



A  
TONGUE  
SO SWEET  
AND  
DEADLY

COMPELLING FATES SAGA

SOPHIA ST. GERMAIN

# A TONGUE SO SWEET AND DEADLY

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BOOK ONE

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*To Tahoe.*

*Thank you for joining me on hundreds of  
walks when I needed inspiration.*

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## CHAPTER ONE



The noise in the packed tavern was unbearable.

A relentless hum of chatter and clattering of glasses pounded against her temples, and Lessia cast a longing glance at the door behind her.

It had been a long day already, and the only thing she wanted was to climb into bed—to be anywhere other than this teeming, blistering room.

Even the snow swirling outside the dusty windows behind her looked more welcoming.

But she needed to show her face tonight.

She'd spent the past few nights holed up in her study, and Lessia knew word would get back to her king. If she stayed in tonight as well, his henchman would come looking for her.

She'd tested his patience before—two days seemed to be the longest time she could escape his watch.

Sighing, Lessia flicked her hair and forced her lips to curl into a sly smile as she waved to try to get Bren the barkeep's attention. A few patrons glanced her way, and she winked at two of the regulars when they raised their cups in her direction.

Bren was tied up, scrambling to take orders from thirsty soldiers who'd spent too many months at sea, so she rested her chin in one hand and traced the jagged outline of the wooden countertop with the other.

As she picked at the sticky surface, a drunken soldier barreled into her, jarring her arm off the counter and nearly tripping her.

Shaking her head, Lessia leaned back over the bar, but when the rough material of his uniform kept scraping against her arm, his hip painfully

jutting into hers, she turned her head over her shoulder and glared at him.

“Could you move, please?” She pointedly glanced at the space beside him. “There’s plenty of room for both of us to order.”

The soldier swept his auburn hair out of his face and flashed her a drunken grin. “No need to frown, beautiful. I’m only trying to get a drink.”

His eyes roamed over her black cloak and the long-sleeved black tunic she wore beneath, and he arched a brow. “I’d buy you one. But you’re clearly not here to socialize.”

With that, he turned back to the bar, leaning over the dark wood to give a wobbly wave to Bren.

Lessia rolled her eyes.

She knew her attire didn’t do her any favors, not like the beautiful dresses other women in the tavern wore, their laced corsets accentuating their waists and the capped sleeves showing off their slender arms.

But it wasn’t like she had a choice.

The soldier kept trying to get Bren’s attention, and she couldn’t help the smirk that pulled at her lips at his feeble attempts. The tavern was too busy tonight; there was little chance Bren would prioritize him over the many patrons he knew.

Especially when Lessia stood next to him.

A hand squeezed her shoulder, and she spun around, finding her best friend in one of those beautiful dresses she’d admired.

Gray, with white detailing trailing up the long skirts, the dress was simple but beautiful against Amalise’s blonde tresses and huge blue eyes. And it had short sleeves, so she probably didn’t have sweat dripping down her neck like Lessia did.

She dragged a hand through her wavy hair. “Is this one giving you trouble, Lia?”

Lessia shook her head. “I’m good.”

When Amalise narrowed her eyes and a familiar wicked sheen glinted in them, Lessia stepped into her path.

Too often, a situation like this escalated into a brawl, and with tension already heavy in the air from restless soldiers, Lessia wouldn’t be surprised if the whole tavern got involved after one punch.

That she was too tired for.

She let some of her own wickedness fill her eyes and offered Amalise an edged smile. “I told you I’ve got this, Amalise. You go back to whatever

poor man you plan on dragging home tonight.”

Lessia waved toward the table where the rest of their friends sat and where a group of soldiers and merchants hovered nearby to try their luck with the beautiful women.

Amalise scowled, but when Lessia kept her feet firmly planted, she shrugged and drew a breath to calm herself. Amalise could be a bit protective, and her temper rivaled Lessia’s—which was one of the reasons they became instant friends when Lessia arrived in Elbow five years ago.

Finally, a smile overtook her face, and Amalise wiggled her brows, whispering theatrically, “I’m thinking the one over there.”

She not-so-subtly pointed to a tall soldier whose eyes were fixed on them and who was clad in the same navy uniform as the man next to Lessia but with wavy black hair spilling far down his back.

Amalise pursed her lips when her eyes snapped back to Lessia’s. “He’s got better hair than me! I need to know his secret.”

Lessia snorted. Amalise didn’t need any beauty tips. She was already the most gorgeous woman Lessia had ever seen. And Amalise knew it.

Lessia’s eyes trailed her friend as she approached the soldier. Her full hips swayed seductively as she stepped up one step too close, invading his space to whisper something in his ear.

Snickering to herself, Lessia turned back to the bar.

The soldier who’d bumped into her had managed to order a few cups of ale and slipped Bren some silvers.

Bren’s eyes widened when they locked with hers, an apology ready at the tip of his tongue, but Lessia winked at him, gesturing toward the rest of the bar, where dozens of people leaned across the surface, desperate for his attention.

When he still hesitated, she waved her hand again, offering him a wide smile.

Although from the look on his face, she wasn’t sure if it reassured him, as his posture remained tense when he finally approached another patron.

Shifting her eyes back to the soldier, Lessia tapped his shoulder. “I know you’re new here, so I’ll give you a pass this time. But me and my friends over there”—Lessia jerked her head toward the table where Amalise and a few others eyed them closely—“are thirsty. And we order first around here.”

He seemed to prepare to respond with something snarky, but his gaze swept over her again, and his muddy brown eyes widened. “You’re—”

“Half-Fae. Was it the ears? Or perhaps the teeth?” She couldn’t help but let her lip curl, showing off her sharp canines, her grin creeping wider when the soldier inched backward.

“Or was it maybe the height?” Lessia straightened to her full five-nine stature, leveling her amber eyes with his frightened ones.

The soldier stared at her with the bar pressed into his back, the air around him crackling with nervous energy and fear seeping into his scent.

Lessia softened her gaze. “Is this your first time on Asker?”

His quivering chin dipped.

Gods, he must hail from one of the remote isles in ElLOW if he hadn’t encountered Fae or even half-Fae before. Not that there were that many half-Fae on the human isles—or in Havlands at all—but here on Asker, the capital island of ElLOW, it wasn’t unheard of to run into one from time to time.

The air shifted as the soldier’s eyes narrowed. From the stale scent lacing his breath, it must have been ale bolstering his confidence, and his features twisted into a drunken sneer as he spat, “I don’t know who you think you are, *halfling*, and I truly don’t care. My friends and I just spent weeks at sea. We are thirsty.”

Her guilt instantly melted away, and Lessia clenched her jaw not to snarl at him.

Shifting her golden-brown hair out of her face and balling her hands into tight fists to keep her unpredictable Fae emotions in check, she hissed quietly, “I am going to give you one more chance, soldier. My friends and I own this part of town—including this tavern. You may apologize for the vile thing you just called me by heading over to them and distributing the drinks you bought.” She nodded toward the mugs of ale lining the bar behind him.

When the soldier scoffed and turned around to gather the cups and return to the rowdy group of soldiers he’d come with, a buzz filled her ears, and Lessia ground her teeth.

She shouldn’t.

Using magic on humans was not only illegal, as she’d break the most sacred stipulation of the treaty between humans and Fae; she’d also despise herself for it later.

But her patience was truly running thin today.

And she had a reputation to uphold.

Casting a quick glance around the room, making sure no one looked their way, she blew out a deep breath and closed her eyes. The corners of her mouth lifted as her magic purred at the chance to be unleashed.

It had been months since she last used her so-called gift.

When her eyes flew open, she stared at herself in the dusty mirror behind the counter, and a shiver snaked down her spine at how her eyes glowed like molten gold in the dim light.

Apart from the pointed ears, she could be mistaken for human, albeit a quite tall female, but when she let her magic reign like this, there was no mistaking her Fae heritage.

Once again, she tapped the soldier's shoulder, and when his smug face snapped her way, his body stilled, his muscles locking.

"What the..."

The soldier backed into the counter once more, the ale in the two cups he held spilling onto his black boots.

Lessia closed the distance between them, gripping the lapel of his uniform jacket and bringing her face to his. She let her hair fall forward again, two bronze curtains concealing her face from the other patrons.

"What—what happened to your eyes?" The soldier's voice shook as his gaze flitted between her hand and eyes.

Ignoring his question, she let magic seep into her voice, transforming it into a deep, seductive murmur as her eyes locked with his. "You will give those cups to my friends. And you'll continue to buy us drinks all night—courtesy of your big, big heart," she purred.

The soldier's eyes glazed over, his posture relaxing as he nodded.

Smiling, Lessia continued. "As a matter of fact, you'll be happy to do it. After tonight, you'll remember that the harbor and the east side of Asker belong to me and my friends. And you want to please us. Please be sure to inform your friends as well."

Lessia blinked, forcing the lingering magic back inside her until the unnatural glow left her eyes and her natural honey color returned.

Rolling her neck, she offered the soldier a sweet smile, tilting her head when he still hovered by the bar. "What are you waiting for?"

The soldier scrambled to gather all the cups in his hands, and Lessia laughed softly when he walked over and, with a smile on his face,

distributed them amongst her friends, leaving a cup behind for her.

Grinning to herself, she lifted the mug to take a sip of ale. Even if she often felt like she cheated when she used her magic, since no soul in Havlands could withstand her commands, it was helpful in situations like this.

But Lessia's smile fell when cold, oily magic rippled over her skin, and her hand froze midair. With the hair on the back of her neck rising and her Fae senses blaring, she whipped around so quickly the ale sloshed over her hands.

Her heart hammered against her ribs as she beheld the silver-haired Fae slipping onto one of the high chairs beside her. The snow clinging to his gray cloak glittered in the dim light, and his tanned skin and the cascading waves of his shoulder-length hair shimmered—even in the depths of winter.

“That’s what you waste your magic on? Some free ale and a simple human?” His deep voice rumbled through her, her heart beating in rhythm with his fingers tapping the bar.

Even with his glamour in place, the soldiers around them retreated, keeping a respectful distance—their dull human senses picking up on the danger radiating from the Fae.

Not that it surprised her. Full Fae could cast a glamour over themselves—could trick anyone into believing they were mere humans. But Merrick was one of the Fae king’s most vicious soldiers, and not even a glamour could mask the cloud of hostility that clung to him.

She’d heard the stories about him growing up, how the Fae called him the Death Whisperer—how alone, he’d taken out entire companies of soldiers that dared stand against him.

Lessia shakily set down the cup and wiped her hands on her breeches. “Merrick.”

Clasping her hands behind her back to prevent him from seeing them tremble, she swallowed. “To what do I owe this pleasure?”

She winced as her voice wavered, and cast a quick glance toward her friends.

Thankfully, they were occupied, toasting with the soldier she’d sent over and laughing as more of his friends joined them, each with drinks in his hands.

Silently cursing herself for staying in the past two nights, she waited, stiffening as his magic continued to dance over her skin.

The layers of clothes she wore did nothing to keep the oily vibrations off her. On the contrary, she could almost hear the magic whispering through the wool.

She'd have to take a bath and scrub every inch of her body to feel clean again.

Merrick angled his head, always careful to keep his eyes averted from hers, his long fingers impatiently running over the surface of the bar. Bren eyed her as he swiftly placed a goblet of golden liquor before him. When she inclined her head, Bren slipped away, hurrying to the other side of the bar.

"Where were you the past few days?" Merrick lifted the cup, swirling the liquid a few times before he took a long sip.

Lessia followed his movements closely as he elegantly set it down, his tongue darting out to lick a stray drop off his full lips.

He moved like a snake: everything about him cold and calculated, as if he could lunge any second and deliver a fatal bite.

Clearing her throat, she inched backward but stilled when the magic coating her skin tightened its grip, warning her not to take another step.

She shouldn't have sent the other guards home.

Merrick was the fourth Fae guard King Rioner had sent to watch over her. The others had lasted less than a week before they accidentally met her eyes and she sweetly asked them to leave and forget all about her. But Merrick had been a constant the past four years, not once meeting her gaze, not even allowing her a glimpse of the color of his eyes.

Although she was certain they were pure night—two dark windows peering into his lethal soul.

His magic nudged her again, like sharp daggers leaving stinging kisses on her back.

Lessia drew a deep breath. She only needed to assure him she hadn't forgotten about the king's orders; then she could leave, go home, and forget all about him until the next time he sought her out.

"I've been working. With so many taverns and gambling rooms to manage, I do have to spend time on paperwork as well. I can't be out every night."

Merrick remained quiet, but the air around him thickened with tension.

Lessia shuddered as she quickly continued. "I am planning on bringing some of the soldiers and captains home tonight, and my friends will ensure

the soiree we'll host will be the talk of the town for days. I've already let them know who I am. The king will be pleased to hear that most people in Asker are familiar with my name by now."

His thick silver eyebrows twitched in irritation, the only emotion he ever allowed to cross the hard lines of his face.

At least when she was around.

But she doubted that face ever softened. There was a reason for his nickname, one she didn't care to find out.

"You know as well as I do that *our* king is not pleased. He ordered you to make a name for yourself here, Lessia. He did not order you to become a harlot, a human plaything."

Lessia stiffened, her nails digging into her palms until the smell of iron filled the air. But she wouldn't allow herself to correct him. It was better he thought that of her than knew what she actually did when she was out of his sight.

"Well, I do own most of the taverns in this part of town now. And I'm respected amongst the merchants and barterers who pass through, so we get the best goods at decent prices. Even with the prices rising, I can keep costs down." She swept out an arm toward the packed room. "That's why everyone comes here, why we're busy every night. I'd say I did pretty well. And I should expect our king would think so too."

When Merrick's nostrils flared, she clamped her lips shut.

Shifting, she studied his profile, the angry lines of his mouth as he sipped yet again from the goblet.

What she wouldn't do for him to turn his face to hers, to meet those evil eyes and tell him to leave. Perhaps ask him to forget who he was entirely, tell him to move to the abandoned shifter island and never return.

All Havlands would be better for it.

But no such luck. Merrick tapped the bar again, and Bren immediately slipped up to refill his cup.

"I guess you'll see for yourself soon enough," he said quietly as Bren shuffled off.

Lessia didn't think her heart could beat any harder, but when the tattoo on her arm burned in response to his words, burned for the first time in five years, she couldn't stop the gasp that escaped her. Her hand flew to cover her left arm, pulling at the tunic she wore to ensure it was covered.

Merrick downed the liquor and rose, towering over her as he turned to leave. She swore his lips curled slightly as his whisper brushed her ear. “King Rioner is coming to see you soon. He’s calling in the debt you owe him. I’d say be ready, but...” His face dipped toward her arm, knowing exactly what was hidden beneath the layers of clothes she always wore. “It’s not like you can escape it.”