

Book II: The Wizard Twins

The Reluctant Consort

By: Lora Leigh

Prologue

Marina Sellane observed the small group of human males as they carted off the wagonload of food stores that they had taken from the small house by force. There were six of them; great hulking males whose cruelty had earned them her undying hatred.

Inside the small house she could hear the wails of the mother, but there was now silence from the daughter of the house. The father was yet lying in the dust of the yard. He breathed, but the bloody wound to his head would need attending.

Marina watched the wagon disappear around the bend in the road and rose hesitantly from her hidden position behind the thick, concealing foliage of a Peron bush. Its flaming red and blue tinted leaves had hidden her from the assailants to the home as she came upon it.

She arrived too late to help. But she had memorized the faces of those who had committed the crime. A crime on Covenani land this time. Her eyes narrowed in fury. Her mother would have each man in that wagon beheaded for this crime.

As she started to move around the bush, she was caught suddenly from behind. The smell of an unwashed body, the feel of brute strength had terror washing over her. Once again, memory and nightmare seared her brain. Two, so much larger, frightening, hurting.

Her heart was thundering in her chest, strangling her as she fought the hard hands holding her to the large male bodies. Not again, she prayed to the Unit of Grace. Please, in the name of mercy not again.

“What have we here?” a coarse voice laughed, and she heard the chuckles of several others.

Marina screamed out in fury. Her body bucked against the hold as her fingers formed claws and she fought to rake the hands holding her imprisoned. Within seconds another joined the first. Hard hands held her, laughing voices jeered at her struggles.

She kicked out at them, twisting furiously, desperately, but she could do nothing to keep them from stripping first her large shirt from her body and then her boots and pants.

“Hell, we have us a Sorceress. An unclaimed bitch to boot.” Dirty, his face and hair matted with filth, the lumbering male laughed down at her furious face when he spied the birthmark that marred her thigh.

Marina trembled with terror. Her power was still dormant and she had few defenses against the men who now held her. Fighting to concentrate for strength, she sent out a mental call for help. It would be her only chance. Perhaps if there were Covenani near, then they could reach her before the rape she knew the males intended. It had been all that had saved her before. But her sisters were not near this time. There was no one she could depend on to come to her aid.

“Queen Amoria will see you put to death for your crimes here,” she screamed out as cruel fingers pinched her nipples and another pulled at the small curls that covered her cunt.

“She’ll have to catch us first, bitch,” the bearded one sneered. “But you can bet you won’t be the one to tell. The three of us will fuck the life out of you before we ever leave here.”

“No!” Her scream was torn from her as two of them pushed her to the ground, holding her there as the third began to release his breeches.

She struggled desperately against their hold as she fought for the power to increase the range of her call. Gods, someone had to hear her soon. Surely there was someone near.

She was so intent on a psychic scream for help that at first she was unaware that the sudden screaming around her was not her own cries for help. As she tore herself from suddenly slack hands, she rolled to her feet, jerking her shirt from the ground with every intention of running to the forest for cover.

An agonized male scream behind her had her turning. There, locked in the swirls of gold and pale blue energy, the three humans writhed in fury and pain as they fought the paralyzing force of their magick containing them.

Breathing hard, stunned by shock, Marina fought to drag her shirt over her body. The buttons eluded her, though. She clutched the front closed, watching as two Wizard Twins strode casually from the forest line.

They were dressed in leather breeches and snug tunics, with dagger and sword strapped to their hips, though neither had been unsheathed. Their dark faces were brooding, savagely cast and arrogant. They watched her with narrowed eyes, rather than watching the humans they had ensnared with their magick.

“Princess Marina, are you unharmed?” Dark and sensual, the voice wrapped around her, making her breasts tingle, her womb to clench.

“I am unharmed.” She nodded. “They are with those who attacked the family here and stole their stores of supplies. My mother will wish to question them.” They appeared to be slowly suffocating from the force of magick enclosing them.

One of the Wizards glanced at the three. Heaving a sigh, he waved his hand. Immediately, bands of energy enclosed only the wrists and ankles of her attackers, holding them firm but allowing no escape. Then the Wizards both began a slow progression toward Marina.

Breathing hard, she watched the two warily. As they crossed her boots and breeches, the articles were lifted by an unseen force and placed within their hands. Their gazes were intense, heated. Marina’s nipples hardened, her pussy flamed. She didn’t consider this a good thing. She backed up a step.

A small grin quirked their lips, heated arousal licked at their expressions.

“Come, Princess. Dress and we will talk.” The articles were handed to her.

“Definitely, we will talk,” the other sighed, his eyes going over her bare legs. “You had no business being here. Why are you not at the castle?”

Marina addressed quickly, or as quickly as her shaking hands would allow. She watched the Twins warily.

They were the Sashtains, and seemed to be shadowing her every step. Sneaking out of the castle was becoming next to impossible. Leading her small force of Sorceresses in gaining the information she needed about the advancement of Seculars was growing harder by the day. Serena would be less than pleased by this development. And should her mother learn of her daughter's activities, then there would be no peace within the castle for years to come.

"I was visiting families on Covenani land." She finally shrugged as she buttoned her blouse and fought the fear that still held her breathless. "I did not expect to come upon Secular attackers."

Caise and Kai'el watched her broodingly. They were in no way fooled by her nervous smile.

As the male lying in the dirt groaned, their attention turned from her.

"I will call the Sentinel Guards and Sorceress troops to this place," Kai'el sighed. "You will return to the castle immediately, Princess, your mother would be most distressed by your activities this day."

Marina drew herself carefully erect.

"I do not obey orders of Wizard Twins," she bit out furiously. "There are two females in that home that require..."

"You have no place in that home," Caise growled, his golden eyes furious now. "You will return to the castle and allow the healers with your mother's troops to care for those women."

"This is not your call." But she backed away as Caise stepped forward, his face suddenly taut with his anger.

"Princess, you do not wish to test me on this matter," he growled.

Immediately, energy crackled in the air around her. Soft as velvet, yet strong as steel, coils of gold and pale blue energy circled the air around her.

"This magick is for your protection, and our assurance you do as ordered," Caise told her with a smug smile. "Return now or I may have to check more deeply into this penchant you have to be where you should not venture."

"You have no right to order me. Neither of you do. This is Covenani land, not Cauldaran." Fury blazed inside her. Like a conflagration she had no power to control, it ripped through her body and mind.

"Do not test us on this, Princess," Kai'el turned to her, his pale blue eyes filled with desire, and something more. Something she refused to delve further into.

Immediately the power that circled her protectively became warmer, more caressing, gentle in its demeanor. Her eyes widened. Her sister Brianna had told her how the Verago Wizards used such power to prepare her for their heated love play.

"You will not." Fear, as deep and blinding as before tore through her. She could not imagine allowing such a touch, giving leave for the pain that she knew Brianna would surely lie to her about. Her sister was protective of her, she would never allow her to know the true depth of the sacrifice she had made for her people.

“Do as I said,” Caise snapped. “Return now, Princess, before I lose my patience and show you what I do indeed dare to do.”

For a brief second their eyes met. Power swirled inside her, blinding, intense. A surge of intensity she had never known, that terrified her to the soles of her feet. Before he could step closer, she ran for the woods and the large golden unicorn that had carried her through her forest. Escape was her only thought. That, and a terrible fear that she would never truly be free of the Sashtain Wizard Twins.

Chapter

“Have you lost your minds!” The dragon Garron was awaiting them as they stepped into the chateau that Queen Amoria had given them for their use while they were on Covenani lands. It wasn’t nearly as opulent as the castle left to them by their father’s, but well enough for the time being.

Thankfully, the receiving room was large enough to hold a dragon that stood head and shoulders above even the tallest Wizard known to be born. An irate, tail twitching, brows lowered, black eyes snapping, Sentinel Dragon.

Caise turned and glanced at his brother, Kai’el questioningly.

“Did you notice your mind missing brother?” He asked with innate mockery. “I myself seem to be intact.”

Kai’el breathed in with rough impatience. “Perhaps Marina stole it with her insane actions earlier this day. It was enough to make a man question not just her sanity, but his own for the decision to align himself with her.”

Kai’el’s patience had been strained to its limits in the past months with the spread of the Secular’s, the human sect that had decided that all magick of Sentmar must be destroyed. They had begun with their attacks on Covenani lands, but it was now spreading to Cauldaron.

Unfortunately, they were gaining in strength, and not by non-magick means.

The dragon snarled. A curling of his hard, scaly upper lip that had both brother’s watching him warily.

“Your attempts to intimidate the Princess Marina will not succeed,” he informed them derisively. “What made you imagine that approaching her in such a manner would do you one wit of good?”

“Perhaps we imagined saving her was the wisest course of action,” Caise grunted as he moved across the room to the small bar and poured a healthy measure of Covenani wine. It was by far weaker than what they were used to, but the supplies they had ordered delivered from his own castle had yet to make it to Sellane land.

“You forget brother, the Covenani Princess must be handled with kid gloves, right up to the Joining moment and her delicate sensibilities not offended by our crass lusts,” Kai’el reminded him, his voice just as mocking as he faced the Dragon.

“Save your sarcasm for a situation where it may be effective,” Garron advised coldly. “I have come to discuss this matter of Joining with the Princess Marina. I did not come to witness your weak male pride in

the face of her rejection of you.”

Caise clenched his teeth together, feeling not just his own rising fury at the dragon’s insulting tone, but also his brother’s.

It was becoming a less than comfortable situation. Princess Marina’s pinnacle of power could be assessed one of two ways. They could wait until her natural pinnacle arrived, or they could force it free. From all indications she had suppressed it herself for years now, the woman’s strength of will was incredible. Very few sorceresses had ever been able to delay the pinnacle, the fact that she had didn’t bode well for them as her mates.

“What is there to discuss, dragon?” Kai’el paced to one of the long, wide windows that looked out upon the Lake of Dreams. A clear, perfectly blue body of water that stretched for miles and entered into the endless mists of the Magick Forest. “We are here to petition for the Joining, just as agreed. We will stay here until as such time we can leave with our consort.”

“There is much to discuss.” The dragon’s voice was rough with impatience as he turned to face the two men, his black eyes liquid and far too intelligent.

There were few dragons left, that the Wizards knew of. Garron was one of the strongest, and the most powerful in regards to his favor with the Sentinel Wizards.

“Then discuss a way to keep her ass in the castle and away from those rabid sorceresses pretending to be warriors,” Kai’el ordered him with chilling politeness. “You ordered us to watch over and protect her, and I tell you now dragon, that female is becoming a source of great frustration in that area.”

“She is not an animal, Wizard,” he growled. “She is a determined young woman. There is a difference.”

“A woman determined to drive us insane,” Caise, snorted as Kai’el smothered his laughter. The sudden amusement on his brother’s part did nothing to dampen Caise’s temper.

“Her mother believes her to be so delicate, so fearful of male advances,” the Dragon said slyly then. “Would it not surprise many to know it wasn’t fear that held back the Princess’s desires, but rather her own determination to succeed in her own goals, rather than those of any male she would be paired with?”

Caise stilled.

“You yourself warned us of her attack years before,” he snapped. “I clearly remember the warning Dragon, of what would happen prized portions of our anatomy should she be offended sexually.”

A dragony brow lifted in mockery. “I?” he asked imperiously. “Surely you were mistaken, Wizard. I never resort to threats. Only to promises.”

A smart assed dragon. Caise shook his head at the decided downhill swing he and his brother’s lives were taking at the moment.

“So you are saying it’s not fear that drives her, but rather her own female goals?” Kai’el asked then.

“Give the boy a ribbon,” the Dragon drawled as he gave Caise a sarcastic look. “He can be very bright at times, can’t he?”

Caisewinced as Kai'el turned from the windows and watched the creature with icy eyes.

"So why give us this information?" Kai'el ignored the offense, for once.

The dragon's shoulders shrugged negligently.

"I always have my reasons," he said, the knife sharp mockery still in place. "The question is; how would this change your own situation?"

Caiseglanced over at Kai'el, recognizing the dangerous stillness that had come over his brother.

"Dragon, this venture into sorceress idiocy is testing my patience," Kai'el snapped. "We will decide how best we should proceed ourselves, but you can rest assured, the Princess Marina and her stubbornness has met their match."

Marina rose from the bathing pools beneath the castle, water cascading along her naked body as the steam that drifted around her caressed her sensitive flesh. At her side, her sisters Selena and Brianna watched her curiously as she lifted one of the thick bath sheets from the stone shelf and wrapped around her snugly.

She kept her back to them as she covered her body, not wanting them to see the swollen state of her breasts, or the erect points of her nipples. They had been aroused since the power of the Sashtain Twins had wrapped around her, caressing her, slight though it had been.

Between her thighs, the soft triangle of curls that shielded her pussy was damp with more than the warmth of the waters she had been submerged within. There was also a soft slickness there, a mysterious ache that refused to go away. Part pleasure, part pain, the ache had her clit throbbing, her pussy hot and building with a hunger she didn't understand as well as she knew she should.

"Are you certain you weren't harmed this morning, Marina?" Selena questioned her gently. "The Sashtain Twins were quite concerned when they brought the report of the attack to mother."

Marina snorted as she rolled her eyes mockingly.

"I'm certain they were quite concerned," she said with false sweetness as she thought of the two arrogant Wizards. "Sentinel's forbid that I should be truly raped and relieved of my virginity. What use would I be to them then?"

She turned back to face her sisters as she sat on the stone bench at the edge of the shallow pool. Serena and Brianna relaxed within.

"Your power is not all they seek, Marina," Brianna sighed. "The joining is much more than the physical. The release of your power to them, brings you more than you could ever believe you are losing. It is returned ten-fold with that they give in return."

Marina crossed her arms and leaned forward, bracing them on her knees. It wasn't the first time Brianna had claimed that her joining with the Verago Twins was more than satisfactory and pleasing. But this time,

there was a lazy assurance, a confidence in Brianna's tone that she hadn't heard before.

"They intend to petition for The Joining, don't they?" She asked her sister warily. "They are not here to discuss the treaty between Covenani and Cauldaran as they claimed. They are here for me."

In the weeks that the Sashtain Twins had been at the castle with Brianna and the Verago Twins, Marina had not faced her sister with her suspicions. She had allowed Brianna to skip around the true meaning of this little diplomatic visit, as best she could. Marina hadn't wanted to face what she knew was coming, but she was aware that hiding from it wasn't going to help now.

Brianna glanced at Serena, and the look they shared was more of an answer than Marina wanted. Concern etched both sisters' faces as they finally turned back to her.

"Do not say a word." Marina held up one hand as she stared down at them. "Has it not occurred to either of you, that perhaps I sincerely do not wish this joining?" She asked them. "What rights have they, or even the two of you, to force a choice that I am not in agreement with?"

"It won't be our decision, Marina," Serena reminded her gently. "It will be Mother's."

"Based on your advice, I'm certain," Marina stated. "How will you feel Serena, when your own time comes? When Mother forces this choice on you?"

Serena shrugged her slender shoulders gracefully. "My position is different. No man can petition anyone for a joining with me, except me. As heir to the throne, it is my choice alone. As third in the hierarchy of the throne, Marina, the rules are different."

"I can see the fairness in that one," Marina snarled sarcastically. "As heir, you are of course better than the rest of us."

"You're fighting us because you cannot fight the situation," Serena pointed out aloofly. "I understand your anger, but I fear it will do you little good. As Brianna has assured myself and Mother, the truth of the Joining can only be found in experiencing it. I understand your fears, and I ache for them, Marina, but I feel you are doing yourself and the Sashtain wizards a disservice."

"And I feel you are letting your coronation as heir go to your head," Marina grunted. "That crown must go sister dear, it's cramping your brain."

Brianna attempted to stifle her laughter, even as Serena's lips lifted in a wry smile.

"Perhaps not my brain, but it does weigh on my shoulders," she finally sighed. "I still say your fears are unfounded."

"It is not the fear of Joining that drives me from them," she finally snapped. "I am not a child to be coddled and protected from the world your highness. I have decided my future for myself, it does not include arrogant, bossy Wizard Twins. Call them off or I may do something dire."

"I was insane to ever agree to this plot you and the others hatched up," Serena moaned then. "Marina, your destiny is not that of a female warrior. Your destiny is to sit on your own throne, overseeing Cauldaran lands. The Sashtain twins are one of the three highest rulers in Cauldaran. They are part of the Council of Power and one of the three Royal sets of that land. You cannot refuse them."

"Of course I can." Marina narrowed her eyes at her sister. "It's quite easy, Serena, I merely say no."

"Or so I thought," Brianna snickered. "Trust me sister, that does not work."

"And that is not the point." Serena rose from the water then, graceful, royal, even nude and stepped from the pool as she pulled her own bath sheet from the shelf and wrapped it around her. "The Magick of Sentmar is not indestructible, Marina. We are the most powerful of the Covenani. The Sashtain Twins are of the most powerful of the Cauldaran. Refusing out of stubbornness is all right and well, but there is much more at stake here."

"Then you Join with them," Marina suggested sweetly, ignoring the flare of denial that rose in her chest.

"My Consorts have already been chosen," Serena snapped in reply. "Do you think you are the only one to be bound into a relationship you are not certain is right for you, sister? You go to rule over a land, to become more than you are now, while I will step down in power and in reverence when I accept the Joining chosen for me. Do not dare to decide that I have somehow cosigned you to a fate that I would not accept myself."

Silence filled the chamber then. Marina watched as her sister finally sighed wearily and sat down on the bench beside her as Brianna moved from the pool.

"It is not fear that denies the Sashtain Twins," Marina said then, staring into the cleansing, healing pools and seeing more than just the waters there. She saw them, three sisters, their reflections moving within the soft flow of water. "It is much more and yet much less. I will not Join against my will, be it with Wizard Twins, or with a male of our own land. I will not accept that I cannot make my own choice."

As children they had always banded together, and as they grew, they had not changed. Serena had always been their staunchest ally, and they had backed their sister at all times. Marina could remember no time before this, that she had refused the woman she knew would one day be her queen.

"And this is why Caise and Kai'el have not demanded the Joining as of yet," Brianna spoke then, her voice a whisper of compassion. "They do not want you under duress, Marina. But they will not give up either. As I learned, fighting it brings only more fear and greater anxiety. You were not suggested as Consort to these men, because of your position or any power you may wield. The Wizard Sentinel's came to the them, and as with all royalty, decreed the alliance they say in the crystal fountains. You may fight all you wish, but you cannot deny what the gods themselves have arranged."

"The gods decreed nothing to me." Marina jumped to her feet, facing her sisters, not so much in fury, as in determined outrage. "My permission was not asked and I refuse to bow down and calmly accept whatever those Wizards spew from their mouths. You may decide as you wish, Serena," she said bitterly. "But I have other plans than to sit in boredom on a throne I do not covet. My destiny was decided years ago. By myself. No man, nor Wizard has the right to steal it from me."

Before her sisters could argue, she turned and stalked from the pools, her head high, outrage shuddering through her body. She had believed her sisters to be the strongest women she had ever known. To see them so easily accepting a fate they had sworn years ago would never be theirs, infuriated her. Even worse, to know that the Wizard Twins were so easily taking over the ruling house of Covenani filled her with a bitterness she could barely breathe past.

Arrogant. Bossy. Superior. Wizard Twins believed they owned the world. It was time they learned, no man nor Wizard, owned Marina Sellane.

Chapter

Marina knew she have expected that Caise or Kai'el would not let any opportunity slip by in their determination to convince her to give into the petition of Joining that she knew would eventually come. She wasn't a fool, and though she had her reservations and her demons to quell, it wasn't fear that they would harm her that drove her from them. It was the fear that they would possess everything she was.

She had seen Lasan and Drago in their quest for Brianna. The single minded determination had been frightening. The way they watched her, hungered for her, the way they surrounded her whenever Marina had seen them near her sister had sent shudders racing over her body. How could Brianna stand it? To be smothered with so much male attention at one time. It would make her insane.

Just as it was now.

She stood warily as Caise moved down the hall, his long, dark blond hair framing a face that any woman could admire. Wide amber eyes, thickly arched brows and lips that made her lick her own for some odd reason, every time she saw them.

"Princess." He drew abreast of her as he spoke, his voice deep and sensual as it stroked over her body.

She gripped the bath sheet tighter over her breasts, her gaze flickering to the door of her room just ahead. If only she had been faster, she thought with a sigh.

"Good afternoon, Wizard Sashtain," she greeted him formally, as though she were dressed in silks rather than thin cotton. "If you will excuse me, I'm just coming from my bath."

She would have moved around him, but she had a feeling it would be a useless attempt. He was watching her with intent, amber gold eyes, eating her alive. Rather than terrifying her as it should have, she could feel the tingles of response racing over her body. Her breasts felt swollen, her nipples aching. And she didn't like it. She didn't want it.

"So I see," he said carefully. "Allow me Sorceress to escort you."

He offered his arm in an elegant, graceful move that she wouldn't have thought a man of his muscular stature could pull off. Tentatively, she reached out, allowing her fingers to curl over his forearm, ignoring the impulse to test the muscles there.

She was insane, she thought fatalistically as the door to her rooms loomed ever closer. Never let a Wizard Twin near a bed, was the advice she had been given by more than one Sorceress and Cauldaran female. Their sexual appetites of the Wizards Twins were supposed to be stuff of legends. Or nightmares.

"I believe I could have made it here safely on my own Wizard Sashtain," she murmured as he opened her door with a flourish.

"Of that I am certain," he acknowledged, his gaze meeting hers, striking sparks of heat where they shouldn't. "Perhaps I merely enjoy your company."

"Or perhaps it is no more than yet another maneuver to gain your way into a Joining," she suggested with

sweet mockery, casting him a glance from the corner of her eyes. "Really Sashtain, do you think all you must do is get me near a bed and I'll fall into it as easily as your other conquests have?"

His eyes narrowed on her, the striking gold color glittering beneath his dark blond lashes.

"You know my name." He fairly growled the words.

"Do I?" She arched her brow as her hands tightened on the top of the bath sheet. "Identical twins are oft impossible to tell apart."

"For all but natural consorts," he reminded her darkly. "Do you continue to deny what is so obviously the truth?"

His hand lifted then, his the backs of his fingers smoothing over her bare shoulder as he watched her intently. She felt the sparks raging across her nerve ends. How unusual. Heat moved from her shoulder to her fingers, then raced back to strike a bolt of heated sensation to her nipples, the pit of her stomach, the aching depths of her pussy.

She forcibly restrained the shudder of feeling that would have shook her body. The response wasn't unexpected, but as always, the pleasure from the slightest touch caught her unawares.

"It is what you see as the truth," she finally whispered, aware that she had lost a measure of the strength she tried to hold in front of the Sashtain twins. "I see a far different course for my life Wizard. It does not include being at the beck and call of men who have no concept of a female's freedom."

His brows drew into a frown. "And is this how you see a Joining, Marina?" He asked her then, moving closer as she flattened herself against the wall just inside her door. Her eyes widened as he reached out and pushed the door, the soft snap echoing through her mind as she realized they were now well and truly alone.

"I cannot take you without Kai'el present," he seemed to be reassuring her even as his hands clasped her hips and drew her closer to him. "But it is a temptation that is as much pain as pleasure."

She could only stare up at him, but her gaze wasn't centered on his, it was locked on his lips. The hard, sensual curve was coming closer, filling her vision, taking her breath.

"No." She finally found the strength to press her hands to his chest, to whisper the word that her lips didn't want to form.

But he caught the sound just as he caught her lips. Open, waiting for him, parted for easy access by his diabolical tongue, vulnerable to the firm line of his as he held them open.

Should a kiss be destructive, she wondered? Should it fill the mind with no thought other than the sensations whipping through the body, still the impulse to fight, to flee? Should it weaken, and yet leave her trembling with the blood rushing through her body?

A weak moan broke free of her throat as she felt his tongue licking over hers, her lips, tasting her, filling her with his taste. It was an insidious pleasure, wrapping around her senses with the subtle, supposedly non-threatening gentleness of the touch. Her hands curled against his chest as she fought the need to get closer, to taste more of him.

Heat was exploding in her womb, she could feel the juices trickling along the lips of her pussy. Her clit was throbbing, aching, the soft whisper touches of magic breezing over it as his hard knee parted her thighs, his upper leg pressing into the bare flesh.

Sweet Matriarch! She arched into against him, only distantly aware that somehow, somewhere, the bathing sheet had fallen to the floor and she now stood against him, damp and bare.

"I could consume you," he growled then as he tore his lips from hers, smoothing them across her cheek, to her neck.

His hands tightened at her bare hips before one released her curled around her upper thigh, lifting it, insinuating his hard upper leg tighter against her cunt as his other hand moved her against him.

"You are so wet you burn me even through my breeches." His teeth grazed her neck, her shoulder, moving lower, his lips and tongue striking bolts of liquid fire to the very depths of her pussy. "Tell me this brings you fear, Marina. Tell me you do not enjoy my touch."

He was grazing her breasts, his tongue curling around the tight nipple as he sucked it into his mouth.

"Mercy," she gasped, her head falling back against the wall as she fought for strength.

His mouth tightened on the soft flesh it held captive, his teeth rasping the tender peak, tongue lashing as the damp warmth of his mouth suckled at her deeply. She was shaking. She could feel the tremors vibrating through her body, the pleasure, mind destroying, straining across every nerve ending.

"So sweet," he growled as he moved to the twin mound. "Sweet and soft. Feel the pleasure Marina. Feel how hot and wicked you can be. You long to be wicked, my warrior sorceress, I can see it in you."

Wicked. Wild. A woman of her own. That had been her dream.

"You are safe in my arms, Tempress," he swore deeply. "You know our laws. I cannot take you alone. Be my wanton, Marina. Show me your power."

She could. He was alone. Kai'el was not here, they could not force the Joining, and they could not take her separately until after the Joining. Her hands smoothed along his chest, her fingers clumsy but determined as she pulled apart the small metal clasps of his tunic shirt.

It parted, revealing the hair spattered, broad expanse of his chest as his head pulled back from her breast and he watched her with hot amber eyes.

Her lips moved then to his chest. Her tongue stroked over the warm flesh, curled over the flat, hard male nipple and reveled in his muted moan.

She hadn't expected this. Control. She was in control. He could not force her, he could not demand no more than she was willing to give in this situation.

Her nails raked over the hard muscles of his abdomen as her lips went lower. What was it she had heard Brianna tell her sister? That when she took the length of one Wizard's cock into her mouth, and the other was not present, then he could feel it. He knew the pleasure, the ache for release?

She could torment both, tease them, make them regret the ache that was making her life misery.

Her lips trailed lower, her tongue painting a trail as she pushed at him until he released her from the wall.

“You would not.” He stilled as her hands went to the clasp of his breeches. “I warn you Princess, you know not what you tempt.”

His voice was tortured, as tortured as her body had been over the past nights, since the swirls of their power had caressed her, sank into her.

His breeches parted as she went to her knees, her eyes staring up at him, seeing the dark, never ending hunger glittering within them.

“What do I tempt?” She questioned him as the broad, hard length of his cock was revealed, jutting forward from the flaps of the material, the tip glistening damply as she licked her lips.

His hands were in her hair now, his fingers bunching within the strands as she circled the base timidly. She had never touched a man in such a way, except in her dreams. In her darkest fantasies.

“Do you wish to be wicked, Marina?” He taunted her then. “Do you know what happens to wicked little girls?”

Her lips curled into a smile as she licked her lips again. “Do they get spanked?” She taunted him back, knowing he wouldn’t dare, and yet feeling the excitement that filled her ass he spoke the words.

“They get many things,” his voice was strangled, hot. “If one wicked little girl is not very careful, she will get her mouth filled with my cock. Or is that what she wishes?”

Her lips parted, her tongue swiping over the flared head as he flinched, a groan rumbling through his chest as his hips pressed forward.

“I will watch my cock take you like this again one day,” he growled as his erection stretched her lips, the crest buried past them. “But it will be your soft, sweet pussy I pierce rather than your soft pink lips.”

Her pussy gushed at the words. She felt the slick fluid ease from her vagina, coating already wet feminine lips before dampening her thighs.

Her lips tightened as he thrust deeper, burying the head of his cock nearly to her throat as she began to suckle at him hesitantly. She couldn’t describe his taste, though she tried. It was male, electric like a storm, rich like pleasure. The thick shaft tempted her, taunted her with its width and the emptiness of her pussy as she felt the deepening presence of his power swirling around her.

“Ahh, good girl,” he crooned, his hands pulling at her hair as he eased back then forward once again, thrusting in and out of her lips as the wet sounds of her suckling sent her senses spinning. “Perfect perfect lips, Marina. There is a good girl. Good girl. Suck my cock, sweet one. Suck it deep and hard.”

She was insane. That distant thought whipped through her mind even as she drew on him deeper, her tongue lashing at the flesh, licking and loving every fierce throb beneath the satiny flesh. Her head bobbed as she followed the movements of his hands in her hair. Her lips gripped him wetly, her mouth sucking him deep as his body tensed, his cock tightening further.

“No more.” He pulled back, breathing harshly, his muscles trembling beneath the flesh as he pulled her

to her feet and his lips covered hers again.

There was no asking in this kiss. No soft gentle licks or waiting for permission. He pushed his tongue past her lips and devoured her as one hand cupped her breasts, his thumb rasping over her hard nipple as she arched mindlessly to his touch.

Yes. Matriarch have mercy, how was she to deny this pleasure?

“You will destroy me.” He set her from him seconds later before backing away, struggling to right his breeches before quickly reclasping the small metal clips that held the tunic shirt together.

She could only watch him, standing before him naked, swaying weakly as she stared back at him in amazement.

“Dear Sentinel,” he muttered as he jerked the bath sheet from the floor and wrapped it quickly around her. “Heed my warning Princess, stay out of Kai’el’s path for days to come. He will not forget this lapse, nor the fact he was not here to participate, until he has had his due. And trust me when I say his due may be far more than you care to pay at this time.”

Her eyes widened. She trembled at the warning, knowing then she may have made more than a grave tactical error where the Sashtain Twins were concerned. She may have just handed them the answer to her defeat.

Chapter

Coming down from the high and the arousal of being in Caise’s arms hadn’t been easy. It was a long, miserable night, filled with blistering need and a rising tension she couldn’t stem no matter how hard she tried. It left her cranky and on edge the next morning, at a time when she needed to be at her most alert.

She and the eleven sorceresses who followed her had moved more than a morning’s ride through the forests toward the nearest mountains to the ruling castle of Covenani. The Wicked Mountain rose tall and mysterious in the distance as they rode hard towards them. The information she received days before that one of the outlying farms could be part of the Secular movement, had disturbed her greatly. But when they arrived, there was no sign of movement, let alone Seculars.

Marina watched with narrowed eyes as the sorceresses she commanded moved into position around the small farm on the borders of the Wicked Mountains. So named for their sheer drops and the sensual moan of the winds through their crevices, the Wicked Mountains was long regarded as a favorite hideaway for lovers. In past years though, the occurrences of attacks on the narrow roads that led into the mountains had been rising.

The Seculars were gaining in numbers and in strength. The lands given to them by the Covenani and the Cauldaran centuries ago was some of the most peaceful, enriching lands on the planets. It was given to the non-magick sects to claim and farm and build as they desired, away from the more magickal lands they seemed to so hate.

But, the rising tide of discontent among the Seculars was reaching a fever pitch. Lawlessness governed

their small towns and villages, and now it was spilling more and more often into Covenani and Cauldaran lands.

The attack on Brianna the year before had shown how pervasive the hatred had become, even among those nonmagick folk that still lived and worked with Covenani lands. Brianna's own nurse had been infected by their lies and deceit, and had sought to kill the young princess before her Joining with the Verago Twins.

In the months since, attacks along the borders and into the Wicked Mountain that separated this section of Covenani from the Seculars, was growing.

Marina, the farm appears deserted, Cristalie Montair spoke along the psychic link the sorceresses had established when first banding together. *He would not have just abandoned it without informing the Queen.*

And Marina knew no such declaration had been made. Carhew had traded for goods at the castle not a few weeks before. He had not mentioned sighting the Seculars at that time, but days later, information had come to Marina that perhaps Carhew was in league with the Secular's himself.

Elias Carhew was one of the few nonmagick land owners in the Covenani. For the most part, the land responded only to the magick of those working it, it rarely accepted one who did know its gentle heart, to shape its lands. But this portion of land had responded to the man. His bounty was often as prosperous as any Covenani Sorceress or landholder. Because of that, he was afforded much trust and respect by the ruling house. If he had betrayed it, then the consequences to both him and his family would be dire.

Perhaps they are in hiding, she relayed to the others. *Let us see what happens before we go any closer. I want proof he is in league with the Secular's, if he is. Justice is the Queens, not ours.*

She sensed the agreement of the other eleven women as she made her way carefully along the border of thornebushes that grew at the edge of the forest and worked her way toward the back of the house.

It was too silent here. There were no beasts nor fowl that could be heard or seen, and Carhew, she knew, had an impressive array of animals. The barns appeared deserted, just as the house had, the fenced yards empty of any beasts.

Do not approach past the forest line, she ordered the others, seeking to understand the strange disturbance she could feel in the air.

Princess, should we call the warriors to our aid? Minera, a cousin and powerful sorceress herself seemed as unsettled as Marina was.

Not unless we know for certain they are needed, she denied the request. *We are here because our warriors are stretched too thin as it is. Let us see what we can find first.*

She slid her sword from its sheath, feeling the warning of danger that crept up her spine as she moved further along the sheltering line of the farm yards and finally managed to get a clear view of the barn yards to the back.

Sentinel's preserve us! Her prayer was followed by a chill of horror as she stared, mesmerized at the scene before her.

The fenced in barn yard was awash in blood. Near two dozen cattle, several domesticated unicorns and flocks of fowl lay upon the reddened ground. Many were missing heads, some were completely mutilated, but all were dead. In the center of the grisly scene, tied upon a wooden stake was Carhew, obviously dead if the slash at his neck was any indication.

Retreat! She screamed out the mental order, staring into the scene with a wash of horrific dread, barely able to breathe, unable to move herself. *Get back to safety. Contact our warriors and seers. Sentinels save us, what have the Secular's done here?*

She could feel the sorceresses' confusion, but they moved to obey her quickly. Combining their powers they sent out the call to the Covenani and Cauldaran warriors within the land, telegraphing their position but unable to interpret the images that even Marina could not believe she was seeing.

What had she gotten herself into?

She stared at the nightmarish picture of death and violence, shaking, shuddering, unable to move from where she hid, her muscles locked, her inability to believe what she knew she was seeing, filling her mind.

Marina. Marina Wizard Twins are moving in. Owls are in the air and your sister warns that Caise and Kai'el come with them.

She was shaking with cold, chills were racing over her body as she fought to reject the end of innocence for this beautiful land. She could feel the disturbance now, and knew it for what it was, the very land was screaming in outrage. The heart of Sentmar had sliced open with this violence, never known before, and it was vibrating with its horror.

How long she stood there, she wasn't certain. She was unaware of the tears on her face or the whispered prayers that moved past her lips.

Matriarch save us, Sentinels preserve us.

Hold us in your arms, safe from harm.

She hadn't known Carhew well, but she had respected him for his love of the land. A land that now lay soaked with his blood and that of all he loved.

"Woman have you lost all sense?"

She was jerked from her stooped position, straightening in reaction and staring back at Kai'el in dazed fascination. She could feel warmth suddenly surrounding her, swirls of pale blue and amber gold power shelter and enfolding her. For the first time in her life, she welcomed the thought of male power.

She watched his lips open as though to say more, before his gaze moved beyond her. He stilled, all expression wiping from his face as his eyes lightened, becoming the palest gray a second before he jerked her to his chest, his arms enfolding her.

"They killed everything," she whispered as she stared over his shoulder into the canopy of brilliant green to the sky beyond. "Can you hear the land screaming, Kai'el. I hear it screaming..."

"Enough." His voice was dark, hoarse. "You will return to the castle where we will address this recklessness of yours later."

“No...” She tried to jerk away, pushing against him. “He was a part of our land, one of us.”

“Sweet SentinelMagick , Marina.”He gripped her shoulders, staring down at her with dark, intensity. His eyes were almost colorless now, his expression desperate. “This is not the place for you Sorceress,” he whispered. “Not in the midst of this blood and violence. Return to the castle, for I do not believe my soul can bear the guilt that I did not protect you from this.”

“Protect me?” She shook herhead, her mind still filled with blood as she stared into the gaze of a man that she knew would take her soul if she allowed it. “I need no protection.”

“Then I do.” He shook her, his hands hard, his face appearing a bit pale. “You will go now woman, or Sentinel’s be my witness, I will ensure you never leave that damned castle again.”

She assured herself it was only shock that allowed him to drag her to the gathering of huge owls that carried the Wizard Twins across the lands. There, he deposited her on the leather saddle seat strapped between the wings and wrapped her fingers around the high curved front.

Marinastared down at him in shock.

“You have no right,” she whispered.

“Then I take the right,” he snarled back at her. “Count yourself lucky I force nothing else. Now return to the castle before I lose what is left of my temper and my control woman.”

He stepped back, a startling, beautiful sound coming from his lips as he gave the great owl its commands. Immediately huge wings unfurled and within seconds it was lifting from the ground, followed by severalCaldaran Sentinel Guards and winging its way to theCovenani castle. ButMarinahad a horrible feeling that the nightmare had only just begun.

Chapter

“I cannot believe you would dare such a dangerous task. That you, a Princess, an heir to a throne that has survived for aMellinia , would dare to place yourself in such danger.”

QueenAmoria in a rage was not a comfortable sight. Her green eyes snapped with outrage, her slender body quivered with fury, her normally composed, serene features were anything but placid at the moment. A flush of anger mantled her cheeks as her power whipped in the air around her.

Marinastood silently, refusing to meet her mother’s gaze, staring silently past her to the windows that looked out on the palace gardens beyond.

“Marina, what were you thinking?” the Queen, not her mother,Marinareminded herself. The Queen was demanding an answer.

“I was thinking many things, Your Highness,” she answered respectfully. “Uppermost was the safety of Covenani lands. My home, Your Highness, is under attack.”

“And we have warriors just for situations such as this,” the Queen reminded her harshly. “You are not a

warrior. Those sorceresses running with you are not warriors. You are no more than little girls playing an exceedingly dangerous game.”

“Only because you have refused to allow us training,” Marina pointed out coolly, forcibly tamping back her own anger. She didn’t fault the Queen for her fury, for she knew it was a mother’s fears driving it. “I have requested training for nigh unto five years now. Had you not refused us, we would have been better prepared.”

“Matriarch have mercy!” The prayer was more a curse. “Have you lost your senses, child? Have you completely slipped from reality into some realm of fantasy that even reason cannot reach you?”

Marina turned her gaze to her mother then. She saw the fear that raged in her mother’s eyes, the desolation and the memories.

“They have stolen enough from us, Mother,” she said then, acknowledging the woman rather than the ruler. “I will lose no more to those bastards!”

Queen Amoria paled. Marina watched her silently as her mother groped for the chair behind her before sitting down heavily and staring back at her in horror.

“You have no power,” she whispered then. “No sorceress has the power to combat such evil. I will not allow you to attempt what even your father could not do.”

“And I will not sit idly by while the land is awash in yet more blood,” Marina declared quietly. “We are careful, not foolhardy. We do not battle, we merely search for answers and make certain that information is given to the warriors. We can defend ourselves if we must, but we do not look for blood.”

“You will cease at once!” The declaration was given by the Queen.

“No Mother,” Marina refused softly. “I will not. You may demand acquiescence from those who have followed me, but I will not stop.”

The look Queen Amoria gave her should have had her shaking in her shoes. She should have been terrified by the cold purpose she saw in her ruler’s gaze.

“Then I will seek an audience with the Sashtain twins,” The Queen announced. “The Joining ceremony shall be held at once.”

Marina straightened her shoulders, knowing she would have to face this last desperate act of a mother to save her child.

“Do you attempt to force me into an alliance with the Sashtain’s Wizards, Mother, than I will renounce my title and leave this castle forever. I am not Brianna. I will not bow beneath the pressure of your demands simply out of love for you. You are reacting as a mother, not as my Queen.”

“You dare to defy me so arrogantly.” Amoria came from her chair, trembling in fury now. “You dare to stand before me, as though you were a warrior rather than a Princess with no concept of evil and tell me, your Queen, what you will or will not do?”

“I will tell you the unfairness of your demands at any time,” Marina raged then. “I will tell you that what I saw this day will haunt me until my death. And I will tell you that this is my land, my people, and I will not

sit in comfort as they are killed one by one and the land I cherish screams out in horror. I tell you I will not be patted on the head, sent to my room and forced to fuck whatever you decide will occupy my bed, Your Highness. I would lie beneath a low born commoner before I would give into such demands.”

“You speak as though I would whore out my daughters,” The Queen screamed furiously then. “Do not blame me that they are sniffing at your door daughter, it is not I who decides such matters.”

“And do not blame me for telling you that I will die before I allow you to order a Joining,” Marina screamed back. Anger flowed through the room, thickening by the moment as mother and daughter faced off in a battle that both had avoided for nearly a year now. “I am not a bargaining chip mother, nor am I some Secular cow that will willingly spread her thighs for the very men who steal her power and her freedom before allowing her to follow her heart.”

“Her heart? Her madness is more the like,” Amoria fisted her hands, her eyes blazing as she began to pace the room. “Your words are those of a child, not a woman as you would pretend to be. Joining with Wizard Twins steals nothing and gains you much in return.”

“Then I have no desire for their dubious gains,” Marina snarled.

Amoria stilled, breathed in deeply, then turned to face Marina again.

“Do not do it, Mother,” she warned then. “I will not willingly abide it.”

“You will return to your rooms,” her mother snapped. “The guards will be alerted that you are not to be permitted from them until such time as I order otherwise. You will remain within this castle, Princess Marina. And you will abide by your sovereign’s commands or face the consequences. And trust me, those consequences could be much harsher than merely lying beneath a commoner,” she sneered. “Now remove yourself from my sight before I forget you are a woman grown and attempt to paddle your behind as I did as a child.”

“Pardon me, Mother, but it was my nurse who delivered the punishments. As usual, you merely decreed them,” Marina reminded her sharply. “Should you wish me to actually fear your reprisals, perhaps you should deliver them yourself.”

“Leave.” The single word was harsh, and delivered in a voice that Marina knew to obey immediately.

She turned stiffly and stalked from her mother’s receiving room and back to her own. She wasn’t unaware of the guards following her, or the curious eyes that watched her exit as she left. She was certain their raised voices had carried much further than the closed room they had been in.

Her mother wouldn’t let this go. Marina had seen the fear in her eyes, had seen her awareness that her youngest daughter wouldn’t be controlled, wouldn’t be set up on a shelf for Queen or Consort. She had shown her mother her determination, had stood firm in the face of her rage rather than playing the subtle game she and her sisters had played for years to comfort the mother they treasured.

The time of innocence was over, both for the Queen and for their country.

“Well, at least she will never be boring.” Caise stepped from the adjoining room at the Queen’s command, followed by his brother and the quiet, reflective dragon, Garron.

QueenAmoria turned at his quietly spoken words, the long skirt of her royal blue cloud silk dress flowing around her as she faced them furiously.

“Garron, I blame you for this nonsense,” she snapped, her eyes glittering with tears as she fought to maintain control. “You assured me you could guide my daughters as needed. That you would keep them from harm if I maintained the reins of leadership. That.” She pointed imperiously at the doorMarinahad exited through. “Is what you have done forme.”

“She did seem rather stubborn, did she not?”Garron observed in his typically mocking way as he scratched at one scaly cheek with the point of a dragon claw. “I wonder where she gets itfrom?”

The look he gave the Queen was nothing less than sarcastically knowing.

“From her father!”Amoriasnarled then, the rage burning inside her glittering in her eyes. “She is as foolish and as her sire and just as reckless.”

Garronwas silent then asCaise andKai’el watched him curiously. The dragon’s expression was curiously morose, his liquid black eyes somber.

“In that we agree my Queen,” he finally said with a ponderous sigh. “Their Sire was amazingly reckless. Now we must find a way to be certain our tempestuousMarinadoes not meet the same end as he.”

The Queen sniffed in distain before her gaze sliced toCaise .

“I will accept a request for Joining, if you so desire to put one forth.” She lifted her head imperiously. “We can have her out ofCovenani before the end of the new moon.And safe.”

Caiseglance at his brother, seeing in his eyes the same answer he felt brewing in his soul. As much as they wantedMarina, and they wanted her with a desperation that went beyond lust, they knew they could not have her in such a way.

Independenceand determination were as much a part of her as the lovely green eyes and long dark hair.

Caísesighed wearily at that thought. Aye, they wanted her until their cocks ached with flaming hunger, but this was not the way.

“We will not force the Joining my Queen,” he finally said softly. “We will request the Joining from our Consort and receive agreement from her lips only.”

QueenAmoria’s eyes widened a second before they flashed with defeat. Her fists clenched in the folds of her skirt as her breasts heaved beneath the soft fabric that covered them.

A second later she crossed her arms, hands rubbing at chilled flesh as she turned from them and paced to the wall of windows on the other side of the room. She was a beautiful woman for her age, slender and graceful, with a regal bearing that couldn’t be taught. It was a part of her, just as it was a part of Marina.

“I lost her father to the Secular’s,” she finally spoke, her voice echoing with sadness. “He knew the whispers of uprising were merely a warning of what was to come. I did not believe such danger could confront us, that those withoutmagick could endanger us. I thoughtCovenani would always be safe.” She

turned back to them, her shoulders straightening in determination. "If you do not with the Joining with my daughter, then I will find another means. But I will not lose her as well."

"YourHighness, if I may." Kai'el stepped forward, one hand gripping the hilt of his sword as he faced the determined Queen. "Perhaps there is another answer."

Her brow lifted curiously. "And that would be?"

Kai'el glanced at Caise. They had discussed their plans extensively with Garron and several of the Sentinel Guards that flew with them. It could work, but only with the Queen's permission.

"We cannot force Marina into a Joining, she would deny it with all she is, effectively blocking the release of the magick that will ease her into that first coming together. Without the sharing of magick, our Consort will know naught but pain from the Joining."

"Yes, I know all this." She waved a hand commandingly for them to proceed.

"Perhaps by allowing Marina her freedom, we can convince her that we are the Consorts she would have chosen herself," he suggested then, ignoring the incredulity that began to fill her gaze. "We can give her a choice my Queen. She can work with us, or she can accept confinement. We must gain her trust, or we will never gain her love."

"Impossible," she snapped. "It is too dangerous."

"Dangerous, yes." Kai'el nodded. "But what choice do we have My Queen? Our fathers clearly remember the Wizard you Joined with. He was a powerful man, even without his twin. A determined man. I see in Marina the same qualities our fathers saw in your consort."

Queen Amoria sighed deeply. "He was impossibly stubborn," she growled. "And Marina is much like him."

"She is." Kai'el nodded. "And she believes in the fight she has accepted. I would not wish a Consort that does not hold to her ideals and her beliefs. Caise and I would have a Consort willing to fight for what she wants, willing to be a woman rather than a child to be led. She will not rest if she cannot make the decision herself, to leave this battle to Wizards and the Sentinel Guards. It must be her choice."

"Or her death," she whispered.

"We will be with her always," Kai'el swore. "Marina is not completely reckless, she will see the value of our strength, and we will make certain she is watched at all times. The risk is always there, but how much greater is the risk if she feels cornered and seeks to escape and fight on her own?"

The Queen then turned her gaze to the silent dragon who watched the proceedings thoughtfully.

"I agree with their plans, Amoria," he said then. "None could worry over Marina's decisions more than I, but I also see that she is driven in this. We can work with her, or we can alienate her and lose her forever."

Her eyes narrowed on the dragon once again.

"As I said before," she enunciated with throttled anger. "I blame you for this recklessness of hers. And

should my daughter suffer the fate of my Consort, dragon, then I will know whose heart to cut out. Dragon or no, I will cut yours from that scaly chest and have feed it to the wraiths of the forests. Is that understood?"

He inclined his head slowly. "I will sharpen the knives for you myself, should such occur, my Queen," he promised without his customary sarcasm. "What use is life, if such a failurelays upon your shoulders. I will lend my power as well in guarding her. I promise you this."

She sighed deeply then. "I have lost my consort, and nearly lost Brianna to this evil,Garron . Now, my baby would fight them and risk her life in this dark war. How I wish our people had struck as first suggested all those centuries ago, when the Secular's first raised their viperous heads against themagick of our world."

"As do I, my Queen,"Garron shrugged his huge shoulders uncomfortably, turning from her as he made his waylumberously to the wide doors they had entered."As do I."

Chapter

Marina moved locked her bedroom door cautiously, her ear against the panel, eyes closed as she used the small amount of power an un-joined sorceress possessed to detect where the guards stood and what assurance she had of privacy.

She had ordered them to the other side of the hallway. It seemed they had obeyed her command, which would give her what she needed to complete her own plans. Plans she had no intentions of allowing anyone to overhear.

Opening her eyes, she turned back and faced the two sorceresses who awaited her.

"Are the dungeons prepared?" She wiped her hands down the sides of her leather clad hips nervously as she moistened her dry lips.

JasmineXanella andTay'Anya Lander were two of her most experienced fighters. Their brother's were Covenani warriors and had taught them since their childhood, how to fight and track and the use their small bodies to the best advantage.

"The dungeons are ready Princess..." Jasmine glanced atTay'Anya , her brown eyes filled with concern as she flipped the thick length of her golden brown braid over her shoulder before she turned back to Marina. "They are Wizard Twins, Princess, are you certain this will work?"

She inhaled deeply, gathering her courage around her as she faced the two women she had fought with for a year now.

"The iron in the cells and manacles were created whenCovenani andCauldaran first separated," she said, careful to keep her voice low. "TheCauldaran Wizards were furious at the separation, as many Consorts had escaped to this land at that time. To detract them from their arrogant assumptions that they could just fly away with their consorts, those who were caught, the iron was mixed with the small amounts of TigarianOrethey were able to find." She smiled tightly. "TigarianOreversesmagick . It leaves them no stronger than aCovenani male. This is why the Secular's were given the lands on the other side of the WickedMountains.Magick cannot exist there because of the amount ofTigarian elements in the land. Not

true ore. Nor capable of binding together, but enough elements to make magic unworkable.”

Tay’ Anya shifted nervously. “Can the Secular’s use the Tigarian against us?” She asked worriedly.

Marina smiled in particular glee. “It doesn’t work against the Covenant. Female magic seems to be exempt from its properties.”

Both women smiled slowly. Tay’ Anya’s gray eyes gleamed in amusement as she fluffed the long, riotous black curls that fell down her back and cocked a hip smartly.

“Well, now this changes things just a bit,” she drawled, her eyes glittering suggestively. “Perhaps you can tame your Wizards after all, Marina. It gives the rest of us hope.”

Marina chuckled at that, though the nervous anticipation building in her stomach threatened her composure.

“Minera and Cristalie are waiting in the kitchens,” Jasmine said then. “We’ll meet with them and get started. With any luck, we can draw them to the dungeons as planned.”

Marina lifted the letter she had written just for the occasion and handed it to Jasmine.

“This will draw them to the dungeons,” she assured them, stilling the nervous tremor in her fingers as Jasmine accepted the letter.

As the other woman accepted the paper, a sharp, hard knock sounded at the door. Marina’s eyes widened as she felt the energy reaching into the room.

Go! She ordered them telepathically, waving to the opened panel in the wall as they rushed for the hidden corridor.

Damned Wizard Twins, she thought furiously as she slid the panel soundlessly closed. Another knock, more insistent and louder now sounded again.

“Go away, Wizard!” She snapped as she tugged at the leather vest she wore and checked the lacings that held it closed between her breasts.

The knock sounded again. She could feel the determination of the Wizard from beyond the entrance. One Wizard. She closed her eyes and breathed out roughly as she strode quickly to the door and jerked it open.

Sweet Matriarch, she was in trouble now.

She backed away, retreated essentially, but else was she to do as the Wizard Twin advanced on her slowly. Her eyes widened, as his pale blue eyes seemed to glow within his dark, sun-bronzed face. Patterns of energy began to swirl around him, the palest blue, a whisper of color that steamed with sensuality and power.

“You were not invited into this room,” she snapped as he advanced on her slowly, his eyes heavy lidded, the dark blond lashes shielding the color but not the intent she could read in his expression.

The door slammed shut, then locked with an audible click. All on its own. He was using his power and

doing so quite effectively. She had noticed from the moment of their arrival weeks before that the Sashtain twins rarely so blatantly used their powers.

“Should I wait for an invitation, then I would still yet be standing in the hall. Would I not Princess?” He continued to advance on her, and she of course, continued to retreat. She could see the heavy sexual intent in his expression, barely covering the anger that simmered just beneath the surface.

“Such a naughty little Sorceress,” he spoke then, his voice a dark rumble as it left his lips, sending vibrations of sensation pulsing through her womb.

Marina continued to retreat until her back met the wall, her breathing becoming more labored as he came closer, closer, until his chest was a mere breath from the hard points of her nipples.

“You should not be here,” she stated harshly, though too breathlessly for the words to hold any weight. “It is not in your place to chastise me.”

“Chastise you?” He lifted a dark gold brow curiously. “Princess, I have not come to chastise you. I am here to honor you.”

She blinked back at him in surprise. “You do not appear to be honoring me Wizard,” she gasped as she stared up at him, feeling the heat of the power swirling around her.

“Such a brave, courageous Sorceress is surely a woman well met for my passions,” he murmured then. “If you can face the evil of the Secular’s, then a Wizard’s lusty hunger should not shock you in the least.”

It shouldn’t? Then why couldn’t she breathe?

Her hands flattened against the wall behind her, her nails digging into the stone as she fought to keep from touching him. It was touching that had led her to such an excess with Caise, and a night of miserable arousal that still had not yet left her body.

“You and Caise are playing a cruel game with me,” she accused him fiercely as his head lowered, his lips feathering over her vulnerable neck as his hands moved to smooth back the long fall of black hair that had fallen over her shoulder.

“Caise is rather involved this moment with keeping your delectable little ass out of the Joining Ceremony, Marina,” he whispered then at her ear. “I decided it was my turn to experience the pleasure of your sweet little body. Deny your need for my touch. I dare you Princess.”

“He’s doing what? Kai’el, wait...” His lips moved to her collar bone, then slid to the soft flesh of her breast that rose above the leather vest she wore.

“I cannot wait to taste you,” he whispered. “I know the heat of your mouth surrounding my cock, the feel of your tongue tempting my control. Did you know I would feel each caress to Caise’s body as you made it, Marina? Did you know this is experienced only with a natural Consort, the woman the Sentinel’s and Matriarch’s have chosen for us?”

“No.” She shook her head, trying to fight the curling pleasure that radiated from her womb, stroked over her nerve endings and sent her senses spinning.

“We know the pleasure to be found in fucking your mouth, I would now know the pleasure to be found

in tasting every secret you hide beneath those manly clothes.”

The laces that held the vest began to loosen.

“You cannot do this,” she gasped. “Caiseis not here.”

“Caiseneeds not be here for you to find your pleasure, little one,” he warned her softly. “I can bring you to the most explosive release and he would know only the pleasure I feel in doing so. It is only during the Joining of Power, that first penetration of your virgin pussy and the tight, hot depths of your ass that we must not be apart. When that power releases, both Wizards must be a part of their Consort. And we will know when the time for that can wait no longer.”

The lacings that held the vest fell to the floor as the leather began to part as though guided by unseen hands. Marinacould only stare up Kai’el , shocked, uncertain as excitement and arousal began to strike like bolts of sensual lightening into her womb.

“So that means what?” She gasped as his hands smoothed up her bare midriff before cupping her breasts with the heat of his broad, calloused palms.

“This means we can play a bit,” he whispered. “We can get to know each other better. I can show you how a Wizard Twin punishes a naughty little Sorceress.”

His hands tightened on her breasts, his thumbs and forefingers gripping the hard peaks of her nipples and tweaking them with an erotic heat that had her losing her breath. Sweet merciful Matriarch, such pleasure could surely not be possible? But it was. The proof was in the heat whipping through her body and the sudden awareness of the juices leaking from her pussy to dampen the leather of her snug breeches.

“This is insanity.” She choked out the intended rejection of his touch, but her moan a second later as his head descended and his tongue lashed at one stiff tip, denied the objection.

He was playing with her. She knew he was. But she couldn’t halt his touch, couldn’t bring herself to make him relinquish her.

“I have dreamed of tasting these pretty breasts,” he whispered, glancing up at her from beneath thick lashes. “Sucking them into my mouth, my tongue playing with the stiff little peaks, my teeth nipping at them.” He followed his words with actions.

Marinacouldn’t stop her hands from moving then, gripping his arms, then his head, her hands sliding into the cool silk of his hair as his mouth consumed her, devoured her. The pleasure was lava hot, blistering as his teeth rasped her sensitive nipple, his tongue laved it, then he sucked it deep into his mouth to torture it with a combination of intense caresses.

She couldn’t bear it. She could feel the tension building in her belly again, like a knot of white-hot heat threatening to explode out of control. She prayed for mercy, though there was none to be found in the lash of exquisite sensation whipping through her. There was only mindless, incredible pleasure.

The damp heat of his mouth, the feel of his tongue curling around her nipple just after the hard rasp of his teeth was too much. Control was but a prayer, and one she feared would never be answered.

“So soft and sweet.” He lifted his head as one hand moved from a breast and smoothed back down her midriff, over her leather covered abdomen, until his palm, shockingly, incredibly tucked tight between her

thighs.

Marina couldn't halt the sharp cry that escaped her lips as the heat of his palm seared her pussy. Her clit, already swollen and aching, flared in bright, brilliant need. She moved against his palm helplessly, rubbing the tormented little peak against the heat pressing firmly into it.

"Ah yes little love," he whispered, smiling down at her wickedly, his pale eyes gleaming heatedly. "You're hot, Marina. So hot you're near scalding my hand." He pressed more firmly into the sensitive pad as she writhed against it, fighting to breathe, to keep her senses intact.

"You are diabolical," she whimpered as she felt the laces at the side of her breeches loosening.

Anticipation began singing through her veins but with it was a determination that he would not control her so easily with his touch. His hand was moving into the parted seam of her pants, but hers was moving as well. As his fingers slid through slick heat hers moved as well, cupping the hard, thick erection beneath the pants he wore.

He groaned as she cried out.

She felt it then. The pleasure was moving through it, growing tighter in her womb, building in strength as his thumb caressed the ultra sensitive flesh at the side of her clit, rotating, sending sparks of brilliant heat rushing through her system.

"Sentinel's preserve us," he growled her fingers tightened on the hard bulge of his cock. "You will burn us alive."

Before she could fight, before she could protest, his hand had pulled back from her and he lifting her, moving her to the curtained bed before she could completely grasp the reality of what he was doing.

He had her on her back, coming over her, his lips coming down on hers as he parted her thighs, moving between them as he pressed his erection against the swollen, wet flesh of her cunt.

The kiss consumed her. His lips parted over hers, nudging hers open as his tongue licked at her temptingly.

"Wizard, have you forgotten the Joining laws?"

Chapter

Garron's voice, unfortunately, didn't have the effect that Marina knew it should have. She opened her eyes as Kai'el's head lifted, a frustrated curse bitten off as he buried his face in her hair, his body hard, tense against her.

Looking over his shoulder, she flushed at the Dragon's mocking look, his shorter 'arms' crossed over his scaly chest, his broad face awash in amusement as Kai'el began to move. Pulling the edges of her vest over her swollen breasts he winked at her with disarming charm and amusement before levering himself off her body.

"I forget nothing Dragon," he drawled as he moved to his feet, turning to glance at the Dragon before helping Marina from the bed. "We were merely... learning each other."

Marina was certain her blush was staining her entire body as the Dragon lifted the hard line of his brow at Kai'el's response.

Learning each other, Marina thought in bemused amazement. She had heard it called many things, but never that.

"Lessons are over for the day then," Garron informed him coolly. "Queen Amoria wishes your presence in her receiving room, along with your brother. It would appear he had finally convinced her of your earlier suggestions." He turned to Marina then. "Strange Consorts you have my dear. Caise Sashtain has fought the ordered Joining quiet fiercely. It would appear that you will be given a choice, rather than an edict."

Shock vibrated through her as she turned her gaze to Kai'el then. He shrugged, a wry smile crossing his lips as his pale blue eyes reflected a self-mockery that made him appear all too handsome.

"We do not wish to force you to come to us, Marina." He shrugged his broad shoulders as he glanced back at the Dragon. "I trust you can amuse yourself for a while now, Dragon," he grunted, clearly more frustrated than he was letting on. "I will return to the receiving room as you request."

"You do that, Wizard," the dragon seemed to croon. "Perhaps I will see you later this evening. If you do not become otherwise occupied."

The Wizard cast him a questioning look, then shook his head as though having decided that deciphering the Dragon's often vague comments was a needless endeavor. Thankfully, Kai'el asked no further questions, but adjusted his clothing arrogantly and left instead. Leaving her alone with the Dragon, and knowledge that Marina was certain he had.

He chuckled as the door closed.

"Wizards in chains. This one I truly must see. I can think of none more deserving than the Sashtains. Do you not agree sorceress?"

Marina grimaced. She should have known it would be impossible to hide this from him. His all knowing eye had never failed to amaze her, but now it infuriated her.

"Are you going to tell them?" She held her vest closed over her swollen breasts, refusing to struggle with relacing it while the sarcastic Dragon watched on.

"What I should do is apply to your behind a leather strap as I should have when you were a child," he snarled roughly, sending a flare of pain raging through her heart.

She had always strived to find pride in Garron's eyes, seeing anger instead cut her to the bone.

“I did not expect...”

“You did not think,” he grunted. “Dress as befitting a Princess and I will inform your cohorts of the change in plans. This idiocy will not be done, Princess, not when all you have fought for lies within your grasp instead and the danger you would place yourself could be magnified by your own stubbornness.”

She raised her head proudly before him, blinking back tears as she watched him.

“I came to you for help years ago,” she said roughly. “You have no right to berate me now, Garron . I told you then my plans.”

“Aye, that you did,” he growled, shaking his large head. “You have let that even forever shape your destiny, child, and you are not even aware of it. Do as I ask and dress. Your Wizards I am certain, will find some way to curb your more wayward habits. Or at least I can only hope they will.