

Dragon's Desire

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Synopsis

In the dragon kingdom of Djarera, Lara Sotherlin has at last found her life-mate in the handsome rebel, Zendar. But the four clans, still furious over Zendar's rebellion, refuse to accept him as heir to the throne.

Zendar can see no other way to save Djarera from all-out warfare than to leave, even if it means losing the woman he loves. And Darrek, badly scarred and left half-blind by the battle to save Elara, believes he wants nothing more than to be left alone. Together, they disappear, leaving Rand and Elara frantic.

Now Elara and Rand must put everything on the line to find them, and in a last desperate struggle, each of them must finally acknowledge their own deepest desires. But will the result be ruin for the dragon kingdom, or the dawn of a whole new era?

Chapter One

A pearly light crept through the sky outside the arches. Lara watched it through eyes that felt gritty and raw from lack of sleep. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered but the determination inside her, as fixed and unvarying as a compass pointed north. All night, she had watched the stars slide slowly past the arches, measuring that determination against the steel of her mother's will.

Now, as the first faint blush of pink tinted the watery gray, Lara made her decision. Nudging the sleeping Rand, she whispered, "Come on." Rising silently, he followed her out the door and through the wide, empty halls of Wind Castle.

Pushing open the door to the throne room, Lara sighed in relief. She'd half-imagined her mother, sitting all night on the throne, hunched over it fiercely like a hawk guarding her eggs. But the room was

empty.

Rand whispered nervously, “Lara, are you sure?” Without answering, she strode firmly to the dais and, for the first time, sat in that high stone seat, her skirt falling around her. Then she shut her eyes.

She hadn’t the foggiest idea what she was doing. All around her the castle was peaceful, quiet as the hollow inside of a shell. There seemed hardly a breath of air stirring anywhere. How was she supposed to call the Winds?

Scowling, she concentrated, seeking for the trigger. Sending her attention deep inside herself, she came face to face with the ache of her own grief. It throbbed inside her like the air inside a pounded drum, trapped and vibrating. She heard small, gasping sounds, and realized she was crying.

Oh, Zendar. I can’t... I don’t know how. Zendar!

Like a beacon, the cry blazed up inside her and lanced out, blazing through the emptiness as if to follow his trail. In its wake, she was almost painfully aware of the silence around her. It wouldn’t stay that way long -- the light was broadening minute by minute outside the open doors. It was now or never.

Stilling her breath, Lara stretched out with her mind, trying to find the power that Zendar had tapped. The silence grew, spreading down the open corridors of the castle, and her awareness flowed with it, feeling halls and arches interconnect like a vast spider’s web -- *No. Like a wind tunnel, she realized. Like a channel.*

And down those marble corridors came whispering currents, not of air, or not just of air, but of energy. Bands of energy that almost shimmered in her mind, rolling through the air, the stone, the very ground beneath her. She could almost feel Djarera itself spinning on its axis and the waves of energy that flowed out from that centrifugal motion. Behind them, like a shadow she felt vaster, larger motions like the deep, irresistible force of the tides, spiraling out from the sun, wrapping around the smaller, choppier waves of the planet’s own energy. And behind *that...*

Falling deeper, Lara felt, for one brief second, the slow, stately spin of the galaxy itself.

Her eyelids flew open even as the small inner door of the hall slammed open, and Melgara, bristling with fury, stalked into the hall.

“Elara, stop!”

Holding her mother's gaze, Lara said, "No." Then, reaching deep within her mind, she sought outward, seeking for the faint line of turbulence she sensed, like the fading contrails of a plane, spiraling away from the castle, from Djarera...

Softly, she mind-spoke to Rand. *Be ready.*

He nodded. Lara groped among the waves flowing around her, tapped into them, drew them together...

"Elara! Wait!"

Resolutely, Lara looked again at Melgara. "Mother, I love him."

Letting herself shift even as she rose from the throne, Lara called the Winds.