
IMPRESS HER,
POSSESS HER

Heroes of Neoma

SHERIDAN KNIGHT



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Charm Him, Disarm Him

BOOK ONE

Chapter 1

Twenty-five silent, young women lined the white and gray, sterile hallway. All were emotionless, resigned to their unknown fate as they waited their turn.

Below their feet, underground, came strong rumbles. Slight and slow at first, they grew stronger and more consistent over the minutes, impossible to ignore.

Calliope anxiously grabbed onto Sheena, another student, in front of her in line. "What? What is going on?"

"Shush. Shush, and kneel down on the floor." Sheena bent to the floor, pulling Calliope with her.

Lights flickered and sounds of destruction reverberated in every direction. The floor was shaking, everything was shaking and Calliope feared the shaking would send them into the internal depths of the planet, the source.

The surface shook so hard that the tiles and wall across the hall from her separated. She needed Cassandra. She wanted Cassandra. Looking down the line, the women all had their faces buried between their knees and under their arms. Were they not scared? Even now, they were unable to think and feel of their own accord.

Standing, her legs trembling, and unbalanced, she darted from the line. Sheena's voice reached her, over the roars emanating from beneath. "No Calliope, don't!"

The building felt unsafe and unstable, as if folding in upon itself, but she ran. The nurses and guards she passed did not attempt to stop her flight. Some areas had lost all overhead lighting, but the doorplates and some emergency lighting guided her way.

All she knew was that she must get to Cassandra. She was almost there, not much further. What price would she pay for her flight? Currently it mattered little to her as her feet hurried through the corridor. She ran right into Cassandra, who was exiting her quarters. "Calliope, hold still!"

Tears flowed from her eyes. "What? What is this?" Calliope sobbed.

"I said hold still! Stop talking, girl!" Cassandra held Calliope's head, pushing it to the left, exposing the right side of her neck. Quickly and accurately, as a doctor with years of experience, she pulled the trigger on the instrument.

"Ow! Ow, Cassandra, that hurt me." Tears came faster as she peered into Cassandra's eyes, revealing all her fear and bewilderment.

The tremors had weakened, but the effects were far from over. Grasping Calliope's forearm, Cassandra pushed her along. "Wipe your eyes and face. Go along with everything I say."

Their pace quickened as they rounded a corner and sprinted down many corridors she had never seen. Calliope didn't know their destination, but Cassandra loved her, and she trusted Cassandra. The Superiors were frantic, running here and there, unconcerned with the movements of the pair.

Arriving at the station, Cassandra pleaded with her eyes, though she knew the answer she would receive, if there were time. "Do you understand? Will you do as I say?" She had raised and taught Calliope as if she were her own child—in secret and

unlawfully. Her answer would be yes. She knew there were no limits to the young woman's devotion. Swallowing loudly, she walked them right up to the station guard. "She is supposed to be on this departure."

The station. No, I don't understand, Calliope thought.

The guard scrutinized the two women and waved over the guard with the microprocessor. He was a tiny man, smaller than any of the women at the Center, and even more so in comparison with the doctors. His eyes were black and he had a thin line for a mouth. "What? We have to depart them now while there is still time."

"The doctor says this one is supposed to be on. I thought we had them all," the first guard said.

"We do, according to the manifesto!" His impatience and irritation evident at the interruption, he shifted his black eyes to Calliope. "Let me see your mark, and tell me who you are assigned to!"

Cassandra once again pulled Calliope's head to the left, displaying the requested evidence and said, "Amerrande. She's going to Amerrande."

Calliope's perplexity over all the unusual occurrences of the day turned to dread and caution as new concerns flooded her mind. She was marked. Women whispered of the mark, issued once you received your duty. However, since you went to the station upon receiving the mark, no one could ever discuss the procedure, sight or meaning behind it afterwards. Her whole body trembled. Why would Cassandra do this? This wasn't what they had discussed and planned. They had never considered this, it was never a possibility.

Rumblings sounded below again. The black-eyed guard, reluctantly yet frenziedly waved them on. "Put her on. They have to go." He hurried off.

Tears swam in Cassandra's eyes, and her voice quivered. "I love you. This is your chance, make the most of it. You will know

what to do, trust me. Follow your heart, but fear it as well, and always, always trust your mind." Caressing Calliope's arm, as any overt sign of affection would be a red flag, she directed her to follow the station guard.

Overwhelmed, frightened and plagued with uncertainty, Calliope followed him. Entering the transport she took a seat, as the countless number of other women on board had done. Replaying Cassandra's words, *'You will know what to do, trust me,'* she realized there must have been no other way. This was how it had to be.