



## Excerpt from “The Sword”

Morganen watched his brother, careful to conceal any signs of satisfaction from his expression and posture alike; he was younger than the rest of them, but no fool. Any moment now, the temporary sleep spell he had placed on the hysterical woman—her screams had summoned his other brothers, and belatedly their eldest—would wear off. Any second now, she would wake up and start their Destined fates rolling...

Her brow pinched, her teeth sinking into her lower lip.

“...Is she in pain?” Saber murmured as she twitched and whimpered, unable to help himself.

“She was badly burned,” Morganen confided, equally quiet. “Her home was collapsing around her; she was trapped in her bedroom, awakened too late in the fire to save herself. Part of the roof collapsed on her; that was what woke her up, I think. I do not think she has any broken bones, but my twin only had time to heal the damage done by the flames; not her bruises, nor her memories. Just the burns she has suffered, though that is more than enough, for now. His skill with burns is something all of us have been thankful for at one point or another, living with him.”

“Why is she not awake now?” Saber demanded under his breath, looking up at his brother from where he had crouched near the woman. Careful to not speak too loud.

Morganen didn’t let any of his satisfaction show. Three years without a woman, and his twenty-nine year old brother was drawn to her even more than any of their other siblings. He had studied this woman long and carefully to make certain she would be perfect for him. “I think she is still

caught up in the nightmare of her near-death. Such a trauma requires comforting, to ease its pain.”

Saber snorted and rose. “She can comfort herself—”

The woman jerked and screamed even as Saber moved, scrabbling to get herself at least somewhat upright. She ended up twisting onto her knees, slapping at her flesh, at her hair and clothes as she screamed repeatedly... The harsh yells trailed off quickly as her eyes finally registered the real world around her, not the nightmarish one she had been reliving.

Her breath caught as she stared at the border of white marble and light, granite stone floor under her palms, taking in the stone walls lined with stone shelves that were glass-fronted and stuffed with books as she turned to look around her. At the sight of Morganen less than a bodylength from her, she shrieked again, throwing herself back and away from the unexpected, too-close apparition, scrambling to her feet.

That made her stagger right into Saber. He caught her to keep both of them from being knocked over. She yelled something and whirled on him, thumping and tugging and doing *something* as she hollered that yanked him right off his feet and threw him roughly onto the floor, flung over her hip as if he weighed less than a sack of flour.

A different noise broke through her unintelligible yells. Morganen, shoulders quaking, cheeks reddening, laughed breathlessly hard at the sight of his brother sprawled and stunned on the floor. Flushing from something entirely other than laughter, Saber shoved himself upright, ignoring the woman as he stalked his brother.

A shouted demand cut through his determination to make his brother pay for laughing at his unexpected humiliation. Both men turned towards the cause of the unwarranted mirth. She was yanking down her scorched tunic and rattling off a babble of completely unknown words.

Saber looked at his shorter brother, frowning in confusion. “...She doesn’t speak Katani?”

Letting out a sigh, mouth still tempted to twitch up at the corners, Morganen shook his head. “Nor any language I knew of. I saw her peril while I was scrying in distant realms—Jinga! Quick, catch her!”

Saber spun around in time to see her edging towards the workroom door. She saw that her movement had been spotted and whirled for the hall beyond. “—Catch her?”

“*Catch* her!” Morganen repeated. “I’ll have to give her a translation potion, and I obviously can’t do it with a moving target!”

Letting out a sound of disgust, Saber loped after the woman.

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