satin kissed her bare skin from shoulders to toes. White. The slave garment slid over her flesh, mocked her, made her want to shriek, cry, and rip out Slarin’s heart. When she left Tantra-9 with Tobiath, she’d sworn never to wear white again. Fate, apparently, had other plans.

The giant doors swung closed behind her, a death knell. Trystan’s face was colder than the solid marble beneath her bare feet. There was no sign he knew her, no lines of worry around his eyes, or tightness around his mouth. He could’ve been walking into a bar or a temple. His eyes were a cold, hard gray. They gave nothing away, no hint he cared whether she lived or died. She hoped he was simply playing his part and they hadn’t walked straight into a trap.

“Welcome, Princess.” Unfolding like a half dead skeleton, her enemy rose to his feet at the far end of the chamber. Covered completely in a blue cloak, his face teased her from the shadows. The only thing she could see clearly were his eyes, cobalt blue and filled with an unholy flame shining out from two dark, deep sockets. “I’ve been expecting you.”

Cold moisture collected on her temples. She licked her lips and tried to remember what she was supposed to say to this monster. The pulse of magic in the room, the evil flow of power, whirled through her mind until her brain lost all contact with her mouth. She was, literally, speechless.

The thing laughed at her. The dry crackling sound made her wonder why he wasn’t dead already. Then he

moved, flew several feet off the ground at her like a ghost, or a demon. His blue cloak whipped around him, the snapping sound eerie in the stone room. There was no wind.

One heartbeat. Two. Three. Then he landed in front of her and the hood fell back from his face revealing familiar creases. Wisps of shockingly white hair flowed around his head as if he faced into a strong wind.

A hot tidal wave of rage filled her gut and burst through the chains of horror holding her. Kamara knew his face, too well. This beast, Bental Slarin, was her father's most trusted advisor! He was believed to be Immune, not some sorcerer with godlike powers. The night of Zira's death he'd sat at her right hand at dinner, complimented her, pretended to be her friend, slept in her home... implanted false memories. "You bastard."

His smile deepened the lines in his face until she thought the gray-toned flesh must surely crack and slide from his skeleton into a pool of old, dead mush on the cold marble floor. Slarin's skin was nearly as dark as his army of statues. "Irony, isn't it?"

"What do you want?" Anger still swirled in her belly; it rose up through her throat and rushed over her head like a burst of hot water in a shower. Magic flowed with it, writhed beneath her skin with a life of its own, like a sentient being waiting for revenge. Control. Time. Kamara bottled her rage and played her part.

The flames in Bental's eyes dimmed until he almost looked like her old friend, her trusted surrogate uncle. "What do you think I want, Mara? You were always too damn smart for your own good. You tell me."

His gaze raked over her, lingered on her nipples through the sheer white material of the slave dress, swept lower and held as the soft caress of his magic wrapped around her, brushed the underside of her breasts and the inside of her naked thighs like a soft, tingling mint breeze.

"Stop." She wanted to scrub her body until it was raw, to remove any lingering trace of his magic, of his betrayal. Trystan had tried to warn her, to tell her who he was. Logic believed him, but she realized her heart had not.

"I've always wanted to see you in white."

"Fuck you."

Once again, laughter split his mouth into an unholy replica of a horrific theater mask. "Unfortunately, my dear, now is not the time. I must feed, but I'm afraid even I would be unable to hide all traces of your energy from your father if we indulged ourselves that way." An unseen wind whipped the hem of his cloak around him again. The light flared brighter in his eyes, turned the blood in her veins to half-melted snow. "Then again, it won't matter. He'll be dead soon. Then I'll truly feed."

"Feed." The simple word whispered across her dry lips of its own accord and suddenly too many things clicked into place. Legends. Horrors. Myths dark and long forgotten by most. Goosebumps jumped out on her flesh, the hair on the back of her neck rose in alarm, and her already frantic heartbeat raced even faster. Cold seeped up through her bare feet, spread through her body until she had to clench her teeth to keep them from chattering. When the monster spoke, she realized she was shaking her head.

"Yes. Yes. Yes. Every thought is true. Every story you've ever heard. I am the Immortal One, the dark one who feeds on souls and magic." Bental raised his hand. An old gnarled finger stroked her cheek, and her fear. "And you will be my next bride."

"Your next sacrifice."

His twisted finger now played with the curls of her long, black hair. "Perhaps. But you are strong, Mara. The most powerful I've felt in nearly a thousand orbits. You will feed me for a century, my dear. Perhaps longer," Bental traced her lower lip with his index finger, "... if I pace myself."

Kamara held still as a statue, refused to react, to reveal her fear. But how much longer would she be able to tolerate his touch, the stale half-dead smell of his body so close to her own? Where the hell was Tobiath? He should've rescued Zira by now. Severed the monster's link with his power source. Any moment now the fiend before her would grow weak enough for her to attack.

Trystan stood behind her, forgotten, a dim shadow eclipsed by her confrontation with Bental Slarin. He'd said he would wait, would be ready to help her when she made her move against the old wizard. But looking into Bental's demonic eyes, her gut twisted and churned. Magic flowed through the ancient man until it seemed his

entire body was held together by the very essence of the universe. Cold. Dark. Devoid of life.

Bental stepped forward. The hem of his cloak whispered over her toes, and his breath grazed her cheek. “I will bind you to me, beautiful Mara. Your soul will feed my demon, and your body will sate my cock.”

Emptiness, icy and indifferent, invaded her limbs with his words. Like a giant leech that survived on magic instead of blood, his presence siphoned energy from her every cell. He summoned her power as if it were his own. Try as she might, she could not wrest control of the abilities stirring to life within her, or stop him from feeding off her energy. Magic whipped through her like a tornado. Her body fed on the universe, called upon it to answer, and all of creation heeded.

A groan of pain escaped her as the maelstrom burned her insides like acid. Kamara dropped to one knee and pressed a hand over eyes threatening to pop out of their sockets. Automatically, she reached for the one man she trusted to save her. Tobiath.

He answered. A sudden calm replaced the storm building around her as Tobiath pulled the chaotic energies into himself and sent them back out into the universe. His soul wrapped her up in a warm cocoon and held her safely away from Bental’s malevolent touch. Comforted her. Loved her. He didn’t speak to her, didn’t tell her where he was, but it was enough.

Rising to stand before him once again, Kamara looked Bental in the eye and did not flinch. “I won’t be your sacrifice, old one.”

Bental raised an eyebrow and turned away, walked back toward his empty throne. “So, you have taken Tobiath as your lover. Have you bound him to you, dear? I think not.”

She hadn’t. Kamara mistakenly believed the link they already shared would be strong enough to fight. And it might. But too late she’d discovered their link wasn’t enough to protect her from the monster she faced. No, they’d never spoken the ritual words, but she wasn’t about to admit anything to Bental. So, she just glared at him and wondered what his next move would be. Now she knew Tobiath could anchor her in battle. It was time to figure out how to eliminate their enemy. She hated to admit it, but she wasn’t sure they were going to win this one. Either way, she’d die before she became Bental’s next immortal snack.

Bental walked past his throne to partially disappear in shadow. Kamara strained to see what he was doing and noticed thick draperies hung behind his seat. Black, they hung from at least twice her height to pool on the floor in sinister folds. An ache started where her heart should’ve been, a premonition of pain at what she suddenly knew she’d see. Bental’s hand appeared from beneath his cloak, shining against the black backdrop like a ghost’s as he pulled the draperies open and revealed their dark secrets.

Chapter Nine

The black curtain concealing his presence from the woman he loved slid aside, revealed the scene before him one agonizing inch at a time. Tobiath's vision was crystal clear, enhanced by digital imagers in the facemask he still wore. The charcoal gray Sneak Suit covered every inch of him, from head to toe, and was designed to hide its wearer from all manner of magical and traditional detection devices. But the suit hadn't been enough this time. Seven beasts he'd never seen before had surrounded him just as he reached Zira's holding cell. Nearly as tall as he, the orange furred animals had taken him down and summoned guards. Powerful jaws and sharp hooked teeth ripped and tore through the fabric until his body was battered and bloody and the thick material covering his flesh hung in pieces. The suit had saved his life, kept him alive. Barely. The suit now regulated his body temperature, felt like the only thing holding his insides together. Absorbed his blood.

The bastard Bental had strung him up and left him. Tobiath knew he'd failed and the knowledge almost made him rejoice in the hot trickle of blood flowing down his leg. Kamara might die, and their enemy never even asked his name.

Mara stood before him, defiant and strong. Thank God. Behind her, Trystan waited, eyes seething like a starving predator waiting oh so patiently to pounce and devour his prey. There was still hope.

Tobiath watched a series of emotions cross Kamara's face, realization, disbelief, and finally, fear. The pain in her dark eyes fueled the fire burning in his belly, turned his frustration into a raging inferno of retribution. Using every ounce of strength left to him, Tobiath struggled to break the iron cuffs pinning him to the wall like a sacrificial lamb. Bental had left him in the black Sneak Suit, not even bothering to uncover his face, as if his identity were of no significance. A fresh line of blood trailed from his wrist, wove and trickled through the hair on his arm and pooled in the sleeve at his elbow to drip onto the black marble beneath him. Each muscle in his body strained and fought the bands around his wrists. The iron didn't budge.

"Welcome to the party, my friends." Bental raised those eerie blue eyes to Tobiath's face. The old one was malicious, so twisted inside Tobiath doubted he remembered his true name. Bental's voice was a strange rasp, half speech, half wheezing. The ancient was growing weak. He'd nearly drained all the energy from the frail elderly woman chained to Tobiath's right.

Jazmyn was old. Over a hundred orbits of age, if he believed her claims. Looking at the deep lines tracking across her face, the hopeless gray eyes, and the frail little body beneath her white gown, he believed. Jazmyn told him she had been born a Daughter of the House of Moons nearly one hundred and fifty orbits ago. Bental Slarin had simply appeared before her one day, taken her, and bound her to him before her magic had fully awakened. When she realized the full extent of her power, it was too late. Her fate and her soul were already bound to Bental's. Survival had meant feeding him energy, feeding the greedy beast inside Bental that had kept the past king of Anthea alive for millennia.

Chained to his left was his precious ward, Zira. The young woman's head lolled to the side, unconscious. Her face bore a close enough resemblance to Kamara's that his blood boiled anew. Blood stained the white sleeves of her slave gown where she, too, had struggled against the iron and magic binding her. If Mara managed to defy Bental, the immortal would need her younger cousin to feed his starving cells in her place. Zira had been the old man's target until he'd met Mara and been lured by more power. And more will. Even now, Tobiath watched Mara's shoulders straighten as she recovered from the shock of seeing him chained. Oh, yes, his Mara would destroy Bental. Or die trying.

The last worried him most. An image of her broken and dying flashed through his mind, made his whole body hurt. He needed to get off this damn wall.

"Let them go." Mara's demand brought a smile to Bental's lips. Then the old man turned to answer her and left

Tobiath staring at his back. Honor be damned. If he had a blaster right now, he'd shoot the bastard between his shoulder blades without a qualm.

"I'll set them all free, even your new friend Trystan, if I have your word you'll remain here as my new bride."

"No!" The word exploded from Tobiath. "I'd rather die, Mara! You know it."

Kamara raised tortured eyes to his, the link between them overloading with too many emotions. Too many fears. But she knew he meant what he said. He watched the knowledge stiffen her jaw and set her lips in a stubborn line he'd developed a fondness for kissing. "I'll die first, Bental," Kamara said.

"No." Bental flowed across the floor toward Kamara like a levitating corpse in blue. Tobiath noticed her hands were shaking, but she refused to flinch when he stroked her cheek with one thin finger. Bental continued, "You will not die today, Kamara Lonriev. You will be mine for a very, very long time."

Kamara glared in disgust, in defiance. "I'll see you dead first."

Bental laughed then. The sound echoed off the walls, magnified and grew until the laughter filled the space, filled his head, until the gargoyles themselves seemed to be laughing with him. Tobiath's hair stood on end at the haunting sound. They were missing something important, a vital piece of the puzzle. Bental took a step back. The unseen winds swirled around him again, whipped his cloak with loud snaps as the old man floated straight up off the floor. "Now, Mara, you will see your lover die first."

In a flash of light and energy, Bental struck. Kamara's scream hurt almost as much as the blade protruding from his chest. He'd failed. He'd failed them all. But he could give her one last gift. Stuttering in his chest, Tobiath's heart beat for Kamara. *I love you, Mara*. Then he opened himself, focused his dying will on Bental, and tried to siphon energy out of the Immortal.

Beside Tobiath, Jazmyn stuttered and cried out. He was weakening her further, speeding her death. Trystan sprang from where they'd all forgotten him. He reached Tobiath and yanked the blade from his brother's chest in one swift move. "The Binding! Do it now!"

"Trystan!" Bental's challenge rang through the air. The power in his voice exploded inside Tobiath's head like a cannon blast. Trystan spun away from Tobiath and landed on the balls of his feet, ready for battle.

"I hate you, old man." Trystan pulled a blaster from somewhere for his right hand, and a small staff for his left.

Bental laughed and raised the hand with the black ring toward his slave. "I hate you too, son." With one powerful surge of magic, Bental sent Trystan flying across the room.

Tobiath's already struggling body froze in shock. Son? Son! Trystan staggered to his feet and struck back with a burst of green flames born of Zira's magic. Bental staggered back under the blow and circled Trystan for another attack. How was this possible? Trystan was his twin, his *brother*. An Immune. And Bental Slarin was his father. On his left, Zira moaned and struggled to regain consciousness as Trystan flew backward again.

Beat. Skip. Beat. Tobiath's eyelids were too heavy and the train of thought drifted away into the tempting void. He struggled to hold his eyelids open and watch the fight. Kamara was running toward him, somehow free of her chains. Time slowed to a near standstill. In slow motion, he watched her come to him, drank in the vision to carry to the other side.

His father flew through the air, landed at his feet, and thought returned. God, no wonder there were only a handful of Immunes alive at any one time. Their extended lifespans. All were descendants of Bental, the mythical king of Anthea. The king whom the Daughters of the House of Moons had risen against. Perhaps those crazy Amazon women weren't so paranoid and unreasonable after all. Perhaps they had a better version of truth than his people did.

The Immortal One gained his feet. Grayish skin twisted into a feral mask of hatred as Bental advanced on Trystan. His father. His fucking father. The thought made him sick, made the taste of blood in his mouth welcome. None of the demon's offspring should be allowed to live...

"Tobiath!" Kamara yelled in his ear, demanded he hold on, focus on her. "Stay with me! Trystan won't last long."

Tobiath saw Trystan struggle to his feet out of the corner of his eye. No, his brother would not last much longer.

"Do you trust me?"

“I love you.” Beat. Skip. Breathe. It all hurt like hell.

“Mind to mind, Toby. Say it.”

What did he have to lose? His heart? His soul? His life? All already belonged to her. And once Trystan was gone, Kamara would be alone. She would lose. “Mind to mind.”

Mara raised a hand, ran it through his hair, then slid her open palm over his shoulder and chest. “Heart to heart.”

“Heart to heart.” It took every ounce of will just to force his mouth to form the words, to push enough air through his lungs to speak at all. Beat. Skip. His right leg collapsed and he fell, jerked to a halt by the iron around his right wrist. Pain twisted up his arm, but without the piercing shock he expected. Numbness settled in. Cold tendrils of death danced over his skin.

Reverently, she lifted one bloodstained finger to her mouth and took his essence into herself. “Blood to blood.”

“I’m dying. Don’t...” He didn’t want to do this, bind her and then depart this life. All hope for her to have a husband, children, would be gone. She’d walk to death’s door with him.

Perhaps she would defeat Bental first. He had faith. Kamara was powerful beyond his comprehension. But a healer his Mara was not. Even if she were able to heal with magic, he was Immune. No one could stop the inevitable now. He would not weaken her with his dying breath.

“Blood to blood, Tobiath. Say it. Say it!”

“No. I love you.”

“Tobiath.” Beside him, the old woman spoke for the first time in hours. She too was dying. The battle Bental fought with Trystan sped her deterioration; every ounce of power Bental spent was hers. Crystal clear and proud, her gray eyes, identical to his own, searched for and held his gaze. His mother. After all this time. And all he could feel was numb. “Do it. Unlock your power, son. I didn’t leave you with the Sentinals all those years ago for nothing. Destroy him. It’s your destiny.”

Destiny. He’d always hated the damn word, but his mother’s dying eyes demanded he grant her last request.

Tobiath turned back to Kamara, to the love and terror in her dark eyes. He would simply have to live. “Blood to blood. I bind you to me.”

“I bind you to me.”

Within him, something shifted like a thousand tiny tumblers clicking into place. Purple flames licked at the insides of his body. The healing heat grew until he was branded, burned from the inside out.

Kamara rose to her tiptoes and unlocked his wrists with the key Trystan had given her. She caught him and eased him down the wall when his legs buckled. He did feel stronger, but his heart still struggled, his lungs couldn’t get enough air, his blood still burned with magic.

Kamara knelt beside him and kissed him, hard and fast on the mouth. “Let’s give this bastard what he wants, shall we?”

“And what is that?”

“A taste of me.”

His lips twisted into a smile. Mara laid a hand on his shoulder and the jolt of magic would’ve thrown him back if he hadn’t already been sitting against the wall. As usual, his body absorbed the magic, funneled it, tightened it into a powerful stream to be shot back into the universe. Normally he had no control over where it went. Now... Mara traced the line of his shoulder, wandered over his chest to make sure his wound was gone. Satisfied, she placed her hand in his and stood. He rose beside her as realization dawned. Awe immobilized him for a heartbeat. Her smile lit her eyes, shone with trust, the gift she’d given him. He could destroy her now, feed off her essence as Bental did. She would be helpless to deny him.

As if she read his mind, she turned those sexy-as-hell bedroom eyes on him and smiled. “I love you, Tobiath.” He’d die before anyone ever hurt her again. Immortality wasn’t worth the price she’d have to pay. “Let’s take him out.”

“Yes.”

Hand in hand, they turned to the battle raging between Trystan and Bental. No more than a few minutes had

passed since the fight began, but Trystan was battered and bloody. A grudging respect solidified as Trystan climbed to his feet and fired back, time and again. When Tobiath took a step forward, Trystan's smile was pure relief. "It's about time."

Trystan raced for them, flying through the air with Bental right behind him. Just as he reached them, he tossed the staff to Tobiath. "Your turn."

Tobiath grabbed it out of the air and smiled at the energy running along its length, at the ability it would give him to focus his will.

"No!" Bental stopped flying halfway to them; he dropped to the floor and retreated several steps. "Jazmyn, what have you done?"

"Told them your secret." Jazmyn's cackle was as unnerving as Bental's. "Goddess bless you both, my boys. You found each other, just as I knew you would."

"What are you talking about?" Bental backed up another step. The flame dimmed and flickered in his blue eyes until Tobiath could see doubt and fear behind them.

"Oh, yes. They are both yours. Both Immune. Both of my blood." Jazmyn's eyes rolled up into her head and she laughed, the sound hollow and bitter. "Both strong enough to destroy you."

"Jazmyn, no!" Bental rushed toward the back wall, but it was too late. Her soul floated away and her body fell slack against the iron binding her. Dead.

Desperate for another energy source, Bental rushed to Zira but Trystan got in his way and punched the older man in the gut, doubling him over. "You're done here, Bental. Zira is already bound to me."

Horror took root in Bental's gaze when magic no longer answered his summons.

Tobiath advanced on him, ready to strike. The old man's true name flowed into his consciousness, one last gift from his mother. "Bentalzine Slarinth, I, Crown Sentinel Z-4, pronounce you and Jazmyn, fourth Daughter of the House of Law, guilty of kidnapping and attempted murder of a member of the royal house of Anthea. The punishment is death."

"Not so fast, *son*." Bental pulled two blasters from his thighs and pointed them at Tobiath and Kamara. "I still need a mate. Kamara and I will get along just fine after you die."

Kamara surged through him then, pulling the energy with her as she'd done so long ago in his rooms. But this time she gave it to him, sank into his consciousness until they were one mind, one heart, and one soul. He saw her plan clearly and directed the magic toward Bental, into the old sorcerer's body, into every cell. When he felt millions of tiny links to Bental, he opened the floodgates, made his own call for magic, and the power of the whole universe rushed to his aid.

The surge of power rocked the small room and slammed into Bental's cells, exploded them all simultaneously, like a million tiny bombs, in one blinding flash and burn of magic. When the smoke cleared, there was nothing left. Not a single hair of the ancient evil remained.

"Never could compete, Mara." Zira's voice brought them back to earth, pulled Tobiath out of the heat and comfort of his link to Kamara.

Kamara turned and ran to her cousin. "You all right?"

"I'll live. Get me off this wall."

Trystan walked to her and silently unlocked her wrists from the black metal links above her head. If Zira's eyes had been daggers, Trystan would be bleeding. Badly. As soon as she was free, she stepped around Trystan and squeezed Kamara with all her might. "I'm not going back to Anthea." Zira stared into Kamara's eyes and Tobiath felt something pass between the two women, an understanding of pain, betrayal, of a soul colored by experience and unable to return to the old ways. A slow burning rage simmered within Zira, bubbled up thick and hot, like melted steel.

A wave of unease hit him through his link with Kamara and another powerful surge of magic rocked the marble halls. Zira was gone, vanished into thin air. Tobiath watched pain and resignation shine from Kamara's gaze.

"Where did she go?"

Kamara shook her head, tears in her eyes. “I don’t know. That’s one of her gifts. She can travel through space from one point to another. Unless you have a blood bond, she’s impossible to track.”

Tobiath held out his hand to Kamara and she wrapped her arms around him, buried her face in his shoulder, and continued, “She was never this powerful before. She couldn’t travel long distances, or underground. The bond to Trystan must’ve made her stronger.”

She was shaking. The small trembling made him want to kill Bental Slarin again. And again. “Don’t worry, Mara. I’ll find her for you.”

“No.” Trystan looked grim, blood dripping from a cut over his right eye. He stared at the spot where Zira had vanished. “This is my fault. I’ll find her.”

Tobiath studied the face so like his own. But for a roll of the dice, he’d have been his father’s slave, and Trystan the Sentinel. In that, Tobiath knew he’d been the lucky one. He recognized determination in the square set of Trystan’s shoulders, resignation and regret burning in his brother’s eyes. Trystan cared, all right. More than he wanted to admit.

Tobiath tightened his arms around Kamara and spoke to his brother. “After you get your love life straightened out, find us. I’d like to get to know my brother, learn more of my mother and your lives here.”

A lingering sadness filled Trystan’s eyes, and envy, as his gaze traced Tobiath’s arms where they wrapped around Kamara. “I will find you, Tobiath.” Trystan’s smile held a hint of self-mockery. “And I’ll bring Zira home. You have my word.”

Kamara pulled from his embrace until she could look at Trystan. “Don’t torture yourself with promises you can’t keep, Trystan. Just see that she’s happy, wherever she is.”

Trystan nodded his head in acknowledgement and walked from the room.

Chapter Ten

“Are you sure about this, Mara?” Tobiath’s hand hovered over a tiny little blue button that would alter her life, and his, forever. They were back on his ship, snuggled up together in her new favorite chair, the captain’s chair. She tried to keep her mind on the business at hand, on the message she’d written and recorded over the last several hours. It cleared Tobiath’s name, let her family know that Zira was alive and well... somewhere, and abdicated the throne to her older half-brother Padraic. His bonded mate was heir to the throne of the Moon Warriors. It was the perfect solution to reuniting their two worlds. And if Padraic ever got his hands on her, he’d probably kick her ass. She grinned at the thought.

“Would you stop asking?” Kamara wanted to laugh, and cry. The decision would affect billions of lives. She hoped for the better. Snuggling into his bare chest, she rested her head on his shoulder. “Do you want to rule Anthea?”

“Hell, no.”

“Neither do I.” Several moons of living on the slaver station had soured her view of the pampered palace life she’d once led. “I have to destroy Tantra-9, Tobiath. I can’t allow the slave trade to continue. Not when we have the power to stop it.”

“We can blow up the station without even breaking a sweat, Mara. But destroying the station isn’t going to stop the trade.” Kamara sighed in contentment. Tobiath knew, would always know, what she meant.

He absently stroked her hair with his fingers, comforting her. Their bond was so intense since the Binding, she could literally feel what he was feeling, know what he was thinking, could send him her thoughts even though he did not possess the gift of telepathy.

“I know. But it’s a start. I want to hunt those responsible. I want to take out the biggest traders, destroy their ships. Steal their money. That should at least slow it down.”

“All right. I’m game. You know I’ve always hated that place. Perhaps even more than you do.”

“Then send the message and let’s go to bed.” Kamara lifted her face, nuzzled the side of his neck. He smelled too good, too real, like passion and power and lazy days spent in bed making love. Alone on his ship once more, Kamara had stripped the offensive white slave garment from her body and borrowed one of his shirts. Sitting in his arms, wrapped up in one of his black uniforms, she felt like she was truly and finally home. He lowered his head to kiss her, but stopped halfway to her mouth. The look in his eyes made it perfectly clear he was remembering the last time they’d shared this chair.

Suddenly too hot to sit still, she wiggled free enough to pull her borrowed shirt off over her head. The shirt had barely covered her ass, and she had nothing on underneath.

“This isn’t bed, Mara.” Tobiath sent her message with a decisive punch of a button, then lifted and repositioned her so she straddled him in the chair. Bending her back over until she hit the control panel, he lowered his mouth to her breast.

“That a problem?” She wiggled her ass against the stiff black uniform fabric covering his erection and buried her hands in his hair.

“No.” He traced the edge of her taut nipple with the tip of his tongue. When the skin was wet and aching, he blew and his breath felt like a cool autumn breeze. Her nipples got harder. Tighter.

“Tobiath!” Already she was soaking wet, ready. Needing him. The seam of his pants rubbed her clit, hard and unforgiving. With a moan of delight, she spread her legs wider and wiggled until the seam split her folds so she could rub her clit against the hard edge.

“Yes?” He moaned against her breast, then trailed fire across her chest kissing his way to her other nipple.

“Get rid of your clothes.” The hard muscles of his arms intrigued her with their power and gentleness. She

kneaded the muscles with her hands, depended on his strength for leverage as she continued to rock against him. He sucked a taut peak into his mouth, flicked his tongue. Bit softly. Over and over. "I'm busy." She laughed. She couldn't help it. Laughing felt so damn good she never wanted to stop again. Raising her arms over her head, she offered her body to him like a pagan sacrifice. Leg muscles flexed, she lifted her hips off his lap so she could have exactly what she wanted. One word was uppermost in her mind. She gathered the magic and visualized her need, focused her will on one word. "Vanish."

Two syllables and Tobiath was naked beneath her. Rough and impatient, his hands grabbed her by the waist and pulled her open cunt atop his hard cock. Closing her eyes in bliss, she slid down onto him, slowly. Slowly. Stretching.

Kamara squeezed her inner muscles, intensified the sensation of being invaded until the head of his cock burst past the barrier, and slammed home against her cervix. A spiral of sweet pain and lust made her cry out for more. Tobiath slid his hands to her hips, fingers dug into her flesh. He lifted and pulled her down, impaled her again in one hard, fast move. She lost the ability to think. His hands moved over her back, caressed the skin, slid lower to squeeze and spread her cheeks apart. Her cunt muscles jolted awake at the sensation, pulled his cock deeper, rippled up and down his cock in hot, wet demand.

"God, Mara. You're going to kill me." Tobiath whispered the words against her neck. His teeth nipped at her shoulder, at her collarbone, at the delicate curve of her neck. A hint of whiskers rasped the sensitive skin, made her shiver and her cunt clench.

Kamara left one hand in his hair, the silken strands clenched in her fist, her only anchor to reality. She slid her left hand between their bodies, wedged her fingers between his stomach and her clit, shoved her hips toward him, trapped fingers tapping the nerves of her clit into a frenzy.

Tobiath held her still, pressed down over his cock, thrust his hips up. The taut muscles of his abdomen drove her fingers harder against her sensitive clit. Again. Kamara let her head fall until her forehead rested against the top of his shoulder. The faintest hint of cologne lingered here, mixed with his skin, his sweat, and filled her nostrils with hot, hard man. Her breasts were crushed against his chest.

Riding him, spread over him, she ground her mons into him in a faster rhythm, wanted him to move more, to take command and pound into her as hard and fast as he could.

Finally, finally he lifted her and pulled her back down over his cock. He pulled her buttocks apart and slid the tip of one finger up inside to tease her ass. The slight intrusion, the extra sensation of invasion blew all thoughts from her mind, turned her into an animal acting on instinct. Hand still between their bodies, she clenched his hair in a fist and pulled his lips to her nipple. Using her leg muscles and her hold on his head for leverage, she arched her back and spread her legs as wide as they would go, and bucked like she was riding a galloping stallion. Up. Down. She squeezed her clit. Released it. Thrust her nipple into the hot, wet cavern of his mouth and whimpered when he bit it, as it sent a bolt of lightning to her core.

Kamara couldn't stop moving. Wanted it harder. Faster. Tobiath's fingertip wiggled with every plunge of her hips, pulled her anus up and back, tightened her cunt around his massive cock until she couldn't breathe, couldn't feel anything but his mouth, his finger, and his cock ramming deep.

The first ripple of orgasm tore his name from her lips in a voice she didn't recognize as her own. A blast of love and lust, of blinding need slammed into her through their link, and her whole body tightened in response. Her cunt muscles clenched then released in endless waves that spread to every muscle in her body until her entire being exploded in an orgasm so intense she screamed and Tobiath followed her over the edge.

Minutes passed, and she was too lethargic and sated to move from his embrace. Face pressed into his shoulder, Tobiath's arms wrapped solidly around her, Kamara inhaled his musky scent, the scent of their sex, and let the aroma bathe her soul in contentment. She worshipped his body, shared his heart and soul, and gifted him with magic. Love pulsed through their veins, their soul link, in a hot cadence that brought one word to Kamara's mind in a steady, repeating rhythm... *mine... mine... mine...*

A smile pressed her cheek into the muscles of his chest. She was a princess, after all, and everyone knew a

princess always got exactly what she wanted.

The End

Kara Fey

Kara started writing at the tender age of eleven, and was never smart enough to stop. Now she battles the craft of writing like it's an addiction, an obsession, or a psychiatric/chemical imbalance. (It's probably all three.) She especially believes this when all her characters are running around in her head demanding their stories be told. There's probably a medical term for that...

Kara can't stand wimpy heroes and heroines, so her characters are strong willed, intelligent people who aren't afraid to take chances. We all need a little taste of that kind of courage and fantasy in life. Her one wish is that readers will enjoy her stories! Visit Kara's website at www.KaraFey.com.