



ARIANA NASH

SEALED WITH A KISS

A Silk & Steel SHORT STORY

ARIANA NASH
Pippa DaCosta writing as

‘Sealed with a Kiss’

0.5 Silk & Steel

Ariana Nash

Dark Fantasy Author

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FOREWORD



While writing the dark-fantasy novel, *Silk & Steel*, our mysterious elven assassin mentions how he had his eyes opened to his own sexuality by a messenger from a nearby village. At the time, the line was meant to be just that, a brief mention of his past, but after finishing the full length novel *Silk & Steel*, that line wouldn't let go. Like all good stories, it *demand*ed to be told. And so, after I suggested the idea to my Facebook reader group, and they demanded it too, *Sealed with a Kiss* was born.

Events in this short story take place a few years before *Silk & Steel*. It can be read at any time during the series without spoilers. It's also worth noting that the story here is *lighter* than the main *Silk & Steel* series.

If you enjoy reading about Eroan's first m/m encounter, please sign up to my mailing list [here](#) and continue his journey in the full length novel, *Silk & Steel*, out early 2019.

Add the series to your shelves on [Goodreads here](#).



Now grab yourself a glass of wine or two, get comfortable, and enjoy *Sealed with a Kiss*...

Please note: the following story contains on-page gay sex.

SEALED WITH A KISS

A SILK & STEEL SHORT STORY



This land lost its name,
When the dragons came.
In fire and ice and pain,
They spread their reign.
Buried and forgot,
Cities fell to rot.
Now there's nothing left,
For us elves to protect.

~ *Elven folksong*



“Did you hear? The messenger said they found a cache of human weapons buried to the east of Cheen.” Janna slid onto the bench next to Eroan, squeezing herself into a gap between him and his dining companion. She plucked a grape from Eroan’s bowl and popped it in her mouth, earning Eroan’s playful look of disgust. She swallowed and added, “Guns, apparently.”

“Sit beside me why don’t you, Janna.” Eroan grinned, plucked his own grape free and washed it down with a generous sip of wine. The harvest had been good this year. Elves filled their plates from the spread overflowing the long communal table, some with flushed cheeks and slightly glassy gazes. He couldn’t blame them for their fun. Alumn wasn’t always this plentiful with her gifts of fruit and grain. They deserved to enjoy it while they could.

He raised his gaze to the hooded figure guarding the door. Curan. Beneath that cloak, the Order assassin would be armed to the teeth. Eroan felt the press of his own two daggers against his shins

and another at the small of his back. Assassins of the Order didn't partake in celebrations, they protected them. He couldn't stay long. Really, he was just here to keep Janna out of trouble. A task easier said than done.

"I hope they found ammunition too," he drawled. "Else the guns will bounce right off dragon scale."

Janna sent him a sideways look, testing if he was joking. Her bundle of hair flowed in various artful curls and hitched where she'd pinned it back in places. The style suited her and showed off her perky elf ears. Ears he'd often liked to flick when they were younger, just when she least expected it.

She saw the crack in his thinly pressed lips, and a smile slipped through. "You're a fiend." Her quick hands stole another grape. "Do you have to spoil all the fun?"

He scooped up his bowl of grapes and dumped it in front of her. "No, just being realistic. Guns haven't been of any use for centuries."

She twisted on the bench, giving him the full weight of her glare. One of her fine eyebrows arched. "You're still on your first cup of wine."

"Counting, are you?"

"Only because I've had three. You're making me look bad."

He'd noticed and had watched her drift about the crowd, trading smiles and laughter. Janna had a magnetism few could ignore. Children and the old loved her. She *was* easy to love. He had to admit that. She was also a ruthless hunter, better than Eroan.

"They say he's gorgeous." She plonked her elbow on the table and planted her chin on her fist. It took Eroan a moment to catch that her thoughts had circled back to the messenger. "Long dark hair like ravens' wings," she sighed. "I suppose as a messenger he must see all sorts of wild and dangerous things on his treks between villages."

Eroan rolled his eyes. "I see all sorts of wild and dangerous things every day."

"You don't count." She waved a hand dismissively.

By Alumn, that look in her eyes. Anyone would think the messenger had bespelled her. Or more likely, it was the wine. "I guarantee your messenger has never killed a dragon."

"You were trained to do that since you could walk." She dismissed it like killing dragons was a daily event. "He lives in the wilds. *Alone*." She fluttered her lashes. "Piper says he has eyes that speak of untold mysteries and a jaw she wants to paint."

"She'd better ask before approaching him with a brush."

Janna snorted a laugh and then sobered. "Do you think he'll be here?"

"Maybe." Probably. The celebration was partly in the messenger's honor as thanks for bringing gifts and news from Cheen and farther afield. Despite Eroan's words, messengers were a tough breed. The wilds killed more elves than dragons these days. Especially elves alone. Wolves, bears, and dragons routinely picked off unprepared travelers. Although dragons tended not to bother a single elf unless hungry or bored. Eroan could respect a male who'd chosen a messenger profession. They

didn't often live for long, but the role was a vital one.

He caught the warmth on his friend's cheeks and watched her take another sip of wine. "If you don't slow down, you'll be too drunk to lure him back to your bed."

She gasped, exaggerating shock. "I would never do such a thing!"

A wicked little twinkle sparkled in her eyes. He loved to see it. That look of hers had often gotten him into trouble with the elders. Somehow, she always wiggled out of punishment while he usually ended up knee deep in it. "Of course not, you're such an honorable pillar of our fair community."

"I am, actually. Why Xena said to me moments ago"—Janna cleared her throat and adopted a high, proper accent—"*Janna, you could be a pillar of our community if you stopped socializing with that terrible Eroan.*"

Eroan laughed. "You're such a liar. Xena adores me."

Her hand landed softly on his thigh. She leaned in and grinned. "Pfft, she's just trying to get in your pants."

Eroan laughed harder. Not only was Xena as old as an oak tree, but the thought of the elder getting in anyone's pants was also one he rather wished he hadn't had. "Thank you for that image, dear friend. Now I remember why I don't come to these celebrations with you."

The main hall door creaked on its hinge as it swung open. Xena, dressed in the elders' heavy white gowns, breezed in as if summoned by Janna's joke. At the sight of the elder, Janna almost spat out another gulp of wine. Eroan might have shushed her if all his thoughts hadn't vacated his head at the sight of the male now entering the hall behind her. *Gorgeous* was one word. Eroan might have thought of more had his mind been capable. The messenger had the type of jaw Eroan wanted to run his fingers along, or maybe he'd use his mouth, and he wouldn't stop there. The messenger's lips, full, and bow-like, Eroan would explore next. The messenger would then look into his eyes, and those long, dark lashes would pull Eroan deeper into a magnetic gaze he'd never escape from.

Janna thumped him on the arm, snapping him back into the now. "What?"

"You!" She snickered.

Warmth flushed his cheeks. He chuckled at her, himself, and having had too much wine. Alumn, it was warm in here.

"Oh..." Her eyes went wide, and she fluttered her lashes while speaking through a pretend smile. "He's looking right over."

Eroan poked his tongue into his cheek and firmly glared back at his friend, determined not to look and give himself away. "He's this messenger you mentioned?"

"Told you he was beautiful."

"Didn't notice."

Janna snorted a dirty laugh. "Blushing at Xena were you?"

"Oh, come on, it's warm in here." He grabbed for his wine and stole a surreptitious look toward the door as a few more gulps went down.

Xena was escorting the messenger through the crowds, politely introducing him to the elders. He smiled small, kind smiles in return, said a few things Eroan couldn't hear over the background chatter and generally looked like a respectable emissary for Cheen.

He was perhaps slightly older than Eroan but young for a messenger. They were usually all old and weathered like they'd been left out in the sun too long. This one couldn't have been much over twenty years.

A cloak draped from his shoulders, and just as Eroan wondered what hid beneath that cloak, someone kindly offered to take it. The messenger's quick fingers unbuttoned the fastenings at his neck. He shrugged it off and handed it over. His waistcoat sleeves ended just above his biceps, and now that the cloak was gone, the snaking play of tribal tattoos around the male's muscles were on full display.

Apparently, Cheen were making messengers differently these days. It was about time they made fighters to carry their messages. And this one clearly either worked his body for his trade, or he trained well.

Eroan let his gaze follow the tight cut of the waistcoat down to the male's narrow waist. No weapons. But then it would have been rude to arrive to a celebration armed. Eroan's gaze wandered farther down, riding over the curve of his ass. The trousers hugged in all the right ways.

A flutter tightened in the pit of Eroan's stomach. He finished his wine and licked his lips clean, then caught Janna's long, knowing look.

She knew him too well. Better than anyone here. And she was looking at him now, equal parts amused and happy. He wasn't sure he liked that look on her. Like she knew something he didn't and would make him pay later to reveal it.

She settled her hand on his arm. "Go talk to him."

"I have patrols." He brushed her off and stood.

"Eroan..."

"It's fine. I'll be late. Have fun." He stole her wine and threw back the last of it, then handed her the glass and kissed her lightly on the forehead before she could protest. "But not too much fun, eh?" He flicked her ear.

She squeaked and batted his hand away. Within minutes she'd be laughing among her many friends. But his place wasn't here, among them. He made his way through the crowd, exchanging greetings and best wishes and almost made it to the door when Xena appeared in front of him. For an elder, she moved damn fast. Talk was she'd been an assassin once. Although, these days, her weapons were more likely to be words. She wasn't someone any elf dared mess with.

"Ah, Eroan... I saw you leaving and hoped I might catch you. Allow me to introduce Trey, Cheen's messenger."

Eroan could taste his own heartbeat. He tried to swallow it back down again, but as he flicked his gaze to Trey, the damn thing raced harder. "Welcome," he said tartly. "I'm just about to head out on

patrol.”

Xena’s kind, old eyes smiled. “Oh yes, I don’t want to keep you from your duty.”

“You’re of the Order?” Trey asked, one dark eyebrow raised in intrigue.

The male had a voice like warm honey. It rolled and dipped, slow and leisurely, like it could wrap around Eroan and lick down his back. Now that image was firmly rooted in his head, heating his face.

“Yes, now if you’ll excuse me.” He attempted to brush by Xena, but inside the tightly packed crowd, the movement pushed him closer.

Trey touched Eroan’s elbow, just a steadying grip. It was there and gone again, but the feel of the male’s fingers on him sent his blood racing. Eroan pulled his arm free, and Trey immediately lifted his hands in surrender. “Sorry, I didn’t mean... It’s rather packed in here.”

His expression must have come off as hard because Trey backed off. “Enjoy the food,” Eroan snapped. He turned and shoved his way outside, deliberately keeping his head up and pace quick to avoid any more attention.

Outside, the evening air dumped a shock of cold realism into his veins. He stopped at a well and braced his hands on top of the waist-high stonewall and breathed in. Cold air tightened his lungs and helped cleared his head.

That had been a spectacular disaster.

Enjoy the food? Really? That was the best he could come up with? What by Alumn was wrong with him? He straightened and adjusted the dagger at his back like he always did, as though realigning it helped realign something in him. Too much wine and the warmth in there... He could think clearly again now he was outside. Only his thoughts fell to the way Trey’s hair had been braided in places to keep it weighted down his back. Smooth, straight black hair. What would it feel like sliding through his fingers? These thoughts, they were slippery too, and they led to places he shouldn’t go.

Eroan spotted Nye striding through the village, the assassin’s gait long and fast. Eroan could use the distraction and headed to intercept him. “Nye, how are the patrols?”

“Good.” Nye tucked a thumb into his pocket, dipping the belt and array of throwing daggers slung there. “It’s all quiet out.” He nodded toward the great hall. “Has everyone gotten merry yet?”

“Getting there. Janna’s making an attempt to beat her wine record. Are you going in?”

“No, I—” He stopped and seemed to reconsider. “Are you?”

“No,” Eroan laughed softly. “If I go back in there, Janna will never allow me to leave.”

They chatted for a few moments more until Nye excused himself and headed for the Order house, leaving Eroan standing in the village square, drumming his fingers against his thigh. He could patrol, but really it was too early, and the Order had the village well-guarded for another few hours.

He certainly couldn’t return to the hall after he’d made such an idiot out of himself by rushing out. If he returned to his hut, he’d just rattle around inside.

“Damn it.” He needed to burn off the restless energy or he’d lose his mind during the long hours

patrolling the woods.

Beside the Order house, the long training hut sat quietly tucked on the village fringes. With all the Order recruits on tasks, Eroan slipped inside. Instantly, his heart slowed its manic racing. Pushing through the inner door brought him into the narrow sparring room with its matted floor and weapon racks. Oil lamps offered enough light to chase away most of the shadows. This would do nicely.

He shrugged off his outer jacket but left on the snug-fitting tank top to keep his muscles warm until exertion kicked in. The working daggers went onto the table too. He plucked heavier, resistance daggers from the racks and tested their weight in both hands as he made his way to the center of the mats. With each step, his thoughts sharpened on the task ahead, slipping into the zone where nothing beyond these walls could distract him. And he began the positions he'd known for at least twenty years. He knew them so well, he didn't need to think them, they *flowed* through him as easily as the blood in his veins or the breath over his lips. One position became another became another. Every extension he pushed through, every thrust ended in an imaginary kill. He was a machine, a monster, a thing without thought and emotion. He was forged steel. A killer.

He spun. The dagger flew and punched into the doorframe beside his unexpected visitor's head.

Trey swallowed hard and slowly turned to watch the blade strum in the wood. "*Fuck.*"

Eroan hadn't heard that word before, but it seemed to suggest surprise and awe. A curious lick of pride smothered some of the anger but not nearly enough to brush it all away. He could have killed the fool. "That's a good way to lose an eye, or worse." He strode forward and stopped in front of Trey. The messenger leaned against the doorframe, like his being here was perfectly acceptable.

"Only elves of the Order are allowed in here." He tugged the dagger free of the wood and returned to the mats.

"I asked someone... They said you were here..."

Someone, huh? Nye probably. Eroan stood in the center of the mats again and flicked splinters off the blade. The warmth of the messenger's gaze rode down his back. Or maybe that was his imagination, which seemed to be running wild this evening. "What do you want?"

Trey sauntered into the corner of Eroan's vision. The messenger stopped at one of the weapon racks and ran his hand along one of the training swords. "Have we met before?"

"No."

"That's what I thought." He touched another, a shorter sword this time, and danced his fingers over the handle. "And yet you really don't like me."

Eroan huffed a dismissive laugh. The male had been here a few hours and had taken umbrage at Eroan's cold shoulder? Could he really be that self-centered?

"Or are you this much of an asshole to everyone?" Trey glanced over. The smile, sitting crookedly on his lips, belied his words and turned them into more of a suggestive tease. As though he were daring Eroan to admit it.

Eroan studied this riddle of a male. A stranger, really, but he'd always been drawn to mysteries. A

body made for manual work, and yet he delivered messages, so he had to have the stamina to trek for days. He wore the tattoos of the nomadic tribes, and those were just the ones wrapped around his biceps. He likely had more.

A curious one, this messenger. And he still hadn't answered why he was looking for Eroan. If Eroan continued to be cold, the messenger would probably walk right out that door and be gone in the morning. Something in that thought had a small flutter of anxiety shortening his breath.

"If I came off as an asshole, I apologize. That wasn't my intention."

"So, then, it wasn't me?" Trey leaned against a table and folded his arms.

Eroan looked at the dagger in his hands. Its twin he'd tucked into his belt. Now the adrenaline and his anger at being interrupted were wearing off. He felt other sensations creep in. Sensations like being hyper-aware of the male's position by that table, how he stretched one leg out and bent the other, presenting the kind of semi-relaxed pose that invited friendly conversation. The male's breathing was slow and calm, nothing like Eroan's current panting. Eroan's thoughts had latched onto it all like he'd pinned the location of his prey in his mind before stalking it.

Eroan knew only one thing: assassins weren't supposed to be distracted by messengers. Or anyone. Perhaps he should have stuck with being an asshole. "Did you want something or are you just here to watch?"

"I would like that."

"You want to watch?"

"If you don't mind?"

He'd sparred in front of students, but when he practiced, he liked to do so alone. He'd never had anyone watch him before. The rebuttal sat on his tongue but stayed unspoken, mostly because a little sliver of excitement had tightened his chest. By Alumn, was he *shy*? No, that was a ridiculous thought. He wasn't some green elf fresh out of training.

"I don't mean to make you uncomfortable." Trey pushed off the table. "I can leave."

"No, it's fine."

The male stopped and looked over, doubt clouding his eyes.

"It's... It's fine, really." He pulled the second blade free, tossed both in the air and caught them again. "Just don't go sneaking up on me again. You might get hurt." Eroan hadn't meant it to sound like a promise, but it had sure come out like one.

Trey's dark eyes drank in the threat. His lopsided smile ticked into his cheek. He settled against the table once more and watched.

This time, when Eroan fell into the rhythm, his skin tingled. Trey's gaze never left, and at some point, the messenger's smile fell away, making way for a stern intensity that had Eroan's heart racing for reasons that had nothing to do with exercise. But even under Trey's gaze, the sweep of movement soon called to him, taking him far away from the room, the village, to somewhere only he knew, somewhere cold, somewhere harsh, somewhere he feared he might one day be trapped in. There was

another there, in the dark, with eyes of green—

Trey was in front of him. Eroan stumbled, about to lash out with words. Trey's hand cupped Eroan around the back of the head, and the messenger pulled. His soft mouth clamped over Eroan's and a dart of lust shot through Eroan so fast, so real, he gasped and shoved, then staggered back, needing space, needing... something. He wiped at his mouth, stunned to find his lips tingling like the rest of him.

“Shit. I'm... I... I misread you. I'm... That was...” Trey blushed and rubbed at the back of his neck, and all Eroan could think, all he could see, was the male's mouth, and how he ached all over to feel that sudden, all-consuming lust again. Because it had never—*never*—been like that before. “It's a good thing I'll be gone in the morning,” the messenger mumbled.

Eroan dropped the daggers where he stood and, in a step, had his hand in Trey's hair, and damn if the male didn't freeze, lips parted, open and inviting. Eroan wet his own lips with the tip of his tongue and held himself still. Trey was panting too now, and that only made the violent desire he'd sparked alive in Eroan a hundred times worse. Or better. He couldn't make sense of the rambling nonsense in his head.

He brushed his lips against Trey's. The messenger gasped. The touch was tiny, barely there at all, but it burned Eroan's mouth in a way that made him want more. He darted his tongue out and tasted the stranger, quick and strong. Trey shuddered, and Eroan bit into his own bottom lip to keep from moaning out the sudden want riding him. Somewhere in all of this, he'd gotten achingly hard. As he shifted a step closer, layering himself against Trey, a familiar nudge of Trey's obvious arousal rubbed against his hip and Eroan had to reel himself back from grinding against him like a damned animal. He had more control than this...

He couldn't move. If he moved, this wouldn't stop. He wasn't sure he could stop it anyway. Fast on the trail of that thought followed the realization he didn't *want* this to stop. Trey ran his tongue along his top lip and sealed a long, lazy, kiss over Eroan's mouth, stoking his blood higher.

Sweet Alumn, this stranger was made of forbidden magics to do this to him.

Eroan dropped his head back, and Trey's warm, hot mouth trailed down his jaw to his neck. His tongue swirled, and lust darted straight to Eroan's arousal, making it twitch against the inside of his pants. Delicious friction momentarily emptied out his mind.

Eroan caught Trey's jaw, stopping those torturous kisses, and looked the male in the eyes. He wanted to tell him he'd never felt this before, he'd never been with a male before, never even kissed another male. He'd had lovers, he'd touched himself imagining dreams, but this wasn't a dream, and Eroan wasn't entirely sure if any of this was right. But Trey's wide, avid gaze, made it so that none of that seemed to matter.

He backed Trey against the table, teasing his open, hungry mouth as he ran his hands down the male's waist. Eroan nipped at the messenger's chin and spread his hand against the bulge in his pants, folding his palm and fingers around his erection. Trey arched into him like Eroan had plucked on a

string and made him dance to the sweet music of desire. The male braced his arms against the table behind him and lifted his head. With his eyes closed, those dark lashes settled on his face. He panted through pink, open lips. Eroan had never seen a male so aroused, so close. He wanted to make him pant harder, wanted to make him spill his seed for him. He wanted to make the male writhe and beg. The intensity of it, the madness of it, it was almost too much.

Trey's eyes fluttered open. He sighed out and suddenly cupped Eroan's face. "Don't think..."

"It's just..." *I've never done this before.*

Trey's mouth was on his again, and Eroan's thoughts tumbled like they did when he practiced the Order moves. Like he could fall into the moment and disappear inside of it.

"I've got you," Trey whispered, making it sound like a promise, like nothing Eroan could do would be wrong. His thumb stroked the corner of Eroan's mouth, and Trey looked deeper into his eyes. "I can blow your mind, Eroan. You just have to stop being afraid."

"I'm not afraid." His barriers came down, slamming into place. He stepped back and looked around him, at the racks, the walls, remembering where he was. "This..." What was he thinking? He ran his hand over his hair and pulled at the ponytail, flicking it over his shoulder. This was a sacred place, and he'd let this messenger distract him from that.

Trey let his head fall. When he looked up, some of that dark hair Eroan had dislodged from its braid had fallen over his face. He rolled his lips together as though savoring something he couldn't have. "You didn't know, did you?"

Was it that obvious? Was his fear so easily read on his face? "I can't do this here." He picked up the daggers and set them back on the rack, then reached for his preferred daggers and jacket. It was just a kiss, just an experiment. It didn't mean anything. Like all the other fumbles, just a bit of fun.

"Or anywhere?"

Eroan ignored him and headed for the door.

"I'll be gone in a few hours, and you'll never know..." Trey called, stopping Eroan in his stride. "If that's what you want, that's fine, but isn't this the best way to find out?"

Eroan shrugged his jacket on. The messenger would be gone in the morning. If this—whatever this was—turned out to be nothing more than a madness he needed to be sated, then wouldn't it be better to find out with someone outside the village? Someone he didn't have to face every day? His people loved to talk and any dalliances with a respected member of the Order would be the gossip of the village square within hours. Order assassins didn't do relationships. But that didn't matter with this stranger.

Trey circled around in front of him and swept his hair back, tucking it behind his tipped ear. "Are you really going to let me go without finding out what it is you're missing?" His smirk was made of wickedness and want, and Eroan wanted to kiss it right off his lips.

Trey swept a hand at himself, adding a flourish. "All this for one night only. Say no, and I'll leave. But say yes..." Closer, Trey came, until he stood almost as close as they'd been moments ago, hard

bodies pressed tightly together. “And I’ll give you a night you’ll never forget.”

Eroan sucked in a breath and lifted his chin. He couldn’t tell if it was the wine or the restlessness left over from the training, but this male sparked alive things inside of him he’d always been able to quell before. Little flickers of desire, tiny sparks he’d snuffed out. But the need to touch this messenger, to taste him in all ways, had Eroan folding his fingers into fists. He had no idea what this was, and to his shame, he had no idea what to do with it. “I don’t... I wouldn’t usually do this.”

Trey nodded once. “I understand.” He was out the door and gone before Eroan could let loose the shout to stop him. He hadn’t meant for him to leave!

“Fuck,” he swore, liking how that strange, new word sounded from his lips. Was he really going to let Trey go after the male had just offered himself like that? He wouldn’t get another chance at this.

“Wait...” Eroan pushed outside and slowed.

Nye had caught Trey leaving. He looked up at Eroan’s shout and glanced between Eroan and Trey, who happened to be smiling like he’d been caught with his hand in the honey jar.

“Nye...” Eroan forced a smile. “I was just... showing Trey the training room.”

Nye’s face warred with suspicion first, then broke out in a polite, guarded smile. He shook Trey’s hand. “Welcome, messenger. How’s Cheen?”

“Wet. Smells like fish when the wind comes in off the sea, but otherwise, it’s good.”

Nye chuckled and looked again at Eroan. Looked a little too long for Eroan’s liking. “You going on patrol now?” his friend asked.

“Yes.” Eroan mentally kicked himself. He’d forgotten his duties. The messenger was a bad influence, and Eroan had to snap out of it. “I was just heading—”

“You know, I could take your shift if you like?” Nye offered. “If you want to show Trey the village.”

“At night?” Eroan asked. Both of them looked at him like he’d just tripped over something obviously in the way.

“I’d like that,” Trey’s smile grew.

“There. Perfect.” Nye backed up a few steps. “Come find me when you’re done, Eroan.” Why was Nye grinning like a fool? “No rush... Take your time.” Nye saluted and jogged back toward the main Order house.

“We could start at your place?” Trey suggested with a look filtered through his lashes, one made to lure unsuspecting elves into bed. If Eroan took him home, there was no escaping what would happen between them. Eroan’s body sung with the idea of it. Sweet anticipation had his throat dried-up, making him wish he’d drunk more wine. Had this mischievous messenger been put here by Alumn to test him?

Eroan nodded and stalked across the village square, acutely aware of Trey’s long-legged stride keeping up with him. The revelry from the grand hall had begun to spill outside. Elves chatted, smiled, danced in the torchlight while some of the Order loitered on the fringes, studiously keeping

watch, never taking part. Eroan shouldn't have been shirking his duties. And there was the guilt, creeping in, dampening the fire in his blood.

"Eroan!" Janna waved her arm and pried herself from the affections of the same male who'd been trying to woo her for months and not gotten anywhere. He saw Eroan and narrowed his eyes.

"Janna, I was just—"

"Hullo Trey!" She pulled up short and blinked at the messenger beside Eroan. "Xena was wondering where you got to..." Her gaze took on a straight, steely edge. She had her target in sight and was going in for the kill. Eroan had seen that look a hundred times when they hunted together. "Do you know, I completely forgot what I was going to say." She didn't look away from Trey. Just stared, and then blinked and snapped out of it with a laugh. She fanned her face. "When did it get so hot? And by gracious Alumn, when did Cheen start making males so fine?"

Trey's gaze adopted the same intensity it had in the training hut. He tilted his head and made a slow, suggestive appraisal, undressing Janna with his eyes. She parted her lips and froze, going from predator to prey in a blink.

Uncomfortable jealousy knotted in Eroan's gut, twisting his emotions into a tight, painful ball. Trey was his, and Janna was not getting a piece of him before Eroan had his chance. But this was Janna, his friend. He could never stand between her and a night of fun. She deserved it as much as he did.

Trey side-stepped to Eroan's hip, dropped his hand and planted it firmly on Eroan's ass. His fingers dug in. Shock and desire slammed into Eroan, riding right over any attempt to brush him off. Eroan gritted his teeth and swallowed hard as Janna's gaze dropped to the evidence. Her smile grew. "I'll just... take myself somewhere else. You two have fun now." She wagged her fingers at Eroan and headed back toward the torchlit crowd.

Eroan felt heat reach the tips of his ears. They stood just outside the torchlit areas, but anyone looking would see exactly where Trey's hand still clutched.

"I don't know how they do things in Cheen, but we tend not to publicly grope members of the Order here."

"Shame..." Trey purred, slinking around in front of Eroan. He dragged his hand over Eroan's hip and brushed against the front of his pants. "Because you clearly enjoy it."

Eroan caught his wrist and squeezed tight enough to make the male bare his teeth, revealing tiny, sharp canines. Eroan bowed his head, leaning cheek to cheek, and whispered, "I don't think you realize who you're teasing."

Trey's hand twisted and plunged between Eroan's legs, expertly cupping Eroan's hardening arousal. "Then show me who I'm fucking with, Eroan, Assassin of the Order."

Eroan's heart hammered against his ribs. He breathed like he'd been running for hours. Inside, all the need and desire and wants had tangled into a throbbing, aching, pressure point that fed him thoughts of throwing Trey against a wall somewhere and losing himself in the feel of him, not caring

they might be seen.

“You want me... You want me like you’ve never known.” Trey’s lips brushed Eroan’s cheek. Every word drip-fed lust into Eroan’s veins. “Like it’s a madness taken hold. And you know the best part of all this...” His fingers closed, and Eroan’s thoughts funneled to his straining erection and how Trey rubbed from the base of the shaft, through the fabric, up to the head. “You get to have me.”

He wasn’t going to make it back to his hut. If Trey carried on caressing him, he wouldn’t last more than a few minutes standing out here in the damn square.

“I’ll bring you to the edge right here if you want me to.”

Eroan grabbed Trey’s hand and pulled him along beside him.

Trey laughed and tugged free a few strides later. “All that stubborn fire in you... I saw it the second your elder took me into the hall, saw you straight away, laughing with your friend. Saw the look you gave me before you tried to hide it.”

Every word out of Trey’s mouth was winding Eroan tighter than a spring. Did this male take lessons in lovemaking or was he just wired to flirt with every breath?

“Here.” Eroan shoved open the door, let Trey step inside and admire the piles of linen and textiles, slammed the door behind him and pressed himself against it like he could delay the inevitable. He had to get a hold of himself.

“What’s this place?” Trey asked.

“Laundry,” he growled out, apparently incapable of full sentences.

Trey turned at the sound of the word and smirked that devilishly crooked smile, the one that made his dark eyes gleam. He lifted his fingers and started working at his waistcoat buttons, popping them open. “Will we be disturbed?”

“No.” Eroan sounded wrecked, and that was just the beginnings of the mess in his head. Watching Trey’s fingers helped. One button opened, then the next, then another, until the waistcoat hung open over a loose cotton shirt. Torchlight spilled in through the windows, but the torches inside weren’t lit, making shadows play across Trey’s face and darkening his hair. In the low light, he looked like something Alumn-sent, like temptation wrapped in the body of a male and Eroan wanted to tear off the wrapping and explore the gift inside. The problem was, he was stuck against the door, rooted there by a fear he’d so strongly denied but felt keenly now.

Trey shrugged off the waistcoat, lifted it out to the side and let it drop from his fingers. Each move was a deliberate tease. Every glance, every step, every cock of his hip... How was it possible this male was so damn fine? It shouldn’t be allowed.

“There’s fire in your eyes, Eroan.”

Fire elsewhere too. It was going to eat him up any second now.

“The way you look at me, you’ve no idea what it’s doing to me.”

“I think I do...” Eroan swallowed and managed to pry himself from the door to take a step forward. And with that step came another, and another, and then Trey was in his arms, hard and

resisting, but warm and pliant too, and Eroan thrust into an all-body kiss, the type that takes two to ignite, and Trey caught fire in his arms, rocking, writhing with him.

The male pushed back, nipping at Eroan's lip. His hands found Eroan's ass. His fingers sank in, yanking him forward so there was no space between them, no time, no thoughts, just the feel of male on male, of hard against hard. Eroan fell into the feel of him, clutched him close and kissed at his neck, his collarbone, hearing Trey purr out delicious sounds and moan into Eroan's mouth when he came back for more. They hit a table, or a wall... something, and Eroan ran his hand up Trey's thigh, around his waist, and pulled out the shirt. When his fingers skimmed the male's flat, lean stomach, Trey hissed a gasp in through his teeth, body wracked with tremors.

Yes, this was madness, but it was good madness, oh so good, and Eroan could feel his barriers falling away. All of it, the ache of loneliness the Order life imposed upon him, the thrill of understanding that this was what he'd ached for his entire life but had never allowed himself to have.

He thrust his hands up Trey's back, relishing the feel of the male's musculature roll beneath his palms. He dug his fingers in and dragged them down Trey's spine, making the male arch into him like he could plaster himself against Eroan.

Trey gently levered a hand against Eroan's chest and pushed. He crossed his arms and tore the shirt off over his head, mussing his braids. Eroan stole a few seconds just to look without shame, to look and admire the defined abs and where the V led all the way behind Trey's belt like a path to wicked desires. Eroan's arousal throbbed. He plucked his daggers free and let them fall, then dropped his hand to stroke himself, only for Trey to get there first and take two fingers to Eroan's shaft. The trouser fabric suddenly felt like too much and not enough. Eroan fumbled with his belt, tore it off and froze as Trey went onto his knees, flicked open the buttons on Eroan's fly, and circled his hand around Eroan's freed erection.

He almost lost his mind and his seed right then and might have had Trey not squeezed his tip, briefly turning sweet pleasure into startling pain, and released just as quickly, leaving Eroan a panting mess.

The messenger pulled Eroan's arousal down, opened his wet mouth and flicked his tongue across Eroan's head, sending a rush of dancing pleasure to the seat of his balls. Trey's dark lashes fluttered, and the male took him into his mouth, using his tongue to swirl and lick around the crown as his hand tightened and stroked in a tight, maddening pulsing beat.

Eroan groaned out something, words maybe, and closed his eyes, letting the pleasure build up and up like a tightening thread building to snapping point. And then Trey was on his feet again, his tongue thrusting into Eroan's mouth, tasting of his own sweet pre-seed. Eroan was lost now, lost to the feel and taste of this impossible male. Eroan speared his hands into the long hair, now mostly free of its braids, so it flowed like silk through his fingers, and then he kissed down Trey's jaw, relishing each tiny gasp and shiver he wrung from Trey.

"Touch me," Trey whispered, his voice ragged with want. "Like you touch yourself."

Eroan tore off his jacket and flung it somewhere. The shirt went next, buttons flying and now, chest-to-panting-chest, he roughly tugged at Trey's belt, ripping it free of the loops, and plunged his hand inside, making Trey spit his favorite f-word. Eroan took Trey's engorged, hot, silken shaft deep into his palm and rubbed long strokes downward, making sure to grind against the head with the ball of his palm. Trey rocked with the rhythm. He fell back against the table, braced one arm to the side of him and threw the other around Eroan's neck. Skin on slick skin, Eroan watched Trey's pupils dilated and drank in the sight of Eroan leaning over him, at the feel of his hand pumping.

"Ah, fuck... Stop. I can't..." Eroan smothered the male's mouth with a kiss and felt him buck, felt his cock strain. Trey hooked his arm tighter around Eroan's neck, thrust up into his hand, and then threw his head back and cried out as the pleasure slammed through him, robbing him of all control. His seed slickened Eroan's palm, making the ending strokes exquisitely smooth.

"Damn it..." Trey blinked quickly. "That wasn't supposed to happen yet."

Eroan liked seeing the messenger flustered, liked the heat on his face, the swollen touch to his lips and the drunken look in his eyes.

Trey swallowed with a click. He lifted his chin and bared his gritted teeth. "Fuck me."

"What?"

Trey straightened, gently maneuvering Eroan back a step. He kicked off the trousers, took Eroan's soaked hand and wiped it behind him, and then turned and lay chest-down over the table. "You won't hurt me, just go slow at first."

Eroan clutched at the male's ass and dug his fingers in. This was... unexpected. "Are you sure?"

"Please. Trust me. I promised you'd lose your mind..."

Eroan spread the cheeks and slickened his fingers with the remaining seed on his palm. Slowly, carefully, he inserted a finger. It seemed impossibly tight but soft and inviting. Trey grunted, "More. I want you. Damn it, Eroan, stop fucking around and do exactly what you've wanted since you saw me."

Eroan braced an arm against the table at Trey's side, took his flushed erection, gave himself a few invigorating strokes, and gently pushed against Trey's hole.

Trey gripped the far side of the table, turning his knuckles white. He turned his head and snarled over his shoulder, "Like I know you can."

Eroan eased in, soaking up the sweet friction sliding over his cock, and then out again, sending shivers dancing up his spine. Oh by the gods. His eyes rolled. This was too good.

"Now who's the tease?" Trey laughed and canted his hips, opening himself.

The laughter choked off when Eroan thrust in. Darts of pleasure burst through Eroan's member, up his back, making his ass lock and hips thrust. He gripped Trey's waist with both hands and thrust deep again, making the messenger growl for more. Again. Eroan needed this, he needed it more than he could have ever known. He thrust again, hips working now to pump out a beat that had Trey panting and Eroan's mind sparking. His thighs slapped against Trey's. The messenger grunted and growled

like an animal and it was all Eroan could do not to lose his seed too soon, but it was happening, starting down low like an arrow about to be sprung from its bow. He heard himself growling with every thrust but was too gone to care. Mindless, just a male made of fire and need and wild abandon, he took everything Trey gave until it built too far, too high, and pleasure blasted it all to nothing, leaving Eroan shuddering his seed in deep. He came back to himself, filling out his body again, so damn sensitive it hurt to move. Trey smirked over his shoulder, his eyes telling a satisfied story.

Eroan swept all Trey's dark hair up in one hand, knotted it around a fist, and pulled just enough to hold Trey still. He fell forward, lay his chest against Trey's slick back, and nipped his salty shoulder.

"Now that we've gotten years of raw lust out of your system, are you ready for something a little more leisurely?" Trey asked.

Eroan swallowed hard. "There's more?"

"Dawn is a few hours away yet... Unless you have somewhere you need to be?"

There was, but Eroan couldn't recall where. There was nowhere else he'd rather be right then. He shifted his hips and eased himself out of Trey while running his fingers down the male's spine, making the male's eyelids droop and his lips part. Oh yes, Eroan could spend a few more hours locked in pleasure-making. He wasn't letting this one go now, not before he had to.

Trey rolled over and propped himself against the table, sprawled in the torchlight spilling in through the window like some kind of dream who might not exist outside of this moment. Eroan had to stop himself from falling on him and licking every lean ripple, mapping that male's body with his tongue.

"You're the cutest when you blush," Trey purred.

Eroan scooped up Trey's shirt. Trey was circling a nipple with his finger and eyeing Eroan like he wanted to do exactly the same to him with his tongue.

"I've never been called cute before." He threw Trey's shirt at him.

The messenger snatched it out of the air. "It's a night for firsts."

Eroan laughed and shook his head as he collected his scattered clothes. Trey was a damn tease. Was he always like this? "Do you do this in every village you visit?"

"What if I do?"

Eroan looked over, but Trey was focused on dressing, his smile a ghost on his lips. A messenger's life was a short, lonely one. Assassins weren't so different. Being part of the Order was more than a purpose, it was a calling. One left from Eroan's ancestors—those who had failed to protect humans. But callings allowed little room for company. This night, this gift Trey was giving him, it was a gift from Eroan too. Because once Trey left, he might never see another sunrise. May never have another lover, never taste another heated kiss or hear that sudden, wanting gasp or hear his name whispered in pleasure.

Eroan approached Trey and waited for him to look up. When he did, the messenger straightened, suddenly wooden with tension. His waistcoat hung open, trousers sat loosely on his hips and his mess

of hair sprouted at odd angles from half-tied braids. His smile was all but gone, and Eroan knew why. In a few hours, this would just be a memory to cling to during long, cold nights. Nights in which there were bigger, darker things waiting to tear him to pieces.

He touched Trey's cheek, tilted his chin up, and gently set a kiss upon his parted lips. Of all the maddening, passion-wrecked kisses they'd shared, this one felt the most real. Eroan didn't need to speak. Nothing he could say would change anything. He smiled and watched the warm smile mirror on Trey's face.

After dressing, he took Trey's hand and led the messenger out the door.

Later, Eroan couldn't remember returning to his home, just the feel of Trey's body rocking beneath him, the sound of the male's demands for more and the luscious insanity Eroan felt answering those demands. Dragons could have come in the night and burned the village down around him, and he wouldn't have noticed. Wouldn't have cared. It wasn't supposed to be this way, but Eroan had given years of his life in service to the Order. This night... This night was his.

They tangled in Eroan's bedsheets with firelight from the hearth licking over soft, pale skin. Eroan followed that warm light up Trey's arm, kissing the sensitive spot inside his elbow and up to where the tribal tattoos circled his bicep. Eroan kissed those marks too, and with his right hand, he pushed Trey's thighs apart and stroked lazy circles inside where he'd earlier discovered more tattoos looped around Trey's hard muscles.

Trey swallowed with a loud click.

Eroan would never tire of seeing what his touch could do. He shifted his weight and craned himself over Trey, bracing an arm on either side of Trey's shoulders. The messenger lay beneath him, a luscious spread of maleness just waiting to be teased and taken. His hair pooled beneath him like black ink spilled over the pillow. Eroan flicked his own hair over one shoulder and let the platinum blond curtain trail over Trey's chest where it rose and fell with his breathing. He lowered himself to his elbows and swirled his tongue around one of Trey's pert nipples, then licked lower, riding over powerful abdominal muscles to the dip at Trey's hip.

Trey's fingers combed into Eroan's hair, pulling it back from his face, making him look up. The male wore a frantic rawness, his needs displayed in wide eyes and swollen lips. Lips he bit into, delivering a shot of lust to Eroan's veins that fed straight to the bundle of nerves seated below his wanting erection.

Trey was going to ruin him. Maybe already had ruined him. He couldn't imagine anything being this good ever again.

Eroan tilted his head down. Trey's fingers released. Lower, Eroan snaked until his chin nudged Trey's erection, making it twitch. He kept his head tilted down, but looked up through his lashes and met Trey's eyes just as he took the silken head into his mouth. Trey's arms flew out, his back arched and that word fell from his lips again. Then his fingers were in Eroan's hair again, guiding, building the beat. Eroan took what he could, took him deep, and then broke off, gasping. Trey had clutched at

the bed like it could stop him from falling. Eroan wasn't stopping anything. His lips fought with a sly smile. He pumped his hand faster, flicked his hair out of the way, and tongued the male's slit. Trey's entire body jolted like he'd been struck by a blast of power. "Fuck!" His seed spurted, hips shuddering, and Eroan milked the last tiny drops from him. Tremors chased the come-down. Smugly, Eroan crawled back up the bed, propped his head on his hand and crooked his leg protectively over Trey's.

"Alumn," Trey laughed. "Had I known what I'd be waking in you, I'd have come here sooner."

Eroan's gaze snagged the window. It would be dawn soon, and this dream would end. He lay back and stared at the ceiling cross-beams. Maybe he could travel to Cheen, visit the Order there? But that would mean leaving Janna and Nye, Curan and Xena, the green Order recruits, and as much as Trey blew his mind, he wasn't sure he could leave his home in pursuit of this.

"Come with me..."

Eroan winced and looked over. Trey saw the denial in his eyes and flicked his gaze up at the ceiling. "Sorry, I shouldn't have asked... Your Order needs you."

"Will you return?"

Trey's cheek fluttered.

Eroan shouldn't have asked either. The chances of Trey coming back anytime soon were slim. He went where the messages went, not where his lust wanted him to go. They both had orders, responsibilities, duties. To speak of anything else was a foolish dream that couldn't exist outside this night.

Trey sighed out and turned onto his side, propping his head up. He took a loop of Eroan's hair and stroked it around Eroan's nipple, tickling, then sent that silken touch lower but lost his way and spread his hand over Eroan's heart.

"Do you have someone... at home?" Eroan asked.

"Does it matter?" Trey let his propped arm fall and nestled against Eroan's side.

"No, I suppose not." It did, but only because he hated to think this bright, funny, confident elf deserved more than a life on the roads. If he had a home, at least Eroan could pretend Trey would be safe. He couldn't help wanting to protect him. Protecting was in his nature.

"What about you? The girl at the feast?"

"Janna? No, we're friends... I don't... Order assassins don't have relationships."

"None?"

"None."

"Then I'm your private little secret?" Trey's eyebrows lifted in mischief.

"I don't think I could handle you in public."

"You'd be right..." Trey let his eyes flutter closed. Eroan admired those soft dark lashes. "Eroan Ilanae," Trey whispered. "One day, that name will be more than an Order assassin. Elves all over will whisper it."

“They will?”

“Hm...” Trey’s breathing slowed. “It’ll be spoken in awe... At a time when we’ll need you the most.”

Eroan pulled Trey close, letting him use his shoulder as a pillow, and stroked his upper arm. The male’s breathing soon shifted into the tell-tale deep-breathing of sleep. Eroan let his own eyes close. Wasn’t this what it was all for? Protecting people like Trey, protecting the only elves left in a world ruled by monsters? He could live with that.

Dreams took him, wrapping him in warmth and comfort until he woke what felt like minutes later with the sun streaming in through the windows. The fire had burned down, the grate full of ash, and beside him on the bed lay a single wildflower in Trey’s place—tiny blue petals around a black center. Eroan lifted it to his nose and breathed in. It smelled sweet and light, like Trey, or maybe that was his imagination making a connection that wasn’t there. Like Trey wasn’t here now, and might never have been here at all if Eroan didn’t feel the ghost of his kisses and touches burning all over his body.

He smiled. Janna would be knocking on his door soon. The day would begin, and life would return to normal. Trey had been right. Eroan would never forget this gift of a night, and he knew Trey wouldn’t forget it either, wherever his journey took him next.

The End

Did you enjoy *Sealed with a Kiss*? Please leave a review on Amazon and [Goodreads](#), or your favorite store. Just a rating and a few words will do. Every review helps spread the word.



See more from the assassin Eroan Ilanea in *Silk & Steel*, coming 2019 by Ariana Nash. A dark m/m fantasy spanning a world ravaged by dragons where a tormented dragon prince has the misfortune of capturing one of the last surviving elven assassins who will change the world, and the prince, forever.

Read on for an exclusive excerpt of *Silk & Steel*...

SILK & STEEL (EXCERPT)



Eroan

THE IRON DOOR rattled on its hinges and groaned open, spilling silvery light inside. Gloom fled to the corners, leaving behind a figure with broad shoulders. *Male*, Eroan thought. Curious scents of warm leather and citrus tickled his nose. After the wet and rotted smell of the prison, he welcomed any change in the air, even if it meant his visitor had returned.

Eroan kept his head low and his eyes down, hiding any signs of relief on his face. The shackles holding his wrists high bit deeper. He'd been so long in the dark, he'd almost forgotten he was a living thing. The constant, beating pain was a cruel reminder. This visitor was a cruel reminder too.

He knew what happened next. It had been the same for hours now. Days, even.

The male came forward, blocking more light, lessening its stab against Eroan's light-sensitive eyes. He turned his face away, but the male's proud outline still burned in his mind. Other images burned there too. The male's half-smile, the glitter of dragon-sight in his green eyes. Eroan had rarely gotten so close to their kind without killing them.

His mission would have been successful if not for this one.

"You need to eat." The male's gravelly undertone rumbled.

He needed nothing from *him*.

A tray clattered against the stone floor. The sweet smell of fruit turned Eroan's hollow stomach.

Moments passed. The male's rhythmic breathing, slow and steady, accompanied the scent of warm leather rising from his hooded cloak, and with it the lemony bite of all dragonkin. A scent most elves were taught to flee from.

"Were you alone, elf?" the dragonkin asked. The questions were the same every time. "Will there be another attempt on her life? How many of your kind are left in our lands?" More questions.

Always the same. And not once had Eroan answered.

Steely fingers suddenly dug into Eroan's chin, forcing him to look, to *see*. Up close, the

dragonkin's green eyes seemed as brittle and sharp as glass, like a glance could cut. His smile was a sharp thing too.

"I could torture you." The dragonkin's smile vanished behind a sneer.

Eroan's straining arms twitched, and the chains slung above his head rattled against stone. *He has me in body, but not in spirit.* He gave him nothing, no sneer, no wince, just peered deep into the dragonkin's eyes. Eyes that had undoubtedly seen the death of a thousand elves, that had witnessed villages burn. If they had souls, this dragon's would be dark. *He could torture me. He should. Why does he wait?*

Eroan recalled that cold look when their swords had clashed. He'd cut through countless tower guards, severing them from their life-strings as easily as snipping at thread, but not this one. This one had refused to fall. This dragonkin had fought with a passion not found in the others, as though their battle were a personal one. Either he truly loved the queen he protected, or he was a creature full of fiery hate that scorched whatever he touched.

The dragonkin's fingers tightened, digging in, hurting, but just as the pain became too sharp, he tore his hand free and stepped back, grunting dismissively.

Eroan collapsed against the wall, letting the chains hold him. Cold stone burned into raw skin. His shoulder muscles strained and twitched. Pain throbbed down his neck too, but he kept his head up, kept it turned away.

"I cannot..." Whatever the dragon had been about to say, he let it trail off and reached for the ornate brooch fixing the cloak around his neck, teasing his fingers over the serpent design.

Eroan wondered idly if he could kill him with that brooch pin. Of course, to do that, he'd need to be free.

The dragon saw him watching and dropped his hand. "You do not have long, elf." His jeweled eyes glowed. Myths told of how the dragonkin were made of glass and forged inside great fire-spewing mountains in a frozen land. Not this one. This one had something else inside. Some other wildfire fueling him.

The dragon turned, sweeping his cloak around him, and headed out the door.

"What is your name?" The question growled over Eroan's tongue and scratched over cracked lips. He almost didn't recognize the rumbling voice as his own.

The dragon hesitated, then partially turned his head to peer over his shoulder. The fire was gone from his eyes, and something else lurked there now, some softer weakness that belied everything Eroan had seen. His cheek fluttered, an inner war raging.

The answer would have a cost, Eroan realized. He shouldn't have asked. He let his head drop, tired of holding it up, of holding himself up. Tiredness ate at his body and bones. The shivers started up again, rattling the chains and weakening his defiance. This dragonkin was right. He did not have long.


"My name is Lysander."

The door slammed, the lock clunked, and Eroan was plunged into darkness.



READ *Silk & Steel*, the dark fantasy by Ariana Nash, in 2019. Join the Ariana Nash [Facebook group here](#) and see snippets, cover reveals, and competitions first.

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The background image is the book cover for 'Silk & Steel' by Ariana Nash. It features a dark, moody scene with a red dragon's head in the foreground, looking towards the right. The dragon's eye is visible, and there are some sparks or fire in the lower left corner. The text is overlaid on this image.

A tormented Dragon prince.
A captured Elven assassin.

Duty demands they fight for their people but
love has other plans

Silk & Steel



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