

Changeling Press

MINA
CARTER



SIREN'S
SEDUCTION
DRAGONKIN

DragonKin: Siren's Seduction

Mina Carter

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Edan is a loner, pure and simple. A loner with one goal in life, to avenge the twin killed in an illegal cage fight four years ago. With no body to mourn, Edan takes his twin's place in the ring to save as many paranormals as he can from the brutal sport.

Paranormals like Dualla's aunt Melody, saved from a rich human's "collection." Restored to her tribe, the older mermaid tells tales of her handsome and enigmatic rescuer, tales that have the younger women of the Romani mer-tribe in flutters.

Everyone except Dualla. Half mer, half... something else, she's always been the odd one out. A healer like her mother, she's had the same dream for years -- dreams of a man who is more than a man, and a dragon with purple scales who sets the sea on fire. A warrior to her mystic. A man with a broken heart... one Dualla knows she was born to heal.

Chapter One

The fight was over. Two hundred pounds plus of defeated cage fighter hit the floor, groaning his pain into the matting. Victorious, Edan spun in the centre of the ring, sweat-soaked blond hair whipping around his shoulders as he looked for his next target.

There wasn't one.

He'd won.

He roared in triumph. The crowd gasped as he loosed his hold on the dragon within and gave the creature full voice. The window panes, set high in the walls, rattled, and glasses danced over the tables with the force of the sound. His dragon drew closer to the surface, scales pressing against the inside of his skin as his bones ached with the effort of holding it inside.

Edan lifted his head and looked around the crowd as he forced the creature to recede. He didn't bother to hide the contempt written across his face. The room was filled, every seat at every table occupied for this blood-thirsty spectacular. He recognized politicians, police chiefs and wealthy businessmen. Kneeling at their feet, wearing near identical collars and expressions of misery, were their paranormal "pets."

Edan gritted his teeth until his jaw ached with the pressure. He could see numerous weres and several variety of Fae. Nothing too powerful of course... certainly nothing like him. A dragon would take this place apart in seconds if anyone was stupid enough to even try and put a collar on it.

"And the winner is... Edan Lisander!" The announcer's voice rolled around the small room.

Mac, Edan's owner, ducked into the cage to grab Edan's wrist, shoving it into the air in the traditional winner's salute. "Good job, big guy. Thought you were a goner at one point."

Dark haired and lean, Mac appeared human. Especially next to Edan, who looked like he could break the smaller man in half. Nothing could be further from the truth. In Mac's case, what walked and talked like a duck was anything *but* a duck.

Edan knew if he tried anything, he'd just end up bruising his knuckles. Mac was a gargolye; one of the only creatures who could suck up more damage than a dragon. Which made them perfect partners -- a deadly duo in their bloody little game.

"Pfft, to him?" Edan nodded at the crumpled figure of his opponent. "You've gotta be kidding me. He couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag, no matter how much Fairy-dust they pump into him."

Like his contempt, Edan didn't bother to hide his disgust. The guy had been high before he stepped into the cage, and there was nothing that pissed Edan off quicker than a user. Particularly one who thought he was the biggest bad-ass out there. Of course, there had been nothing else for it... Edan had been forced to introduce him to the mesh of the cage several times.

"Oh yeah?" Mac threw back, "I suppose hitting his fist with your face was part of you wearing him down then?"

"Behave," Edan bit out while Mac paraded him around the cage like a good little pet. "Or you'll end up as a garden ornament. A butt-ugly one."

"Yeah, yeah, you and whose army, scale-boy?"

Edan just shook his head. Mac had the gift of the gab for sure. "So, how'd we do?"

Mac's grin was quick, the look in his silver eyes almost feral. "We got him bang to rights. Bastard was counting on his boy winning this fight and for you to take a fall in the fourth. Right about now he's making a run for it with the takings."

"We've got all his escape routes covered?"

Edan ducked out of the cage, slipping a little on the blood and snot by the hatch but recovering within a second. He slanted a look over his shoulder in the vain hope that Mac wouldn't notice it and go arse over tit. No such luck. For a creature made of the biological equivalent of granite, the gargoyle was damned light on his feet.

Mac threw a towel around the dragon's neck as Edan flopped into a chair near their corner. "Of course. What do you take me for? No matter where he runs, Steel and Reese'll track him down."

Edan used the edge of the towel to wipe the sweat from his face. They'd spent too long tracking Carmicheal, put in too many man hours getting their ducks in a row, for it to all go to shit now. With heavy hitters like Steel and Reese on the case though -- both of whom had more than enough reason to hate Carmicheal's guts -- Edan didn't have to worry about anything.

Well, other than the two weres ripping each other to pieces. Edan's eyebrow arched. "You sure it was a good idea to put those two together?"

Mac shrugged. "They'll either work out their differences or kill each other. Either way, I won't have to put up with their bitching and bellyaching about each other anymore. I call it a win-win situation."

Edan snorted a laugh and reached up. Gathering his hair at the nape of his neck, he snapped a band around it.

"What the fuck? What do you mean he's gone? I put good money on this fight and I want my damn winnings!"

The shrill voice of complaint was just the first. Before either Edan or Mac could turn and identify the speaker, more voices had joined the fray. The noise in the room increased as the crowd realized there might be a problem.

"Looks like the peasants are revolting." Mac threw the bigger man his shirt and grabbed Edan's bag. "Come on, big guy, time to haul ass before things get ugly."

The shirt hit Edan mid-stomach as he rose to his feet, his movements graceful even after seven rounds and a pounding in the cage. His attention wasn't on Mac though. Instead, it was riveted on the other side of the room where a fish tank covered

the wall. In fact, it was the wall, he realized, now he got a good look at it. There was something in there, something big.

"You go on. I'll be out in a moment."

* * *

If she heard one more "ooooh, he's so manly," Dualla was going to throw up. Lounging on her favorite rock to one side of the village's communal area, the mermaid closed her eyes and basked in the weak sun as it filtered down from the surface. It wasn't as good as sunbathing, but down here, it was the best she could do.

"Melody, tell us again how he rescued you!"

Merilea's high-pitched demand broke through her older cousin's tranquility. Dualla's brow pinched. Inner happy meal, she thought in determination, reach for the inner happy meal. *I am a chicken nugget, a happy chicken nugget. One who doesn't give a damn about daring rescues and handsome bloody heroes.*

"Oh, he was so brave... and handsome. Did I mention he was handsome?"

Only about a million times.

"Ohhhh, was he big and strong?"

Dualla's tail swished in irritation as she fought to control her annoyance. That was the trouble with her tribe... with mertribes in general. They were mostly female and tended to be isolated. She'd say inbred -- what with the women around her acting like complete ninnies over her aunt's rescue -- but inbreeding relied on there being some men around.

Mermen were rare these days, and those who were left had banded together into all male groups. Hunter groups. They roamed the oceans without regard for tribal territories and offered their services -- hunting or more... intimate services -- to the tribes. Arrogant and violent, they were the main reason many mermaids went to the surface for their lovers, returning to the sea pregnant. Some, like Dualla's mother, spent their lives between land and the sea while their kids were growing up. It was easier than contracting with a merman.

"Oh, yes... and handsome --"

Dualla cracked an eyelid and treated her aunt to a glare. Older than Dualla by ten years, although no one would have guessed with Melody's delicate beauty, she was sitting like a queen on the speaker's rock, winding strands of golden seaweed through her dark hair. If she mentioned the word handsome one more time, Dualla was going to throttle her with it.

"-- he was tall and so muscled... I nearly fainted when he scooped me out of that filthy tank..."

I wish you'd faint now and spare me. Dualla wasn't ungrateful to have her aunt back. Not at all. Like the rest of the tribe, she'd been beside herself with worry when Melody had been taken -- kidnapped by fishermen and sold to a surface dweller like some kind of goldfish. Just... there was a limit on how many times she could hear the same story over and over again before she snapped and tried to beat Melody to death with a cockle.

"His hair was like spun gold."

"Ohhhh..."

Dualla kept her eyes closed, zoned the chatter out and tried to doze. A healer like her long dead mother, she was often plagued with dreams that disturbed her sleep. Unlike her mother, Dualla only ever had the one dream.

The same dream over and over again. A dream of a man... a surface dweller, dark and dangerous despite his blond good looks, with the kind of darkness that came from the soul. A dream of a dragon with purple scales to match the line that ran down Dualla's own tail, and who breathed fire and set the sea alight.

She had no idea what it meant. As dreams went, it was the smallest snippet, no more than a few seconds. A man with long blond hair swirling around his shoulders turned toward her and pinned her with those intense eyes. Then the dragon opened its maw to burn her up.

"Huh!" Dualla jerked awake as high pitched laughter broke through her doze. She'd dropped off for a second. Her sleep last night must have been more broken than she'd thought.

Sitting up, she pushed the mass of long, dark hair back from her face. Once again it had escaped from its binding. She grabbed a piece of Melody's seaweed as it floated by and rebraided it with quick, economical movements. As she did, a young mermaid on the edge of the group caught her eye.

Merilea was one of the youngest women in the tribe, no longer a child but, in Dualla's opinion, still too young to be properly an adult. Innocent and naive, her eyes still reflected wonder at the world around her. It was an innocence, Dualla knew without question, those outside the tribe, be they two-leggers or hunters, wouldn't hesitate to take advantage of.

Merilea looked about, a quick check for anyone watching. Dualla shifted her gaze and fixed her attention on Melody as though she was enthralled by the sixtieth retelling of the daring rescue and its handsome hero. All the while she watched Merilea out of the corner of her eye.

Dualla was just a healer, yes, but a healer had to read between the lines sometimes to find out what was really wrong with their patients. There was nothing better for that than reading body language and good, old-fashioned women's intuition.

Right now, her intuition told her to watch Merilea like a hawk...

Chapter Two

He turned, his mass of golden hair swirling about his shoulders as he looked at her. His eyes were purple, a purple so dark it was almost the color of the midnight sky. He didn't speak, just looked at her, and she felt her body respond. She sashayed forward with a seductive sway in her hips, her feet bare against the cool marble tile of the floor.

A cool breeze filtered through the open window beyond him, lifting the voile curtains even as it ruffled the edges of his hair. She reached for him, sliding her hand over the heavy muscles of his back and shoulders. Her fingertips played in his hair as she pulled his lips down toward hers...

He moved above her on the bed, his arms braced on either side of her head, and his hair surrounding them like a silken curtain. Anticipation rolled through her as he parted her thighs with a hard knee and settled between them. The broad head of his cock brushed against the wet lips of her pussy and pressed against the entrance to her body. A soft moan escaped her as he rotated his hips, pressing against her in all new and interesting ways.

Lifting her arms she wound them around his neck to pull him down for another kiss. Their lips met, clashing in a torrid embrace that stole Dualla's breath. She wanted him, needed him. He was more essential to her wellbeing than her next breath.

"Please." Her voice was a hoarse whisper of need. She needed him to fill her, to fulfill the promise of the thick cock pressed against her. Her pussy clenched hard. Just the thought of him sliding into her caused liquid heat to slip from her, soaking the head of his cock. He rumbled deep in his chest, a sound of pleasure and need. It was a sound she liked, a sound she wanted to hear and be the cause of again.

"You... feel amazing." Whispered against her lips, his words were a verbal temptation as he pushed forward. Dualla's body yielded, stretching to accommodate him. She wasn't an

innocent but she hadn't had many lovers. None of them had ever touched anything more than her body... never her heart.

He lifted his head and gazed down into her eyes as he slid fully into her. White hot desire, need, and love lit his purple eyes. "Mine, my souler, now and forever."

Dualla woke with a start as a heavy clanging outside her sleeping chamber dragged her awake. "What the f --"

With a swish of her powerful tail, she pushed off from her sleeping pad and swam to the door. Blinking sleep from her eyes, she squinted out into the darkness. Dualla tried to make her fuzzy brain assimilate the shouts ringing through the water as she emerged from her cave.

"Merilea's gone..."

"What do you mean Merilea's gone? She was here just an hour ago!"

"Gone. Disappeared. Gone missing. *Not here!* What the hell do you think I mean? She's just popped out for a quick swim?" The sharp voice of Danita, the tribe tribal chieftain, burned the rest of the sleep out of Dualla's brain. A shiver ran through her, from the roots of her hair to the tip of her tail.

Merilea was gone. Dualla's lips compressed as she turned and disappeared back inside her cave. She knew where Merilea had gone, and if she hauled tail, she might be able to get her back before Danita, Merilea's mother, blew a gasket.

* * *

"Stupid, stupid girl," Dualla muttered under her breath as she sped through the night-darkened waters. The further she swam, the fouler her language got. All the time, she kept her eyes peeled for trouble and her wits about her. The night ocean was not a safe place, even for an older mermaid like Dualla, and definitely not for safe for an air-headed ninny like Merilea.

Typical blonde. Dualla gritted her teeth and swam on. In fact, Merilea was so blonde she gave blondes a bad name. Dualla wrapped her arms around herself to conserve warmth. Normally she didn't swim so deep, but the way to the Lisander

island was fraught with perils -- like the shark breeding ground she'd just passed. The last thing she wanted was for the girl's rescue party to end up shark-food.

Every moment of the way she expected to see Merilea caught by a hunter or, Poseidon forbid, on the surface playing silly sods with the human fishermen. A game amongst some of the mermaids that Dualla and the elders condemned as dangerous. They sang their songs and drew the poor men in so they could flash their tits, then they'd disappear under the waves, laughing when the human men became enraptured.

Sea-god's trident! She hoped Merilea wasn't planning on doing that with the bronzed Adonis from Melody's story. That would be suicide. Melody's rescuer couldn't be any other than a Lisander, which made him a dragon. Dualla could see the potential for trouble. Dragons weren't human, but they sure could be enraptured.

Dualla, for one, never wanted to see an enraptured dragon, especially not if that dragon was a Lisander.

Arms stretched out at her sides, she paused in the water. She was a strong swimmer, but Merilea had a head start on her, and to catch up, she was going to need some help. Current riding would take her close to the surface, but it couldn't be helped.

A slight tug on her hand warned her of a current just out of reach. Dualla powered forward, straight into the center of it. The fast-moving water grabbed her and pulled her along, whipping around her body and flattening her hair to her scalp.

The seascape sped along at a dizzying rate as she relaxed and let the current do all the work. She didn't even need to steer much. The merest flick of her tail was enough to keep her on course. The morning sun had begun to light the ocean waters before Dualla admitted Merilea had gotten farther than she'd thought.

Much farther. She had to be at the Lisander's island by now.

"Stupid child," Dualla muttered again, having exhausted her vocabulary of swear words a couple of hours ago. Tiredness weighed her fins down, but she pushed on. She had to find Merilea. There was no other option.

A commotion on the surface up ahead caught Dualla's eye. Squinting, she tried to focus but it was no good. She was too far away. Then a scream echoed through the water and shattered the tranquility.

Merilea.

Dualla's heart pounded, her gills working ten to the dozen to provide enough oxygen to power her desperate race toward the source of the commotion. She had to be in time, she had to be in time. The litany circled around in her head.

Then, in the blink of an eye, the visibility cleared and Dualla could see what was happening. She paused for a moment mid-current to assess the situation. Just as she'd thought, Merilea had gotten herself into trouble. Stuck in a fishing net, she was tangled up between a bad-tempered lobster snapping its claws at everything within reach and three starfish clinging to her tail in terror.

"Dualla!" Merilea cried as she saw her cousin. "Help! I'm stuck!"

"No shit, Sherlock. How'd you get stuck in there?"

Dualla approached the net with caution. Reaching for the shell knife tucked into her belt, she considered how to cut the terrified youngster out.

"Arrrgh, will you just stop it! Look, Dualla's here, she'll get us out," Merilea informed the lobster and knocked its claws away.

Dualla was glad someone had some confidence in her because, right at the moment, she wasn't sure her crude knife was up to the task. With slender fingers she tested the cord and knots that made up the net. Just her luck, it was a nylon weave. She needed to find a weakness, something she could use, because trying to saw through it was going to take too long.

Finally she found a weak spot down near the bottom of Merilea's tail. As she pulled there was the slightest give in the net. Spinning in the water until she was upside down, Dualla studied it. The strands were worn and frayed, just a little, but it might be enough. "Okay, hold still."

Dualla slid the shell blade between the nylon and Merilea's scales. One wrong move and she'd slice through them. The knife might not be much use against nylon, but it was more than sharp enough to cut through mermaid scales.

Merilea flinched as Dualla sawed at the fibers, but kept still. Thankfully. One less thing to worry about, because blood in the water so near to a shark nursery was never a good idea. Perhaps because she was so intent on making sure she didn't cut Merilea, Dualla wasn't paying much attention to the surface. A mechanical whirr rumbled through the water followed by heavy clunks as the net was reeled in.

"Dualla!" Merilea screamed in terror and trashed about.

"Stop it!" Dualla snatched the knife back from the net. "Hold still so I can get you out. I'm nearly there."

"Ugh... arrrrnnnggggh!" Merilea stopped moving, a new note of pain in her voice. Panic filled Dualla. She looked up expecting to see clouds of blood in the water. Had she cut Merilea without realizing? The water was crystal clear apart from starfish poop. The poor things were shitting a brick from all the thrashing.

She looked up to find the lobster attached to Merilea's nose, using its free claw to gesticulate wildly at the boat above them. Dualla didn't know much lobster signing, but she was fairly sure it was a variant on the ever popular "fuck off and die" insult.

"Good, good. Hold it there."

Dualla went back to her sawing, using the knife to cut through and then brute force to snap the weakened strands. The water filled with curses as the cord burned her fingers. She didn't have a choice. The net was getting closer to the surface every second, and if Merilea was still in it when it arrived, then she'd be replacing Melody in a fish tank.

One by one the strands gave way under the dual assault of her fingers and the knife. Not quick enough. Dualla shot a glance up at the surface but the lessening pressure on her body told her they were way too close for comfort.

The last strand gave.

"There, now. Out!" Dualla all but dragged the smaller mermaid from the net, passengers and all. Just as Merilea slipped from its nylon clutches disaster struck.

The lobster shrieked, let go of Merilea's nose and launched itself at Dualla. The net whipped around, and with an oomph Dualla landed in its embrace.

Just as it lifted out of the water.

Chapter Three

Edan was having a bad day. Nothing new there. Edan was always having a bad day; it was a permanent state of being for the tall dragon. Today, though, was turning out to be a particularly shitty example.

First off, his boat had refused to start, which meant an hour's tinkering with the engine before he could get the temperamental thing going. Then his favorite supplier had been clean out of lobster. He was less than a two minute walk down the dock when an annoyed female voice sounded over the general hullabaloo.

"Touch and lose the hand, buddy..."

Just keep walking, Edan told himself as his protective instincts tried to kick in. He'd had enough of protecting people. Three long years he'd tried -- tried his damn hardest -- to protect others. What had it gotten him? A dead brother and injuries that had crippled him in dragon form, and that, in his human form, made women shudder. He would add a bad attitude, but that had been in place for years.

"Yeah, you think? Just try it and find out."

Edan tried to walk past the boat with all the commotion. Out of the corner of his eye he could see a small crowd on deck, all men, surrounding what sounded like a very pissed off woman.

"Arrrghh, you fucking bitch!" A roar of pain drowned out the woman's cursing. "You cut me! What the hell is that? A *shell*? Fucking hell, I'll probably get tetanus now. You'll pay for that!"

Crap. Edan sighed. That was the wrong thing to say...

There was no way his dragon, bloody, stupid, protective creature it was, was going to let a threat like that go. Not when a woman was in danger, and he was still

without a fire companion. As far as it was concerned, any woman was a possible candidate.

"Is there a problem here?"

Edan's silky drawl cut through the argument like a hot knife through butter. All eyes turned to where he stood on the gangplank, perfectly balanced despite the cane in one hand. The doctors had told him he no longer needed it. Apparently it was a mental thing -- an emotional support. However Edan ranked doctors and cockroaches on the same level so he wasn't inclined to listen to anything they had to say.

"No problem here, mate, just move along."

Blood dripped on the deck as one of the fishers, obviously the guy in charge, turned. His eyes were hard and unfriendly, not pleased to see the newcomer at all. Edan didn't blame him. In this situation he wouldn't be happy to see him either.

Injured or not, the tall Dragon knew how to handle himself and it showed. No one built the kind muscle Edan was packing without some serious time in a gym... or a ring. The vicious scars down the side of his face hinted at the latter. "Looking like a problem to me, mate."

Edan's eyes flicked around the silent, hostile crowd. All men, which didn't surprise him, and all human, which didn't surprise him either. In his experience, humans were more monstrous than the monsters they liked to deride. Something that was never truer than now; a bunch of human men terrorizing a poor, defenseless woman.

One of them strayed a little too close, and she swiped at him with the knife she held in her hand. The other was curled protectively around a lobster, of all things. Not your average lobster but a lobster built upon gargantuan lines. Edan's belly rumbled. Now there was a meal!

The fisher yelped and moved out of range with a quick hop, skip and jump. Edan hid his grin. Okay, maybe she wasn't so defenseless after all. However, what she was doing here, naked and dripping wet, was a question he wanted answered. Her curves

registered in the back of his mind, but Edan was too good at what he did to let her feminine charms distract him from the matter at hand.

"Yeah, but not your problem. I'd move on mate. Wouldn't want you to get the good side of your face all messed up. Looks like you've already picked a few fights with the wrong people."

Edan shrugged, a one shouldered movement that screamed nonchalance. He wasn't at his best, but if this guy wanted a fight, then Edan was more than prepared to oblige. "Let's just say you don't want to see the other guy. Not unless you've got a strong stomach."

The man snorted. "Yeah, right, that's what they all say. Now you gonna piss off or what?"

Edan's gaze didn't shift from the human's face even though he could see the woman sneaking up behind him. One of his crew gave the game away instead with a yell. "Kev! Watch it, she's got a --"

"Arrrrrrrrrggggh! Getitoffmeass!" Kev shrieked in pain as the lobster clamped down on tender butt cheeks with powerful claws.

"-- lobster."

Edan burst into movement as Kev rocketed across the deck, grabbing at his ass and trying to remove the lobster firmly attached there. Two men at the back grabbed the girl, leaving the rest to meet Edan head on.

The fight was fast and furious. Edan danced between his opponents with a lethal grace and skill rarely seen on the streets. Over six foot and well muscled, most people assumed Edan would be slow and lumberous, something he definitely was not.

They tried circling him. It didn't work. As the two sidled up behind him, Edan dropped to the floor into press-up position. His leg swept around in a vicious arc and knocked them off their feet. Seconds later a couple of hundred pounds of pissed off dragon-shifter rolled over both men, and one got a knee in the throat, the other an elbow.

Edan left them in their own private worlds of pain, using the second guy's stomach as a launch pad for his next offensive. His fists lashed out, finding pressure points and undefended stomachs. His feet slammed into joints; ankles, knees, ribs... Edan didn't care. He brought all the violence of an MMA cage-fight up close and personal. Probably far more personal than the small group of fishermen had ever wanted in their lives.

The girl's whimpers of fright reached his ears as the last man fell. Edan's head whipped around. Lips curling back from his teeth, the thin trickle of a growl escaped his big chest at the sight before him. Eyes hot with rage, he stalked over the deck.

They had her spread out between them, too absorbed to notice the fight had ended. One was groping her breasts, and the dark marks of forming bruises took Edan's fury up another notch. The other had his cock in hand as he tried to get between her legs, a difficult task while she was struggling like a wildcat. Edan's hand landed on his shoulder.

"Fuck off and wait your turn, mate," he snapped, casting a glance over his shoulder. The blood drained out of his face when he saw Edan. "Fuck me..."

Edan's fist slammed into his jaw, sending him to the deck and into unconsciousness in one simple move. "Sorry, *mate*, you're not my type."

He turned to deal the second man a similar fate, but before he could, the girl twisted in her tormentor's hold, wrapped her arms lover-like around his neck -- and slammed a hard knee right into his groin.

"Oooooopphhh!"

He curled into a crumpled heap. Edan dropped back into a defensive crouch, looking around for more opponents, but the man at his feet was the last. Only Edan, the girl, and the lobster, who had detached himself from the now absent Kev's ass, were left standing.

She was beautiful. There was no other word for it. As soon as Edan got a good look at her, his heart faltered and stopped, only to slam back into life again when his dragon stirred itself to see what all the fuss was about.

Pretty... Want. Want now, it demanded, as man and dragon assessed the vision of feminine loveliness in front of them.

Even though she was naked, she stood without shame or self-consciousness, her hair cascading down her back in a mass of wet curls. Neither her hair or the heart-stopping beauty of her face held Edan's attention long as his gaze travelled south, both man and dragon transfixed.

Her breasts were full and firm, the nipples dark against the paleness of her skin. Edan's mouth watered at the sight. He'd lick and kiss his way around those breasts, taking his time as he worked over every sensitive inch of skin until he'd reached her nipple. A nipple he'd suck into his mouth, plying it with his tongue and teeth until she moaned in pleasure.

His gaze moved downwards. That luscious rack made her narrow ribcage and waist seem tiny. Her waist appeared small enough that Edan was sure his fingers would touch around it. Her hips flared out beneath, the perfect place to put his hands as he fucked her from behind. The delights kept coming thick and fast. As she moved to check for new threats, Edan got a glimpse of smooth pussy lips below the neat triangle of hair over her mons.

He was going to have her -- no two ways about it. *Ours*, his dragon agreed, *our souler*. Edan didn't get time to think about the last comment. Seeing the girl waver on her feet, he stood, and in a fluid movement, wrapped his arm around her waist to drag her against him. Then his arms were full of soft, naked, curvy woman, and his body roared to life.

Blood and need surged through his veins and pooled in his groin. Within seconds, his cock was as hard as an iron bar. Fuck. He'd gone way too long without a woman. She was scared out of her mind after being attacked, and all he could think of was spreading her thighs and sliding his cock into her hot, wet pussy.

A tremble ran through her, making Edan feel like even more of a shit than he already did. Making soothing sounds he stroked up and down her back. "It'll be okay," he murmured. "It's all going to be okay."

Slowly but surely, her trembling ceased until she rested pliant in his arms, and her hands lay motionless against his chest. Despite the fabric of his shirt, he could feel the touch of her skin against his, a touch which set him on fire. She moved, just a little, and her hips brushed against his. It was the smallest movement, but it brought her soft belly into contact with the erection tenting his pants.

He felt rather than heard her gasp. Lifting her head she looked at him, surprise in her ocean-colored eyes.

Edan steeled himself. He was not this crass -- no matter what people thought of him or his single-minded campaign since his brother's disappearance. He wouldn't force himself on any woman.

Ever. Especially not one who'd been through what she had.

Her eyes darkened a notch, hunger in their depths, and all his good intentions went to hell. Attention riveted on her mouth, he bent his head to claim her lips.

She tasted of heaven.

Edan drove his hand into her hair to hold her still. She didn't struggle. Instead her lips parted on a small moan of her own. Far from having to coax her to respond, her response was easy and immediate. His tongue swept out and parted her lips, exploring her mouth with a ruthlessness that came straight from the dragon part of him. He was rewarded with the tentative brush of her tongue against his.

Heat exploded like fireworks through his body. She wasn't shy. That much was obvious from her reaction, but Edan had had enough women -- indeed in his younger days he considered himself more of a lover than a fighter -- to tell she didn't have an awful lot of experience. Certainly not enough to play dangerous games with an aroused dragon.

Try as he might though, Edan couldn't bring himself to end the kiss. Despite the fact they were on a boat surrounded by men he'd beaten into unconsciousness, he couldn't stop. Every possessive and protective instinct he had crowded to the fore and urged him to draw her closer, to mold her soft curves over the harder plains of his body and kiss her senseless.

Her little moans of pleasure urged him on, as did her hands in his hair. Her small hands pulled on the tie at the nape of his neck and freed the shoulder length blond locks to spill over his broad shoulders.

Her fingers wrapped in the silken strands and pulled his head back. Edan started in surprise, but his growl of warning became one of pleasure as her lips wandered down the bared column of his throat.

"Careful, doll, dangerous games," he warned, even though, to his confusion, he found he liked the small display of dominance. Flattening his hands across the back of her hips, he pulled her flush against his cock. "Sure you want to go there?"

Her response was to nip his throat. The pinch of her blunt teeth was erotic as hell. For a second, Edan felt his dragon rise, scales pushing against the inside of his skin. Gritting his teeth, he held on to control. With his injuries, he didn't like to change in front of anyone. Then her warm tongue brushed his skin...

Chapter Four

“Okay, one warning is all you get.”

Dualla squeaked in surprise as she was scooped up into strong arms. Instinctively, she clutched at his shoulders for support, but his grip was firm and his gait sure as he strode across the deck. She knew he wouldn't drop her. She didn't know how she knew, she just did. The knowledge was soul deep, as though he'd carried her in his arms many times before.

His loose hair brushed against the strong column of his throat and her gaze riveted to it. She was fascinated by her handsome rescuer, which was completely out of character for Dualla. She'd always prided herself on her independence and resourcefulness, yet here she was clinging to a guy like a stereotypical damsel in distress. Then there was the way she'd melted in his arms at the first touch of his lips, and the arousal that even now hummed through her body.

She'd never reacted like this to a man. Ever. Never wanted to take one to bed and screw his brains out as a reaction to a simple kiss. So locked in her internal musings, Dualla didn't realize his intent until he set foot on the gangplank.

“Hey! No! What do you think you're doing?” She tried to struggle from his arms, her voice panicked. He stopped and looked down at her, eyebrow arched in question. Heat flared across Dualla's cheeks as she made herself meet his eyes.

“I'm not exactly dressed for company,” she pointed out, nodding down to indicate her nakedness.

Wrong move. His violet gaze dropped for a second and she felt his gaze on her breasts. Her nipples hardened into taut peaks, begging for his touch. Her pussy ached in an insistent demand to be filled. Heat and hunger burnished his eyes to the color of midnight. Then he shook his head. “Crap, yeah. You're right. Hold on.”

He gently set her on her feet, and to Dualla's surprise, he proceeded to strip out of his shirt. Any sense of embarrassment she had disappeared, forgotten as his fingers worked the buttons of his shirt. First one, then two and more parted to reveal his chest, hairless and solid with muscle. Dualla curled her fingers into fists as she fought the need to explore with her hands and lips.

The fabric slipped from his shoulders as he shrugged out of the garment. Her eyes widened as they followed the lines of his back. Here the skin was heavily marked and scarred. This time her gasp was audible and had more to do with shock than admiration. As soon as the sound left her lips, Dualla knew it was the wrong thing to do.

Her rescuer stiffened, his shirt caught half on and half off his shoulders. He pierced her with a hard look. "Something wrong?"

His voice was like a whip. Dualla ripped her gaze away from the mess of scars down his back but she was too late. He'd seen her look. The tension between them changed from the throbbing awareness of arousal to just plain tension.

"Seen enough?" he demanded, tearing the shirt the rest of the way off. "Or would you like me to do a little twirl as well? For fuck's sake, cover yourself up," he snarled, his look scathing as he bundled the shirt up in his hands and shoved it at her.

She took the shirt automatically, then scrambled into it as quickly as she could. "Look, I'm really, really --"

Edan cut her off with a vicious movement of his hand. "If you're going to say 'thank you' then can it. I'm not interested." He snarled and stalked off down the dock.

"... sorry." Dualla blinked, her words addressed to his retreating back. She looked down to where Levi had poked his head out from behind a coil of rope. His claws waggled, an offensive gesture if ever Dualla saw one.

"Yeah, it was a bit out of order, wasn't it? And I thought only women got PMS."

Her gaze followed him along the dock, his tall form easily picked out amongst the thin crowd. With a build like that, there was no way he'd disappear into a crowd,

even without the limp or the scars. Curiosity filled her. What had happened to him to cause the scars and the caustic attitude?

"Well, I'm sorry. Mr. Grumpy he might be, but he did save our lives. No, don't look at me like that. You were destined for the cook pot and you know it," she told Levi firmly. "And he saved Melody too, so like it or not, we need to say thank you. Or at least make the effort."

Mind made up, Dualla tucked Levi firmly under her arm. She gathered some curious looks as she walked along the dock -- after all, there weren't many women dressed in nothing but a man's shirt and carrying a lobster walking the dock, but she ignored them all. Confidence was the key. Act as though you belonged and no one challenged you. Inside though, she was half waiting for someone behind her to shout "Mermaid! Someone stop her!"

No one did. Most humans couldn't tell a paranormal unless one came up and bit them on the ass, which was actually a possibility with some of the demon-kind, so she was fairly safe.

A shudder racked her at the thought of what would have happened if Merilea had still been in the net when it had reached the surface. The men on the boat had seen her for what she was for all of a second before she'd managed to shift. Her tail had become legs while she was still in the water. It was something only an adult mermaid could accomplish, which was why they kept youngsters like Merilea away from shore.

Dualla's lips compressed as she skirted a pile of crates. Halfway around she stopped and ducked back. Tall, blond and grouchy was heading down one of the docking piers. If he looked back, even for a second, then he'd catch sight of her. Crouched behind the crates, Dualla risked a peek just in time to see him climb gracefully into a sleek motorboat and cast off with a negligent flick of his wrist.

The engine roared to life. Dualla expected him to speed out of the dock with the typical live fast, die young mentality most human men seemed to adopt anytime they got near anything with a powerful engine. He didn't though. After starting the engine he settled back and the powerful, expensive craft chugged gently out of dock.

"We're up, Levi," she said as she emerged from behind the crates and headed down the same pier. It rocked under her feet and the clear turquoise waters visible through the wooden slats called to her. Nearing the end of the pier, Dualla looked around. There were people moving around on the main dock so she knelt down and pretended to check one of the mooring ropes. Hopefully no one glancing her way owned the ship the rope was attached to, otherwise she'd have some explaining to do. The last thing she needed right now was to spend a night in a cell accused of trying to steal a boat. Wouldn't that be ironic, a mermaid accused of stealing a boat she definitely didn't need.

Waiting until no one was looking, she dropped Levi quickly in the water and followed him into its embrace moments later. The cool waters closed over her head as she sank under the surface without a ripple. Her lungs shut down as her gills, almost invisible behind her ears when on land, fanned out and took over.

Levi darted around her as she sank to the soft sand, his antenna waving as he waited patiently for her to shift the legs for her tail. Dualla reached inside herself, into the place that made her mermaid. She concentrated on the feel of her tail as she swam, on the feeling of water against her scales and the sheer exuberance of swimming through the depths... a freedom she could only think was near to flying for land dwellers... and allowed it to fill her heart.

Pain arced through her body. Her legs fused together and scales raced down to cover the skin that had been there a moment before. Within a few heartbeats, her familiar silver and purple scaled tail had replaced the human legs that were useless in the water. Pushing her loose hair back again, Dualla grabbed Levi, tucked him under her arm, and then set off after the speedboat.

The speedboat was pretty easy to keep up with, which meant Dualla didn't have to half kill herself to follow her quarry. Lazily, she rode the currents as she kept the hull of the Lisander's speedboat in sight. Every so often she would switch currents, going deeper or coming closer to the surface, picking one that would allow her to follow.

An hour later she surfaced behind a rock near the shore. The boat was moored on a small jetty nearby, but empty, it didn't hold Dualla's attention for long. No, her eyes were fixed on the figure of the man it had contained as he made his way slowly along the jetty to the beach.

His shoulders were bowed, sorrow and pain radiating outwards. Dualla didn't need to be psychic to see that. His limp was more pronounced now, his foot dragging a little on the sand as he walked up the beach. Dualla's heart wept as her gaze dropped to the vivid scars across his back. They only covered one side, the other taken up by the heavy dragon tattoo that marked him for what he was -- a dragon.

Just the sight of the marks made her wince. What had happened to him? What would scar a dragon so? Dragons were nasty as hell when roused and damn near impossible to kill. They could heal most injuries during a shift. So what creature could injure a dragon so badly that he was still scarred in human form?

On the beach Lisander paused and looked out to sea. Quickly Dualla ducked behind the rock and held her breath...

Chapter Five

What was it with women and scars?

Edan cursed and looked down at the water lapping around his feet. His human skin itched, burning as it stretched too tight across his bones. The water looked so cool and inviting. For a second he allowed a daydream of what would have happened if she hadn't seen the marks on his back to fill his mind.

He'd have taken her back to the boat, to the tiny cabin below decks. A cabin barely big enough for the double bed crammed in there but more than enough for what he had in mind. He'd start by stripping his shirt off her, and then watch those expressive eyes darken with pleasure as he worked his way down her body...

"Ack, no use wanting what you can't have," he told himself firmly and stepped into the water. He wriggled his toes in the sand as the cool water swirled around them. His eyes half closed in pleasure. It felt good, so good that in the next heartbeat he was wading -- no, running -- further into the coolness.

He plunged onwards and relief washed through him as the blessedly cool water enveloped his feverish body. Small waves swelled about his thighs and then his waist as he walked further out.

As soon as it was deep enough, he dived under the water. Bones popped and cracked. His skin melted and slid, stretching as his body changed. His spine elongated even as his arms and legs changed shape. Joints popped and changed configuration as a pair of leathery wings burst from his shoulders.

He broke the surface, fully shifted into dragon form. Spreading his wings he roared his defiance at the sky, trumpeting the full throated roar of a dragon in his prime to the sunset. Then he slumped, his useless left wing slapping against the surface of the water.

Edan turned his wedge shaped head and regarded the damaged wing. Broken and tattered, it would never bear his weight in flight, and injured, he was useless, just half a dragon... less than half a dragon.

Less than half a man.

A failure.

Secure in his solitude, Edan dropped his head. The mournful cry rumbled in his large chest and rolled up his throat. Dropping his head under the water, he warbled his sorrow into the turquoise depths.

* * *

Tears filled Dualla's eyes as he sang his sorrow to the deep. It was the most beautiful sound she'd ever heard. All the beauty and strength of the dragon rendered into a sound so heart-rending, she felt her own heart ache in response.

Wide eyed, she peered around the rock. He was still there, lying on the surface of the water, spread out like a huge, draconic swimming pool float. Even though his song near broke her heart, Dualla couldn't stop the slight quirk of her lips.

She wondered what the grumpy as all hell dragon would do if a bunch of kids decided to jump all over him. Given his attitude earlier, most people would say toast them all to crispy critters, but Dualla knew better. She'd seen the look in his eyes. There was bitterness and pain, but no malice.

"He's hurting," she told the lobster clinging to the white shirt she still wore. His shirt. "We have to help him."

Levi gave her a look and waggled his antennae.

"Oh, hush you. You're just a grump."

Dualla sank back under the water and rounded the rock. Caution running through her, she swam slowly toward the dragon. His bulk shadowed the golden sands beneath him. His belly scales were light in color like a shark, dark on the top so it couldn't be seen from above, and light on the underside so it was difficult to see from below. The same evolution seemed to have occurred amongst dragons.

The closer she got, the unhappier her crustacean passenger got, until, when she was almost directly underneath the dragon, he jumped ship, letting go and seeking the safety of the sea bed.

"Traitor." She shook her head at the scurrying lobster then turned in the water to study the form above her.

Now she could understand the terrible scars down his back. His body was marked by violence. One wing was a torn and tattered mess, the remains of the flight membranes clinging to the bony struts that had supported them. Once she'd absorbed the horror of the damaged wing, she noticed other things, like the fact the scales along his sides were torn, leaving deep, gaping wounds between the ripped edges.

What on earth could have done this to him? What kind of creature could wound a dragon so badly the wounds didn't heal properly?

She flicked her tail and ascended, concern in her eyes as she reached out a hand. Any worry for her own safety was forgotten as Dualla inspected the wounds. It didn't occur to her that she was approaching a dragon, one of the world's apex predators, blindside. Or, if it did, it was lost under her healer's instincts as she inspected his injuries.

When she was working, Dualla tended to lose all sense of personal danger, a fact proven by the scar near the bottom of her tail. She'd been trying to patch up a small shark which had gotten in a tussle with a larger shark, and in her haste to help the creature, had forgotten it had teeth -- large, rather sharp teeth. She'd been lucky to escape with just a scar rather than losing a fin.

That was the trouble with being a healer. She couldn't turn it on and off at will. Even now she could feel the magic that made her what she was, welling up inside her, reacting to the sight of injuries which needed to be healed.

Her attention focused on his injuries. Her surroundings -- the crystal clear water, the slight pull of the surf toward the shore -- all faded into the background. She frowned as she studied the ragged edges of the wounds. His skin was torn between the scales. If she could just push the edges together...

The instant her hand touched his scaled skin everything went wrong. With a roar the dragon roused from his slumber, far more agile than Dualla had thought possible. He was an air dragon, not a water dragon, so he had no right to move so fast in the water.

His tail whipped around with the speed of a striking stingray, slammed Dualla into the sandy seabed and pinned her there. Self-preservation instincts kicked in and she struggled, but she was fighting a battle on two fronts. The weight of his tail held her immobile so only the barest trickle of current washed water over her gills, cutting off her oxygen supply as darkness threatened to overwhelm her.

Then, thankfully, the crushing weight on her chest lifted. A pair of huge, cat-slitted purple eyes dominated her vision before she lost the second of her battles and succumbed to darkness.

* * *

Holy shit.

The instant Edan whirled around in the water and felt his tail impact something, he knew he'd made a terrible mistake. For one, the touch that had sparked his violent reaction had been soft and gentle. It had made no difference. Edan's reactions were on a hair trigger, and gentleness had been at a premium in the last couple of years. Had he really sunk so low he assumed any touch was an attack?

He turned in the water again, but this time, instead of his wing catching the water like a paddle, the bony struts of his damaged wing sliced through it. Forgetting he wasn't a fish he lurched forwards and tried to breathe water. Coughing and spluttering, he righted himself and then looked around in the water to see what he'd hit.

The slender but curvaceous form of the mermaid wasn't hard to spot. The water was too shallow to hide anything, let alone a mermaid, or the gigantic lobster scurrying toward the deep as fast as his legs would carry him. Edan ignored the creature for the moment, then his large draconic eyes narrowed as he realized the mermaid wasn't moving.

His eyes widened, following the furrow in the sand, one which ended under the mermaid. Crap, his tail was pinning her down. Edan moved, lifting his tail as he shoved his head under the water to look at her in concern. He couldn't see any blood and... mermaids couldn't drown, could they?

At least, he didn't think they could. She was basically a fish, wasn't she? A very sexy fish with a rack he'd give his eye teeth to get his hands on, but a fish nonetheless. Whoever heard of a fish drowning?

He lifted his tail but she lay motionless on the white sand. Edan's heart stilled in his chest. She looked way too pale to be healthy, even for the slightly blue tint of mermaid skin. Had her lips been blue before? Damn it, his first aid courses had only covered heart attacks and knife wounds, not what to do when you accidentally crush a mermaid.

She opened her eyes and the unfocused look in them made Edan's decision for him. If she couldn't drown, then she could at least suffer a concussion, a concussion he'd caused, which meant he was honor bound to look after her until she was better.

Yeah, right, the little voice in his head replied. *So it's got nothing at all to do with the fact she's female with a figure that would tempt a saint?*

Edan ignored the quip, his concern increasing as her eyes fluttered shut and her body went limp. Shit, shit, shit! She'd passed out. That wasn't good. Worry filled him, overruling all else as he scooped her up in a large taloned paw and hauled ass.

The surf frothed about him as he clambered up the shore out of the water and onto the beach, the unconscious mermaid cradled in his arm. The subtle buzz of magic rolled over his skin. As the air hit her tail, the scales tightened then split up the centre, rolling back to reveal a perfect pair of legs.

Fascinating, he thought. *She shifts without conscious thought, or even consciousness. Handy trick to stop the normals finding out what you are.* His claws dug into the soft sand for balance as he stood on one foreleg and watched her closely for signs of improvement. The blue in her lips receded a little, more pink returning to the sexy bee-

stung pout, but not as much as he'd like. Her chest expanded and she took a ragged breath, her lungs kicking in to take over from her gills.

Edan waited, silently willing her to open her eyes, but the seconds ticked past, each sounding loudly in his mind, without so much as a flutter of her eyelashes.

Crap, crap and, just for a change, more crap, Edan cursed himself roundly. He had to get her some help. The thought his paranoia had actually hurt someone, hurt someone who was trying to help him, ate away like acid in his gut. He needed to call Mac. The glib gargoyle would know what to do.

Looking up, he assessed the small cliff face in front of him. His villa was perched at the top. For a dragon, it was perfect. He could walk out of his bedroom and, in two running steps, be in the air. Well, he could be if he had wings that worked properly. Grimly, Edan put the thought from his mind, his bitterness at his injuries disappearing under the need to get his little mermaid some help.

Hoisting her more firmly against his shoulder, Edan all but ran over the hot sand to the base of the cliffs, skittering like a desert-lizard. His claws bit into the soft rock as he started to climb. Using the powerful muscles in his hind legs and his free fore-paw, he half climbed, half scrambled up the rock-face.

God, if anyone sees me now, I'll be a bloody laughing stock. He'd made the climb within a minute, but his haste had more to do with concern over his passenger than any damage to his reputation. Edan's rep was ferocious enough that even his kinsmen would think twice before making fun of the large purple dragon.

He clambered over the edge of the cliff and onto the large decked area in front of his home. His claws scrabbled against the stone edging before they found purchase on the soft wood of the decking. In one last effort, he pulled himself onto it and, in the next breath, triggered his change.

"Fuuuuuucccking HELL!" he bellowed, venting all the pain of the rapid change into his voice as he forced his body to shift. A normal shift took around five seconds, which allowed his body time to readjust to the difference in mass between his human

and dragon form. There was an awful lot of his dragon form to be stuffed back into even a six foot plus frame on a normal shift, but to do it quickly? That damn well hurt.

He hit the decking next to the prone form of the mermaid with a heavy thud. Sweat beaded on his skin, rolled and dropped to the deck below. He gritted his teeth until his jaw ached from the pressure, holding the pain inside. His bones snapped and reshaped themselves as his skin shrank, absorbing his scales as it tightened around his now human-shaped body.

Chapter Six

"Edan, you know what you have to do."

The big dragon sighed as he held the phone to his ear and listened to the lecture his former partner was treating him to. A similar lecture to the one Mac had given him every weekend since he'd walked from the game.

How the hell was he supposed to realize his last opponent was an enslaved demon? If there was one creature no one wanted to face in a ring, it was a pissed off demon, especially one from the lower hells. Christ, those things could take on an angel and win, never mind a dragon! No one put a demon in the ring -- not without fair warning.

"Yeah, yeah... I know. Open up, talk about my 'feelings'." Edan mimicked his doctor's voice. He was word perfect on all this now.

Mac snorted. "Actually I don't give a fuck about your feelings, man. You wanna get all lovey-dovey and new man-ish, talk to a shrink."

"Well, what are you talking about then?"

"You're a dragon."

"Way to go, Captain Obvious. So what?"

Mac huffed in irritation, the sound so familiar, Edan could see the irritated look on the gargoyle's face. "Well, I read in a magazine --"

"What?" Taken by surprise, Edan's voice was sharp. "Wait! You can read?"

"Ha. Ha. Very funny."

"So what did this magazine say?" Edan's curiosity was piqued, especially since now that they were at the crux point, Mac seemed to be having trouble spitting out what he wanted to say.

"Well... you guys use sex, don't you?"

Edan stilled, the phone cradled between his ear and the big muscles of his shoulder. That was a side of himself he'd never been comfortable with, something special, reserved for being a dragon and his souler.

"You mean for healing." Edan's gaze slid through the open doorway into his bedroom. His little mermaid lay across his bed, the silk of the sheet doing nothing to hide the lines of her body. Instead, it highlighted the narrow span of her waist, the cello curve of her hips and brought his attention to the luscious mounds of her breasts. She was cold. The tightened beads of her nipples showed clearly through the thin fabric.

Souler. Our souler, his dragon rasped. Need slammed into Edan's body again and stole his breath. He was naked. His clothes had been destroyed during his impromptu swim earlier. The thick length of his cock hardened, a proud arch that bobbed against his toned stomach as he walked into the bedroom.

"Yeah... Well, of course there's the fish angle, so you might have to screw her in the bath tub or something. I dunno. You're a big boy. You'll figure it out."

Edan's expression tightened as he fought a war on three counts; his conscience, his nature and against temptation. He wanted her, pure and simple. He'd wanted her from the moment he'd seen her taking a swipe at that fisherman on the boat. Hell, even the fact she'd been attacked hadn't stopped him from dragging her into his arms and kissing her half senseless.

Even then, only her reaction to his scars had killed the mood. But, if that were the case, if she couldn't bear to look at him, then why had she followed him, and tried to help him out in the bay?

He needed healing, she needed healing, and it was the latter that did it for him. How could he refuse the needs of his mate? Edan sighed as he lost the battle he was fighting and accepted she was his mate, his souler. He'd known as soon as he'd seen her, but unlike his brothers, he hadn't wanted her to be. What woman would want to be saddled with half a man, a pathetic excuse for a dragon?

Yesssss, his dragon purred, sensing his surrender. *Ours, at last.*

"Mac, I'll talk to you later." Cutting the connection, he dropped the phone on the bed with a near silent thud. A second later he gathered her into his arms, lifting her as though she weighed nothing. To a creature able to bench press cars, she didn't.

His body roaring with the twin fires of need and lust, he walked through the apartment and out onto the veranda. Extending from the cliff side where they'd landed earlier, it wrapped all the way around the house. Sheltered in the lea of the building was Edan's pride and joy; a huge hot tub.

Already naked, he didn't stop, just walked up the steps and down into the water. Triggered by his weight in the tub, the jets fired up. The water was already bubbling when he sank into the tub.

"I sure as hell hope you don't turn all fishy on me now." Much to Edan's relief, the touch of the water didn't turn the slender legs back into a tail. Soft breath whispered over his neck as her arms tightened almost imperceptibly around his neck.

He started to unwrap the wet silk from around the delectable little bundle in his arms. His long-neglected healing talent was touch based, which meant getting them both naked, something neither he or his dragon would argue about.

The silk sheet was easily stripped from her. It put up a small fight as it tried to wrap itself around one of her ankles but couldn't hold out against a determined dragon. Edan dropped it over the side of the tub and settled her more securely in his lap.

She wriggled and ground her soft ass against the hardness of his cock. Edan's eyes rolled back in his head, and he started to recite the seven times table. Backwards. From three hundred and fifty. Even the soft moans and sleepy movements as she came back to consciousness were driving him crazy.

Reminding himself they were here for healing, which wouldn't be accomplished if he set her on the side of the tub and fucked her, Edan shifted her in his arms. His big hands swept over her curves as he took a deep breath and reached inside himself. His dragon roared and reached out to him, but Edan ignored it for the moment and reached deeper. There, buried deep inside him, wrapped around that which made him dragon, was a narrow thread of power; gold to his dragon's purple.

Edan reached for it, feeling the heat in his chest and in his cock as it expanded to fill him. A ragged moan escaped his lips as his cock throbbed so hard, he literally ached from it, and his balls grew taut and heavy.

The golden wash of power radiated out from his chest, through his veins to his hands. He looked down, shifting his vision from human to draconic and snorted. A faint wash of gold followed his hands, hovering over her skin for a moment before being absorbed.

* * *

Dualla woke slowly. Delicious warmth surrounded her, and creature of the deep she was, she eagerly tried to hold onto it. She hadn't been warm, not properly warm, since she'd returned to the ocean in her late teens. Memories of long Saturday lie-ins buried under a thick duvet were the stuff of reminiscences and dreams.

That's what this had to be, a lovely dream of being warm again. And by hook or by crook, Dualla was going to hold onto it as long as possible. Her arms moved to wrap the dream duvet around her, but it persisted in feeling less like a duvet and more like a solid male chest and wide shoulders.

Dualla grumbled under her breath, and instead of wrapping the warmth around herself, settled for draping herself across it instead. It was damned inconsiderate though. This was her dream. You'd think the duvet would at least act like a duvet.

Large hands swept along the length of her thigh, a heated touch which made her wriggle. Only a little at first but then more as her body started to respond to the gentle touches. Great, she was getting turned on by her own dream duvet here. What kind of pervert was she?

It felt too good to ignore, though. Dualla shifted under the dream hands. Her back arched as one swept up the side of her rib cage. Dream or not, she wanted more of it. If that made her a pervert, then so be it.

Decision made, she snuggled closer and sighed as the hands followed suit. Warm water lapping around them, she rested her head against the broad width of a solid shoulder and let the hands do what they wanted.

She sighed. She was warm, wrapped around a man who smelled like home and with the water of her element surrounding her. If that wasn't heaven for a mermaid, she didn't know what was. Slowly, from passive strokes down her sides, the hands grew bolder. When they prompted her to move, to loop her arms around the broad shoulders, she did so without protest.

Large palms smoothed up her sides, into the curve of her waist and upwards. Dualla's breath left her lungs on a sigh. More of a moan than a sigh, it whispered against the neck just a hairsbreadth from her lips. A groan rumbled in the broad chest she rested against, and her lips curved into a smile. That was just too much temptation.

Eyes still closed, she leaned into him and brushed her lips against his throat. He smelled familiar, but still in the comfortable place between asleep and awake, she couldn't place it at the moment. It didn't matter. More important to her at the moment was the wonderful feel of his skin under her lips and the sounds of pleasure each kiss elicited.

Her kisses had the desired effect. He tilted his head to the side to allow her lips to explore. Dualla crawled up him and pressed bare breasts against the solid wall of his chest. The taste and texture of his skin under her lips was intoxicating and addictive. She knew him somehow, and she felt comfortable with him...

"Fucking hell, darlin'. You're killing me here."

His groan was soft but heartfelt. Dualla had less than a second to respond before one of his hands swept up the naked length of her back and buried itself in her hair. Cupping the nape of her neck, he turned her head as he lifted her to straddle his lap.

Two things happened at once. His lips crashed down on hers in a dominating kiss that took her breath away at the same time she settled in his lap. The thick length of his cock pressed against her, right where she wanted it. Dualla moaned as her body turned to liquid and her pussy clenched hard in need.

His tongue swept along her lower lip. A hot, wet brush of sheer temptation and a silent demand for access. On automatic, Dualla opened up and let him in. With a small sound of triumph in the back of his throat, he tilted her head and plundered her mouth.

Hand still hard on the back of her head, his tongue swept in to explore the silken inner recesses.

His other hand smoothed around the back of her hips. He pulled her tighter against his rigid length and rocked his hips. Heat and friction blossomed between her legs, radiating outwards in ever increasing circles. Dualla's small moan was lost under the onslaught of his lips. The friction against the sensitive lips of her pussy was simply amazing.

Their tongues dueled in a passionate embrace. Dualla refused to be passive and battled for dominance as she squirmed in his lap. She rubbed herself against him like a cat, her breasts against his muscled chest and her pussy against his rigid cock. A cock she could feel trapped between them, the wide head pressing against the soft skin of her belly. Lifting up, she rubbed her clit along the length of his shaft, the tiny bundle of nerves pulsating in demand. She needed him inside her, like yesterday, if not sooner.

And why not? This was her dream after all. If she wanted to fuck a duvet that had for some reason turned into a hot guy with a large cock, then why shouldn't she?

"Oh yeah, baby, just like that." He broke the kiss to whisper against her lips. His hands moved and the one in her hair slid down to cup her breast. Agile fingers rolled the tight bud of her nipple between them for a second. Dualla's head dropped back, another moan bubbling up to spill over. Oh, he was good... he was better than good. He was fucking fantastic!

Her hips rocked on automatic, rubbing against his cock as her back arched and thrust her full breasts toward him. It was an invitation he didn't hesitate to take up. Within a second, a hot mouth closed around her nipple and suckled hard. Liquid heat surged through Dualla, from her nipple directly down to her pussy.

"Oh God, that feels so good," she muttered hoarsely as she ground her hips against him. Normally she was a little more reserved, at least with the few men she'd been to bed with. Restraint, the need to keep what she really was hidden, played a large

part. She'd never been able to truly let go with any of her lovers and now, here in her dream lover's arms, she realized what she'd been missing.

"I want you to fuck me." The demand fell easily from her lips and even before she'd finished her sentence, Dualla moved, lifting up on her knees so she could reach for his cock. He moved quicker, clamping his hand over her wrist to stop her.

"No, not yet." His voice was soft but brooked no argument. "Keep your eyes closed and just go with it. Let me pleasure you, let me heal you..."

Heal her, what on earth was he on about? Dualla frowned and began to open her eyes, but the water swirled violently as he moved. The next instant, she was kneeling on the seat he'd been sitting on and bent over the side of the hot tub. Awareness that this wasn't a dream crept in. Bizarrely, she didn't panic. She knew him and this felt right, too right to be wrong.

A hard, male body pressed against her from behind as his cock fitted into the groove of her ass. Her legs turned to jelly as the quivering heat in her center intensified. She bit her lip, her head dropped down, and she fought the need to beg him to fuck her. She wasn't going to beg. No mermaid would stoop so low, even if it was all she wanted to do right now.

"That's good," he crooned behind her, his deep voice hypnotic. A shiver whispered through her as his hand smoothed over the curve of her ass, pulling the cheeks apart to rub the thick shaft of his cock between the generous globes of flesh.

"You feel wonderful. You look wonderful, bent over like this. You've got a fantastic ass." His voice was tight and controlled as he bent over her, the heat of his chest against the skin of her back. His hand snaked around her hip and slid between her legs. Dualla caught her breath and her body tensed in anticipation. He wasn't...

He was. His fingers found her folds and parted them, seeking the delicate nubbin of flesh that was her clit. Her body flooded with liquid heat, a heat so intense she half-expected the water around them to boil. He circled her clit, then dipped down to the entrance of her body. Two strong fingers rimmed the edges of her pussy before sinking deep inside her.

Dualla whimpered. Her needy cunt clenched down hard on the invading digits, clamping around them tightly in lieu of the cock she desperately needed. Slowly he pushed further, shifting position, and his hot breath fanned her neck.

"You're hot and tight." He scissored his fingers inside her slowly. Dualla's eyes rolled back in her head. "I wasn't going to do this. I was just going to make you come. I was just going to heal you, but I can't. You're too much to resist."

She opened her mouth to object. Just make her come with his fingers? No, that wouldn't do. She wanted -- no, she needed -- a cock. His cock. Right here, right now. She didn't get chance to air her frustrations. In the next heartbeat he curled his fingers back, seeking and finding her g-spot at the same time his thumb grazed her clit.

Dualla squeezed her eyes shut at the sudden burst of pleasure, pressing them so tight fireworks burst across the insides. "Oh God," she moaned. "Just fuck me. Please, just fuck me! Now!"

She felt his answering chuckle through the wall of his chest pressed against her back. With a pop he pulled his fingers from her. "Bossy little mare, aren't you? Well, what the lady wants, she gets."

He moved behind her, the warm water swirling around her waist to lap at her naked tits half in and half out of the water. Her nipples beaded into hard peaks and begged for attention. His hands spread her ass cheeks and Dualla smoothed her own hand across her ribcage to cup her breast. As he fitted the broad head of his cock against the entrance to her cunt, she tweaked the beaded nipple and thrust back. He pushed and slid into her half an inch, her body stretching around the bulbous head.

"Fuck, you're tight," he muttered. "I don't want to hurt you."

"Just do it," Dualla snarled, pushing back to impale herself further on his cock. Her pussy ached, stretched almost to the point of pain, but after a second's pause, it was more of a pleasurable burn. Then the need took over. The need for more, to be filled completely and stretched to the limit, obliterated all else. Dualla rocked her hips and, on each backward slide, took more of his cock into her pussy.

"You'll be the death of me, souler, but you asked for it."

There was that weird word again, *souler*. Had she been anywhere but in a hot tub with a hunk's cock halfway up her pussy, Dualla would have questioned it. Right now, she was more interested in getting what she needed before the bubble burst and she woke up. She'd had that happen before, waking up hot and bothered then having to finish herself off with her own fingers.

Hard fingers gripped her hips and held her still as, with small, ruthless jerks of his hips, he worked his way inside her. Each forward thrust was followed by a small pause while he waited for her body to adjust to him. Much as she needed to be filled, Dualla could have kissed him for that, balanced as she was on the fine edge between pain and total, utter pleasure.

"Uh, yeah. That's good. More..." She moaned and wriggled her hips. He pushed one last time and was fully in her. It felt good, better than good. It felt fantastic.

Edan moved again, sliding out of her almost all the way. He stopped and left just the head of his cock inside her to rotate his hips. Dualla bit her lip again as the sensitive, nerve-laden flesh clamped around his cock went into meltdown. Before she could issue any more demands that he stop teasing her and get on with it, he surged forward again. His balls slapped against her skin as he slammed into her with a power that left her breathless.

From that point on she had no chance of getting it back. He thrust into her time after time, fucking her with a power and precision she'd never had before. Just as she thought she'd gotten used to it, matching his rhythm with a little backward thrust of her own hips, he upped the ante. His hand snaked around her hips again, and a hard knee parted her hips even further.

She whimpered as the angle of penetration changed. Impaled on his cock with her legs wide apart, she felt like she was being split in two as his fingers found her clit again. At the same time he rammed his cock into her, he rolled the sensitive little bud between his clever digits. Keeping pace with his thrusts he flicked, or tweaked, or pinched until Dualla was breathless and her soft moans filled the veranda around them.

The tension between her legs and deep in her core coiled tighter and tighter, rising higher than she'd ever felt before. When she came, and she was going to come soon, she knew the tidal wave of pleasure would be mindblowing.

"Don't come yet." His order was soft but firm. "You don't come until I tell you to."

Dualla squeaked, her need rising by the second. "Bit late to tell me now!"

"Oh, it'll be worth it," he promised against the skin of her back as he placed gentle kisses along her spine. His fingers continued to ply her clit as his strokes slowed down. His free hand smoothed along her back and down between their bodies. Dualla froze when his thumb started to circle the puckered rose of her ass.

He wasn't... was he? An energy bolt shot through her body as her attention focused on the lazy movements of his thumb.

She'd never done anal before, but she'd always wondered about it, how it would feel to have something the size of a cock... well, there. Right now, as his thumb rimmed her anus, it felt at least the size of a cock. If his thumb felt so big, how the hell would she manage with a real cock?

"Hey, relax. Just go with the flow. You'll like it, I promise. Breathe and push out as I press," he whispered then pinched her clit without warning.

"OOhhhh!" White-hot pleasure coursed through her body as he shoved his cock in her to the hilt and pressed his thumb into her ass. The burning stretch as her virgin ass gave around his thumb tipped Dualla over the edge. Her keening cry echoed around the veranda, followed by his grunt as her body clamped down hard on his cock.

Dualla turned into a wildcat, trashing and thrusting back against him. "Just fuck me harder," she demanded.

A demand he eagerly obeyed. Pulling his thumb from her ass, his breath came in harsh pants as he slammed into her. Dualla whimpered in ecstasy. Her body was being used and used hard but it felt so damn good!

A roar of triumph left his lips as he thrust into her a last time. His body stiffened, his cock pulsing and jerking as he bathed the neck of her womb with his seed, and for the first time in her life, Dualla wanted a man's seed to take hold...

Chapter Seven

Fucking hell. Edan blinked the grey from the edges of his vision as he came down from the most intense orgasm of his life. His whole world had tilted on its side the instant he'd come, buried in her silken depths. Deep within his soul, something reached out to her, making the connection with hers to wrap her in the intangible bond of a dragon and his fire companion.

He dropped his head and dragged a ragged breath into his lungs. Fuck it! He'd gone and done what he'd sworn to himself he wouldn't do -- tie her to him in the bond.

Perhaps... his head lifted as hope filled his chest. Perhaps it had worked and healed them both? His cock still buried within her, Edan reached inside to feel the connection between himself and his dragon. The creature purred, sated for the moment by the connection with their souler, but the ache of his damaged wing was still there.

Disappointment crushed him, stealing his breath again, but in an entirely different and unwelcome fashion. It hadn't worked. His face tightened into a grim expression, Edan pulled from her. His heart ached as his cock slid free of her body. All he wanted to do was pick her up, carry her through to his bed and take her again, and then again, until she was completely and irrevocably his.

He dropped into the seat opposite and ran a shaking hand through his shoulder length hair. He couldn't do that. What woman would want him?

The water swirled opposite and he felt her eyes on him. Lifting his head, he opened his eyes and met her gaze. Her eyes were darkened, hair tousled and her lips had a bee-stung look. All in all, she looked like a woman who'd been thoroughly lov -- No, he wasn't going there. They'd fucked. That was all. Nothing to do with loving. No way, no how.

"You feeling better?" His voice was rougher than he'd intended. Her eyes widened a little at his harsh tone but she nodded. Edan rumbled deep in his chest and stood, naked and unashamed of it. He was in his own home. Why should he worry about his scars here? His still erect cock bobbed against his belly as he waded out of the water. "Good. Get out."

* * *

Still coming down from her climax, the cruel order took her breath away. Speechless, Dualla watched Edan's back as he retreated. She'd known it was him. Who else could it have been? It all made sense now. All her life she'd dreamed of a purple-eyed man and a dragon with scales of the same hue. She just hadn't realized they'd be one and the same.

"Oi! Edan Lisander, you hold it right bloody there!"

Anger exploded, bright and hot, in her chest as he walked toward the double doors. The hideous marks across his back were vivid against his wet skin. Absently, Dualla noted they seemed fresher somehow than they had been on the docks, but she had more things to think about at the moment.

"Or are you too much of a damn coward?" She threw the challenge at him as she climbed out of the tub. Luckily for both of them, warm water didn't trigger an automatic change like cold saltwater did, otherwise their erotic little interlude there would never have happened.

You think? You'd have had his clothes off in a hot second given even half a chance, a little voice in her head chuckled. Dualla conceded it had a point. Even with the marks on his face and body, Lisander was eminently fuckable.

He stopped at the word coward. Strands of his wet hair clung to his broad shoulders as he turned his head. His handsome profile stood out stark against the shadows of the house behind him. "What did you say?"

Dualla lifted her chin and stuck her hands on her hips. No one had ever accused her of lacking in courage. Even so, baiting a dragon was about the bravest -- or stupidest -- thing she'd ever done.

"Coward."

He whipped around faster than she'd seen anyone move. Ever.

Feral anger glittered in his eyes and tightened his face as he walked toward her. No, walked was the wrong word. Stalked was more like it. He stalked her like the predator he was. A predator who could fry her to smoked haddock within the blink of an eye. Or, she bit back a whimper at the thought, pick her up, carry her inside and have his wicked way with her.

Yeah, he already did that, remember? The voice reminded her in a snide undertone. Dualla ignored it, swallowing hard as Edan circled her. She remembered all right, and she wanted a replay.

"Say it again. I don't think I heard you right." He walked around to face her again, standing so close she could feel the heat from his skin, trying to intimidate her with his larger body. Dualla glared back up at him. Her heart pounded as adrenaline surged through her body, but there was no way she was backing down from such a cheap trick.

"You heard me. I called you a coward."

A small muscle in the side of his chiseled jaw clenched as though he was fighting to hold onto his temper. "That's what I thought you said. Dangerous thing to say to a dragon. Didn't your mother teach you any sense?"

Dualla raised an eyebrow and raked a cool look over him. "Didn't yours teach you to ask for help when you need it? Or were you just born stupid?"

God, she was driving him nuts. Edan almost shook with the effort it took to keep his anger in check and not touch her. He settled for glaring. He was being an ass, he knew, but what else could he do? All his instincts raged at him to drag her into his bedroom and complete the bonding they'd started. Instincts he was managing, just, to keep in check, except now she wanted to challenge him, something his dragon nature would never let pass.

"I was gentle before because you needed healing," he bit out, his voice dropping as his dragon rose closer to the surface, "... but don't push me or you'll find out what

it's like to be fucked by a dragon. Properly fucked. Now, if you value that pretty skin of yours, get out."

"No." She folded her arms over her naked breasts. His eyes flicked down to them, noting the arms hid nipples that had tightened and peaked at his words. The subtle scent of her arousal filtered around the veranda and forced Edan to bite back another moan. If she didn't get out of here soon, despite his good intentions, she wasn't going to get a choice in the matter.

"Do I have to throw you off the cliff?" he threatened, already reaching out to grasp her upper arms to try and shake some sense into her.

That was his first mistake in a whole list. The instant his hands contacted her skin, electricity arched between them. He'd meant to drag her to the edge of the cliff and throw her off it. From this side of the house, she'd fall into water deep enough to break her fall, and as a mermaid, there was no chance she could drown.

He'd meant to throw her off the cliff, but instead, he pulled her up hard against him and crushed her lips under his. In the hot tub he'd been gentle, holding his natural responses -- his need to dominate -- in check. Even so, things had gotten out of hand.

This time he made no pretense of control. His hand drove into her hair and held her head still. His lips pried hers apart so his tongue could dip into her mouth and ruthlessly explore the honeyed recesses within. A groan rumbled up from his soul. He'd always laughed at the ridiculous descriptions in slushy romance novels -- the ones that described women as tasting of honey or champagne and strawberries.

Now he knew what they meant. She didn't taste of anything as definable as champagne and strawberries. She tasted of home and forever, and God help his soul, Edan wanted that. He wanted it so badly his bones ached with holding back and not claiming her. So he channeled his frustration into their kiss, nibbling and drinking from her lips before thrusting his tongue between them to duel with hers in a rhythm as old as time itself.

Finally, when they were both breathing raggedly, he pulled back and looked down into her eyes. The slight breeze from the ocean shifted her hair across her

shoulders and drew his eye. She was so delicate, a slender waif compared to his hulking frame.

"Walk away," he ordered, his expression grim and serious. "I'm damaged goods. You need a man who's whole."

Silence stretched between them -- a taut, tension filled silence that was almost like a third person on the veranda. Edan couldn't believe he'd laid his soul bare to her. Then again, that was what being soulers was all about. She was the other half of his soul, his fire companion and his true love all rolled into one. She was everything he wanted, everything he was and everything he would become. Without her, he was nothing.

He watched her, his eyes wary. He needed her to accept him. A dragon couldn't force his fire companion or there was no point in the bond. A forced bond was little better than slavery. He was asking her to accept a broken man though. His heart was desperate for her to say yes even as his head knew the best thing for her was to walk away.

"You saw me down there. I can't fly. I'll never fly again. Look at me," he urged, sliding a finger under her chin to make her look up into his face. Her eyes wandered over the scars on his cheek and jaw where the demon had marked his flesh. "And tell me you want to wake up to this every morning?"

Chapter Eight

Dualla's heart ached deep in her chest, turning over as she saw the hurt in his eyes. He expected her to reject him so he was pushing her away before she could. Understanding flooded her body, followed swiftly by a fond irritation. As if that wasn't just like a man. He'd decided he was no good for her so that was it. She had no choice in the matter.

Resignation filled his eyes when she didn't answer straight away. His hand dropped to his side, as limp as the defeated look in his eyes. He started to turn away. "Just as I thought. You can let yourself out."

"Just hold on a moment there." Dualla's hand snaked out and touched his damaged shoulder. His large body flinched at the touch, and instantly she lifted her hand, an apology on her lips. "I'm sorry. I didn't hurt you, did I?"

Edan turned slightly to look over his shoulder, his purple eyes filled with curiosity. "No."

Great, she was going to have to work for it, was she? Fine. She'd glimpsed his heart, and there was no way on this planet she was letting him get away. Her expression turned sultry and she stepped up behind him. "And this? This doesn't hurt, does it?"

His body shuddered as her fingers traced the scars, and her lips caressed the worst with gentle kisses. The large fists at his sides clenched and unclenched as she moved over his back, never staying in one place for long. His head dropped back, and his damp blond hair cascaded down his spine. Dualla swept it aside as she worked her way up, having to stand on tiptoe to kiss along the top of his shoulders.

"No, doesn't hurt." His admission was gravelly and halting, as though the words were torn from him. Every line of his body tensed as though he couldn't bear her to touch the scars but at the same time couldn't stop her.

She curled her fingers in the silk of his hair, running her hands through it to gain a gentle hold. Moving around his body, she lifted onto her toes again to plaster her body against the front of his, and followed the trail of a scar around his neck.

"And this?" She pulled away to look up into his eyes. They were heavy-lidded and dark, the expression in them taking her breath away. "These..." she indicated the scars, "don't matter to me. It's what's in here..." her fingers tapped his broad chest. "...that matters. The scars are only important to you, and they'll only be important as long as you let them be."

His nostrils flared, and for a moment scales pressed against his skin from the inside, appearing stark against his skin. His eyes changed, the pupils narrowed and became slits as the purple deepened from violet to near midnight.

Dualla knew she was looking at Edan's dragon. Her breath caught in her throat. "You're beautiful," she said as she smoothed her fingers over his scarred cheek. "And yes, I want to wake up to this every morning... if you'll let me."

"Sssssouler," the dragon whispered and then, with a shake of Edan's head the creature was gone, replaced by the man. He smiled tightly, his face a mask of deep need and longing.

"Do you mean that?" he demanded, his hands clamping around her waist to hold her tightly against him. "If you didn't, then you have one chance to walk away. After that I can't be held responsible for what happens."

Dualla swallowed, the heat in her body rising to match the heat in his eyes. "W-what do you mean you can't be responsible? You dragons don't eat your mates after sex or something do you?"

Then it happened. One moment he was glaring down at her and the next -- the corners of his lips quirked and started to turn up. His smile spread across his face like

the sun breaking through a storm cloud and transformed what had been a cruelly handsome face into one that stole her breath and reason away.

"No. If we did, I'd already have eaten you, remember?" He nodded toward the hot tub, reminding her of what they'd already done in there. His expression shifted and turned sly. "Although, eating you sounds like an excellent idea."

Dualla didn't get time to respond. By the time she'd processed his words and realized what he meant, he'd already swung her up into his arms and was striding into the house. Her gasp of surprise made him smile again as he walked straight through the house and into a room with a large bed. Dualla squeaked when he dropped her onto the sheets. Bouncing a little, she came to rest spread out over the dark silk.

Edan looked down at her, his gaze possessive as it roved over her body. Heat prickled across her skin. It was as though his look was a physical touch. She bit her lip when his attention reached her breasts and lingered over her nipples, which beaded in response, begging for his touch.

"You're amazing. Look at what you do to me." Edan reached down and wrapped a hand around his cock, pumping the hard length in slow strokes. The purple head was wide and glistened with pre-cum. "I'm ready for you again already. Spread your legs. Let me see you properly this time."

Dualla's gaze riveted to his hand on his cock. She parted her thighs. Her cheeks flushed as she fought the urge to close them again. She wasn't usually self-conscious, but there was something about his close scrutiny that bolstered her courage yet made her shy all at the same time.

"Perfect," he breathed, as she moved her thigh and he could see the plump, pink lips of her pussy. "I knew you would look as perfect as you felt. Touch yourself. I want to see how you make yourself come."

Dualla shut her eyes. Oh God, she'd never done that in front of a guy before. Could she? Dare she? Without conscious thought, her hands slid down her body, cupping her ample breasts for a moment before flirting with the curves of her waist. He groaned as her hands slid over the small curve of her belly and between her thighs.

"Yeah, just like that. Let me see you work it..."

Dualla closed her eyes as she used the fingers of one hand to spread her labia. The middle finger of the other swirled over her clitoris, rubbing in the circular motion she knew was most effective. The bed dipped at her side but she kept going. Her finger circled around and around, occasionally stopping to dip down to the entrance to her body to collect the liquid arousal pooling there. She was wet already. It seemed that just looking at this man, or having him look at her, was enough to get her body going.

The heat in her loins flared hotter, shaped and pressurized by each circle of her finger. Her hips started to buck, riding the small waves of pleasure starting to build. Soft moans escaped from the edges of her lips, even though she bit down on the lower one to keep them in.

"Don't worry, sweetheart. Let me hear you, I want to hear you." Edan's voice was taut now, rougher than she'd heard it yet. She opened her eyes a crack to look at him. His hand moved faster on his cock now, his gaze avid as it fastened on her fingers working her clit and pussy. Temptation driving her, she slid two fingers inside and fucked herself slowly. His nostrils flared and he dropped his hand from his body.

"Fuck it, I can't take anymore. Your scent is driving me wild. I have to taste you," he growled and moved forwards on the bed.

His large hands smoothed over her thighs, opening them wide so he could fit the width of his shoulders between them. Then his head was buried between her thighs. Dualla tensed as she waited for the first brush of his tongue over her clit. Instead, he drove his tongue deep into her body, the unexpected penetration making her cry out in surprise. He mumbled approval in the back of his throat, withdrawing and then thrusting his tongue into her cunt again as though desperate to gather up every last drop of her juices.

"God, you taste amazing." His voice was muffled. The vibrations against her ultra-sensitive clit made her moan and writhe under his mouth. "I could do this all day."

Dualla sobbed in response, twisting her hips. Whether she was trying to get away or get more stimulation, she didn't know. She was far too gone to care anymore. He spread a broad hand over her stomach to hold her still and ran his tongue up from her cunt all the way up over her clit. When he got there, he went to town. He nibbled and he licked. He sucked and pulled the sensitive nub of flesh between his teeth to flick it with his tongue.

"Ohmigod! I-I'm gonna come."

Her hips jerked instinctively as he thrust his tongue deep again, fucking her with the agile muscle. Just one more touch and he'd tip her over the edge. Instead, as though he knew her body was crying out for him to close his mouth over her clit again, he carried on where he was, sliding his tongue deep into her body and back again.

Dualla growled in frustration and reached down to grab a handful of his silken hair to drag him up to where she wanted him. "There," she panted. "Now."

"Oh, you mean here?" She heard a smile in his voice he blew a cool breath over her clit. Dualla almost howled in frustration. Before she could make any more demands, though, he leaned down and sucked the small nubbin into his mouth.

Her climax hit her like a tidal wave across the shore. Heat exploded out from her core, surging along her veins like an inferno to fill every cell of her body. The soft moan in the back of her throat became a keen cry of pleasure as she called his name. Wave after wave hit her, washing her away in a sea of ecstasy. The brush of his tongue over her clit was both her tormentor and her savior. Hands twining in his hair, she lifted her hips, begging for more even though she wasn't sure. There was no possible way she could take it.

With a last flick of his tongue over her, Edan pulled away and crawled up her body. Hands braced either side of her head, he looked down at her.

"I can't believe you're actually mine," he whispered, and the vulnerability in his eyes broke Dualla's heart all over again. To see such a powerful creature, and such a proud man, humbled before her was nothing short of a miracle and something Dualla knew she'd never see again.

She lifted her hand, and making sure to pick the damaged side, touched his cheek again. "I am, always have been," she admitted. "You're the man of my dreams. Literally."

He grunted and reached down between them to position himself, pressing the broad head of his cock to the slick entrance of her body.

"I'll make you explain that. But later," he said and pushed forwards. Dualla's back arched as he slid into her in one long, powerful slide. His smile was slow and assured as he started to move, a steady rhythm which started to build the fires of her arousal all over again. "Right now, I'm a little busy loving my soulmate, my souler."

Epilogue

"You are one lucky son-of-a-bitch, you know that, scale-boy?"

The amused voice broke through Edan's contemplation of the party going on in his garden. It had been a few months since he'd taken Dualla as his fire companion, and the curvy woman had insisted on a party to mark their bonding. Considering the fact she was pregnant, her belly already starting to round with his child, the normally reclusive Edan hadn't been able to say no. Then again, one pleading look from her turquoise eyes was enough to shatter any arguments he tried to muster. Simply put, the big dragon couldn't resist giving her anything she wanted.

"Mac! You made it."

Edan turned from his post behind the barbeque, a broad smile on his face which tugged at the barely there scars on his cheek. Repeated healing -- making love to Dualla -- had accomplished wonders. Even now Edan could hardly believe his wing was almost whole again.

Mac leaned around him and snagged a sausage. "Of course I did, man. You think I'd miss your bonding party? Someone's gotta give a speech and warn the poor girl about your deplorable antics as a single man."

Edan grinned and shook his head as Mac bit into the sausage, then cursed as the hot meat spilled out and burned his lip. "As impatient as ever. Hey, it's daylight. What happened to the old sun slavery bit?" he asked, realizing the sun was out and Mac was walking and talking. Not the standard MO for a gargoyle. Usually they were locked in stone during the day.

Still chewing, Mac lifted a small pendant around his neck. "Warden-made, cost me an arm and a leg. Someone else's, of course," he said around a mouthful, then swallowed. "So, that the lucky lady?"

Edan followed his gaze to where Dualla was holding court amongst the other fire companions. The look on his face mellowed. The sunlight glinted off her dark hair, hair that had gained a purple hue since their bonding, and the light sound of her laughter drifted over the lawn to the two men.

"Yeah."

"Eloquent as ever I see." Mac finished his sausage and swallowed, looking back at his former partner. "She's beautiful. You're a lucky guy."

"Why are you here, Mac?" Edan asked bluntly as he turned the burgers. Quite why he was standing here burning meat on a barbeque was beyond him. It would be so much easier for him to just shift and toast the lot in one go, but he had his orders.

"We got a lead on Carmicheal." Mac's voice lost the charming note and went all business. Edan nodded and stabbed another burger to turn it. "You healed enough to want in?"

Silence stretched between the two men as Edan carried on turning burgers, a frown on his face he looked up and across the lawn toward Dualla. At that moment, perhaps sensing his dilemma, she looked up and their eyes connected.

A smile spread over her lips, love and happiness shining in her eyes. Edan shook his head, his decision made.

"Not this time. Ethan's gone and I'm done in the ring. My life is here now, with my souler."

Mina Carter

Usually I hate talking about myself. In any conversation, I'm always trying to find out about the other person. People are fascinating to me, and yeah, I'm a people watcher ;) Ok, me. About me... I'm short, dark haired and British. The rest is kinda subject to change without notice. I'm quite possibly nutty (insane) and I'm a bit of a control freak when it comes to organization. Although this doesn't mean I can keep a room tidy, it does mean I know just about where everything is in it!

I love to write, always have. I write primarily romance, which can span over paranormal, urban fantasy, contemporary and even sci-fi, but always it's about a romance ;) So whether it's brooding bad-boy vamps or handsome starship captains, you'll always find a healthy dose of the alpha male in my stories and the women strong enough to tame them ;)

When I'm not writing, I'm addicted to Photoshop and online rpg's. Usually you'll find me combining all three of my loves (writing, images and rpg's) in a simming group someplace. I virtually live online so the chances of catching me lurking around a forum or two are good as well.

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