



# KILLIAN

WHISPERS FROM A HIDDEN WORLD

TN TARRANT



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BOOK ONE

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SAMPLE EXCERPT

## 2

EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD KILLIAN walked into what had been his mother's study to check on his siblings, thinking back to five years before. He had only been gone from the house for a week before he returned, with a caretaker, to look after them.

"Killian? Killian!" The irritated tone and the smack on his arm drew Killian from his memories of that awful week. He looked at his sister. "Do I really have to go?"

Killian sighed. Araminta really didn't want to leave for training as a *Tii-su*, but Killian certainly understood why she didn't have a choice about it. Her untrained use of her abilities was occasionally painful, in a variety of ways. He hugged her.

"Yes, you do. You are of age to begin training, and, believe me, you need it. You don't have to be an active *Tii-su*, once you're trained, but you have to learn to control your abilities. It's one thing to mindblock a child who can't control themselves, but to leave those blocks in place as an adult isn't a good idea. You're old enough to start learning, and you will, Araminta." He looked her in the eye, brooking no argument. His sister was a good-natured child, generally, but she did have a stubborn streak.

Finally, the girl nodded, sighing. “I just don’t want to leave home,” she said softly.

Killian nodded back, understanding. He hugged her again. “Council is in six weeks. I’ll bring Jaden with me, and we’ll visit you. Now go finish packing.”

Ten-year-old Jaden smiled from the desk where he was working on his homework. Killian smiled back. He knelt down beside his brother to check his progress. It had taken time, and there were still bad periods when Killian called Georges, for himself, or his siblings, but they had all recovered. Jaden and Araminta both knew what happened, even though they didn’t quite understand why. Killian didn’t know what to tell them because he didn’t understand either. He often felt like the mother he’d grown up believing in had never existed. When JoAnne, Killian, and Lady Nedai had gone through the books, they found Janet had run the estate nearly into bankruptcy. After discussions of what happened, Lyle, Killian, and Lady Nedai had gone to the bank, armed with David’s death certificate, and had closed the account out, finding David had squirreled away an impressive ten thousand dollars in American funds — and then some — over the years.

Lady Jonai and Lady Nedai both discussed the matter, deciding it was one thing if Janet had lost the estate, but it wasn’t fair to the Larrestes children, particularly since they were all underage. Therefore, they decided to make a loan to the Larrestes, at a minimal one-percent interest, giving the necessary funds to get the estate in the black and keep it there while Killian learned the ropes. The reparations from Anan were divided by Killian after getting advice from Lady Nedai, with one half being put into the family coffers, and the other being placed in a savings account for himself.

Killian was happily getting into Jaden’s math homework when there was a pounding on the door. He frowned. It couldn’t be any of the few hundred tenants he had, as they knew they could just come in during the day, although he preferred they knock and wait from early evening on, for family time. It was barely three-thirty in the afternoon. Jaden gave him a puzzled look. Killian shrugged and went to the front door.

He opened the door and found a stunning young man on his doorstep, a stranger. The stranger stared at him, looking frightened.

"Please, may I speak with the lady of the house, sir?"

"I am the Lady of this house. What can I do for you?" Killian replied calmly. He gestured the man inside; however, the man didn't move.

"I seek Sanctuary, my lord," he answered.

Killian chose not to correct the man about his title, no point in embarrassing a frightened male when he obviously hadn't meant any insult. "Why?"

"My *Senka* insists I marry a woman I do not want to touch me. It isn't a peace arrangement, nor a command from Council. He cannot get his inheritance from my mother until the arrangement she made with my fiancée's mother is honored."

"He doesn't get the money until you get married?" Killian asked, wanting to make sure.

"Yes, sir. Please, sir, I haven't much time. If I cannot find Sanctuary here, where might I go? A tenant farmer sent me to this house." The man truly was frightened, and his accent was odd. He sounded American. Why in the world was he in Europe?

As Killian briefly considered, he saw a car drive up in a rush, and the woman who got out of it made his blood go cold. He looked at the young man. "You seek Sanctuary from her?"

The male glanced over his shoulder and crowded against the door, without crossing the threshold. "Yes, my lord."

Killian stepped back. "I grant you Sanctuary, of my home, for as long as you need." He grabbed the man by the shirtfront before he could even process what Killian had said, pulling him into the house and behind him. Killian watched as the woman from the car stalked up the steps. He had his dagger at the ready.

"Hello, Killian," Anan said with a sneer. She pointed her own dagger at the man hiding behind him. "That's mine."





## B

KILLIAN STOOD HIS GROUND and even managed a polite smile he did not feel. “I’m sure there must be some *misunderstanding*.”

Anan’s eyes glittered as she studied him. She looked much the same: tall, dark skin, very pretty face until you looked into brown eyes that seemed soulless. The scar on her face had faded away. He had witnessed her seventy-lash flogging for attempted rape, as had the entire village. Her torso must be terribly scarred from the flogging, and he was fiercely glad of it. Floggings were rarely handed out as punishment, public ones even more so, but it was the lightest possible sentence for attempted rape. Some on the Council had felt she was young enough to learn a vital lesson, and others had felt the scars she’d gained from Killian’s escape from her would be a punishment in and of itself. So Anan had escaped the death penalty, with the warning the Council would not be so lenient should there be any repeat of such behavior.

“No misunderstanding, Killian —”

“You will address me properly, Anan Nyirej,” Killian said calmly. He was Regent *Artris*, and she knew it. “You have no leave to address me so familiarly.” Wits would win this battle, not anger.

Anan scowled. Killian watched her consider her options. "Lady Larrestes, the male hiding behind you is my fiancé. We were supposed to marry several hours ago, but the male chose to run away during the ceremony. It is an understandable fit of nerves from a sheltered male, but enough is enough." Again, she indicated the man still hiding behind him. "Send him out here so we may be about our business, and there'll be no trouble."

"I have given this man Sanctuary, Anan Nyirej," Killian replied, aware that both Araminta and Jaden had come into the hall. Knowing them, they also had their daggers in hand. Thanks to Lady Nedai, all three of them now had more than adequate knife skills. "He stays here, and there will be no problems. I will contact the Magistrate to mediate this dispute." He raised a taunting eyebrow at Anan, then smiled coldly. "Unless it is agreeable to you that I mediate?"

"Of course not, you —"

Standing at Killian's shoulder, Jaden interrupted. "I'd be careful about calling Lady Larrestes names." The derision in Jaden's tone caused Anan to glare at him. "Male Artris, Regents, or otherwise, don't have to find a woman to act for them. They can take care of it themselves."

Anan scowled angrily, but there was nothing she could legally do. If she tried to take the man, Killian could defend him however he deemed fit — up to and including killing her for breaking Sanctuary. "I'll call the Magistrate myself," she said.

"You're welcome to do so, but don't do it on my property. I ban you from my houses and from my fields, Anan Nyirej, and I ban those that would act on your behalf, except by the Magistrate's or Council's order. Leave now, or you will be ... assisted to leave." Killian was not a scared thirteen-year-old anymore.

For a minute, Killian thought Anan would try her luck, but she did not. She stormed back to her car and drove off recklessly.

Killian turned in time to catch the man as he fainted with sheer relief. Killian picked the young man up, feeling a strange tingle throughout his body as he held the man close. He turned to Jaden to tell him to call Lady Nedai, but his brother already had his cell phone out, making the call. Araminta followed him and their guest to an upstairs bedroom.

At Killian's request, she ducked into a bathroom to get some clean cloths dampened with hot water. Killian carefully laid the man

down on the bed in the largest guest room, wondering why he had come to Europe for Sanctuary instead of seeking it in his homeland. Unable to stray too far away from the stranger, Killian sat on the bed.

"My girls, my girls," the man moaned quietly as he came to awareness.

Touching him gently to get his attention, Killian asked, "You have children?" He took the chance to study his guest, who seemed to be about Killian's age. He had darker toned skin, like milky coffee, and in the afternoon light, faint iridescence in a streak here and there on his face and hands, his only exposed skin. Most Rimalians had duller skin these days, since Earth was so temperate a planet. And very oddly, he wasn't dressed like a young man about to marry, more like a male in mourning. The man's eyes opened, leaving Killian speechless. How had he not noticed earlier how stunning those eyes were? Green, like a spring meadow.

"Children? I don't have children ..."

"You were fussing about your 'girls' ..." Killian said, taking the cloth Araminta handed him and washing the man's face.

"I own dogs. Three Boxers. They're my girls." The man suddenly curled up on his side, moaning. "My father's probably already killed them. What was I doing?"

"What do you mean?" Araminta asked softly. She sat on the other side of the bed, patting the stranger's shoulder.

Killian carefully pushed tendrils of the man's black hair out of his face.

"My girls came with us. *Senka* didn't want them, and Anan said I could keep them, especially after she found out that breeding them can make good money. But three days ago, after I told my father I was still having serious doubts about marrying Anan, that she gave me the creeps, I woke up to find them gone. *Senka* said I could have them back after I married Anan. If I didn't, he would have them put down." Pain came off the man in such waves that Killian could feel it even though he wasn't touching the man. Strange, his empathy usually only worked with skin-to-skin contact.

Concerned, Killian glanced at Araminta, who was far more sensitive. Tears ran down her face, but she seemed to be in control.

Killian touched the man's cheek, marveling at how soft his skin was. "What's your name?"

"Sh-Shiloh Zahirris," he said as he visibly struggled not to cry. Surprisingly, he curled closer into Killian's touch.

Killian gave up trying to keep some distance between them and pulled Shiloh onto his lap, holding him carefully. Clearly the other man needed the comfort. Shiloh pressed close, as if he wanted to crawl into Killian's skin. Killian was shocked at his body's response to that wriggling, and he hoped Shiloh didn't notice. Either Shiloh was too distraught to notice, too scared, or just too polite to say anything. Whatever the reason, Killian was grateful, and he tried to focus on Shiloh's situation, not his body's unheard-of reaction.

As Killian held a crying Shiloh, Jaden brought Lady Nedai into the room. She must have been nearby to arrive so quickly. Killian didn't worry about greeting her properly. One of the first things she had taught him was that there was a time for formality, and a time to ignore it. This seemed like the time to ignore it.

Lady Nedai sat down in the chair in the corner -- Killian assumed it was to seem less imposing since she was taller than everyone else in the room -- and motioned for Araminta to come to her. Natalya Nedai often acted as a maternal figure for Jaden and Araminta, having no trouble giving them affection. Araminta ran to her and crawled into her lap. Being *Tii-su* born, Araminta occasionally needed extra coddling.

Continuing to hold Shiloh, Killian told Natalya what had happened and what they'd learned from Shiloh. She held Araminta and listened quietly.

"You did the right thing, Killian. I would have given him Sanctuary as well."

Killian felt a curious pride that someone he respected had given him her approval. He didn't really need it, but it was nice to have. "I have to call the Magistrate, right? And she'll mediate the dispute?"

She nodded. "That's right. In the meantime, Shiloh stays with you, under your protection." She studied the small man in Killian's lap. No longer sobbing, he seemed to have calmed a little. "Shiloh, I am Lady Nedai, what is your mother's name?"

"Zahirris, my Lady. Elizabeth Zahirris was my mother."

"She died, what, three years ago?" Natalya asked gently.

"Yes, my Lady. My father is Ewan Zahirris." Shiloh tried to sit up, almost falling off the bed altogether. "None of my Clan have taken over as *Artris*."

Having helped Shiloh onto the bed, Killian's arms felt strangely empty. He pushed the thought aside to consider later.

"Shiloh, where did you run here from?" Natalya asked, still rubbing Araminta's back.

"Pavia, my Lady. We came three weeks ago, rented a small house." Shiloh shuddered. "When the priest asked me to say my vows, I couldn't do it. I just bolted. I forgot about everything but getting away. I even forgot my girls." Tears began to slide down his face again. Shiloh covered his face with his hands, shivering. "How could I forget my girls?"

Killian patted his back, trying to offer comfort. "Natalya, can we do anything about finding Shiloh's dogs?"

Natalya chivvied Araminta from her lap and stood. "I'll go to Pavia and see what I can find. The logical place is any kennels there." She walked over and held her hand out to Shiloh. Slowly he took it. "Does your father have a cell phone?" He nodded and gave her the number. "Very well, I'll call him and see if a little gentle intimidation gets the information."

"You can bring them here, if you find them," Killian told her.

She nodded. "I'll take Araminta with me, if that's all right? Show her a few tricks of the trade, so to speak."

Killian glanced at Araminta, who looked hopefully at him, so he smiled and nodded. She hugged him, patted Shiloh's hand, and then ran out of the room. Natalya followed with a more dignified, but hurried pace

Killian looked at Jaden. "Go see if we have any clothes that will fit him, please."

"Stand up, will you?" Jaden asked Shiloh. Killian was proud of his brother for not arguing the chore.

Shiloh stood. Even in his shoes, he was about five-foot-five, and his slenderness didn't help him seem any taller.

"Killian, all we've got are your clothes, and they're going to hang on him."

Killian shrugged. Jaden was right but it couldn't be helped. Killian was four inches taller, and stockier, taking after his paternal

grandfather. Unlike many Rimalian males, their grandfather had been tall, broad-shouldered, and heavily muscled. And helping to run the biggest farm estate in the enclave gave Killian a regular workout.

"They're clean, and will do until we take him shopping. See if you can find something with a drawstring, okay?" Jaden nodded and zipped out. Killian turned back to Shiloh. "You're safe here, you understand?"

Shiloh nodded. "Thank you." He looked down shyly. "I'm sorry, my Lady."

Killian tilted his head, confused. "Why?"

"I insulted you, and yet you still gave me Sanctuary."

"By calling me 'lord?'" Killian guessed.

"Yes, my Lady. I didn't realize you really were the Lady of the estate. I thought you were like my father, widowed," Shiloh explained, still looking at the floor.

"It's all right, Shiloh. I understood you meant no offense." Killian reached out and lifted Shiloh's chin to see his eyes. They really were the most stunning green Killian had ever seen, and he found himself drawing Shiloh into his arms again and tucking him close. There was something oddly peaceful about holding the young man. Shiloh slowly, tentatively, wound his arms around Killian's waist. Killian could feel the small tremors in Shiloh's body as he tried not to fall apart again.

"It's okay if you still need to cry, Shiloh. You've had a rough time of it the last few days." As if he'd been waiting for permission, Shiloh began to sob again, burying his face against Killian's chest.

Jaden slipped into the room, carrying a pair of Killian's sweatpants and a T-shirt. He put the clothes on the bed and then left, shutting the door quietly behind him.

Eventually, Shiloh cried himself out.

"Come on then, let's put you to bed. You need to sleep a while." Killian helped Shiloh back into the bed, reluctant to lose touch with the man, then helped him remove what little jewelry he wore, setting it on the nightstand. Killian pointed to the end suite. "That's the bathroom. When you're done sleeping, come down and join us. Don't worry about dinner. If you sleep through it, I'll fix you something when you do get up. My bedroom is across the hall from yours. When you get up, we'll talk about whatever

you may need besides clothes. This will be your room as long as you stay with us.” Tucking Shiloh in, clothes and all, he left Shiloh to sleep after a final pat on the shoulder.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TN Tarrant is a hard-working single mom living in the wilds of Wyoming, who enjoys embarrassing her child with bright red lipstick prints to the forehead. When she isn't embarrassing her child, or hunting, killing, and dragging groceries home through the snow, she loves to write romantic stories with hot lovers. She suffers from a love of extremely bad jokes and has a tendency to inflict them on innocent bystanders.



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BOOK ONE: WHISPERS FROM A HIDDEN WORLD

by TN Tarrant

*Regent Killian Larrestes survived a harrowing attack and the betrayal of his family by his mother. Shiloh Zahirris is seeking Sanctuary from a marriage he doesn't want. When he ends up under Killian's protection, they find themselves falling in love.*



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Regent Killian Larrestes survived a harrowing attack and the betrayal of his family by his mother. Since then, he worked to help them all recover, learning the complexities of protecting and commanding a large, sprawling Clan.

Shiloh Zahirris is seeking Sanctuary from a marriage he doesn't want. When he ends up under the protection of Killian Larrestes, Killian takes him in, protects and supports him, and they find themselves falling in love.

But will social objections, personal insecurities, and a plot seeking revenge against them, destroy their chance at happiness?

